

ON REASON AND HIGHER LIFE

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

(A letter addressed in reply to certain questions from a modernistic mind.)

First of all, it has to be remembered that reason is not everything, and it is futile to work up an apotheosis of reason. This itself is contrary to reason, and it is a prejudiced faith of the human mind which makes it imagine that reason is all. You ask, 'On what is faith based?', but I ask, 'On what is reason based?' 'Who told you that reason itself is reasonable?' Don't you think that this itself is a faith that you have inherited due to your social circumstances which you yourself condemn on another occasion? That the human mind unquestionably clings to the doctrine of a reason for everything and does not want to accept anything which cannot have a reason shows that the mind is prejudiced; and do you call this rationality?

Secondly, it is not true that everything in creation can be explained by reason, and I do not believe that you will again subscribe to the prejudice that the visible alone is real and there is nothing above what the human mind can visualise. The culture of our land is not based merely on reason, though it is not contrary to reason. The greatness of our culture lies in a super-rational faith – mark super-rational – on which even reason is based; because reason is an offshoot of experience, as inference is based on perception. Our culture is primarily rooted in the great gospel of unselfishness for which you want a reason now. Yes, there is a reason, and this reason is our philosophy. This is our religion, this our aim,

and this the fond ideal of all humanity. Without going deep into the reason behind things too much, it is not difficult for us to discover, with even a little of common-sense, that we belong to a wider environment of which we are integral parts, and we do not exhaust ourselves in the shell of our personalities. Emphasise again, we belong to a wider environment, we are constituents of this environment, and we cannot exist if we are disloyal to the law of this environment to which we belong. To cite an example, a limb of the body cannot exist if it wishes to revolt against the law of the body taken as a whole, because the limb is an integral part of the body. Now, unselfishness or selflessness, as you wish to understand, is nothing but the way or the mode in which the part belongs to the whole, by which it surrenders itself to the fulfilment of the law of the whole, through which the lower is transfigured in the higher. Are you satisfied that there is a reason in unselfishness? In an unselfish act we do not do something unreasonable, but the only reasonable thing possible, for unselfishness is the discovery of oneself in the larger whole. I believe this is sufficient reason.

Now, about the question of money which you have raised: No one says that money as such is evil, as nothing in God's creation as such can be called evil. Taking money or giving money as such are not evils. But the evil lies in clinging to anything, getting disturbed by the absence of it, being in an emotional tension when deprived of it – in short, being attached to it. All attachment is evil – not money or gold, or anything for that matter. As to why attachment is evil is a different subject altogether, which I would like you to study in detail by going through standard texts written by geniuses. But this does not mean that we should necessarily accept money for our services. I do not mean to say that taking money is always an evil. But not to take money is noble and is a mark of greatness. Not to accept money is not in any manner the denial of one's ability to produce, as you put it, for though money is a measure of one's ability to produce, as you say, it is not necessary that the ability should always be measured. Let it be there unmeasured. What is the harm? No

harm happens to the sun if there is no one to measure the intensity of its heat or light. One may lose money by not accepting it, but thereby one does not lose one's ability to produce, because money is not the ability – it is ability that brings money.

Further, as I have pointed out above, our existence is to be dedicated to the larger whole to which we belong, and in not accepting money for services rendered, you are only asserting your participation in the larger whole, while simultaneously diminishing the importance of the part, taken independently, in the light of the whole. That is it love of money which is evil does not mean that it is not evil when it is coveted by one who is able to produce it. Whether one is able to produce anything or not, all earthly love is bad insofar as it binds one to a limited life of a very narrow perception. Earning money honestly is one thing, and coveting it is another thing. There is nothing wrong in earning it, but there is something wrong in coveting. Earning has a spontaneity of naturalness, while coveting is deliberate and artificially construed. However, it has to be reiterated that things themselves are not evil but attachment is evil, for all attachment is a bar to the onward progress of the human individual towards a larger reality of which it is a part, as already stated.

Whether it is moral to accept something for nothing is a digression from the point at issue, for unselfish service and accepting something for nothing are two different standpoints. Do you think that people accept money merely because they do not want the other to receive something for nothing? Is it the consideration of the morality of the others that makes us accept money from them? Have you seen one individual in this world who thinks like this? You know, legal quibbles do not always touch the core of truth. Take the matter as it is, on its face. Do we accept money from others so that others may be benefited by the morality thereof? Definitely not. We want the money for ourselves. And the morality in regard to the other is irrelevant to the matter. I am reminded of a man who, in anger, thrashed some poor

fellow and when queried later on answered that he thrashed the other to instil into him the lesson of 'bearing insult and injury', which is supposed to be a spiritual virtue. You can imagine how untrue the man's answer is, though it is true that it is good to bear insult and injury. Similar is the case with receiving and giving money, the point that you have raised. Giving is considered as good and taking not so good merely for the reason that giving unfolds our real personality while taking encumbers it. This is simple enough to understand. The question of the morality about giving and taking is clear to your mind, I believe.

Sacrifice is the voluntary surrendering of a value, it is true, without thought of reward. You say that sacrifice of the nature of dedication of oneself or one's values to total strangers, especially those whom we despise, is not possible. But there are many other impossible things in the world from the point of view of the ordinary mind, but all possible with some effort and understanding. The reason behind sacrifice is the same as the reason behind unselfishness, which I have touched to some extent already. It is not based on blind faith as you think, nor on other's saying it, and it is not beyond one's power of reasoning, as you surmise. It also not impossible as you seem to think. You are right when you say that to make a true sacrifice is death, but it is death of the false personality and not the real one. It is the death of our prejudices and erroneous notions. It is the death of what is to be cast off one day or the other. It is not the death of the real we. Suicide is not the solution, for suicide is not the death of the personality but its affirmation in stronger terms than one would do when alive. Suicide is the culmination of attachment to oneself and one's own pleasures, which is foolishly affirmed with the wrong notion that by the cutting off of oneself from circumstances which are painful one can attain the desired end. This is not the solution because the effect cannot be destroyed without removing the cause.

Giving one's body for scientific study may be some sort of unselfishness - there is no denial. But this is again attachment to humanity as a corporate body, which is not in

consonance with truth. There is something more real than humanity as a group, which cannot be forgotten.

It all, in the end, hinges upon whether an act is done for one's personal pleasure or for the good of a larger existence. But no sacrifice should involve pain or injury to others. This is another condition to be borne in mind, barring of course the pains of the nature of the operation performed by the doctor for the good of the patient. To perform a sacrifice it is not always necessary that there should be a 'taker', for sacrifice is not always material. Sacrifice is possible even if you alone exist in the world and there is none else, for sacrifice is more a psychological act of self dedication to a higher existence than a mere parting with material objects, though the giving away of material things also is a part of sacrifice of a lower order. Remember again that sacrifice is not giving where it is not needed but the giving for the sake of wiping out of the encrustation of one's egoism and attachment. You seem to be thinking of only a horizontal sacrifice where someone takes something but there is a vertical one where the higher one consumes the lower. The gigantic fraud that you speak of is not the moral principle of giving but the ignorance with which we deny its meaning and value due to insufficient enlightenment about the truth of things. The principle of giving is based on the principle of the relinquishment of the narrower personality in the larger good which is the eternal reality.

We do not 'give' merely because another man's need is identical with his lack of ability. This is not the reason behind giving. We give because thereby we evolve, and there is the end of it. In this world there is always someone who has a larger ability and some other who has a lesser one. There is no point in mentioning it in the interpretation of the psychology of giving. In the performance of duty the result is not the motive. The motive is the psychological process that is going on in the act of giving. What you think and feel is important. The end beyond it is not the consideration. Our philosophy of Karma Yoga, which is the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita, is one of emphasis on the essential value of

active duty and not the passive existence of its remote end. It would be a poor philosophy that identifies this with the dogma or those who, in their inability, what to share the bounty of others. The question of 'others' has no relevance to the act of giving. As I mentioned above, giving is a psychological process and there is no psychology except in the subject which thinks. There is no use tagging on to it the object which is an extraneous element to all thinking. This inability to distinguish between the true subject and its false object, which is only a notion of its, is itself the outcome of a muddle in our thinking, for the person that we see outside is not the object. The person standing outside us as a subject in his or her own capacity is not the object of our thought. The real object is the objectness that we associate with that subject. We have to think over this a little deeply.

There is no use merely being a skeptic. One who doubts everything should also doubt one's own conclusions in order to be a consistent skeptic. That would be a wonderful state of affairs, isn't it? What is your standard of judgement, and what is the standard on which you base this standard? Can you doubt that standard? Can you be a skeptic about it? All doubt has a reference to a standard which itself is not doubted. We cannot live with doubts. Life itself is a negation of all doubt, for life is and doubt negates all existence.

Your queries regarding selfishness have been adequately answered, and your point concerning the one who imagines he has no self as he borrows from others should have also been answered. Borrowing is not effacement of ego but a strengthening of it, which is not difficult to understand. A shameless man is not an egoless man. We always distinguish between Sattva and Tamas.

Our highest wisdom is expressed in the great sentence of the Veda: 'Reality is One and undivided, though it is envisaged in variegated forms.'