

THE MISSION OF SWAMI SIVANANDA

by

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The Divine Life Society has been a veritable embodied form of the spirit of worshipful Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. It is impossible to conceive of or to work for the Divine Life Society without contemplating at the same time the ensouling principle of this Institution, Gurudev Swami Sivananda. It is his Viratsvarupa, his visible form, that is before our very eyes as a network of spiritual and cultural forces that is the Divine Life Society. We are likely to think that an institution is a piece of land or a set of buildings or a few persons doing something hectically from morning to evening. The empirical concept of an institution in its material form needs a reorientation and has to receive a more sublime touch, in the same way as we cannot define a human being merely as a bodily personality or an individuality.

A human being is not merely a body. A human being is a set of values. Merely because we see a shape of a human body, we do not call it a human being. Human nature is what is implied in the concept of a human being. This nature is what characterises humanity and differentiates it from animality, and where the values or the characters or the natures are absent, we do not call it a human being. The human being is a spot, locality, a pinpointed individual wherein powers, forces, values, meanings and significances are manifest. When these significances are not manifest, we do not see human nature, and we do not see a human being.

We may see a cannibal when the characters of the human being are absent. We may see a tiger without a tail.

Likewise, an institution is a collective, embodied form of the best values in human nature, which are grouped in various categories, on account of which we have various institutions. We have educational institutions, we have cultural institutions, we have industrial institutions. We have organisations of various types in the world, all which are dedicated to the manifestation, expression, nurturing, tilling and culturing of certain values which a set of people or a group of persons have held or are holding as their ideal or goal. The Divine Life Society is, thus, not a set of buildings or a piece of land or a few persons. It is something invisible. And it is this invisible significance that gives value and status to its visible form which we generally call a Society or an organisation. As I mentioned earlier, it is a value, a culture and a significance that gives meaning to what we call the human personality. This was the interpretation, definition and concept held by Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj about this organisation, the Divine Life Society.

A value which subsumes every other value is a divine value. This is the difference between a divine characteristic and other characteristics. As they say, an elephant's footprint includes the footprints of all other animals; even so, the divine characteristic or value includes within itself all other conceivable characteristics and values in the world. So divinity is not a transcendent miracle eluding the grasp of our understanding, but an immanent force which vitalises and gives significance to even the material values of life. God is not, as erroneous religions may hold, an otherworldly superhuman creator, inaccessible to the yearning heart of man, but a here and now, an eternity and an infinity fused and blended into a single mass of immanence, capable of being invoked at any moment. We have the historical and magnificent illustration of Narasimha-avatara, God bursting forth through a brick pillar. He did not come from Vaikuntha, or Kailasa, or from the seventh heaven. He came from a pillar, most unthinkable indeed, and he can come from any place

because of the immanence characteristic of God apart from His transcendence.

Swami Sivananda's Mission, in the form of the Divine Life Society, was precisely to inculcate in the minds of people the values that have been misrepresented by outdated religions and religious philosophies, and to give a transforming touch to the concept of philosophy, spirituality and religion, by which religion becomes a living force and not a dead mechanism of temples and churches. Religion is a vitalising principle and power in our own personal lives so that it is impossible for a person to live or exist without accepting and adoring religious and spiritual values in the true sense of the term.

Religion became an outmoded routine of incapacitated persons, on account of which erroneous doctrines today think that religion is a kind of opium which drugs the intellect of man and makes him cease to think in a correct fashion. This is because religion has been defined and taught in a wrong way. Religion is a state of mind and consciousness, and an attitude. It does not belong to temples, it does not belong to mosques or churches, it does not belong to monks and nuns or monasteries or nunneries or chapels. Nothing of the kind. Wherever God is, there religion also is. The religious value is, in the hands of saints like Swami Sivananda, an instrument of world-transformation. We may call it religion, we may call it spirituality, we may call it culture, we may call it philosophy, it makes no difference. All these nomenclatures point to a single *necessity* of life in its generality. We can underline the word 'necessity'. What we call the ultimate necessity of the human soul is religion.

Religion is not a gospel from the books or a cult from a group of preachers or prophets which we can accept or dispense with. It is not up to us to accept or dispense with religion, because it has already been said it is a necessity, and it is the ultimate necessity, not merely the slipshod variety of necessities that we have in our immediate day-to-day existence. The ultimate need of the human soul is called

religion. This was to be taught to mankind. It was fading into the background and receding to the limbo of human consciousness. It was dying.

Many saints and sages were projected by the Almighty Himself, right from the time of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, when empirical, material values began to gain an upper hand and the bodily needs, economic necessities and public relationships were given greater importance than the cries of the human soul. It was a time when life in India was in a turmoil, culturally speaking. It was then that personalities like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa cropped up to set the forces in balance and hit the nail on the head once again, at the right spot. Then we had a galaxy of saints and sages. Read the history of the movement of the spiritual renaissance in India, particularly the saints, right from the time of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Rama Tirtha. Then we had Sri Aurobindo, who accentuated these masterly strokes that the masters had already given, Ramana Maharshi, Ramadas and Mahatma Gandhi. God will not keep quiet. When He is ignored, He will assert Himself in every field of activity. He asserted Himself even in politics, in the form of Mahatma Gandhi.

Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj brought into high relief this need for answering the call of the Spirit of man, and projected forth the Divine Life Society—not a set of buildings, but a surge of values. The wakening of the mind of man, or shaking human nature from its slumber of ignorance, was the primary mission of Gurudev. It is very necessary that we, in our enthusiasm and hurry, do not forget this concept of the Divine Life Society as a spiritual organisation, which is a man-making concept and not a house-building scheme. It is a methodology of creating humanity out of animality so that it may rise to divinity.

We are told that we rose from the mineral, came up to the vegetable level, then passed through the animal, and have come to man's nature. We are Homo sapiens. We are human

beings, which means to say that we have transcended the animal nature. We do not call ourselves human beings if the animal nature is still present in us. What are the animal natures? If we can sting like a scorpion or bite like a snake, show teeth like a tiger or pounce on another like a lion, we are not human beings. But, we can do that. At times we can bite like a snake and sting like a scorpion. This means to say, while we have risen from the physical structural pattern of the animal body, we have not yet transcended animal nature wholly. That is why we have wars, battles, cut-throatism, pick-pocketism, corruption and what not—which are attempts at overcoming one's own brother.

Divinity is a transcendence of human nature itself, which would be an impossibility if humanity has not gained its own consciousness, at least in an appreciable proportion. Divinity cannot show its head in humanity if the animal nature has not been sublimated adequately; and divinity completely manifests itself in human nature when animality is completely overcome and we become totally human. The total, purified and sublimated form of human nature is exemplified in the personality of Sri Rama. We cannot find a person like Rama. But he was the apotheosis of human nature, the perfection of human character, i.e., what man ought to be. He did not demonstrate Divinity; that was not the purpose of Rama-avatara. He demonstrated only human nature to its perfection, to the logical limits. And if we can come to that level of human nature, reach that perfection of humanity, then we can automatically reach divinity. We are trying to reach the seventh *bhumika* and *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and we talk only of *nirbija*, and so on. We never talk of anything less than that. But all this will end in tall talk. It will end in nothing ultimately, when the roots are in the animal's bowels.

Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was tirelessly hammering this point on the minds of people of different places in the world. He called them the Branches of the Divine Life Society. The Branches of the Society are not like the branches of a tree. They are invisible forces projected by his own Self.

Swami Sivananda never travelled abroad during his lifetime, and he travelled through India only once. He stuck to Rishikesh. He said: "My characteristic is stickability." People used to call him "a stickable Swami" i.e., he stuck to one place only, he never moved anywhere. Well, he also wrote a poem also on stickability. With that stickability he has shaken the consciousness of mankind in an unprecedented manner. His arms reached humanity in the different continents.

Saints and sages do not work through their bodies; and whether or not they fly in a plane, it makes no difference. They fly without our knowing it. Saints and sages, masters and incarnations do not work through their bodies, because they are not bodies. Their bodies are only the vehicles of the force which they really are. The electric bulb does not shine, it is the power that is inside it that shines, and it exceeds the limit of the walls of the bulb. The bulb is so small, only a few inches in diameter, but the light goes so far. Its illumination reaches farther than the limitation of the wall of the bulb. Even so, masters like Swami Sivananda worked miraculously, to the wonderment of man, and stirred mankind, creating gems in different parts of the world. All this is due to his *tapas*, austerity.

The more we remember the austerities, the *tapas* of Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the more do we bow in obeisance to his lotus feet. His power is working in leaps and bounds. He used to say: "My mission is not complete." Sometimes he used to humourously say, "In this birth, everything I have written in English. In the next birth, everything I will write in Sanskrit, because people would like to read my works in Sanskrit also." He was a very jocular person. His jokes were multifaceted, all-instructive, full of wisdom, sometimes going directly into the heart of a person and making him different that very minute.

A few blessed souls have received direct grace from Swami Sivananda, and there are hundreds of thousands who were inspired and transformed by him in a mysterious manner through his writings. He has brought about a

transformation in their hearts through his invisible powers, and those hearts he called the Branches of the Divine Life Society. The Divine Life Society is in the heart of every man. As a matter of fact, it is in the heart of man only. It then manifests itself outside in the form of action and the visible shape or instrumentality of its mission. The purpose of these Centres is to ignite other sparks. The spark is everywhere; it is in you, in me and in every person, but it is smothered, it is stifled, it is covered over, and it is not able to become self-conscious. When the spark itself is not self-conscious, it cannot make others self-conscious. To rouse the spark of the Spirit in man to its own self-consciousness is the work of the Divine Life Society and its Branches.