

THE AIM OF LIFE

by

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Visitor: What should be the aim of one's life?

Swamiji: Let me first explain who you are. You are an individual. An individual is a social being, a member of a certain society. You think of each person in the society as a separate individual. You do not think that one soul is connected with another soul. Suppose you all sit here, without having any connection with one another. In that case, you cannot call it a society. It is like a heap of pebbles on the road which look connected with each other, but are not really so. In fact, society does not mean merely a group of people. Society is the relationship between individuals, and not merely a group of people. There is a difference between a group of people and society, though on the surface it appears that society is nothing but a group of people.

There is, therefore, a difference between group psychology and individual psychology. You may think something as an individual, but when you are in the midst of a hundred people, you think differently. Why is this so? What happens to you? You become a part of the group. This is the difference between society and the individual. This relationship between one person and another is the primary concern at present. Whatever you do is in the light of society, the social relationship. You are not doing it absolutely from your own individual point of view, though ultimately that is your intention. You cannot impose upon it your own

personality, inasmuch as you cannot extricate yourself from social relationship.

But social relationship is ultimately to be transcended in one's understanding of the great fact that society is not independent of individuals, notwithstanding the fact that it is the relation between the individuals that is society. If individuals were not there, society would not be there. So, individuals are tremendously important. You have an importance in your individuality, because you are an individual. And the importance of one individual is the same as that of any other individual. If you know yourself fully, you know everybody else, because everybody is made of the same substance. So from social psychology, you come to individual psychology. Though the primary intention is to face society ultimately, that will not decide all your questions unless you read the psychology of human nature. And the way in which the human mind works decides the manner in which society works. Because society is a relationship of individuals, it is essential that you know what is the structure of the human mind and human nature. It is made up of certain factors. It is constructed of certain forces and works in a certain manner, and you have to take into consideration the structure of the human personality, the human mind, the intellect, the emotions and whatever there is of the psyche.

But this is also not sufficient. Why should the mind work in that way? This is another question. The human mind works in a given way because of its pattern of thinking, understanding and desiring. And one has to conform oneself to the way in which the mind works. There is the question of why the mind works in that manner and not in any other manner. This question cannot be answered by psychology, because psychologists study only the patterns and processes of the human mind. The why of it, they cannot say. This is the question which leads us to philosophy and the philosophical enquiry which is in the higher realms of spirituality, religion, yoga, etc.

Your relationship with the universe is the reason behind the way the mind works in that particular way. Human society is determined by individuals, and the individuals themselves are determined by cosmic relationship. You are constituted of a particular relationship with the universe of the world outside. You are connected with the air, water, fire, ether, sky, the moon, the sun, the solar system and so on. So the way in which you are related to the cosmos outside is the determining factor of the manner in which your personality would work - the way in which your mind works and, incidentally, society works. And your relationship with the universe outside is the subject of philosophy. From sociology, we go to psychology, and from psychology we go to what they call epistemology, i.e. the way of thinking and understanding things outside and the manner of our perception. Then we go to cosmology, the creation of the universe.

When we go to the creation of the universe, the question of the creator arises. Who created this universe? So we go to metaphysics and the Absolute. Just imagine! You are related to so many wonderful things which are unthinkable, and it is enough to make one giddy. Your head will start reeling if you have the time to think of the various relationships in which you are involved. Though it seems you are connected with only little things like shopping and standing at a counter to encash a cheque, and they are silly matters for you, but these things are connected with the Absolute. And this will become clear to you only if you have time to think deeply about small situations. Even the littlest thing of the world is connected with the Absolute. Now I come to your point. You asked me how you can decide the aim of life. Do you get some inkling as to the answer to this question? Do you have some idea as to the implications of your question?

Visitor: Yes.

Swamiji: What should be the aim of your life? Tell me.

Visitor: You should see to your own qualities, your own intelligence and...

Swamiji: You should not look to your own quality. You have to look to the various stages of life. I mentioned to you the various stages of the development of thought. You go gradually from the lower to the higher. You are not looking at any particular thing - neither to yourself, nor to society, nor to the world, nor even to God Himself - but you have to look to all things at the same time, in different gradations or ascents, and you must know where you stand. You should not jump too high by thinking that you are on a higher level when you are actually on a lower. Generally we suffer and come in conflict on account of our theoretical imagining that we are on a higher level while practically we are on a lower one. That is called worry, mental tension, etc. Tension is the problem that is created by a theoretical future and a practical present. *[laughs]* So you should be very wise. You should not try to soar to the sky very quickly. When your feet are planted on earth, you must know that they are on the earth; you should not think you are in heaven.

People say, "Oh! I am concerned only with God, spirituality and yoga." That is not true. This kind of statement will not work; and, it is not a fact. The fact is that you are in the world. When the wind blows, you feel cold; you have hunger, you have thirst, sleep... And there are many other considerations. So you must eschew the idea that you are thinking only of God. One must be realistic. Though the aim should be to transcend these lower limitations, you cannot ignore their presence when they are there.

Second visitor: Swami Sivananda says that while he was doing ordinary things, he had his consciousness on the higher level. He does not talk of any level of perfection, but says we should be conscious only of the higher values...

Swamiji: Yes, yes; that is so.

Second visitor: There is no link between the ordinary level without real perfection and the higher consciousness within oneself.

Swamiji: Why do you say there is no link? A link between them is actually present. In fact, the very art of perfect living or the aim of living life is the maintenance of a higher purpose. It need not necessarily be the highest purpose; it is the purpose immediately higher, just above your present level. That is what you are concerned with, not with the supreme level. That is not your concern. When you say this is right, that is not right; this is good, that is not good; it should be like this, it should not be like that - when you say this, you have already set a higher standard than the standard you are following. Otherwise, you will not say this is good and that is not good. You have something in your mind as the proper standard, to which you make a reference to find out what is right and what is wrong. So your idea of it is already there. If it is not there, you will not know what is right and what is wrong. The very fact that you are thinking "this is right, that is wrong," shows you have a link with a higher idea which you are maintaining in your mind and from the point of which you want to judge the lower level. Similarly, when you have reached that, you will find a still higher level. You go on like that until you reach the highest step. So, as I said, you must concern yourself with the immediately higher level.

The immediately higher level for an ordinary individual is the social norm. You cannot break the social norm, you know that very well. Otherwise, you cannot live in human society. Whether the people in society are correct or not is a different matter. For you, it is correct. Western society has one norm, Indian society another, and Japanese society still another, different from both. It is very strange that every society has its own norms, and neither this is nice nor that is nice. But that is a different subject. You belong to a particular society, and you have to follow its norms. So at the earliest stages of existence, social norms become the higher level. When you transcend that, there is a racial level. When you transcend the racial level, then you are independent and you do not have to hang on society for your existence, and you have strength and value of your own. Then you start judging things from the point of view of your own conscience.

Sometimes your conscience will rebel against social norms. You will think society is stupid. But you cannot live in society with this feeling; you have to get out of it, and that is a different matter. When you are in it, you have to follow it. So when your society relationship is transcended, you begin to follow the higher reason with which you are endowed. What we call conscience is the next step.

There is no need of thinking too far into the higher levels, because the mind is not used to it and, therefore, will not go to that level which it has not reached, though it will go to the cosmic level itself in time. Your reason may not be of the final norm, because that is also an empirical thing. It is conditioned by your body and your needs. Your idea of the necessary and unnecessary is dependent on the needs of the body and mind. Whatever is necessary for the body and the mind, you regard that as really necessary. And this something is necessary for the body and mental well-being, and you have got to give in. That is the temporary and tentative judgment of the values of things. But you will transcend this value afterwards. What is good at this level is not necessarily good for the body and your individual psyche from the point of the law that operates in the cosmos. And that is the next step. Then, finally, the highest good is that which is in consonance with the existence of God Himself, and anything else is not good. But you cannot reach that level immediately. As I told you, slowly and gradually you must go from the lower to the higher purpose, otherwise you cannot make judgments. Every judgment logically is the standard that is set as the next higher level. In any opinion that you express, whenever you pass an opinion on anything, hold an idea or a concept or a judgment about anything, you have connection with a higher purpose which becomes your standard. Otherwise you cannot know what is right and what is wrong, what is perfect and what is not perfect, what is true and what is false. So there is a real link. But the link will develop into higher and higher dimensions. You cannot see the higher dimensions, but only the immediately higher.