

SPECIAL INSIGHTS INTO SADHANA

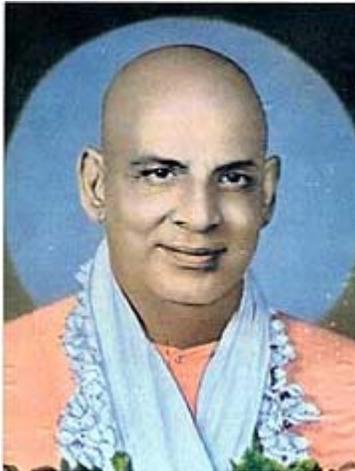
No. 5

By

SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA

from

Early Morning Meditation Talks



Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society



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



Sri Swami Chidananda

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This special series of eight booklets is being published between September 1996 and September 1997 in honour of the 80th Birthday Anniversary of H.H. Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, the President of the Divine Life Society.

Each booklet contains several of his early morning meditation talks given on special spiritual occasions in the sacred Samadhi Hall of the holy founder of the Divine Life Society and Sivananda Ashram, H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. The series of eight booklets covers the entire year of special occasions and festivals celebrated in the Ashram.

The talks contain penetrating insights into the meaning and purpose of *sadhana* as Swamiji takes advantage of these occasions to point out the fundamentals required for success in the spiritual quest such as devotion to the goal, discrimination, obedience to the Guru, faith in God and oneself, and a divinely lived life.

The spiritual advice and encouragement contained in these booklets will be an inspiration and help to earnest spiritual seekers throughout the world.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

PREFACE

The whole year for the Hindu is a continuous observance of some sacred day of worship or other. The year is completely built around a great many days of sacred worship of various expressions of the one non-dual Divine Reality.

Each month is significant for the presence of some important day of divine worship. So, from beginning to end, life becomes God-oriented; it becomes devotion filled. Life becomes based upon worship.

The holiness and sanctity of life and actions of the followers of the Vedic religion is insured by this great wisdom-based approach to life. All the twelve months become a composite period of adoring the Divine Reality around which the entire life of the individual revolves.

Swami Chidananda

“The quintessence of Advaita Vedanta sadhana is to affirm the truth and reality of your essential, eternal, divine identity and to resolutely reject the error of thinking of yourself as a finite human creature.”

—Swami Chidananda

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YOUR REAL PROBLEM

Radiant Immortal Atman! Beloved and blessed children of Light assembled in Gurudev's spiritual presence in this sacred Samadhi Hall! May the divine grace of the supreme Eternal Reality, the one reality behind ever-changing names and forms, enable you to become firmly established in the noble ideals and divine principles that you have adopted for living your chosen way of life and in the lofty spiritual qualities which are required and are indispensably necessary to become firmly established in the sublime spiritual life. May His divine grace enable you to develop the inner spiritual strength necessary to cultivate successfully the noble divine qualities, *daivi sampada*, like *sama*, *dama*, *titiksha*, *uparati*, *sraddha* and *samadhana* (calmness of mind, control of senses, endurance, self-withdrawal, faith and proper concentration), like *viveka*, *vairagya* and *mumukshutva* (discrimination, dispassion and a burning desire for liberation), like the qualities of *ahimsa*, *satyam* and *brahmacharya*.

And may the grace of Gurudev make it possible for you to not only be firmly established in these sublime divine qualities, but also to effectively apply them in living your day-to-day life, in your daily thinking, feeling, speech and actions. May Gurudev's *guru-kripa* grant you the insight and wisdom to effectively adhere to and apply these noble principles and divine qualities in your relationship with life around you, with your fellow beings whom you have to deal with in the practical living of your life in the *vyavaharic* field.

Idealism is one thing. Idealism becoming a living force in your day-to-day life, in your being and doing, in the manner in which you relate yourself to your fellow beings in the field of daily *vyavahara*, that becomes another thing. That becomes practical idealism. That becomes applied divinity, *daivi sampada* in action. This is more difficult because it encounters various adverse factors and obstacles. It also encounters the formidable obstacle of your mind's refusal to give way to higher principles in preference to lesser principles. This is because the mind sometimes has its own attachments, whims and fancies, and it has fallen in love with certain lesser ways of expressing itself. It clings to them; it does not want to leave them.

There is an essential unwillingness of the mind to change, sometimes obstinacy, sometimes even obduracy. Therefore, great wisdom, earnestness and sincere application are necessary in order to bring the mind around, recreate it and to cultivate in ourselves a new mind. It is a regeneration. Gurudev used a significant phrase in one song: "Die to live." The old has to die and give place to the new in your interior. It is in dying to the little self that one attains to everlasting life.

It is a very difficult task. You can suppress the mind. You can repress it. You can keep it in check. But to make it die, so that it forever leaves off its old inveterate tendencies and consents to become totally new, that is very difficult task. For the mind is always propelled by a basic delusion, a basic ignorance. A Hindi *bhajan* contains the line: "*Man mari, maya na mari*—I thought I had killed my mind, but I had not yet killed my delusion, my *maya*, my spiritual ignorance. Therefore I found that the mind is still there. It appeared to be dead, but it is still there, because it is propelled from my inside by this great illusory and delusory force."

In his song of "Eighteen Ities," Gurudev says "Brahman is the only real entity," and follows it immediately by saying "Mr. So and So is a false non-entity." As long as one does not overcome

the deluded notion that “I am important, I am something, I am someone,” unless you realise and become convinced that Mr. So and So, your “I” within, your little personality consciousness, your distinctive ego-consciousness, is a false non-entity, then it is very difficult to really start living the divine life.

For we still cling to that within us which is not the Divine, which is the outcome of *bhranti* (error), the outcome of *avidya*, of *ajnana*. *Dehatma buddhi* (considering the body as the Atman) gives rise to this false ego-principle of a distinctive, separate, individual human personality consciousness. It is the *adhyasa* (superimposition), the proximity of the *suddha chaitanya tattva* (pure consciousness principle) which is your *nija svarupa* (own true nature) with the *jada tattva* (insentient principle) that goes to make up your *prakriti* that is your earthly self.

It is this proximity that has given rise to this ego-principle which is, at the moment, the most important thing in the whole world. Even though it is a nothing, even though it constitutes your bondage, your essential darkness, your *prapancha and samsara*, your greatest problem and affliction, yet such is the tremendous power of *maya* that she makes you regard it as the most important thing to be treasured and supported, to be carefully preserved and nurtured. From morning till evening we are doing nothing but taking care of it, trying to see that it is not in any way assailed or hurt. We do everything to keep it permanently there, whereas we should see clearly that it is our greatest problem. It indeed constitutes our true problem, the central problem of our spiritual life.

And if you psychologically investigate ego-consciousness, analyse it, pursue it and begin to find out, then psychologically also, you will find it to be the kingpin of all troubles, the clashes and conflicts, the fights and quarrels, the bitterness and hatreds. But then, one does not wish to do this keen critical analysis of one’s inner personality structure. For the ego is the essence of it. It is the prop of the personality. It is the ridge-pole of this life. And if the ridge-pole is taken away, the whole tent will collapse. There will be nowhere for you to reside.

So, therefore, it is always maintained. Great importance is given to it. Yet it is our affliction. *Ahamkriti* (egoism) is our *badha* (hindrance). It is our *bhavaroga* (disease of transmigration and worldly existence). It is the main affliction from which we are suffering. But we do not know that it is the source of our suffering. We think that it will protect us from all suffering. We rely upon it. We depend upon it to maintain our integrity.

Everyone knows the great adage: “Then shall I be free, when I shall cease to be,” but we do not recognise its truth, its validity and its importance. We do not recognise its worth in our life, its central place in our *sadhana*. So we know everything, yet we live in ignorance. We have all the knowledge, yet we cling to ignorance. That is why we weep and wail, we fight and quarrel. We bring upon ourselves various types of afflictions, frustrations, disappointments, disillusionments, sorrows and griefs, not knowing that the key is simple. We can rise above all of them if we refuse to give importance to this ego-consciousness, this “so and so” false non-entity and become established in the truth of our being.

Yet, even though this is said a hundred times, we fail to recognise this truth. That is why Lord Krishna says: “*daivi hyesha gunamayi mama maya duratyaya* (Verily, this divine illusion of

Mine, made up of the three qualities of nature, is difficult to cross over).” Difficult it is to understand, for it is so subtle, so elusive, so effective, that knowing, yet one does not know. One lives in ignorance. Seeing, yet one does not perceive. One still remains blind. Hearing, yet one does not really understand. One pays no attention to what one hears. Therefore, even though hearing, one still fails to understand what is being said.

This is the subtle workings of *maya*, which wants to preserve this personality, which deserves to be liquidated and not preserved. Yet its preservation is the most important business of life for the vast number of individuals that go to make up human society. Fortunate indeed are the microscopic few who clearly recognise that our main problem is ourselves, that our *prapancha* lies within us, our *samsara* lies within us, our bondage lies within us, not outside. Others are not our problem. We are more our problem than all others put together. This indeed is to be pondered, to be grasped, to be understood and known, and this indeed has to be dealt with one day or another, if you are to transcend yourself and attain your true status, your divine identity. One day it has to be done. Until that time, we shall still be carefully nourishing and preserving our problems, we shall be carefully perpetuating our bondage and protecting our troubles.

Think deeply. cursory reflection will not take you into that which alone can make you realise the truth of the reality. It is only deep thinking that will bring you face to face with this central truth of your present situation, that you are presently established in a limited, separate human consciousness, a “so and so” consciousness, “such and such” consciousness. Deep reflection will be necessary to realise the actual nature of your present consciousness, deep and constant reflection.

Therefore, we invoke the grace of the Divine and the benedictions of holy beings like Holy Master, to enable us to become well aware of the state of our inner consciousness, to enable us to deal with the situation the way it is, and become established in our true Self, to rise and go beyond our lesser self and to make our ground a dimension of our true Self, our divinity.

Then alone divine life starts. Then alone divine life is possible. Otherwise, *maya* deludes us into thinking that we have already lifted our consciousness into a higher plane, while keeping us firmly established in our plane of the I-consciousness. So it is difficult to understand the very subtle workings of *maya* unless we are constantly after Her with in-depth thinking, reflection and reasoning. Therefore they say, you must have keen, actively-exercised discrimination as your constant companion day by day. Great is the need to supplement our devotion with keen, analytical, critical reasoning. *Bhakti*, *jnana* and *vairagya*—all three have to go together.

We are celebrating the birth anniversary of one of the greatest spiritual personalities of India, who had within himself an abundant measure of *bhakti* and *jnana* as well as *vairagya*. So his name has become immortal. Sri Krishna Chaitanya Gauranga Mahaprabhu was a supreme devotee of the highest state of *bhakti*. But at the same time, he was a very strictly rational, logical and keenly analytical personality. And due to the combination of these two, he became established in the highest type of *vairagya*, supreme *vairagya*. If you study his life, you will be astounded to see in his personality a rare confluence of the highest *bhakti*, highest *jnana* and highest *vairagya*.

He, who lived more than 500 years ago and is the inspirer of the Hare Krishna movement, the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya (sect), is indeed a great ideal. He perfectly realised the falsity and nothingness of his little ego-consciousness and at one stroke was able to cast away all ambition and all his love for learning and rationality. He had been an outstanding scholar and a towering intellect. But due to his great insight and great spiritual awakening within, he was able to put away his ambition and scholarship and conquer the ego—a very difficult task indeed. If you have conquered the ego, you have conquered *samsara*, you have conquered *prapancha*, you have overcome bondage, you have liberated yourself.

“Then shall I be free when I shall cease to be.” This “I” which is so dear to everyone, which is the most important thing in the whole world for everyone, which one does not want to let go of, it is this that really constitutes your problem and it creates problems for others also.

And it is to solve this problem that all philosophies have come up. All the great Acharyas, Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya, Nimbarkacharya, etc., all the great teachers, Guru Nanak, Zoroaster, Jesus, Buddha, have laboured only in order to teach us, to enable us to overcome this little “I”. It is inveterate and very difficult indeed to recognise in its true colours. All the philosophies exist only in order to debunk this “I”. All systems and schools of philosophy exist to make us see this truth clearly, that “I” is your real problem. It is not an easy joke. You have to become a real philosopher, you have to become a real Yogi, you have to become a real Vairagi, you have to become a real Viveki, in order to recognise this subtlest of all subtle truths.

God bless you. God’s grace is necessary. Guru’s Kripa is necessary and our willingness to face facts is necessary. Our willingness to recognise the truth when we see it, is necessary. It is the third important necessity. May you be endowed with all three!

LET IDEALISM BE BORN IN THE HUMAN HEART

Adorable Divine Presence, Thou Who art the one all-pervading, ever-present Reality behind the ever-changing, vanishing names and forms that constitute this world appearance, this projected phenomenon in time and space! Adorable Divine Presence, Thou Who art without and within and everywhere, Thou Who art interconnected in the innermost cells of our body, Thou Who art the Eye of our eyes, the Ear of our ears, the Breath of our breath, the Mind of our mind, the Heart of our heart, the Prana of our prana, the very Soul of our soul, Thou Who art seated within us as our own inner, eternal being, bless us dear Lord that we may ever be aware of Your Presence! This is all we ask of Thee: that we should never lose the awareness that we live, move and have our being in Thy glorious, holy, sacred Divine Presence and that our life is lived in You.

May there be peace in the whole world. May there be harmony and oneness between individuals, communities and nations. May there be peace in the East and the West, peace in the North and the South, and peace all over the universe. Give us this day the guidance necessary to make this day a fit and worthy offering at Thy Feet. Let this day be lived with noble deeds, sublime feelings and with right understanding, good intentions and pure thoughts.

Beloved and worshipful Gurudev, thou who has granted to us once again the grace of being in your spiritual presence at this early morning hour, bless all your children, who are gathered

together here in this sacred Samadhi Hall of your holy Ashram! Bless them that their eyes are opened and from darkness they may see light. Remove spiritual blindness and grant them all divine sight.

Bless them all that they may grasp the message of these past nine days and the reason why our ancients had ordained that a new year commences with nine days of continuous worship, adoration and prayerfulness. For nine is the fullest number beyond which numbers cease and then combinations start, all permutations and combinations of this mystical culminating figure of nine. For this nine days, our ancients wisely ordained that we observe a period of fast, prayer, worship, adoration, chanting of the Divine Name and reading of the scriptures. Thus they gave us unmistakable direction that the full year should be filled with worship, adoration and diligent reading of the scriptures, so that we get guidance upon the pathway of life through the wisdom teachings contained in the scripture and so that the air should be filled with devotion, worship, prayerfulness and all that is conducive to the highest human welfare here and hereafter.

What a great love for mankind our ancient had! What a great concern for posterity they harboured in their hearts! Through their universal love and compassion they made this provision for these nine days, so that we may know how to live our life in order that the whole year may be a great step in our spiritual evolution towards divine perfection, illumination and ultimate liberation. How can we ever repay this debt of gratitude they have put us into by this great wisdom, this great consideration for our highest welfare!

Radiant Atman! What are your thoughts about the way in which the year has commenced that you have been blessed to participate in? Have you reflected upon it? Have you tried to understand its meaning and the depth of its significance? Have you tried to grasp the message it has for you and your life, what it seeks to convey to you? Or have you, like millions of other people in India, just passed through it mechanically, in a routine manner, as a habit, because it is a tradition? Or have you tried to understand it in a special way, because you are a special group of people who have chosen the spiritual path, who have made God-realisation the goal of your life?

You are *sadhakas*, you are seekers. You are expected to be full of *vichara*, full of *viveka*, spiritual enquiry, spiritual discrimination, and *jijnasa*, a keen hunger for Knowledge. Therefore, in your special capacity as *jijnasus*, *mumukshus*, *sadhakas*, spiritual people and try to understand the message that Vasanta Navaratri has for you. Otherwise, it will have come and gone and you will be where you are and what you were before. That was not the purpose with which these great sacraments and occasions of worship were instituted. They were instituted with a different purpose—that they may awaken you from time to time, inspire you, give you the right guidance, point out to you the direction in which you must go. All this and more is contained in these great occasions set up for us by our illumined ancestors.

We bemoan the condition of the world, the condition of present-day mankind. We regret the deterioration in the individual's character. But we seldom try to see wherein lies the cause, wherein lies the reason for this that we bemoan, this that we regret. We seldom seek to know why this has come about or how it can be corrected. We seldom seek to know.

Gossip is just talking about things one sees and hears. But serious deliberation and discussion takes into consideration why these things are happening, what are the cause or causes, how can they be remedied? And What can *I do* as a contemporary individual in today's society in order to remove the causes? What can *I do*? What can be my contribution? This is deliberation. This is not gossip.

And Gurudev has given us the key: "As a man thinketh, so he becometh." Thought leads to action. Action is the outer manifestation of the thought that has arisen in the mind. A person thinks something and then does what this thought impels. Thought is the origin of all human conduct, all human behaviour, all human actions, the world over. Thought is the key, it is the source of human life and conduct, of human action and reaction and interaction also. If thought is properly taken care of, then everything that results from it will also be properly taken care of. You sow a thought and reap an action. If you continue to sow such an action, you will reap a habit. Such habits repeated bring about character, and your future destiny depends upon your present character. At the root of it all is thought, what we think. Thought leads to action, action leads to habit, habit leads to character and character decides destiny.

Therefore, what is to be done? We have just completed the Vasanta Navaratri, where after nine days of continuous reading of the *avatara lila* of the *maryada purushottama* Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra, we have celebrated the birth of Lord Rama, Ramajanma. Do you not see the significance of it? Clearly what is indicated is that the very purpose for which we devoutly read the scripture is that the ideal of Rama may be born in our heart. This is the only solution to the disease of sorrow, conflict, clash, immorality, impurity and *asuric* conduct that prevails in the world today. That is the only solution, the only right remedy, the only right key.

Constantly there should be a renewal of the human heart. Noble thoughts should be generated. Sublime ideas and sublime motivations should be created in the hidden interior of the human heart and mind. Then alone the human world will change, human conduct will change, human character will assume new, sublime dimensions; man will become different, what he is destined to be, divine, a child of God. It will not be possible unless we bring about a revolution in our thoughts, unless we make idealism to be born in our hearts every moment, every day.

Let idealism be born each day in the human heart. Let idealism be born again and again in the human heart. That is the one way. All other efforts are bound to fail if this fundamental process is not initiated in the human nature, in the human mind, in the human heart. An abandonment of base, wicked thoughts and a deliberate encouragement and determined attempt to bring about a sowing of sublime thoughts, great thoughts, noble intentions and pure motivations, is indeed the key. Let idealism be born in the human heart every moment each day.

If the inner man is ideal, if the mind thinks sublime thoughts and ideas, if the heart harbours noble emotions, if these intentions are at the back of each action, then the human being will behave like a true human being; he will begin to live like a God on earth. Then alone a new era will dawn for man and mankind in the human world. For the key lies in what the human mind thinks and in what feelings and sentiments the human heart harbours. And this can be of the highest, sublimest, holiest quality only if idealism is kept alive in the human heart.

When idealism vanishes, darkness envelops the human world. Man's interior, the mind, becomes a dark factory for the manufacture of ignoble thoughts, dire thoughts. Man then creates a hell upon earth, he creates his own undoing, his downward descent. The key lies, therefore, in taking every care, taking great care about how the mind functions, how it behaves, what thoughts it generates and what are the quality of those thoughts. Idealism alone can keep these thoughts lofty, noble and sublime. In this way only will man become a source of all that is auspicious and blessed. All other solutions will be symptomatic solutions, patching-up symptoms, not eradicating the root cause.

Therefore, let idealism be born in the human heart every day. This is the great significance and the message of the *jayanti* of Lord Rama who was the ideal divine human individual, human character. Reflect deeply over this facet, this angle, this aspect of what you have just now gone through. Know that its message is: Let idealism be born in the human heart each day, freshly, newly, vigorously. This is the solution to the problem of human character, human conflict and human unhappiness created by human thought, the wrong type of thought, human error, and not doing the right thing to bring about a change.

You have been told. An indication has been given about the solution. Now it is up to you—*yathe'cchasi tatha kuru*—it is up to you to make use of the solution or not. If you want to see a better world, a better humanity, a better future for the world, there is but one way: Let idealism, lofty, noble, sublime idealism, ethical and spiritual idealism, humanitarian idealism be born in the human heart each day, every moment.

Our human thought is the key to human destiny. *Srotavya, mantavya, nididhyasitavya*—this is to be heard, reflected upon and pondered deeply. God bless you!

THE KEY TO YOUR TRANSFORMATION

Radiant Atman! The words *aviveki*, *viveki* and *sadhaka* refer to three different types of individuals. An *aviveki* is a person who does not discriminate. All the lessons in life which God sends him or her are wasted, because he or she is in *ajnana* (ignorance). And *ajana* is the outcome of *aviveka* (non-discrimination).

On the other hand, a *viveki* is a person who does discriminate. He learns the lessons of life, but they have no effect on him. His learning and the lessons he has learned are stored up in his head; they produce no fruit because they are not applied. He does not allow these lessons to have a powerful impact upon him.

But a true *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) is one who is both a *viveki* as well as one who actively reacts to whatever lessons life brings in the course of going through it, the experiences that form part of it. Nothing is wasted upon the true *sadhaka*. Everything produces a change, a transformation for the better. Everything brings forth from the true *sadhaka* and seeker a certain positive, creative response, after which he is never the same as before. He is changed. His character, his nature, his very life becomes enriched, enhanced by something new which was not there previous to the impact the experience had upon him.

Two hundred years ago, there was born a grandchild, a baby girl, in the family of a very renowned Japanese warrior, a *samurai*. He was a great warrior, very brave and heroic. And the baby girl was a most beautiful child. She grew up to be a maiden of such exceptional and unusual beauty that the family thought it fitting that she be offered to the Empress of the country as a handmaiden or servant.

At that time the Japanese were ruled by emperors. So they took her to the palace and the Empress and the entire royal family were also struck by the beauty of this girl. She was found to be very keenly intelligent, very active and very perceptive. So she soon became a favourite and an important part of the Empress' retinue.

Unfortunately, within a few years, while the girl was still in her teens, the Empress, whose health had been apparently perfectly normal, suddenly passed away. This sudden passing had such a profound impact upon this young girl that something stirred deep within her and a sudden change came into her entire psychology. She said: "What is this life? Everything is vain. Everything passes away. There is no stability; nothing can be relied upon. Nothing is real. Everything is evanescent, transitory, ephemeral, perishable and passing."

She was very intelligent person, and so profound was this conviction that she lost all interest in life and determined then and there: "I must pursue the path of meditation and enlightenment." She determined to become a Zen nun, a seeker and a meditator.

Everyone was shocked. Her whole family was in an uproar. They said: "Impossible! It is against our family tradition. You are too young for this; you are unprepared. You must marry. Moreover, it will not be possible for you to be a nun having such great beauty as God has endowed you with." She yielded to them upon one strict condition—that after she had mothered three children, the marriage agreement would be at an end she would then become a nun. No one believed that such a thing would be possible and so they readily agreed and arranged a match for her. She also told her future husband and in-laws the same thing—that only on this condition would she be willing to enter into wedlock.

All agreed and so she was married. Dutifully she served her husband and in-laws, took a full interest in family affairs, looked after the household and behaved in a one hundred per cent normal way. But, at the same time she was a keen student of Zen literature and practised meditation. Still, in all ways she was an efficient house-wife, a good wife, and obedient daughter-in-law and a good daughter to her parents.

However, after the third child had been born and reared for a few months, she suddenly announced that her promise had been fulfilled. She would no longer continue in the family life and instead would take to the life of a Zen nun. In spite of all protests, she shaved her head and silenced them with a reminder of their promise.

She then left everything, put on a nun's robe and wandered away in search of a Zen master. She went to a great city where a famous master was and asked to be taken in discipleship. She was refused due to her beauty. She went to another master where she was also refused on the ground of her beauty.

Therefore, she determined that this obstacle should be removed. So, one day, in the privacy of her room she made a big fire, put a iron rod into it and branded her face. She made her face ugly beyond recognition and thus lost her beauty forever. She then went back to the second master who immediately accepted her as a disciple. She soon became a very earnest and sincere practitioner of the Zen way of life and advanced spiritually in an amazing manner.

Such was her determination. And it was all due to the way in which she was able to react when confronted by the sudden death of her patron, the Empress. Of the hundreds of others who must have been in the service of the palace and the Empress, some would have wept, mourned for some time and then adjusted themselves. Others might have been thoughtful and reflected and for some time had some *smasana vairagya* (graveyard dispassion). They might have stopped wearing ornaments or good clothes. But soon they too would have reverted to normal, back to square one, as they say, or into the old rut. But here was one who was not only not an *aviveki*, not only not ignorance, not only not merely a *viveki*, but was one who was also practical, who had the *viveka* and immediately applied it to her own life.

Similar indeed was the case of Prince Siddhartha. He was a *uttama adhikari* (best qualified aspirant), a practical spiritual seeker, who was ripe to react to the experiences of life in a creative and transforming manner. And that was what made him first a renunciate, a *tyagi*, then a *tapasvi*, then a Yogi, then a *jnani*, then an enlightened Guru, an *uttama tattvavetta* (one who fully knows the truth) and finally a world teacher. And the whole world has benefited. Because he was a *uttama adhikari*, he did not go through life's experiences blindly with eyes closed, in a state of ignorance, in a state of non-discrimination and non-enquiry, *avichara* and *aviveka*. Nor did he merely go as an intellectual *vicharavan* and *viveki*.

Intellectually we may make enquiries, come to conclusions, learn things and then do nothing about it. So we are only burdened with knowledge. Life is left untouched. But Prince Siddhartha was a practical spiritual seeker, and he reacted to even simple ordinary experiences which leave millions of others just cold. Everyone has seen old age; everyone has seen disease; everyone has seen death. They are seen but nothing happens.

It is only when metal is touched by a philosopher's stone that it becomes gold. If clay or wood comes into contact with a philosopher's stone, it will remain clay or wood only. If a person of metal comes in contact with even day-to-day experiences, he will be transformed. Siddhartha was a person of metal; he had the right stuff in him. And this beautiful Japanese girl also had the right stuff in her. There was something there ready to absorb, to react, to get transformed. And, therefore, a transformation took place.

Today is Sri Buddha Jayanti. You should, therefore, ponder Buddha's life, his ideal reaction to experiences and the memorable and epoch-making step that he took. When he felt this profound change, he did not keep quiet about it. He was a practical Yogi. He took a bold step and became a renunciate and a seeker. Then he became an austere practitioner, a *tapasvi*, practised Yoga and meditation and became a *jnani* and a world teacher.

The great poet Sir Edwin Arnold has written about him in wonderful, inspiring poetry, *The Light of Asia*. And a very readable and most absorbing biography of Buddha was written by Adam

Beck. Then Professor Edwin Burt from Cornell University near New York has written *Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*. It is worthwhile purchasing a copy and studying it. During the late forties, Professor Burt stayed in this Ashram for two or three weeks during a visit to India and Nepal. He gave a series of talks on comparative religion before Guru Maharaj Swami Sivanandaji.

So, it is not what the *jiva* keeps experiencing in this life that really enriches it or transforms it and lifts it up to sublime heights, rather it is actively exercised *vichara* and *viveka*. More than that, for even this is not sufficient, it is how one reacts in a living manner, in a vital manner to experiences. It is this that becomes the transforming factor in the life of a true seeker.

This is so not only in the spiritual field but also in the secular field, even in the business field. If a businessman's son goes on like a fool, he will never learn anything. The same son, if he is not a fool but a keen observer, may learn many lessons about the business world, but if he does not react to them, he will not be successful. It is only the one who keenly absorbs these experiences, reflects deeply over them, applies the lessons learned and brings about changes, it is only such a one that becomes a successful business person and perhaps a multi-millionaire. It all depends upon whether one vitally and in a living manner reacts to the experiences that one undergoes. It is that which determines one's transformation in life.

That is what the life of Buddha teaches us. He reacted in a wonderful manner, in a living manner, very early in life. Thus it was that at a young age he became a great enlightened and illumined teacher of his own times and has gone down as an immortal personality in human history. Even though it is well over 2500 years since he was born, even today his teachings are followed by millions of Buddhists. And the world also remembers him, both East and West.

That is the result of the living way in which he faced life, underwent experiences and responded to them in a living way. May this be well absorbed. May this be deeply pondered. That is the benefit of observing such occasions as Buddha Jayanti. May you all try to make this a period of special study of Buddha's life, his teachings and what they imply, what message they have for us. May we become enriched by his lofty and sublime example, life and teachings. God bless you all!

AFFIRM TRUTH REJECT UNTRUTH

Radiant Atman! This week we will observe the *jayanti* of Adi Sankaracharya, one of the greatest of Self-realised souls and philosophers this world of ours has produced. Leaving home, in a spirit of renunciation and aspiration to realise the Reality, at the tender age of eight years, he completed an unbelievable mission in the span of just a few years, passing away in his 32nd year. During that period he did what is known as *digvijaya* (conquest of the quarters), carrying the banner of Advaita Vedanta, the supreme philosophy of absolute monism, into the four corners of India and overcoming all lesser schools of philosophy through his convincing, irrefutable arguments. His incredible work remains dynamically living, active and ever progressive even to this day, more than 1200 years after he propounded his doctrine.

The quintessence of Advaita Vedanta is to affirm the truth and reality of your essential, eternal, divine identity and to resolutely reject the error of thinking of yourself as a finite human creature having a name and form, beginning and end, and subject to changes such as birth, death,

old age, disease, decay, pain, sorrow, suffering, etc. Resolutely rejecting this error and simultaneously affirming your eternal, unchangeable divine identity is the centre of Advaita Vedanta *sadhana*. They call it affirming and rejecting, *pushtikarana* and *nirakarana—neti, neti*.

Sankara's most popular work, *Vivekachudamani*, is a call to discrimination between the Self and non-Self—*atma-anatma viveka*. *Atma* is *sat* (existence absolute). *Anatma* is appearance only, temporary in time, limited in space, perishable; it is *kshara purusha* (perishable being). *Atma* is *akshara purusha* (imperishable being)—*ajo nityah sasvato 'yam purano na hanyate hanyamane sarire* (Unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, the Self is not killed when the body is killed). Thus the *Vivekachudamani* is a discourse, a treatise and a *sadhana* on discrimination between the Self and the non-Self.

And a second work of his, *Atma Bodha*, is a light upon what the Self is. As you discriminate between the Self and the non-Self, you get a good knowledge of what the non-Self is, so you can reject it; you will not be deluded by it. You can free yourself from the veil of delusion by knowing the nature of *anatman*. And then, to be rooted in the Reality, to be fixed in it firmly, to be able to think, reflect and meditate upon it and to awaken the correct awareness within your consciousness, a thorough study of what the Self is is of great importance and value. To that end, *Atma Bodha* can be the way that God can gradually answer your prayer, "*tamasoma jyotir gamaya*" and "*dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*" ("From darkness lead me unto light" and "May He illumine our intellects").

To avoid that which is wrong, we have to get a knowledge of what wrong is; and to pursue and practice that which is right, we have the need to have a knowledge and a grasp of what right is, of what Reality and Truth is. Thus both the negative and positive and positive aspects of Vedantic admonition are of equal importance in making the mind aware of its error and to make the intellect grasp the truth.

When Brahman is the reality to be attained, why unnecessarily know about the world, *prapancha, samsara*? The answer is that because you want to free yourself from the delusion of the world, you must know the tricks of this deluding appearance. Indeed, you must know everything about it, because it comes in numerous subtle ways.

We think the world is outside us, but, by and large, the world or *prapancha* or *samsara* is within us. We have to understand that. What is it within us that makes us regard *prapancha* to be real and makes us move towards it, get attached to it, get bound by it? What is it within us? That has to be rooted out, eradicated first. Thus the study of *avidya* or *maya* within is the key to freeing ourselves from delusion and rising from darkness to light.

Gurudev again and again reiterated: "Thou art immortal Soul. Thou art not this body nor this mind. They are *upadhis*, limiting adjuncts temporarily added on to you. They are there as part of your lesser personality, your earth consciousness, but you are also there far beyond them, transcending them, a divine personality, a supra-human spiritual reality, untouched by time and space, not bothered by pain, sorrow and suffering."

This, then, is to be heard, reflected upon and meditated upon. May you direct all your attention to the practice of this truth which shall make you free. For it is this truth that arouses in us

our kinship with the eternal, universal Reality, *paramatman*. May the grace of the Lord grant you success in this *sadhana* of being what you really are and of resisting the pull of the lower mind to make you imagine that you are something other than this Reality.

Constantly you have to reject the attempts of the mind and its age-old, inveterate tendencies to keep itself tied down to a lower level of ignorance and mistaken identity. It should be given no quarter. By the strength of your will power, your positive, awakened consciousness and your resolute and determined *sankalpa* to attain realisation in this very body, you must keep this process up. You must shine with an effulgent inner awareness of your own essential, immortal and imperishable divine identity. Your interior should be a mass of effulgence, of *jnana prakasa*. There should be a state of *jnana bodha* within, a state of wakefulness within—no slumber. For this you must pray, and for this you must practise.

May this week be permeated by the spirit of Jagat Guru Adi Sankaracharya, the Advaita Acharya, and may it have the effect of successfully lifting up your consciousness from the present, ordinary, humdrum human level of earth consciousness into a lofty, sublime higher spiritual level of a divine spiritual consciousness!