

# THE GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

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SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

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## **Publisher's Note**

This is an informal talk that Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj gave in 1974 on various aspects of the Guru-disciple relationship. In Swamiji's unique, penetrating and comprehensive style, he outlines the origin and development of Sannyas from earliest times until the present day, the relationship of disciples with their Gurus, and his own experience as disciple of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, founder of the Divine Life Society.

This precious jewel is being brought out in print for the first time on the occasion of the tenth Anniversary of Swamiji's Mahasamadhi.

## **In Ancient Times**

According to tradition, Sannyasa is regarded as an external expression—a social form, we may say—of maturity of thought. Sannyasa is not taken at random, at the whim and fancy of any person.

In ancient times, prior to the time of Manu Smriti, for instance, there was no social order of Sannyasa. There was Sannyasa, but it could not be called an order in the sense it is understood these days. In ancient times, even during the time of the Upanishads, we had Sannyasins and nuns, but they did not belong to any organisation. There were no organisations, no ashrams of the type that we see nowadays. Though there were ashrams of a Guru or Gurus with one or two disciples, there were no organisations like ours with five hundred disciples or residents. That type of organisation did not exist.

During the time of the Upanishads and a little later—prior to the circumstances described in the Manu Smriti, as mentioned—there were individual Sannyasins, and they served a Guru for years together. Usually a candidate for ordinance into Sannyasa is expected to serve a Guru for at least twelve years—not less than twelve years—and serve a Guru in every way, as if he entirely belongs to the Guru. He is not an independent person at all. The disciple, the *chela*, the *sisya*, is part and parcel of the Guru himself, and the will of the Guru is the will of the disciple. As a matter of fact, the disciple is expected not to have any individual way of thinking at all. He should not interpret the Guru in any manner whatsoever. He should not even use reason in judging the instructions of his Guru. Whatever the Guru says is the final order, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, reasonable or unreasonable from the point of view of the *chela*.

There were occasions when a *chela* was tested by his Guru very severely, even up to the point of the death of the disciple. The disciple never died, of course, but he was

tested to such a point where any weak-minded or rational-minded disciple would have run away from that place. He would not have stayed with the Guru. The Gurus were very able persons; they were only testing, and the test was very severe. After such a period of test for twelve years or even more, the Guru would summon the disciple, and without any premeditation, he would initiate him.

In the Upanishads, we have some very interesting anecdotes referring to the type of life of a *chela*. In the Chhandogya Upanishad, for instance, there is the story of Upakosala, who served a Guru by the name of Satyakama. Although the Guru did not initiate the disciple even after years and years of service, and it did not appear that he was going to initiate him at all, he took service from him, and very exacting service. Many years passed, and the Upanishad says that even the gods took pity on the *chela*. It is very surprising indeed. The celestials saw the difficult, arduous life which the *chela* was living, and took pity on him. They came in certain forms, and initiated the disciple. And the disciple, who was tending the Guru's cattle in the forest, having received this mystical initiation from the celestials in a mysterious manner, returned with the cattle to the Guru's abode. When the Guru saw the *chela*, he said, "How is it that your face is shining today, a thing which I have not seen up to this time, as if you know something which you did not know earlier? Have you learned something new?" The *chela* replied, "Yes." "Who taught you?" "Not anyone that is human," he said. The *chela*'s answer was, "Not anyone that is human. Something other than human taught me." The Guru was a man of insight, and he saw in his vision that the celestials themselves had

initiated the *chela*. He said, “I have nothing more to tell you. Whatever you have learnt is quite sufficient, and I only confirm it.”

There is another instance of the hardships which the ancient disciples were made to undergo by their Gurus. There was a *chela* called Uttanka, who served his master for years and years. Not twelve years—he served for twenty years, thirty years, forty years. It appears that the Guru never uttered a word. One day when the *chela* Uttanka was carrying firewood from the forest to the Guru, one of his hairs got stuck in the firewood, and he saw that it was white. He started weeping, “Oh, I have become old.” His hair had become white, and he had never even observed it, poor man. He was so devoted to the Guru that he never had time to notice that his hair had become white. He saw it only when it got stuck in the firewood. “Oh God,” he said, “I have become old, and still I have not received initiation.” He wept and beat his breast. When he went to the Guru in that condition, the Guru took pity on him and initiated him. There are instances galore of this type.

There are also instances of this kind outside India. You must read Professor Evans Wentz of Oxford. He has done some research in Tibetan mysticism, and one of the books which he has written is the English translation of the biography of Milarepa, a great yogi of Tibet. You will start weeping if you read about his life. You can never imagine that a *chela* can undergo such hardships. It was not mere hardship in the ordinary sense; they were actually tortured by the Gurus. But the Gurus had their own reasons for it. Later on Milarepa’s Guru told him why he tortured him. He said, “I do not want anything from you.” He said this a day

before Milarepa was about to be initiated. “I have not put you to test or trouble because I wanted anything from you. I have got everything by divine grace. But you have committed several sins, and all those sins had to be expiated, which is why I tested you, put you to hardship, extracted hard labour from you, and never gave you even a proper daily meal.” Milarepa was starving, and was actually ill. He could not get up, he was crawling, and even in that condition he was asked to go and tend the cattle, to build a house, and so on.

### **Living in Ashrams**

Coming to the point, the disciple is supposed to live under a Guru for several years for various reasons, one of which is to be psychologically weaned from the atmosphere of home. The idea of father, mother, brother, sister, etc., must go from the mind of the *chela*, so he is asked to live with a Guru for as many years as would be necessary to make him free from the obsession of family tradition and family relationship, etc. Twelve years is the usually prescribed period of time, but it is not a watertight period. It could be a little more where necessary or it could be less if it was permitted, though normally it was twelve years.

One reason was that he should be separated from psychological obsessions—the obsession that a person has towards his family, the idea that ‘this is mine’, and so on. Another reason was to get acquainted with the spiritual way of living, which is different than the family way of living. It will be interesting to understand in what way the spiritual way of living is different than the family way of living. If

you want to know, you should live in an ashram; only then will you understand what it is.

We have an ashram, the Divine Life Society, with so many people, friends—very dear friends. He is my friend, I am his friend, and so on. And we live like brothers, yet we are not brothers. That is the difference. It is very difficult to understand this. The relationship to a brother, which is a physical blood relation in a family, is different from the relationship to a brother in a spiritual institution. Anyone who lives in an ashram knows that, whether it is an ashram in Pune or an ashram in Rishikesh. It is not a family, though it is a family in one sense.

I will give you a philosophical sidelight to what I am saying from one of the works of Acharya Sankara. There are three kinds of attachment. Sankaracharya says in Sanskrit that these kinds of attachment are called *bhramaja*, *sahaja* and *karmaja*. *Ja* means born of, originated from, caused by. *Bhramaja* means that which is born of illusion, the attachment that is caused by sheer delusion. The attachment that is natural to the constitution of one's individuality is called *sahaja*. *Sahaja* means normal, usual, natural. *Karmaja* is that which is caused by the operation of the forces of past actions. These are the three kinds of attachment. If we do not want to use the word 'attachment', we can use a more palatable term—'association' or 'relationship'. So, there are three types of association: association born of delusion, association which can be called natural to the very structure of one's individuality, and association which is generated by the past actions of an individual.

Now, what is this association or attachment that is caused by delusion? It is consciousness imagining that it is an individual. This is delusion. Consciousness cannot be an individual, it cannot be located in space and time, and it cannot become an isolated unit because there is no such thing as division, isolation or segmentation of consciousness. Therefore, an idea entering into consciousness that it can be isolated into Mr. so-and-so, Mrs. so-and-so, this, that, and what not, is delusion. And the identification of consciousness with this type of physical individuality, this association, is born of delusion, *bhramaja*, which is some kind of confusion. It is not clear understanding. The other association is what is called natural to the individual. It is accepted and taken for granted that one is an individual, whether or not it can be metaphysically justified. Acharya Sankara says it cannot be justified because of the *bhramaja adhyasa* point of view. Well, whatever it is, if you take for granted that you are an individual, empirically speaking, we shall accept it. Then something will automatically follow. That which automatically follows is called *sahaja*, natural. Because it is automatic, it is therefore called natural. What is automatic? The moment consciousness gets individualised, physical and social consequences spontaneously follow in the form of physical attachment or physical association and social association.

Many things have happened to us since we descended from God—or fell from heaven, as it is said. There is a very long story of the metaphysical fall of the once-spiritual angel that we were, in a beautiful book called “Gods in Exile”, written by an Australian gentleman. We are all Gods

in exile, is what he says. We are exiled from heaven for some reason or the other, and this is explained in different ways in different traditions and theological backgrounds. The association of consciousness with a peculiar medium, which in Vedanta philosophy is termed *abhasa*, is what Acharya Sankara calls natural association. *Abhasa* means a reflection of consciousness in the individuality or the intellect of the person concerned. And the moment this reflection takes place, the Universal gets reflected in the particular, the particular gets identified with the body, and we begin to say, “this is my body” or “the body itself is the I”, to go still further down. This is *karmaja*, or action-born association, because this body is, according to our belief and psychological analysis, not made up of physical elements—not made up of earth, air, water, etc.—though it is so, in one sense; it is made up of the cohesive forces of the past *karmas* of the individual concerned.

You may ask why it is not made up of matter. It is a manner of speaking. Matter is everywhere. Matter is in the wall that I am seeing in front of me. Matter is in the mountain behind me. Matter is there on the ground. But why do I say that this particular lump of earth alone is I, and not this table or this wall? I do not say this wall is I or this table is I. This particular formation of matter alone—the body—is I. How is it? Why do we say that? It is because this body is the shape taken by a group of material atoms on account of the driving impulse of the past *karmas* of the individual. *Karma* is like cement. Cement joins together the bricks of the wall; otherwise the bricks would be separate, not in one place. Atoms are everywhere. But why should they be joined together and held in unison at a particular

point in space and be called a body? The cementing element is *karma*. So this body is also regarded as a form of *karma*, and when that *karma* is exhausted and its momentum is over, there is a disintegration of the elements. The mortar is removed, the cement is scraped off, and the bricks fall down. That is the death of the body. Therefore, consciousness subsequently gets identified with the body also. Not only that, it goes further into society and says this is my husband, this is my wife, this is my son, my daughter, my daughter-in-law, my brother, my brother-in-law, and so on. We have gone still further, beyond this body. That we are entertaining this body is bad enough, but we have gone still further and say, “that is so-and-so” or “that person is mine”. What a pity! We do not allow others to be in peace. This is *karmaja* association.

These have to be cut at the root by the gradual elimination of contributory factors to this sort of thinking, which can be done only in an ashram. Therefore, we go to ashrams. Here also we say that so-and-so is our friend, or that he is our assistant. Even if we say that, there is a difference between saying it in an ashram and saying it in the home. “He is my brother.” A great difference is there, and each one knows for oneself what that difference is. If anybody dies here, we do not weep, but if anybody dies in our house, we beat our breast for days together. If anybody in an ashram dies, nobody will weep, though we are brothers. This is a very interesting point. Why should not we weep when a brother dies? It is because *bhramaja* is cut off here. That *bhramaja* association, the original attachment of ours, is psychologically cut off. We have physical associations, social associations, psychological

associations, but not that original thing which ties a brother to a brother or son to a father, and so on. That is severed. We are internally independent beings, though outwardly we are associated with a group. That is why, in the ashram, we do not weep if someone dies. Do you understand? Hence, these refinements of personality are to be acquired by a new type of educational career that is provided for in ashrams.

### **Association with the Guru**

The third point is: association with a Guru is a blessing by itself. I speak from my own personal experience, if you would like to know—how we have been blessed by the personal association that we had with Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. This is purely a personal feeling that I am expressing. I have never seen a person like him, and never hope to see another, at least in this life. He was superb impersonality in personality—impersonality seen in a personality. He was a person like anybody else in the sense that we could see him; but he was an impersonal being. When he came, one could never feel that a man was coming. If anybody comes, the idea of male-female is there in our minds, and so we say a male is coming. But when Swamiji came, we could never feel that it was a male. This male-female idea never entered our heads. That is, he would radiate a force around him which would be wholly impersonal. Impersonality has no gender. There is no male-female differentiation in impersonality; and that impersonality was in him. He was neither a man nor a woman. At least, that idea would not enter our heads when we saw him. “Oh, some male is coming.” This idea would

never enter in his presence. If a woman saw him, she would not think that a male was there. Nobody would have such ideas at all. It was something very strange. The person who saw him would simply be possessed by some new kind of feeling at that time. He would be overpowered, overwhelmed by a new force.

These are the Gurus. They have spirituality in them; the soul works through them. It is not the mind and the intellect that work through the Gurus. Gurus never speak through the intellect. That is why the *chela* is not supposed to use his intellect when the Guru says something. When the soul speaks, the soul alone has to respond. The intellect, the reason, a scientific attitude, etc., should not be applied. It would be an anomaly, and the *chela* would be a misfit. The Guru is a soul and not a body.

### **The Guru Never Dies**

Now I am coming to another, more important point about the Guru-*chela* relationship. Because the Guru is a soul, he never dies. We will never say, "Our Guru died; we have nobody now." This is not intelligible to us. The Guru can never die, because the Guru is not the body. Nor is the *chela* a body. Now we come to the other side of it. Neither is the *chela* the body, nor is the Guru the body, and the relationship between Guru and *chela* is not a bodily relationship. So even if the Guru is a thousand miles away, the *chela* is happy. He is not bothered. He will not cry, "Oh, my Guru is far away. I have nobody." Distance is wiped out in the spiritual field. There is no distance in the world, really speaking. Distance is only a spatial concept. When even television and radio have wiped out distance, do you

think that consciousness—the soul—cannot wipe it out? It can, and it does. Though this is a very advanced state, it is the truth of things. The disciple and the Guru are related in a mystical manner, and that relationship continues even after the death of the body.

In the Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads, we have another example of it. It is said that when a *sadhaka*—a very advanced soul, not an ordinary *sadhaka*—quits this physical world, his soul advances further and further and passes through various stages of experience. It does not directly reach the Absolute. That is a difficult thing. Though there is a path which directly contacts the Absolute, it is another subject altogether. Normally speaking, there is progressive salvation, as it is called—*krama mukti*. *Krama mukti* is the gradual salvation of a soul from the bondage of individuality. This gradual liberation takes place through various stages. At least fourteen or fifteen stages are mentioned. At one stage, says the Upanishad—at the eleventh or twelfth stage—the soul reaches the point of losing personality-consciousness. There the soul cannot go further by its own self, and somebody else comes to lead it. ‘*Amanava purushah*’ is the term used in the Upanishad: a superhuman being comes. ‘*Amanava*’ means superhuman, not human. Someone who is superhuman comes and takes the soul by its hand, as it were, and directs it onward. The traditional exponents of the Upanishad say that it is the Guru that comes. The Guru himself comes. He was not dead; he was alive. It is not a social relationship, it is not a physical relationship, and it is not even a psychological relationship of the type that Freud describes in his psychoanalysis.

When a physician is to heal a mentally ill patient through a psychoanalytic method, the patient is introduced into a particular condition of mind where the will of the patient is made subservient to the will of the physician. The will of the physician becomes the will of the patient, and the will of the physician directs the will of the patient in such a way that the patient loses personality-consciousness in one sense. But that losing of personality-consciousness is morbid; it is not spiritual.

Some psychologists of the West have developed a doubt in their minds whether the Guru-*chela* relationship is not that kind of obsession which is to be cut off—because the patient is not supposed to cling to the physician always. When the mind is healed, when the person is cured of his mental illness, the obsession is taken away. No more does the patient cling to the will of the physician. So, is the *chela's* devotion to the Guru also a kind of obsession? This question was raised by certain psychoanalysts. Can we regard it as healthy, or is it an unnatural clinging which is not to be?

The answer is that it is not an obsession. This is something difficult for ordinary psychologists to understand. It is the longing of the soul for its wider dimension. Only people who have trodden the spiritual path will know what it is. We cannot find all this explained in textbooks. It is highly mystical, very deep—and secret, I should say. There are great secrets which are not published in books, and that is why even the Upanishads are not supposed to be imparted in public. In some Upanishads it is mentioned that we should not shout the Upanishads to people. The very word '*upanishad*' means a secret guidance

that is given to the soul of the individual for its onward march. It is not to be broadcast over the radio or the loudspeaker. The Upanishad is not spoken like that; it is a very great secret. Why is it a secret? Because it will not enter the mind of the non-initiated. If geometry is taught to a buffalo, what will the buffalo understand? Even if the buffalo is told again and again that three angles of a triangle make two right angles, it will just make some sound and go away.

Therefore, let us not teach geometry to a buffalo. It will not make any sense. Sometimes not only does it not make any sense, but it is misconstrued. “The soul is immortal.” This statement was heard by some *chela*, and he went on killing fish in the Ganga and eating them. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahmsa said, “Look at this fellow. He has misunderstood the Vedanta.” The soul is immortal, and therefore you can eat fish—does it mean that? Is this the outcome of Vedanta? Well, that is also one kind of Vedanta! “The soul is not killed, so why should I not eat fish? I am eating only the body of the fish, not the soul.” So Ramakrishna Paramahamsa used to say, “Look at these Vedantins.”

This is the sort of Vedanta we have these days—which is very, very bad. We should not teach Vedanta when the mind is not receptive. It will misconstrue. First of all, it will not understand; and even if it understands, it misunderstands. Therefore, mystical teachings are not to be imparted in public over loudspeakers and microphones. They have to be imparted only to the select disciple who is well mature.

Electric current only passes through high-tension wire. It does not pass through bamboo or plantain stem. Plantain stem cannot be a medium of electricity. It is said there are three types of disciples: plantain stem, firewood and gunpowder. Gunpowder will immediately catch the fire. If a match is struck and put on gunpowder, it immediately explodes. These are high-class aspirants. Once they are told, it is sufficient; they do not need to be told a second time. Their minds catch the teaching like gunpowder catches the fire. The second class of aspirants is like firewood. We have to go on blowing air, and only then does the wood catch fire. If we simply light a match and try to set the wood on fire, the first match gets extinguished before the wood catches fire. The third type of disciples is like plantain stem. It will never catch fire. However much we may throw it into fire, it will remain cold. "Oh, I didn't understand what you were saying. I am going back." This is the third type. So the disciple should be at least second rate, not third rate. And we should not shout first-rate instructions to second-rate disciples, and so on. The art of teaching is a science by itself. The teacher should be a wise man, not a fool. He should not go on saying truths which are not to be uttered at that time.

The presence of the Guru is a great influence upon the mind of the *chela*. Whatever we are today, in our own humble capacity, is entirely due to our personal association with Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, and not due to the books that we have studied or the texts that we have mastered or the lectures that we have heard. These are nothing. We are husk, and it is due to the force of Swami Sivananda that we somehow or other imbibed—by his grace, I should say.

Sivananda was everything for us—father, mother, brother. When he passed away, sometimes it looked as if the earth itself was giving way, cracking under our feet. We had nobody; everything went off. Anyway, we continue to work. Some spiritual force is working, from where the strength comes. Otherwise, this asthmatic body cannot do so much work. I have asthmatic complications; I cannot eat, and take so many medicines. Necessity is the mother of invention. When necessity arose, strength also came, perhaps. Guru's strength is spiritual strength; it is God's strength. Guru and God are regarded as identical. Gurur-Brahma Gurur-Vishnu Gurur-Devo Maheswara Gurur-sakshat Param-Brahma tasmai Shri Gurave namah. We do not regard the Guru as a human being, and he is not supposed to be regarded as a human being. Therefore, he is not a body; and therefore, he does not die. The immortal Guru maintains an immortal relationship with the *chela*, who is also an immortal part, a spark, a ray of divinity.

### **The Rise of Organisational Sannyasa**

An organisational type of Sannyasa arose, I should say, after Buddha. Prior to Buddha, there was no organisational Sannyasa—no Sangha, as we call it. “*Sangam sharanam gacchami*,” the Buddhists say. There was no Sangha before Buddha. Each individual, each Sannyasin was independent by himself. He used to stay in his own *kutir*, cottage, or in some forest or somewhere, or he would be a wandering mendicant; he did not live in an organisation or a monastery. There was no monastery of this kind. It was Buddha who organised monks into a group and constituted a body, called the Sangha, for the first time; and

Sankaracharya followed suit. So Buddha and Sankara should be regarded as the founders of the organisational system of Sannyasa, though Sannyasa did exist even before Buddha and Sankara, in an individual form. People were living Sannyasa in their individual capacity as mendicants, taking *bhiksha*, or alms, from house to house, and so on. No ashram of this kind existed. It started after Buddha, and Sankara learned from him, in one sense.

But Sankara learned something else from the Buddhists' system of Sannyasa. That Sannyasins had to be organised into a group was a need felt by Buddha. Sankara corroborated, accepted it, and he also did the very same thing. But there is one thing which Sankara did not do, which Buddha did: admit women into the monasteries. Buddha also was not for it. If you have read the life of Buddha, you will know this. Buddha never admitted women into monasteries, for his own reasons. Buddha did not argue. He was not interested in arguing on these matters. He kept quiet. One day Mahaprajapati, his own mother and the queen of the palace, wanted to embrace Sannyasa. She came and stood at the gates. The first woman who entered Buddha's order was Mahaprajapati, from his own palace. The disciples came and told Buddha, "Lord, Mahaprajapati, your mother, is standing at the gate." Buddha did not say anything; he kept quiet. After a few minutes Ananda, his dearest disciple, came and said, "Lord, Mahaprajapati, your mother, is standing at the gate." Buddha kept quiet. For the third time Ananda said, "Lord, Mahaprajapati is waiting in the hot sun." Buddha still did not say anything. Then Ananda said, "Lord, is the Lord only for men, or for all beings?" "Alright, let her come. But

the *dharma* of the Buddha will not last more than 500 years,” Buddha said. And then she was taken. Well, this is only a philosophical commentary, we can say, which Buddha gave with a single sentence or remark on this incident that took place. But later on, after Buddha, it became a very difficult affair to manage.

If we read the history of Buddhism, there were many causes—not one cause—behind the thinning out of Buddhism in India. Some say Sankara was the cause, some say Kumarila Bhatta was the cause, some say the Gupta emperors were the cause, but there were so many causes. No illness comes from a single cause. One of the causes was a kind of psychological deformity that crept into the minds of people in the order, due to there not being a proper understanding of the relationship between the monks and the nuns.

Sankaracharya stopped the admission of women. We will find that Shankaracharya had no lady disciple, although Buddha did. For some centuries—why centuries, for very many years—no women were admitted into the order of Sannyasa of Sankaracharya. No Sannyasi would initiate a woman. He would never do that, because it was not in his tradition.

There are at least three stages of the development of the order of Sannyasa. The first is prior to Buddha, and the second is after Buddha. The Sannyasa up to the time of Buddha was of one kind: purely individualistic. There was no mutual social relationship of Sannyasins, no brethren Sannyasins. But after Buddha, brothers started; and the brethren of the group formed monasteries. Then a third stage came into existence, after Swami Vivekananda. He

brought in a new atmosphere into the Sannyasa order by introducing a greater social sense. There was very little social sense in the Sankaracharya order, though there was order. The Buddhist monks were an order, Sangha was an order. There were thousands of Buddhist monks living in monasteries—in Nalanda, Taxila, and in so many places. The Maths of Sankara in Sringeri, Joshimath, Puri and Dwaraka were very important centres, but they were not social in the sense we understand society. They were devoted to their own scriptural studies and service of Guru, meditation according to the techniques of their order, with *moksha* or liberation as their goal. So in spite of the fact that the monks joined together in monasteries and there was organisation of Sannyasins after Buddha and Sankara, still the Sannyasins kept aloof from human society. They would not mix with laymen; and laymen were regarded as not spiritually mature enough to get deeply associated with Sannyasins. But Swami Vivekananda brought a new turn. Monks who were originally spiritually oriented also became socially oriented on account of a need of the times that was felt. We should say that all these changes take place according to the needs of the times. During the period of the Vedas and the Upanishads, this kind of organisation was perhaps not necessary on account of the lesser number of Sannyasins. When the number of Sannyasins went on increasing, an organisation became necessary. So Buddha said Sangha, and Sankaracharya said Maths, and so on.

But the world has changed now, and Sannyasins cannot be the same type that they were during the time of the Upanishads, during the time of Manu Smriti and the Mahabharata, and even during the time of Acharya

Sankara. These days humanity has come together into a closer relationship on account of modern scientific inventions. There was also the impossibility of Sannyasins to live such a kind of life because of the later development of human society, which was that no *bhiksha* could be obtained. There was no question of *bhiksha*. A very difficult affair it was. Either the Sannyasin should die without *bhiksha*, or he must find another means of existing. Royal patronage also ceased. During the time of Buddha, Sankara, etc., huge estates were leased out to the monasteries by the Rajas. Nalanda was such, and there were many other instances of this type. There was royal protection for the monasteries, and afterwards that ceased. Society still protected the monasteries, and so the tradition continued; but society also became a little different later on. Social conditions necessitated the formation of a new type of Sannyasa organisation, which we find today. This started after Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramatirtha; and afterwards everybody had to accept it, because it was the right step that Vivekananda took.

Thus, social life and spiritual activity came together; they were not bifurcated. Later on it became incumbent upon monks to recognise the social activities as a kind of spiritual activity itself, not outside Sannyasa. It became very difficult for Sannyasins to stomach all these changes, and some resented it. Even during the time of Swami Vivekananda there was resentment from his own nearest of brothers. There was one Lattu Maharaj, later on called Swami Adbhutananda, a very good soul. Like Swami Vivekananda, he was one of the first disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In those days, there was no compulsion and

order for the sake of obedience. Obedience and compulsion imposed by a superior upon an inferior was unknown to the monks and Sannyasins of those days. They had never experienced it. So when Vivekananda started a new trend of thinking and said, “Tomorrow morning the bell will ring at 7 o’clock and all will sit for meditation,” Adbhutananda said, “I am quitting this place today itself.” He rolled up his bedding and said that he was leaving. He said, “You are giving trouble to me by saying that the bell will ring at such and such time tomorrow and we have to sit for meditation. I don’t want this kind of thing. Ramakrishna never did this. He never rang the bell and troubled us like this. Now you start ringing the bell, I am quitting.” He really rolled up his bedding and was about to leave. Then Vivekananda made it little mild and said, “Don’t go, don’t go.” He introduced some change, and it was not as strict as in the beginning. Some brothers resented it. “We don’t want to be ordered by anyone, and won’t tolerate it. We are humble souls, humble disciples trying to attain *mukti* in our own humble way, and we don’t want to be ordered or expected to do something when a bell rings.” They did not like it. In the beginning everything is a bit difficult, and afterwards it gets accommodated.

Then finally, after the passing of Swami Vivekananda, the first social monastic organisation was the Ramakrishna Mission. I am particularly using the word ‘social’ because they were the first to directly associate themselves with laymen, which earlier was not there. Sannyasins would not associate themselves with laymen, lay people. They would always be isolated. After the institution of the Ramakrishna Mission by Swami Vivekananda, and especially after his

passing, it became more social. Now the Sri Ramakrishna Mission lays tremendous emphasis on social service of various types—educational, medical, famine relief, etc. Wonderful social work is being done by them. This emphasis was given first of all by Swami Vivekananda himself, because in the same way as society changed, the individual also changed—even the Sannyasins and monks.

Due to the changing times, it was difficult for people to sit for meditation throughout the day. How could they live a life of meditation throughout the day? Try it yourself. It is impossible. Can you meditate throughout the day? You cannot. Then, what will you do? An idle mind is the devil's workshop, because all unwanted ideas will enter it. These unwanted ideas need not necessarily be criminal or anti-social, but they are unwanted, from the spiritual point of view at least. Very difficult it is to live a spiritual life. This was realised very early.

Swami Sivananda was one of those who said that *tamas* has to be first overcome by *rajas*, and *rajas* has to be overcome by *sattva*, and then finally *sattva* has to be transcended. *Raga*, *dvesha*, *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*, *irsha*, *asuya*, *dambha*, *darpa* and *ahamkar* are the thirteen Sanskrit names of the types of *tamasic gunas*, and are enumerated in Vedantic textbooks. These are the thirteen kinds of dirt of the mind. They are *tamasic* qualities—the lowest bestial forms, we may call them. How can one get out of this? How can you meditate with these qualities in your mind? Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to ask this question to his disciples. It was Swami Vivekanandaji who started this trend of thinking. A person cannot sit and meditate. It is useless to say, “I meditate. I do

*japa*.” You are not doing *japa*. You are not meditating. You are unnecessarily wasting your time. Instead of building castles in the air and having unwanted thoughts, and not progressing spiritually, really speaking—in other words, instead of wasting your life—why don’t you do something good? Divert your energy towards good activities. Let it be *rajas*. You want *sattva*—meditation means *sattva*—but you cannot go directly from *tamas* to *sattva*; it is impossible. Therefore, you pass through *rajas*. *Rajas* is activity. If you do not accept *rajas* and think that you are ready for *sattva* alone, you are thoroughly mistaken, and you will fall into *tamas*. Sometimes *tamas* and *sattva* look alike. You may be sleeping, and yet you may think that you are meditating. As Shakespeare’s line says, “Great genius is to madness near allied; a thin partition divides them both.” Genius is near to madness; meditation looks like sleep, and sleep looks like meditation. You will be thinking that you are a highly advanced soul, but you will be on the lowest pedestal. If you rub a person, you will know what that person is; otherwise, you cannot know. Scratch a person, and then you will know him. He may appear to be spiritually advanced, great, but try scratching him. Then you will see how far he has advanced spiritually.

*Karma* yoga was detestable to traditional Vedantins. Whether they were *bhakti* yogis or *jnana* yogis, it made no difference; they both hated *karma* because they thought that *karma* is a kind of entanglement in society, from which they had already extricated themselves by so much *Guruseva*, so why should they be expected to go to society once again? This was an argument against *karma*. Sankaracharya was against a particular type of *karma*, and

many people did not understand what *karma* he was against. And the *bhaktas* said, “What is all this about *karma*? Don’t talk about it. There is no question of service.” So devotees as well as philosophers both rejected *karma*.

Though it is understandable and reasonable from one point of view, it is impracticable from the realistic point of view. You cannot pray to God throughout the day and be as devoted as you would like to in the emotion of your devotion; nor is it possible for you to be a philosopher of such type as to be continuously conscious of the Absolute. Neither of these things is possible. Therefore, the modern teachers suggested an alternative—or, in the language of psychologists, a substitution. But it is a way to sublimation, and is not merely a substitution which will end in substitution. You are not doing *karma*, social service or activity only because you cannot meditate, though that may be one of the reasons. “I cannot meditate; therefore, I will do some work.” That is not the reason. The reason is something else also: that you can sublimate your energies through properly channelising them into good work. Though *rajas* is not *sattva*, it is better than *tamas*. This should be accepted. Instead of going on sleeping for fifteen hours a day, which will do no good either to you or to anybody else, would it not be proper to do a little service to your brothers? What would you lose? What do you lose by doing a little service? On the other hand, you gain something. You gain something psychologically, you gain socially, and you also gain spiritually if it is properly done with the right attitude. So now we have ashrams of this kind, where there is a blend of society, social service, spiritual aspiration and mystical meditation.

## Initiation into Sannyasa

The initiation traditionally given today is of the same type as it was during the time of the Upanishads. The tradition has not changed, though these days the Gurus do not insist upon twelve years of service or probation. Even though they still say it should be twelve years, actually it is a bit reduced. But the Gurus are supposed to observe the disciples, and not give them Sannyasa immediately. Even initiation into Naishtika Brahmacharya is not done at once. Brahmacharya is of two kinds: Upakurvana Brahmacharya and Naishtika Brahmacharya. Upakurvana means preparatory Brahmacharya, and Naishtika means absolute Brahmacharya. An Upakurvana Brahmacharin may live under a Guru and study the Vedas and scriptures and so on, and then return to the household. An Upakurvana Brahmacharin is allowed to leave the Guru after the period of the study is over and become a householder, a layman; there is no objection. But a Naishtika Brahmacharin cannot do that. He is preparing himself for the higher order of Sannyasa. A symbolic distinction is made in the clothing. The Upakurvana Brahmacharins wear white cloth because nobody will object if they return to their house; but a Brahmacharin who wears yellow cloth cannot return, because he is a Naishtika Brahmacharin who has accepted absolute Brahmacharya as a preparatory for Sannyasa. After some years, when the Brahmacharin is regarded by the Guru as sufficiently fit for the order of Sannyasa, he is called for initiation.

The tradition is that a week or sometimes even a day before the initiation, the Brahmacharin is asked to observe

a fast. The day prior to the day of initiation would be a day of fast, and the night prior to the day of initiation would be one of vigil. He would not eat and he would not sleep that day. Those who are ill and physically not ready may not be able to observe this rule to its letter, but that is what is prescribed. At least the minimum possible discipline that would be expected of a candidate for Sannyasa is fast for at least one day and vigil for one night, chanting the Gayatri mantra or his Ishta mantra. The tradition of Brahmins receiving one type of initiation and those other than Brahmins receiving another type of initiation still continues. It has not completely gone. Though bifurcation according to caste is not so much these days, the spiritual aspect of it still continues. For example, the Gayatri mantra *japa* is the special mantra of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. Nowadays, Gurus do not insist on that mantra. They say, “You do your Ishta Mantra. Whatever be your deity, your God, your concept of the Supreme Being, do *japa* of that deity throughout the night of vigil. Generally, Gayatri mantra is not given to women. In certain cases it may be permitted, but normally it is not advised for women. They do their Ishta Mantra.

The next morning there is the commencement of the ritual, which begins with a bath in the Ganga, or in a tank, a well, a river, or a stream. Whatever it is, it is a bath in cold water. Then the candidate has a shave. A tuft of hair is left, which is very traditional and conservative. After that he has to take another bath.

Then he performs what is known as *shraddha*. ‘*Shraddha*’ is a Sanskrit word which cannot be translated into English. It can be explained, but there is no dictionary

synonym for *shraddha*. It is an offering that is made to dead people—ancestors or *pitris*, as we call them. In India, among Hindus especially, it is a tradition to offer rice balls mixed with *til*(sesame) and some other items, coupled with libation, ablution in water, with the chanting of mantras for not only peace of the departed soul, but also for the soul’s salvation. Generally when a person dies, this *shraddha*, or offering to the departed soul, is made by the nearest surviving relatives. In the case of the candidate for Sannyasa, there is a special kind of *shraddha* which is called *atmashraddha*—*shraddha* done by oneself for one’s own self. The idea behind it is that if a Sannyasin physically dies, nobody will mourn for him. Nobody will weep. If he goes, let him go; nobody is bothered about it. Who will do *shraddha* for him when he has severed himself from his family, from society? Nobody will do *shraddha* for his soul after his death. So what does this candidate do? He performs the offering now itself, even before death. “Even before I die, I reserve something for myself after my death.” *Atmashraddha* is the offering that is made to one’s own self as a discarnate spirit. This is a very traditional ritual, which is done by Pundits. We Sannyasis have already made the necessary provisions for ourselves for quitting this physical body because nobody will do it for us after our death. We have to do it ourselves because we have no relations and have cut off all connections. After *atma shraddha*, he takes a bath. Nowadays they do not take so many baths. They take only one bath, because they can fall sick by going on dipping themselves in cold water. It is very difficult to take several baths, especially in the winter when the water is very

cold. They cannot do it, so they have only one bath, but traditionally there are many baths.

After the penultimate bath, subsequent to the *atma shraddha*, they are asked to sit before a holy fire—before a sacred fire which is installed very ritualistically with the chant of mantras relevant to the occasion. In India, we have a concept of what is known as a *yajna*. *Yajna* means sacrifice. We may say that in one sense the whole Hindu culture is based on the concept of *yajna*. If you understand what *yajna* is, you have understood the whole of Hinduism. It has such a vast meaning and many implications, though it literally means sacrifice. The candidate for Sannyasa offers a sacrifice before the sacred fire; *yajna* is performed by him. ‘*Homa*’ is another word for it. The particular name for this *yajna* is *viraja*, which means free from *rajas*. No passions will be there afterwards. Generally in the *yajna*, or the sacrifice, offerings are made in the form of certain materials such as *til*, rice, *jaggary*, *ghee*, and certain other preparations like gruel, etc. But in this *viraja homa*, though the medium of offering is of course *ghee* to symbolise the sacrifice, the passions of the performer are supposed to be offered. This is something very interesting. The Sannyasin offers the passions of his individuality. “No more passions in me hereafter; no love, no hatred in the sense of personal attachment.” He may have universal love, that is a different thing, but there is no personal love hereafter. “I won’t love anybody, I won’t hate anybody, I won’t have lust, I won’t have greed, and I won’t have any kind of desire which is driven by the physical body.”

I mentioned earlier the thirteen types of dirt in the mind. These are the passions of the soul, physically

associated. Lust, anger and greed are the primary passions. All these are offered, and he chants a mantra and says, “Hereby I offer my passions into the sacred fire; they are burnt to ashes. My anger is offered into the fire; it is burnt to ashes. My lust is offered into the fire; it is burnt to ashes. My greed for wealth and property is offered into the sacred fire; they are burnt to ashes”—and so on. There are so many mantras. Finally he says, “I offer the physical body into this fire. I offer the *pranas* into this fire. I offer the senses into this fire. I offer my intellect into this fire.” What remains afterwards? Only Pure Consciousness remains. When I have offered all my passions, I have offered my body and the senses, the intellect, the mind and the *pranas*, what remains in me? Only the Spirit remains, Pure Consciousness remains, this Atman remains. The Sannyasin shines like gold in his concept of the spirit, free from physical, psychological and social passions. This is symbolised by the *virajayajna*. After this *yajna* is performed, he glows in the spiritual sense—*brahmavarchas*.

Then he is introduced to the Guru, and initiation takes place. The Guru does not come into the picture up to this time. He sits in the background. Now the Guru comes and asks the disciple to sit facing him. The Guru and the disciple sit facing each other, and there is a spiritual communication, as it were, between the Guru and the disciple. The soul speaks to the soul. It is not some Swami speaking to some Brahmachari. The initiation starts with the chanting of the mantra Om, and is followed by so many other mantras, which all connote the introduction into the consciousness of the disciple the idea of the universality of

the Spirit—Brahman, as it is called. The universal Atman is called Brahman; they are one and the same thing.

This goes on for some time, and the Guru asks the disciple to give fearlessness to all people. One of the very important vows that the Sannyasin takes at the time of initiation is that he gives fearlessness to everybody: “There is no fear from me hereafter. No fear shall come from me either to human beings or to animals. I will not kill a snake or hit a scorpion or attack a human being. Even by word, I will not insult others. No hurt from me will be there at any time.” This is called *abhayadana*. When you see a Sannyasin, you feel happy that your friend is there. A Sannyasin is a friend of all people. He has no enemies, and no person will be afraid of him. That is a very interesting thing. No person in the world will be afraid of a Sannyasin, because he will not harm any person. He will not harm even by word. He will not say, “Get out, you idiot.” Such words will not come from the mouth of a Sannyasin. Even if a person is not physically injured, he can be insulted by words; but he will not do that either. Not only that, it is said that even animals are not afraid of a Sannyasin who is in a very advanced stage. Not to create a vibration of animosity even before subhuman beings such as reptiles, etc., is a difficult thing to achieve, but that is an ideal which is before the Sannyasin. He gives *abhaya*, fearlessness to all creatures.

Then by loud proclamation he renounces the three worlds—the physical, the astral and the celestial. The three worlds are the physical world that we see with our senses, the astral world which we cannot see with our senses, and the celestial world which is called heaven. He does not want

the pleasures of the heaven either. So he renounces all the three worlds—all associations with the three worlds, and with the denizens of the three worlds. He gives fearlessness to all, and says, “I am free from the three evils of life.” In Sanskrit they are called *eshanas*. *Eshana* is subtle longing, passion in a rudimentary form. Love for wealth, love for sex, and love for name and fame are the three *eshanas*. He renounces all these three, and has no love for wealth, no love for sex, and no love for name-fame, which are the three pitfalls of a Sannyasin. If he escapes one, he will get caught by another. Ordinarily speaking, no one can be free from all three. It is impossible. He will be caught by at least one. But one has to be free from all three if he is to lead a life of Sannyasa. So he takes a vow while gazing at the Sun and touching the waters of the holy Ganga: “I shall be free from these three evils, the passions of the individual being.” And he makes the Sun as his witness! What a terrible thing it is to make the vow before the Sun. He will see it. “This fellow has uttered these things before me.” It is a terrific vow which we are made to loudly chant.

Then the Guru says, “Go wherever you like.” That is the traditional order. “Go wherever you like. Blessed be thy soul, and attain salvation at the due time.” Traditionally speaking, the disciple will not return. He will go away; that is all. He does not live with the Guru afterwards, but goes wherever he likes. He moves towards the north, towards the Himalayas, and he will never be seen after that. But that is extreme, and nowadays very few people do it. Otherwise, the disciple says, “Guruji, where will I go? I will stay here itself, and do whatever you say.” This is a modern innovation. But there is a danger that the disciple may

forget the vows he has taken. Mostly the vows are forgotten because once again the idea of body comes, the idea of society comes, the idea of name-fame comes. These three things are terrible, and nobody can escape them. But one must be free from these by very hard effort of deep study of the Upanishads. The Guru says, “All right, if you cannot go away, stay with me and study the Upanishads—the Mandukya Upanishad, the Chhandogya Upanishad, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, etc. Meditate on the glorious descriptions of the Absolute given in these Upanishads, spend as many hours as possible in deep meditation on their teachings, and regard yourself as the humblest of creatures.”

### **Swami Sivananda’s Influence**

I told you that Swami Vivekananda gave a new turn to the order of Sannyasa. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj gave another turn to it. This is something very interesting. A few of us are blessed in the sense that we lived with Swami Sivananda and studied all these things. We have never lived with Swami Vivekananda, and I have never even seen him. But we lived with Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, so we know some of his peculiarities and his idea of Sannyasa.

A very difficult man was Swami Sivananda. Do not think that he was very soft, like butter. He was not. He used to tell us, “I am Vishnu and Rudra combined.” ‘Vishnu’ means very considerate, taking care of us. But ‘Rudra’ means that he will simply finish you! He used to say, “I am Vishnu and Rudra both.” He would chastise us before all people and make us cry, and then give us an apple or an orange. We would not know whether to laugh or to weep.

He would say things that would make us feel ashamed, but afterwards he would say, "Take this orange, and do *japa*." What a strange man! It is impossible to describe the training that he gave to us. These interesting things are not found in books. They will not be found in any biography or autobiography of Sivananda. They are only in my mind and the minds of some of his oldest disciples.

I came to the ashram in 1944, and I know almost everything from the beginning of this ashram's foundation. There were very few people at that time. Swami Sivananda chastened me very terribly. I now wonder how I stuck to this place. Without him, I would have run away. Some spirit made me stay here; otherwise, one cannot continue like that. An awful life it was. We had to do so much work. I remember having to work for fourteen hours a day, and I was suffering with asthma even then. Sivananda would purchase injections and give them to me, but I had to work also. "No asthma," he would say. "Work!" I was in charge of all the departments. Now we have five people in each department, but at that time only one man, me, was doing the work of ten departments. I was in the Membership Dept., the Divine Life Magazine, the Vishwanath Mandir, and I was lecturing, etc.

Swamiji was very fond of lectures. He would say, "Today you will speak in Satsang." "O God, what will I speak? I will have no sleep at all tonight." Before all people he would say, "You speak." "Swamiji, I don't know," we would say. "Nothing doing; today you will sit here and speak. Say something. Suppose you are angry, will you not be able to say something at that time? You have so many words to utter when you are angry, but now you cannot

utter even a few words? Will you speak after God-realisation? Now itself you must speak. You need not speak after God-realisation, but now you must. Today you start lecturing.” We could not utter even a few words. What could we speak? Ideas must come, and language must be there. If neither the language is there nor the ideas are there, what could we speak? But he was a great man. See how kind he was. Even in several lives I cannot pay the debt for the training that he has given to us. He has made us something not only in the eyes of people, but also something in our own hearts. When I first came, I was a small boy. The first thing that Sivanandaji said to me was, “Why did you come here?” I said, “I want to study yoga.” “Okay. Stay here till death. I will make ministers fall at your feet.” I was laughing, thinking that he was joking. Ministers did not even know my existence; how could they fall at my feet? But his words have slowly come true, to some extent. It is a great thing.

Well, I mentioned to you how Swami Sivananda gave training to us. His philosophy was the humility of Sannyasa. The Sannyasin is the cheapest of persons. Anybody can beat him without retaliation of any kind from him. A Sannyasin is the property of everyone, the humblest of persons, the last man to ask for anything and the first man to serve people. This is what he insisted upon. The Sannyasin is the last person to ask for anything and the first person to serve when the opportunity arises, all the while remembering the great goal of life. He used to impart to others his own methods of meditation. Some people used to ask, “Swamiji, how do you meditate? What is your technique?” He would give simple answers to these

questions. Sometimes he would joke with us by saying, “Krishnananda Swamiji, do you know what *sadhana* I am doing?” I would reply, “I don’t know what *sadhana* you are doing.” This happened during later years, when he was physically incapacitated and could not walk. “The first man that I see in the early morning is the sweeper who comes to clean the bathroom,” he said. That sweeper is still in the ashram, and he served Sivananda for years together. “And what do I think at that time? That a sweeper has come to clean the bathroom? No. The Lord has come; one of the heads of the Virat Purusha is being seen. And I throw a flower at his head and chant mantras from the Vedas which describe the Cosmic Being. How could the Cosmic Being exclude a sweeper? Can the Cosmic Being exclude a sweeper? It cannot. The sweeper is a part of the Cosmic Being. So do you know what I see? Not a sweeper. Then what do I see? I see His foot, and I offer a flower. Then what do I see? I get down from my bed and say, ‘Oh, I am keeping my foot on Mother Earth. I prostrate to you, my dear Mother; excuse me for keeping my foot on your chest.’ Then I go for bath and take three dips in the Ganga. Why do I take three dips? During the first dip I think in my mind: blessedness to all those that have left this world. Another dip: blessedness to all those that are in this world. And the third dip: salvation for this soul.”

The training we received is beyond explanation. You will understand what training we received only by seeing us here and observing our way of life. We cannot explain all this by writing articles. It is a life of several years of vicissitude, ups and downs, socially as well as psychologically. But we feel he is still alive spiritually.

Otherwise, what strength do we have to run such an organisation and to attract you all? It is all a very difficult job. Why should you come here; who can attract you? You will go somewhere else. It is all a wonder.

Some devotees used to ask Gurudev: “Swamiji, how do you get money to run the ashram? Every day you are feeding so many; food is flowing like water. Wherefrom do you get money?” Generally the answer would be that donations come from outside, people send money, and so on; but his answer was something quite strange. He used to say, “Rain drops from the heavens. *Uparse barasta hai*: It drops from the skies.” His ideas were really wonderful. He did not say that it comes from people, and so on. And sometimes when we used to tell him, “It is very difficult to manage this ashram, Swamiji,” he used to say, “This is not your ashram. Who are you to manage it? This idea also must go. He who has started this ashram will run it. If he does not want it, he will close it. Why do you bother unnecessarily?” Even in great difficulties, he used to calm our minds by such answers. We would go to him in great distress, and this was the answer from him. Then we would go back, and everything would become all right. He used to give very simple, homely and prosaic answers, in one sentence.

Nowadays we do not have debts; but then we had debts. At that time, the income was very poor and the debt was more; a very awful situation it was. The Secretary would go to Swamiji and complain, but Swamiji would not say anything. Instead he would order for certain extra things and make matters worse, and the Secretary would be weeping because the shopkeeper would come only to the

Secretary for payment, not to Swamiji. Gurudev used to tell us, “I will not allow any bank balance, because attachment will come for that. I won’t keep even one *paisa* in the bank, because otherwise you will be thinking of that. I don’t want you to think of it.” But before he passed away, he made arrangements to clear the debts. That was another wonder. Suddenly the whole complexion of the ashram changed after he passed away. Some people thought that everything was over and that the ashram would close, that it was finished; who can manage it? But that did not happen. A month before his passing, all the debts were cleared, and he made all provisions for his burial, his consecration, feeding, and so on. Various types of help came, and the debts were cleared. Everything was stabilised, and only then did he leave. The ashram was stabilised in every sense.

In the midst of all these jokes and humour there is the concept, idea and notion that has been driven deep into our unconscious level that God-realisation is the goal of life. In all of Swamiji’s works, the first sentence would be: “The goal of life is God-realisation.” Then he would go on saying so many things. He has told us this so many times that we can never forget it. The goal of life is God-realisation, and everything else is only a preparation for it. Service of humanity, service of Guru, and everything else are preparations for it. They are not obstacles.

I must conclude by saying that God-realisation is the goal, and no other thought enters us except that. Even when we are suffering in any way—physically, socially, financially, or in whatever way—the idea that God-realisation is the goal of life does not leave us. That keeps us happy. The spirit of God is present in the worst of suffering.

In the greatest calamity, God is present. God is great! God bless you.