

Discourses/Articles
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DIVINE LIFE

The moral or the ethical principle may be said to consist in the method or the art of determining the lower in terms of the higher. When one is totally exhausted in what is visible, this visible thing which is the object of our judgment, interpretation and encounter, cannot be evaluated in terms of that which reigns above the visible level.

As a matter of fact, there cannot be such a thing as virtue unless there is a standard of virtue. What you do, what you think, what you speak, becomes either permissible or not permissible in comparison with a standard that has been set, and this standard, whatever it be, may be considered to be the determining principle of human conduct. And divine life, at least in the sense in which perhaps Sri Gurudev Sri Swami Sivananda Maharaj envisaged it for the purpose of the welfare of mankind, should be regarded as the regulative principle of human life.

Though the word 'divine' has a very deep connotation which may take us far above the ken of human understanding and perception, the term 'divine' here, in the words 'divine life' are to be understood by us from a down to earth practical point of view, because divine life, which is the gospel and the message and the teaching and the precept of Sri Gurudev, is an art of practical living in this world. It may have some connection with larger, wider, higher realities, and it may even touch upon such transcendent mysteries as God and His creation, the relationship between the *jiva* and God, and such other deeply philosophical or metaphysical issues. But for our purposes, which is perhaps the real purpose on hand, divine life is the technique of so conducting ourselves in life, inwardly as well as outwardly, as not to be disharmonious with the principles that govern the world.

Swami Sadhanandaji Maharaj who was speaking, spoke one-half verse from the Mahabharata. Do not do unto others that which you would not wish to be done to you. Do unto others as you would be done by. Here is the crux and the essence and the quintessence of Dharma, which is the way of divine living. From another point of view I may say what are called the *yamas* in the system of yoga of Patanjali constitute the very rock foundation of divine living. *Ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, aparigraha yamaha*; these sum up the whole ethical system. This is all morality, all goodness, and the system of perfect living.

From this angle of vision, in the light of this understanding, it may appear that self-control is indispensable in divine life, because to be a good person one has to be a self-controlled person. A person who gives the longest possible rope to the operation or the activity of his senses and the mind is not a self-controlled person, and he cannot be regarded as a good person.

You know very well the word hammered into your ears again and again as the great teaching of the Master, “Be good and do good”. You cannot know how it is possible for you to do good unless you know how it is possible for you to be good, because the doing of good is only an emanation of what you are made of. The whole personality of yours moves outwardly in human society when you do a good deed or perform what is righteous or virtuous.

There is a great dictum of ethics that the finality of good conduct consists in the acceptance of everybody else also in the world as an end in itself and not as a means to one’s own end. This is perhaps the last word in ethical science and the moral principle. This is not an easy thing to understand, though the grammatical meaning of this sentence perhaps is clear to every one of you. You cannot treat anyone and anything in this world as a means to an end – everyone is an end in itself, everything is an end from its own point of view. This is the basis of a good living, a harmonious living, a happy living, a divine living.

The art of not injuring anybody else, the technique of not exploiting any other person or thing for one’s own selfish purpose is a necessary ingredient of living a divine life. Let every one of us consider for a moment the extent to which we are likely to exploit the conditions and circumstances of other people. We cannot enjoy a flower unless we pluck it from the garden. We cannot have any relation to a person unless he is a liked one or a disliked one. We cannot independently assume an attitude of ends rather than as a means. A person is related to you in an extraneous manner, and the art of considering things or persons as ends in themselves rules out the question of relationship. Here we are entering into a concept of what they call the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven, in our own language it is Brahma-loka, is a system of living where one does not hang on another. One is not subservient to another. Each is what one is. And each is what one is that is complete existence. There is a self-sufficiency and self-completeness and self-perfection in each individual, in the Ram Rajya that people speak of, or in the golden age of Kritya Yuga, when we have been told that social compulsions in the form of social rules and political ordinances were not necessary. This is the final ideal of a divine living.

But we have to work towards this end. Every step in yoga is also yoga. Though yoga means union with the ultimate reality, it also means every step that you take in the direction of this union with reality, because, as I had occasion to mention earlier, reality manifests itself, perhaps at least from our point of view, in some degrees or levels of manifestation. Thus it is that you are in communion with the degree of reality when you are in a state of yoga.

A state of harmony is established when you enter into the field of divine living. A divine living is an art of non-conflict, and, much more, non-injury to any person. You cannot hurt the feelings of any person, because it is the rule of the universe that what you mete out to others will also be meted out to you.

The world is sometimes, perhaps, like a mirror that is placed before you – it will reflect exactly what you are. The universe, the world, the whole of human society, if you

would like to call it, is an impersonal atmosphere or an arrangement before you which reacts in the manner you react in respect of it. Whatever you think of other people will also be thought about you by other people. Whatever you speak to others will be spoken to you one day or the other. And whatever you think about other persons will be thought about you, and whatever you do to others will be done to you, if not in this life, in some other life at least.

Extreme good and extreme bad reaps its fruit in this life itself. But ordinary good actions, milder, may not produce their effect in this life itself. So you may appear that you are going scot-free; but you cannot go scot-free like that, because every thought, every attitude, every outlook, every reaction, every envisagement, every judgment is recorded in a document which is not visible to our eyes. The whole universe is a computer system, as it were, which works automatically and records every vibration that takes place in every corner of the universe. In this world of God's creation, perhaps, there is no such thing as privacy. You cannot secretly mumble something into the ear of somebody without it being heard everywhere – it will be heard in Vaikuntha itself, not only here in your little room.

So, this world is made in a different way from the way in which it appears. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was the great apostle of divine living; though the word 'divine life' existed even before Swami Sivananda's advent in this world, he was the person who gave force and meaning to this great system of internal and external organization called divine living.

Generally we are carried away by the word 'divine', and are inclined to think that to divinely live would be to live like a god, like an angel, like a Mahapurusha or Siddha, and almost move like a god himself. Though that is a very virtuous and praiseworthy ideal – it would be good if we can walk like a god in this world – we know very well how impractical it is from the conditions in which you are at the present moment, because unless we know what God is, we cannot try to move like a god. We have various distracted, perhaps erroneous notions of God, Atman, Moksha, etc., and therefore we will have also a consequent erroneous conception of living a good life.

First and foremost, the meaning of divine living is the meaning of this sentence of Bhagavan Veda Vyasa that occurs in the Mahabharata recited to you already. Whenever you try to think something about other people, please consider for a moment – would it be all right for me if others also think like that about me? When you speak a word or do some deed, consider for a moment whether you would feel happy and satisfied if people speak about you also in the same way and do the same thing to you. "I would not like to be thought like that, I would not like to be spoken of also in this manner, and this thing should not be meted out to me." If this is so, how would you say that you can mete out this treatment to other people?

The world is a kingdom of ends – this is the reason why you cannot mete out to people what cannot be meted out to you. The world is not made up of scattered particulars or isolated individuals with whom you have no connection whatsoever. It is not true. The people around you are not unrelated to you in this system of organic connectedness of God's creation. We are inwardly involved in a great kingdom of fraternity and citizenship which is not visible to our eyes. The very same people which

you see here, you will see in Brahma-loka also, but you will see them in a different light altogether. You will not see different people; it is not a different world that you are going to see. The kingdom of heaven is not outside, not far off, not external. It is a new degree of reality; it is a higher level of perception of the very same thing that you are seeing now in a grosser form in this physical world.

So we have to be very cautious when we deal with things – corruption, untruthfulness, incontinence, harming other people, exploitation, hoarding. These are the opposites of the Yamas. And, as I told you, the Yamas of Patanjali sum up the whole of ethical life. The whole of morality is here in these five little dicta of Patanjali – Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha. I cannot think of any other ethical or moral principal which is not included here. What you call Panchasheela, from Buddhist parlance, also is practically one and the same.

Therefore divine life is an unavoidable way of living for every one of us if we want not to perish in this world. There is tension and insecurity and we have suspicion even about our own neighbors, because we are not endeavoring to think in terms of the requisites for living a divine life.

It is necessary that you have to accept the existence of God first if you are to live a divine life. If you have no fear of God, you cannot have fear of anybody else. This is an old Kannada saying I heard when I was a small child, written on a wall in a school: “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.” If you cannot fear God and you deny God's existence totally, then you have to be prepared for the worst of things that can happen to you in this world.

There was a humorous philosopher who said, “Well, if God does not exist really, well, so much the better for you, be free from all botheration. But suppose He exists – beware, be cautious. In case He happens to exist, be cautious – anything can happen to you.” This is a very jolly, humorous, very uplifting, a fact.

Now, we are not here to discuss whether God exists or not. It has to be taken for granted by devotees and admirers and disciples of Gurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj that God has to exist. And, as a thinker said, if God does not exist, we have to create one God. Just as if there is no President, we have to make one President, otherwise we cannot exist. Otherwise, people are not born as Presidents and Prime Ministers; they are like anyone else. But why do you create a President? Because without that person, we cannot exist. So he said that if God does not exist by any chance, we have to manufacture one – otherwise existence is not possible.

The idea is that the principle called God is the final controlling authority over not only the operations in the universe, but the behaviors of people and the conduct of anything else in this world. I am very fond of remembering again and again the oft-quoted saying of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj that in every enterprise of yours, God has to come first. *Sri Ganeshaya Namaha, Om Sri Sarasvati Namaha, Om Namah Sivaya, Om Namah Narayanaya.* You do not suddenly start gulping food or drinking your tea, because even the art of consuming food is regarded as a Yajna to the great divine authority that is the digesting principle and the determining principle, perhaps *the* principle that we are. This is a wider subject.

So, it is absolutely essential for every divine lifer to believe, and to be convinced, and to be rooted in the great ideal that God does exist and that God perhaps only exists, inasmuch as He is All-in-All.

Now, God exists, and God has created this world, and we are seeing this world. Therefore it is an effect of God – it is also to be respected. The world comes after because it is an effect of God, and we were subsequent creations. If we read the Vishnu Purana or the Srimad Bhagavatam Mahapurana, or even the cosmological descriptions given in such scriptures as the Mahabharata, you will find that we are not the first created beings – we were created afterwards. We are not the crown of creation in the sense of antecedence in the chronological system of the coming down of things from the original creation. God comes first, the world has to come afterwards, and you are the last creation. Therefore the first consideration should go to the cause, and not to the effect.

Here is also a great gospel of unselfish living. The statement that God is first, the world is next and yourself is last is also a principle of good living. You have to pay respect to the cause first before you consider the welfare of the effect. You have to pay respect and obedience and obeisance to God first, and be prepared to obey His commands, His ordinances, “the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven”, as Christ put it. That is first and foremost – you cannot avoid it. If you rule out the possibility of the very existence of God, and violate the law, then anything can happen to you – you should not make complaints afterwards. It is like a renegade, or an anti-governmental or anti-social element.

The world is the next thing that should command your respect. You do not come first – your consideration should be for the Ultimate Reality first and foremost, then your consideration for the world afterwards. This is a Purendradasa saying, “The first duty is the service of God; the next duty is the service of man.” He does not say service of yourself – that is automatically involved and you need not too much bother about yourself. You shall be taken care of by the powers that be if the world receives your respect, honor, recognition, in the manner it is expected of you. You come afterwards.

But modern man, educated man, proud man, who, as Shakespeare puts it, plays such antic tricks, like an ape, as make the angels weep. Angels are weeping at our behavior. They are crying, “What sort of creation is this? How things are behaving!”

We need not be too eager to receive respect from people. It will automatically devolve upon us. This is not merely a spiritual gospel – it is also a sociological principle; it is also a method of ethical living; it is also an art of good conduct. Everything is implied in this great statement of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, “When you are united with the Ultimate Cause, It shall take care of you.” The higher determines the lower and guides the lower, decides upon the way and the conduct and the maintenance of the lower, and entirely is responsible for the lower, as the head of the family is concerned with all the members of the family and each one need not concern himself or herself as an independent person.

So, one of the principles of divine life, which is a large subject to dilate upon, is pinpointed in this pithy saying of Sri Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, “God first, world next, yourself last.” When there is a sweet dish, says Manusmriti, don’t eat it for

yourself; you must share it with others. Sweet, delicious, nice things should not be eaten independently by closing the doors. I remember this very well, and I feel ashamed also, when anything is offered to me which I would like to offer to other people also. Very delicious, valuable, precious, delicious, tasty things should not be eaten alone – give it to your servant. You would not like to give it, because servant is nobody, he's dirt. This is a very strange attitude of ours which has come upon us due to an overestimation that we have somehow or other imposed upon ourselves as the be-all and end-all of everything – the world has no concern with us.

We do not think of the world as much as we think of our own selves. We are putting the cart before the horse and doing just the opposite of what Sri Gurudev was expecting us to do when he said, "God first, world next, yourself last." We are anxious that we may lose our property, welfare, and goodwill and all satisfaction if our concern goes to other people and we lose concern about our own selves. The world is not outside you. Therefore you are not justified in exhibiting a sentiment or conduct of neglect of this world as if it is an extraneous dirt that you would like to get rid of or get out of at the earliest opportunity. We are not educated enough to understand the intricacy that is involved in the relationship between man and the world. There is a large set of two volumes written by Royce, a great idealist of America, under the title "The World and the Individual". Worth reading. What is the relationship between the world and the individual – he writes in 1,000 pages or 2,000 pages.

We cannot understand what is the way in which we are connected among ourselves. Most of us seem to be not connected at all among ourselves; each one has his own etiquette and each one can go secretly independently in any direction you like. What happens to others? It is not your business. This is a purely empirical, not even a good way of looking at things.

A divine living tries to raise your outlook of life into the vision of a prepondering principle that operates in the whole world, including your own self. A violation of this principle would be a violation of divine life. Today we are living in a world of mechanism and high industrialization and have a tendency therefore to feel that we are absolutely independent persons physically, biologically, socially, in every blessed way, so that we can independently work for our blessedness and salvation unconcerned with other people.

The concern with others, with the world and with God, is something unavoidably and inextricably related to you, and so Bhagavan Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj came to awaken us to this fact to shake up man from his slumber of ignorance. It does not appear he has come to choose one individual as his chief disciple so that he may push him up, up to the point of Moksha, though there were Gurus of that type, who had only one disciple and were concerned only with that person. But different masters and prophets had different types of vision. Buddha had one type of vision, Christ had another, and Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was a different type altogether. He has come to wake us up from sleep, and once you wake up you know what things are, and you need not be told that "this is the thing to be done, that thing to be done etc." When you can see things properly, further instruction is not necessary. So Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to say, "I have woken you up – the rest is up to you. I have told you everything that has to

be told. Now it is up to you to follow these principles that I have placed before you as your good.”

So the art of divine living is an art of ethical living, first and foremost. You may be wondering that ethical and moral living is only one aspect of life – it is not the whole of life – and sometimes you are inclined to feel these days that no truly ethical and moral man can succeed in this world; only a corrupt man can live. This is an erroneous error again; it is a mistake on your part. Truth always succeeds. If you can believe that truth triumphs, then corruption, black-marketing, exploitation cannot succeed. But you will say, “I’m seeing it’s succeeding.” It succeeds in the same way that Ravana succeeded. For ages he ruled with great pomp. Untruth triumphs as if it’s a god itself, and no other god exists except untruth. For the time being, it may be for years together, it will succeed, and with great authority it will rule the world. But later on what happens? The great Manu says the root itself will be struck off. The great Ravana whose pomp is described in the Valmiki’s Ramayana in more gorgeous verses than when he describes Rama, that Ravana had his root itself cut, and today we remember him not in the way he lived but in the way in which he ought not to have lived.

So, divine life is no doubt a divine, godly life. If possible we may live like gods, like angels in heaven, but for practical difficulties such an extreme step is not possible for us, we have our own weaknesses, little foibles. But these little foibles and difficulties have to be harnessed as appurtenances and not obstacles for living a good, serviceable, and virtuous and righteous life in this very world. Even the last person is going to be taken into consideration in the great system of organization which is God’s kingdom. “He also prays who merely stands and waits,” is what Milton said. They too pray who also stand and wait. So humbly, simply, without demonstrating too much our arrogance, whether intellectually, economically or physically, may we remember that this earth is not the last halting place for us. This is only one Dharmashala, one inn, one Chaultry, one hotel in which we are taking a little rest for the night, and tomorrow we have to pursue our own ways.

A divine life is not possible if you think that this world is the all and there is nothing else outside. There is a series of higher realms which we have to ascend, and this perhaps is the lowest of creation, the grossest manifestation – the earth plane. So, humbly recognizing the presence of higher realms, of greater realities to which we have to ascend, which is our goal, which is our ultimate aspiration, we have humbly to live as pedestrians, pilgrims, aspiring to reach that destination, and not taking for granted that this earth is the all and this is our property. This is not our property, even as the furniture of a hotel or an inn or a Chaultry does not belong to you though it has been given to you for utilization for that night. Nothing of that Chaultry or inn or hotel is your property. You have the authority – for the time being the permission given to you to use it – but you are not the owner of it.

So, we have the permission, a kind of blessing bestowed upon us, to utilize the facilities provided to us by this world, by this ashram, by the great ones, by every blessed thing, but we cannot possess anything. We are not owners of anything in this world – we are pilgrims. A pilgrim cannot own anything on the way. If this can be borne in mind, we shall be humble, humbler than what we conduct ourselves to be; and a humility, a humble nature, is not a put on appearance. This is also a thing that you have to

remember. In the recognition of the might and the grandeur of the cosmos and the greatness of God, you automatically become humble. Before a huge elephant you are humble; before the ocean you are humble. You are not putting on humility there – you are automatically humble because you know the might and the grandeur and the terror that is there before you. Such is the mystery of God, such is mystery of creation, such is the glory of the great destination that we are aspiring for; and in the light of this, if we live and think and act and conduct ourselves, we would be living a divine life.