

THUS SPAKE SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

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Prayer – A Sure Source of Strength

We must be in a prayerful mood of humble submission to the Almighty every moment of time. Let no one be under the impression that he is a Raja Yogi, and therefore, not in need of God. That is a mistake. One cannot perform this feat of Yoga practice alone. God's grace is necessary. The greatest Yogis were humble and submissive in their attitude. Prayer works miracles, wonders; and a humility of attitude on our side will be a great asset to us. Every day we have to offer our prayers to the great Master, our Guru, and to the great Almighty who is our great benefactor and friend. And, by the sincere prayers that we offer to God, we invoke His benedictions, and God's actions are instantaneous. He will do the Sadhana for us; in fact He does the Sadhana. All our activities are God's activities, finally speaking. We are like small children imagining that we are doing many things, while all these things are being done by somebody else for our sake.

The Role of the Guru in Vital Education

In the modern systems of education, vital education is not there. We have intellectual education, but nothing by way of a vital, emotional education imparted to the very stuff of the individual, with the result that the stuff of the individual has remained the same, as it was before. It has not been affected in any manner. The outlook of life does not change after getting educated in a college. The individual remains the same even after that. But, in the Gurukula educational system, the outlook change was effected. The student became a different person altogether when he came out after a period of training under a master. Today, we have no personal relationship between the student and the teacher. There is sort of commercial relationship, which is almost the death of education. Even that relationship is now snapping. There seems to be no relationship at all between the student and the teacher these days. The whole framework is crumbling and we do not know where we are heading

towards. But, in earlier days, the teacher was like a father to the student. The Guru, the teacher, the instructor or the professor was also a parent who had the welfare of the student in his mind. Which professor has the welfare of his student in his mind today?

The influence of the teacher on the student is very important. The instruction that the student receives from a teacher verbally is one thing. Perhaps the student can have that instruction even from other sources, in schools and colleges. But, the benefit of the influence of the teacher can not be gained from other sources. When the Guru speaks to the disciple, when the Yoga teacher instructs the student of Yoga, the soul of the Guru or the teacher makes an immediate impact on the mind of the disciple. This is because the teacher of Yoga is not just an ordinary person. He is not just another Tom, Dick or Harry. He is an exceptional person, exceptional in every way. The Yoga teacher is not an ordinary human being. He is one who has passed through the various stages of Yoga training and acquired the competency to teach on account of his own personal practice. This is very important. Unless one has himself practised Yoga, he cannot teach Yoga. It is neither possible nor desirable to read one book and then start teaching. It is the very practice of Yoga which is the strength of the Yoga teacher, which gives him the confidence to communicate vitally with the student. When this is done, a rapprochement is established between the will of the teacher and the will of the student, because of a mutual agreement of ideas and ideologies between the two. The student surrenders himself to the teacher, wholly and solely, and the teacher takes on the responsibility of looking after the welfare of the soul of the student, and not merely his intellect. This is a very important factor which helps the student of Yoga in his practice of mind control.

What is Tapas

The checking of the urge of the mind in the direction of the senses is Tapas or austerity. Tapas is a Sanskrit word

which means heat. The heat of strength or power or energy is generated and increased in our system by the restraint of the senses and the mind. We become cold when energy is leaked out. When a man is about to die, his legs become cold, his hands become cold, his body becomes chill, the blood stream is withdrawn, and the Pranas retract inwardly because of the power of the mind moving in a different way. Energy, when it is absent in the physical body, makes it feel chill. We become cold in every way when we lack the heat of Tapas. The heat of Tapas is something like electric energy. It cannot be said that electric current is hot, though the same current can produce heat when channelised in a particular manner. Electric energy, by itself, is neither hot nor cold. It has no such characteristics. But, it is an energy which can become anything. It can heat, it can move, it can lift, it can do almost everything. So, the heat or energy which we conserve by the practice of Tapas or austerity is such an impersonal energy which cannot be equated with heat or cold or any characteristic, though this energy can be utilised for the purposes of life which are variegated in their nature. Above all things, this energy becomes necessary for the concentration of the mind, because Yoga is nothing but concentration of mind and mediation of consciousness. The whole being of a person, the whole of his mind, intellect, feeling and spirit has to be channelised towards this supreme goal of Yoga.

Now, if there is a leakage of current at some point in the electric circuit, the voltage will fall. The electrical engineer will say, "There is a leakage somewhere, and so, there is a fall in the voltage." That can happen to us also. The voltage of our energy falls, when there is a leakage of energy in some direction, through some avenue of the senses. So, by physical, verbal, sensory and mental abstraction of oneself from external objects, one can conserve his energy. And by doing so, a person not only becomes healthy physically and mentally, but also becomes strong. A person who practises Tapas has greater strength than the one who does not so practise and who wastes his strength by way of indulgence in

multitudinous activities of life. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to say. "Tapas is nothing but burning like fire with the heat of energy by the control of the senses." One who performs Tapas has a glow in his face, a lustre in his eyes, an aura around his personality, a strength in his speech, and a capacity in his body on account of the austerity that he performs. Every word that he speaks will have a tremendous force and will carry conviction. But for his Tapas, the same word will be a cold word which may not fall into the ears of any person. Tapas is austerity of the whole personality – body, speech, sense and the mind. Tapas is one of the observances or Niyamas.

How to Test Your Spirituality

Contacts may be physical or psychic. All these are to be avoided in the search for the Spirit. As a matter of fact, psychological contacts are more dangerous than physical contacts. The mind it is that works havoc. The mind thinking a sense-object is more vicious than a physical contact of body with body. If the mind is not working, the physical contact means nothing. So, all psychic contacts with objects should be withdrawn, and in this withdrawal of the senses and the mind, if you can feel a release of all your tensions, if, in going to the bottom of your own being in the solitude of your life, you can feel a freedom and a happiness which the world knows not, then you are really living a spiritual life. If nobody sees you, and you are happy, then that would be test of your spirituality. And if you feel like fish out of water, because nobody sees you, then that would be the contrary of it.

Because the Spirit is alone, it wants nobody, and it wants nobody's help in this world. It is so complete and full that you cannot add a cubit to its stature by multiplying the existence of the objects before it. The whole universe, before it, is a zero. As, in arithmetic, you have a figure before the series of zeros, all zeros mean nothing without the figure preceding them, the figure here is the Spirit. It may be One, but if this figure One is absent, there are only zeros!

What does Ritual Represent?

A ritual or a performance represents an attitude, a conduct, expressed outside in action. We may offer a leaf or pour a drop of water on a piece of stone considering that piece of stone as our God. There begins religion. The stone is not God, but our feeling of the presence of a higher power in it is our God. There are psychological aspects of religion – these rituals in all the various forms that we see in temples and in churches, for instance. The devotee kneels down; he looks up; he holds his hands; he bows his head down and he offers a deeply felt prayer through words of utter affection and agonised feeling of devotion. This he does by ritualistic worships, offerings and sacrament.

Activity and the Path of Knowledge

All activity is a manifestation of the defective nature of the imperfect individual. Action which is a means to achieving an unacheived end is incompatible with Perfection which is Supreme fulfilment. Action is not the essential nature of a thing; it is the agitation of the illusory vestures in which things are shrouded that is called action. It is possible to change the course of an action, but Self Knowledge is ever unchanging. Action is relative; Knowledge is absolute. Action is dependent on the individual doer; Knowledge is independent of the individual and rests solely on the unchanging object, Brahman, with which it is identical. Knowledge is not subject to the process of producing, obtaining, purifying or modifying, as action is and as the results of action are. After an act there is something to be known or attained other than the act; but after attaining Knowledge there is nothing to be done and nothing else to be attained. Action is of the nature of prompting or inciting one to something else outside; but Knowledge is Illumination itself which is at once the breaking of the bond of Samsara and the experience of the Perfection of the Absolute. The Jnana-Marga or the Path of Knowledge, because it aims at a fusion of the means and the end in one, is, for those who are

not endowed with the necessary equipments, extremely hard to tread, and the difficulty is well pointed out in such references to it as 'the razor's edge', 'the pathless path', and the like, which show that Knowledge has a unique track of its own which is not what is known to the mind and the intellect working with the material supplied by the senses. "The path of the Knowers is untraceable like the track of birds in the sky and of aquatic beings in water." Only those who have a penetrating insight and are perfectly dispassionate can walk the Path of Knowledge.

Spiritualising through Body Posture

Yoga Asanas have a spiritual connotation. Interpreted merely as another system of physical exercise, the Yoga Asanas may not appear to have any connection with spirituality. But, in truth, everything connected with Yoga is somehow or the other related to the intention of the spirit finally. This is the peculiarity of the culture of India. Everything has some cord on with the spirit, even the least ritual of worship, and the smallest gesture of adoration, or study or practice. Because, the culture of India has one great aim before it, namely, to spiritualise every activity; and, in this light, no work in the world should be there bereft of the element of the spirit. So, even the Asana is a spiritual exercise, though one may not be able to easily understand how a physical exercise can be regarded as spiritual. Asana is spiritual, because of the intention behind its practice, the purpose for which it is done, and the effect it produces on the mind particularly. The Hatha Yoga system has an enumeration of many Asanas – eighty four, mainly – all aiming at the bringing about of a flexibility in the various parts of the body, so that there may not be any kind of undue pressure exerted by any part or limb of the body causing pain, ache and discomfort. Instead of the body controlling us, we have to control it. Generally, we are controlled by the body, because it has its own idiosyncrasies and predilections. The body aches when we do not attend to it according to its requirements. But, if we have some sort of a restraint and

control over the functions of the body, it yields to our requirements, especially when we want to be seated for a long time for meditation or Japa.

Personal Problems in Yoga Practice

Worry and grief constitute an obstacle in the practice of Yoga. Unfortunately, life is always beset with sorrow and if we are to search for a man free from vexation of every kind, we would, perhaps, not find one. Yet, Yoga cannot be successful if mental stress is to pursue man like a hound, wherever he goes. It is necessary for one, before any attempt at Pratyahara, Dharana or Dhyana, to extricate oneself from these tormenting forces of the world. And the student may, from the point of view of this situation, be able to understand what an amount of effort is necessary on the path to keep the mind in balance; for balance is said to be Yoga. It is only when the balance is upset, due to some factor in life, that worry sets in. Hence, the first step in Yoga is not Pratyahara or Dharana, but a psychological disentanglement, or a stock taking as people do in business, and a striking of the balance-sheet of the inner world. One has to find out where one stands. How can one do concentration or meditation if pains are to eat into one's vitals? There are many problems that are brought upon oneself through economic situations, social circumstances, family conditions, etc., as also personal health and mental stability. These are important aspects that have to be taken into consideration. Supposing that the student is deeply annoyed with someone, will he be able to sit for concentration at that time? No. Because the mind is already engaged in something else and is not prepared for concentration. It has already been given some work and it is trying to reconcile itself with negative conditions that have been thrust upon it. Yoga is a positive state, different from all moods of the day. There is nothing of the negative in the Yoga way of life, neither in the mind nor in the perspective of one's vision. Misgivings about Yoga are due to a want of proper understanding of its meaning. All anguish is to be set right. How to do this is a personal problem. It has to be dealt with

on an individual consideration, as the answer varies from person to person.

Spiritual Life Calls for Eternal Vigilance

The love for the individual, limited, selfish life is many times wrongly justified by the ravaging desires for name, fame, power, wealth and sex; by the tyrannizing demands of the body; by lust for honour, worship, exaltation, praise and lordship; by ambitions connected with the objective world, whatever be the nicety and the refined garb or the polished appearance of these ambitions. Even craving for too much erudition or scholarship is an impediment to the spiritual seeker. These hosts of obstacles have to be stepped over; all desires, ambitions and curiosities have to be nipped in their bud. The more careful and circumspect a Sadhaka is, the more should he try to sharpen and deepen his intelligence. There is no limit to the need for one's vigilance and active consciousness. Even at the entrance to heaven, a passage may be there leading to hell. The boat may sink even near the opposite shore.

Role of Constructive Emotions in Yoga Sadhana

Our concept of God is not purely logical. It is also emotional. And, therefore, when we take to any point in concentration, and choose any object for this purpose, we have to see if it agrees with us emotionally. For instance, we cannot keep a snake in front of us and meditate upon it, though, for the purpose of concentration, that is also good enough as any other thing is. But, emotionally, we will not be in harmony with the thought of a cobra sitting in front of us. There will be a disharmony for reasons well known to us. But, if we choose a subject which is emotionally connected with what we like for reasons of our own, our mind will concentrate immediately. While it is true that we have to be emotionally appreciative of the object of concentration or meditation, we must also see what sort of emotion it is that we entertain when we meditate. There are emotions and

emotions. Even when we are rebellious, outrageous and rude, we are in a state of emotion. But, that is not the type of emotion that we speak of when we say that emotionally we have to be related to the object of concentration. Rebellious emotions are distracting emotions. They are not wholesome feelings. They tear our personality to shreds and throw us in different directions. But, the constructive emotions knit the parts of our personality into a whole, and we become brighter and more beautiful than a tyrannical individual with a self-assertive individuality. When we frown, we are in a state of emotion. When we smile, we are again in a state of emotion. But, the two emotions are of two different types. When we are very ruthless and cruel, we are also in a state of emotion. When we are compassionate, kind and merciful, we are again in a state of emotion. There can thus be different kinds of emotion and we have to know where we stand.

This is the reason why many of the Yoga teachers, Gurus and masters tell us that it would be good and profitable to take to the chanting of the Name of God instead of unnecessarily struggling in the mind by an imposition upon itself of thoughts and feelings which it is not accustomed to or familiar with. Each individual has his own notion of God, the Almighty Creator, to whatever religious faith he may belong. It is sure and certain, and clear and obvious for him, that his own notion of God is the best of thoughts. He may not have a better thought than that. There, his emotions come together in a fraternal embrace, and his logic also works in a friendly manner. So, Japa of a Name of God, concentration on the meaning of the Mantra, or the formula containing the Name, is regarded as perhaps the best method to bring the mind to the point of concentration. When we offer prayers to God, we say something, at least mentally. We say something in our mind, and emotionally, we feel certain attitudes towards God. These are the things that we have to maintain perpetually, as far as possible, by repeated sessions of prayers, and a continuous sitting for Japa or chanting of the Divine Name, which will bring us to the point of concentration. This is a religious technique of concentration.

Brushing Up the Mind into Higher Thoughts

Yoga does not always mean meditation with closed eyes. It means many things that are contributory to it ultimately. A little bit of study also is very necessary. Perhaps it may also have to be maintained as a necessary routine always. Some amount of reference to a text on Yoga may be required to brush up the mind into higher thoughts. Otherwise, we cannot always entertain noble thoughts. It is not easy to accommodate in the mind lofty thoughts of God always, throughout the day. That is impracticable. So, we take to various methods of practice in order to accommodate the mind to this habit of lofty thinking. Discussion with good people, friends, is a help and is something like a secondary Satsanga. Also helpful is a study of great texts on Yoga, given by great masters, incarnations, prophets and divinities of the past.

The Human Situation

The main question which engages one's attention almost everyday is of the way to tackle what may be called the 'human situation' in the world. Man's circumstances are very much related to what he does and what he is yet to do. And it is not easy for him to decide what is the best for him.

Most people come to grief due to the wrong notion that they can succeed by 'asserting' themselves. The truth is just the opposite. The false idea that self-assertion can bring success is based on the ignorance of the fact that there are also others in this world who can equally assert themselves and stand against the assertion from any particular individual or centre of action. No one has ever succeeded in life, who confronted the 'others' in the world with his ego. All egoism is met with an equally strong egoism from outside. To take always one's own standpoint, whether in an action, an argument or even in feeling, is to court 'opposition', while the law of life is 'cooperation'. Self-assertion, thus, is contrary to nature's laws and shall stand defeated in the end. All egoistic action, whether in mind, speech or body, evokes a similar

action from other centres of force in the world and to live in such a condition is fitly called Samsara, an experience in which perpetually warring elements react against one another and bring about restlessness and pain. The remedy against Samsara is the art of 'appreciation' of the existence and feelings of others who also demand an equal recognition in the scheme of creation. Whenever you say or do anything, start it from the standpoint of the other who is in front of you, listens to you or is concerned with what you do. You are then more likely to succeed in life than by any other means which you may think is really effective.

But what is to be done when, for example, an enemy attacks you? Are you to assert yourself, or not? Here again, the decision that you take should depend upon the nature of the consequences that would follow from the step that you take. The unselfishness of an action is judged from the extent to which it is conducive to the realisation of a higher value in life. To know whether a value is higher or otherwise, it has to be viewed both in its quantity and quality. Quantitatively, is it beneficial to the largest number of people possible? And qualitatively, does it tend to the realisation of the highest reality capable of being conceived as accessible? Or, to put it concisely, how far is it spiritual?

Time and Space

The nature of the experience of space and time depends upon the manner in which the consciousness happens to be objectively modalised. Persons who are in a depressed state of mind or who are in deep sorrow are apt to feel that, a moment of time is like a year, while those who revel in happiness would feel contrary. Space and time are ultimately conditions of consciousness and are not independent of it. In the dreaming state, experiences ranging over thousands of years can be undergone in a moment's time, while at the same time, the mind in this state can also project a moment's experience into a history of several years. In the state of intense spiritual contemplation and Samadhi, space and time

are transcended, and only pure consciousness reveals itself. In this consciousness, the entire universal cycle is said to appear and disappear within the millionth part of a moment.

The Essence of Service

A charitable disposition towards others is the essence of service. Charity of feeling is the greatest of charities. Giving donations of some dollars is not necessarily charity. That is only an outward expression of one's internal recognition of the value of people outside. The discovery of great spiritual value in all things in the world is the essence of the serviceful outlook of life. We do not serve people because they are inferior to us, or because they are beggars and we are rich. That is not the reason why we do service. Service is the outcome of our feeling that the great aspiration that is throbbing in our heart is also present in other hearts. Social circumstances might have converted the other people into what they are, but that is not their essential being. The charitable feeling, which is the essence of service, arises on account of a recognition of divinity in all things, rather than on account of the discovery that others are poor fellows, beggars on the road, and unwanted units in society. There is no putting on of a superior attitude in unselfish service. We do not become important men, because we do service. It would be a blunder to think so. Perhaps, one who is capable of doing the highest service regards himself as the humblest of people. He is the last and the least, and not the first. These are again subtle points which one has to be able to appreciate in one's own self, by careful examination of oneself daily.

Do Not Shout, "I am a Yoga Student!"

The desires of the mind, and the urges of the personality in general, are the activities of the outward nature that compel our attention in Yoga. We can flow with this current of the outward nature or we can oppose the current. Yoga tells us to be very cautious and adopt a via media. It tells us

that neither have we to flow with the current of nature entirely, nor oppose it directly. Both these extremes are unwarranted, because they will immediately make us a cynosure in the eyes of Prakriti. It is better to live unnoticed than become an object of attraction to everybody; because an object of attraction always gets into some trouble. Whereas, an unnoticed person somehow gets on happily in life. Therefore, even in the practice of Yoga, the student should live in the midst of Prakriti's activities in an unnoticed manner, and not make her suddenly conscious of his activities by shouting aloud, "I am a Yoga student!" Prakriti does not like shouts of this kind. The reactions of nature, if they are strong, may bring about a reversal of the practice. An internal desire may burn the senses. Desires, which the student tries to run away from in the name of Yoga, desires sensory as well as egoistic, violent urges, may press him forward in the reverse direction; and these reactionary urges may be stronger than the corresponding urges manifesting in a normal person in the usual course. Bottled-up energy is always stronger than the energy that is given a little bit of freedom. Let it be noted that Yoga is not bottling up of energy, but a wise utilisation of it. If water is allowed to build up in a dam without being released, the dam will burst. Dams are not built so that they may burst. They are built for optimum utilisation of the available water resources. But, if the waters are not so utilised, and are just allowed to build up inside the dam, the dam will burst, and the waters will ravage the land.

The activities of nature being external in space and time, and we being a part of nature, we are automatically involved in those activities, and we cannot easily curb our external urges. They have to be controlled only gradually. The stages of Yoga are, therefore, gradual ones in Patanjali's system.

Want to Join an Ashram?

The seeker's entering a monastery or a place of holy seclusion is really the beginning of his troubles. The

austerities personally volunteered and the disciplines externally imposed by the surroundings or the atmosphere of this life try to dig up the gold and the treasure that is hidden in the mine of the seeker's inner substance. But the digging also raises a lot of dust which can even blind one's eyes, and hard stones and pricking thorns may not infrequently be found side by side with the treasure that is buried in the deeps. The spiritual urge can suddenly wane, being beclouded by the dust and dirt which may be kicked up by the forces insisting on an attachment to diversity, which may for a time eclipse even the brilliance of the sun of the Supreme Spirit planted in the heart of man as his very Self and beckoning him from outside as the illimitable Infinite. A lethargic condition, one of torpidity, callousness, hunger and sleep may be the stage immediately following upsurge of religious enthusiasm and longing for spiritual liberation, with which the seeker may enter a monastery or find a place in the vicinity of a Master. A falling back upon the principle of least resistance and least action can be the outcome of this state of mind. The spiritual urge gets pressed down at once by the cumulative effect of a dark and cloudy reaction set up by the powers of desire, otherwise normal to a human individual, which have been relegated to the limbo all the while when the spiritual urge was predominant, though for a short period. The sense and the ego are like the devil and the deep sea, between which the seeking individual is likely to get caught, and whichever of the two ways one moves, one's fate is sure to be destruction.

After a lull of inertia and sleep for a few years, there can arise an irresistible desire for sense-enjoyment, the very thing which looked undesirable years ago when a fit of renunciation drove the seeker to the hermitage or the monastery. The usual form of desire is actively sensory and here-in it is that one may become prone to yield to the pressure of the subhuman side of passions that insist on having their fill. These are the impetuous instincts of the animal world, the savage nature, which have no regard for the good of the individual concerned, because their objective

is only physical satisfaction. This is the immoral nature, so much condemned in the science of ethics, since it has no concern with the welfare of others. The seeker may become neurotic and eccentric when the outlets for his feelings and urges are blocked by the regulated atmosphere outside. The greatest enemies of the spiritual aspirant are wealth, sex, fame and anger. A craving for silly satisfaction through even the pettiest objects of sense, of play and diversion, may rise to the surface and press for fulfilment. There is always an interplay of inertia (Tamas) and craving (Rajas) in the mind of the seeker who is still on the path of struggle and is groping in darkness. The achievement, if at all there has been any, up to this stage, is a suppression of desire simultaneously consequent upon the burning of the fire of renunciation and love for God, which showed its head in an earlier stage. It is something like an ocean sweeping over dustbins and locations of drainage and sewage, flooding them with its overwhelming rush and force and submerging them for a while, but not actually transmuting them into purer substances. The initial spiritual urge of the jubilant enthusiast, our youthful hero on the path, is of this nature. The dust and dirt and rubbish are all there when the oceanic waves recede and when the daylight of sense activity falls upon them, reverting them to their original form of rot and stink. Spiritual seekers, beware! It is not all rose bed or milk and honey that is the path you are treading. A razor's edge, verily, it is!

The Grandeur of the Absolute

The grandeur of the Absolute is grander than all other grandeur. It is the crowning edifice of truth and glory. Nothing is beyond That. It is neither form, nor content, nor extent. The soul sinks into It by an experience of all-fullness – neither essence, nor kingdom, nor wisdom, neither equal nor unequal, neither static nor moving, neither sitting nor resting, neither one nor two, neither true nor false, neither this-ness nor that-ness, nothing known to us, nothing known to any existent being. It has no name, there is no definition of

It! It is *That which is*. It is not love, not grace, not world, not soul, not God, not freedom, not light, for all these are relative conceptions. It is not *Satchidananda*, which is only an ideal 'other' of what we here experience. Satchidananda is only the logical highest, a mere intellectual prop. Reality is beyond Satchidananda, also. It is Itself, the eternal sun that shines in the infinite sky of the absolute world! It transcends cosmic consciousness. It is the supra-essential essence. Eternity and Infinity embrace one another to form Its Centre of Experience. It is an Ocean that sweeps away the earth and the heaven and the netherland. Sun, moon and stars are dissolved in It. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva vanish into It. It is the Life of life, Wisdom of wisdom, Joy of joy, Power of power, Real of real, Essence of essence. Birthlessness and deathlessness float in It like ripples. It is the supreme Death of all, and yet the highest peak of real Life. The totality of all the joys of the universe is merely a distorted fragment of That Supreme. It puts an end to the vicious circle of transmigratory life.

The Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy

We have started recently a small campus called the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy only to bring into our own memories and minds the divine message of Sri Gurudev. The intention is not to teach something technical, historical, academic or philosophical. The idea is very simple, very humble and very insignificant if you would like to call it. And its insignificance lies in the fact that it does not seek any kind of propaganda in the eyes of the social public, but it seeks the recognition in the great eye of God, the Almighty. And if you can succeed in rousing up even one individual to the status of God-consciousness, the Divine Life Society would have done a great service and the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy would have served its purpose. It is not quantity that we seek, it is quality. We may not be thousands in number, we may be very few, we may be two hundred, it does not matter. We do not require even two hundred. We require one and if that one has the inner soul-force which has the strength to

declare that it can stand on its own legs and it can draw sustenance from the five elements, from the sun and the moon and the stars, Sri Gurudev would be immensely pleased. The world, that is, the creation that is before us, is itself our support and God is our support. And God is never dead, He is never away from us. And if our connection with Him be spiritual, which means to say indivisible, then the help that comes from Him is perpetual. And so it comes without asking. If this gospel can be planted in our hearts, even in the heart of a single person here, God will be immensely satisfied, and the blessings of Sri Gurudev will be abundant. I have spoken all this with an intense feeling for the grand aim for which Sri Gurudev lived and the purpose for which I believe God has created this world itself.

Alice in Wonderland

We have an inveterate obsession in our minds which prevents us almost entirely from conceiving the goal of life as a practical reality. For us, the goal mostly remains as a kind of concept and an idea, an ideal which is not easily reconcilable with the hard realities of the workaday world. The goal may be God Himself, and nevertheless, He is only an idea and an ideal, a concept, an imagination, a possibility, a may-be or a may-not-be.

This suspicious outlook is not absent even in the most advanced persons due to the strength of the senses, the power of the mind, and the habit of the intellect in understanding things in a given fashion. We are discussing in these lessons a subject called Comparative Philosophy, and in this context, we would be benefited by bestowing a little thought on the conclusions arrived at by certain other thinkers also, apart from Vedantic philosophers like Sankara, with whom we have a good acquaintance and about whose thinking we have spoken enough.

There was a great man called Plato in Greece. According to Paul Dawson, the whole world has produced only three philosophers – Plato, Kant and Sankara. There is some truth

in what he says. There cannot be a greater philosopher than these three persons – Plato, Kant and Sankara – says Paul Dawson. I was thinking about this statement. Why does he make this statement? Finally I felt that there is some truth in it, whatever it is.

The idea of the Ultimate Reality is the principal doctrine of Plato; and I started by saying that we are living in a world of ideas when we live a spiritual life, when we behave religiously, conduct worship and chant Mantras, do prayers, do Japa and even mediation; but there is a very uncomfortable consequence following the idea that, after all, the Reality is an idea.

Ideas are abstractions, notions which are supposed to correspond to realities, and as long as ideas correspond to realities, they are valid. I have an idea that there is a building in front of me. This idea is a valid idea, because it corresponds with the real existence of the building outside. So, the validity of my idea depends upon the reality of the object which is in front of it, but my idea itself has no reality. It is a borrowed reality. It hangs on the existence of something else outside, in this case, the building. So, if the idea of the Ultimate Reality or God is to hang on the existence of another thing, God is not a real being. This is a very subtle difficulty that may trouble the minds of even sincere seekers. Don't you think that the world is real? It is not merely real, it is very, very real, hard to the core, flint-like and no one can gainsay that it is. Perhaps that alone is.

God is an idea that has been introduced in our minds by our ancestors, by our books, by our scriptures, by our professors and our teachers and parents, and somehow, we have been forced by the logic of this teaching to believe there should be such a thing as an 'other-worldly existence' and we have somehow reconciled ourselves to it – God must be there. But we are accepting the existence of God against our own will. We are hungry and thirsty and this hunger and thirst of the body is more real than the idea of God. No one can say that it is not so, whatever be our devotion to God. We

are terribly angry, upset, very much attached to things, all which cannot be explained in the light of the supreme existence of God. This is so even in the case of advanced seekers, Sadhaks and sincere aspirants. This subject is the principal theme of Plato's doctrine.

Ideas precede reality: this one sentence is the entire philosophy of Plato. The reality of the objective universe is subsequent to the idea of the universe. Here we have an echo of the great philosophy of Vedanta that the Hiranyagarbha is prior to the cosmos of physical appearance. The Panchadasi, the Upanishads and the other systems of Vedantic thinking tell us that in Hiranyagarbha the world does not exist in a concrete form as it appears, that it is only an idea cosmically manifested by Isvara who is even subtler than the idea. Isvara is only a possibility of the very idea that there should be such a thing called the universe. So, Isvara is subtler than the idea which is Hiranyagarbha, and Virat is supposed to be the animating consciousness behind the so-called physicality of creation. So, even in the Vedantic Philosophy, there is the same doctrine of idea preceding concrete existence. But we can never believe this.

My idea that there is a desk in front of me cannot be said to be harder in its concreteness than the desk itself. I have an idea that there is a little table in front of me. Is the table more real or the idea that the table is there more real? Any man with common sense will say that the idea is subsequent to the existence of the object called table and the idea is not preceding the object. Because there is a table, you think there is a table. You have an idea that there is an object. So, the idea that there is an object is the consequence of the existence of the object. So, the idea of God must be subsequent and not precedent.

These questions arose before Socrates. How can you say that idea is prior to the universe? How could there be an idea unless the universe exists? How can you have a thought about a thing unless the thing exists? How can you say that things are subsequent and ideas are precedent?

If God is supreme consciousness, how could consciousness be prior to existence? Consciousness is always of something. If the something is not there, there cannot be consciousness. What do you mean by merely saying consciousness, awareness, understanding, thinking, feeling? They cannot have any significance unless they are connected to a thing which is already there. This is the gross realistic doctrine of empirical philosophers which was highlighted by British thinkers like Locke, Berkeley and Hume, but already anticipated by people like Plato and Aristotle in a different fashion.

This is a very terrible problem before us. Notwithstanding the fact that we are devotees of God and honest religious thinkers, the concreteness of the world and the reality of the things we see with our eyes and contact with our senses cannot be abrogated merely by the notion that ideas are precedent. Ideas cannot be precedent as long as we are accustomed to thinking in the way we are thinking today. "Here is a man coming." I am saying like this. This man is there; therefore I have an idea that he is coming. If the man was not there, the idea cannot be there. It is not that I think the man first and then the man comes. The man is there and the idea comes afterwards.

So, realism has a great fort before it. There cannot be an idea unless an object exists already. So God must be afterwards and the world first. Here is materialism, which has a very strong ground. Consciousness cannot be there, unless the object is there. So, what you call consciousness is only an exudation, a manifestation, a kind of effect of an already existing material stuff. Crude materialism, realism, is impossible to face easily. You cannot answer this question. You yourself will not be able to say anything in this matter; so you say that there is something in it.

This problem is an indication of the state in which we are placed. How far are we advanced spiritually? Where is our spirituality, where is our God, love and God-consciousness? Incidentally, it is not a joking matter or a humour. It is a very,

very serious thing for us. Whatever be the study of the scriptures, we cannot get out of the idea that we are living in a very, very hard, flint-like, iron-like, steel-like world; and we can never accept that the idea of the world is in any way more real than the world. But Plato affirms that the ideas are more real than the world. The universals are precedent to the particulars. Horseness is prior to the horse. Tableness is prior to the table, buildingness is prior to the building. How can there be buildingness before the building came into being? How could there be horseness before there is a horse? We cannot answer these questions easily. We know very well that there cannot be horseness unless the horse were already there. But man's mind is very poor. It is not wholly philosophical and we cannot understand how there could be an idea of a thing unless the thing were already there. How could God's consciousness be there if God is only Consciousness?

We have been indoctrinated in this belief not merely in this birth, but throughout the births we have lived through in earlier incarnations. The difficulty arises on account of the impressions created in our minds by hanging on to objects of sense through the many births we have passed through.

The little spiritual aspiration that we have is a late development in the process of evolution. Let each one of us think, "Since when am I thinking of God, religion and spirituality? Since how many years back?" Compared to these few years of our ardent adventure in the spiritual field, what a long, long time we have passed in other types of thinking! The heavy weight of the errors in the thoughts of our previous lives hangs on us so vehemently and powerfully that our little aspiration is submerged. So, again and again we have suspicions in our minds. Doubts are galore. Very great difficulties are there. "Am I fit? Am I right? Is there any substance in it? Am I living in a foolish world, a fool's paradise? Nothing is coming. I have been meditating for years, nothing is visible. I may be hoodwinked. Is there any point in it at all or is it all a waste?" These doubts can come even to sincere seekers.

The idea of the world is not dependent upon the world. The world is dependent on the idea. In a crude form, Berkeley said this. But, in a more philosophical fashion, Plato affirmed it. We can never stomach this idea that consciousness is precedent to matter, though we have attempted to convince ourselves, in our previous discussions, that consciousness is our essential reality by an analysis conducted of the three states – waking, dream and deep sleep. We have already understood this to some extent. We have gone to the depths of our condition in deep sleep where we appear to exist only as pure consciousness minus associations of body and mind. If we could exist as pure consciousness minus body and mind in the state of deep sleep, that must have been what our sleep, that must have been what our stuff is. This so-called body of ours, this hard substance of contactual experience, and the mind which thinks of it, are subsequent evolutes; and if they were the ultimate realities that we are, they would not have perished in deep sleep also. But we had no experience of body or mind there. We were bare, featureless, unobjectified being, consciousness only. This is what we learnt in our earlier analysis of the condition of sleep. What were you in deep sleep? Not man, not mind, not anything, not object. What were you then? A bare impersonal, indefinite, undivided awareness you were. So, this consciousness that you were is the same as consciousness of being, inseparable from being being inseparable from consciousness, consciousness inseparable from being.

This is the great conclusion of Vedanta philosophy – Being-Consciousness. Sat-Chit was your essential nature – not body, not mind, not anything that the senses perceive or conceive, not the world. Then, wherefrom this body came? What is this body? What is the world? What are these big buildings and stony mountains and the flowing rivers and the burning sun? What is all this? From where have they come?

They are also ideas. When Berkeley said that all the trees, the mountains, the heaven and the earth were only ideas, Samuel Johnson, it seems, later on kicked a brick and said, “I

hereby refute Berkeley.” Kicking a brick does not refute Berkeley. It is a very prosaic way of confronting this poor bishop. There was some mistake in the thinking of Samuel Johnson. You cannot kick a brick and say, “I have refuted Berkeley”, because Berkeley includes Johnson himself, not merely the brick, in his doctrine of ideas.

Electric repulsions can produce a sensation of hardness, as many of you, or some of you at least, must have experienced when you had an electric shock. If you touch a live wire with a heavy voltage flowing through it, you will have a sensation of terrible weight and solidity, though there is nothing there. You will feel a mountain hanging on your hand. Any of you who ever had a shock would know what it is. How could this idea of a heavy weight of a hill hanging on your hand be a sensation when there was nothing whatsoever except the fact that you touched a live wire? Why go so far? Come to our modern scientists.

These solid objects – may be of steel or granite – are constituted of electric energy inside. Pure energy, electric energy – we may say, electricity itself. What is electricity? It cannot be seen, it has no weight, it has no dimensions, no length, breadth, or height. But it is the raw material of heavy substances which have length, breadth and height. This indescribable continuum of force and motion has become the atoms and the molecules, hard things like the mountains and the solar system.

Go further still. The doctrine of relativity lands us in a mere idea of the cosmos. The space-time stuff that they speak of as the ultimate substance is not a hard reality. Neither can space be called a hard reality like a table, nor time. But, researches into the substance of physics seem to conclude that the hardest realities like hills and rocks are constituted of configurations of the space-time continuum. We cannot understand what this space-time continuum is except that it is a mathematical heap of point-events in the brain of the scientist – and not a human scientist at that!

Here, Berkeley rectifies himself when he says that the world is an idea, not of Mr. Berkeley, but of a larger being in whom all the individual ideas are also included. We again come to the Hiranyagarbha of Vedanta philosophy, though such words were not used by Berkeley or Plato. Plato used the words, "Idea of the good". A strange definition of his. You may say, "Idea of God" if you like. It is not an idea of God, but the idea which is God. Actually, God is only an idea; not your idea, but an Idea as such, which is the cause of all other ideas. The Yoga Vasistha goes into great detail in explaining this point that the whole universe is mind. Not my mind or your mind, but mind *as such*. Pure impersonal existence, of which our minds and thoughts and feelings and solutions are ripples.

Read the great book of Samuel Alexander, "Space, Time and Deity", which is a great exposition of the structure of the universe which is so hard and real in space-time only. Space-time is not a substance. It is not something tangible. You cannot touch it, you cannot see it, you cannot sense it, you cannot taste it, you cannot smell it. And a thing which cannot be sensed is not reality at all. But, that is the reality!

It pinpoints, pressurises itself into a movement, a force. And space-time becomes motion, manifesting itself into the primary qualities of length, breadth and height. Remember: length, breadth and height do not mean length, breadth and height of a substance. They have never come into being. These are difficult things to understand. Only a purely impersonal thinker or mathematician will be able to appreciate or understand. How can there be a conception of length, breadth and height unless objects are there?

But space-time is itself without dimension. It has no dimensions. It is a four dimensional something – not a three dimensional substance. And we do not know what this four dimensional thing is. It is only an idea, a meaningless thing for us. It becomes primary qualities like length, breadth and height, etc. Geometrical patterns are called primary qualities which manifest themselves as secondary qualities of colour,

sound, taste, smell, etc. The world has not come into being yet. They are only Tanmatras – Shabda, Sparsa, Rupa, Rasa, Gadha, says the Vedanta philosophy. These Tanmatras are not substances, but principles behind the objects which produce these sensations. They are not hard substances like earth, water, fire, air and ether; they are comparable to the secondary qualities of Aristotle and Plato and modern scientists.

Oh, what a wonder! We seem to be living in a dreamland like Alice in Wonderland. We are not living in a world as it appears. The primary qualities condensing themselves into secondary qualities of sensations, solidify themselves *as it were* into hard realities-like the heaviness that you feel when you get an electric shock.

So, under these conclusions, it appears that the solidity and the substantiality of this physical world is comparable to the solidity and the substantiality of the mountain that you felt weighing heavily in your hand when you had a heavy voltage shock. Does the world exist? No one knows.

Now, even your own body is of the same nature. This substantiality of the world which has been reduced practically into nothing but a sensation and an idea of a cosmic existence includes the very motion of our body also, so that we also go, the scientists also go into these conclusions. Sir Arthur Eddington said that no scientist can live in this world without going mad. Fortunately, he does not want to go mad, because, under these conclusions, no one can exist here for three minutes. Buddha said this. A really perceiving individual cannot exist in this world for three days. He will melt into nothing. But the fact that perception has not arisen is the reason why we are very happy here. So, ignorance is the cause of our very comfortable existence. Now, this comparative study of Eastern conclusions with Western discoveries seems to make us feel that all great men are thinking alike – whether Plato or Aristotle, Kant or Hegel, Acharya Sankara or Vidyaranya Swami.

Ideas are therefore not ideas of things which are earlier than the ideas; just as space and time are not subsequent to what we call the objective world, but precedent to the objective world. It is a final conclusion of Sir James Jean, for instance, that God must be a mathematician. It is not a man thinking a mathematical point, but mathematics itself. How can you only think mathematics, without a person thinking mathematics? He says it is a mathematical consciousness, highly abstract, purely impersonal, and the universe is nothing but conceptions of mathematical point-events.

Today we are in this world of modern physics. And what is Hiranyagarbha, what is Isvara, but these very things in the Sanskrit language? What is this Shabda, Sparsa, Rupa, Rasa and Gandha but conceptual precedents of the hard things called earth, water, fire, air and ether including our physical bodies? We can imagine why we have difficulties in meditation, why we cannot do Japa, why we cannot do prayer. We get angry for little things and we fly at the throat of another brother, because we are yet to be spiritual.

Religion has not yet entered us fully. We are playing jokes with God, at least for now. These deeper truths are not capable of easy entrance into our minds, because we are busybodies, very busy with bricks and mortar and vegetables and tea and coffee. These are greater realities to us than the supernal ideas that are the contents of our religious and spiritual consciousness.

I brought these ideas before you to bring about a comparison between the greatest thinkers of the East like Acharya Sankara, the Rishis of the Upanishads, and Sri Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita and Western thinkers like Plato, Aristotle and Kant. They seem to be thinking alike. Only they seem to be thinking in different languages and giving and different definitions.

So, we are now face to face with the great reality, the God of the cosmos. We have passed through the analysis. We have conducted a study of the essential nature of the human being by a study of the three stages of consciousness - waking,

dream and deep sleep. We studied epistemological processes – the perception of the world, how we come in contact with things, and how we know that the world exists at all. This also we have concluded. Many of you may not remember it, but think over or see your diaries if you have noted anything down.

Now we are facing the third principle of the ultimate reality of the cosmos, call it the Absolute, call it Satchidananda, God, Isvara, Hiranyagarbha, Virat – whatever it is. Here, true religion begins. Real religion is an awareness of the presence of the Supreme Being. Therefore, it is well said that religion begins where intellect ends, where reason fails. When religion begins controlling your life, you cease to be a mere intellectual or a scientist or a philosopher. You are no more a thinker, but a person who lives reality.

Religion is living reality and not merely thinking reality or academic analysing. All this is over already in our earlier lessons. We have thought enough philosophically, academically and hope we shall enter into true religion which is God-consciousness itself in some proportion, in some measure, in a modicum.

To face God and to encounter Him in our actual life is to live religion. So, religion is not ringing a bell, waving a light, or chanting a mantra. It is encountering God face to face. So, religion is superior to philosophy, if you understand religion in the true sense of the term. Religion is not Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism. It is the art of envisaging God-being.

Man melting, like ice vanishing before the blaze of the sun – that is religion. When the sun of God-consciousness rises, this substance called body-consciousness evaporates into an ethereal nothing. Gradually, we begin to approximate God-being. The life of religion is the way of gradual approximation to God-consciousness. Here, true love begins to preponderate in our lives. We do not merely think of God as philosophers or academicians or professors. We love God; and we cannot love a thing which is not really there. We

cannot love a thing which is only an idea or a concept in our mind.

All love is an urge of the soul to contact that which it feels as a hard reality in front of itself. Every love is God-love finally and the final stuff of the universe may be said to be love.

I have been telling you sometimes that there is some secret meaning behind the last words in the Eleventh Chapter of the Gita when we are told that Bhakti is supreme. The Bhakti that Sri Krishna speaks of here is not ordinary obeisance to an idol. It is not a mass that you perform in the church. It is a melting of your being before the Absolute. Therefore Bhagavan Sri Krishna says, "Not charity, not philanthropy, not study, not austerity, is capable of bringing about this great vision that you had, Arjuna! Only by devotion can I be seen, contacted. Only by devotion am I capable of being known, seen and entered into." These three words are used in the Bhagavad Gita at the end of the Eleventh Chapter – knowing, seeing and entering. Arjuna knew and saw, but never entered into It. Therefore, he was the same Arjuna after the Bhagavad Gita also. He never merged into the Supreme Being.

Now, religion is knowing, seeing and entering into. Knowing is considered by such thinkers like Ramanuja, the great propounder of the Visishtadvaita philosophy, as inferior to devotion. I am now digressing a little bit from the point, into another thing altogether, which is also interesting.

Knowledge or Jnana is not equal to Bhakti, says Ramanuja, the great propounder of the doctrine and philosophy called Visishtadvaita. And Acharya Sankara says that Jnana is superior to Bhakti. It may appear that they are quarreling with each other. Really, they are not quarrelling. They have some emphasis laid on different aspects of the same question. Why does Bhagavan Sri Krishna say that nothing can make you fit to see the vision of God, to behold Him, except Bhakti? It would seem that He speaks like Ramanuja and not like Sankara. But they are only speaking in

different languages....the same thing. There is no contradiction between them. "Knowing, seeing and entering into" signifies the process of contacting God by degrees. There is, in the parlance of Vedanta, two types of knowledge – Paroksha Jnana and Aparoksha Jnana. Paroksha Jnana is indirect knowledge. Aparoksha Jnana is direct knowledge. "God exists" is indirect knowledge. "I am inseparable from God-being" is direct knowledge. Now, we do not feel that we are inseparable from God's being. That knowledge has not come to us. So we have not entered such a height of religious consciousness as to be convinced that we are inseparable from God's existence. But we are convinced enough to feel that God exists.

At least the people seated here are perhaps convinced that God must be. He is. Circumstances compel us to feel confidently that God must be, that God is. But we have not gone to such an extent to feel that we are inseparable from Him. That is a little higher stage. We have known in an indirect way. Jnana has come, but Darshana or, vision of God has not come. We have not seen the Virat in front of us, notwithstanding the fact that we are seeing Virat. This whole cosmos is that, but somehow we have segregated our personality from Virat consciousness. A cell in the body is seeing the body as if it is outside it.

The way in which we are seeing the universe now is something like the possibility of a particular organism, called the cell in the body, separating itself in motion – not really of course – from the bodily organism and looking at the body. What would be the condition or the experience of a cell in our own body notionally isolating itself from the organism to which it belongs and considering the body as a world outside it? You can imagine the stupidity of it. This is exactly what we are doing. We think that the world is outside us. We can fly into space, drive in a motor car on a road, because a peculiar notion has become a reality in our mind, that the world is outside us though we are a part of the world. So, the idea that the Virat is an object of perception, that the world is external to us, is notional and not realistic. All our difficulties are

notional in the end. They have no reality or substance in themselves. We are bound by our minds, our thoughts, our feelings and our willings. So when Acharya Sankara says that Jnana is superior and Ramanuja says that Bhakti is superior, they are saying the same thing.

By Bhakti Ramanuja means that love of God which supersedes intellectual activity or a mere knowing that God exists. And when Sankara says that Jnana or knowledge is superior, he means knowledge which is identical with being and which is the same as Para Bhakti or the love of God where the soul is in communion with the Being of God.

The highest devotion is the same as the highest knowledge. Jnana and Para Bhakti are the same. The Gauna Bhakti or secondary love of God, which is more ritualistic and more formal, is inferior. But Ramanuja's Bhakti is the surging of the soul and the melting of personality in God-experience. It is to become mad with God-love as we hear in the case of Spinoza, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Mirabai and Tukaram. Their Bhakti was not simply love of God as that of churchmen or templemen. It is a kind of ecstasy in which the personality has lost itself in God-love and God-being. That is Jnana and that is Bhakti. So, there is no difference between Ramanuja and Sankara in the ultimate reaches. And Bhagavan Sri Krishna's dictum is also of a similar character.

So now, when we are discussing the final point in our studies, we are gradually losing attachment to this obsessional notion that we are this little Mr. or Mrs. Body and that we are located in a part of the physical world called India or America, Japan or Russia. And we are slowly trying to become citizens of a larger dimension which is wider than this earth, perhaps larger than even the solar system and this physical cosmos.

When we enter into the true religious life, we become real children of God.