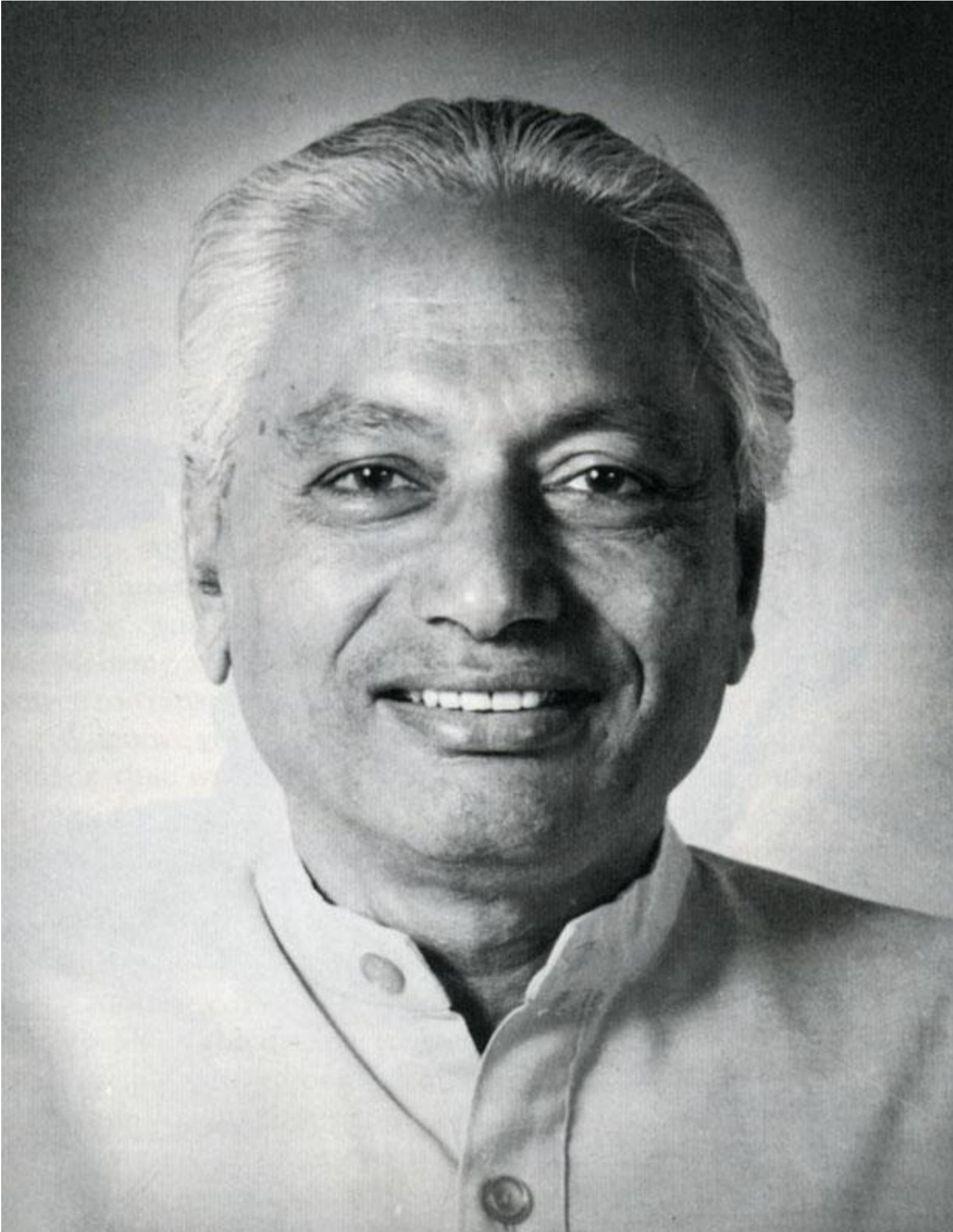


Insights & Inspirations



Daily Readings



1st January May All be Happy

Years come. Years go.

To many of us the New Year's Day is just the day on which we change the calendar.

We do not value time.

We do not realise the value of life.

Every second, every minute, every hour, every day, every month and every year that is past cannot be recalled.

A businessman at the end of his financial year draws up a balance sheet; he is happy only if he has made some progress in his business.

But the man-in-the-street is quite unconcerned.

We have 'lost' one year; what have we gained?

Ask yourself.

The South Indian has a number of highly interesting customs associated with the New Year.

One of them is forgetting old enmities and greeting all relatives and friends and even strangers with love and goodwill.

We should practise it here.

Let us forget all enmity and ill will and live in unity with all.

Another custom is to include in the lunch a dish of neem-flowers (bitter) and syrup (sweet).

The coming year may have its sweet and bitter experiences; let us, in wisdom, welcome them both.

Let us seek the unity that underlies all creation and all experiences.

May every one of our breaths offer this prayer to the Lord: "May all, o Lord, be happy."

Let us efface all man-made distinctions from our heart and recognise the Indwelling Presence in all.

Life is an opportunity, but ignorance converts it into a burden.

God created a lot of work for man to do, but ignorance transforms it into worry.

Man has his duty to his fellowman, but ignorance makes it a millstone around his neck, weighing him down with cares and anxieties.

Wealth and wisdom God entrusted to man to serve his neighbour with; but ignorance bound him with them in the fatal ties of possessiveness.

May God bless you with a glorious New Year!

2nd January Freedom From the Known

Question:

What do you think of health food stores?

Swamiji:

Of course, I love healthy food and I am all for every attempt to promote the production and distribution of healthy food.

But it is doubtful if such healthy food can be stored and sold 'on a commercial basis'.

And there is another aspect to it: when the business tycoon sees the swing towards health food, he also switches to it and all manner of unhealthy stuff passes for health food.

This goes on all the time.

The eagerness with which people swing from one health cult to another, from one miracle-cure to another is super-marvellous.

Now it is medicine, now it is psychoanalysis, now it is psychotherapy, now it is psychedelic drugs, now it is Gestalt therapy, and now it is Transactional Analysis, now it is church, now it is Self-realisation, now it is yoga, now it is Zen, now it is Krishna consciousness, and now it is surrender to the guru.

What is truly remarkable is: every time there is a switch from one to the next, you gasp and declare, "Wow, this is it!"

It works. For a time.

The climax. Then the anticlimax.

And then the swing.

What is the mystery? Simple.

What you are now hooked onto is 'the known': stale, stinking and soon boring.

A new fad floats into your life.

You drop the known and pick up the new.

And there is a momentary thrill.

Freedom from the known.

But no, not yet: for soon you discover that whereas the known terminology was knocked out, the new one refers to the same old known factors.

Soon the newness of the new terminology wears out and the known re-emerges the boring victor.

You did not even really wake up; you blinked in momentary twilight consciousness, but quickly sank back into deep sleep.

Health, wisdom, life, love, divinity - all the good things are ever alive.

They cannot be captured, stored and distributed.

Saints renounce the world to show us that there is no real happiness in this world, and also that for the purpose of living we need very little.

They point out, for instance, that our dinner table contains more of ornaments and art collections and less of food!

3rd January Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. Religion is applied philosophy.

If even this wisdom is allowed to serve only as a glittering burden, far from saving us, it will serve only as a millstone around our neck.

Religion therefore binds us; binds us to God and (since God is omnipresent) to the welfare of all beings.

In India, this is regarded as dharma.

The name 'Hinduism' was derived from geography: the religious practices of the people who inhabited the land of the Indus River.

They - the seers of Truth who had actual, direct perception of the Reality - sought the highest wisdom; this wisdom is enshrined in the Upanishads.

And they - the yogis - applied that wisdom to life itself.

The resultant practices were regarded as those of the Hindu religion.

They had very broad vision: the vision of Truth that they had had no frontiers.

Their religion had no doors. As they migrated southwards, they absorbed everything good as they went.

No 'alien' faith could invade them, for in their eyes no one was alien!

Everyone was absorbed, so avaricious was their spiritual hunger.

So avaricious were they for true wisdom that they were ready to grasp it wherever it was found.

They recognised the ultimate reality to be transcendental and Infinite, and conceded that this Infinite could have infinite points from which it could be viewed in infinite ways.

God is One and Infinite.

The Infinite precludes the existence of something 'other' outside it.

Oneness precludes 'manyness' within or without.

The rishi saw the Truth, intuitively and not sensually.

He declared that when we open our eyes we actually see God, but due to the fact that our vision is veiled by ignorance or non-understanding, instead of seeing God the Reality, we see the world which is an appearance. Instead of seeing the One, we see the many.

God is one. He is Infinite. He is Eternal.

This was their sublime vision of the Reality - that God and God alone exists.

Turning away from God is disease.

He who turns to God is at perfect ease within.

4th January Rivalry, Violence and Me

It is lovely to see little children play.

How earnest and totally absorbed they are.

Summoned by their parents, they leave the game and go home.

Joy is the spirit of play.

When they play tennis or cricket they are supposed to understand the spirit of working in harmony with others.

However, when someone sets up a couple of goal posts, the game loses its spirit.

Sport loses its spirit of sportsmanship.

The children are no longer interested in playing but in kicking the ball between the two goal posts.

Now the other is no longer a friend with whom to play a game, he becomes a rival.

Psychologists say that the spirit of competition brings out genius, hidden faculties and talents.

This may be nonsense.

Once we consider ourselves rivals playing a game against each other, betting comes in - 'Who will win?'

This then extends to countries and the game becomes a political game with trade and profit entering.

Thus this noble thing called sport has been tainted by the spirit of competition and fighting.

The next step is violence, like the Munich massacre of 1972.

It is not only soldiers who kill.

People engaged in commerce probably kill even more through the spirit of competition, waiting to destroy rivals.

Unfortunately, violence does not seem to spare even the realm of religion.

Someone lays down a rule and everyone must follow this, or he will be persecuted.

The whole of life seems to be tainted by violence.

Where does it start?

Whether it is violence in sport, commerce or politics, it starts with me.

We say, "It takes two to make a quarrel."

I am convinced it needs only one, and that is me!

If the 'me' is kept out of the way, or if I refuse to fight, there can be no quarrel.

This can be translated into religious terms, too.

Anyone who believes in God accepts that God is omnipresent.

If I want to become one with this omnipresent God, what is it that stands between me and God? Me!

That is the obvious.

Nothing can stand between me and the omnipresence of God except 'me'.

I must be a student, looking into the book of life and feeling the urgency of the problem.

I must arrive at the point when life is seen as a problem, when selfishness is seen as a problem.

I must see that selfishness is the problem.

Then the 'I', the selfishness, drops away.

5th January Action From the Self

Question:

How can we be more effective in getting things carried through to their fulfilment?

Swamiji:

There is a saying, 'Trust in God, but first tie the camel'.

It is God who has given you some intelligence, a lovely body and energy - use all that, then trust.

That is the basis of my cynicism and scepticism.

The mind or the intelligence cannot foresee - to foresee is anticipating trouble.

If you foresee trouble, if you see the trouble before-hand, it means you are looking for trouble.

Then you will run into it!

That is one thing.

With the intelligence it is possible to scan the horizon and see a broad spectrum of possibilities - the best and the worst.

The best shouldn't create a problem, so ignore it.

You want to do something.

You are sure of certain things, and these are factors which are clear.

So take care of that which you can take care of.

But you cannot ' even take care of these unless you are capable of looking at each one from different points of view - some of these factors may be acceptable, some may not be.

All factors that you can take care of, please take care of.

Then leave it to God.

In all activities, according to the Bhagavad Gita there are these few factors: the doer, the instruments of action, the method of work, and the motive.

Then there is an unknown factor over which you have no control, which may interfere and ruin the whole thing, or crown it with tremendous success.

There must be clarity.

Have you seen all the possible road blocks?

So there are all these irksome factors: one should not neglect, one should not push, one should not take anything for granted, one should not nag.

This applies to everything in life.

It involves much homework because you have to think of every little action.

But this is only fun.

The world is not going to be saved by something you and I do or not do - but in doing this the right way we find the right way.

And while doing whatever we do in the right way, we discover the Self.

So the action is from the Self, of the Self.

The behavior is the expression of the Self, and the way in which the behavior behaves indicates what the Self is like.

It reveals the nature of the Self.

6th January

Health in Religion

Traditionally, religion has adopted one or the other inflexible attitudes toward health. There are many in the world to whom health is itself a religion: they are the members of the 'Body Beautiful' cult or of the 'Back to Nature' movement.

You might sense a deep religiousness in them, though they may outwardly refrain from a show of that spirit.

In them you often encounter fanatic adherence to vegetarianism, exercising, drugless living, etc.

At the other extreme, you have the ascetics to whom any activity or attitude to life that has anything to do with body-building is worldly, materialistic and irreligious.

They either ignore their physical well-being or positively glorify the sick and the weak body, which to them is proof that the spirit has completely overcome the physical!

There is one thing in common between them: that is an artificial and arbitrary division of what is one, into the spiritual and the physical.

There is no such division between the physical and the spiritual.

Body, mind and spirit are one; and this one wholeness is health, and it is also holiness.

True religion, therefore, strives to harmonise the body, mind and spirit, so that this harmony may eventually radiate from the healthy-holy person as social harmony and the realisation of the one infinite being (God).

That is the very definition of yoga.

Yoga (or religion) is harmony, 'bringing together'.

It is good to stop the definition there: thus challenging each one to discover in how many ways disharmony manifests itself.

Disharmony has thus to be discovered by oneself for oneself; otherwise it cannot be effectively dealt with!

The cultivation of the inner harmony is implied in the commandment that we should love our Lord with all our mind, with all our heart, and with all our strength.

And Lord Jesus commanded further that if you have fought against your brother, better leave your offerings, go and get reconciled with your brother before placing it on the altar.

To do this requires an inner sensitivity.

This inner sensitivity acts like a lamp, the light of wisdom, which constantly illuminates our inner personality and preserves health, holiness and wholeness.

Without this, no amount of yoga, exercising, half hour meditations or mechanical and occasional prayers are of much use.

7th January The Heart of Communication

Question:

All over the world there is a clamour for more communication.

There is more communication today than there was some years ago.

Yet we see that unity, harmony and understanding, that such communication is supposed to bring about, are receding.

Why is this so?

Swamiji:

Surely because we have not learnt what it is 'to communicate'!

To communicate is very different from 'to convey'.

When we endeavour to convey, we wish to convey to the other person, group or nation what we consider is right.

Implied in this eagerness to convey this, is the dreadful truth that we consider that the other person, group or nation, is in error.

If that other person does not agree, we think that he is immature, uncivilised or unrighteous.

We then resort to various methods of persuasion!

Such persuasion is rightly regarded as 'battle for the soul' of the other person.

This is violence, domination - and destructive.

This had many synonyms in the yester-era: proselytisation, invasion, slavery and latterly brainwashing.

The most recent euphemism is 'communication'.

But communication is quite different in character.

One needs to know the secret of communion in order to communicate!

In order to commune or to communicate, one must enter into the spirit of oneness with the other person, group or nation.

In order to enter into that spirit of oneness, one must drop one's own ego, one's selfishness and one's self-righteousness.

When the veil that is the ego is discarded, the evil lust to dominate the other person vanishes, and the pure light shines.

In this light both the parties involved in communication see the truth.

When both the parties have learnt the art of communication, have entered into the heart of communication, there is Silence, which is more profound than a thousand words.

Realise that all relationship is the interaction of the images of 'I' and 'You' within yourself. This is the platform.

From there you can either leap into self-enquiry or 'seeing all as God'.

When you realise it is all imagination, why not imagine, 'It is all God'? (Image-in.)

8th January

Gurudev's Divine Grace

Though Swami Sivananda was dynamically engaged in the service of mankind as the head of an ever-growing ashram and the Divine Life Society, He was ever blissful and never lost His peace of mind.

His secret of action is revealed by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita in a phrase which Gurudev loved: 'mamanusmara yudhya ca', meaning, 'Remember me and fight (do your duty)'.

The word 'duty' is rendered by several phrases in the Bhagavad Gita: 'sva-dharma', 'sva-karma', 'karyam karma' and 'sahajam karma'.

Dharma is what is natural.

Karma is action.

All these expressions imply simply 'the natural action that has to be done'.

There is neither an internal nor an external compulsion here.

That which has to be done, has to be done.

Yet, in practice one may not find it so simple.

For the mind interferes in the action as the ego, and memory interferes as the 'me'.

Hence, Krishna commanded Arjuna, "Let your heart seek Me, and let action proceed unhampered."

Action is thus freed from motivation and judgement.

Such action is natural.

Action is freed from thought or ego interference.

Such action is non-volitional.

It is done because it has to be done, because it happens.

This spirit is also the spirit of self-surrender.

Surrender is not the surrender of an imaginary ego, but a turning within to become aware of the springs of one's own actions, physical and mental.

When the attention turns within, it is realised that "God dwells in the hearts of all beings, making them act as they do." Bhagavad Gita (18-61)

When one seeks to find God, one becomes aware of the simple truth that all actions spring from Him; there is no 'I'.

When one seeks to find the hidden motives for the actions, one finds God, Whose energy keeps everything in the whole universe revolving.

The direct realisation of this truth is self-surrender or Self-realisation, and it is freedom and instant enlightenment.

Such indeed was Gurudev's divine life.

If the aspirant worships the guru, may he not then forget God?

No, guru is only the fullest and most faithful reflection of God.

Who will forget his own face, however much he looks at and admires his face in the mirror?

9th January

What is Yoga?

If you look at even a small Sanskrit dictionary, you'll see that this word 'yoga' has twenty to twenty-five meanings.

Most of the meanings of the word are basically intended to convey a getting together, a coming together.

In order to see if there is the spirit of yoga, I must know what comes together with what.

I must first of all become aware of the elements involved in it and I must become aware of how they got away from each other.

If they were not together before, they cannot be brought together again.

Two completely dissimilar things whose natures are completely different cannot be brought together.

When it comes to the practice of what you and I call yoga, we should not forget this basic principle: health is there already, and it has been disturbed.

What disturbs this inner health?

According to the yogis, toxins interfere with the free flow of prana or life force (energy).

In that unity, in that harmony, a split has been created by the toxins.

When that toxin is removed, the flow is restored.

Hatha yoga dissolves these toxins.

Now comes the problem.

Am I aware of this disharmony?

And, do I want this harmony to be restored?

Am I serious about it?

If I am serious I will not with one hand try to restore this harmony and with the other feed disharmony.

This is what many people do.

They practise some asanas, some pranayama every day, but their living habits are wrong.

If I understand the spirit of yoga correctly, I would realise the toxins must be removed and no new toxins put in.

Otherwise we practise yoga as some kind of an exercise and feel frustrated that nothing happens.

This is because we are not serious and we don't value the fundamental principle of yoga.

There is often this confusion that he who is omniscient, the yogi, will be able to tell you where you left the bunch of keys you have lost.

He may not!

The knowledge by which all else is known is like the knowledge of the nature of salt.

You know the quality of salt and why you use salt in food.

But that cannot enable you to know how to prepare curry.

Omniscience is not the knowledge of particulars.

It is a knowledge of the cosmic ground.

10th January

The Best Career: To be Human

Lessons in the yoga postures are a very good training of the body and often overflow to include training of the mind.

The body has a rather remarkable intelligence built into it.

If it is not dulled by unhealthy eating and living habits, it is capable of dealing with all the physical situations that may arise from moment to moment: in fact it seems to function almost always from moment to moment.

If you are able to observe yourself carefully, it is not difficult to see that whereas life is no problem, food is no problem, not even the animals and the people around you pose a problem, but your own prejudice ('I like this', and 'I don't like this') creates incessant problems.

Is it possible for you, without judging, without condemning or condoning, to see for yourself how this prejudice arises and operates, and where it exists in you?

Surely, it is not in the body: even when it appears to be physical, the operation of the prejudice is seen to be in the mind, the physical body acting only as a docile tool of the mind.

When you learn to see this, and when you thus observe yourself, you are in meditation.

What is needed first of all, is the keen interest to observe the mind.

If this is not there, any attempt to meditate or to observe oneself leads to dullness, sleep or frustration.

Secondly, most of us need just a little help in our effort to turn the mind upon itself.

One of the very best methods suggested is 'listen to your breathing' or mentally repeat a mantra, synchronising it with the breath and be aware of it.

When the mind thus turns its attention upon itself, you will discover what distracts such attention!

It is not always an extraneous factor which disturbs the attention, but your own reaction to it.

It is your predisposition that tempts temptation to tempt you.

If you have discovered this, then it is not only possible to avoid the operation of prejudice, but to go to the very source of prejudice, and thus to the very source of fear, anger, hate, jealousy, infatuation, pride, etc.

All these are mental aberrations which do not exist as such in nature.

If we learn to live without creating these prejudices, we shall be human beings!

Otherwise we shall continue to look like human beings intent only on destroying all others and ourselves.

11th January

Yoga or Physical Culture?

People labour under a delusion that while a disciplined life is indispensable for a certain path, for another it is not.

Saints and sages glorify certain practices like japa and kirtan as extremely easy to break the ice of the aspirant's despair ("I am so sinful that I am useless for any yoga practice").

Soon after this, the aspirant is 'enrolled' in the ranks of aspirants, and the sage gently reminds him that unless he is prepared to (in the words of Gurudev Sivananda) "Detach the mind from the world and attach it to the Lord," no progress is possible.

Even so with karma yoga.

I well remember hundreds of instances when Gurudev warned that without desirelessness, egolessness, and (on the positive side) Narayana-bhava or Atma-bhava (seeing God or the Self in all), mere activity is but labour and so much energy wasted.

Without physical, mental and moral discipline, what is styled as hatha yoga (but which in fact is just yoga asana) will degenerate into mere physical culture, and raja yoga or the yoga of meditation and mysticism will be impossible.

However, Gurudev did not insist that we should all become 'perfect' in self-control before undertaking these yoga practices.

He insisted that right from the beginning everyone should practise japa, kirtan, meditation, study of scriptures, yoga asanas, pranayama etc., without losing sight of the imperative need to progress side by side in measures of self-control.

Intelligently and sincerely practised, yoga asanas and pranayama themselves can enable us to acquire mastery over the senses and mind.

I request the yoga student to study Gurudev's immortal works on Hatha Yoga and Science of Pranayama, where He even suggests how the yogic practices can be made to serve the aspirant's desire to overcome his evil habits and tendencies, and to grow in virtue.

For instance, "Practise sirasana, sarvangasana and siddhasana simultaneously with pranayama.

These are all highly useful in the conquest of passion," says Gurudev in His most inspiring book *Sure Ways for Success in Life and God-realisation*.

Every spiritual aspirant should make a thorough study of this wonderful scripture.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle in the path of yoga is insincerity!

Only God's and Guru's Grace can enable us even to detect its presence and ultimately to remove it.

12th January Yoga Asanas

Why do students of yoga practise yoga asanas at all?

What are yoga asanas and why are they yoga asanas?

We are not looking for eternal youth or physical immortality - these things are not possible.

The nature of all created things is change, decay, and death.

No-one is going to change that.

In two scriptures, the Bhagavad Gita as well as the Yoga Sutras, it is made very clear that yoga is practised in all its aspects for self-purification.

When we talk of 'purification' we only imply the removal of what does not belong.

What 'I' want to be, is pollution!

If you go on contemplating the phrase: 'to keep these as they are meant to be', you suddenly realise that 'I' don't know what they are meant to be, and therefore there is no desire to make them this or that.

The first and most mischievous element is removed.

'I' don't want to be this or that; 'I' must only ensure that these should be as they are meant to be.

When there is no anxiety to be this or that, to appear youthful or old, every bit of 'dirt' shows up.

Then there is a signal which says 'something needs to be cleaned'.

Following that signal it is possible to bring about a purification of that aspect of my being.

But in order to be able to do that, one must learn to communicate with the body.

The system of yoga asanas is a very delicate and beautiful system, and one has to enter into the beauty of it.

They do not exercise the body at all as gymnastics do.

'Asana' means posture and is described in the Yoga Sutras as 'comfortable, steady.'

If you are unstable, jumping up and down, or if there is discomfort, strain or pain, then the attention is distracted.

Whereas if it is not uncomfortable, you can observe what goes on within, and this observation has the power to focus one's attention on the inner workings of the body.

For the first time you discover that every time a new posture is practised, a whole intelligence system rearranges everything for its sake.

Even if there seems to be a little discomfort to begin with, it melts away as you hold the posture.

If it is done that way, then every yoga asana becomes a new discovery.

Anger throws up a lot of poison into the blood - and in order to remove it and purify the blood, we breathe hard and fast.

13th January Benefits of Yoga Asanas

One must train oneself to appreciate the benefits of the yoga asanas and to be thankful. When I even sense a little improvement, I taste it, become aware of it, fall in love with it and thank God for it.

If I do that then I am not likely to gamble it away. I see that this is the path to purification. Then I will really and seriously avoid all that creates the problems again and go still further to see if the purification continues.

The yoga asanas themselves have been so framed that they work upon the inner systems of the body, not the muscles and bones and so on but the brain, the nervous system and the endocrine glands.

The only purely physiological influence that the yoga asanas have is in the case of the digestive system.

All the rest is almost psychic.

The yogi's theory is that if the flow of prana is clean and pure then both the mind and the body will function properly - not because of the food we eat and the tonics we take.

What is prana? Nobody knows.

We see one thing very clearly and that is that as long as the body lives, the body functions and the mind functions.

When the life force leaves the body the mind is not able to think and the body is not able to function.

That which makes the body and the mind function is prana, yet neither the body nor the mind can understand it.

(This flow is not flow in the sense of a river or the current in the electric wires, but it is like the flow of radio waves in this room.)

When the prana is obstructed, it will send out signals either of pain or of dullness.

One should become sensitive to these two aspects of destruction: one brought about by wrong eating, wrong ways of living and wrong habits, and the other, dullness brought about by laziness.

When these two are avoided then one communicates with this prana.

It is this prana that connects the body with the mind.

What happens in the mind is reflected in the body and what happens in the body is reflected in the mind.

When the body and the mind are pure, when the prana flows unobstructedly, there is a great sense of well-being and there is purity.

That is all the yoga asanas and pranayama are meant to achieve.

This is really not an achievement or a goal because that is your natural state.

The body continues to live, to exist as long as it is meant to live.

14th January Why Hatha Yoga?

Question:

I am not this body, not this mind; but there is emphasis on hatha yoga.

Why is that so?

Swamiji:

There is a feeling that the body is mine.

Why should that idea be discarded? - because when something happens to this body you think 'I am suffering', 'I am enjoying'.

This confusion is very deep.

Hatha yoga enables you to realise that the body has its own intelligence, energy; it won't obey you.

And there is no other way of finding this out.

If you tell the body to sit and meditate, it won't obey you, the mind becomes restless.

If it is my mind, why should it be restless?

Unless and until you grip the problem of the restless mind, you can't have an external appearance of tranquillity.

In order to achieve this, you have to go deep into whatever it is.

That restlessness is partly physical and mental.

The problem must be tackled from different angles.

You can't merely say: "The body is not mine".

When the body is slapped, you say: "It hurts me".

In order to resolve that confusion, hatha yoga is necessary.

Neither the statement 'I am the body' nor 'I am not the body' is an experienced reality, truth.

How does one find the answer?

The whole of the hatha yoga system is based on that.

It is not merely what is called yoga asanas.

The intention in hatha yoga is not to build up a body beautiful.

The whole approach is to find an answer to this question: "Is the body mine or not?"

The intention again is (if you follow Iyengar's system) there are so many parts of the body whose existence you are unaware of.

So by twisting and turning, you not only make the body a little more supple, active, dynamic, mobile (that is of secondary importance), but suddenly you realise you have so many muscles, tendons which normally you are unconscious of.

So, bring them to consciousness and realise you have no control over these things.

Then you learn to let the body function on its own intelligence.

Pope has said: "The proper study of man is Man."

God is the centre of man's being.

If man is harmonised here, he is in harmony with the world, he promotes harmony.

If there is a discordant note within his own heart, he sows the seed of discord everywhere.

15th January Behold! The Benefactors of Humanity

When some people hear that the yogi spends several hours a day in practising pranayama and meditation, the question naturally arises: "But of what use is all this to mankind? Do we not have our duty to our family, to our society and to the world at large? How does yoga enable me to discharge this duty well? What does it do to promote humanweal?" Gurudev Sivananda often responded in a lighter vein with the answer: "During the period that these young students practise pranayama and japa, others are free from their mischief!"

Thus there is less evil in the world.

He would then add: "The yogi is the greatest benefactor of humanity."

When you think of 'duty' and 'humanweal', a million questions arise.

How does one discharge one's duty without doing the least harm to others?

How do I promote the interest of my community by destroying the interest of your community?

Do I even know what is good for the entire humanity, to the whole of mankind, to all beings in the universe?

Are we not aware of the untold harm that great social, religious and political leaders have done to humanity while 'acting in the best interests' of their country, community or even mankind?

Think of all the wars, riots and endless conflicts.

Does anyone who provokes these or participates in these say, "I wish to destroy mankind," or "I am an aggressor or war-monger"? No.

He says, "I am working for world peace," "I want to promote the welfare of all beings."

Yoga demands: look within!

Look for the hidden springs of whatever you do.

When your own inner motives and motivation are exposed to your view, in utter disgust and shock you will drop them.

When your own being is rid of the ego, then your actions will surely be totally unselfish.

You will see that there is no division between 'you' and 'he', and that you are the entire humanity.

In fact, the yogi alone is the benefactor of all humanity!

Others are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Man thinks.

He thinks he alone is capable of thinking.

Granted.

Where there is true knowledge, thought is irrelevant.

Perhaps trees and other 'unthinking' beings know.

They do not need to think.

16th January Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is often confused with the practice of yoga asanas, which forms a small part of it.

The very word 'hatha' alludes to the two main nadis - the ida and pingala - the lunar and the solar forces that operate in the body.

Nadis are not nerves but 'movements' of energy.

The energy is prana.

Prana is cosmic.

Energy cannot be divided.

Prana is the energy inherent in consciousness.

It is Cit-Shakti.

Motion is natural to energy.

The notion of space arises in consciousness on account of this notion of energy.

Motion is movement from a certain point to another.

There are then two possibilities: the movement might form a neat circle (a mere vibration) or the movement might miss the original starting point (the centre) and gyrate in a spiral.

In the case of the latter, there is movement away from the centre.

If you look at a conventional picture of the chakras 'in the body' and if you describe a spiral with the 'crown of the head' as the starting point, with the uncompleted circle expanding as a concentric circle, you immediately realise that everyone of these segments of the spiral passes through the body (at points corresponding to the chakras) and it includes spheres farther away from the 'centre' - outside the body, too.

Thus, these chakras are microcosmic representatives of the macrocosmic elements.

The spiralling away from the centre is not running away forever.

There is a constant pull from the centre which is consciousness.

Hatha yoga arrests this spiral movement so that prana may flow back to its source - which is cosmic consciousness - in a single stream.

Movement in a single stream is non-movement, since it is natural to energy; it is what is hinted at as 'movement in a circle' which is at once complete and perfect all the time.

Watch your breath. You see that it flows on - your thought is not relevant to it - you do not grasp it with your thought.

Similarly it is possible to live - to let the stream of life flow along without the interference of thought.

17th January Awareness Itself is Harmony

You can practise all these postures and breathing exercises for the rest of your life; you'll have very good health, but nothing more.

The spirit will still be dull and any little problem in life knocks you completely off balance. Of primary importance is awareness: if there is awareness, that itself is harmony.

Why is it so?

Any disturbance is in the physical, mental, intellectual or emotional field.

Being awareness, it is aware of itself and therefore aware that there is no disharmony in it, that this disturbance is not in this awareness.

At that very moment the other disharmony is somehow dissolved.

When in our ignorance we are tempted to judge others, we often think that there is a kind of a conflict in the external situation.

But when we are aware, of what is going on, this awareness removes ignorance and we see it in a different light.

What appeared to be conflicting is really seen as complementary.

You can see that in the movement of your arm.

When one set of muscles begins to contract the other expands.

If you observe your breathing you also realise this.

As you breathe in, one set of nerves gives the command to the lungs to expand, and at the same time the other one says, "Now I am going to pull back".

They are not fighting with each other.

It is when these two forces function efficiently that there is harmony.

The intelligence that sees disharmony outside is dull and there is disharmony in that mind.

When this dullness is removed and the intelligence is awakened, then that intelligence observes the situation; there is tremendous awareness and in that awareness there is no disharmony.

At that very instant the external disharmony disappears as disharmony.

This wisdom is extremely important in our lives.

Without this, karma yoga, unselfish service or selfless service is not possible.

If this is not there you'll find yourself constantly taking sides, and that is aggravating the situation everywhere.

How does one transform one's life into yoga?

By awakening this inner intelligence and sustaining this awareness throughout, all the time, without allowing that awareness to be clouded again.

What you don't know is secret; what you know is gossip.

Truth is neither.

18th January Yoga is Yoga

When the inner harmony has been established, one immediately realises that unless there is harmony in our relationships with one another, there is no safety.

I can be a man of peace, but if my relationship with you is not peaceful, my inner peace is fragile.

So I must know how to live in relationship and still preserve this inner harmony, by directly realising that there is oneness between us already, that we are together.

It is not as though we are completely different beings who have to be brought together.

If that is so, the togetherness will never arise.

All bodies are made of the same food.

Some of us may eat fruits and vegetables and others may prefer to wait a long time before eating the vegetables - they are the ones who eat the meat!

So whether we are vegetarians or non-vegetarians we are all eating vegetables.

All bodies are made up of the same stuff and all of us breathe the same air.

Just as we arrive at a sense of unity on the physical aspect, we can also arrive at the sense of unity on the psychological or mental aspect.

Whatever be your thoughts or my thoughts, all these thoughts are made of the same substance.

The understanding that 'all thoughts good, bad or indifferent - are made of the same substance makes you one with God.

All these silly, stupid ideas of superiority, inferiority, hate, attachment, jealousy and fear disappear because all these are based on the idea or thought that 'You are different from me'.

When that idea disappears then all the evils that we are struggling against disappear.

The yogi realises the importance of divine grace; he realises that as long as the mind functions in relation to the body and this life, there is the possibility of these things coming up again.

Looking and praying for grace, he is constantly vigilant.

That vigilance is like an inner light in which there is no division: it prevents any new factors or disharmony from even arising.

The whole panorama is seen as one - and that whole thing is yoga.

The physical part of it is often called hatha yoga, the mental part of it raja yoga, the interrelation part of it karma yoga and the relation with God or the Cosmic Being as bhakti or jnana yoga, but yoga is yoga.

If you separate it, you are destroying the spirit of yoga.

19th January

Total Health

It is not possible to say that there is a physical part of health, because this physical part of health cannot be parted or separated from the rest of it.

If I separate the physical aspect of it, then it is possible that I go on doing all sorts of marvellous things with my body, but my mind remains rotten.

Sooner or later that rotten mind will also infect the body.

Therefore the yogi, having paid some attention to the body, also sees that the body is closely related to the mind and to the life force, that the spirit of yoga also works on the psychological or mental plane as well as on the spiritual plane.

How is it that I am thinking something, saying something else and doing yet another thing?

This is the problem of modern civilisation.

I must see that this sort of life disturbs the mind and creates a split in it, that this sort of hypocrisy is to the mind what poison is to the body.

If taking in some toxin disturbs what you call physical health, taking in this sort of hypocrisy disturbs the mental equilibrium.

When these psychological pollutants are removed, there is clarity; the mind and the heart are clear and there is transparency.

What you call conscious mind, subconscious mind, unconscious mind or superconscious mind, all become clear; and, even more important, there is no division.

In order to bring this about it is important to become aware first of all of the psychological pollutant, that there is unclarity, doubt and confusion; and then having become aware of this, one must seriously strive to get rid of it.

If you want clarity and you are serious about it, this clarity will lead to transparency of the mind.

In that transparent mind all these artificial or non-existent divisions cease to exist, and any new pollutant arising is seen immediately.

If a thought, a feeling of jealousy or anger arises in me, I know it immediately.

And the awareness that "Here is another pollutant coming in," is strong enough to keep it away.

Thus on that level there is harmony, and the body and the mind function together in health most beautifully.

Our attention should not be focussed on 'doing' but on 'being'.

Hence an example to be copied is useless.

Examples must be understood, not copied.

20th January To Calm the Mind

The body is not immortal, eternal; it is subject to all difficulties; it is part of the physical universe; it came into being and it has been growing stronger and stronger.

Later it will grow weaker and weaker, and one of these days it is finished.

None of these things can be avoided - only the foolish idea that 'the body is mine' and an equally foolish idea that 'the body is not mine'!

As long as it is an idea, it is a foolish thing.

As a reality, it is something different.

It is a wise approach to seek to experience the answer to this question.

And once the hatha yogi begins this quest, he learns how to purify the body; and once the body is purified to hand it over to itself.

When it comes to purification of the body, it is not only yoga postures that help us; not the isolated physical gymnastics.

It is a whole package deal: diet, your dress, your relationships, the way you deal with other people, because the mind can affect the body and the body can affect the mind.

If the body is full of toxins, the mind is perverted.

If the mind is constantly agitated, the body is filled with toxins.

So, in order to approach the mind, the yogi has the method of using the breathing to get at the mind.

When it comes to breathing or what is known as pranayama, there are thousands of approaches.

Am I breathing or is the breathing breathing me?

So, try to stop your breath for a little more.

You have no control over your mind or your body.

The control you have on your breathing suddenly gives out - by whose intervention?

That is called life-breath.

That is called life; we are all living because of that.

When you discover that, you are not worried about life and death.

On the way you discover that breath, prana, seems to control the body and also the mind.

If you hold your breath beyond your capacity, your mind begins to panic.

It is impossible to exceed the limit set by the breath itself.

If you observe what goes on within you as you approach that limit, there is restlessness (physical as well as mental) and you can see that you are about to lose consciousness; you can't think as you want to think.

Life force connects both the body and mind.

The hatha yogi used this method gently to discover what links the body and mind together.

Then you discover that by merely paying more attention to breathing (Buddha was fond of this), you are able to calm the mind.

21st January Integral Yoga

Though we use the expression 'Integral Yoga', yoga itself means integration, and where there is no integration there is no yoga.

My Guru, Swami Sivananda, emphasised at every turn that it is no use trying to develop one aspect of your personality while neglecting the others.

The yogi studied the different aspects of our personality and evolved a system that simultaneously develops all aspects - not one after the other, not one at the expense of the other.

No specialisation is possible here.

There have been so-called religious or spiritual people all over the world who regarded the body as a spiritual obstacle and who said it must be punished and tortured or that it should not be attended to.

These were the ascetics.

There were others who believed in raising consciousness to a super-physical level.

They talked in terms of 'levels'.

So neglect the body, neglect the mind, neglect everything below this level, shoot up to the 13th and link with the Supreme God!

Is it possible for you to leap up to the 13th Floor and go to the top?

It seems to be difficult.

When the body is sick you cannot think of God, or if you do, you are merely praying to God for the health of the body.

The hatha yoga system took into account that there is a body which is part of this total picture, and it has to be looked after.

One of the disciplines of raja yoga is 'saucha' or purity, which the yogi defines as cleanliness of everything, not only your body but the environment, so that the yogi's vision is total, not fragmented.

The body is to be kept clean and healthy and as you endeavour to do so you will discover that you need to keep your food, your lifestyle, your clothes and your environment clean and healthy, otherwise it is not even possible to have physical health.

Then, in order that we may not forget that there are other things than the body, and so avoid an imbalanced attitude, the yogi also recommends some elementary ascetic practices which amount not so much to self-torture, but a simple life.

Can I follow your example?

I can only see your behaviour, I do not know your motive, your 'being'.

Hence, at best I become your worst caricature.

22nd January

Hatha Yoga and the Chakras

Hatha yoga texts describe several forms of elemental dharana (intense concentration) on the chakras which are tuning points for the different elements.

They say that one who does such dharana (concentration) conquers such elements, so that the yogi is able to fly, to walk on water and through fire!

This may be true.

But it is also possible that these elements have their own psychological factors.

The earth-element represents grossness and coarseness as well as firmness and reliability.

The water-element represents diffidence and lack of moral courage, as also compassion and unselfishness, adaptability and humility.

The fire-element represents intense zeal as well as destructive and violent rashness.

Air represents unsteadiness as also quickness of perception.

Space represents an amorphous personality as well as limitless breadth of vision.

Intense concentration upon them enables one to eradicate or to cultivate these qualities.

Thus the practice of hatha yoga can be the very best aid to self-purification.

The aim of hatha yoga is to enable one to be reabsorbed in cosmic consciousness.

That is known as laya.

The yogi contemplates each chakra with great intensity.

Each chakra is a mandala which allows prolonged contemplation and which involves the adoration (bhakti) of the aspect of the divine presiding over each one of them.

The radii of each chakra, representing the dissipation of the corresponding energy, are withdrawn into the central core of the bija.

This energy is then invited to ascend to the next higher one.

At each chakra, the seeker is absorbed into it.

Symbolically, he becomes one with that element.

When he contemplates the space-chakra he becomes one with space, as it were.

In the ajna chakra (eyebrow centre) he experiences himself as the inner light (lightning).

At each chakra he realises that the energy (prana) and the intelligence that dwell in the chakra (and therefore in the body) are beyond the 'me' or the ego-sense.

At the ajna he comes closest to the 'beginning' of the spiral, the bindu.

From there it is God's or Guru's Grace that lifts him up to the bindu itself - for beyond the ajna the assumed individuality does not exist.

Physical discipline helps mental discipline.

Let each problem come.

As you look at it you will see that each problem has its own solution on its own shoulders.

We want the solution to walk in front of the problem!

23rd January Swami Sivananda's Integral Yoga

These questions are often asked: "How can you say that the body is impermanent, not real, and yet practise hatha yoga which seems to assume that the body is important?"

How can you consider God omnipresent, nameless and formless, and yet indulge in some kind of singing, chanting and worshipping?"

There is a beautiful verse which is attributed to Hanuman.

Hanuman was a great devotee of Rama in the legend called the Ramayana.

In that, it is said that even Rama depended upon Hanuman to win a victory over his enemies.

One day it is said that Rama asked Hanuman: "Thank you for all that you have done for me.

Tell me, what do you think our relationship is?"

The answer that Hanuman gave was very beautiful: "When I think I am this body, I am your humble servant.

When I feel I am a living soul, I feel I am part of you.

When there is an awareness that I am a personality, I am part of you and therefore at that moment I feel tremendously strong; I feel grace flows from you to me, and therefore I am able to work wonders.

Then when the body-consciousness is completely lost, in that superconscious state I am you, you are me, there is no difference.

I don't exist at all, only you exist."

We are aware of these three states in our own daily life.

Sometimes the ego-consciousness is very strong; sometimes it is nearly not there, there is just a shade of ego-consciousness; and sometimes it is not there at all.

The inner light must observe this parade.

When there is strong body-consciousness, that must be utilised and also attacked by doing karma yoga.

Karma yoga in that sense includes asanas, pranayama and all the rest.

When there is just a trace of ego sense, of ego-consciousness, one must engage oneself in prayer, in chanting, in meditation.

When the ego-consciousness is completely absent, what happens happens as He wills it.

To realise that there is no contradiction at all in this synthesis, one must see it in action.

It was my good fortune to have seen this in my guru Swami Sivananda.

He could combine what one normally thinks of as contradictory points of view without any conflict at all.

He was extremely humble, but not meek or weak.

He was soft like butter, but when you tried to crush him he was like granite.

He could be a very strict disciplinarian, and yet extremely generous and loving.

One could see in his daily life that he literally saw God in everybody, and yet he was very regular in his own spiritualistic worship.

He lived in the realisation that the world doesn't exist as one sees it.

24th January Remembering the Truth Constantly

Prejudice might appear as selfishness.

Selfishness is based upon division: "I must have this and not the other: I am good and not the others.

I am more important in the world than anybody else and therefore I must be saved and the others can be destroyed."

How do we overcome this?

By growing in unselfishness, and that is called karma yoga.

All this needs deep contemplation, which is raja yoga.

None of these things are possible if your body is sick, and therefore you must practise asanas and pranayama, which is hatha yoga.

But not one of these things is of any value whatsoever independent of the others.

If on the other hand you combine all these and practise what Swami Sivananda called Integral Yoga, then you are trying to tackle this difficulty of the inner division on all fronts at the same time.

That was His teaching: to combine all these spiritual practices without losing sight of the fact that God is omnipresent.

Yoga is the direct realisation of this Truth.

Until we are able to see, honestly and truly, that the same God who shines in the sun is also in the candle, that the same God who dwells in the greatest saint also dwells in the smallest of insects, we are not really in yoga.

If I really see God, I will not try to see God.

The very fact that I am trying to see God shows that I am not seeing God.

If I see God in all, it comes naturally.

There is no artificiality in your behaviour, it is spontaneous, natural.

If we remember this Truth constantly and if we also remember that there lived a person on this earth - Gurudev Sivananda - Who embodied this Truth, then it grows upon us.

Philosophers are necessary to interpret the mystic wisdom of sages.

But these philosophers are like waiters in a hotel.

If one is inefficient and makes a mess of your lunch, dismiss him - but do not go away without your lunch.

Go to the source and get your food.

Even so, go back to the mystics and to the fountain-source of religion.

It is foolish to renounce religion because philosophers differ and are confused.

25th January The Essence of Yoga

Asanas and pranayama have almost come to be regarded as mere physical exercises; and the other practices of yoga are found in religious traditions all over the world.

But, what is a 'spiritual' practice?

A practice becomes spiritual only when it is full of the spirit of yoga, full of the spirit of God.

Gurudev pointed out that if this spirit is present, all activities of one's life become spiritual; minus this spirit even what looks great on the surface is worthless show.

Yet it will not do to ignore the traditional spiritual practices (like prayer and meditation) in the belief that our whole life is spiritual!

If it is, it will itself demand regular periods of renewal in japa, meditation, prayer and worship.

And these too will be full of the spirit of God.

Gurudev asked us to 'see God in all', 'to serve the Lord in all'.

How do we see God in all, who sees God in all?

As long as we see only with the physical eye, we shall see only physical bodies.

With our mind we see (try to understand) others' minds or ideas: we 'see' them as intelligent or dull beings and so on.

Feeling responds to others in sympathy.

But none of these can see God.

Only God can see God.

Flesh sees flesh, mind sees mind, heart sees heart, and God sees God.

All the yoga practices are meant to purify the body, mind and heart, so that the transparent inner instruments might reveal the indwelling presence of God.

Yoga does not create anything new.

Meditation is the intensest form of self-purification.

When our whole being is pure, we realise the great truth expressed with great beauty in Baba Muktananda's great message: "Be God to one another".

This is not as much a commandment as a simple statement of truth: when your own heart is pure, the God within you sees God within all.

We only think or guess that we are searching for and seeking peace and happiness.

In truth we do not know.

For every time we get what we regarded as peace and happiness, we drop it and seek something else.

Only this seeking is continuous.

The quest is always there.

Hence it is good to understand that quest.

We do not know its goal, hence all that we can do is to be aware of it.

In the meantime, normal life goes on.

But when this inner observation is continuous, life's ups and downs do not affect us as they did when the observation was not there.

26th January Leading a Spiritual Life

People ask what they must do first in order to lead a spiritual life.

It is not as though you are a completely blank canvas.

You are made up of the knowledge you have acquired, the things you have done during this life.

So in wanting to lead a spiritual life you must start from where you are.

Since we are not all on the same platform, the same stage, the answer must be different for every individual.

Yoga cannot be practised part by part.

One has to practise everything.

From the first day that you decide to lead a spiritual life, you must do everything, even though you do it imperfectly at first.

Whatever you do it must be whole - the body, mind, heart, life - everything must be involved in it right from the first day.

At the same time the spirit must be kept bright, pure, clear.

If the spirit of spiritual life, the spirit of yoga, does not touch a part of your being, there is the danger that in that part you will make some mistakes.

Specialisation in yoga means partial development and therefore there is no yoga.

Yoga means integration, perfection!

But this perfection can be visualised as perfection in stages.

So you start practising the yoga postures in a small way - today!

You start doing some small service in a small way, study some scripture without understanding very much.

Repeat a mantra or meditate imperfectly.

I am not entirely perfect, but I have started on all fronts.

That is what Swami Sivananda taught us in His Integral Yoga: right from the first day of the practice of yoga you can do everything - i.e. whatever you know at the present moment - without considering that you know everything, without thinking that you have obtained perfection, without despairing or becoming discouraged, without comparing yourself with anyone else.

Today you are doing what you know, what you can and what is 'whole'.

You study, meditate, do some japa and asanas.

Where there is an opportunity, you do some service.

You lead a fairly disciplined life.

While doing this, one little defect here, one little difficulty there, comes to view.

You try to rise above these things and overcome them.

When you have taken that step, the next step comes into view!

Thus one goes on developing infinitely, throughout life.

That is yoga.

Power corrupts, but only corrupt men seek and assume power.

27th January Yoga is Life

Any motivation in the practice of yoga becomes almost immediately counter-productive. Indeed, it is obvious that it is some sort of a motivation that brings the student to yoga in the first place.

But a wise teacher would do well to point out immediately that yoga is the antidote to the ills caused by motivation and a goal-oriented life, and therefore seeking a goal for the practice of yoga defeats its purpose.

People are ill, physically and mentally, because instead of living they are constantly struggling for something.

Living does not involve struggle, contrary to popular misconception.

The simplest form of living is joyous and blissful, and life is intelligent, wise and alert enough to avoid pain and unhappiness instantly.

It is some sort of twisted motivation that causes pain and suffering, and then rationalises such pain and suffering even to the point of exalting them.

Right from the very beginning of the practice of yoga the student discovers that the intelligence in the body is capable of meeting every situation that arises in life from moment to moment.

This is the purpose of the yoga asanas (postures).

During pranayama the yogi again discovers the great power and vigilance of the life-force which is beyond the ego-sense and which alone enables us to live.

In meditation the yogi discovers (uncovers) self-ignorance.

Then, self-knowledge (knowledge as the self or self as pure knowing) alone is.

This is kaivalya, freedom, liberation - which ever is and should, therefore, be treated neither as the goal nor as an idea.

There is not even a rejection of pain, but the realisation that such rejection makes pain painful!

It is not pursuit of pleasure, but the realisation that it is the pursuit that makes pleasure pleasurable (and as its inevitable reaction, painful).

When there is neither rejection nor pursuit, life is liberated from the haunting shadows of ignorant notions.

There is enlightenment.

All life becomes divine life.

We mistake pain for pleasure and persist in it, though it is painful.

We hypnotise ourselves into the conviction that this is pleasure.

One has to de-hypnotise oneself - de-self-hypnotise - through yoga.

28th January Remedial Action

Life or the existence of energy implies motion, movement, activity.

All life is motion and, paradoxically, in all this motion there is a state of absolute equilibrium or balance.

How is this balance maintained?

By a fantastic trick which is the basic law of electromagnetism - unlike poles attract each other.

So, by keeping two unlike poles together, we build a force of attraction.

Everything is vibrating, everything is in motion and yet in an orderly motion.

It is possible for this orderly motion to be momentarily disturbed and that momentary disturbance is remedied by immediate balancing counteraction or remedial action.

This is Nature and this is what we see in our life.

When one sees the beauty of this balancing nature, one realises there is an intelligence behind it.

And also that that intelligence seems to be superior to our intelligence because it is able to remedy our stupidity.

When these two are seen, then the sources of real action are seen.

The 'I' which superficially appeared to be the doer of all actions is seen to be non-existent and therefore non-active.

But that which was beyond the understanding of the mind and the ego-sense - that is the real doer of all actions.

Yoga does not deal with the self or God, but with the obstacles to the vision of God, to this natural living.

The world or the creation takes no notice at all of your private desires.

The world has not been created to satisfy your cravings or to avoid what you do not like.

What experiences pleasure?

What experiences pain?

How do they come in?

Where does attachment come from?

It is these things that really interfere with the natural flow of our life and introduce pleasure, pain, appointment, disappointment, hope, despair.

The art of dealing with these is called yoga.

Yoga leads to Self-realisation.

Self-realisation is not the end product of the practice of yoga; but when the yoga practice removes all obstacles, the Self is realised to be the sole reality.

Surely, there is no technique to freedom.

You wish to 'stop the mind'.

Yet if you are on a moving train you cannot jump out and 'stop'.

You will have to run along for a few moments till the momentum is exhausted.

A 'householder' feels that being a householder it is difficult to practice yoga.

Who holds the house?

The universe holds the world, the world holds the house, the house holds the body.... and who holds the body?

Drop the idea of holding anything, for it is only the idea that is held.

29th January Word is Word: Truth is Truth

In our lives we have varied experiences which we then endeavour to describe. The original experience is past and what we describe is something quite different. Though it lasts only as a description, we consider it to be the reality.

Thus a confusion arises.

It is this confusion that haunts our lives.

We cannot struggle out of this confusion; any effort can only aggravate the problem by compounding the confusion.

If we become aware that the description is only a description, the truth can be seen.

Yoga is not any of its descriptions; but we may need a description to help us realise the truth of yoga.

An inspiring description occurs in the Bhagavad Gita (VI-22): "Yoga is non-contact with that which is in contact with pain."

'Pain' is a word.

The word is not pain nor is it painful.

The first actual experience of pain was not 'pain', for then neither the word nor its corresponding concept existed.

There was an experience and the appropriate action arose out of it.

After that first experience, thought created a concept and its corresponding word.

There arises memory.

This memory is in contact with the concept of 'pain'.

The 'me' is a bundle of countless such memories.

Memory may have its own field of activity and in that field it may be valuable; but neither experience nor action should spring from memory.

If the present experience of 'pain' is not linked with the memory of past experiences, it is easy for the body-intelligence to deal with this 'pain' unhampered by the dreadful load of past associations.

For instance, the little baby may not experience 'pain' and 'pleasure' (as we know these).

It rejects whatever may be a threat to the life-force (in that rejection there is no hate) and it receives everything else.

It does not desire and there is nothing undesirable to it.

Such action is spontaneous and non-volitional.

The whole thing leaves no trace at all.

But it is memory that distorts it.

When the present experience is not thus linked, we are in yoga.

The present experience is freed from contact with that (memory) which is in contact with the concept of 'pain'. Hence there is no-one even to call the present experience 'pain'.

There is experiencing, for sure; but it is freed from the notion of 'pain'.

The pure experience gives rise to its own action.

This is life.

And it is life freed from sorrow and suffering.

One may call it bliss, but that is only a word - the truth is just truth.

30th January Non-volitional Living

Some years ago, one was asked, "Which God do you worship?" or "To which religion do you belong?"

Now it is "What yoga do you practise?"

These questions betray a total misunderstanding of the words 'God', 'religion', 'yoga'.

My Guru often emphasised that God is one, religion is one: God is love and religion is of the heart (again love).

Yet, instead of allowing them to unite us all in love, we let our own ego create divisions and more divisions in the holy name of God, religion or yoga!

It is easy to practise many of the yoga postures.

Meditation has been modified to suit the masses: and such meditation is not difficult either.

There are literally thousands of yoga centres and yoga teachers throughout the world: it seems that it is easier to teach yoga than to practise yoga!

But, what is extremely difficult is to live yoga.

Yoga is union, harmony, integration, oneness.

The student of yoga asanas discovers this harmony during the practice of the postures: the whole body functions as one unit, each part of the body supplementing and complementing others, without competition, jealousy or callous indifference.

Of course, all that happens involuntarily.

In our own life, however, the little individuality, the little ego, interferes ever so often.

It is that little ego that disturbs the harmony and thus robs us of our happiness.

Can this ghost be laid to rest?

Can we find the key to nonvolitional living, non-volitional action?

For such non-volitional action will promote harmony instantly, by the total avoidance of conflict.

May God thus inspire all yoga teachers!

The world does not need me.

It can get on jolly well without me.

I do not need the world.

I can jolly well get on without anybody - my constant companion being myself.

Yet I need to serve, for only in such service, in such relationship, can I know myself.

The service or the particular form of the relationship is not important; it is the self-awareness that is.

31st January On Harmony

Often we speak of harmony - at the domestic, social, religious, national and international levels.

But we always look for it in others, as if to say, "If everyone does what I decide, I shall cooperate with all.

If no-one annoys me, I shall not get angry."

That is useless if not disastrous.

For that is what perhaps everyone thinks, too, and thus there is no harmony.

Harmony is the same as peace, love, bliss and godliness.

All these are gifts of God.

We cannot produce or cultivate harmony.

However, God dwells in our hearts ever eager to grant us all these boons.

But there is something we and we alone can and should do to receive them.

The first and foremost factor is to realise that no one else is responsible for the tragedy that our life is.

This realisation instantly turns the gaze within and enables us to see that our false values generate the ghosts that haunt us.

Just as we blame someone else for our unhappiness, we imagine that someone else will make us happy, give us pleasure or grant us peace.

We run after these, we cling to the external ever-changing phenomena which are not only not the source of our peace, happiness and security, but on account of their own instability, they make us unstable as long as we depend upon them.

When all this is directly seen, not merely conceptualised (falsely thought of as 'intellectually understood') there is a radical transmutation.

Whether or not we are 'happy', we abandon the craving to be otherwise.

The miracle: we are instantly happy, peaceful and therefore loving, since we do not blame anyone for anything.

There is harmony in our hearts, and in our relationships.

There is peace on earth.

By the offspring you can tell the species of the mother, even if she is not before you.

If the offspring is a calf, the mother is a cow; if the offspring is a puppy, the mother is a bitch; if the offspring is human, the mother is a woman.

Similarly, if an act of enjoyment gives birth to pain and misery, it was not enjoyment, but pain (the womb of pain) only.

1st February Face the Violence Within

If I get a newspaper I see about 2,000 problems in each morning's edition.

Newspapers are supposed to tell us what is happening in the world, but they are only full of crimes, riots, murders and wars.

These are not the only things that take place in this world.

But the newspaper only tells us something grim, something vicious, something to upset the mind.

It is not even a one-sided picture, but a small corner of one side of the picture.

Who is responsible for this?

Why shouldn't someone report that today 30,000 people got married, 500,000 fell in love?

The fact that nobody tells us anything good is to me almost conclusive proof that there is a streak of violence in us.

There is this conflict in us, this aggressiveness and hate already itching to express itself.

The trouble is not outside.

One must see this thing clearly - the violence is in me.

So long as the violence is in me I can always find a reason to justify it.

When I use a wrong argument, I am covering up the truth.

Is it possible for me, therefore, to strip the truth of all shoddy argument and to see it as it is in all its nakedness?

When you look into yourself, face the violence within, you see that death is inevitable in this world.

Nobody who is born is going to live forever.

If I see that that which I am defending is also bound to die then I will not defend it and therefore will not be violent.

People will indulge in violent behavior until they realise the utter futility of killing one another.

The reason why this goes on and on endlessly is because we are evading the discovery of ourselves.

In order to make this discovery we will have to become intensely aware of this aggression and this violence.

Here I am caught with something that I cannot get rid of.

I cannot get rid of it because it is me.

How can I get rid of myself?

It is me, it is not a garment that I can take off and throw away; but then, can I sanction it?

"If I don't hit this man now, he is going to hit me later."

In anticipating his violence, I become violent.

There is violence in me and if I see violence in him it is only because it is in me.

This violence is looking for an excuse to express itself - the violence in me is going in search of a cause.

2nd February The Inner Light Dispels Darkness

Can we live in such a way as not to stir up emotions of attachment, fear and hate?

These three are the ghosts...

I wanted to say 'that pursue us', but probably we are the ones that are pursuing these ghosts!

Why? Because we have turned away from light.

When we have turned away from this inner light, it is then that we see the shadows.

That is obvious - if you are facing the light you don't see your own shadow, but if you turn away from the light you see it.

Either you fall in love with it: "What a marvellous person he or she is"; or, if the shadow happens to be cast in a mirror, you admire yourself.

"How great I am, what a marvellous person I am".

When you turn away from this inner light, one of these three things must happen: either you get attached to something or you begin to loathe it, and of these two is born fear.

Fear does not arise totally independent of these two fundamental emotions - love and hate.

You love her and so you are afraid you may lose her; you hate him, so you are afraid he may be around you all the time.

Is it possible for us to live completely free of these three ghosts which are constantly pursuing us?

They are not pursuing us.

No ghosts ever pursue us.

I don't think they're interested in us!

We seem to be all the time pursuing them because we have turned away from the light.

We run in an attempt to get rid of the shadow that is in front of us, but we find that we cannot capture it.

These are the only two things we are doing in our lives: either we want to capture the other person or get rid of him - he being the shadow.

Sooner or later one should realise that it is not possible to capture the shadow, and it is not possible to get rid of it.

Being a projection from you, why do you want to capture it?

Why do you want to fall in love with a reflection in the mirror?

You are the original of that which is a reflection!

That is the meaning of the Sanskrit expression: "All happiness is experienced in me, by me, within me."

When you ask a question like "Who am I?" you will have to find - and not think out - the answer.

It is not a mental act, but a discovery.

3rd February The Lord's Leela

Be ever-mindful of your faults and the virtues in others, of your happiness and the unhappiness of others, wishing them happiness.

Then you are a saint.

The man who always criticises others is so full of evil that he does not or dares not look within.

There is a popular saying in Sanskrit that "One should not behave contrary to the social norms, even if one is sure that it is not unethical".

But that applies only to social or religious leaders whose example is followed by others, and not to great saints and yogis whose ways are not for us to judge or to emulate.

The divine presence, being everywhere, is in you, in me, in all the infinite creatures, flowing everywhere.

Therefore there is inevitable interaction.

When that interaction is one of love, the result is happiness; if it is one of attachment the result may be frustration; if that interaction is one of hate, jealousy, fear, the feedback is one of unhappiness.

This is what we mean when we say, "The world is a mirror that reflects us".

If you look at the world with love, it reflects happiness towards you; if you look at the world with hate, it reflects unhappiness towards you.

The world is the leela (play) of the Lord.

It demands keen wisdom, insight and discipline to see this.

He and he alone plays the role of the sick man, the doctor, nurse, the germ and the drug.

He alone plays the roles of the poor man, the exploiter and the philanthropist.

He is the murderer and the victim.

(You need all these characters in any good play.)

He is the theatre, the drama, the actors and the audience.

Hence no-one is superior and no-one is inferior.

Yet He Himself plays the role of a critic who exalts some and condemns others.

He who knows this is He Himself.

'Judge not' is absolute.

As the Bhagavatam cautions, he who points out the evil in another partakes of it.

However, if in certain circumstances you have to - then like Sati in Bhagavatam, denounce the evil-doer and sacrifice yourself.

Of course, you can 'believe'.

But your belief and my belief spring from 'ignorance'.

You think you know - and that knowledge is 'greater ignorance'.

4th February What Choice Have You?

There is something beautiful in natural phenomena.

Their inevitability and even their unpredictability are beautiful.

There is no confusion, there is no indecision.

There is wisdom.

When it comes to the human being, there is confusion and indecision.

We feel that we have to make the decision; of course what is made is artificial, not natural, and it has no relation whatsoever with intelligent life which is natural.

This confusion is effectively masked by our perverted intellect with the theory of 'freedom of choice'.

The trees have no choice, the birds have no choice, "But we human beings are superior and therefore we have choice".

The choice is between that which is good (often not pleasant to the seeker of pleasure) on the one hand, and that which is pleasant (most often not good) on the other.

The human intellect sees this creation of its own fancy as choice.

It prefers the pleasant, but dreads the evil consequences; it likes the good but not the unpleasantness involved in it.

It hopes that the evil consequences or the unpleasantness will somehow go away; in this hope it postpones the decision.

Procrastination aggravates the problem.

Inhibitions and reservations make spontaneous action impossible; and there is no energy in such unspontaneous action.

It is clear that the root cause of all this is the pursuit of pleasure.

When the inner intelligence sees this, there is intense awareness of the pursuit of pleasure.

In the light of this awareness, this pursuit is stalled.

Life proceeds, action proceeds, making its own moment to moment and extremely intelligent decision.

Life flows naturally, whatever its course and whatever its destination.

The key to the vision of divinity is love, but love which transcends the dualistic 'love and hate', love in which there is no trace of hate (hate is inevitable if there is the least craving or attachment), love which is cosmic.

To love all is to love no-one, as Swami Ramdas used to say.

Such love is divine, God.

God manifests in such love.

God realises God, which is God-realisation.

5th February Life Everlasting

Is it possible to determine action without linking it to a goal and a hope?

Of course, one can see that there is the ever-present danger of frustration in hope.

A Christian mystic once said that one has to risk frustration in order to realise one's hopes.

But is action (which is life) really and truly linked to hope?

Does hope have the power to alter the course of action or life?

Or, does hope arise merely to mask one's fear - fear often born of a realistic appraisal of one's actions!

If we are honest we shall instantly and without the least difficulty see that our hopes are rarely realised; when they are, it is only because the hopes accidentally happen to reflect the reality.

But if there is no hope (which also means there is no fear) the attention or the intelligence is freed from the distraction of the 'future'; there is awareness of the immediate present', and without 'hoping' that the summer heat will go away, you find a cool spot in the building.

That is living without hope or fear.

Life lives, and it has no choice.

It does not need a motivation, a goal, a reason or a purpose.

Natural (divine) action (life) arises in Life-in-God.

Few of us are aware of what this natural action (divine life) means.

We live a mechanical life.

We think we have a reason for whatever we do, a goal or a 'lofty' purpose.

But we do not recognise that the reason arises after the action has commenced, because we do not recognise mental action but regard the physical as the only action.

First there is the thought (mental action) or the will, then the rationalisation, and then it flows into physical action.

The thought arises in the psychological conditioning which goes unnoticed.

When we see this, rationalisation ceases, the intelligence observes the inner process and becomes aware of the psychological conditioning.

When this intelligence sees the danger of such a conditioned life, an instant and radical change takes place in the very source of action; the psychological conditioning is inactivated, and there is everlasting divine life.

Everyone who needs and seeks guidance obtains it.

The masses look to the rites and rituals, teachers and scriptures.

And they get the benefit of their help.

The one who does not need these, of course does not get any help from them.

He should not waste his time saying so!

6th February Parent: Child; Teacher: Taught

Question:

How does a parent bring up the children?

Swamiji:

The answer is provided by nature!

The expectant mother is entirely responsible for the nourishment of the unborn child.

The nursing mother has a choice: she could either breast-feed her baby or use the bottle instead.

Once the child is weaned, the child becomes independent of the parent.

In the same manner: for the first few years of childhood, the child is entirely dependent upon the parent psychologically, and hence it tries to question and find out or observe and imitate.

From the age of about 8 to 15 there is a give-and-take relationship, and the parent has an optional responsibility.

Beyond that the responsibility ceases.

However, if the child had been properly nourished earlier, it knows how to take care of itself.

The key-note of communication throughout this period seems to be Love!

Love is utter egolessness.

This love-egolessness is the condition prerequisite to any communication.

When two egos clash, there can never be communication; when one is strongly motivated and the other is not, there is sometimes a domination (with its unpleasant consequences of revolt).

This is what the mother-baby relationship teaches us: the baby has no ego and is therefore entirely dependent upon the mother, and the mother is full of love (and therefore egoless) and responds to the baby's needs without any motivation.

Then communication is perfect.

In the second phase, the communication is effective only to the extent that such love-egolessness exists.

Even in later years, such love-egolessness can exist and thus make teaching-learning possible.

However, one should beware of a tendency to assume what is good for the young man or woman, and to impose 'for his own good'.

The imposing ego will be treated as a threat by the student or the offspring whose own ego will, in an endeavour to assert his or her freedom from such imposition, ignorantly or willfully harm himself or herself.

And the parent or the teacher has a big share in this harm!

It is often said: "The Lord has entrusted these young ones to my care; how can I not feel terribly concerned about them?"

The answer is: "If the Lord entrusted them to your care, He surely knows how to bring them up too!

Let not your ego interfere.

He will, from within You if need be, guide them."

7th February Custodian of Culture

Any factor that tends to interfere with the two vital formative influences in one's life (the parent and the teacher) is bound to cause a 'soul quake', destroying the very foundations of humanity.

The reason is obvious.

Such an interference will have a catastrophic snowballing effect.

For, the child is the father of the man, and today's student is tomorrow's teacher.

It is not too late.

One half - the better half - of humanity is still very responsive (indeed: the other half is not totally unresponsive either, for nothing survives by halves).

Women all over the world are up in arms: in their arms they hold Man - father, husband, son, brother or friend.

In those arms man finds security, peace, happiness, and hopefully salvation.

My Gurudev Swami Sivananda used to glorify woman as the first Guru of Man.

She has been the real custodian of dharma - religion, culture, goodness, humanity throughout the world.

She has often stood behind man; she has been veiled and sheltered from evil influences for the simple reason that the great ones recognised that once she was destroyed all would be lost.

All the major religious and spiritual movements throughout the world today are either spearheaded or sustained by women.

This is indeed cause for great joy.

With such inspiration, yoga teachers all over the world (men and women) will hold aloft the torch of yoga, so that humanity may prevail in the hearts of all, nourished by the loving, restraining and guiding hands of enlightened women whose role in man's life is thus described in an ancient text:

karyesu mantri karanesu dasi bhojyesu

mata sayanesu rambha dharmanukula

ksamaya dharitri sadgunyametaddhi

pativratanam sarangadhara niti

(Meaning: At work, she is a counsellor; in times of need she is a servant; at the table she is a mother; in bed she is a nymph; she is a pillar of support in righteous action; and she is of unbounded patience like the earth. These are the six qualities of a woman devoted to her husband.)

8th February Gurudev's Secret

When you follow the Guru Who is the Light of Truth, make sure that you have kindled the Light of Truth in yourself, that you are also the Light.

Otherwise you will walk in the darkness of the shadow that the human personality of the Guru casts behind Him.

The Guru is everywhere at all times, for He is the Light of God, and His Grace is freely available to all at all times.

It is up to the disciple to study his own mind and see for himself how it throws up doubts and distractions.

The light for such self-study is viveka or vigilance.

Such vigilance keeps the distractions away and the doubting intellect at bay, so that the heart may be open to the Guru.

Gurudev's genius was synthesis, harmony and oneness.

In His vision there was no division.

Hence there was no division in His heart and in His mind.

He was the living illustration of the famous expression that occurs frequently in the Bhagavad Gita: "He sees God or the Self in all and all in God or the Self." '

It was this vision of the Infinite that lived as Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

He is our guarantee and assurance that such a vision is possible, and that in such a vision lies our salvation; not in running away from anything, whatever be our justification for such action.

Even evil is not shunned, renounced or abandoned!

When the vision of the Infinite is attained and God dwells in our hearts in all His radiance, evil does not exist and does not arise.

In the light of truth there is no darkness.

When the light shines in darkness, there is no darkness.

This was Gurudev's secret.

Hence there was not even a struggle to overcome evil in His life.

Only he who is endowed with such a vision can love all.

He is love, and nothing but love can flow from him.

He is divine.

His life is divine life.

In it there is no self, no selfishness.

In it there is no division - not even between the one and the many, the divine and the undivine, light and darkness.

Hence, Gurudev was able to live an intensely dynamic life, presiding over the world-wide Divine Life Society, apparently dealing with diversity without ever losing the vision of the infinite.

He was infinite love.

May His blessings be upon you all!

9th February Karma

What governs this unpredictability of life?

We tend, as the medical scientists and astrologers do, to take the credit for all the fulfilment of our purposes and quietly sweep the failures under the carpet.

But if we honestly look at life, the failures are at least as many as the successes.

Then one wonders, "What is the truth concerning life? Why are some prophecies or hopes fulfilled and others not, some prayers heard and others not?"

It is perhaps then that we begin to look at life, not merely think about life.

If you think about life you become a philosopher.

If you look at life you become a yogi - this is the difference.

These two are completely different.

It is pretty easy to think about life because we don't see, we don't know what it is all about.

We speculate: "It may be this, it may be that."

But it's extremely interesting and absorbing to be able to look at life, not think about it.

I may be able to look at life and you may be able to look at life and discover the truth, but it is valid only to the discoverer; it doesn't work for anyone else.

Life is like the ground which receives seeds all the time; these seeds germinate and saplings spring out of the earth.

You see the tree, the sapling or the shoot, but the shoot is not an isolated event - it is connected to the tree.

Once it is recognised that life is an on-going process, the question of time becomes totally irrelevant.

It is a deed done, maturing now.

Therefore every moment you and I have the same freedom of action which was exercised some time ago, to plant the seed.

The same freedom of action is here now.

When that seed grows into a plant and yields its own fruit, you are free to do what you like with it: plant it again, chew it all up, burn it.

This, in brief, is the doctrine of karma.

It is not only "As you sow, so shall you reap," it is really "As you sow, so shall it grow."

The rest is unpredictable.

Whether you are going to reap it, enjoy it, suffer it or destroy it, we don't know.

We are all the time identifying ourselves with our masks - the personality; and the entire society seems to be geared to exploit this.

Lawyers, politicians, pedlars in religion, experimenters in science are all only too eager to point out differences to us and exploit them to their (alas, temporary) advantage.

10th February A New Look at Past Karma

I am utterly convinced that 'karma' is 'action' and not 'fate'; that we do not suffer because of some unknown sin we committed in the distant past, but because of the state of our being just now.

And the most dreadful sequel of the past is the repetitive tendency which past action leaves in our mind - which the yogis called 'samskaras' or 'vasanas'.

This is the reason why our life runs round in circles, we commit the same mistakes again and again and again, and blame our present conditions on a remote past, ignoring the immediate cause (which may, of course, be the same as the remote cause).

The problem is inside me, the problem is me - not what I did years ago, but what I do now, what I am now.

It is more profitable therefore, that we should look within immediately, now, and discover the present cause of the present conflict or unhappiness, without relating it to past karma or commitment.

Relating it to past karma, commitment or even habit may dilute the observation and make it ineffective and incapable of bringing about an immediate change.

Immediate change can only be the result of a direct observation, direct observation can only be of what is there now: though, undeniably, what is there now was there in the past, too.

It is what is there now that is throwing up all this sorrow and conflict.

The past is misty; the present is clear.

Without consoling ourselves ("I must have done something in the past to deserve this sorrow; and if I do something good now, I shall have a good life later"), if we become intensely aware of what is now, the change can also be immediate and radical.

This is what the yogis implied when they said that Self-realisation immediately puts an end to all karmas.

The vegetarian says: "If you eat the right food in the right manner, you will enjoy peace of mind and love will fill your heart."

The yogi says: "If you practise yoga asanas and meditation your system will be rid of all toxic substances and you will enjoy peace."

A religious man says: "Go to the temple; pray, repeat God's names, sing and dance. By His grace you will be filled with peace and love."

Do they necessarily contradict each other?

11th February Duty

The teachings of the great ones seem invariably related to the personality of the teacher, and when transmitted to a disciple, they are modified by the capacity of the student to absorb and assimilate them.

The teaching also has to be adapted to the context in which it is given.

When Krishna taught Arjuna the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna was a warrior faced with the battle of life and death on the battlefield.

In the Bhagavatam, Uddhava, Krishna's other disciple, had no such predicament.

He had reached the end of his tether and was ready to leave the world.

The teaching in that aspect was slightly modified there was greater emphasis on renunciation.

It is not that the teaching given to Arjuna was worldly and that given to Uddhava was other-worldly.

Only the emphasis was different, the quality is more or less the same - one has to do one's duty.

The concept of duty as taught by Krishna is not something which can be intellectualised.

It is not a formula that can be applied to one's life.

What is duty?

As long as there is life, it is the inviolable duty of the heart to pump blood and the lungs to breathe.

Once you recognise that, what you call duty, nature, dharma, God's Will, God's Grace - all become synonyms.

Duty is not something which can be imposed upon us, nor is it something we can learn from someone else.

It can only be discovered, each one for himself, by observing one's own nature.

The spontaneous expression of that nature is one's duty.

Once I turn my attention within, I see that I am greedy, proud, easily annoyed, angry.

Can I take that to be my nature?

What is natural will invariably be constant.

Yet, I have seen that in my relationships with others, even though similar situations may arise, I do not behave in the same way.

By directly looking into this, I observe the perversity, and see that I am not living a natural life, and therefore I am not doing my duty.

In this way, as life becomes more and more natural, there is both duty and great beauty in it.

It is then that one goes on to the next inevitable step.

If this is natural to me, what is 'me' in my nature?

That leads to Self-realisation.

Therefore Krishna told Uddhava; "If you learn to do your duty in this way, your heart becomes pure, and in a pure heart there is Self-realisation."

This is karma yoga in essence.

Karma yoga is not merely doing one's duty as dictated by others, nor doing something thinking it is unselfish.

Karma yoga is to go right into one's own inner nature, to find what that Self is.

12th February The Spirit of Karma Yoga

All the so called spiritual practices are normally confined to the morning or to the evening, and most of them involve nobody but you.

But that is not life.

Life is when you come out of your meditation room or your house, and you meet and have to live and work with others.

If your yoga practice is yoga at all, it must enable you to live in a yogic spirit throughout the day.

If that is not there, then your yoga practice was hallucination.

What happens in our daily life when this yoga spirit is cultivated, is called karma yoga.

Karma yoga is not merely activity but life in the spirit of yoga, of harmony and of love; and this love and harmony are possible only when there is realisation of selflessness.

There is a Buddhist expression 'the absence of independent self existence'.

Unless that is clearly realised (but not as an intellectual notion), yoga as a living thing is not possible and it does not become a living truth.

Yoga students ask what to do in the meantime.

We are trying to intellectually understand what selflessness means.

Logically it seems to be clear that there is no such thing as self, and yet we live and act as if we are an independent self existence.

This means that there is disharmony between our philosophy and our life.

This disharmony can only be removed in its totality by God's Grace, but in the meantime we can also do something about it.

That which we do in the meantime is also called karma yoga.

When the yogi in the fullness of his Self-realisation realises that there is no self, then selflessness is natural to him, and his actions are totally motiveless.

In the absence of that Self-realisation, the action always has some motive, for the self is incapable of acting without a motivation.

The selfish motive may be crude or refined and relate to some kind of selfish goal here or in heaven, but there is always a goal.

This self can extend itself to cover a whole country or a religious sect.

Though all these extensions appear to be better than a purely selfish action, it is not unselfish action, because that entity is merely an extension of myself.

On the other hand the yogis also suggest that when the self is extended like this, it is possible for us to understand that in that diluted self (which is selfless to some extent) there is greater joy and greater happiness, and to hope that one day the total absence of self might result.

13th February Karma Yoga

How should one live so that we don't create a problem for ourselves and others?

How can we live an active life that doesn't make ourselves or others unhappy?

When, in our relationships with people we don't become a problem to them, and they don't become a problem to us, it is called karma yoga.

Karma yoga is not only what it is often billed to be (i.e. service of others), but living in such a way that you are not a problem to others, and they are not a problem to you.

If that is not possible, you live in a state of tension which destroys the whole structure of yoga.

If it is possible, what should be done?

Because here it is a matter of doing.

The yogi examines the three fundamental aspects of action in relationship:

(1) there is the one who does something,

(2) there is the one to whom it is done, and

(3) there is the action.

These are the three fundamental factors.

For instance, I am saying something, it is all directed towards you and there is the action.

There is something very simple and beautiful here.

Both you and the person whom you serve, whoever he may be and whatever be the service, are both made of the same substance.

Physically we are made of the same substance, whatever be the superficial differences.

Physically we have more things in common than uncommon - the mind, the life-force, everything seems to be common.

We think we are different from each other.

That is the pollutant.

Karma yoga was evolved in order to keep this pollutant out.

Karma yoga tells us to remember the common factors more often than imagining that we are different from each other. So a supercommon factor was introduced - 'God' or 'Consciousness'.

The yogi ultimately realised this as truth, but to begin with he introduced as an axiom the idea that God dwells in this personality, this body, this mind.

It is God that enables this personality to function and therefore speak, and it is the same God who dwells in you, in these bodies and these personalities, that enable you to hear and to understand.

Remembering this, the pollutant of distinction is gradually removed.

Human beings have to be handled the human way; and that is the only difficult thing for a human being!

14th February Making One's Life Sacred

Karma yoga is not something which can be practised in isolation.

It is a method by which all activity is transmuted into yoga by combining these activities with devotion and wisdom.

My Guru, Swami Sivananda, pointed out that karma yoga must be based on devotion to God or supreme wisdom.

One can use nice formulae like 'God alone does everything' and 'I serve God in all', but how does it happen?

Are we merely giving expression to some formulae?

How does it feel to be in the presence of God?

It's one of those extraordinary facts of life that, whereas you can train your thought or thinking and will yourself to think, you cannot will yourself to love.

You cannot demand either that you should love somebody or that somebody should love you.

It is not possible.

Either that love happens or it doesn't happen.

Sometimes you can detect or discover some sort of a switch.

All the bhakti (devotional) practices are like these switches.

There is another problem here.

If the mind or the intellect comes into this, it blocks it.

Either the mind should come into alignment with the feeling, with the heart, or stand aside.

When I develop devotion to God I might adopt certain methods suggested as the switch for this devotion, and the mind must cooperate.

If I have a picture or an image, my heart considers it as an image of God, a focal point through which my consciousness can enter into God-consciousness.

Now the mind or the intellect begins to fall in line with this feeling, and the intellect realises that, since God is omnipresent, He is present here in that image.

I offer flowers, decorate it nicely. I stand in front of it and start praying.

That statue stands there and doesn't smile, doesn't say "Thank you," doesn't say anything.

After doing all that I say "Thank you God for accepting this service".

Then I come back to my friend.

I do something and he sits there like God almighty.

Then I remember that God also didn't smile, didn't acknowledge my service.

I have learned a tremendous lesson.

It is my privilege to do what I'm doing.

Whether the other person recognises or does not recognise what I have done is immaterial, because what is done is worship of God Himself.

This service is considered a privilege.

I don't expect any thanks.

Observe this very carefully.

Whatever is placed on the altar some fruits, flowers or bread - becomes sacrament at the end of the service.

Then it is distributed as prasad.

Even so, if this attitude can really happen, then all my actions become sacred - my whole life becomes sacred, holy.

That is what is called sacrifice.

15th February Enlightenment is Nearby

There is a beautiful formula that the brahmins in India use: "All that has been done is done to Himself by God with His own energy."

There is no dualism involved.

The moment there is a dualism - 'I' serve 'you', 'I' am teaching 'you' - there is a problem.

Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita suggests a very beautiful attitude: "Man reaches perfection by treating everyone of his actions as a flower with which he worships God who is everywhere."

When God does something Himself there is no motive or no one knows the motive except God Himself.

When there is even this intellectual understanding that it is God who functions through this body and this mind and serves His own manifestations everywhere, then there is no selfishness.

There is no motivation and no goal, no laziness and no idleness.

The person who has correctly understood the spirit of karma yoga is ever active, without a goal.

If at the same time he is vigilant and meditative throughout the day, then he detects the very arising of the self.

If that is possible, then enlightenment is within your reach.

What is not clearly visible, observable, when you are sitting in meditation or practising pranayama or yoga asanas, becomes very clear in human relationship or in your daily activity.

You can see the manifestation of the self - lust, anger, greed, jealousy, hate.

I don't see the self, but the arising of these emotions, these thoughts, tell me that it is very much there.

Is it possible for me to live without all these coming up?

It should be possible theoretically, because when you are sitting in meditation none of these disturbances are there.

But when we meet each other, work for each other, serve each other, all these things come up.

So there is a two-fold or three-fold approach.

I am working with you, along with you and for you, but with this feeling that 'God works, not I' and 'You are all manifestations of God'.

At the same time I am using the meditation technique to observe where all these - lust, anger, greed, and so on - arise. I am also prayerful and humble and look up to God and say, "God, I have no idea how to deal with this," and generate the spirit of surrender.

When all these come together, then surely enlightenment is nearby.

16th February The Mind Asks and Answers

The mind demands a reason for everything and it then supplies the reason.

Isn't it a joke?

It is the mind that asks for the reason, and it is the mind that supplies the reason.

Neither of these has any validity in life at all.

You can see that quite clearly.

Very simple! I shave my head every morning, the mind wants to know why.

'Why do you shave yourself?'

'Because I want to appear nice - not so old as I really am'.

But then, the hair comes up again.

It seems to be a hopeless, thankless, useless job!

I am sure all of us eat at least three times a day.

Why do you eat? Because you want to appease your hunger.

But it is not appeased.

A couple of hours later it starts again.

Or, you may answer that question 'Why do you eat?' with 'I want to live'.

But you don't live.

Inevitably we are proceeding towards the grave.

What is this absurdity we are trapped in?

We assume all sorts of purposes.

'Why do you practise yoga?'

'In order to be ever-youthful, ever-young.'

Nonsense!

Believe me, I have seen many yogis - great ones, super-great ones, less-great ones and not-so-great ones, and I might tell you that most of whom I was acquainted with about 30 years ago are all dead.

Why are you practising yoga?

In order to be forever young and forever healthy and all that sort of thing ... it's not possible!

When you come to a yoga class, the mind asks you, 'Why am I practising yoga?' and the mind supplies the answer.

It's a ridiculous thing: the mind asks the question and the mind itself provides the answer.

One doesn't visualise the total scheme.

You want just one part of it.

I don't know if you have ever considered this.

Supposing all of us were granted physical immortality - for ever and ever and ever.

You know what a rotten world we would create?

All the idiots will continue to be immortal!

When the enlightened person sees God and God alone in all, how can He see ignorant or sinful people to preach to?

Perhaps He does not see them as foolish or ignorant - not even as other than God.

God wants to have a bath and wash Himself!

This will work through the man of enlightenment - who therefore acts as the soap in the hand of God to wipe some parts of His own body clean!

17th February The Fire That Consumes Ignorance

Realising that we are all students, pilgrims who have undertaken the same pilgrimage called life, it is possible that I may help you and sometimes I may need your help.

We are all in the same boat.

If we adopt this spirit there is no shyness, no self-consciousness.

Nobody is God almighty here!

With this attitude we can discuss our problems freely without assuming an air of superiority and out of that discussion itself arises knowledge.

When we discuss our common problems then some kind of fire is produced and it is that fire that consumes our ignorance.

In this spiritual game you have to take a dose of your own medicine perhaps before administering it to others - unlike other treatments where you can be completely detached.

So, as you are consoling others you are consoling yourself; as you are advising others, you are advising yourself.

If in this way you go on talking amongst yourselves about your respective problems and their solutions, some deeper understanding arises.

18th February Loneliness to Self-transcendence

Loneliness hurts, so you go and seek somebody's company.

That somebody might be pleasant for a few minutes and then he also pricks you, hurts you. Immediately the self wakes up.

And immediately the self wakes up there is unhappiness.

Even if this is an extraordinarily beautiful relationship, it has to come to an end.

When that comes to an end the self wakes up again and there is misery until there is another dimension and another direction in which the awareness can be made to flow, and that is within.

Here there is self-transcendence - awareness seems to pierce the self and go beyond it.

But here there is movement of awareness towards the centre, there is no movement away from the centre, and the self is asleep again because it is left behind - therefore there is centring of consciousness.

This could last forever if you want, because there it is yourself - there is nothing to gain, nothing to lose, nothing was gained and so there is no loss.

Loneliness is already a projection of the self. How?

This self, this wall, creates the image of an ideal condition which it calls happiness.

(No-one has so far really defined 'happiness' and even if somebody has tried, that definition is not accepted by everyone - which means that happiness is a myth created by the self in order to make itself miserable!)

I have an image of happiness, and since I do not measure up to that or I do not have that which constitutes happiness, I must be unhappy - I am not unhappy!

Having created this unhappy situation, the self tries to project itself, tries to grasp something in order to fill this void, this loneliness.

This loneliness is self-created, it is not there - I am always lonely, alone.

Now, all that the yogi asks is stop there and look - look at what the self is doing.

When you are enjoying something, the self is fast asleep, but the moment you investigate this, the self wakes up because you are 'pouring' awareness into it.

The awareness was distracted, the self was asleep and the awareness was flowing towards something else, and because the self was asleep, you thought there was happiness.

When this awareness strikes, the self is withdrawn into it - that is called pratyahara.

That is, you do not project anything anymore.

Everything in the world is exactly as it is.

This is the other form of self-forgetfulness, which is marvellous when you go right down to the core of your centre, you pierce the thing called 'self' and enter into yourself.

There you are completely centred but 'self-forgetful'.

19th February Sivaratri in Sivanandashram

Rishikesh is Siva's abode. Gurudev was Siva; in fact in the early years He used to sign 'Siva' and several of the biographies also referred to Him by the abbreviated name of 'Siva' instead of 'Sivananda'.

Furthermore, when the disciples first decided to celebrate Gurudev's Birthday, but did not know His exact date of birth, they chose the Mahasivaratri, the day auspicious to Siva.

Siva and Sivananda share several characteristics.

Both are generous to a fault.

They are easily pleased by a little service.

They do not entertain any suspicions in regard to people who approach them, even if they have malicious intentions. Siva grants boons indiscriminately.

Sivananda gave shelter to and poured His Grace on people who were hostile to Him, and one even tried to assassinate Him!

One of the mantras used in the worship of Siva describes Him as 'He Who is never insulted' (for surely the Lord does not 'feel hurt' and is therefore beyond insult).

This was true of Gurudev Sivananda also.

To Him, all of us, the entire mankind, were like His own children; the loving parent loves the child even when it behaves insolently.

Siva's, and Sivananda's, love knows no limits whatsoever.

Siva and Sivananda reveal the simple truth that all auspiciousness flows from contemplation, meditation, prayer and samadhi, rather than from feverish activity.

They sing and dance: when Gurudev danced in ecstasy, a tremendous wave of bhakti or devotion swept everyone's heart.

Siva hid His auspiciousness in matted locks and sacred ash; Sivananda hid His holiness in elegant clothes or an overcoat.

They teach: "Man, seek the truth.

Learn to perceive the appearance as appearance and the truth as truth.

When you are able to see ugliness and beauty, good and evil, for what they are, and at the same time avoid reacting in a judgemental way, you have found the key to rise above them (not by ignoring them or by imagining they do not exist)."

This is an extremely delicate exercise and it came alive in Gurudev Sivananda's own life.

May His light guide us.

20th February The Message of Mahasivaratri

Mahasivaratri is one of the holy days that My Guru, Swami Sivananda, observed with great intensity and devotion.

There are numerous stories in our myths and legends to illustrate the popular belief that Lord Siva is pleased with even unintentional and accidental 'devotion'.

The implication is obvious: how much more glorious is devotion which springs from wisdom and understanding!

The Mahasivaratri brings us all together as co-pilgrims and provides us with a taste of the beauty of such togetherness.

Even so we are pilgrims in this world; we are all proceeding to a common destination.

The spirit of togetherness in that pilgrimage illumines our path, lightens our burden and enlightens our understanding.

Lord Siva is usually pictured as the supreme meditator.

'Sivam' is auspiciousness, prosperity, welfare.

These flow, not from feverish activity but from fervent meditation.

Siva is also the highest exemplar of total renunciation.

Humanweal, peace and happiness (at both the individual and the collective levels) flow from renunciation and not from acquisition.

These are but words until one experiences them as living truths, until one has a taste of the freedom that flows from renunciation, and of the peace and the happiness that flow from Divine Grace.

This is the purpose of pilgrimage.

During the pilgrimage people help one another, serve one another lovingly for the sake of God.

As co-pilgrims we soon realise that happiness is sharing, that joy is to the giver.

All these are impossible if there is no spirit of renunciation.

We learn all these lessons during the Mahasivaratri.

When we have a taste of the sweetness of self-discipline it becomes natural to us.

Imposed discipline is imposition, not discipline, and it only gives birth to impostors.

If you observe the Mahasivaratri with faith and devotion for the sake of which you give up smoking, drinking and other evil habits just for one day, and if you taste the joy of such selfdiscipline, then the mind naturally seeks such a disciplined life.

Only a disciplined man of peace can promote peace and human welfare.

Lord Siva is the archetype of such a person.

The Mahasivaratri is the emergence of such a person in you.

21st February The Dance of Siva-Shakti

Another day. A mild breeze rustled the leaves of a nearby tree, They shook with a graceful swinging motion.

So does the pendulum in the grandfather clock.

So does everything in the Great Grandfather's universe.

Sun-rise, sun-set, birth, death, construction, destruction - are these merely oscillating movements?

Life seems to take no notice of our individual opinion or feelings.

One has only to look around oneself: there is life everywhere.

Life comes into being, life lives.

Life flows on unconcerned.

Life does not demand that we rejoice over some changes and grieve over others; and it is not difficult to see that all these changes are inevitable in unchanging life.

You are born.

You grow up, till you reach your own half-life according to your own inbuilt biological clock.

Then you swing back to where you started - people do not see this and think you are growing old, to die.

The plant grows into a tree; and then, as the gardener says, "It goes to seed."

It goes into the seed - just like a wave which rises and falls at the same spot, though to an observer it looks as a sort of straight-line movement.

There is no straight-line movement.

Such movement is an optical illusion.

There is only swinging.

The whole universe is swinging.

Thought arises in consciousness.

It stays for a moment in consciousness - whether that moment is known as a moment or an epoch (It is thought that thinks of such temporal distinctions anyway!), then it returns to consciousness.

Creation. Evolution. Dissolution.

The life-spans of different creatures seem to differ, but only in comparison.

When the half-life is reached, the resolution begins, the return movement begins.

Soon the creature returns to the starting point, for the beginning and the culmination are the same factor Consciousness-Energy (Chit-Shakti).

Sun-rise and Sun-set!

Oscillating, swinging universe.

The dance of Siva-Shakti, Chit-Shakti!

He who knows this is neither born nor does he die.

When you do something with all your heart and soul, there is guaranteed success.

You begin to look - not at the difficulties - but at the possibilities.

22nd February The Self

Does the end of the body mean the end of the self?

Once death has come, will I still exist or not?

Most of us do not take this enquiry seriously.

One thinks, "Why worry, who cares what is the meaning of life and what happens when it comes to an end?"

Instead of meditating on this, one looks after the body, enjoys oneself, works or steals to get more money.

We go from one stupid action to another until death knocks at the door.

When it is too late, you suddenly jump up, "Oh no, wait, I must meditate".

But you cannot do it now.

Can I bring about this 'facing death' now?

Physiologically or biologically death has not yet come to me, but psychologically or spiritually it has.

Then I see that all the pleasures I have enjoyed have made me weaker; that all I think I possess, possesses me!

These things happen in the world around us, but even though we see them, we close our eyes to the truth.

The dialogue between 'me' and 'death' which may be taking place within me right now, becomes meaningless, unless I am sincere in my search for truth.

If I am sincere and serious, I will not be side-tracked.

The temptations are not outside.

Temptation is in the mind, desire is in the mind, and the desire is the temptation.

If I am serious about this question: "What is death and what happens to me in death?", when I discover that death only removes that which never belonged to me, I am no longer afraid of it.

It is as simple as that.

Then the query arises: "What is 'I'?"

The only obstacle to answering this question is unsteadiness of attention.

Watch and note if merely seeing is temptation.

If you look within, inwardly watching the mind, you find that the attention does not change, does not shift at all.

The eyes still see, the ears still hear, life still goes on - but your attention is within yourself.

And there, deep within the innermost core of your being, you realise that you are the Self.

Not the self which is some kind of an image, nor something which looks like a big light, nor something which looks like a god.

(All these ideas have been created by you.)

This Self has nothing whatever to do with your good actions or bad actions, it has nothing whatever to do with your suffering or your pleasure.

Uninvolved in pain, uninvolved in death, uninvolved in birth - it is.

23rd February The Mystery of Consciousness

One of the participants in a discussion became interested in 'akashic records'.

It seems to be the nature of the mind to probe these phenomena, often at the sacrifice of probing into itself.

Yet sometimes speculation has led to greater understanding.

The radio has considerably facilitated the explanation of akashic records.

The music broadcast from all the stations of the world are literally within your grasp (in the space within your fist); the fist is not a proper receiver.

Similarly, it is possible that all the music and the utterances of prophets and divinities exist now, but we do not have the proper receiver.

All this exists in the infinite intelligence as infinite consciousness in which everywhere is here and everywhen is now.

Attention skims over this consciousness; knowledge, experience and awareness arise.

But what limits them to the concepts, 'This is my field of awareness. This, I know. This, I experience.'?

Is this 'I' born with every such experience, or is there a permanent 'I' which identifies now with this and now with the other?

A Vasistha or a Ramana might point to the answer.

A Buddha or a Sivananda might caution: "Do not talk about this, but look for the mind and its manifestations, the ego and its tricks, and thus you will discover the truth."

When the attention is utterly purified of its habits and concepts, the truth reveals itself.

The discussion led to psychic powers, especially healing powers.

Psychic powers are inherent in all, and surely most of us have had our premonitions, our hunches, our intuitions and our inspirations.

Mostly such powers manifest when there is temporary 'loss of self' for they lie beyond the little ego.

In pure love or total self-surrender and devotion, the healing grace flows.

If the self had only remained suspended - but it wakes up and regards itself as the source and owner of the grace, and thereby loses it.

Our Master lived in the awareness of the expressions, "O Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love, thou art omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent," and numerous healing miracles experienced by His devotees failed to rouse the egosense in Him.

Change the flow of the mind and the senses and we achieve the God within us.

That is one of the purposes of meditation.

24th February Another View

As long as the mind is involved in this world of diversity, it is inevitable that there should be diverse points of view.

These diverse points of view spring from the same source, the mind, activated by the same consciousness.

To that infinite consciousness or God, the diverse points of view are natural and do not involve contradiction, but to the individual it is still a problem.

But the problem of the individual does not go away even then.

When you see that someone else is not doing what you think is the right thing, should you take up the cudgels and fight or suppress your own feelings?

We who are accustomed to the 'either or' way of life do not see a third possibility!

Which is, say what you have to say without even a wish in your heart to suppress the other point of view - you cannot, in any case.

'Resist not evil' does not imply 'keep quiet'.

When you have seen what your point of view tells you is evil, the 'see no evil' border has been crossed beyond a point of no-return.

The other boundary, 'resist not,' is at a distance. Watch it.

Often we say this to one another: "I love you, I am happy to be with you," etc.

We take for granted that we know what the other person is, and that it is that which makes us happy.

The oriental philosopher declares: "The One Self dwells in all beings and so one should love all."

This is one interpretation of the famous declaration of Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad: "Not for the wife's sake is the wife dear, but for the sake of the Self is the wife dear."

Perhaps there is another view!

When one says to the other, "I love you," there is an assumption that one knows the other. Can one know the other?

You try to grasp the other with your mind: you think he is this or that.

That then becomes the image you have of him in your own mind.

It is your own mental projection.

That image is, in fact, part of your own self - your own mind stuff.

Then, you love 'him', (that is, your image of him, your own mental projection) and this is nothing but your own self!

Thus, when you love another, you love your own self; when you hate another, you hate your own self.

One who sees this truth ceases to love or to hate another, and finds that there is nothing to be afraid of in another.

Freed of love, hate and fear, his heart becomes pure and his mind tranquil.

In that Pure heart and tranquil mind is reflected the truth that the pronouns 'I' and 'You' are inadequate substitutes for the Truth which is One.

May we all see the One!

25th February Off Course on Life's Journey?

On the bridge of a ship, between India and Ceylon, the Captain said: "From here the coast of Ceylon is nothing more than a piece of hair floating on the ocean."

"Yet," I said, "you take the boat right into the harbour. How do you manage it?"

He explained the use of the compass and let fall a casual remark of profound significance.

"Swami, if I make an error a couple of degrees here and do not correct it, instead of taking you to Ceylon, I might land you in Burma!"

Two degrees where the deviation takes place, but the gap widens to hundreds of miles eventually.

This caution is often ignored in life.

Often abetted by the psychologist's description of the fixations and neuroses, people abhor any rigid discipline.

There are those who assert that inhibitions are always dangerous.

Animals are strong and do not suffer from neuroses only because their actions are less inhibited than man's.

Even those who don't approve of this jungle law, feel that we should not impose rigorous discipline on ourselves and even more so on the young ones.

There is a phrase which is so often used when we have done something wrong: 'It does not matter'.

The compass has swayed a couple of degrees.

However, if the position is not quickly changed and the course of the ship of our little life altered, we will not reach the destination.

The little deviation will lead us to a big disaster.

Often we hear, too, the glib excuse: "But times have changed. Who is senseless enough to put back the hands of the clock?"

Nobody suggests that this is possible.

But we should realise that there are two classes of change in nature.

One is inevitable and the other is undesirable.

When your grandfather does not want to run uphill because his physical frame has changed over the years, you accept it and leave him alone.

But if your young brother says his knees are shaking and he can't climb, you do not ignore him, you take him to a doctor as he is obviously sick.

Certain changes are natural, and you will have to accept them as signs of the march of time.

Means of transport, of communication and of livelihood come under this category.

But lack of respect for elders, drunkenness, debauchery, cheating and violence, turning away from God and the good life are all symptoms of inner disease and demand immediate corrective treatment.

26th February Unity in Reality

Life looks grand and rich on the surface, but when the excitement is over, we discover that all that glitters is not gold.

Deep within, the Western world is restless and unhappy.

It is equally true that the Eastern world tends to mistake laziness for contentment, sleep for samadhi.

Young men must sometimes go abroad and see how other people live.

East can learn a lot from West, and similarly, West from East.

I have seen European swamis in India.

One Swami Nirmalanandaji - an American - is as great a lover of Lord Krishna as anyone in India, and wears a pouch around his neck with a small image of the Lord.

A young German lady-swami living in a cave near Rishikesh adores Lord Siva; and why not?

Why is it that, when Indian children sing Christian hymns, we take it for granted, and when European children sing the Gayatri or the Maha Mantra ('Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare') we are surprised?

One is as natural as the other.

I still remember what one of the Rotarians said to me in Perth, after I had talked to them there: "I wish I could speak your language, as well as you speak mine".

Why not?

There is today a big movement in Europe in this direction.

Many groups of enthusiasts sing kirtans in Sanskrit, Hindi and Tamil.

What surprised me most, however, was the enthusiastic interest shown in yoga by several monks and nuns Jesuits in Germany.

This was the first time that I noticed them participating in talks on yoga in such a big way. And why not?

They have not become Hindus thereby, but they have demonstrated 'Unity in Reality', not merely in theory or in words.

Dialogue is not one person listening to the other, but two exchanging views.

The Lord Himself is the most eager listener when two earnest seekers sing His names and glories, and endeavour to pierce the veil of ignorance through meditation.

To that omnipresent Reality we bow.

If one learns to look at the truth and realises that we are all human beings, the idea of nationalities seems childish and foolish.

27th February The Food Problem

Young people are conscious of the need for pure food as a condition for health and inner harmony, and of many questions related to food.

The 'ideal' food is of course fruits, nuts and whatever vegetable has run its cyclic course, ripe or unripe.

Nature or God seems to have intended this cyclic exchange of material between the human and the vegetable kingdoms.

In this exchange there is no destruction involved.

The tree has no more use for the ripe fruit: it is food for the humans.

Even so with vegetables and cereals.

Even these have been elaborately classified by people who provide a lot of thought for food.

The general principles for this classification are found in the Bhagavad Gita (Song of God).

Our Gurudev, Swami Sivananda, followed Lord Krishna's example and gave us 'general hints', knowing that there are no absolutes in this relative existence.

He emphasised that the food you eat should be conducive to peace of mind and should facilitate spiritual practices.

His motto was 'Eat to live, not live to eat' which meant, in the words of one of his disciples, 'to be always hungry'.

Gurudev also believed that the 'spiritual content' of the food may be assured by offering the food to the Lord and eating it as His prasada (sacrament).

In the ashram everyone recites the fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita at mealtimes so that one remembers that God is the digestive fire in all beings and that eating is truly an offering of sacred fuel into that divine fire.

Gurudev advised us not to be dogmatic but to preserve the spirit of sattvic food, which is whatever preserves a sattvic (holy, spiritual and noble) temperament and nature.

May His light guide us.

Man is a problem-solver.

If you solve all his problems for him, he will create some for you!

Since the Industrial Revolution, more and more of the simple problems of man have been eliminated by machines; hence he is creating bigger problems which involve whole societies - wars, revolutions, etc.

Not until we return to the simple natural life (which would obviously keep man busy with the simple acts of living and raising a family) will mankind see peace.

28th February Is This the End?

On one October day I received two letters: a friend's mother had passed away in Mauritius, another friend's husband had passed away in India.

A few days later, a very dear friend in Tel Aviv passed away after a brief illness.

At the same time I heard that a wonderful young yoga teacher in Australia had committed suicide.

Shock after shock: a garland of tragedies.

It is easy to philosophise when others are subjected to these shocks.

But when we are involved it is a different matter. Gurudev Swami Sivananda used to say, "Here your philosophy, your scientific intellect, your degrees and diplomas, your learning and erudition fails."

Shock (shoka in Sanskrit) wakes you up.

It wakes you up from the dream of happiness and security in the world 'guaranteed' by a bank balance, family and friends.

It wakes you up from the slumber of ignorance, in which you close your eyes to the reality and console yourself that all is well.

It wakes you up from the delirium of equating sense-pleasure with true happiness.

It wakes you up from the insanity of lust for power, pleasure and profit.

Viewed rightly then, shock is not a disease but a treatment.

It is not the end, but a new beginning.

And yet, without the shock, this beginning would not have begun.

The 'other' had to end.

It would not have ended if the end had only been heard of or read about - as when we read of someone's passing away in the morning newspaper.

It has to be immediately seen and directly experienced.

This is what Lord Krishna beautifully describes in the Bhagavad Gita as 'direct and immediate seeing of the evil in birth, death, old age, disease and grief.

This seeing is not possible if the fact is far from us nor if we are engulfed in the grief.

But the shock can enable us to see if it touches us, and yet we do not let it crush us.

May you live an enlightened life!

God is omnipresent.

God alone exists.

God pervades all that exists.

He is the very soul of existence.

Give up the idea that you are different from another.

Realise that in and through these different forms there is one supreme God.

Give up desire, anger and greed, for these prevent you from the realisation of the one God.

29th February Life and Death are Inseparable

Most questions arise only because we have forgotten the most vital part of life, which is death.

'I am alive today, and I shall certainly do what has to be done. But I am not here (physically) forever.'

If I am able to hold that idea in my mind for even a few minutes, it is capable of correcting every kind of imbalance in my life, in my attitude to life and to the world around me.

Life has become a problem only because we have tried to isolate it from death, and treated death as a problem.

When we see that death is not a problem, but an inevitable component of life, then life does not throw up problems either.

Life and death are one and inseparable.

This is pure and simple truth.

It is universal.

Death has no partiality and loves all of us equally; it comes to saint and to sinner alike.

If you meditate upon this, both selfishness and injustice collapse; they lose their meaning, their significance.

When that which you value most - life - is seen as a vehicle that drives you to the grave a profound change takes place in you.

Then you learn to live, and to love all.

Injustice cannot be eradicated by any other means.

Evil cannot be 'fought' by good; unrighteousness cannot be 'destroyed' by righteousness.

The fighting and the destruction themselves are evil, and they breed evil in those who were previously oppressed by the former evil.

Evil cannot be cancelled by resistance.

Actually it is the resistance that infuses strength into the evil force.

If there is no resistance, the evil may, in all probability, blow itself out.

Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he taught "Resist not evil".

If there is no resistance, there is no violence either.

But that does not mean that injustice, oppression and other forms of evil are desirable!

There is another way of dealing with it.

To live as if the last hour is at hand.

That in itself is total awakening to the truth that life and death are inseparable; and moral and spiritual awakening just happens.

1st March Yama, Niyama

Yama is the first of the limbs of ashtanga yoga.

Yama means a group of five virtues: truthfulness, ahimsa (non-violence), continence, non-stealing (i.e. not taking anything that belongs to another person and non-greed (i.e. not coveting someone else's possessions).

Yama is used here in the sense of self-control, holiness.

But Yama is also the name of the deity connected with death.

There is a prayer asking God to let happen what has to happen, adding that if death has to come, may it be without difficulty, 'Let me go the way a fruit falls from the tree when it is ripe.'

We think that as there is life in every part of the body, it would be a great struggle when life has to be cut off.

Yet when death comes naturally, there is nothing dramatic.

It is so simple: one just stops breathing!

Death takes life from this body quietly, without any trouble.

Yama in its meaning of self-control, virtue, must also be like that - effortless!

There must be an inner ripening; when the whole being is ripe, then virtue happens.

If you want, you can make a show of non-violence - repress the aggression you feel, bite your tongue, use nice words etc., and so do violence to yourself.

This is not genuine, non-violence.

Love happens. It cannot be forced.

When your whole being is filled with love, when you are spiritually ripe, then virtue happens without any inner struggle.

We have not questioned the basic assumption, that man is naturally aggressive and brutal!

Why not take love as what is natural for us and consider aggression, violence etc. as the perversion?

As you go on developing non-violence in you, when it is 'ripe', all that is opposed to love drops away naturally. There is no need for artificial restraining, repressing.

Death brings restraint eventually to our stupidity, our viciousness.

One may continue being stupid, nasty etc. for sometime, but there is a limit.

One day you have to go!

One who sees that nothing goes on forever in this world becomes naturally virtuous.

Krishna's teaching is to pick you up, turn you around and drop you at the same place.

He does not give you one little hint to make your life easier. Why?

Because you have to wake up; there must be a tremendous explosion within you.

2nd March Natural Yoga

There has been perennial argument among teachers and students of yoga concerning the qualification of yoga-practitioners.

Which comes first, yama-niyama (ethical discipline) or dhyana (meditation)?

Is it possible to practise or even to learn meditation if one is not fully established in yama-niyama?

On the other hand, is it possible to get one's foothold in yama-niyama if one does not learn to meditate, to look within and to observe oneself for oneself and to recognise the tricks of the wayward mind?

So, which comes first?

Gurudev Swami Sivananda said, "Both."

It is of course possible to study scriptural texts and to form an image of what yama-niyama is all about.

It is then possible to 'apply' it to one's life.

That would be artificial, superficial and 'cosmetic' discipline.

It is either partial or hypocritical.

Take for instance ahimsa or non-violence.

It is possible for me to suppress my anger when I am insulted or injured and congratulate myself that I have thereby 'practised' ahimsa (I am doing violence to myself then!) and either think I have learnt to love my 'enemy' (which is surely hypocritical) or to feel "God will punish him for this," which is another form of violence (cursing).

The yogi's approach is different.

When provoked by insult or injury he studies (that is what 'discipline' means) the internal annoyance and 'that' which reacts to the provocation.

The eagerness with which he does this is the source of ahimsa and all the other aspects of yama-niyama.

In other words, he is so busy studying the psychological phenomenon of anger that he has no time to be angry.

Similarly with lust, greed, fear, jealousy, etc.

The yogi works on himself and an inner revolution takes place as a result.

This is both meditation (dhyana) and discipline (yama-niyama) which Gurudev emphasised.

It is natural and effortless, profound and permanent.

You see light outside because of light in your own eyes.

A blind man cannot see.

You see good in others if there is good in you; you see evil in others if evil is in you.

Seeing evil is itself evil.

3rd March Self Discipline

No study of raja yoga is meaningful without the discussion concerning yama-niyama (self-discipline).

If you turn to jnana yoga, the same factors appear in the guise of 'sadhana-chatustaya' (the four means).

Even karma yoga and bhakti yoga cannot really be practised without ethical foundation.

But self-discipline cannot be imposed by another.

All the scriptures of the world contain stories to illustrate this.

God and His incarnations have power over the elements, but the human being defies them!

Adam disobeyed God Himself.

One of the disciples of Lord Jesus turned against Him.

Lord Rama and Lord Krishna had enemies.

Lord Buddha's own cousin plotted against Him.

Man refuses to be influenced.

He has to discipline himself.

And he even resents the suggestion of an external imposition contained in the words 'has to'!

Krishna revealed a great truth in the Bhagavad Gita: "You are your own friend and your own enemy.

If you lead a life of self-control you are your friend.

If you lack self-control, you are your own enemy."

There is no compulsion here, but an indication of a truth.

Self-discipline in yoga has to be discovered by the student himself, not by struggling to cultivate the virtues listed under yama-niyama.

The very fact that there is need to cultivate them indicates that they are not there already and that perhaps their opposite qualities exist!

Any effort at such cultivation depletes energy spent in the inner battle.

Hence the master suggests that while you practise the asanas, observe the behaviour of the body.

Regardless of what yoga posture you are doing, the whole body participates, the inner intelligence restores the balance and comfort.

The whole body acts as one unit, though it appears to have many parts.

It is one.

In meditation, similarly, you will discover the intelligence beyond the limitations of the body and mind (thoughts and emotions) and the limitations of the individuality.

That which is beyond these is pure intelligence or consciousness which is indivisible.

The intelligence that functions in the body is undivided; even so, the intelligence in the universe is undivided.

When this truth is realised directly, yama-niyama and all the rest of self-discipline follow effortlessly.

It is like this: when you want the baby's face to smile, you tickle the foot, not pull its cheeks apart.

When you realise your oneness with all life, virtue or self-discipline is natural.

4th March Discipline and Temptation

Yama and niyama are simple if one truly endeavours to understand that they are in themselves the faithful manifestations of a vigorous search for reality.

The searchlight of that search searches for the hidden springs of that which creates problems in our life ambition, desire, hate, greed or by whatever name this may be called.

It is not difficult to see that this is merely a temporary mode of the mind stuff itself.

That is: if the mind stuff can be compared to a crystal ball, anger (for instance) is its redness when a red flower is placed near the ball.

One cannot say it is, nor can one say it is not.

The crystal ball has not suddenly become red, in fact it has undergone no real change.

Yet one sees that it is red.

When, in the light of the yogi's observation (which is free from the notion of an observing self or individual personality) there is the realisation of the absence of the self, there is the purest form of virtue which is entirely different from our conceptions of virtue and vice.

In that virtue there is no 'No' or resistance.

There is choiceless awareness which is spontaneous action.

This choicelessness or spontaneity should also be rightly understood.

It is also very simple.

Light illumines: it has no choice.

Darkness veils: it has no choice.

Light does not say 'no' to darkness; darkness does not say 'no' to light, either.

The yogi is naturally virtuous and holy, not because he 'resists evil'.

His 'tolerance' (for want of a better word) of others' evil arises from his awareness that these others are equally helpless in their situation.

He may help them without judging them, and thus he manifests his holiness without condemning the unholiness and thus importing unholiness into himself.

Realisation is the light which dispels the darkness of ignorance in which evil arose and thrived, which gave rise to the 'self' which generated lust, anger, greed and all the rest of it.

In this light such qualities do not arise, and there is no effort involved in this yama and niyama.

There was a time when I was impatient with hypocrites.

Now I am beginning to feel that it is a stage in evolution - when man has at last begun to entertain lofty feelings which he is unable, and so unwilling, to act upon.

5th March Power Beyond the Self

Surely, the whole of nature is vibrant with energy and we are all part of that nature.

The energy is however the power of consciousness (Chit-Shakti).

This energy and this consciousness are indivisible.

The functioning of this consciousness is energy and the energy therefore functions highly intelligently.

All this is beyond the grasp of the individualised being.

It is the individual that creates a division in all this.

The 'self' divides energy from consciousness and then seeks energy without the grace of consciousness (or wisdom).

The light of wisdom reveals to us (by our own daily experience of deep sleep) that there is a marvellous recuperative power hidden within.

We also realise that at other times this power-source is made available when we are literally possessed by love which transcends the 'self'.

A frail young woman is able to 'move mountains' when her little child is involved in an accident.

One factor is common to both these: the dividing and limiting self had been suspended.

When the egoistic self is removed, the natural energy operates without the least division and, therefore, without any loss whatsoever.

In fact this is what yama and niyama emphasise.

They are neither disciplines imposed upon us by others, self-imposed disciplines nor measures of self-control in the sense 'I suppress my inclination and even natural urges'.

Non-violence, truthfulness, purity, etc., demand that the self (whose activities are known as violence or the spirit of domination) should be vigilantly watched.

The self is but a shadow cast on the indivisible oneness by ignorance.

This indivisible oneness, God (Who is omnipresent and infinite), is the inner light in all.

In this inner light the shadow of the self vanishes.

As long as this light shines brightly, the shadow of the self does not appear.

That is meditation which is both the practice known as meditation and the uninterrupted vigilance that is characteristic of the yogi.

When thus the shadow of the little self is dispelled, the great disciplines grouped under yama and niyama naturally manifest themselves.

That is known as love.

Love is infinite power.

6th March Yama

The discipline in those areas in which the self can play a destructive role is yama and five of them have been described in the Yoga Sutras: ahimsa, satyam, asteyam, brahmacharya and aparigraha.

What does ahimsa mean?

The total absence of himsa is ahimsa-himsa not only means physical violence or harassment, but harmfulness.

Even the intention to do harm to others is himsa.

I may hate, be jealous, be rude or crude either in ways or in looks.

On the other hand your life itself may disturb me - what to do, go and jump into the lake?

In order to promote the happiness of one body, I am punishing another body.

It is possible that aversion, instead of flowing towards another body, flows towards this body which is mine, and instead of weakening or destroying the self, it makes the self very strong.

Can harmfulness, the desire or the intention to harm, completely disappear from my heart?

In order to do that I must learn how to observe the arising of the emotions and to remove them from there.

If you are able to do that then you are meditating.

When it comes to diet, there are all sorts of theories, each one more confusing than the other.

Men of extreme ahimsa say that you should not only not kill an animal and not eat meat, but you should not even eat plants, for they also have life.

You may eat fruit but not the seeds, because the seed has life which is going to sprout another fruit later.

At the other extreme we have the health cultists and the nature-cure people.

Their view is that a living thing can only survive on life.

But I also see that the cows live on dry grass.

The cow eats that and gives me milk.

If we see all this, either we conclude that there is life in everything or that some destruction of life is inevitable in our living.

Some of the greatest saints and sages of all religions of the world have been meat-eaters.

When you think of them and think of this teaching, you don't want to say that they are not perfectly enlightened.

What you see may not be as clear-cut as you think or hope it should be.

This only means that your own inner vision must be fully open and perceptive in order to see that there are no absolute rules in any of these.

We need inner spiritual strength to endure, to transcend, to overcome - and then to forget!

7th March Yama or the Five-fold Discipline

'Yama' is the first limb of yoga as described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

It has been variously described or explained as restraint, self-control, regulation and discipline.

To me, discipline means study.

I do not want to say "I will do this" or "I will not do this", or that "I must do this" or "I must not do this", because I see that that attitude often leads to inner conflict and confusion; and unless you have a great master who is able to guide you, it won't work.

If He is a great master and He tells me to "Do this" I do it, or "Don't do this" and I don't do it.

Even there I am studying.

What is it that wants to do this or refuses to do it?

My Guru says "Do this", and there is some inner resistance; He says "Don't do this," and there is a craving.

So even there I am more interested in studying this phenomenon (along with the obedience to the Guru). Especially when such a perfect Guru is not near you to help you at every step, it becomes very important to understand this discipline as study, not so much to say I will do this or I will not do this, but to understand craving and resistance.

You ask if one may have to say 'no' to the temptation to sleep a little more, in order to wake up and meditate in the morning. Perhaps!

There is another route to this.

Can we observe ourselves and see why we are unable to stay in bed or sleep when there is something interesting elsewhere?

What wakes me up at all, everyday - not just a resistance to the temptation to sleep some more?

The 'urge' to wake up is built into the system, as much as the urge to sleep.

What is called temptation is a mode of the mind, a habit-mould, education or training - the thousand ways in which we have convinced ourselves that it is pleasure to stay in bed.

If, on the other hand, we had been trained differently, the whole thing would have been different.

When I clearly understand the arising of such a craving or of resistance, then I see the manifestation of the self or of the ego.

The self, like a mosquito or a bug, stays and bothers you as long as you are not aware of it.

When you become aware of it, it weakens and eventually dies.

Therefore the discipline becomes yama, the death of the self.

8th March Let Us Behold Thee in All

Diversity is the fact of creation; but creation itself is one, unity.

Unity and diversity form indivisible duality.

Diversity exists only because of unity; and unity is revealed as the ground of diversity.

God is one, the universe is one, humanity is one - but they are capable of infinitely diverse expression.

Variety is inherent in the unity.

Even so in religion or the spiritual quest.

One school of thought suits someone, but it is unsuited to another who seeks another school of thought.

Different teachers, diverse paths, various ashrams and a maze of ideas and ideologies exist to serve the single spirit and to fulfil human aspiration.

It is not necessary for each one of us to understand and appreciate all.

It is sufficient if we understand that such is the fact of creation and appreciate that the other man's viewpoint is as valid and as true as our own.

That was the unique genius of Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

Gurudev's redeeming and life-transforming message is contained in the Universal Prayer.

Its central theme is given in just one vital sentence: "Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms".

This sentence is the essence of Gurudev's own life as well as His teachings.

"Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms."

What a sublime vision.

What a unifying force.

What a fountain of love and harmony.

How ennobling and uplifting!

Such a vision immediately destroys the narrow ego-sense and with it the feeling of 'the other' in all our relationships.

The omnipresence of God, to which all religious people all over the world pay lip-service at the moment, precludes 'I' and 'the other'.

When we cease to pay lip service to that Truth, but realise that Omnipresence, we shall in fact behold Him in all these names and forms.

We shall then love and serve all, even as Gurudev served and loved all without any distinction whatsoever.

A life of such loving service is indeed divine life.

May this be, then, our own prayer, morning and night and at all times: "Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms".

Gurudev's eternal spirit is present in this prayer.

May it be enshrined in our hearts.

9th March Ahimsa and Diet

In the Bhagavad Gita, the definition given for the classification of food is so total that it is very difficult for anyone to evolve a definite list of do's and don't's out of it.

The sattvic (pure) fruit is fresh and juicy, it enhances the qualities of sattva - calmness, lightness, peace, life-span, health, pleasure - and it must be tasty and give enjoyment, not only pleasure or happiness.

If you place before a young man what you consider the perfect food - first class fruit cut and presented nicely - and the very look of it makes him sick, then it is not sattvic.

It is destroying his enjoyment.

That does not mean that if he likes some filthy thing that promotes his enjoyment, it is sattvic. It is not.

So, this problem is not at all easy to understand.

By God's and Guru's Grace, each one has to determine for himself what is sattvic in relation to himself.

This is only one small part of ahimsa.

What happens to our relationships?

Are we soft, sweet and gentle all the time?

There are some situations where that may be himsa (himsa - violence; ahimsa - non-violence).

Apart from anything else, you are suppressing your own emotions.

I am your brother, your son, your husband, or whatever it is, and I am doing something which you disapprove of, which I should not do.

How do you react to that?

Especially if I am a child, if you do not restrain me, you are promoting evil.

So with supreme love you may have to be egotistic.

And therefore, again we see that this ahimsa is not capable of being reduced to do's and don't's.

It is not something which can be demonstrated or positively defined.

That is the reason why it is negatively worded 'a-himsa'.

What ahimsa involves is constant, unbroken awareness in which there is alert attention which avoids himsa.

And that itself is meditation.

Ahimsa becomes possible when there is meditation; and it promotes meditation, it purifies the heart and the mind.

No one does anything other than His will.

God has five functions: creation, preservation, destruction, veiling and grace.

No one does anything other than these.

The only sin is that man feel that he does all this.

10th March Non Violence

That heart which is hurt is violent.

Here non-violence takes a very delicate and beautiful form.

Non-violence, as far as the social structure is concerned, is restricted purely to not hurting other people; not fighting, not killing.

But non-violence in the spiritual sense is a subtle inner adventure leading to self-knowledge.

Is it possible to lead one's life never hurting another, yet also never being hurt oneself

If someone calls me a fool, I may feel hurt; and once I am hurt, I will bear that hurt for all time to come.

However much I may mask it, in ten or fifteen years it may still come up as gossip or some other type of subtle character assassination.

I have not forgotten.

And that is violence.

So, that heart which is hurt is violent.

And likewise, when I am not hurt by others, I will not hurt another.

When will I not be hurt at all?

When I realise that what is hurt is only the ego, my own self image, a shadow which is the product of my own ignorance.

This is the fool that is hurt.

Yet if I am a real seeker, endeavouring to dispel this shadow of the ego, I should mentally thank that person who pointed out the fool.

My goal is to discover the ego and he has made that ego react.

Now I can see that reacting ego and deal with it.

So, if I feel hurt and call myself a spiritual seeker, I am insincere, I am not honest with myself.

Non-violence and the quest for truth are closely related, universal disciplines.

So, non-violence is essentially the virtue of not being hurt.

And the virtue of not being hurt is the virtue of having no self image.

When the self image is completely eradicated, rooted out of the heart, then I am love.

I do not love, I am love.

I am non-violence.

And whatever happens in my life is love, even if I am a butcher, even if I am a soldier.

Even if my karma leads me in such a direction, in my heart there is no animosity, no ill-will, no aggression, no violence at all.

Whatever actions proceed from that heart, mind and body will be good.

So, to be good comes first and doing good is a mere extension of that being.

11th March Truth

Truth may mean being truthful in one's speech.

That is a tall order, since there are times when we may have to tell lies.

Scripture describes how on certain occasions untruth becomes truth and how on certain other occasions truth becomes untruth.

If we get hung up on speaking the truth as a discipline itself in a restricted sense, then we not only lose sight of the totality of truth, but we fail even in that restricted speaking-truth. Why?

Because the vision is narrowed and there is no insight.

What is truth?

If someone tells me: "So-and-so is a holy man.

Please go and have his darshan," the truth is that in his opinion that person is holy and I should have his darshan.

I do not come to any conclusion about it.

To come to a conclusion is a dangerous thing - the mind is closed and the quest, truth, is lost.

Therefore, is it possible for us not to jump to any conclusion about anything?

Which means to be able to distinguish between what is an opinion and what is the truth.

If we are constantly looking for truth and if we are able at the same time to know "This is only an opinion.

It is not truth", that itself is the truth.

It is then that we are able to graduate from mere verbal discipline to higher mental and spiritual disciplines.

The very fact that we realise 'This is my opinion', stops us from expressing it where it need not be expressed, where it will hurt.

When what you are about to say is not factual, pleasant and beneficial, say something else.

If that is lived, not applied or merely practised as an exercise in our daily life, it leads us to the next stage: if this is just an opinion, where is it formed and what is the truth concerning it?

One who pursues this quest comes face to face with some shocking truths concerning the mind.

Peeling layer after layer of the mind and its prejudices, we realise how opinion is formed because of samskaras.

(Some scar which was formed on the mind by previous experiences, is being disturbed by the present experience and the prejudice comes up.)

An opinion springs from our own prejudice.

Coming face to face with this, we realise that all these opinions are prejudices and we are still looking for the truth.

To be constantly aware of the search, there is a confession, a realisation that all that the mind conceives of and expresses is untrue, false opinion.

That is the truth.

One who lives this truth is a true seeker.

12th March Isvarapranidhana

Yama and niyama are disciplines - not so much things to be done, as truths to be understood, to be grasped.

If I understand the truth, that truth itself works.

As my guru Swami Sivananda used to say, "Be good, do good; but it is the 'be good' that is more important, for if you are good you must do good."

Discipline is not something I have to do with great effort, but discipline is an understanding of the truth; when the truth is understood, the truth itself acts.

Yet, here in the Yoga Sutras, these three constitute what is known as kriya yoga (dynamic yoga, the yoga of action):

- tapas or the inner burning fire;

- svadhyaya, study of scriptures as well as study of one's own actions and reactions, and the motives of one's own actions; and

- Isvarapranidhana, surrender to God.

These three are part of yama and niyama and they also constitute what is described as kriya yoga.

Isvarapranidhana literally means 'surrender to God', devotion to God.

What is God?

In the Bhagavad Gita we read something very interesting.

Krishna says, "I am the true, and I am also the false."

(I do not think such a statement is contained in any other scripture.)

That is, both reality and unreality are God - not only the reality, but what you think is unreal is also God!

God is the all.

Do not cut this Infinite and say, "This much is God, and this is not God."

The moment that licence is given to the human mind to divide the Infinite and designate, "This is God," and "This is not God," there is licence to violence, and man kills man.

Here is the boldest declaration by Krishna: what you consider truth or reality is God, and what you consider unreal is also God.

You are caught and squeezed.

Your ego has no escape.

And you say, "God, I am sorry." That is perhaps Isvarapranidhana.

For when God is all this, you cannot hate anyone, you cannot be afraid of anyone.

That is probably what God is!

13th March Investigating the Persona

The yoga discipline known as Isvarapranidhana has been variously translated as devotion to God, dedication to God, surrender to God.

Who or what is this God I am talking about?

God in this context is not some sort of a superman, but probably a super person.

'Persona' is a mask - the body and the mind that make you an individual constitute the mask.

Behind this mask is God.

So it is a 'super persona'.

The mask, the persona, is the body-mind complex and the purusha is the individualised cosmic consciousness.

Thinking or feeling that 'I' or ego cannot comprehend this truth, I give up.

Therefore tapas, meditation, contemplation, yoga, sadhana - you can call it what you like - becomes terribly important.

The question arises, 'What makes me do what I do?'

One type of action proves to be wrong, another type of action obviously seems to be right.

I think that it is right, all of you think that it is right and even by the result it is considered to be right, but it strengthens my ego.

Therefore both these actions are wrong.

In order to discover what is right action, I must know right now who or what makes me do this that I do.

When you ask yourself this question seriously, you are investigating the persona.

If you are observing yourself keenly at that point, you will almost literally see that the attention or awareness which was flowing out starts returning to yourself.

I like something or someone, and I do not like something or someone else.

Suddenly you come face to face with your own prejudice.

That is a very painful part of the enquiry, and most people drop the whole thing or get frightened and do not go further.

I am not going to ask myself 'What is it in him that makes me like him or dislike him?'

Searching for an answer to this question in the objects in the external world is futile, the awareness has gone outside.

Instead, the awareness goes searching deeper within.

Is there a fundamental difference between like and dislike?

If there is both a God who is all love and a devil who is all hate in me, are they two different things?

When you reach that point the likes and dislikes drop away because they have no sense, no reality at all.

14th March Surrender to God

Self-surrender is often made to look easy.

When it is taken lightly, it is the mind that creates a 'god' and a 'self' and surrenders that self to that god.

The self is the subject, not an object.

There is awareness all the time, but this awareness illumines objects (including experiences).

The yogi uses objects to turn the awareness to the subject, as it were.

This is the beginning of meditation.

The master allows any object to be used for this.

It is even hinted that pleasure and pain can be used as meditation-subjects.

But, pleasure tends initially to be a distraction and later to become dull and boring.

Self-inflicted pain has been used by mystics all over the world, in the name of austerity.

The question is: is all this necessary, are there not sufficient pleasant and unpleasant experiences in daily life which can be used to trigger meditation?

Surely, yes.

When the light of awareness is turned on them abnormal reactions cease, the pleasure inherent in life is heightened (because it is freed from the excitement which results from craving), and the pain is lessened (because it is freed from the fear, arising from memory and imagination).

There is no suppression of any emotion, but there is non-reactionary action which arises from the inner intelligence.

Everything in the yogi's life "turns his gaze within", in the words of Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

The quest for Self-knowledge goes on till it is realised that just as 'self-pity', 'self-love' and 'self-hate' are words without real substance, the words 'subject' and 'object' are also words without a corresponding reality.

The one awareness or consciousness is indivisible and forever undivided.

This realisation does not interfere with or negate life; but life is greatly enriched by it.

Isvara-pranidhana - 'self-surrender' or 'surrender to God' - may have three connotations.

As niyama, it is a sincere prayerful attempt to approach God.

Self-surrender as a way in itself happens when the fire of enquiry burns through all the components of the self and through all its activities.

The infinite is not the senses, the mind or the self.

But then, what is beyond? Unable to find the answer, the self collapses in surrender.

The Light dispels the shadow of the self (the investigator or the experiencer).

The questions: 'Is the observer different from the observed?'

'Is 'I' independent of the totality?' burn without an answer because there is none (no self to hear the answer!

The observer is the observation - pure awareness.

The experiencer is the experience - pure experiencing.

There is total freedom, kaivalya.

One alone is, as all-one.

15th March The 'I' Cannot Know God

We are asked to surrender to God, to be totally devoted to God.

What is God?

Why not admit: "I do not know."

The 'I' is not something that can know God!

We are shown in the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures, that God is not limited or weak, but we are, and so we need some aid to remind us of God.

We use symbols to represent God, and as we sit in front of them we feel the presence of God.

He is however not limited to that picture or statue.

The symbol, the statue, serves as a reminder of God, but when one looks within and feels the Divine Presence, there is no more need of any outer sign.

I know that God is not only there, but He is everywhere - also in me!

Thus, once one has learned to feel the Presence of God before the symbol and to realise his omnipresence, one knows how to experience this elsewhere.

Sometimes there is a block: I notice something I do not like, something ugly.

I say: "No! This is not God"

Then I remember Krishna's words about God's Omnipresence, regardless of the mind's classifications.

The block is dropped.

I regard the sage as God-like.

Then I encounter another man whom I consider to be less holy.

Suddenly there comes the message of Krishna to my mind: "Even he is God."

In this manner there is expansion of consciousness like the ever-widening circles around a stone dropped into a pool.

Surrender to God cannot be explained; but if one is careful one may catch a glimpse of it.

As one goes on in the light of this expanding consciousness to realise that this and that i.e. everything is God (the so-called holy as well as the apparently unholy), something is dissolving within: the ego!

Suddenly one realises that this God, who is in one and all, pervades all creation.

I cannot be exempt from this Omnipresence, which is all-inclusive, which includes me - but not as 'I'!

The 'I' has dissolved.

Suddenly one realises: that is surrender to God.

The function of the body will still go on, even if you are the Buddha.

It will live just as the grass and the trees live, but there is total surrender of the ego-sense - isvarapranidhana.

At that stage all your preconceptions, all regret and remorse, have gone.

The feeling 'I am a holy man' is gone, as also the sense of guilt: 'I am a sinner'.

Whatever life brings or takes there is neither approval nor disapproval.

If unhappiness comes, let it come!

Then one is happy and is happiness!

That is true surrender.

16th March Dissolution of the Ego-sense

Surrender to God cannot be explained, but if you are careful you may glimpse it. When your consciousness expands, and in the light of this consciousness you realise 'this is God, that is God; what is regarded as good is God, what is regarded as not so good is God; what is truth is God, what is regarded as untruth is God; what is holy is God, and what is regarded as unholy is God', then something is dissolving within you.

That is the ego: the ego which was built up of your own ideas, education, culture and tradition.

All these things which have been gathering together to form the ego are gradually dissolving.

All your prejudices are dissolving.

Your self-estimation is dissolving.

All your ideas about good and evil are dissolving.

Suddenly you realise that this God who is omnipresent includes you also.

You are not exempt from it - but not as 'I', because the 'I' has dissolved.

That is called surrender to God.

It is not something about which you say, "I have surrendered to God; when will I have my next cup of coffee?"

It does not mean that after the surrender you will not drink coffee - the body wants the coffee; and the body will have the coffee - but the ego-sense has dissolved.

The earth is parched dry, heat rises and rain falls.

The stomach feels hungry, food comes, eat.

All these things happen.

What has been called 'I' is also one of the happenings in this universe; it will continue to be as such.

But the 'I' had no business to be the judge!

It used to; it does not any more.

Isvarapranidhana is the total surrender of the ego-sense; not the ego itself, but the ego-sense.

The ego is part of the world-happening.

This body will still go on living even if you are the Buddha himself, even as the tree lives.

But you do not have the feeling 'I am a sinner', nor the opinion that you are great.

Your self-estimation has gone. Your regret and remorse have gone.

'I am a sinful man' is gone.

'I am a holy man' is gone.

And this is isvarapranidhana, surrender to God.

Brahma, Vishnu and Siva can dwell together - as Dattatreya.

Hence one may create and preserve what he creates, and destroy others for this.

But Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvathi do not dwell together.

If you are efficient (full of power - Durga), you may not be good (Lakshmi) and wise (Sarasvathi).

These three are found independently, but very rarely together.

17th March The Self Becomes Cosmic Awareness

What is individualisation of consciousness?

Can consciousness be limited?

Can space be cut up?

The mind says that there is this room, different from the outside.

Then you investigate and realise that space is not cut up - this room, the walls around this room and the outside are all one undivided space.

As long as this perception of divisibility of space continues, it is foolish to pretend, "I know the Infinite".

Do you see this room as a room or not?

A physicist says "No, space cannot be cut"; we sit and listen and say "You're right".

But you have not seen it as reality, as truth.

Similarly, you create in your mind another image called infinity.

If we are honest we freeze, "Oh my God what is this?

I'm caught, I am trapped".

When your whole soul seems to shed tears in agony, then that which was blocking the awareness from realising the Infinite melts away; not because I wanted it or deserved it, but because I realised honestly, sincerely that I was completely impotent.

That is isvarapranidhana.

At that moment the 'I' of awareness (this is beyond even the purusha or the individualised consciousness) shines - blazing.

Visualise the shadow on the wall.

There's a flood of light on the shadow and the shadow becomes enlightened; that is Self-realisation.

In that Self-realisation the awareness was examining the shadow and the moment that shadow became enlightened, the limitation disappeared, not because the shadow became light, but because the light shone on the shadow.

It is not for the individual self to attain Self-realisation.

The awareness seeks to know the truth concerning the individual self, and stands completely baffled - it is not possible.

The light of God shines on it and this darkness or shadow disappears.

The awareness is thinking of the truth concerning this individual self, "What is it?"

It is unable to find the answer to that question, and therefore in great humility but with tremendous zeal, it surrenders.

There is surrender, but not surrender of laziness or inertia; there is passion or zeal but it is not egotistic.

When there is this surrender, the self is enlightened.

The awareness which was investigating the self suddenly finds itself the cosmic awareness.

18th March No Hope

What is the difference between memory and hope?

Just plain spelling!

Memory is never pure.

Memory of the past is invariably twisted and distorted by hope.

In the same way, hopes are almost invariably built on memory.

Take the memory away, there are no hopes.

The mind, or that which induces value to objects, to experiences, to teachings, is constantly looking for something - happiness, for example - without ever having asked whether that exists.

If the question is asked seriously, only one thing exists: the questioner, the hoper of these hopes, the rememberer of the memories.

However, an interesting but tragic quality of the mind is its tendency to select.

When it reads a scripture, it selects only what suits it, what it values most - not in terms of how to better itself, how to discover itself or how to learn, but merely to get a testimonial that it is perfectly right, to pat itself on the back. The self is purposely hidden and the mind does not want to look at itself.

The scripture says that he who is devoted to God experiences joy flowing towards him from all directions.

If this experience is not there, there is something wrong.

It is not the fault of the teaching, it is our unwillingness to go thoroughly into the whole problem.

What is it that resists?

Hope, fear, cravings.

Yet, when we focus our attention upon one of these, it seems to disappear.

But, has the craving in fact gone?

It is possible that it has moved out of the focus of our attention temporarily.

However, if we had trained ourselves in focussing our attention, then we would not let it slip.

To develop this attention, the Masters have given elaborate instruction in meditation.

Here, a different attention arises: the attention is flowing towards the perceiver, the question is turned upon the questioner, the seeker has merged himself in his own seeking.

There is a state in which there is no thinking.

That state is called total surrender, absolute devotion and complete and total love.

When we are full of love in this manner, happiness flows to us from all directions.

It is then that devotion is properly understood and properly practised.

And then the problems are instantly solved or resolved.

19th March Understanding the Truth

'Tapas' in Sanskrit means burning.

Any activity or practice that burns up the false sense of ego or self is tapas.

One of the most important ways in which the self-idea manifests is the feeling 'I am this body'.

The orthodox people suggested that anything that tortures, that mortifies the body is good.

These don't work because you are only punishing the body.

The idea of the self, that 'I am this body', still persists.

After all these wonderful practices you come up and say: "Look what I have done!"

Whereas if something is practised that attacks directly this idea that 'I am this body', that might be useful.

What sort of practice should we adopt in order that the false idea that 'I am this body', might be removed?

My Guru Swami Sivananda had a very simple and beautiful teaching.

He said: "Bear insult, bear injury. This is the highest sadhana."

When you are insulted or get upset, it is this idea that 'I am this body' that is insulted.

When you are injured because somebody hit you, it is the body that is injured.

Therefore if it is possible to work on that area which gets hurt by insult or injury, then this false identification can be overcome.

This is perhaps a very beautiful form of self-enquiry or meditation, and it is something that can provide us with the key to solve most of our problems.

For instance, somebody calls me a fool.

'Fool' is a word and that is his opinion, but when I hear this I am hurt - which means I feel almost a physical pain.

What has this incident to do with the physical pain that I experience?

We have never asked ourselves this question, and therefore we go on suffering this hurt in a million ways in our life.

If, on the other hand, we can devote some time to it just once, it will go forever.

What is this pain and what is it made of?

Where does it arise?

(Not why does it arise, because then you are tempted to blame others or say that you are a very sensitive person. These things do not help you.)

Someone says something and I feel physically hurt.

If one contemplates this really seriously and earnestly, one arrives at this simple and beautiful realisation: that person was referring to a nothing and that nothing got upset.

There is an idea that 'I am this body that 'I am So and so', and that idea is hurt.

That is all.

20th March Tapas (Decolouring of the Mind)

Tapas (austerity, 'fire') refers to a kind of 'heating' of the muddled mind which the Indian sages recommended for 'burning' away the accumulated impurities till the mind-stuff is pure.

When the mind was considered as the real cause of bad behaviour, it was suggested that meditation would purify it.

That was supposed to be sufficient and there was a tendency to go from the extreme of self-torture to that of self-indulgence!

The real purpose of tapas was forgotten in all this.

Tapas was taken to mean suffering - for the sake of God and also for the sake of those one loved.

It was assumed that the Almighty Father preferred his children to die rather than to live for him!

This encouraged a martyr complex and masochism.

Tapas however really refers to the great energy required to discover the colouring of the mind.

The most important factor is the destruction of this colouring of the mind stuff that makes all judgements and evaluations.

What is it that is coloured?

What does all the evaluating?

Without condemning or justifying the mind colouring one looks at it, discovers it - thus de-coloring the colored understanding.

Instead of artificial suppression, one brings it up so as to see it and to be able to deal with it.

One has to get hold of it.

Thus one can get to the colouring that is to be eliminated.

As one calmly says "No!" to the wish or the habit as it arises stopping it physically - the mind gets into a commotion.

The whole being seems to burn.

That is tapas.

One is neither enjoying it nor suffering it, one is in it.

Each time the same desire crops up, one looks at it in that way, going on and on with the enquiry: "Where is it arising?"

What is it?

What makes me want to do this again?" - until after sometime this particular problem has dissolved.

It has been 'burnt' away!

What we are interested in is to find the colouring agent that gives value to these things that attract or repel us.

As one comes face to face with the habit (or thought or ego-wish) it dissolves. The cover has been discovered! The mind stuff has been decoloured, purified!

The Upanishads tell us: "Go on practising tapas. Tapas itself is Supreme Truth!" Tapas is the inner commotion, the energy of the burning; and tapas is the fire that burns constantly - the Light that watches, purifies, illumines - and in the course of time becomes enlightenment.

21st March Svadhyaya

While practising some kind of enquiry - mental tapas - the masters say it is essential that there should be an intelligent understanding of the truth.

Therefore they recommend svadhyaya study.

Otherwise it is possible that I undergo life's experiences and think I am learning from life but I am getting the wrong message.

We need some guidance.

It is here that we realise the great importance of both the scriptures and the teacher.

Together they form what I would call the railroad.

They will not take me to the goal, and what is even more important, they will not push me on it; but if I have the energy and the application they provide a sense of direction.

It is the scripture which keeps us on the track and prevents us from reading false lessons from our life's experiences.

We read some scriptures during the satsang.

If these are not read continuously some people will pick up the same chapter again and again.

They are in love with that one chapter and go on reading that, not the others, saying:

"These are inspiring," but it may be more necessary to expire!

How do I know when I am reading through a scripture that I am giving proper emphasis to all those factors to which I should pay attention?

How do I know that I am not skipping what is inconvenient to me?

It is the teacher who is our safeguard here.

So svadhyaya (study of scriptures) and the teacher become tremendously important if you are seriously practising yoga.

We do this study in Satsang.

The word itself means 'sat' - good, (sang' - company.

'Sat' also means truth or God.

So, to keep good company or to keep the company of truth or God is Satsang.

You'll notice something very strange - we keep rereading the same scriptures.

You'll be surprised to discover that every time you get some new inspiration from the same chapter.

It is possible that we overlooked that passage in the first reading; it is also possible that in the meantime we have matured a little bit.

So the svadhyaya continues, the satsang continues, and we mature, maybe imperceptibly, but surely.

In the absence of the teacher, the satsang is equally powerful.

The satsang doesn't hit you on the head as a teacher might, but what happens is almost equal to that.

You go on hearing in a receptive mood, and you are not allowed to argue or to shout back, so you are receiving; and the message goes right into your heart.

One can of course do all these readings by oneself at home; but in a group, in the satsang pattern, the same reading seems to have a tremendous effect - even if the group is small and the satsang is brief.

22nd March Be a Hero

When we come into contact with great Masters, we listen to their teachings.
But that is only the beginning of a great spiritual adventure which is lifelong.
Only a spiritual hero can undertake this adventure.

To be a hero, all that you need to do immediately is to have the courage to experiment with the teachings.

Are these great Masters teaching us the truth or some sort of opinion?

There is no loss in such experimentation.

There is great loss only if you fail to experiment.

The experiment will either prove them right or not so right.

If the experiment proves them right, then the teaching is assimilated.

Now, experiment with this discovery, until you arrive at the experience of the truth.

Then, give expression to this experience.

This attempt at expression might expose flaws in the experiment, and also the difficulty of expressing an experience.

Now you are mature enough to explore further, and discover the truths that you originally heard from the Masters which they had endeavoured to express in their own way - because you realise that no expression is ever able to express any experience faithfully in its totality.

"It is better to aim at a lion and miss it, than to aim at a jackal and hit it."

With the Grace of God and the divine Masters, if it is possible to aim high, it is also possible to achieve it.

What we need is total sincerity and intense zeal.

When I listen to the Upanishads my mind is in a sublime mood.

Then I sleep - or the mind is stupid.

And then I wake, I am ambitious - and the mind is in another mood.

There is a lump of dough. I fashion it into a figure of Buddha.

A young man fashions it into a film star.

A little boy smashes this and smears it all over the floor.

These are sattva, rajas and tamas.

But what is dough without any form?

What is mind-stuff without any mood.

That is its dharma - 'own nature'. (Moods are but activity or motion of the mind.)

Pursuit of this enquiry will lead to meditation and samadhi.

Also true humility and virtue are born of this enquiry.

23rd March Quest for Truth

Who decides what will be done - what is 'duty'?

No-one external to the self, which means neither another person nor one's own calculating intellect or blind emotion; but only the divine which is the indwelling omnipresence.

Therefore, our foremost duty becomes the realisation of the divine.

It will not do to hide selfishness under the camouflage of duty.

We have cultivated the delightful habit of naming things and experiences - calling some good and others evil, some happiness and others unhappiness, some desirable and others undesirable.

Once the pigeon-holes are fashioned, we endeavour to find a hole for every factor!

We do not look at them to find their true nature, the truth.

Yoga is the search for truth.

We practise asanas, pranayama and meditation, we discuss and study scriptures in satsang.

Even these spiritual activities have to be correctly understood; otherwise they become mechanical and therefore unintelligent.

When their truth is directly seen they become a single quest; otherwise they appear to be diverse and different.

The enquiring intelligence alone is free from the conditioning imposed by the naming intellect.

This enquiry is goalless and therefore endless.

If a goal presents itself, the intelligence shall question it.

Any object, any image, is the subject of this questioning!

When all objects are dispersed in the light of this intelligence, it (the light, the subject) shines and stands self-revealed.

Since it is of the nature of consciousness, there is awareness, but not awareness in the subject-object sense.

That is light. That is enlightenment.

In that light the shadow of ignorance does not arise.

One does not confuse the substance with the shadow, the description for the reality.

If you are hurt, first realise that that is the nature of the world.

To expect anything else in the world is already foolishness.

This is a world of unhappiness, this is a world of sorrow, this is a world of disease, this is a world of death.

If you are looking for a world of undiluted happiness, you have come to the wrong shop!

24th March Have You Heard of yogism?

I haven't!

Years ago an Indian in a responsible position recommended me to a group of seekers as an authority on 'Yogism'.

I have always wondered what he meant by that.

Yoga is fast becoming a fashion, especially among Europeans.

It will soon be regarded as a status symbol, a qualification for obtaining a job or getting married!

People have always aspired to dominate over others: some people with the know-how of yoga will soon 'capture' the field, create a cult, put a hedge of rules and regulations of their own invention around it - and now an 'ism' is born.

Already the simplicity and the meaning of the technique of yoga are forgotten.

When the 'ism' is born, the spirit of yoga will have evaporated, leaving the empty bottle of rituals and formalities, organisations and, if you please, headaches too!

They are life's vehicles and vexations.

Wisdom lies in using the positive and, if not eliminating at least minimising, the negative aspects of these necessary evils.

People have blindly followed many 'isms' - and people are losing interest, surprisingly even in materialism and sensualism.

Everywhere young people are asking.

In our ability and willingness to reply to them lies the destiny of the youth, of the nation and therefore of mankind.

Asking is not for the sake of asking: and the answers will be insipid if the questions are not flavoured with the right spirit of enquiry and inner discipline.

We should encourage the youth to cultivate these.

Knowledge without discipline is newspaper.

Knowledge with discipline is scripture.

Yoga is a technique for Self-realisation or God-realisation, satori, redemption, communion, mystic atonement with the Divine - words do not matter in the very least if you get the idea right!

Keep the spirit of yoga. Use the form.

But where 'the letter killeth the spirit' be bold enough to revive or resurrect the spirit.

Yoga - yes. Yogism - no.

25th March Re-creation or Re-destruction

Gurudev cautioned us against making excuses.

"In winter, it is too cold; in summer it is too hot; during the monsoon it is too wet to practise yoga. Now you are sick and now you are too busy," He often said.

"You complain of the family jhanjhat (responsibilities, worries etc.). These are all lame excuses. Add the sadhana-jhanjhat now."

If you refuse to excuse yourself, you will find plenty of time and energy to do what you wish to do.

When you find an excuse you are really accusing yourself of insincerity.

Everyone loves to complain, to grumble and to find excuses.

You love to make it appear that you are indeed keen to do this or that, but... and the excuses follow!

Even if the temple or the church is next door, you always find an excuse why you cannot or do not go.

But you do not excuse yourself from going to the seaside or for a holiday.

Man burns one end of the candle of his life in struggling to live.

He is soon tired.

He resorts to seaside cottages, a holiday overseas, play, fun and recreation.

But what is recreation?

To create again. What?

That which was lost.

And what was that?

Life, balance of mind, sanity, wisdom - all of which are lost in bread-winning labour and prestige-earning service.

Re-creation is possible only if we deliberately reverse the course of life at the seaside or wherever we may go.

By extrovert activity we lost the saner sense of values and wisdom; now, by introvert contemplation and raising our consciousness above the daily battle of life, we should regain them.

On the contrary, if we continue to be the same old selves, even during the holidays at the seaside, we shall only be burning the candle at the other end, too!

We return from the holidays madder, if possible.

That is re-destruction!

Among the Buddhists of Burma there is a custom: whatever be their station in life, they retire periodically to a monastery and live as monks for a few weeks.

Their attitude to life gets readjusted during this period.

It is not only a period of physical and mental relaxation but of spiritual rejuvenation.

It is a wonderful system, for all of us.

26th March The Importance of Pilgrimage

I think those of you who are interested in oriental epics are familiar with the Ramayana, the story of Rama.

Rama, who was considered an incarnation of God, went on a pilgrimage when he was young.

Today such an exercise is unnecessary, but in those days, people who hardly moved out of their small villages were asked to go on pilgrimages in order to widen their horizons and to become aware of a world which consisted of not just the family, but of people very different from themselves.

A pilgrimage is a very important spiritual exercise, and if you keep wandering from place to place, it is a very chastening experience.

You meet people who not only hold different views from yours, but whose faith and life-style is also totally different.

Suddenly you begin to question the dogmas that were given to you with your breakfast, and the feeling that you alone were right and others were wrong.

You realise that the people you meet don't believe exactly what you believe.

Going on a pilgrimage, or just wandering, also helps you develop an insight into the workings of the divine.

My Guru, Swami Sivananda, was very fond of this.

He used to gently laugh at people who professed to depend on God.

"Leave your jacket at home in midwinter," He would say.

"Don't take any money with you, walk out of the house at midnight, and then you will realise what it is to really depend on God."

It is not tempting the devil or God, but if you go out, surprisingly you will see help coming to you from all sorts of unexpected sources.

People whom you have never met come to you and ask, "Would you have a cup of tea?"

You look into their eyes and say, "What makes you offer this? I have done nothing for you at all."

There you see God's grace.

So, when you wander, there are several advantages.

You come face to face with this mysterious Grace of God, this power which fills the entire universe, which you call love, but which you do not know until you experience it within yourself in a situation where you are at the receiving end.

When you are at the giving end you may think it is love or charity, but it may be something else.

When you are at the receiving end, you realise that here is a person who helps me for no apparent reason, and there you experience God.

You also become intensely aware of the nature of the truth concerning the world.

27th March Free Will versus Destiny

A Tamil proverb warns us: "What you see with your eyes is false; what you hear with your ears is also false."

When you go to an ashram, remember this.

You will have great inspiration: meaning, you will 'inhale' the holy man and his wisdom.

The air that you breathe in sustains your physical life; the holy man and his wisdom will sustain the spirit, not by merely seeing him or hearing him but by inhaling him.

What is free will?

What is predestined?

Who knows?

When you cannot find a satisfactory answer you resort to doctrines like 'God's will' or 'God's grace'.

Who knows what these are? Only God.

To borrow a vedic expression, "Perhaps even He does not know!"

He who wants to know God's will often hopes that that will enable him to avoid suffering the consequences of his own past evil action; or, he wonders if he could engineer a happy future without caring for present action.

In all this speculations, the immediate action is ignored.

Perhaps that is why God has veiled our destiny from us.

When you go to holy men with this problem, they exhort you to be good and to do good, to be righteous and to abide by the injunctions of the scriptures.

When you try to do all this, you will find that the mind is selective: you do what suits you and there is inner revolt when you try to do what does not suit you.

You discover that your will projects a number of ambitions and cravings.

These are the rebels.

They cause all your problems.

And they are totally unnecessary for living.

Life flows on regardless.

When this is realised, your ambitions and cravings drop away.

You have the free will to do this much.

One thing remains.

It is the source of your cravings - called ego. You cannot drop it.

Only God's Grace can do this.

But if you have done what you had to do, this will happen, by God's Grace.

Free will or destiny? Why not both!

I am interested in the work of all masters - I am aware that they may not all be interested in one another's work.

I am anxious not to give offence to any of them!

Complicated - is it?

28th March The Yoga Way to Mind Control

'Avidya' or ignorance of our spiritual nature is a non-entity front, the philosophical (or the Absolute) point-of-view, though it is yet capable of very real and frightening results while it lasts.

It is similar in a way, to a nightmare.

It is not only like the darkness of the night which veils the reality, but like the illusory dream which conjures up false entities which enjoy momentary existence.

The world outside, which we experience, is one such dream: if it appears to be a solid reality, it is because the nightmare is still in progress.

If we dream that we are being attacked by a tiger, what we need is not knowledge of holy scriptures, but merely to wake up from slumber.

Yoga gives us a method which will enable us to wake up from this slumber of ignorance.

That branch of yoga has been called raja yoga.

Three words define this yoga: 'citta, vritti, nirodhah'.

They are not easy to understand because they are subjective facts and not objective effects.

In fact the crux of yoga is to understand and to know the Self, whereas all other knowledge in the world is of the world.

Let us try to glimpse (not grasp) the meaning of the words, but please remember that 'meaning' is not a paraphrasing, substituting one set of words for another.

Citta is Mind with a capital M. What it is will forever elude our grasp; for it is that with which we grasp.

Our eyes cannot perceive or glimpse themselves.

Yet, we do not 'see' what we see.

It is an intuitive vision, inner vision.

In the same way, we may intuit the existence of the Mind.

Mind is that whose changes are referred to as thoughts and emotions, and on which thoughts, words and deeds, experiences and expressions leave an indelible impression that continually modifies its appearance, while leaving its essential nature unchanged.

Vritti is that change itself.

It is usual to translate it into 'a wave, a ripple' i.e. if citta is an ocean, vritti is a wave.

What is the wave, if not the ocean itself, though the ocean is not just wave?

Nirodhah has also been translated into 'suppression', but it is very much more than mere suppression - it is control.

But control does include expression as well as suppression, motion as well as standstill, and all the variations and components of such motion (except perhaps commotion).

Yoga is and should be practised with open eyes, active limbs and alert mind too.

This is like driving the car, not madly and inefficiently but with excellent control and an unclouded sense of direction.

29th March Avidya and Asmita

What is the Absolute, God, the Self?

If we are honest we must admit: "I do not know"!

As a student is told in the Upanishads: "If you think you have understood, you are a fool!"

In Vedanta, this 'not knowing' has another name: avidya.

Literally it means 'I do not know', but it is not the ignorance of something that I have not yet learned to know, to understand.

When we talk of avidya it is a deeper, different not-knowing.

It is the inevitable ignorance of Self-knowledge.

There is absolutely no way in which I could come face to face with this avidya, understand it.

One might 'feel' there is avidya and 'understand' the description of it, but one can never know what this avidya is.

Either one is in a state of avidya, or there is knowledge, enlightenment.

The moment there is Self-knowledge there is no more avidya.

Until then, when I pursue these questions, I have come to this blank wall and cannot know what - if anything - is beyond it.

Similarly with asmita.

This means literally 'I-ness', the ego-sense - not egoism in the sense of vanity.

The closest you can come to understanding it is when you know that you do not understand!

Then you stop and start to enquire.

How does the feeling come: 'I see it'?

That 'I', the ego which arises in me somewhere, somehow, is asmita.

As the eyes look at an object, e.g. the paper, there comes the thought: 'I see the paper'.

It is when the ego-sense springs up mysteriously that the paper becomes 'paper'.

The ego-sense gives a name to itself and another name to the 'other end' of any happening.

If we examine seriously, we will note that it is not as though the world or God created problems, but they are all related directly to the ego-sense.

As soon as 'I' is there, 'the other' is also formed.

And with this comes the differentiation between 'mine' and 'his' - and 'good' and 'evil'.

It is always somebody else who is at fault!

The innocence of the newborn is replaced by ego-sense which labels, classifies, judges, conceptualises.

When we make any statement the 'I' is assumed as a fixed point of reference, from where I am relating myself to everything.

This assumption has to be questioned.

Does the 'I' exist?

May be - may be not!

The answer to this question is asmita: the egosense arising in pure action.

The yogi's approach to a problem is characterised by this attempt to find out first who creates the problem.

Who am I? Or rather: What is 'I'?

What is the ego-sense?

From where and how does it arise?

This is the fundamental question.

That question, if properly pursued, should dissolve the best part of our problems.

30th March The Instrument, Not the Doer

If you watch very carefully, you will see that whatever judgement the mind makes is completely limited to our physiological, biological survival.

This is the animal nature of our being.

(Animal in the strictly technical meaning of the word anima - living substance.)

The mind is not interested in altruism or the search for truth.

It is not interested in dissociating itself from the body and looking at the truth.

If we let the mind take a decision, it will necessarily and naturally function as an adjunct to the physiological aspect of our personality.

The mind advises us how best to survive in this world.

There is something absurd here.

The mind's effort to perpetuate the physical body is a contradiction, because it turns a blind eye on the fact that this physical life must come to an end.

It is very difficult for the mind of most of us to appreciate the totality of life.

It seeks pleasure but refuses to see that the other side of pleasure is pain.

It desires success but refuses to see that success is bound to end in failure.

It sees only one side and therefore it is partial, limited and the advice it gives is bound to be inadequate, limited and therefore frustrating.

One who quite clearly sees this, also sees that the mind, being a self-appointed guardian deity of the body, conditioned by its own foolishness, is untrustworthy; and any action that springs from the mind or the physical organism is pure animal action, meant merely to preserve the physical organism.

It is instinctive, impulsive and therefore futile, fruitless, blind and fragmentary, and must lead to frustration.

The moment one is able to see this, faith in the mind drops.

The wise man who seeks truth, firmly avoids taking the counsel of the mind.

But if the mind is not going to enable us to make the decision, what else does?

How does an action take place?

When we write a letter, we use a fountain pen, paper and the hand.

The hand is propelled by the brain (the mind) and the mind itself is propelled by some unknown intelligence.

The mind is but an instrument - the antahkarana, the inner instrument of action - and the instrument should obviously not become the doer!

Hidden as the inner light in all these instruments is the jiva - the living, sentient, conscious spark of God, the inner light that alone sustains nature.

Whatever there is in this whole universe is pervaded by this consciousness, and any action which springs from this inner light, the jiva or the spark of God within, is real action.

31st March You Must Wake Up!

Our life is so completely wrapped up in irrational fantasies that they provide the motivation for whatever we do - good and evil.

Watch the mind very carefully and you will see this.

If you love me you do all sorts of things and you are prepared to undergo any amount of privation, suffering and expense.

You love me because you think I am your friend or your brother.

That relationship - my so and so, whatever it may be - makes you do all sorts of good things.

This is a reason why this irrational, stupid idea of a relationship is very jealously guarded and maintained by society.

But the unfortunate factor is that it is not goodness alone that flows out of this 'mine'.

You care only for people whom you regard as 'my' people.

Are these people really mine?

How does this 'mineness' arise?

How does this relationship arise?

Are these relationships based on reality, truth?

The strangest part of it is that they are there as long as you accept that they are there.

This 'mineness' is a nightmare or a sweet dream, it doesn't matter which way you look at it.

But please also remember that while you are enjoying a sweet dream you are inviting a nightmare, because they both belong to the same family.

There is only one way to avoid both of these, and that is that you must wake up.

The moment you wake up from this ignorance and begin to enquire into it, the mineness goes away.

'I am' is there and 'you are' is also there.

We are not running away from that.

There is a body here, there is a body there, but we don't possess each other.

We are both equally important, so I don't have to torture myself in order to do something good to you and you don't have to torture yourself in order to do some good to me.

That is a beautiful life where we love and respect one another without possessing one another, when we realise that possession does not exist.

There is no martyrdom and there is no greed.

If goodness does not need the motivation of possession, then it is free, true goodness.

Virtue which is free from compulsion is true virtue.

Is it possible to free goodness from this sense of possession, and in that freedom cultivate goodness?

That goodness is divine.

1st April Is the Body Me?

This body is supposed to be 'me' or mine.

This is already a problem.

Is it me or mine?

There is a confusion between what is me and what is mine.

When you pinch the body, are you pinching me or what is mine?

Suddenly you realise that because you have considered this body to be 'This I am', it appears to be true.

Is this body mine? If it is, then I must be able to do what I like with it.

If I tell the body, "You are mine. You must obey me," and it doesn't want to, then how can I call it mine?

Then I see that if I am to die today, the body is left behind.

So it is not mine, it is neither me nor mine.

It is then that you begin to impersonally observe how this body came into being.

A cell from somebody's body fertilises another cell, then it divides and subdivides and so on; the rest of it being supplied by food.

So, it is merely a food chain which keeps going from parent to child.

This is the physical chain of immortality.

This is the body.

Then there is something within which thinks, which feels, 'This I am'.

The question is: Is there an entity prior to the thought 'This I am' which thinks 'This I am' because it is already there?

Or is it the other way around?

A thought arises 'This I am' and then there is a feeling 'This I am'.

(At least one mighty scripture, the Yoga Vasistha, adopts the second view.)

When you are asleep, there is no feeling 'This I am' at all, though the body exists and functions.

Because the thought 'This I am' does not exist, there is no personality - there is neither the world nor a thing called 'I'.

It is only when you begin to think 'This I am' that you come into being, the world comes into being.

This problem is insoluble until you attain enlightenment and directly perceive that only as long as the feeling, 'This I am', is there can 'I' be presumed to exist.

That is the declaration of those who have realised the truth.

Life is an opportunity, but ignorance converts it into a burden.

God created a lot of work for man to do; but ignorance transforms it into worry.

Man has his duty to his fellowman, but ignorance makes it a millstone around his neck, weighing him down with cares and anxieties.

Wealth and wisdom God entrusted to man to serve his neighbour with; but ignorance bound him with them in the fatal ties of possessiveness.

2nd April Do What Has To Be Done

In sleep there is no world, and in sleep there is no 'I' either.

In sleep I don't exist and the world doesn't exist.

But when sleep comes to an end and consciousness begins to become aware of itself, 'I' arises, and at the same time the world arises.

In this awareness or consciousness there is total surrender.

This is what religious people have spoken of as surrender to God.

In that surrender we are enabled to realise the truth and play the role that God or this infinite consciousness has already allotted to us.

When that role is honestly played, then there is no sorrow or suffering.

We do what has to be done, without any predetermination or precondition.

If a log of wood is thrown into the fast-flowing stream, it does what has to be done from moment to moment.

Such a life is a blessing and in that life there is no ego-sense which says, "I am living, I am doing this."

Everything is done by God (instead of saying Cosmic or Infinite Consciousness, use a simple word - God.) Everything is done, ordained and motivated by God.

Everything is sustained by God.

The discourse in the Yoga Vasistha lasts eighteen days and at the end of the discourse Rama enters into deep contemplation.

But Vasistha shakes him and says, "This is not the time to contemplate. Come on, get up."

Rama says, "Yes, certainly I'll get up and do whatever has to be done." Why?

For the simple reason that the ego, which considered itself an independent entity, independent of the totality of the world, God, does not consider itself independent anymore, and therefore there is no desire to do something or not to do something.

He who says "I am talking here," is a fool, and he who says "I will not do this" is also a fool. Both are arrogant.

But he who knows that it is the Divine that makes all things possible in this world, to him the world itself is the Self-realisation of God.

When that understanding arises, the ego does not exist as an independent entity, but as part of this game.

And he who plays this game knows its rules and knows what has to happen.

You and I are part of this world game.

Let us play our roles in freedom, in love and in harmony.

3rd April Disturbing Thoughts

Question:

I meditate and practise yoga daily, but often get strange, unpleasant, even cruel thoughts. How do I deal with this evil which comes out of myself?

Swamiji:

It is good you realise that they come out of yourself.

If you want immediate but temporary relief, you may substitute some holy or pleasant thoughts.

But these are all thoughts, and hence they offer no permanent solution.

The key to the answer is indeed yoga, the Path to Perfection which is a total integration.

But can one clearly understand what is meant by the word 'integration'?

When we talk of integration of the personality, we should not commit the error of assuming that the personality has somehow broken into pieces.

As Christian Scientists will tell you that disruption is but an illusion.

Those who have experienced nightmares, however, will assure you that the illusion is real so long as it lasts.

'Integration' refers to the disappearance of the illusion.

The violent thoughts are obviously your own; they are from you, they are part of you, they are you.

Can you run away from yourself?

Can you throw yourself away?

If, for instance, you eat some bitter fruit, the moment you realise it is so, you can spit it out.

But you cannot spit out your tongue or a sore stomach.

If your tongue or your stomach hurts, have you watched yourself, what you do?

You have to live with it; yet it hurts, it is unpleasant.

Therefore, you are extremely vigilant and cautious to ensure that you do not let it hurt you now.

In the same way, if you realise that the evil thoughts are in you, part of you, you, and you realise that they are unpleasant and disturbing, you will be ever vigilant to ensure that they do not arise in your mind.

This vigilance makes you extremely strong.

Perhaps that is why our Gurudev Swami Sivananda used to say, "In your weakness lies your real strength."

To try to avoid war is foolish.

People will die in any case, and everything will be destroyed, war or no war.

To wage war and kill is more foolish.

Why kill something which will die a little later?

The problem is how to live.

4th April

The Greatest Miracle

It seems that we really only live if this 'mineness' is gone.

Otherwise we are living in tension and frustration all the time.

Mysteriously, there arises a feeling in relation to this body, this 'I am', a mystery which you will be able to solve only when you are enlightened.

'I am this body' is a mistake more than a mystery and out of this mistake arises the next and deadly mistake: 'You are mine'.

If you examine it very carefully, everything that you refer to as 'mine' is related merely to this body, whereas in truth the entire universe is nothing but a whirling mass of energy, consciousness itself in motion.

Right, but "I don't see it that way, I can't understand it." That's maya.

That which is unable to experience and become aware of the omnipresent truth is maya.

This maya is incomprehensible to the human mind because the human mind is limitation, is maya, part of this confusion.

We regard God as some Being outside of ourselves.

We regard maya or Shakti as something outside of ourselves.

This is because by nature and by birth we have trained ourselves to look at everything outside and to look for everything outside.

We always blame somebody else for our errors and faults.

We always look for pleasure from some source outside of us, and we think our pain and suffering also come from somebody else.

This habit we have formed prevents us from becoming aware of something which is omnipresent.

Omnipresent means here, within me.

Never mind what that 'me' means here.

Turn your gaze within and then it is possible for you to peel off layer after layer of the 'me' and come to the direct realisation of the 'non-me': that which is beyond the 'me', whose shadow is me.

Then you don't fight with this 'me' (you don't fight with shadows) nor try to understand it, for all that involves misdirected effort.

Without fighting it and without fleeing from it you have still achieved the greatest miracle: the confusion and frustration are gone.

Your vision has not changed, you are the same.

The object is the same but something has happened, and that something did not change anything at all.

This is the most important factor.

Where you were frightened, frustrated, battling, you are no longer frightened, frustrated, battling, and where you were striving there is effortlessness.

5th April Vigilance is Liberation

What are the characteristics of a person who has reached the understanding of the non-existence of the ego?

Actions will go on, but the ego-sense is not there.

When the self-glue has gone - self-glue is what we call ego-sense - you are forever satisfied.

What is the cause of your disappointment?

Your expectations!

Why is there this restlessness within oneself, this dissatisfaction?

Because there is a craving for satisfaction of a particular type.

When the 'I', the ego-sense, is there, it leans on something, otherwise there is no dependency, no identity, no identification tag.

If there is no destination, you never get onto the wrong road, you never lose your way!

If I have no destination, all roads are the same.

To one who has no destination, there is no destiny either.

Is one who is free from desire and hope and all motivations, an automaton then?

Does he automatically work to attain liberation? No.

But be careful.

It is not difficult for one to cheat oneself because as long as the body continues to live, apparently as an individual, the movement of energy in that space of consciousness is also there.

In an ignorant state, the movement of energy in this particular field of consciousness was regarded as an individual.

Now that there is a very clear understanding that 'I' does not exist and therefore 'I am liberated', the one that says 'I am liberated' is also capable of falling into another error saying 'I am So-and-so'.

Be careful, be free of hopes, of cravings and desires, but don't abandon attention, vigilance.

As long as the body lasts, as long as there is this movement of energy in that particular field of consciousness, there is also the risk of the same ignorance arising again in a moment of heedlessness.

When that attention or vigilance is vigilantly watchful to ensure that the ego-sense does not arise again, then the energy continues to move, the body continues to function without a confusion arising again.

When one has reached this point where the body functions by its own built-in energy, freed of cravings and hope, one is satisfied with whatever one gets effortlessly.

6th April How to Dissolve All Conflicts

The Pious feeling: "There is conflict in the world and therefore I must fight the evil; or I should completely withdraw from all this and thus prevent violence, death and destruction," is irrelevant.

All the parties to the conflict (including the observer who might avoid it) are inevitably destined to die.

Death and destruction make no distinctions and discrimination.

It is possible that what appears to be violence and aggression 'outside' is not violence at all. Fire and water are not enemies; they are complementary.

Inhalation and exhalation are not contradictory functions, but complementary functions. Even the behaviour of predators may not be 'violence' or 'aggression' but natural and non-violent'.

It is the 'I' that creates conflict in all this.

Violence is in the 'I' and it reads violence in the behaviour of animals and even in the natural phenomena in order to rationalise its own violence.

It is the inner violence that recognises the natural external event as violence.

Hence violence is within and not outside.

This is not difficult to see either.

When you read the news of any conflict, look within and you will see that your own heart justifies one of the parties and condemns the other.

It is the 'I' that does it.

This violence is within yourself.

Attraction and repulsion are inherent in the material substances.

They are also natural to the physical body and the subtle senses.

They function spontaneously without creating conflict or aggression.

The hand pulls away from a hot-plate, but does not fight it.

When you know this, actions just happen, without creating a feeling 'I am doing this' and the corresponding feeling - either 'I must do this' or 'I must not do this'.

This is the state of equilibrium which is a 'sinless state'.

When the self-assumed, self-arrogating role of the ego-sense is seen to be fictitious and unreal, such unreality ceases to be viewed as real.

He who enjoys this state lives in the same world as you and I do, but without conflict.

The yogi neither assumes "I do this," nor does he defy nature.

He lives a dynamic life, without desire, fear or hate - his actions are spontaneous.

He 'enters his heart' into the Cosmic Being or God, in supreme devotion or self-surrender.

His contemplation is dynamic, for he sees the Lord in all.

In total surrender he realises that what appeared to be his own being (in common with all beings) lives and functions naturally in accordance with the divine will.

Life continues: enlightened life.

7th April Living Means Action

Action is on-going; and since life means living, movement, motion, energy, expression of energy, there is another aspect to this doctrine of karma.

That is: you can't as long as you are alive avoid doing something - you have to do something.

When these two are read together, probably you begin to quake in fear and in excitement.

You can't help doing something all the time - physically, mentally, spiritually - and everything that you do is going to keep throwing up its own result.

Oh my God!

So, I am compelled to do, forced to be active all the time by the very nature of life.

But I am not forced to do 'this' and not 'that': I am not forced to respond to the environment in one way or the other.

Who determines that?

The factor called ego, which says "I want to be this, I want to do this.

I want to achieve, I want to succeed.

I want to be happy." With this motivation you do what has to be done, what you would have done regardless of motivation.

Life being action, you are helplessly doing something all the time.

This ego provides a sort of motivation saying, "I am doing this in order to gain that."

Do we always get what we want, even when we have done all that we think we should in order to get that? No.

Why is it so?

Because there are so many unknown, unpredictable factors in our lives.

So, while doing what has to be done, the ego steps in and says, 'I want to get something out of this.'

If we achieve what we wish to achieve, we are distracted; if we do not we are frustrated.

That is our lives. Simple.

These are the two aspects in our daily lives.

Yoga means harmony, union, integration.

There must be an inner harmony, a total harmony within the total being.

The oneness, the harmony that exists amongst the billions of cells in the body, the total, continuous, unquestioning, undoubted, supra-national unity that is what we are looking for.

When all actions that are performed by this body, mind, intellect and ego spring from the cosmic being, the cosmic intelligence, the result is yoga.

8th April Gurudev Sivananda

Often we come across descriptions of enlightened sages, yogis who had attained self-realisation and Jivanmuktas (they who had gained liberation while still living here). Once you begin to think of Gurudev, remember Him, remind yourself of the way in which He walked and talked, the way in which He laughed and lectured, the way in which He smiled and frowned, your whole being is flooded with reminiscences which keep flowing as if a dam had burst.

Sometimes we are tempted to compare Gurudev with this or that holy man.

But truly He was incomparable.

In fact, He was indefinable and therefore unpredictable.

He had no stereotyped behaviour, set responses and rigid routines.

In Him contradictions were reconciled into a complete wholeness and the changes blended into an unchanging light that defied description.

There was no dogma in Him and yet He was not necessarily opposed to dogma.

He was not opposed to anything, not even to opposition!

He was incarnate love, and that love was unlike anything that you and I have experienced.

'Brahmavit brahmaiva bhavati', declare the scriptures: "He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman."

In him the ego ceases to be recognised as an independent entity.

When we speak of one another we are really speaking of the little ego - praising or condemning, affirming or denying.

But when we speak of Gurudev Swami Sivananda, we speak of Brahman the Infinite, in whom there was no ego to be thus described nor an (egoistic) state known as egolessness.

One can only say that if God (truth or love) walked the earth, it would be as Gurudev Swami Sivananda did.

His life was divine. It is. It shall ever be.

He exists and shines in your heart as your own Self.

9th April Vairagya

How can I experience, discover 'I', 'I am'-ness?

It is like trying to stick out your tongue to lick it!

While anything takes place e.g. the eyes see a book, the seeing is all that is really happening.

But somewhere, somehow, there arises a thought: 'I see'.

Once this 'I' pops up as subject, the object (e.g. 'book') is also conjured up.

From this follows: "I love this" and therefore "I do not like that".

Dislike, repulsion and hate are born from love, attraction - products of the dualism of the ego-sense.

This is not part of nature, which knows no like or dislike.

The ripe apple does not fall because it 'hates' the tree or 'loves' the ground!

The fall of the apple occurs as a natural event at a given moment, just as the eyelids close when the eyes look at bright light or the arm withdraws the hand as it touches a source of heat.

In nature things happen - rain falls down, smoke goes up.

There is a going apart, a coming together as with the different poles of a magnet, without struggle or emotion.

If there is oneness there is no question of wanting one thing and avoiding or pushing away 'another'.

Hate only arises from 'loving' the opposite.

That is why one usually speaks of raga (liking) and dvesa (disliking) together.

There is no total, absolute hate.

In fact, I only start disliking something once I am attached to someone, somebody else, be it merely myself.

The truth is that there is attraction and repulsion (hatred, violence and so on) in me, in the mind.

It is not a question of suppressing either physical or mental expressions of dislike, resentment etc., nor indeed of attraction or its opposite.

The main issue is mental colouring, the conditioning of the mind.

Whatever the mind sees gets 'coloured' and we divide the world accordingly into 'black' and 'white'.

We can learn to 'see' anew, to decolour the mind.

(Not to discolour it in the sense of introducing yet another 'colour' to get rid of the prevailing ones.)

For this the sages teaching yoga introduced vairagya - the opposite of raga.

Vairagya or renunciation (dispassion) is not a discipline leading to suppression on the 'either-or' basis.

It recommends neither repressing the desires by running away from them or 'closing' my eyes to their existence in me, nor by heroic resistance biting my tongue so as not to give in to the attractions!

Neither shunning the world and its enjoyments, nor turning the back on places of worship can lead us to Truth and peace.

If God is omnipresent, why run from Him who is in every place and occupation?

All we have to renounce is the mental colouring.

10th April Vairagya and Abhyasa

In sleep there are no problems except the one problem of ignorance!

From this ignorance issue the sources of our problems: individuality, likes and dislikes and 'clinging to life'.

Clinging to life is 'hope': hope is inseparable from fear.

Life brings the senses and particular objects together for a brief moment and then takes them away.

Pleasure and pain are natural to life, and neutral.

It is the mind, and not the senses, which registers the experiences, remembers, cherishes or dreads.

Then it pursues pleasure, it is afraid it may not get or lose it, it hopes it will get it and have it forever.

All these constitute vritti.

Thinking about them, thinking that they have disappeared, philosophising their nature and purpose (that they are part of nature, that they are karma or illusory) is futile.

They cannot really be suppressed; they will not be ignored.

Understanding alone is their (dis)solution or resolution.

One of the methods of understanding is the twofold abhyasa and vairagya.

Vairagya is related to raga (likes or cravings), which also means colouring.

Memory craves even in the absence of the object, and demands repeated enjoyment.

The Master suggests vairagya or uncoloring of the mind.

The first step is: if the memory revives the craving in the absence of the object, recognise the absurdity of such craving - the object is just not there and the craving is madness.

When the inner intelligence realises this, such irrational craving ceases, and the intelligence gains strength to deal with craving when the object is immediately present.

The second step: when the object is present, the intelligence enquires 'Is this normal?' - a natural part of the life-process (like hunger, thirst and so on) or is it a perverted craving which arises from the me(mory)?

If it is natural, the experience is allowed; if it is not, the craving is dropped.

The third step: the intelligence continues to enquire into the whole process of experience memory-craving.

What is the reality of these?

The non-verbal answer reveals the truth that all this is sheer movement of energy in consciousness.

To remain established in this truth is abhyasa.

The attempt to do so is also abhyasa.

However if the ego makes this attempt it is self-defeating.

The practice of the various limbs of yoga enables you to realise that which is beyond the ego.

11th April The Meaning Of Meaning

We often take for granted that we know the meanings of the words and expressions we use. Thus in our communication (or lack of it) we have constantly to explain, to retract or modify what we say.

In the field of philosophy and religion, herbs grow into weeds, mainly because of our lack of interest in the meanings of words and the expressions used.

The student of philosophy and religion is compelled to take them, and he takes them as he takes a bitter pill he swallows them.

The meaning is never understood.

Even the word 'artha' translated into 'meaning' does not mean the word 'meaning', but the 'substance' which the word denotes.

Yoga is integration, not just a morning exercise.

Sadhana is an attempt towards a possible siddhi which means, not psychic powers, but the attainment of what the sadhana aimed at.

Naturally siddhi is not perfection in any aspect of your life, but total perfection, since it is beyond the reach of the finite intellect; siddhi is the absence of all imperfections.

One uses a mantra in sadhana: and mantra not only refers to a special formula but a piece of wholesome advice.

It may come from a guru; but a guru is the enlightenment-experience which happens within oneself (though a human being, animal or other object may trigger it).

This enlightenment removes the darkness of avidya.

Avidya is not ignorance of a particular subject; avidya is ignorance of what says, 'I know this' or 'I do not know this', that is, oneself.

This oneself is asmita, not egoism or vanity, but the fundamental 'I amness'.

It is this asmita that is responsible for raga-dvesa: and these are not just likes and dislikes. Raga arises because there is a conditioning in the mind, a colouring, in which something looks attractive (and therefore the other is disgusting).

The opposite of raga is vairagya, which is not physical repression or mental 'volte-face': it means de-colouring which is done by tapas.

Tapas is not self-mortification, but the burning fire of aspiration and enquiry, which burns up the conditioning and at the same time illumines the truth!

12th April Sacrifice

Sacrifice only means 'made sacred', and yoga is sacrifice in that sense.

An action becomes yajna or sacrifice only when there is jnana or understanding.

If the understanding is not there, the action becomes stupid and binding.

Action by itself is totally neutral, neither good nor bad.

If light shines on the shadow, that which appeared to be a shadow instantly becomes illumined.

Nothing came, nothing went.

The shadow became luminous, light.

That which I saw is not seen any more, but what there was still exists.

That is sacrifice.

Every action springs from the same source, from this Cosmic Being or cosmic consciousness, flows towards the Cosmic Being and cosmic consciousness and the flow itself is cosmic energy and cosmic consciousness.

In other words, action is natural here; whatever goes on goes on without any regard to what you or I would like.

The sole obstacle to a pure and natural life is the feeling or thought called 'I' - the ego-sense.

Life is natural and the only thing that seems to be non-existent and therefore unnatural is the egosense.

Yet one does not know why or how or what it is.

One cannot deny its seeming existence nor can one assert or affirm its real existence, like the shadow.

It partakes of the reality and of the unreality.

All the various ways in which the yogis have endeavoured to overcome this shadow of the ego-sense are called yoga.

And the vital aspect of yoga is the spirit of sacrifice, the spirit in which the Truth is seen and in which life becomes natural.

Wherever the ego-sense seems to function, in whatever aspect of our life or personality, it has to be sacrificed, turned into something sacred.

Sacrifice is completely different from what you and I have been taught it is.

Sacrifice is not merely cutting the throat of something, nor throwing something into the fire.

Sacrifice is when the sanctity or the holiness of something which has always been holy is restored into it.

So fasting can be a yajna, eating can be a yajna.

All kinds of sacrifices are indulged in by people.

I can use certain material substances which I can make sacred, and at the same time I can engage myself in great austerities, spiritual practices, and I can also be made sacred or sacrificed.

In and through all these practices our whole life is sacrificed, our whole life becomes sacred.

13th April The Spirit of Sacrifice

In the Vedas we are given a beautiful vision of God.

They say that God has sacrificed Himself in this universe.

Thus, the entire universe is God's own sacrifice.

In scientific terms this is quite simple: cosmic energy has somehow condensed itself into the form of the universe by an act of sacrifice.

Sacrifice, in sanskrit, is 'yajna'.

According to the dictionary, the official meaning is killing something in order to propitiate a god.

But I feel that it means something that leads to Self-knowledge - sacrifice sounds like something sacred.

Thus, sacrifice is destroying something and also making sacred.

Perhaps the two are not contradictory but complementary.

Until very recently, in Hindu communities the sacred fire was kept in the house all the time and what was offered into the fire was cooked and uncooked food.

This is fantastic if you understand the significance.

A bit of food is offered into the fire; and a bit of that same food is offered into the gastric fire called 'stomach'.

Here it is digested and turned into the beautiful body which then lives for some time; and when the body dies it is cremated with that fire.

Now the two become one.

Thus the spirit of sacrifice was fostered.

In that spirit, you could see that nobody is free.

We are all interdependent and that interdependence means one sacrificing to the other.

The seed sacrifices itself giving rise to the tree; the tree sacrifices itself and produces fruit - food.

There is a chain reaction, an interconnectedness throughout the whole universe.

This marvellous truth is seen when the insight is fully awakened.

Then all the stupid ideas that 'I am independent of you', 'You are my enemy' and so on, drop away.

What you do affects me; what I do affects you.

We are completely and totally interwoven into the fabric of the world.

When that comes to light, the same spirit of sacrifice enables us to see enjoyment and suffering, indulgence and restraint, in very different lights.

Eating is not pleasure, it is an offering where some oblations are poured into the gastric fire burning within, and hunger seems to be satisfied.

In the same way all enjoyments are oblations poured into the fire of an urge that arises in you.

So your entire life is seen as a life-long sacrifice.

14th April The Spiritual Adventure

The descent of light into the heart is the awakening of insight.

There is clear perception of the truth.

This perception transforms the world without touching it, transforms life without changing it.

In it you see the world as it is, life as it is.

You realise that 'you' are part of the world; the mind functioning in the body thinks, and thinks it has a mysterious relationship with the 'rest of the world' outside the skin of the body!

This relationship is of indivi(sible) duality.

With every event in this world, an experiencer somehow arises within the individual body; this experiencer begins to store some memories, giving rise to the 'me' (ego-sense).

The 'me' is the past. It has no future.

This understanding frees awareness from both the past and the future.

The 'me' has energy built into it - the past momentum (known as, prarabdha karma); it does not need further fuel (ambition or desire).

Ambition is unnecessary for life, in life.

The body-mind complex may be allowed to exhaust its energy: this leads to total freedom from the self or 'me'.

If the body (and even the mind) functions without additional fuel, there is freedom for awareness.

This awareness realises that the whole universe is sacrifice (both in the sense of destroying, and 'making sacred').

Everything comes into being and ceases before it takes another form.

Rising-setting is the order of creation.

All material objects, all thoughts and emotions obey this law.

But then, why not the ego - why does it not rise and set, without creating a perpetual problem?

It is this false 'surviving' ego that is to be sacrificed.

When its nature is thoroughly investigated, the ego is sacrificed; and in its place something sacred is realised.

This extraordinarily beautiful realisation is thus stated by Lord Krishna: "By this you will see all beings in the Self and in Me."

There is the realisation of oneness.

When the ego is thus sacrificed, only then does sin come to an end.

It is not the ego that sacrifices and gets rid of evil.

When the veil ('evil' spelt differently) is lifted, the ego is no more - no more an enduring entity.

It continues to rise and fall in common with all else in this universe.

15th April Pranayama

Prana is not merely the 'breath', but it is the Power that makes us breathe.

It is in the air, food and drink we take in.

It is in every atom of existence.

Pranayama, in its true sense, means coming face to face with this prana and understanding its nature, its function.

Prana is in everything and does everything.

Prana is the energy of the life-force that sustains the whole world and all things in it.

It is even in the corpse!

Like electricity, prana has multiple functions.

It is in every form, odour, taste.

In objects that we enjoy, that invigorate us, it is the prana that does so.

The prana that is already in the body absorbs the prana from outside.

We do not really know what this prana is and how it works whether it is static or whether it flows or vibrates.

But we can say that as it vibrates or flows through the body, there is physical action, and prana flowing through the mind is thought.

As prana passes through the mind it makes you think.

One cannot really think about it, as it is that which enables thinking!

One cannot talk about prana as it is the energy that talks.

How can we know and control this prana?

When you are on the threshold - the middle path - you know what prana is.

When you hold your lungs empty you are neither knocked unconscious nor completely conscious in the normal way.

As the prana is the energy of the mind, there is an intimate link between it and the mind.

Understanding the function of prana you understand the mind.

The yogi who wishes to practise pranayama for spiritual progress does not only pay attention to the breathing as such, but to the whole of life, which should be balanced.

In our normal everyday life, prana is in constant motion.

There is constant income and expenditure of prana.

It is never absolutely balanced.

Sleep may be regarded as the greatest source of prana: here there is almost no expenditure of prana.

Prana, being dynamic, cannot be stopped, held back.

When you know what makes you breathe, what makes you hungry and demands food and digests it, what makes you thirsty and take drink, then you know everything!

Prana is ever vibrant, never absolutely quiet.

The energy of prana has to function, but yogis suggest that a life of moderation is most conducive to progress.

We find it hard to walk the middle path and tend either to go all out or to stop completely.

However, a life of moderation is pranayama!

16th April Practice of Moderation

Prana is not merely that which makes us breathe, but that which makes us live.

How is our life span fixed?

Some yogis feel this is calculated in terms of breathing.

The theory is that if you can slow down the rate of breath you can live longer and that prana can be conserved.

From where do we get the prana?

In water there is some prana, so drinking water gives you a little bit of energy, and even walking near a river or sea or lake gives you tremendous energy.

Breathing gives energy, but even in breathing there is some expenditure of energy.

Prana is really derived from sleep.

That is where the 'battery' is charged with prana.

All forms of activity are expenditure of energy, but the sages mention two or three very specifically.

Eating is one.

They say that strangely enough food does not give you prana, so that when you eat you feel heavy - it is more expenditure of energy than income.

The food that we eat merely produces cells for the body, it is necessary for the replacement of the cells.

But when it comes to prana it is more an expenditure of energy.

Sex is another expenditure of energy.

Talking is also a colossal waste of energy.

All these may be essential or necessary for life, but the master says "Minimise them, make them moderate!"

If one is moderate in all that one does, then the practice of yoga becomes fruitful.

How strange that:

Health-conscious man insists for the sake of hygiene that sweets, fruits and chocolates must be well-wrapped.

The wrapper-litter becomes a health hazard.

Public health authorities save the roads from excrement, but pollute the rivers and the sea.

Drugs cure people of minor illnesses, but the factories that make them create major ones.

Planes and cars speed the healing medicines to distant parts of the world, but at the same time leave a trail of poisonous gas.

The agronomist's pesticide dutifully kills the only real pest on earth - Man.

17th April This is Prana

In order to understand what pranayama means we must understand what prana is.

In jnana yoga understanding is not important.

Understanding is not done in the brain but in something that stands under - in the heart.

Is it possible for us to relate our intelligence to prana without the brain?

Can I look at this prana without thought?

The sages who practise jnana yoga have no technique. just as you are looking outside, look within and find out what keeps you - this body and mind - alive.

That is prana.

But what do you do?

The very simplicity of it makes it almost impossible.

Then some masters come down a little bit and indicate something like a technique, using the following method which is found in the Yoga Vasistha.

As you breathe in and out normally, see if you can become aware of the exact moment when inhalation becomes exhalation and exhalation becomes inhalation.

In that meeting point you'll find prana.

There must be some kind of observation which is independent of thought and therefore of the ego.

That observation observes this movement of breath.

If you can do it, God bless you.

If you cannot do it, then the hatha yogi says, "Hit this prana."

The idea is to challenge this prana so that it becomes clear "This is prana".

The question that is asked is the same as in jnana yoga: "What makes me live?"

Here in hatha yoga the emphasis is on kumbhaka.

Kumbha means a pot and kumbhaka is making the abdomen like a pot.

First there is puraka (inhalation), which literally means filling this pot.

When you inhale you find you cannot go any further.

What makes you stop?

That is prana.

But because you are inhaling with force, that prana becomes more detectable.

Then comes kumbhaka - holding the breath as long as possible.

I should not exhale, prana should force the exhalation.

At that point, if the observation is keen, there is the direct understanding, "This is prana".

Unfortunately we usually don't reach this point at all; we hold for some time and then feel it is a bit uncomfortable and breathe out.

There is this cerebral activity again.

The mind begins to calculate.

You breathe out - which means the prana has not yet been challenged - and therefore this is not pranayama.

Any action that needs justification is already wrong.

18th April Importance of Pranayama

In order to come face to face with that which we call prana, Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras prescribes a very simple technique.

The text says: "Vomit all the air, then hold; exhale completely and then suspend the breath".

When the breath is suspended in this manner, thought comes to a standstill, and a different type of intelligence begins to function.

In that, the true nature of prana is seen.

My Guru Himself was very fond of pranayama.

Even when He could not do the yoga asanas because of so many factors, He continued pranayama.

In the same way, even if his students could not do the asanas, He recommended pranayama because pranayama purifies the nadis directly.

In the Yoga Sutras the benefits of the practice of pranayama are given in one sutra: "When you practise pranayama, the veil that covers the truth (the reality) disappears, so that there is clarity of perception and understanding. The mind and intelligence become clear, and the mind acquires the ability to concentrate easily."

In the Yoga Sutras kevala kumbhaka is exalted.

Kevala kumbhaka is suspension of breathing; that is without breathing in, without breathing out, the breath is suspended.

There is a feeling that the whole breathing apparatus is open.

Perhaps the air circulates without your having to breathe in or out.

The state of the mind is shown to be linked to the breathing.

If you want to diagnose the state of your mind, watch your breathing.

If it is steady and gentle, the mind also has these characteristics.

If the breathing is agitated, the mind also is agitated.

Therefore the Yoga Sutras insist upon the kevala kumbhaka state where the breath is suspended.

19th April Pranayama and Meditation

Medical science wants us to believe that breathing is necessary for drawing air into the lungs and expelling it, and that the oxygen in the air purifies the blood.

But air contains more nitrogen than oxygen.

Moreover, a room with a couple of windows is 'well-ventilated' without the walls having to contract and expand, and such a well-ventilated room is capable of purifying itself!

There is perhaps more to breathing than ventilation.

Just as the eyes are the windows of the soul, breathing is a measure of nervous tension and mental activity.

Breathing, mind and nerves, and also blinking of the eyes are all somehow related to one another.

Agitation in one is accompanied by agitation in the others.

Perhaps 'breathing' was intended more to bring about relaxation of the nerves and calming of the mind than just ventilating the lungs.

This thought deserves serious consideration.

If you are absorbed in deep contemplation, the breath slows down, becomes finer and finer, and 'breath flows within the nostrils' as Gurudev put it.

At one stage, when you are absorbed in the Inner Silence, even a little movement of the breath is felt as a great distraction: it is then that kevala kumbhaka (spontaneous suspension of breath) takes place.

The eyes, even if they are open, have a 'faraway' look in them, and they do not blink.

Breathe in and out through alternate nostrils, and watch the character of the flow; you will know the state of your nerves and mind.

Watch: when there is tension, the eyeballs are agitated and tend to 'go up'.

By deliberately turning then downwards, you can check this, too - perhaps that is the purpose of 'looking at the tip of your nose'.

Practise this and realise the truth.

When the body is OK - nerves calm, mind steady, heart pure - there is clearer vision (clairvoyance).

Love enables you to function on another plane and hence you perceive what others miss.

The whole thing enables you to reach a degree of refinement, of transparency, of sensitivity - when you are sensitive to the sufferings, joys, feelings of others - and sensitive to the truth that others may not possess it and so may behave differently towards you.

20th April Is the Body Mine?

When the attention is turned within, the mind does not wander.

You need a key to enable you to become aware of the mind, of its restlessness.

Look at your own breathing: when you become aware of the breathing, you have performed a trick by which you are able to look within yourself.

For instance, if the word 'stupid' enters your ear, immediately there is a reaction.

That reaction will be seen by you.

You are self-conscious: you are going to worry about what somebody else thinks of you.

Observe the movement of that thought.

An important technique to achieve the mental equilibrium, in what is called meditation, is to become aware of the moment of distraction.

You are aware of your breathing until a distracting thought comes.

You are aware of it. It is only a thought; push it away, then the inner tranquillity is restored again.

Then something else comes along, push it.

But you can't push it.

A thought cannot be pushed out.

It comes in and if you do not pay attention to it, it comes in and floats around.

If this simple trick is mastered then you remain calm, the nerves are calm, the body is calm, then you function beautifully.

But the nature of the world is such that there is no static reality.

The body is not static.

Nothing is static.

Billions of actions are taking place in the body.

If you achieve some kind of equanimity, it is being disturbed.

At least 72 times a minute (pulse rate) your inner peace is disturbed, but that disturbance need not really disturb you if your awareness is constant, so that you can function in this world.

They invented all these techniques, physical postures and breathing exercises to enable you to find out the answer to this famous question - 'Is the body mine, is the mind mine?'

You can say neither this nor that, but you can arrive at your own understanding of what the body is and what the mind is.

21st April The Trick of the Mind

The effect of the physical exercises is not difficult to see and to experience; but when it comes to meditation and satsang, people are disappointed if they do not experience something extraordinary.

The disappointment is greater in satsang because they do not seem to achieve something. Yet, they who have understood the meaning of meditation and satsang realise that they are more vital than the yoga asanas.

They do not look for achievement, but for the source of the desire for achievement.

That desire is the mischief-maker.

Enlightenment is pushed away by the very desire for enlightenment.

Desire for liberation is the perpetuation of bondage.

Shall we drop the desire for liberation, then?

Oh no, for then there is desire for other things.

Such desire is the source of sorrow in this world.

It is here that one sees the genius of yoga.

The yogi sees that desire for pleasure and possession externalises the mind and thus subjects it to the experience of sorrow.

The yogi is asked to abandon such desire and cultivate dispassion, so that his attention may be focussed within to observe the arising of desire itself.

This focussing of attention is meditation and it is constant, though one has to learn it and practise it as an exercise.

The attention thus focussed reveals a wonderful truth.

Desire for the object arose because the object was seen as the source of pleasure.

Surely, the object seemed to be attractive because the ego-sense, 'I', thought so!

In meditation the yogi discovers that he cannot see what the 'I' is.

When the unreality of the 'I' is realised, the object of experience (whether it is called worldly or spiritual) drops away.

One's own normal every-day life becomes enlightened or divine life.

It is arising of this 'I am this body' idea as Truth which is known as asmita in yoga.

This arises in ignorance.

This is ignorance.

There is no difference between what is known as avidya and what is known as asmita.

Avidya is unwisdom, ignorance - and asmita is 'I am this body'.

Avidya is said to be the cause of asmita.

But what is the cause of water vapour? Water.

That is, the cause is always found in the effect.

Once you learn to look at it this way, then you have understood the entire vedanta.

The effect is non-different from the cause.

The effect is the cause.

22nd April Creating the Atmosphere

In the Yoga Sutras we are given three words which together mean meditation - dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

Dharana is focussing the mind.

If we hold a magnifying glass either very close to or very far away from the ground, the glass is transparent.

It is just a glass and the light which passes through that glass is spread out.

In our case the mind functions like that - the rays of the mind are dissipated, the attention is spread out.

But when you hold a magnifying glass in such a way that the light is concentrated and there is a pin point of light on that spot under the glass, we find that there is tremendous light at one point and all around it is dark.

That is what Patanjali refers to as dharana.

The attention is completely and totally focussed upon the meditation subject.

When it comes to the use of a mantra in japa, you make sure that the whole of your attention is listening to this mantra.

The space around is completely 'dark', and the attention is not dissipated, wasted.

We are not unfamiliar with concentration, but in our case the concentration is brought about by external circumstances, attraction and repulsion.

When you see an interesting face you are terribly concentrated. Your concentration is triggered by that external object, the 'switch' is not with you.

The yogi merely wants to make sure that the switch is with him - not because he thinks he can meditate, but because he can avoid the distraction.

I want to have the switch in my hands so that I can avoid distraction.

When I prevent distractions from arising, then I have created the atmosphere or field conducive to meditation.

In that favourable atmosphere it is possible for meditation to happen.

When you have to make a decision:

1. Deflate all values - both the choices are equally valueless!

Then anxiety ceases.

2. Make the mind calm and with that calm mind look within for the decision-maker.

Who is it?

You will see there is some craving that pops up to claim that chair!

Dismiss him.

"I want to decide - not let a craving decide for me."

23rd April Dhyana - Meditation

The yoga text describes dhyana as containing all thoughts within the framework of whatever holds your attention, without allowing them to stray away.

For instance, repeating a mantra in meditation demands all one's concentration upon the mantra, and observing what happens within oneself during the repetition.

This is good exercise.

However, you do not need a special room or church or temple to meditate.

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, should be done in a state of meditation.

The last stage is called samadhi.

This has been wrongly translated as 'trance' and associated with loss of consciousness, strange visions or other extraordinary phenomena.

In search of this people take drugs, smoke marijuana, etc.

According to the yoga text, first there is concentration i.e. the attention is focussed on a particular area.

Then, whatever mental activity goes on, takes place within that area.

Eventually, you become one with that on which the mind is focussed.

The 'I' does not exist; only the 'object' (if it may be called so) of your attention exists.

When this happens, there is samadhi.

The intelligence is steady and tranquil - which is what samadhi implies.

When you rise from your meditation seat and engage yourself in worldly activity, let this inner feeling continue.

Practise meditation in this way every morning, without forgetting that it is only 'a practice' - not the real thing!

Real meditation is to do everything throughout the day in a state of meditation, with your whole being harmonised and focussed upon whatever you are doing from moment to moment.

Please remember that this concentration, this meditation, this samadhi are life itself and not a 'part' of life.

Perhaps 'life' is part of this samadhi!

Spiritualization of relationship is not a psychological quality; and it is not the opposite of physical togetherness which is certainly necessary for certain forms of communication.

Even while there is this physical togetherness, it is the spirit that counts: one cannot imagine that one has achieved the spiritualization, one can only ensure that the relationship is not dependent upon the physical or the material.

That is spiritualization.

24th April Touching the Infinite

Meditation cannot enter into me, I must enter into meditation.

The whole of my mind, the whole of my self, everything, must enter into meditation, as if 'I' does not exist.

That is when 'samadhi' happens.

Samadhi is real meditation; or you can say that all the three - concentration, meditation and samadhi - combined is meditation.

One cannot really say when concentration ends and meditation begins or when meditation ends and samadhi begins.

It is very much like morning and evening - you cannot say exactly at this point day-time ended and night-time started.

One flows into the other, and therefore the three are regarded as one unit.

When you are in deep meditation you are touching the infinite.

Meditation will certainly happen if the ground is ready and the distractions do not arise.

That is, in the initial stages we are battling with these distractions all the time.

At one point we realise that the battle itself keeps the distractions going.

Then we abandon our attention to these distractions and focus all our attention upon the mantra or the object of meditation.

That's all we can do.

The rest of it has to happen by God's Grace.

Once this has happened, it is possible that this spirit of meditation continues throughout the day.

Whilst you were sitting and practising this as an exercise, the mantra or the form of God was the object of meditation.

As you come out of your meditation room, whatever you do at the moment becomes the object of your meditation.

So meditation is not to be confined to a certain part of the day nor to a certain part of the house.

That is where I learn the simple art - how to live totally.

And that spirit continues throughout the day.

The attention may shift from one object to another, but every time there is total attention to that single thing.

The whole being is harmonised and focussed upon that one object.

Then one leads a divine life.

The hand that feeds the heart is full of love, and if food is served with love to you, then God, who is immanent, surrounds you with His presence.

25th April Self Discovery - The Magic Of Yoga

Please try this: sit and listen to the breathing.

You can even produce a little bit of sound in order to turn the mind within.

Once that is done, keep repeating the mantra, linking it with the breath.

Then starts the most important part of meditation.

You can take up any thread of enquiry that you like. e.g.

'Where does this sound come from?'

'Who is sitting in my body repeating this mantra?'

'Where is it done?'

But that enquiry must be full-blooded, not dull and drowsy.

In meditation the mind turns to look within without any effort - the less effort the better - but without going to sleep.

One has to be tremendously alert - like walking on a precipice.

Buddha gave this hint: "Live in this world as though you are living with a cobra in the room."

Suppose you go back to your room, tired, you want to lie down and sleep, you hear a noise, switch the light on, and see a cobra sitting right on the doorstep.

What would you do?

You would sit there one hundred percent awake, all sleep gone! No-one need teach you concentration at that time, and meditation will come by itself.

The cobra at that time is truly like a mantra, your whole mind is nothing but a cobra.

You would not be able to think of anything else!

That is called meditation - when your whole being is filled with one object.

You must be keenly interested in discovering this truth.

Otherwise the attention will be easily distracted.

While you are repeating this mantra you probably hear an external sound.

It seems as though all these things are happening remotely, you are not involved and so you are quite happy.

Then the sound of a lawnmower becomes insistent, setting, in motion a trend of thought.

After about 10 minutes of drifting away you suddenly 'wake up'.

How and why did that happen?

In the beginning it is a very interesting exercise, if you can treat it so, to watch and discover the distinction between a thought that is not of great interest to you, and another thought which seems to fly away with you.

If you are watchful, vigilant, then you are able to avoid either of these taking you away.

This again, needs a lot of diligent, vigilant practice.

It is not a great miracle or magic - there are no miracles or magic in yoga.

Self-discovery is the greatest and the only magic in yoga.

26th April Raja yoga

There is another aspect of my personality, and that is the spiritual.

I am practising yoga, I am worshipping God, I am loving all, I am serving all; but I have still not understood who this 'I' is.

I have still not actually discovered that there is this Divine Presence in me, though I accepted it in the beginning as a doctrine, as an axiom from a teacher, from someone who knows.

In order to discover this inner reality or truth they evolved what is known as raja yoga or the meditation techniques.

Through deep meditation we enter into the innermost self to discover that something which is beyond the 'me', beyond the egosense.

It is at the level of this ego-sense that there is a thought that 'I am different from you'.

However much I struggle with what is called karma yoga, or bhakti yoga, I am still only speculating or intellectually rationalising that you and I are one.

I have not actually experienced that.

That experience is possible only if I am able to transcend the ego-sense and get into my innermost self to see there that this is the truth.

If that is the truth there, then the same truth exists in you.

This transcendence of the ego is the crux of the whole yogic process.

If that has not been achieved, nothing has been achieved.

All the rest is exercise.

So they evolved this beautiful system called raja yoga which blended with all the others.

I cannot meditate unless I love God.

I cannot love God, I cannot love you unless my heart has been purified and I have learnt to serve all of you in the faith that you and I are one in God.

That faith which enabled me to serve you now leads me deeper within myself into the innermost recesses of my being, to discover the faith as truth, as reality.

That is raja yoga.

Why do we register only unpleasant experiences in our mind and remember them?

Why not pleasant memories of our relationships with others?

It is possible - I remember only Sanskrit and not geometry.

Meditation enables you to look within and see the memory mechanism.

27th April Divine Will versus Self-effort

A correspondent has written about reconciling 'choice', 'self-effort' and 'God's Will'.

This difficulty arises because we have an image called God's Will.

How do we know what God's will is if we do not know Him?

Funnily, if we enquire 'Where does this image of God's Will arise?', we shall discover that obviously it is in the self, in the 'me'.

And where do the concepts of choice and self-effort arise?

Also in the 'me'.

Thus they are reconciled.

But seriously, "I do not know what God's Will is.

But I am aware that I have a choice in almost every situation and I am aware that that choice is put into effect by self-effort."

Self-effort being action, where does action arise?

Choice being an activity of the mind, where is the mind?

When we look into all this, we discover that the 'mind' thinks it has a choice and it thinks, too, that it can do and not do.

The mind is a shadow cast on the wall on account of the play of 'light and a substance' - the light being God and the substance being His energy (Shakti), together forming Chit-Shakti.

While everything in the universe takes place on account of the play of the Chit-Shakti, the mind merely thinks 'I am the doer', 'I make the choice', and so on.

If all that is only intellectually clear, there is the danger of the mind itself posing to be enlightened and leading us astray into greater darkness.

But if the truth is realised, the shadow (the mind) vanishes.

This is total self-surrender to the Divine Will: from there on there is no choice.

If there is self-effort it is seen as such only by the observers; for 'I' does not exist and all actions proceed from God (Chit-Shakti).

There is no 'I' even to question, "If all is done according to His Will, what is the point of self-effort?"

The tree is in the seed!

Take the case of the microfilm.

When light passes through it and is projected on a screen, the image grows larger and larger the farther the screen is from the projector.

Everything is in the seed - the light of consciousness passes through it.

Mind creates space-time and then thinks 'it' is growing!

28th April Awakening of Intelligence

'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.'

But how does one get to the knocker?

The first requisite is a resolute determination not to blame others or oneself for the problems that plague the ignorant life.

This fault-finding prevents fact-finding enquiry.

Secondly, any cosmetic remedial measure must be seen to be worse than useless.

Killing pain is immobilizing the warning system. A danger.

Escape from sorrow leads to the tragedy of drug-addiction and moral and spiritual death.

Sorrow points to the ego: what hurts and is hurt is the ego.

In this sense it is noble.

But if you regard sorrow as a trap and run away from it, you will walk into a worse trap.

When all life is seen as an inescapable trap, and the mind sees no sense in struggling, it (the mind) is still.

This stillness is not of death, nor of inertia or unawareness.

It is undivided awareness in which there is no movement of either acceptance or rejection, and neither the euphoria of imagined transcendence nor the depression of doom.

When the mind is still, it is 'no-mind'.

Dehydrated water is no water.

Stillness itself is the antidote to the ills that a restless mind creates.

Muddy water, if left alone, clears up.

There arises clarity.

It is possible to look within with intense clarity.

This is the awakening of intelligence.

It is this awakened intelligence alone that is capable of asking the right questions in the right manner and finding the right answers.

The mind does not know how to ask, what to ask and whom to ask!

It generally raises some silly questions, provides comforting answers and feels quite satisfied - all this is waste of time and futile.

The awakened intelligence realises that sorrow is the fact of all unexamined life, and does not seek a remedy but endeavours to understand it by proper investigation.

God is very easy to realise, but first make your mind still, and sit still.

That is much more difficult!

29th April Wake Up and See What is Real

There is a trick in logic which is called the circular argument or begging the question. One such is the statement, "Gods dwell in heaven and demons dwell in hell."

Why is it heaven?

Because Gods dwell there.

Why are they Gods?

Because They dwell in heaven.

Why is it hell?

Because demons dwell there.

Why are they demons?

Because they live in hell.

A neat circular argument, unbeatable.

I am not saying there are no demons or Gods.

I am not saying there is no hell or heaven.

Maybe all these things exist.

But our problem is a very simple one.

We are living a life of frustration brought about by just this one word: 'mine'.

Not whether there is hell or heaven, nor whether there are gods or demons, nor whether you and I are heading towards heaven or hell.

Our present problem is whether it is possible for us here and now to live without being enslaved by this sense of possession.

We are not to abandon something which is real - such a renunciation is very difficult.

We are asked to investigate, to see if 'I' is real.

I cannot say "I don't exist".

Therefore, to abandon the self is impossible.

We are not asked to do that.

The master asks "Is 'mine' also real?"

Have you investigated it, looked into it?

If you are quite certain, after investigation, that what you think you possess you do possess, then don't abandon it.

That is called realisation, whether Self-realisation or God-realisation.

See what is real and in the process of this investigation what is not real just drops away.

Where do we start, especially in this 'mine'?

It really is a mine.

If you put your foot down it explodes to the right, to the left and in the centre.

The worst of all the explosions is the resistance to investigation.

We are put to sleep and we are not allowed to wake up and look.

Sleep, not in the physical sense - that may be necessary for you and me - but sleep in the deeper, spiritual sense.

In part of that sleep are dreams and that's what's going on.

In that dream which you call the world, these relationships exist: "I am yours, you are mine".

When you wake up the whole thing is gone, because it wasn't there in the first place.

When we are caught up in this long spiritual sleep, how do we wake ourselves up?

We need Grace.

Whatever be the name you give to it, we need divine intervention in order to wake up from this spiritual sleep.

30th April Seeking the Source of Wisdom

What is the source of wisdom?

Jesus said: "The kingdom of God is within you," but that was Jesus' realisation, not yours. It is not enough simply to believe this.

'Tat tvam asi' (that thou art) is the Guru's realisation, not yours.

The Master's realisation must become your realisation, otherwise it is not real.

Until that time the sources of wisdom are the scriptures and the guru.

In the Gita, Krishna says: "Therefore the scripture is your authority."

We can possibly depend on the scripture alone, but that is not easy.

You read the scripture and your own mind interprets it.

Shankaracarya in Viveka Cudamani says that for the wise and for the idiot scriptures are of no use.

The Bhagavad Gita says that truth can be known if you resort to a Guru.

What does the Guru do to you?

He teaches you, converses with you.

So, the scripture is a visual source and the teacher is an audiovisual source.

There is something more: non-verbal communication.

Together all these form our sources of wisdom

Since we cannot draw upon the source of wisdom within ourselves, we look outside.

Who is it that looks outside for wisdom?

Me! 'I' want wisdom.

What is the nature of that 'me'?

Who is I?

What is seeking that wisdom?

The receptacle of the inspiration for the arousal of this inner wisdom is what matters most. It should be uncluttered and uncoloured.

That is why the great masters insist that the preparation for Self-realisation is more difficult and more important than Self-realisation itself!

Hence Krishna insists: 'Yoga should be practised for self-purification - atma suddhaye.'

Meditation and yoga practice purify the inner receptacle so that the inspiration is undistorted.

The inner receptacle is called buddhi, awakened intelligence.

It is not wisdom itself, it is not yet capable of rising to those heights where you see just oneness alone in all diversity.

That is wisdom or jnana, which is practically non-different from the awakened intelligence - but one step ahead, perhaps.

Mind is the shadow of the Self.

Mind seeks the bliss of the Self, but ignorantly associates pleasure with bliss.

If you alertly watch the mind when it enjoys pleasure, you can discover bliss - but hope you will not be distracted by the pleasure!

1st May Sadhana

Sadhana means any practice, any effort directed towards an achievement.

Whatever you do to reach your goal is sadhana.

The goal itself is called siddhi, or perfection.

Perfection cannot be defined.

As soon as it is defined, confined, it is no longer perfection.

Mental and physical perfection are unknown to us, and who can lay down adequate criteria to identify them?

Even what we would consider perfection for one stage of our life would not apply to another period of development, or type of person.

But we can at least, to some extent, be aware of what imperfection may be.

Physically you can see that while you might not consider yourself to be in 'perfect' shape, (whatever that would imply) you are, however, free from obvious defect.

The body functions as it should.

It seems that the senses and the limbs and organs behave as God meant them to.

The fact that you cannot do certain things like flying, merely means that that perfection belongs to birds and not to man!

Mentally you regard your mind as free from obvious imperfections, when you see that there is no dullness, no constant turmoil and loss of equilibrium, and so on.

You can also establish on looking deeper, that the imperfection of psychiatric disturbance, psychological complex, neurosis etc. is absent.

That much you can ascertain.

Whatever practice you undertake to reach this state of total absence of imperfection, is sadhana.

One of the spiritual practices which Swami Sivananda emphasised most was japa.

In japa, one repeats a mantra (a short formula).

The mantra often incorporates the Name of God.

Repetition of a mantra quietens the mind and its turbulence.

One must beware of dulling the mind through mechanical repetition, but it may be possible that mantra makes the mind tranquil enough for you to go deep and enquire where the sound comes from - 'Who is the 'I' repeating it?' - thus getting to the source of the Inner Being.

Japa should not be an isolated practice limited to short periods morning and evening.

If it is to be spiritually beneficent, it must affect every aspect of your personality, your life.

As you link japa with breathing in and out, you might discover that the respiration becomes regular, naturally controlled.

Without any need (or possibility) for you to control it.

It simply happens!

Thus the simple sadhana of japa can bring about mental and bodily health as well as spiritual understanding.

2nd May Japa and Mantra

Japa is silently repeating a mantra.

What does the word 'mantra' mean?

The definition is given: mananat trayate iti mantrah

The word 'mananat' is difficult to translate.

It is mentation which is not thinking about it, but is it.

For example, if you take OM for your mantra, you don't think of what all the philosophers have said about OM, but your thinking becomes OM.

Mentation (manana) is to saturate the mind with it, to let the mind be it.

Mantra is that which, when this happens, redeems (trayate) you.

If you can sit here, forgetting everything else, and let the mind become completely saturated with the mantra, then you are saved from all problems.

It's as simple as that!

But we don't do it.

We doubt: "Is this going to solve all my problems and business worries?"

That doubt is the problem.

We value only treatment which is complicated and difficult.

Our mind is so complicated that it rebels against anything simple.

I have a doctor friend who has many wealthy patients who are often on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

He is very sympathetic, and he realises that although there is nothing wrong with them, they feel sick.

He gives them an injection of double-distilled water with great care and attention, and the miracle of it is, it works!

If he told them that there was nothing wrong with them, it wouldn't work, because it is too simple.

We feel that all solutions must be complicated, because our life is so complicated.

Japa is an extremely simple solution to our problems.

This is what my Master Swami Sivananda prescribed for thousands of people with problems.

Sit down, let the whole mind be saturated with a mantra.

Then the problem that is outside you may remain, but you are not involved in the problem, you do not create or complicate the problem.

By saturating the mind with the mantra you are strengthening your inner spiritual resources, so that when you get up from the japa, the problem is dissolved.

3rd May Mantra Medicine

A mantra is a formula.

It is often a single word or syllable (sometimes longer) which, when it saturates the mind, immediately relieves one of all problems.

It is so simple.

It is good to keep the mantra secret, because if you tell someone what your mantra is they may say, "Oh, mine is superior to yours".

Then, into this extremely simple saving factor in your spiritual life, you deliberately and foolishly introduce complications.

You become worried, doubtful; doubt destroys the efficacy of the japa.

There are many different mantras.

OM is a mantra in itself.

SOHAM and OM NAMAH SHIVAYA are mantras.

Among early Christians, KYRIE ELEISON and CHRISTE ELEISON were used as 'mantras' or the 'prayer of the heart' as they were called.

(These are mentioned in the Philokalia and its companion volume The Way of a Pilgrim.)

The Jewish mystics and also the Sufis have their own mantras.

The yogis say that SOHAM is a mantra which all of us are already repeating involuntarily.

If you close your eyes and inhale and exhale deeply and listen to the breathing, the inhalation sounds SO and the exhalation sounds HAM (or the other way round).

This they call ajapa (no-japa) mantra - you don't have to repeat it, it is repeating by itself.

Like your circulation system, it goes on if you wish it to or not.

They even say that God is so merciful, that, knowing that you would not do it, He made the breath do this japa!

The meaning is also very sublime.

SOHAM means 'That I am'.

'That I am' is also a biblical formula - Moses is said to have heard 'I am That I am' on Mount Sinai when he asked God 'Who are You?'

It does not mean that this Swami Venkatesananda (or whoever it is) is God.

No, what you call 'I' is a misnomer - He is the reality, He is the truth.

When you stand facing the sun, behind you is a shadow.

Can you say that you and the shadow are the same? Absurd!

You are the only truth, the only reality, the shadow is non-existent as an entity.

It is not there at all, it is only an appearance.

The 'I', like the shadow, is merely an appearance.

SOHAM - He is the reality, He alone is, God alone is.

4th May Soham - That I Am

You can use the mantra SOHAM, ('That I am') in conjunction with a personal deity if you have one, or without if you don't.

If you have a personal idea of Christ, Buddha or whatever, then sit and feel „He is the reality”.

Not that "I am Christ" (that is absurd) but that "He is the sole reality in me".

If that is true - then who has all the worry? He does!

If God is the sole reality in 'me', then the problems also belong to Him!

When this terrible ego - 'I', 'Me', - clears away, about ninety-eight percent of the problem is gone, because ninety-eight percent of the problem was created by the ego.

For instance, when there is a headache, do you know what makes it worse?

The question that arises within you "Why me?" ("Why should this headache come to me?")

Have you asked yourself: "Good heavens, why not me!"

It is 'Why me?' which resists the headache and makes it worse.

The problems which worry us so much in our life are common to nearly everybody.

Millions have domestic problems and financial worries.

Ninety-eight percent of the problem is the egotistic question "Why me?"

Consider, "Why not me? Am I something special that everybody else in the world may suffer, but not me?"

This consideration gets rid of the egotistic approach.

Any solution, whether it is called japa, repeating a mantra, prayer or meditating - whatever be the solution - if it takes the ego aside it solves ninety-eight percent of the problem.

The two percent which will still be there will be so silly that you wouldn't want to mention it to anybody!

It is when the 'me' is so big that you go around grunting and griping, telling the whole neighbourhood about it. It is that that creates the headache.

However this ego is but a shadow; hence the creation is not real.

Therefore, the solution is simple. Let the whole mind be saturated with this mantra. The mantra says "Not I, but He is the reality." It is in this manner that the mantra has a redeeming feature.

5th May Mantra japa I

When a disciple or seeker approaches a spiritual master and asks a question, whatever the latter says in reply is mantra.

It may be a word or a phrase - it can be any language, as all sound is sound!

There are Jewish, Muslim and Christian mantras, as well as Sanskrit.

It can merely be some wholesome advice, counsel, or instruction, with the help of which the seeker is 'saved'.

Literally translated, 'mantra' means 'that which saves, redeems and protects'.

As repetition of a mantra involves concentration, it certainly saves one from mind-wandering and inner problems.

It saves one from oneself.

There is a story of a man who suffered from an argumentative mind, full of doubts.

He was saved from this by his Guru merely shouting at him once: "Shut up!"

This switched off the chattering mind and he became a great sage.

The Guru may suggest that you take the all-inclusive cosmic sound 'OM' and make it your bow, and fixing the arrow of yourself to it, with one-pointedness, shoot yourself into the target which is God: 'Become one with God'.

He may tell you to repeat 'OM' constantly - hearing 'OM' in the sound of the wind, a plane, the breath - everywhere.

The prayer 'mantra mulam guror vakyam' means that the guru's word itself is taken as a mantra.

If what the guru says is reflected by the mind in such a way that the mind is saturated with it, one is liberated.

There is a Sanskrit definition of a mantra with the notion of 'protect'.

When does the mantra protect?

When there is 'mananat'.

This word cannot be translated, but the English word 'reflection' could be used here.

It isn't by mere thought or contemplation, but only if the mind reflects the mantra is it saturated with it, not by mere thought or contemplation.

It is only the mind which is saturated with the mantra that is protected by it.

When the mind reflects the mantra so effectively that it is saturated with it, that mind becomes the mantra.

Then it protects.

The mind, usually unsteady and impure, is now steady and pure.

Enlightenment comes from inner delight.

6th May Mantra japa II

Japa is the process by which the mind becomes saturated with the repetition of the mantra. This promotes concentration of the mind.

Japa is often used in pranayama practice, and Swami Sivananda recommended its association with yoga asanas.

You might object that this would distract you from concentrating on the yoga postures.

But while the mind is supposed to observe the body during each posture, if you watch carefully, you find that you are thinking of something else.

Only the yogi observes with the mind absolutely still, totally absorbed in the observation - that itself is the mantra.

The Master advises us to think only of the mantra instead of getting lost in silly thoughts, letting the mind wander here and there, thinking of a million things.

During any activity whatsoever, the conscious mind can be occupied with the repetition of the mantra.

One can learn to say the mantra, on waking, associating it with the breath.

Synchronised with the respiration, japa becomes continuous - almost a reflex action.

Mantra-repetition between each of the daily tasks prevents nervous, psychological and physical tension.

Some people believe that the very vibrations of a mantra have a beneficial effect and that sincere invocation of God through japa may make Him appear!

The mantra may be Sanskrit or any other language.

The important thing seems to be that the formula used should be fairly short.

The early Christian Fathers used KYRIE ELEISON, CHRISTE ELEISON - Greek for 'Lord have mercy upon me, Christ have mercy upon me'.

It was called the 'prayer of the heart'.

Swami Sivananda used to recommend to Christians the shorter form of OM JESUS.

A shorter mantra promotes intense concentration, but is only of use when the mind is close to concentration.

If concentration itself is difficult, a long mantra is better as the mind is kept busy working it out.

With a short mantra the attention may more easily wander away.

The ideal however is a short mantra.

The yogis suggest three different ways of japa:

- (1) to say the mantra fairly loud,
- (2) to move the lips without much of a sound, and
- (3) repeat it mentally.

We are looking for love instead of loving - that is the problem!

7th May From japa to God-realisation

There are no Hindu, Christian, Buddhist or Moslem mantras. A mantra is a mantra: God is involved in this mantra, but it is not a Christian God or a Hindu God.

God is an unknown quantity, unknown but not unknowable.

God is not a transferable or marketable commodity.

God is an inner reality, the essence of your being which each one has to discover.

Is your God the same as someone else's God?

How do you know what his God is?

So even here there is no discussion and no argument.

What God, the Truth or Reality means to you alone is real to you.

Yoga is the realising of this God within.

Therefore the same mantra which helps us in our life, which redeems us and saves us from our own little problems, also goes to the root of all problems - the ego ('me') - by enabling us to discover this inner reality.

That is done when the only thing that stands between 'me' and God is removed.

What is that?

If God is omnipresent (inside, outside, everywhere) what is it that stands between that omnipresent reality and 'me'? ME.

As soon as you remove that 'me' (ego), you realise that the omnipresent reality alone exists. So yoga, by discovering the illusory nature of this ego, brings the reality of God into sharp focus.

When you sit and repeat the mantra mentally you can easily learn to watch the manner in which the thought rises and falls.

It does need a little training.

First you can whisper the sound.

In this, the repetition of the mantra is confined to exhalation.

When your mind is reasonably steady, stop this whispering and instead repeat the mantra mentally, synchronising it with the breathing, repeating it while inhaling and exhaling.

If you listen to this with all your attention focussed on this inner sound of the mantra, you will notice that the sound is clear and you are yet able to hear other sounds - it feels like a fish nibbling at your toes when you stand in water!

These sounds are not strong enough to take your attention completely away, they are peripheral.

The attention grows stronger.

When you are confident that you have the strength, if you concentrate on one thought (which in the beginning is the mantra itself), you will come to the root of the mind.

When that happens then, by God's Grace, one day you will discover that even what you thought was 'I' was nothing more than a thought.

When that thought is disposed of, the inner reality of God shines.

8th May Word and Deed

A close scrutiny of Swami Sivananda's teachings should convince an intelligent person that they are born of Swamiji's direct experience.

Religion is not found in text-books and its true spirit cannot be imbibed from teachers, however learned - though all these help us understand religion.

Swami Sivananda used to say that life is a great school and pain is a great teacher.

He Himself was always quick to learn in that school.

Once learnt, the lesson was never forgotten.

His life had its fountain source in these experiences - physical, social and spiritual.

To give one illustration: As a young doctor He had travelled to Malaya, His orthodox brahmin upbringing imposed severe restrictions on His eating habits so that he starved during the voyage; He had wandered into a city (His destination) and was near collapse when He reached a temple and found 'suitable' food.

Out of this experience emerged His later 'flexible orthodox', His understanding of others in similar straits, and most important of all, His eagerness to rush to the aid of anyone in distress.

Have we not been in similar situations?

Do we learn?

Do these experiences touch our hearts, melt our hearts?

For only if they do is the spirit of religion awakened in us to become the living motive-force of our daily lives.

Alas, sometimes the perverted intellect invents distorted logic which hardens our hearts.

We 'learn' from our sorrow that we should be more selfish and more vicious.

We feel, "If only I am more aggressive and demand and get what I want, I shall never suffer."

And the welfare of others is seen to be a threat to our own!

This indeed is the distinction between the divine and the diabolical: their paths are different and hence their very outlook on life is entirely different.

This fact reveals a vicious circle.

The same experiences in life make the divine more divine and the vicious even more vicious.

How is this downward trend of the vicious to be arrested?

For that surely is what every intelligent person wishes an every saint works for.

The ideal is not realised in a day. No ideal is.

Sincere application is the best we can hope for, and even that is rare in the world.

9th May Control Of Mind

There are those who declare that mantras have some special psychic benefits, some magical properties and so on.

All this may be correct.

But we are approaching it purely from the spiritual point of view.

There are others who are definite that each mantra is dedicated to a particular form of God, so that if you repeat a certain mantra you must visualise a certain form.

Probably they are right.

But then, in a sanskrit scriptural text called the Bhagavatam (which resembles the Bible very closely) the statement occurs again and again, "All these spiritual practices have one end in view, and that is to get complete control of the mind".

All yogis, whatever their main preoccupation, realise that it is the mind which creates problems in our life - in our relationships first and foremost.

What is the difference between you and me?

If there is a real difference, why is it there?

Because you think there is a difference.

After thinking that there is a difference you go round looking for a difference.

Naturally you will find it because you create it!

It is the mind that creates all these differences and the differences exist in the mind.

Whether you repeat a mantra or whether you sit and meditate according to the hatha yoga method, according to your choice, the ultimate aim and goal of all yoga or spiritual practice is control of the mind - control not in the sense "I can stop, start or go", not in the sense that "I can sit here and make myself think what I want to think," but control in the sense of a complete understanding of the mind.

What happens (in the family, in society, in the world) is insignificant, for the simple reason that all the people involved in all these endless human conflicts would at best be memories in a few years time.

But what happens within oneself is of supreme importance.

When all those with whom I come into contact and conflict have passed away, I still have to live with me.

Yet, again, it is when I meet the other person that the 'I' becomes clear!

Therefore the family contacts and conflicts are inevitable: but their true purpose is to enable you to discover yourself.

In any conflict, let the initiative or the first move come from the other person.

In love, let the move always come from you!

10th May Om Means Yes!

A Harley Street psychologist once delivered a series of lectures at the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, and declared that almost all illnesses were psychosomatic and arose from too free and frequent use of the word 'no' instead of 'yes'.

OM primarily means 'yes' (vide Taittiriya Upanishad), the same as 'aam' in Tamil.

Patanjali in the yoga Sutras declares that OM is a verbal indicator of the divine.

Yes it is!

Gurudev Swami Sivananda was all 'yes' - rarely he said 'no'.

Even when He might have felt that the other person was not quite right, he would seem to concede the point, but point out (perhaps later) the flaws in the view.

"Yes, you are right!" wins your heart, and then it is easier for you to realise that a change is indicated.

God is indicated by OM.

When this is repeated mentally, you wonder what 'mentally' means.

When, with the mind concentrated, you ask where the sound arises and what it is, the non-verbal knowledge arises that it is the mind; at the same moment the ego which co-exists with the object of thought is also absorbed in the non-verbal realisation of OM.

This is surrender.

When this surrender happens, the ego with all its desires, fears and hopes drops away.

In all our sadhana, japa (repetition of mantra or name of God) plays a vital role.

It is a solution to all our problems!

For all our problems are created by the impure mind; and repetition of the mantra is the best purifier of the mind and tranquilliser too.

We have such a restless spirit in us.

It is the impure mind.

If we do not keep it busy with some good activity continuously, it will create impure desires and thoughts and destroy us.

The best way to keep it constantly busy, without obstructing our daily work, is japa of God's Name.

As soon as we get up from the bed in the morning we should start repeating the mantra and continue for at least half an hour.

Then, during the day, every hour or so, we should close our eyes for just a few seconds, and repeat the mantra a few times.

In this way we shall soon be able to create the habit and ultimately, along with our daily activities, the mind will go on repeating the mantra as a sort of undercurrent.

Even during sleep the mind will involuntarily go on repeating the mantra.

This is a great purifier of the mind; and it will also steady the mind and enable us to enjoy great peace and happiness.

Before going to bed we should repeat the mantra for half an hour.

Then we shall sleep soundly and well.

The current will be kept up during sleep also.

11th May To Become One

It is indeed a wonder that mental japa (repetition of a mantra) is inwardly audible. You have been told by yogis of the anahata sounds and many other psychic phenomena, so that you miss the extremely simple truth that when you do mental japa there is anahata (produced not by one object beating another) sound.

But greater is the wonder when you ask: "Who utters the mantra and who listens?" It is you!

You utter the mantra and you listen.

You are the sound and you are the ear.

Isn't that marvellous?

If you realise this, you have already derived immense benefit from the japa.

This is what is happening to you in your every-day life.

You do not love your friend, because you do not even know who or what he is!

You only know what you think he is, and you only love that image you have formed of him in your own mind. You, the love and the image are all you yourself!

The subject is the object and the object is the subject.

When you observe someone or something, you are only observing the image that the various stimuli produced by that someone or something in yourself.

You observe - and the object so observed is also within you, part of you - yourself.

This is the basis of our judgement of 'others': glorifying them, condemning them, criticising them, praising them, admiring them, loving them or hating them.

The judge and the convict are one, the judge is the convict!

When this is seen, judgement drops and peace prevails in our life.

Even in our own little attempts at concentration and meditation the disturbing element is not outside us, but within us - us!

The dog barks outside, sure enough.

But the 'barking' is heard, registered inside.

'You' are disturbed by this 'barking' that takes place in your own head, brain or mind.

You resist this barking - you have divided yourself into the 'meditator' and the 'hearer of the barking' and so get frustrated.

The two are one: in oneness there is no disturbance.

Our thoughts, words and deeds spring from the single personality.

Our thinking, feeling and willing form part of a single personality.

Their distinction is arbitrary though it helps psychological studies of character.

When the illusion of their separateness is dispersed, health and peace are restored to body and mind.

12th May The First and Fundamental Yoga

Sit completely relaxed.

Watch where the sound of the mantra happens and where you are repeating the sound, where you are listening to the sound.

Where does the repetition take place and where does the hearing take place?

You may be surprised to find that every time you look at it something changes.

Then you discover what the real meaning of the mantra is.

Whatever be the mantra, it does not matter.

When it comes to the real meaning of the mantra, you yourself realise that all mantras mean exactly the same thing, because the real meaning is that the mantra is the 'mind-stuff!'

That word is not the meaning!

It is a misleading description because now you are going to think it is the mind that is repeating the mantra. No!

The mantra can be repeated even during sleep when obviously the best part of the mind is asleep.

So let us begin with the feeling that I do not know what the mantra is; what the mantra means, what the sound is made of, or where it is produced.

Now I am enquiring into the whole phenomenon.

This is one of the most effective forms of meditation.

And when one does this consciously, seriously, then sooner or later you come face to face with your mind and you no longer think you know what thought is, but you see what thought is.

This is something very difficult to explain.

You see what thought is and how it arises.

You see what a feeling is and how it manifests itself.

You see what an emotion is and you see it rising.

You must see, not only with your eyes, but you must sense it first.

If it is something valuable you can keep it.

That is when you are master of the feeling, and if you want to throw it away, you can throw it away.

Then you can live here or in the fish-market.

This may not be Self-realisation, but this is, according to Swami Sivananda, the first and fundamental yoga.

All the rest of the yoga practices He used to describe are auxiliaries to it, strengthening it, facilitating it.

But this was the centre-piece He taught us.

The first thing He did when you became His disciple was to give you a mantra and that mantra itself would lead you to meditation.

But not mechanically.

You had to make your own effort to get there, or at least to show a serious and curious interest in the mantra.

Then you became saturated with the mantra.

Right from now till the consummation of yoga practice, the mantra will keep you company.

Here are some hints which may be of some practical use to those of you who wish to take meditation a bit more seriously.

1. Sit with your body erect.

Become aware of the body, the posture, its contact-points.

This will stop dissipation of attention.

Then watch the breathing, listen to the breath (You must follow this very carefully otherwise you will miss it).

As you listen within yourself you hear SO on inhalation and HAM on exhalation (or the other way round).

You hear the sound SOHAM clearly.

Can you also find out where this sound arises?

When you talk the sound comes from the throat.

Can you similarly locate from where the sound of SOHAM comes when your vocal cords are not functioning?

You still hear this SOHAM.

What produces this sound and where is it located?

If you can closely watch and tune in to that sound, then it is possible to be totally absorbed in it.

In the process of trying to locate it clearly you will discover that your mind is calming down, slowing down, and becoming introverted.

2. You hear the sound of SOHAM within you.

Are you saying it or are you listening to it?

For instance, when you are speaking you are also listening to it, because the sound waves come out of the mouth and enter into the ears.

But while repeating the mantra, you are not uttering a word, yet you can hear the sound of SOHAM.

Are you saying that sound or are you listening to it?

In other words, there seem to be two distinct personalities or entities within you - one that says SOHAM, and the other that listens to SOHAM.

Are you this one, or that one?

It is not an intellectual question and there are no intellectual answers.

You are asking for a direct perception, not a verbalisation or verbal answer at all.

3. As you go on asking this question, suddenly a question pops up, "Maybe I am neither of these".

There seems to be one that says the mantra, another that listens to it and there is a third who asks this question and is aware of the two!

It is at this point that we get into the vital aspect of yoga.

That is, the enquiry: "Who am I, what is 'I'?"

It is introduced in such a subtle way that eventually you almost stumble into the truth.

In that deep enquiry lies the secret of the use of the mantra.

14th May Mantra

Conventionally, a mantra is a short formula, which, when repeated again and again, promotes concentration of the mind.

This process is called japa.

A shorter mantra promotes intense concentration.

Naturally, it is of use only when the mind is close to concentration.

If you use a longer mantra, then the mind is busy working out the mantra.

Supposing the mantra is short (and that is the ideal), how does one use it?

If your mind is restless, then it is possible to shout the mantra and deliberately make it fast.

In other words you are 'hitting' the concentration.

Loud repetition is very beautiful.

When the mind is caught in this rhythm and this sound, then it is time to glide gently into the next method.

You stop the sound now but make the lip movement.

In the third method, even the lip movement stops and you are repeating the mantra mentally.

"Am I repeating the mantra mentally or not?"

When you ask yourself this question, the mind becomes concentrated, the attention becomes powerfully focussed on itself.

For a few moments I am repeating the mantra, concentrating on the mantra, and for a few moments I am thinking of something else; the attention goes away.

From there on it is an unending effort, till one learns the art of dropping all effort.

The effort must not be abandoned prematurely because if you do so, then the fun continues, and you accept distractions as normal.

We want to find out if it is possible for the mind to be engaged in just this one work of repeating the mantra.

No distraction can really distract you unless you want to be distracted; so don't blame distractions.

You go on observing the mantra sound and the image it evokes within, and then a question arises: "What is this mantra sound and what is this inner figure made of? They are both experienced in me."

When this question arises seriously, the mind is saturated with the mantra and with this figure.

You suddenly learn that this is mind.

Whatever this mantra was made of, whatever this figure is made of, that is the mind.

This must be discovered, not thought of, so that this knowledge arises within yourself without your thinking of it.

When the answer arises within you there is a thrill of joy and there is stillness.

15th May Spirit of Curiosity and Wonder

The only difficulty in connection with the practice of mantra repetition is dullness.

It is very easy to go to sleep when you are doing something monotonous.

(In case you have friends who have difficulty in going to sleep, tell them this!)

When you repeat a mantra, even if you roll the beads of a mala, you can become very drowsy.

To the student of yoga this is a bugbear, because he doesn't want to go to sleep, he wants to keep awake and remain intensely alert.

It's very difficult to remain alert while doing japa.

It looks as though the mind does not want to reveal its secret, it does not want to be controlled, and it does not want you to know what its tricks are.

Normally you are thinking, but you are not aware that you are thinking or of the source of thought - which is your mental conditioning.

Thinking takes place, like reflex action, and there's no meaning in that thinking.

You are thinking automatically, compelled by past habit-patterns, without your understanding or control.

You think because you cannot help thinking and thought controls your behaviour; that is what has made your life so messy.

The yogi wants to become aware of this phenomenon and when he uses this mantra, therefore, he has to be extremely alert.

Otherwise he'll go to sleep.

It is then that one needs a few aids.

For a truly religious student of yoga, the first and foremost aid is love of God, and therefore the masters introduce some kind of devotional fervour with the mantra.

When they said that each mantra has a deity and if you sit and repeat the mantra the deity will appear before you, they were not fools.

If you sit and repeat "Om Namah Shivaya", eagerly expecting Lord Shiva to appear before you, you are all alert.

If you have that faith, then naturally there is alertness.

You can have this faith and devotion or you can have a spirit of intense wonderment.

When you say that you are repeating the mantra mentally, what exactly do you mean?

The source of the mantra within you is also the source of all thoughts.

Does the thought go back or forward?

Does it come to you from the head or elsewhere?

When these questions arise in you, you realise that thoughts like: 'I think I am here', 'I think I am bad', 'I think I am a very religious person' have arisen in you for thousands and thousands of years, and caused all this mischief amongst us.

We are quite happy with them, we have taken them for granted.

We do not want to know anything about their origin.

The yogi suggests that we can have this very healthy spirit of curiosity, or wonder.

16th May Feel It!

God-realisation is not the monopoly of swamis and sadhus, nor of easterners or westerners.

If God is everywhere, He is accessible everywhere, He is accessible everywhere to everybody at all times.

What is it that stops us from realising that God is ever real?

What is it that stops us from making God real?

Our whole life is mechanical; we have lost the capacity to understand.

All the teachings of saints and sages flow above our heads so that we are completely and totally untouched, unaffected.

We use a lot of words, but some of these are a menace, a danger to our life.

One phrase is 'thank you'.

'Thank you' often means 'our account is settled'.

Though the 'thank you' may be a danger, gratitude is supreme.

That feeling is something which arises from the very heart.

So, if you want to say: "Thank you," please do, but with feeling.

Another word which is equally dangerous is 'sorry'.

We continue to be callous, negligent, indifferent, lazy, because of the availability of this formality: we can always say: "Sorry".

However, by merely saying 'sorry', one is not apologising or feeling it at all.

If I do something which really makes me feel sorry, I'll do it only once, never again.

The whole inside is churned and there is 'sorry' in the tone of speech, in the very look.

Words like 'thank you' and 'sorry' are superficial words which mean nothing if mechanically repeated.

What is needed is honesty, feeling.

So, into your sadhana, whatever you are doing, whether it is japa, service or worship, put in your heart, put in your feeling.

Let it not come from the heart, that is the emotion; let it not come from the brain, that is the calculating mentality; let it come from deep down, from life itself.

Then there is no selfish motivation for anything, there is no calculation, no emotionalism or sentimentalism in anything, and actions spring from life.

The actions are pure and because they are totally integrated, they are whole.

That is what makes a man holy.

Holiness is to become whole!

When the personality is not integrated, we are fragmented, divided beings.

So, whatever we are doing, whether it is secular activity or spiritual activity, can the whole being feel it and do it?

Whatever we do, is that exactly what is happening - nothing more, nothing less?

Gurudev's main and most vitally important teaching was: Life is already divine; the divine pervades the universe, fills every atom of existence.

So, put this feeling, this spirit back into life!

17th May 'I' doesn't exist

Though we are familiar with concentration and meditation in our lives, we practise them in order to know how they work.

I repeat a mantra and focus all my attention on it till that sound becomes foremost.

I have avoided the distractions and there is clarity of vision.

When the mantra is the only thought or object that occupies the mind, that is meditation already.

But it is not a rigid, static affair; the mind, being vibrating consciousness, is not still in the sense of dead matter.

As you are focussing your attention on the meditation object, there is a stream of consciousness flowing towards it.

You are not meditating on the object, you are meditating in the object.

It looks as though you are entering into it, examining it, looking at it from inside, from within.

You are not standing outside and watching it.

Looking at it is concentration and entering into it is meditation.

You begin to ask, "Am I repeating the mantra or am I listening to the mantra?"

At that point you are entering into the mantra.

If the mantra sound and also the image of God is the mind, what am I?

Am I inside of it or outside of it?

If I am in it, I am also the mind: 'I' is also the mind.

When this question arises you are entering into it, melting into it.

The 'I' is still using the mantra, because the mantra and the form of God are still the focal point.

They represent the mind which is spread out as the world and has not come to be restricted.

The only problem that remains is 'What is the relation between the mind and me?'

There is no verbal answer to that question.

When it arises, it is possible that the mantra sound suddenly stops.

Something else may happen as well - you may fall asleep!

If there is dullness, sleepiness, you can do some pranayama, jump up and down or stand up, and then continue to meditate.

The mind is full of ideas, but at least it is awake and alert.

The mind has to be extremely alert in order to enter into meditation.

Then when meditation becomes deeper and the mantra alone remains, when the listener gets dissolved and meditation happens, you'll know what that means.

The 'I' is not there; it blends into consciousness and the mantra also blends into consciousness.

There is no hearing of the mantra, because 'I' doesn't exist.

18th May You Cannot Have Them Singly

When you observe yourself during japa, you are aware of the mantra being repeated and heard within yourself. These two - sound and hearing - are inseparable, the distinction being one of polarisation.

If 'you' distinguish yourself from these, then another pair is 'born': the self and the not-self!

Another polarisation.

In the same manner, you discover that 'desire follows the pleasure-sense' and 'an experience of pain is accompanied by dislike' in the words of Patanjali.

If you learn to observe these, without being caught up in their coils, you will discover that hope and anxiety, the ambition to succeed and the fear of failure, craving and frustration, security and slavery, domination and revolt all come in pairs!

In fact, everything you wish to have comes along with everything you wish to avoid!

And you cannot possibly break up these pairs and have them singly.

Even to attempt to separate the self from the not-self can therefore lead to constant inner conflict and frustration, till in Pure Awareness even this distinction disappears and all contradictions are seen to be polarisations and thus no contradiction at all.

This is surely what Lord Krishna declares in the Gita: "The gunas move among gunas."

But when the 'I' observes this phenomenon it gets inevitably involved in the self - not-self polarisation!

Hence Krishna reminds us that all this (including the self - not-self polarisation) is the 'field': and 'I am the Knower of all fields'.

This 'I' or God is the all-inclusive Witness Consciousness in which there is no polarisation at all.

This Witness Consciousness of Pure Awareness alone is beyond contradictions and conflicts.

May you all be established in it!

Live without hope, if you can.

If you can you are instantly enlightened.

Then and only then you see the truth for what it is, because you have no hope whatsoever of seeing anything else.

19th May From Purpose to Meaning

Why do people practise yoga at all?

Obviously the motivation is varied: health, vitality, therapy, relaxation, weight-reduction, mind development, supernatural powers, kundalini awakening, equanimity or balanced state of mind, problems related to interpersonal relationship and generally, unhappiness and sorrow.

At the very outset the serious student of yoga discovers that it is a waste of time blaming all these on 'others'.

Whatever their source may be, they are experienced by oneself, within oneself.

The yogi is not keen to analyse these physiological, psychological, social or spiritual problems, to find why they are there or what their purpose may be.

He is interested to find out what they are.

Obviously this can only be discovered by oneself.

Others' views are their views, their opinions.

Opinions differ, indicating that perhaps no one opinion represents the whole truth, not even one's own!

Hence, even the sort of answer that presents itself to the enquiring intelligence is not accepted as truth, for it gives rise to the question, 'Who is the enquirer?'

Surely, this question cannot be answered verbally or conceptually.

That would still maintain the internal division between the observer and the observed, the questioner and the quest.

The quest has, therefore, got to culminate in Self-knowledge, an indescribable experience (the word 'experience' is used for want of any better word!).

In that, the 'what' is realised, the truth is realised, and all problems are dissolved (not merely solved).

This is not the 'end' of yoga, it has no beginning and therefore no end.

Life takes on a different quality.

It is divine life.

The relationship of one who has Self-knowledge is love, for his vision is limitless, having seen all points of view to be limitations.

He is truly a blessing.

Why does God have to work - through us, etc.?

When one looks at the world and the way everything in nature is 'working' one begins to ask questions.

Two types of answers emerge: the materialistic ('each man works for himself') and the altruistic ('each one works for others').

But they are not satisfying in the face of the inevitable destruction of everything.

Then one looks at life again and discovers the third answer: 'It is the nature of everything to be active - and it is God's nature which works through all names and forms.'

20th May Relationship

The quest for the truth concerning relationship is a tremendous inner discipline.

What makes relationship?

Simply, very simply, relationship comes into being; it happens.

None of us were born together - we came alone and we will go alone.

Our relationship had a beginning and it must have an end.

This is the plain truth, and intelligence which sees this instantly transforms relationship into something very beautiful, sacred and holy.

I don't know what brought us together, but that which brought us together knows what should happen, so I approach relationships very respectfully.

I didn't seek this relationship - it happened.

And even if I thought that I sought it, it still happened!

We have come together for a brief moment - that which has arisen must also cease - so I do not expect anything, I am only waiting to discover why we have been brought together and for how long.

In this waiting there is respect, there is love and a total lack of expectation.

From moment to moment I am discovering your interests and how this relationship may be beneficial to both of us.

But throughout, one truth is clear - I was alone, I have come together with you and I will be alone again.

I am not dependent upon you nor are you dependent upon me, but in our coming together there is a certain temporary dependence.

There is beauty here.

Coming together is a blessing, whether we are husband and wife, brother and sister, Guru and disciple or fellow pilgrims.

When this truth is realised, all our relationships are transformed into something holy.

This truth is living, flowing like a river - in it nothing is taken for granted.

If expectation should creep in, poisoning the relationship, intelligence springs into action:

"You have taken this relationship too far."

Expectation drops and the relationship continues on its own sacred level.

This life is a blessing and a privilege.

21st May The River

Life is full of surprises.
The unexpected always happens, but it is not the fault of happening.
We are part of a game called life.
You often ask, "Swamiji, when will you come back?"
In order to come back, I have to go.
In order to go, I have to come.
Though we realise the inevitability of change, change changes something within us which needs not to change.
When we come together we are naturally happy, but then we are afraid to part.
And when we do part, we hope that we will meet again.
Meeting and parting are inevitable parts of life; yet they give rise to happiness and sorrow, hope and fear.
Is that also inevitable?
The body has infinite potential to adjust and readjust ... but never to anticipate.
The intelligence reacts to stimuli, but that intelligence does not anticipate any reaction.
Intelligence (not brain or mind) does not anticipate anything.
And therefore it is free from hope and fear.
Intelligence can act only in the present.
It is mind that functions in the field of memory or imagination.
All thought relates to past or future.
How to live in the present?
Again, ask your body.
Its infinite potential to adjust without the interference of hope or fear is intelligent life.
If joy is to rise, it has its own counterpart, sorrow.
Everything in the world has two sides.
We cannot have only one side of anything.
If we want pleasure only and try to avoid all pain, we discover we have one pleasure and three pains!
Hope and fear are not based on truth or fact.
Can we face truth or reality and avoid imagination?
Can we live our life in truth and not in imagination?
The body indulges in neither hope nor imagination, but only pure life.
See life as it is, not what it was or should be.
Pleasure and pain are one - not two separate things.
Cause and effect are one, cause being the extension of effect and vice versa.
If I can see this truth, then instantly change comes to a stop.
I see a river - the unchanging in all this change.
What appeared to be many and fearfully contradictory phenomena are suddenly seen as complementary.
Night follows day; death is the other side of what we call life.
But these different sides are only my invention.
The river keeps flowing on.

22nd May The Spiritual Life

Life is spiritual.

The spirit is indivisible and it is also invisible.

It therefore does not satisfy man's craving to experience it, to possess it and to express it.

Therefore we see in him a savage compulsion to materialise this spirit.

This idolatry of matter is seen in our veneration of someone who is able 'to materialise things' by a wave of his hand.

But our own life is full of such materialisations; the whole world is the materialisation of the spirit.

All the machines and all the weapons have been immaterialised 'by a wave of someone's hand.'

It is this materialisation of the spirit that has prevented us from realising the spiritual nature of life.

The mind serves as the veil to hide the reality and promotes the worship of matter.

The mind is clever enough to conjure up, like an adept magician, false concepts and images of God, religion, love, peace and happiness, so that even in a moment of disillusionment we might not turn away from the unreal and discover the reality.

Only the greatest of spiritual heroes is able to discover this plot and to realise that these concepts or images are not only not the reality, but the greatest and most potent obstructions to the realisation of the reality which is pure and spiritual.

The spirit is never lost, though, in ignorance, it may be lost sight of.

It is forever waiting to be discovered.

Right from infancy we have been bombarded with concepts that have created divisions in our consciousness.

The infant's vision is pure.

Perhaps even the notion that there is an object external to itself has not arisen in it, because its own ego-sense has not been developed.

The parents strive to condition the infant's mind and call it 'training'.

The child is prevented from seeking to find its true identity by being forced to identify itself with this or that.

'I am constantly pressurised into accepting as an incontrovertible fact that 'I am a man, an Indian, a brahmin ...'.

It hardly ever occurs to me that I am even a human being, leave alone the purest truth, that the spirit alone is real and 'I' am but a cell (a soul) in the cosmic body of the spirit which is the universe.

The direct realisation of the spirit which is indivisible is religion.

It is also love that is God.

That love is not partial, limited, contractual, nor is it the antithesis of hate.

It is the spontaneous manifestation of the already existing indivisible oneness which alone is the truth.

23rd May Religious Education

I once read in a periodical that in Russian schools the students receive religious instruction only once a week.

In many non-communist countries there is no religious instruction at all in schools.

They say they enjoy freedom of worship (religion); but the educational system is freed from religion.

In Mauritius, both religion and education receive adequate attention.

Education at all levels is free.

Twenty-five percent of the island's budget is directed to education - an impressive record,

Religion is free from state control but not from state support.

A fine distinction, ably made and sustained by the wise leaders of the country.

Religious instruction is imparted in schools.

The Christian mission schools bear the names of saints.

Many of the Government Schools, too, bear names that inspire the students with ideals of service and self-discipline.

A Government Primary School and another Government junior Secondary School have both been named 'Swami Sivananda', after Gurudev.

The children in these Schools are becoming more and more familiar with Gurudev's supreme motto: 'Be Good, Do Good'.

Gurudev often proclaimed that these four words contained the very quintessence of all religions.

It is to learn those words 'by heart' (to inscribe them on the tablet of one's heart so that they become living truth) that young ones go to school.

If it was to study books and pass exams perhaps we should all go to school at a much later age!

Learning may be easier for adults, but self-discipline is almost an impossibility unless it is achieved earlier.

Self-discipline is not an imposition even by a teacher; though this does not mean that the teacher should tolerate indiscipline.

By precept, practice and, if need be, praise and punishment, the teacher should promote self-discipline in the young ones.

The best way to do this is of course to place before them the sublime ideals embodied in the great saints and spiritual heroes of all religions.

When the hearts of the young ones respond to the lives of the great, they will no doubt strive to be great, and a great nation with a great future is born.

24th May Learn From the River

In India, rivers are considered holy.

Sages and saints lived on the banks of rivers.

They learnt from the river.

The river symbolised to them the unchanging change of phenomena - 'samsara'.

The river taught them that Truth is ever the same and yet never the same: it has to be discovered anew.

The ancient Truth has to be renewed today.

The river empties itself into the ocean and finds fulfilment; but the ocean replenishes it at its source.

The cycle of creation, preservation and apparent destruction does not alter the Infinite.

Even so, the religious spirit flows on as a perennial stream.

Its waters are the perennial philosophy.

Its designation changes in accordance with the language prevalent at different points on its bank.

The river in itself does not undergo any change; it is not more holy here than it is there.

Such distinctions belong to the stagnant pool of poisoned mind, not to the stream of the religious spirit.

The river is unfathomable and wide: 'this' side is samsara (bondage) and the 'other' side is nirvana (liberation).

It is not as if X side is bondage and Y side is freedom; irrespective of which bank you are standing on, the other side is freedom!

Freedom is freedom from that which you possess and are possessed by, that which you know and have therefore limited, that which has conditioned your mind and distorted your vision.

When all this is abandoned and you dive into the river - neither caring whether you swim or sink, nor wishing for greater security than the swift flowing stream affords - then the other shore welcomes you and you are liberated.

Life flows on, thought flows on.

Let them.

When, during meditation, you watch the flow of the breath, you realise the mutual freedom of the breath and the witnessing intelligence.

Similarly, let life flow on.

Be a witness.

You will be free from sin and suffering, samsara and sorrow.

In deep sleep the ego strives to gain peace and happiness without striving - realising that they could not be had by striving in waking and dreaming.

25th May The Inner Meaning

Question:

What is the meaning of all this singing and chanting, and the repetition of what you call a mantra?

Swamiji:

This question seems to rise in the hearts of most people, particularly the educated ones.

If it is asked in a spirit of enquiry, it is the open door to enlightenment; but it is often spurred by cynicism and doubt, which close that door.

Sometimes it is raised by curiosity which is easily satisfied with words rather than truth.

"What is the meaning?" we are eager to ask.

But, can we understand the answer?

Can we recognise the truth or God or whatever these things point to?

Can we verify it by our own experience?

If you take a mantra (for instance OM), its meaning is not a description of what it stands for, etc. but what it is.

I repeat the mantra, at the same time contemplating the 'meaning' (the truth concerning it).

When I ask myself, "What is the meaning of OM?" I observe the OM sound within.

This observation creates a division within - between 'me' (the observer) and the OM sound.

It is this division that thwarts all attempts to gain knowledge.

It creates likes and dislikes, love and hate, etc, and gets caught in the division and then enjoys and suffers endlessly.

As long as this division exists there is no knowledge; and in our social relationship as long as there is psychological division between 'you' and 'me' there is no understanding, no peace, no harmony and no happiness.

Then you learn to reframe the question: "Am I the producer of the OM sound or am I the observer?"

The mind gets puzzled when confronted with this question.

And the question is reframed once again: "Who am I?" What is my relation with the mind?

Am I in it, or is it in me?

When this question arises spontaneously in the mind, there is great stillness, an inner silence.

In this silence alone can the answer manifest itself.

Verbal answer is no answer: it is a set of words, an image, a thought.

This image is not knowledge because it involves the inner division of the one into the observer and the observed.

The mind is locked with the question, unable to move, unable to know the answer in the conventional way, which is thought.

Beyond this, only He who is 'not-me' should give me the final push, enable me to cross the chasm that divides the known from the unknown.

Only the grace of God, Guru, Self, etc., can do this.

26th May Sweeping Changes in Our Life

There was a time not so long ago that oriental (particularly Japanese) society was extolled for its moral values.

Some of the factors selected for special praise were a sense of duty among subordinate workers, respect for elders, reverence for teachers (religious and secular) and a national pride which enabled them to put national interests first and self-interest last in any situation.

(According to Press reports, all this is changing.)

Such a cultural tradition might indeed have prevailed all over the world; but in the East it survived a bit longer than in the West.

Perhaps industrialisation has something to do with it.

Perhaps literacy has something to do with it, perhaps socio-economic revolutions that have been sweeping the world this century have something to do with it.

Perhaps, too, such sweeping sweeps away some of the dirt that might have settled on the various cultures, besides marring their native beauty.

No system, no tradition, no belief is perfect and permanent.

They are all man-made, man-administered (mal-administered) and man-enforced; hence, they share his vagaries, foibles and hypocrisy.

However much we dislike a system, tradition or belief, however anti-establishment we might be, we find that the 'free' people soon establish themselves with a system based on a tradition in accordance with their (new) beliefs.

Hence, it is wise to recognise their inevitability and to remain vigilant lest the sweeping changes sweep us off our feet.

In Japan, in India and in other parts of the world, too, there is a vigorous movement to reassess the situation.

Two factors have been singled out for intense scrutiny - the only two that have been ever with us before all the revolutions, evolutions and 'isms' arose.

They are the parent and the teacher.

The report about school violence in Japan pinpoints four possible causative factors: working mothers neglecting children, small (nuclear) families in which there is very little interaction between young people, elitism among teachers and over-emphasis on academic distinction.

These are universal factors today.

We are always worrying about the past or the future.

We don't live in the present at all.

27th May The Meaning of Life

The problem that Lord Rama faced is one that engages the attention of all wise humans. Given the inevitability of death and destruction as the forces operating in the world, is there any meaning to 'life', apart from the purposes we create for it, to fill the vacuum of ignorance?

No other question is relevant.

To be or not to be?...

There is no choice but to be.

To do or not to do?...

There is no choice but to do.

But what? What to do?

What the mind determines leads us nowhere.

For what is known as the mind (even what is called one's conscience) is a product of culture, tradition and acquired knowledge - all of which are divisive and hence conflict-ridden.

Can the mind itself be freed from all this? Of course!

By what technique or method?

Or is it by some sort of intercession?

Again we are looking away from the mind itself.

Hence there is either distraction or frustration in all our attempts to find the meaning of life: out of these attempts are the numerous philosophies born.

Can the mind learn to turn its attention upon itself?

If it does turn within, it instantly becomes aware of the endless series of factors which condition its movement and thus determine action; and such action is the author and the victim of the mess that life on earth is today.

This awareness is freedom.

It is not freedom 'from', but it is freedom to explore, to investigate life itself.

With this freedom it is possible to discover the truth concerning life, without ever producing another theory or philosophical system!

To sustain this awareness and thus the freedom which is indispensable for this investigation, there should be tremendous energy, and all that energy should flow in the single direction of the unexplored.

This is known as the religious life, brahmacarya or sannyasa, renunciation of the world, dedication to God.

Without hope you don't die.

That hope keeps you alive is one point of view: as long as you're alive there is hope that you'll get something.

But this much is true - that hope creates a thing called future, which does not exist and therefore forces you to ignore the truth as it is.

It is being present.

That's all.

28th May Attachment

Question:

Attachment is a very complex problem. Are there any techniques one can use to deal with it?

Swamiji:

The technique which is usually suggested is what one might call transference rather than sublimation.

This is referred to in the Bhagavatam.

Attachment is bondage if it is directed towards your husband or children and so on; but the same attachment, when it is directed towards holy men, is conducive to liberation.

Though you may be attached to the holy man, the holy man is not so attached.

So, in that relationship the feedback that you get is one of non-attachment and hopefully (that's what they hope), one of these days you'll discover, "My God, this man is very affectionate, he is not indifferent, he doesn't hate me, but he's not attached to me. What is this magic?"

They hope that when you question thus you will find your way out of this silly thing called attachment.

But, that may not happen.

All these tricks and techniques that are given are ultimately useless because you are merely transferring your attachment.

I see that this attachment is non-existent and therefore there is no need to struggle against it at all.

I am alone, I was born alone, I will die alone and nothing, nothing, nothing in the world will do anything!

Even so, everybody is born alone and will die alone and will pursue their own course.

I cannot cling to them and there is no sense in my allowing myself to be clung to.

In the meantime, you and I are together - we can make our lives as pleasant and comfortable as possible.

As a matter of fact, if there is no attachment there is a greater joy in relationship.

There is no jealousy, no sense of possession, no clinging, nothing.

Whether you are my father or mother, my wife or husband, my son or daughter it's beautiful.

As long as we are together - which means as long as you want to stay with me and I want to stay with you - we can love each other.

But even then I realise that one day you will die, one day I will die.

When that is seen clearly, then there is no attachment.

The intelligence recognises that there is no attachment.

It is not a question of 'I should not be attached'.

'I should not be attached' is already an assumption that it is there and I have to get rid of it.

The direct perception or recognition that attachment is not there, is the only solution.

29th May

Self-fulfilling Prophecy of Doom

From the day the world was created there have been predictions of its imminent destruction.

Surely, it does not need a prophet to declare that all that is created must be destroyed.

But the way in which such doom is predicted is rather interesting.

Everyone who prophesies somehow reassures himself that he will be saved, and by extension all those that follow him!

The message is: "God is about to incarnate to protect the good and to destroy the wicked: we are sure to be protected, and we are sure that our enemies will be destroyed, because they are evil."

In most cases, the enemies are specifically mentioned and described as evil.

The inevitable result is the generation of fear, which the promoters of this campaign want.

Fear gives rise to hate of that which we fear.

Hatred leads to violence.

This violence is of course justified by the prophet who has already declared who the wicked are!

It is a self-fulfilling prophesy; and when a country and its peoples are specifically mentioned, the whole thing smacks of an open invitation to war and destruction.

When every created thing is inevitably proceeding towards destruction, what are we trying to protect?

The prophets have a quick answer: our civilisation, our culture, our nation, our religion, our way of life.

Such protective action is its own doom!

It is the 'protective action' (aggression) that divides the one family of mankind into two or more opposing camps.

Even if such action succeeds, it is unable to preserve that which it pretends to protect.

The world does not come to an end; what we cling to (our culture, etc.) will surely come to an end; our own earthly life, and that of our children and grandchildren will also come to an end naturally.

No one can protect you from death.

When this universal truth is realised, the prophesy of doom sounds puerile.

Life goes on: it knows how to take care of the problems as they arise.

When someone comes to you with the prophesy of doom, tell him: "It is all right; I may not live till then."

If the dead past is not buried, our whole mind begins to stink and makes life impossible for us.

This does not mean, however, that we should ignore our experiences and the lessons they have taught us.

30th May The Measure of Spiritual Progress

What is the spiritual impact of religious organisations?

What purpose do they serve?

Do they instantly eradicate all ignorance and evil, bring about peace and harmony, and transform sinners into saints?

Is such a radical change a push-button achievement?

If you look at the world you begin to wonder: what is the impact of even incarnations of God and spiritual luminaries who periodically appear in this world for the redemption of man?

Yet surely, light cannot but dispel darkness!

People are not all on the same level of evolution or the same plane of awareness.

The light of these luminaries enables all of them to see one step ahead.

He who was enveloped in the total darkness of ignorance (tamas) perceives the light.

He who was asleep bestirs himself to activity.

There is a burst of religious - including social and communal - activity (rajas).

This is an inevitable step.

Activity is like the light-switch; depending on the direction, it leads to enlightenment or darkness.

There is a danger here of egoistic, self aggrandising and even divisive dynamism; but then it is much better than ignorance and inertia.

However, it is extremely important that the torch-bearers of truth should at this point rigorously avoid being swallowed up by the swirling currents of destructive dynamism, and redouble their efforts to promote constructive dynamism.

Such constructive dynamism will promote social welfare while illumining our path to liberation from the ego (sattva).

Salvation is indeed for all, but only a few make it in every generation.

The others are not denied the blessings of the light.

Each one takes a step forward.

Whether it is a small step or a giant step forward depends on one's attitude to these spiritual luminaries.

Many regard them as great teachers: these are the peripheral devotees who look for some useful teaching to promote their own selfish welfare.

They, too, gain.

Few, very few, regard them as gurus: and these few are prepared to surrender themselves to the guru and obey the guru implicitly.

Such total obedience is the key to self-surrender or Self-realisation.

Perhaps great Masters like Swami Sivananda founded ashrams to discover who is a student and who is a disciple!

31st May Living Truth

There is an extraordinary feature which applies to all of us.
It is possible that you are driven out of the house or job or something or the other, but you go on thinking about my wife, my children, my friends.
This word of two letters, 'my', has such dramatic potentiality that you are not prepared to accept that you are being kicked out.
They are still 'mine' and the mind goes on looking back, hugging the shadow.
But nobody is dependent upon you.
That's an absurd concept.
I have directly seen that these things are not mine.
They don't regard me as theirs, but I keep hanging on to them.
How is that?
I see that this is the danger in family life but yet the mind is not prepared to accept it.
It still hankers after the same old life.
They are still 'mine'.
Anything that is 'mine' must explode one of these days.
So when you use the word 'mine' remember that.
Is it possible for the mind to see directly without fuzziness or haziness, with great clarity, that as long as I treat this as 'mine', it will explode and destroy me?
On an occasion like this we often think we have understood.
That is not true understanding.
Theoretical understanding is one thing and converting it into living truth is quite another thing.
Here we think 'I' have understood, but it is merely a psychological game.
It does not become a living truth so easily.
When you see this living truth for a fact, then the action is instantaneous.
Until it is seen as a fact there is no action, but there is a terribly confused life.
Two minutes you are swimming this way, two minutes you are swimming the other way.
What is it that makes you swing like a pendulum?
One moment you want to give up everything and meditate for sixteen hours.
The next moment the mind thinks of something else.
That is our fate because we are gripped by this mysterious force called maya, which does not allow us to see the truth for what it is.
If I see a scorpion in my lap, it is impossible for me not to act immediately.
The seeing itself is action.
Such is the beauty of seeing the truth for what it is.
But in our case we think we see the truth and the danger in the sort of life that we are leading.
Because we are only thinking of this danger we also think that we can somehow fix it.
That is a confused mind.
It has no power to act and there is no action, only confusion.

1st June

Turn Within and See

Question:

Is the Practice of yoga a selfish practice?

Swamiji:

One of the charges levelled against yoga and yogis is that "They are only interested in their own salvation, whereas we are deeply involved in bringing salvation to others."

We are always trying to serve one another without understanding the basis.

Are we trying to serve one another or are we merely trying to escape from the unpleasant task of looking within and finding out who and what we are?

That is the problem.

Without knowing who and what I am, how is it possible for me to help you?

I must know where I am standing before I can help you.

I must know if I have the capacity to do so before trying to help you.

Before saving someone who is drowning, are we sure that we are good swimmers?

If we are not sure that we are safe, it is impossible to save others.

In the light of this, it would seem that all this 'I save you' attempt is a distraction.

We don't want to look within because even an occasional glimpse is so horrifying that we would rather busy ourselves by 'saving' someone else.

Unfortunately, without Self-knowledge, saving another is impossible.

What is the Self-knowledge that the yogis are talking about?

How is it gained?

Is it a gain at all?

If so, then the accusation is valid.

If Self-knowledge is something which I acquire for myself, then you can say: "You are a selfish man".

But is this Self-knowledge something that is gained for oneself?

In order to answer this question, we must try to turn within and see what this Self-knowledge is.

Then you will see that the very striving for Self-knowledge promotes unselfishness.

Perhaps only when you turn within and try to find an answer to the questions: 'Who am I? What am I? Where am I standing?', will unselfishness arise.

Can I be established in peace?

I guess that is what we are looking for.

Though it should really mean you should realise that you are that peace!

It is when you try to hold an experience of peace and joy that it turns into its opposite.

All these experiences come and go.

We cannot hold them.

There is no need to hold the Self; you cannot get rid of yourself!

When this is clearly understood, there is no more struggle.

2nd June Neutrality in Conflict

When A and B - both of whom are your family members or friends - quarrel, what must you do?

If you side with one or the other, you are aggravating the situation, losing a friend and your own peace of mind.

The best advice in the circumstances is: "Be neutral".

Immediately this must be clarified: it is "Be neutral," and not "Do neutral".

There is a world of difference between the two.

To "do neutral" involves the politics of pleasing either or both, of playing safe, of fear of consequences and anxiety.

Neutrality is not a question of pleasing either or both the parties.

Neutrality is not the reaction to what one or the other of the parties to the conflict may say or do, or threaten to do.

When you feel that one or both the parties do not appreciate the fact that you are neutral, you are not being neutral!

Look within, within your own heart.

Are you neutral or do you wish to appear to be neutral?

And does this feeling not also imply that you feel that you are superior to both of them in as much as you are able to see their different points of view, whereas they do not know what a wonderful neutral person you are!

Neutrality is a quality of the mind and the heart, not a quantity of action!

"I am neutral; now what must I do?" is an absurd question.

If you are neutral, if the quality of neutrality fills your whole mind and your whole being, then you will immediately know what to do be neutral, not do neutral!

True neutrality is total freedom, but freedom is not an assertion of one's opposition to A or to B, and unwillingness to obey either.

And this total inner freedom is possible only when one ceases to judge.

(Again, not feeling "Ah well, stupid people, let them fight.")

One ceases to judge when there is love at heart.

Love does not need to be proved.

When affection, neutrality, freedom, etc. have to be proved, love is absent.

When you have to prove your neutrality, you betray fear.

If you are afraid, then you are not neutral - you are on the opposite side.

And therefore, you are the architect of disharmony, perpetrator of the conflict.

If you are aware of this, it drops from you: you are neutral, you are love.

What you say should not only be soft, but should not provoke others.

3rd June Dharma - The Good Life

How difficult it is to define the good life!

And yet, here is something where all the religions, all the prophets and saints of the world over are unanimous and insistent.

The good life is an indescribably glorious expression which we can inwardly experience, but not define.

In India the good life is referred to as dharma, which, again, is indescribable and grand.

It is virtue, goodness, social justice, the means to salvation and a hundred other elements mixed well together.

This word has been succinctly translated and explained in the following terse sutra: "That from which perfection and salvation are obtained is dharma."

The root-meaning of the word dharma is 'something which holds together'.

It is derived from 'dhr' - to uphold, to hold together.

When we put this root-meaning and the sutra together, we have a glimpse of the vast vista of the Good Life called dharma.

It holds everything together, not only in this world but in the whole universe.

It is the mysterious power in the universe that holds even the stars and planets together.

Here perhaps you have a glimpse of the highest meaning of dharma: it is equated to God.

Perhaps, there is no distinction between 'good' and 'God'.

The Good Life is the expression or manifestation of God.

4th June The Darkest Hour is Before Dawn

Irrespective of what we do or do not do, dawn breaks after the darkest hour. One might regret the darkness of this hour, but the dawn is always welcome. In the Bhagavatam, the description of Kali Yuga (the present dark age) unmistakably points out that wealth will be the sole criterion and might will be the sole deciding factor. It is surprising how exactly the description tallies with the present-day world and tomorrow's 'progress'.

Oppression of the weak by the strong is not new to this world; but the rate at which this curse is spreading is alarming.

The freedom of the individual applies only to the strong individual.

"Heads I win, tails you lose," says the strong man; and the weak one is free to toss the coin as high as he pleases!

The modern, mighty and machine-minded millionaire is a postmaster in camouflage, eager to find a scapegoat for every crime that he loves to commit.

In wars, the 'other nation' is the aggressor; in society, the non-conformist is immoral; in business, the poor victim is an incompetent fool.

He is always right and the others are always wrong.

Sometimes he is so thoroughly entrenched in his own views that the spirit of enquiry is totally absent in him, and he dismisses any other point of view as utterly stupid.

However, the Bhagavatam draws our attention to the silver lining that heralds the dawn. It says: "Robbed of their wealth and women by greedy and merciless rulers behaving like robbers, people will resort to mountains and forests and subsist on leaves, roots, honey, fruits, flowers and seeds."

How marvellous!

In this universal chaos, there will always be some who will retain their sanity and discover the right remedy.

Such people are today found all over the world.

They are few in number.

In the East and West, they are the ones who turn away from the glittering nothing that we call wealth, from the corruption called progress, from the insanity called civilisation.

They live a natural life in communes, often in the mountains and the forests, sharing what they have with one another.

They are the pioneers of the New Age.

In the mountains life is not a bed of roses, and many of these good ones may fall by the wayside.

But the few that survive will have enabled Man to survive and will have rendered the greatest service to Humanity.

5th June Behold! The Man

The problem with Man is that he is not Man.
What are the indispensable qualities of Man?

Integrity and sincerity.

Integrity and sincerity are not technical skills that can be acquired, but spiritual qualities that manifest themselves when the covering veils are removed.

Neither wholeness nor sincerity can be fashioned by human effort, it is human effort that veils them.

The man who tries to be sincere is insincere, however 'sincere' his efforts may be!

One who is sincere does not try.

This applies to integrity, too.

The self, the ego, veils the wholeness that remains forever untouched in the heart of all beings; the self is the flaw which the self itself endeavours to mask by inventing what appears to be clever systems and marvellous organisations.

These latter are twice removed from the truth which is beyond the self.

Integrity and sincerity come into being when this self immolates itself at the altar of the omnipresent God.

This is commonly regarded as the field of religion.

One may or may not believe in God or in what has come to be regarded as religion; but it is clear that as long as the self rules life there can be no peace, happiness, welfare, wholeness or sincerity.

It is not hard to see that where people are religious even in the common sense of the word, there is comparatively greater peace and harmony, happiness and prosperity.

Simplicity, goodness, integrity, sincerity and other divine qualities are gifts of God and cannot be acquired.

They make a man Man.

And they manifest when man surrenders the self in loving devotion to the divine.

Though anger comes into being in my relationship with others, the potential cause for anger exists in me.

Only flammable material is consumed by fire and not a big rock.

I must therefore learn to watch myself with utmost vigilance to discover what it is in me that is vulnerable to provocation.

The direct method from here on is to be ever vigilant and watchful for the least mental disturbance and, when the ripples of anger arise in the mind, to become aware of this phenomenon.

To be aware of it is the main thing, not 'To get rid of it'.

6th June The Spirit of Education

Education is integral and should not be divided into the sacred and the secular. The human being has obviously three aspects which are inextricably interwoven: body, mind and spirit.

Education is that which is able to bring out the best in each one of us.

To ensure that which is thus brought out is the best, education trains the moral and the intellectual faculties of man. None of these can be neglected without disastrous results. We need secular education - the arts and the sciences (which is the form or the body of education).

Equally we need moral and intellectual training so that we are able to discriminate between the destructive and the constructive uses of technology.

Here again it is when the human heart attains maturity through moral training that we begin to see that our worst enemy is the 'me' (selfishness).

A truly mature and therefore educated person arises from this realisation.

It can therefore be easily seen that education is the surest means to the eradication of the ills and evils humanity is suffering from today.

When does such an education begin?

It is beginningless!

Hence it is a fresh beginning every day, every moment.

It is a spiritual adventure undertaken by the parent, teacher and student together.

None of the three has authority over the others, all of them being part of this maturing process.

All of them learn all the time from one another and from themselves.

In this spirit of co-operation there is no compulsion, no surrender, no suppression and no rebellion.

Education is the expression of whatever is best in man and the spirit of education is the focussing of attention within one's own heart to observe what is thus expressed!

Such observation is itself maturity.

When the part of the globe revolving on its axis turns away from the sun, there is darkness. This is the greatest message which most of these oriental divinities have given us.

Krishna, Buddha, the wonderful Vedic sages have all proclaimed one Truth, that there is no such thing as 'eternal damnation'.

I am in darkness, not because the sun has set, not because the light has gone, but because I have turned away.

This inner light is there, it has always been there, it will never, never disappear.

But, I must turn towards it.

This turning towards the inner light is yoga.

7th June The Uncompromising Imperative

The life of the school is the pupil.

Discipline is not merely conforming to a series of do's and don'ts, though these may be necessary in any society.

Discipline is a spiritual quality; it is the very spirit of life.

It cannot be imposed from outside; that will lead to the worst form of indiscipline, rebellion.

'Self-discipline' is an oft-used, much-abused term, rarely understood.

The children must 'inspire' discipline (to inspire is to breathe in).

To make this possible the staff must radiate discipline.

The children learn not only from the teachers at school, but from the parents and the entire community who influence the young in one way or another.

Only in an atmosphere of discipline will the young be inspired to discipline themselves.

My Gurudev Swami Sivananda reminded the young that they were the 'citizens of tomorrow' and exhorted them to inscribe on the tablet of their hearts the four words: Be good, do good.

But all these are likely to fall on deaf ears if the young do not see that the elders are exemplars of these values, or that they are making sincere attempts to grow in them.

We are living in dangerous times.

A little error might lead to a great loss.

Man is denied the natural (instinctual) wisdom of the animal.

Hence he 'learns by mistakes' and he 'values what he has lost or is about to lose' (like health, peace, freedom and affection).

There were times when it was possible to gamble with life. Not now.

An error now will end in irrecoverable loss.

The intelligent citizen realises that self-discipline is the only key to prosperity and security.

The disciplined leader inspires discipline in the people and the pupil.

Disciplined people constructively support the leader, realising that their strength is interdependent.

Self-discipline is the antidote to selfishness.

Only he who is unselfish can be disciplined.

Selfishness destroys discipline and thus life itself.

An unselfish person is a human being made in the image of God.

Such was Swami Sivananda: He not only taught but lived the divine life, a life of self-sacrifice and self-discipline.

We are asked to swim in this world - not to keep out of the water (we can't, we are already there), not to get drowned, but to swim.

8th June The Life and Teachings of Gurudev Sivananda

In the countless books that Gurudev has written He has expounded the traditional doctrines, flavouring them with His own charm and simplicity. They are meant to cater to the spiritual needs of all temperaments and capabilities.

In His own life, He exemplified the perfection that at once combined all the essentials of the different branches of yoga. Yoga means integration; and He emphasised integral yoga, thus underlining the truth that perfection is all-round perfection and not partial perfection. Gurudev not only gave us text books on the different aspects of yoga and of the unique alchemy that transformed daily life into divine life, but He also showed by His own highly successful, dynamic, devout, mystic and enlightened life that the yogi is a perfect administrator, a perfect master, a perfect karma yogi who does everything efficiently and in the right spirit, a perfect devotee who lives a life of total self-surrender, a perfect raja yogi whose life itself is continuous meditation and samadhi, and a perfect jnani whose enlightenment is perfect and leaves no shadow of doubt.

Gurudev, Who was incarnate Love, did not demand that everyone should attain this perfection overnight; He recommended and taught a step-by-step approach to perfection. His prescription for spiritual evolution is an expansion of consciousness in concentric circles.

The goal or the ideal is the summit; but it is the immediate next step that is vitally important to the pilgrim.

Gurudev saw no contradiction in the monistic, dualistic and pluralistic doctrines at all.

In our own daily lives we experience body consciousness, self-consciousness (as in dream) and unconsciousness in deep sleep.

It is possible to combine service (in body-consciousness), worship (in self-consciousness), and egoless meditation (in transcendental consciousness) at the same time.

Such was the message of His own life which was at once colourful, glorious and enlightened.

To contemplate it is to assimilate divine life.

May He guide us from within our own hearts.

To the devotee everything is the gift of God; therefore he is constantly contented.

9th June Fear

How to get rid of fear?

But what is fear?

How do we observe and see what fear is?

There is no special technique, except to become like a child and experience the fear without labelling it as 'fear'. When the baby experiences fear it reacts to it spontaneously.

The baby does not cry, as it were, it is the fear that cries!

Later we are taught to identify the fear, to label it and then 'not to be afraid'.

This, however, does not mean fearlessness!

Even now we are afraid, but immediately we experience fear, we push that experience away and pretend that we are not afraid.

We are afraid, and we are afraid to express that fear!

Hence we are ignorant of fear.

All our fears and confusion are born of this ignorance.

Even when we turn within to look at fear as it rises, we are only looking at the label 'fear', which simultaneously rises to cover up the pure experience.

We continue to be ignorant.

If we understand this, and if we see how this ignorance stops us from this vital understanding, we shall drop the label (and with it the inhibitions and repressions that we were taught to cultivate) and come face to face with fear and realise its true nature.

Fear understood is fearlessness.

10th June The Price and Prize of Education

Illiteracy is a curse.

Poverty is a curse.

Backwardness is a curse.

Any attempt to get rid of these curses is indeed laudable.

However, their removal demands greater skill than the heart surgeon's.

Otherwise, the humility of the illiterate peasant, the industry of the poor and the aspirations of the backward might yield place to the haughtiness of the lettered, the laziness of the rich and the complacency of the civilized!

Hence, education should result in self-control and discipline.

Both Gurudev Swami Sivananda and Swami Vivekananda emphasised character-building education.

A beautiful Sanskrit verse describes the following sequence: "Knowledge (education) gives rise to right conduct (gentleness, humility and so on); right conduct generates the requisite qualification; the qualified and skilful earn wealth; wealth is righteously utilised, and happiness follows."

Real education is not merely instruction in the three R's, but the construction within the student of the edifice of character which is edifying.

Such a construction within is naturally the work of the student himself (or herself.)

Externally imposed discipline leads either to rebellion or to abject conformism, both of which are destructive.

When the child's nature is exposed to itself, the child sees what is good and promotes it, and what is undesirable and drops it.

To bring out (educate) this sensitivity, the teacher (which includes the parents and the people around!) should also be sensitive and rightly educated.

Once this sensitivity is established, learning enriches the heart, mind and soul of a student.

That is the prize of education.

But the price is dedicated service of the children, in which the teachers, parents and the public participate.

Just as a hidden cloud in a clear sky suddenly manifests itself and equally suddenly disappears (sometimes even without raining), even so, life which is hidden everywhere appears and disappears.

It is ignorance that identifies itself with some form - 'This is I'.

He who ceases to identify himself is happy.

11th June Wealth: Blessing and Curse

Question:

Will it be possible for the Indians to improve the economy of their country with the help of the practical, all-uniting idea of yoga, one day?

Swamiji:

This is not an isolated Indian problem, it is a global problem.

We are called Indians only outside India, especially where Indians are not very much liked or wanted!

Within India itself, all are not treated as Indians by one another - either they are South Indians or North Indians, Bengalis or Biharis, etc, till you come right down to 'my' family and 'his' family.

Hence we treat the 'Indian problem' as if it is the problem only for the Indians to worry about, and they that are not actually affected treat it as if it is the problem of only those that are actually affected - the poor, starving, suffering people.

This negligence in due course leads to violent and revolutionary changes.

Instead, if we cultivate 'humanity' and look upon all as human beings, sharing the problems of all human beings everywhere, there would be no hunger nor poverty, and perhaps there would be no wastage of food and subsidising of the farmer not to produce more food in other parts of the same world.

Yet, man will accumulate wealth and strive his utmost to obtain more.

My Gurudev, Swami Sivananda, once said, "Even sannyasis (swamis) need money nowadays."

Again, our scriptures insist that we should produce more food and more wealth.

Yet again, one is unable to resist the temptation to regard that 'earned' (often by exploitation) wealth as his own and to look with suspicion upon anyone who asks for a share of it.

Gurudev suggested the way out of this tangle: "Consider that you are only the trustee of the wealth that has been entrusted to you by God."

You are certainly not going to take it away with you when you leave this world!

So why make yourself and others miserable by hoarding it?

Do not bring in silly 'philosophical arguments' to support Your miserliness: e.g. "Charity promotes laziness,"

"Let him suffer the consequences of his own past evil actions (karma)."

Put yourself in the other man's position, sincerely and truly.

What would you expect? Compassion?

Be compassionate.

Turn accursed wealth into a great blessing by sharing it with all.

12th June Samskara

What is the cause of what we call evil thoughts and so on arising in us?

Aggression is frustrated craving.

Where craving arises, that craving itself becomes aggression, violence and hate.

The object is not the real cause of the craving arising; but the craving arises in me.

First I dismiss the illusion that there is an external cause and I begin to investigate the internal cause.

I see that I had a glass of champagne and I liked it.

When in the enjoyment of a certain object, I decide that it is pleasant, that experience leaves a mark on the mind.

In Sanskrit it is called samskara.

It is possible to translate it easily in English as 'some scar' - some scar is formed.

Then it is possible that if there is a glass of champagne in front of me, that scar starts itching.

Sometimes I only need to think about it and the scar comes to life I must have it.

If the scar isn't there, there is no craving.

The samskara is a bit dangerous.

It is possible when there is a reaction for me to take that reaction quietly, calmly, happily.

I can accept an insult or injury patiently and without reactions and that will be settled.

It is also possible that my action is not so strong as to create an influence, but the samskara is the risky part of it, for the samskara demands repetition.

The moment a favourable situation arises, the samskara wants to express itself again.

To say that by fulfilling a craving you are working it out, may not be right because every time you repeat this experience, the samskara gets stronger and the craving becomes even more intense.

Is there a method which avoids both the suppression and the expression at the same time?

Suppression leads to explosion and expression strengthens the samskara.

We should find another method by which the samskara can be diffused: that is to go to the root of the problem, which means deep contemplation.

It is the mind that calls an experience 'pleasure' and runs after it.

If I can see the process taking place now, I have seen the whole thing.

13th June On Aggression

Aggression is a pervasive evil in the world.

It has very many other names - war between nations and social violence of one group against another (these two categories often pass for defence of present or future aggression), competition and rivalry in business as also in sports and education (these two categories are linked with our concepts of success and progress), domination either by one group of people over another (which is considered necessary for the survival of one or the other) or by one person over another (at home and at work, where it is known as discipline, duty, obedience, order, etc).

In one's own behaviour it is noticeable as a superiority (or a masked inferiority) complex which consciously or unconsciously invents reasons why such domination is essential.

Such reasons are considered scientific when the polluted mind observes 'nature' and of course sees that even in the animal kingdom (the word 'even' suggests their superiority over the human being!) aggression and the spirit of domination prevail.

Such rationalisation itself is the symptom of aggression and its perpetuation.

Condemnation of aggression is aggression, too.

It does not go away by 'fighting' it (an absurd paradox) either within oneself or in the external world.

Expressing the aggression produces the world in which we live today.

Suppressing the aggression leads to psychological explosion which must eventually lead to the most

violent expression of such aggression.

When aggression is neither suppressed nor expressed, it comes into sharp focus of the inner intelligence which is then able to understand the nature of aggression.

In the inner light, aggression is seen for what it is: the deluded ego-sense which struggles to protect the shadow at the expense of the substance.

It is a thought, a notion, for it obviously does not exist in deep sleep when aggression is absent, too.

When the fictitious nature of the 'me' is discovered in the inner light, aggression comes to an end.

There is love.

Love alone is.

God is love.

Love is God.

Premaiva satyam.

14th June How to Love God?

How to love God in all?

How to ensure that I love you, not as you - because immediately there is going to be a cause.

Only if I love God who is omnipresent can this motivation be kept aside.

How to love you as God?

I must love, and I cannot love an abstract being; so if you prevent me from worshipping an image or a symbol of God, then I will worship something else.

It may be a girlfriend, money, power or position, film stars or soccer stars.

There is this emotional aspect which is pumping, jumping, in order to find an expression.

One must be very careful in dealing with it and channelling it Godward.

Prayers, japa of a mantra and worship were evolved in order to bring about one little experience of the love of God.

Swami Vivekananda once remarked that Man has never worshipped anything but an image.

You cannot worship the Omnipresent Being.

If some have done, that it is only because in their previous incarnations they adopted the other techniques and methods and had trained themselves.

We might use some image, some idol or some symbol which represents God and through which we might train our emotional being to experience love of God.

If this does not appeal to us, we might land in unpalatable soup, because there is an emotional aspect in us and it demands expression.

If I had that single experience of the love of God, then it is possible for me to love each one of you - all beings - as the manifestations of God.

Again a word of caution.

This, which may be called idol worship or image worship, is meant as a sample to lead me on to this cosmic love.

The love of one is merely a stepping stone for the love of all, not to be treated as an isolated experience.

Even so, if I go to a church or the temple in order to worship God there, it is not to be mistaken for bhakti.

Love of God is not to be confined to the church or the temple, to the image, to an ashram or meditation room, but it is meant as a sample which should be tasted and experienced everywhere, in all my relationships.

If I am hungry, I eat; if I want God, I practise yoga.

No-one can do it for me.

15th June Love All

Love is merely the expression of the unity that already exists between us.

If that is not realised, there is no love.

It seems to be difficult for me to love another without a motivation, and if love is motivated, it is a motivation and not love. Can I love you as long as I have the feeling that you are another?

You and I exist as separate beings, but we are one in God.

Only that feeling or understanding can enable us to love one another.

Loving one another in other contexts is fraught with danger and frustration, because if I love you and you do not reciprocate, I am frustrated, I am mad.

Even murders take place in such a context!

So, I must love you, but I must love you as God, then the emotional aspect of my personality must also be brought in to participate in this total yogic process.

That is called bhakti.

Now the problem is: how to love you, and not to love 'you' but to love 'God in you', or recognise that we love one another because we are one in God.

It is then that your emotional aspect can be trained properly to integrate the rest of your personality in yoga.

It is possible for some to rise instantly to the 31st-floor by recognising the omnipresence of God.

To many of us it may not be so easy, and therefore the wise sages introduced innumerable rites and rituals, methods and techniques to awaken in us this love of God.

As someone very beautifully said: "In order to love all you must learn to love one."

I must love one in order to experience what love means so that I may love all, but usually I love this one and I feel quite satisfied with it.

Then I am imprisoned.

Love cannot be confined in that way.

It has to break all bonds and express itself in innumerable ways towards all beings on earth.

Love for God can be likened to a piece of iron attracted to a magnet.

God compels us, at a certain stage, to love Him as He loves us.

It does not depend upon our will to yield or not to yield; it depends upon God.

16th June See God in All

We have all said that God is omnipresent since beginningless time.
We have interpreted it in different ways.
If God is omnipresent, it naturally means that God alone exists.
Then we are faced with the problem: 'What about me? Am I also God?'
Even that does not seem to be difficult to reconcile with the teaching.
But it does seem to be difficult to reconcile the teaching with what we consider as 'evil'.
So we interpret it in this way: "God is everywhere; in a way, I am also God.
But that wicked man cannot be God."
This is where we are caught.
One cannot theorise this.
One has to see the Truth.
Then it is possible to understand what is meant by 'God is omnipresent'.
If you ask the question: "Who is a saint or a yogi or a sage?"
The simple answer would be, "Anyone whose life is a commentary on the Truth that 'God is omnipresent'."
Such a person was Swami Sivananda.
His whole life was a prayer.
His whole life was an affirmation of the Omnipresence of God.
In God's Omnipresence He was also God.
He used to say: "See God in all".
Surely, if God is omnipresent and I am not seeing God in all, there is some error.
Where is the error? How do I remove this error?
Because, if I pretend to see God in all, I am not seeing God in all really and truly.
Yet since this truth has been declared by a holy man, something deep within us says that it must be true. Therefore, if there is a defect, it is in me, in my vision, in my perception.
I start from there. I hear the truth from a holy man.
Intellectually it seems to be true.
But yet, there is something within me which doesn't accept that it is true.
I must then examine this division within me.
Without hypocrisy, I must work towards the integration of my vision.
It may be easy or it may be difficult.
What makes it easy?
It's easy to answer: "God's Grace," because we don't know what God's Grace means!
Why is it difficult?
Because of my ego.
The answer again shows that I don't know what my ego is.
The difficulty is my ego and if I know what my ego is, I could just take it and throw it away.
So we do not know what God's Grace is, we do not know what the ego is.
We only know that there is this division within and that it is difficult to overcome, but not impossible.
Therefore I must constantly work with this difficulty.
That is yoga.

17th June Omnipresent Love

We often say "God is Omnipresent," and " God is Love," without realising what it means!

God created the earth: our dwellings are made of earth.

God created the wind, it sustains us as air, and as cyclone it brings destruction.

God created fire which cooks our food but burns everything.

Even so with water.

Yet, who would want water to burn, fire to freeze, stones to fly and wind to be still?

God dwells in all; and God is Love.

We do receive this love from all, without any exception whatsoever.

God's love flowing through fire is warm; God's Love flowing through snow is cold.

The form the love takes may appear to be different, but the difference is created and then perceived and experienced by the limited mind.

God dwells in all and God is love.

It is good to realise this.

Your friend's friendship, your husband's or wife's love, your rival's jealousy, your servant's devotion, your enemy's hate, the saint's goodwill and the neighbour's ill-will - all of them without exception, are really and truly the manifestation of love which is God.

When we see it, we also see that it cannot be otherwise.

Fire cannot freeze and snow cannot cook our food: it cannot be otherwise.

God is Omnipresent and God is Love.

Whatever we get from each one is exactly as it is: the Love of God manifesting through that personality. It cannot be otherwise.

When we realise this, we rise above reaction and retaliation.

We realise that it is so.

This is God-realisation.

Rationalisation sees at least two alternatives and picks one: it is uncertain.

Realisation sees that it is as it is: there is no alternative!

There is absolute certainty.

In meditation and in prayer one comes face to face with that which is beyond the self, when one realises the Cosmic Being and Cosmic Consciousness which is the common substratum of all in this universe.

The awareness of that which is beyond self banishes frustration and despair, and promotes understanding.

18th June The Path of Love

Bhakti has often been taken to mean mere emotionalism.

Crying, jumping, dancing, fainting and such other abnormalities have often been mistaken for true devotion.

We often forget that though sages may behave like mad men, mad men are not sages!

We should know the genuine and the spurious.

Otherwise, we shall regard bhakti as a mere riot of emotion.

It is not.

Worship of an image of God, singing of kirtans, repetition of the Divine Name, etc. all have their places in our sadhana. But we should not forget that the goal is realisation, not imagination.

Here, again, as in karma yoga, it is the inner attitude that matters, not the amount of money spent in the worship.

The symbolism of the worship should not be forgotten.

As we grind the sandal-paste, we pray to Him to bestow upon us forbearance, to do good to even those that do evil to us, even as the sandalwood gives fragrance to the man who cuts it and grinds it.

As we offer flowers at His feet, we should feel that we offer all actions as flowers of worship.

As we wave the incense before the Lord, we should inwardly feel that He is all-pervading as the scent of the incense pervades, though imperceptibly, the entire room.

As we wave the single faced lamp, we should feel that we adore the Lord with the inner Self or Soul.

Similarly, the three-faced lamp represents the three bodies, the three states of consciousness and the three gunas; and the five-faced lamp represents the five pranas, the five organs of action and the five organs of knowledge.

Through all these we adore the Lord.

When the multi-faced lamp is waved we should feel that we adore Him with all our thoughts and emotions.

With the camphor, we should melt and pray to Him that our individual personality may thus merge in Him.

It is the bhavana (inner attitude) that ultimately blossoms as anubhava (actual experience) in due course; and it is all important in bhakti yoga.

In Mauritius I did not want to build another temple for installing the images of the manifestations of the divine in.

They came to free us; and it is incongruous that we should lock them up.

So today, Jesus, Krishna, Subramania and Moses stand majestically in the open, surrounded by flowers and fruits, blessing every passer-by.

19th June Idol Worship

Idol worship should lead us on to meditation on the Absolute.

Without the first step of idol worship, meditation on the Absolute is almost impossible.

And, if we do not extend the frontiers of divinity beyond the idol, we may get stuck there.

Hence, even in the method of worshipping idols, our ancient Seers had introduced elements of adorations of the Nameless and the Formless - in fact, they emphasised that we should superimpose the qualities of the Absolute on the idol.

Again, they declared that mental worship of the chosen deity was superior to gross external worship, and that para puja (a way of adoring the Omnipresent God through all our thoughts, words and deeds) was superior to all other forms of worship.

The sincere aspirant realised always that he could not get anywhere on this path without the help of an idol to fix his mind on.

The idol also provided a concrete Form of God on which he could pour out the devotion of his heart, to which he could pray, and on which he could lean in times of stress and strain, trials and difficulties.

He found great relief from tension, worries and anxieties when he had a 'tangible God' to whom he could talk!

The Omnipresent-Divinity which was of course present in that idol too, heard his prayer and granted it.

When the concentration grew intense, the power latent in that idol was revealed; and thus we have stories of the great mystics who could 'see' God in and through the idols.

Let us not forget: God who is Omnipresent, is in the idol too, and He Who is Omnipresent can reveal Himself in any Form to the devotee.

In surrender to God, it is not the ego that surrenders what it 'has' to a God who is outside.

God is the totality; the ego is an apparent divider in it.

When the totality is realised, the ego is absorbed into it.

The totality cannot be conceived of by the mind.

That which 'is-was-will-be' cannot be comprehended by the mind (which functions in time) and can only comprehend what is in the present, or remember the past, or imagine the future.

God alone is: the realisation of this truth is the surrender of the ego.

20th June End to Dualism

There is a state where dualism comes to an end, a state which transcends the dualistic notions of happiness and unhappiness.

The yogis call that state bliss or ananda, a state of pure awareness which is not aware of the other.

Ordinary happiness depends upon something else - the other and the other will inevitably go away.

If I say, "I am happy, " it implies that yesterday I was unhappy and I fear that my happiness may not last till tomorrow.

Happiness that depends upon the other is an escape, but if I am happiness itself, that happiness is forever.

It is my nature and because it has not arisen, it will never set.

The one who is able to 'enjoy life' is also able to create his own unhappiness.

The mind which creates happiness will also create unhappiness.

It is the yogi's endeavour to retain pure inner awareness which is not aware of another.

This does not allow dualism to arise.

Pure awareness does not need to confirm that it is aware.

When confirmation is demanded, I create the other.

Fire does not look for a hot water bottle; confirmation of warmth is not necessary.

That confirmation creates the other and the whole dualistic experience arises.

Thought arises, and bliss is reduced to happiness or pleasure.

It is at this point that the yogi steps in and cautions, "Beware, that happiness will go away!"

The moment I become aware of this, the outward flow is reversed.

Awareness which was flowing towards the other, flows back towards me.

Awareness that was externalising itself, flows within, towards the centre.

When I loved 'you', I was happy, but when I find that love within, I am supremely happy.

It is not the other whom I love, but I am love itself.

It is when I project this love on another that selfishness, expectation and sorrow arise.

The heart in which love shines, which is aware of itself without being aware of the other, with no necessity for that love to flow towards another in a dualistic relationship, that heart is unselfish and divine.

There is nothing in that heart but love, love which does not project but radiates to everything in the universe.

A child opens the fountain of bliss within me, and then I close my eyes!

The happiness we seek in external agents comes from within; the agents provide the fountain of bliss which comes from within.

21st June What is Prayer?

One thing that is practised universally is some sort of worship.

When I love God I want to express my love directly.

I think more and more people should learn to approach the divine directly.

Prayer, chanting and singing are possible.

You can learn to chant in your own way, using your own formula, singing in your own way.

In the case of chanting it is the feeling that counts.

The prayer can be in any language, in any tune and said in any way you like, but what is prayer and how does one offer a prayer?

Both for prayer and chanting it is good to create a certain atmosphere.

Theoretically it should be possible for you to pray in a supermarket; but the environment helps, so that here it is better to make use of the mind's own weakness of working on the basis of association.

So when you want to pray or meditate, use a certain room or a certain portion of your room and don't use that spot for anything else.

So that the moment you go there, the mind already says "Prayer time".

Chanting is very useful and very powerful.

While we chant we are merely invoking the presence of God; and if there is a feeling of devotion, it is possible to experience when this presence is actually felt.

It doesn't happen always, but when it happens it's very clear.

That is what we are looking for in prayer or in devotion.

It happens fairly easily while chanting.

If you use one of those hymns that the great saints have used, there is some inspiration in it.

It has got its own association, its own power or Shakti.

In prayer or in chanting the idea is for the ego, the self, to melt away.

If at the same time you are praying for something, then the self wakes up again, it becomes strong.

Therefore prayer, if it is to be really effective, must be unselfish.

Again it is the brain, the intellect, that interferes.

The intellect can support the heart by realising that if there is a need, God knows it already.

Knowing this, the mind or the intellect does not clamour for this or that and the prayer is just prayer, merely to feel the presence of God here.

In other words the prayer is: "God you are omnipresent, let me feel your presence, let me experience your presence here."

That is probably easier for me to experience in a temple or in an image of God, but once I have experienced it there, it is not difficult for me to experience it everywhere.

That is when one's whole life becomes yoga, karma yoga.

22nd June Tension Means No Peace Of Mind

There is this mansion of peace within us.

The key is prayer.

Prayer is the centre of all religious practice, but the modern man has an intense dislike of prayer.

The fault is not entirely his.

The 'devout' have turned praying into preying!

We do not pray to Him: we prey upon Him.

We regard God as a Christmas tree, with all sorts of gifts hanging round - and we hurry to grab them, lest our brethren should get there before us!

What foolishness and ignorance.

Why should we beg for food from God, our Parent?

Work for it!

Why should we pray for prosperity?

Work for it.

Why should we pray for health?

Live a clean life.

Why should we pray for a holiday in heaven?

If we are good to our neighbours and charitable we shall get it.

Why waste prayer on these childish ends?

Prayer is the key to the domain of peace within.

It involves a twofold confession:

(1) The individual is powerless against the undivine forces within which disturb the peace and stir the animal instincts into activity.

(2) The indwelling Divine Presence is full of power, the light of divinity, wisdom and peace. Hence, prayer is an invocation of that Divine Power to take hold of or flow into and transform the individual personality.

More than even this, our prayers should be practical.

They should be translated into our daily life.

We often pray for Light and Wisdom, but revel in darkness and bestiality!

We should also recognise that God is Infinite, and cannot be accommodated in a small heart.

Our heart should expand and we must wish well for all and translate this wish into a practical life of selfless service and charity.

Then the prayer becomes effective.

Such prayer opens the gates to the inner chambers of peace.

Only he who prays regularly, who lives a selfless life promoting the happiness of all and who delights in the happiness of all can be at peace within.

Only he can be truly happy for there is no happiness for the man without peace of mind.

Do not get attached to an activity, so that you can hand it on to someone else and continue with the next thing that God has for You to do according to His will.

23rd June Prayer

Prayer is not only a religious exercise.

Prayer is resorted to by people all over the world, in all walks of life, for all sorts of reasons, with all sorts of motivations.

Prayer in that sense covers requests, pleading, begging and such other means of one person gaining something from another person.

"I pray, will you tell me this?"

"Pray do this for me."

We use such expression very often in life.

When it comes to prayer as a religious exercise, one has to understand the three vital elements involved in it: who is it that prays? to whom is the prayer addressed? what is the prayer itself - or what are its motivations and goals?

For if once again, even in the religious field, we use prayer as a means of fulfilling our selfish or self-centred ends, then the prayer becomes an extension of the numerous selfish activities that characterise our lives and that inevitably bring us greater and greater sorrow and restlessness.

I go to a powerful person, I pray to him that he may employ me, hire me, and from there on I become his slave.

I go to a prosperous person, wealthy person, pray for a gift; then I am indebted to him for the rest of my life and therefore, once again I become a slave.

And these are terribly unpleasant forms of prayer because they generate in me, immediately, a sense of dependence, a slave mentality, fear and therefore hate.

If prayer in religion also implies our prayers for the fulfilment of our selfish ends being addressed to God or gods, we are merely extending our slavishness to the sphere or the realm of the invisible and therefore the dependence, the fear and the hate will continue.

Perhaps prayer in the religious sense has a very different connotation.

In order to understand the religious importance of prayer, it is essential that we should become aware of the nature of the three elements in prayer: who it is that prays, to whom the prayer is addressed and what the motivation is and therefore what the prayer is.

One who endeavours to find an answer to these three questions enters into the state of prayer which is deep meditation.

In the West they tend to use God - instead of letting God use them!

24th June The Fountain Source of Prayer

From where does prayer spring?

I am praying - to whom? To God.

What is God?

"I think that God is..." etc.

The rest of the sentence is unimportant. I think God is...

So I am praying to a concept or an imaginary being that I myself have put together from descriptions I myself have gathered over the years!

I am not saying that therefore prayer is useless.

Prayer is a vital part of religious exercise.

So, without entering into speculation concerning who that God is, can we look into this religious exercise which we call prayer?

One consideration may also help in getting rid of idle speculation and that is this: if I am praying to God and if God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, as I have been taught, then immediately I realise the prayer is a silly waste of time!

God who is omniscient knows it already; God who is omnipotent is capable of dealing with all the problems without my having to intercede.

So all that is irrelevant.

I pray. Who do I pray to?

I recite the following prayer:

"Om sarvesam svasti bhavatu,
sarvesam shantir bhavatu,
sarvesam purnam bhavatu,
sarvesam mangalam bhavatu."

An interesting feature in this prayer is that it does not specifically declare the entity to whom this prayer is addressed.

"May all be happy,

may no one suffer,

may no one be unhappy,

may all enjoy health."

That is a wish. I am expressing the wish.

Who am I talking to?

If I do not want to enter into any speculation whatsoever, the one person who immediately hears this prayer is myself.

Perhaps if we realise the beauty in that, the prayer becomes living.

I am not suggesting that I am praying to God, "Oh God, make everybody happy - so that I dutifully create more and more unhappy people for You to do Your job"!

It is God's job to promote everybody's happiness and peace, and in order to make His omnipotence worthwhile, I go on creating trouble in society.

That's not the spirit at all!

When these words are uttered, the first person who hears the prayer is myself.

I am suggesting to myself, I am praying to myself, "May all be happy," - which means I should not make anyone unhappy, and, if possible, I should work for the happiness, peace, health and prosperity of everyone I come into contact with.

That seems to be the very essence of prayer.

25th June The Only Prayer

The mind is impotent, irrelevant.

It is only when this truth is realised that life becomes meaningful, otherwise there is no meaning in life.

This is one error we commit.

Another error is when we make ritual an end in itself.

Chanting, ritual and all this is marvellous, but when we keep on doing them meaninglessly and senselessly, they are useless and a waste of time, effort and life.

We think that this puja I am conducting itself is going to save us.

It will not save you.

Nothing will save you.

We should pray to God for only one factor in our lives and that is the enigmatic and almost impossible problem we are faced with: "What is this 'mineness' and how do I deal with it?"

Something tells me it is not true, and yet life tells me it is very true.

From moment to moment my life and peace of mind are destroyed by this.

Other things are rational: I don't have to pray to God to give me my daily bread, it is there in the kitchen.

I can go and eat it.

I don't want to pray to God for wealth, that's easy.

The only thing that is difficult (if not impossible) for us, because we are bound hand and foot to reason, logic and thought, is how to deal with the mind which defies reason.

I can easily solve the problems of my son, my wife, but even if I have solved all that I am still caught up in this one insurmountable obstacle, 'I am this body', or 'This body is mine'.

So then we sincerely pray - to God or to illusion itself, maya "I cannot understand this, please save me".

"Save me" in that context only means see if there is some way of destroying this mineness.

Almost all other prayers are unnecessary, irrelevant and don't make sense.

It is when something within you sees this, that you really and truly realise that God is omniscient.

It is then that you can also from the very bottom of your heart say with Jesus Christ, "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

If you treat God as your Lord, give Him the 'power of attorney' 'Thy will be done'.

26th June The End of Prayer

If belief in God comes into this religious exercise called prayer, then we might suggest to ourselves that the prayer entering into the ears of the person who is offering the prayer reaches the heart of God who dwells within the heart of the praying devotee.

It amounts to the same thing, but it is better to avoid speculation because if the praying devotee believes that the prayer is addressed to another person, then he does not take responsibility for the prayer.

He is not involved in the prayer at all and therefore he can behave most hypocritically.

He says, "May all be happy," and after having voiced this prayer he goes out and fights with someone else the next minute, because the prayer was not addressed to himself.

This, I believe, is the most vital aspect of prayer.

Either way, whether one believes that the prayer is offered to the divine that is seated in one's own heart or one enquires into the source of the prayer itself within oneself, it is inevitable that one should come face to face with the fundamental motivations.

Prayer, being a religious exercise endowed with certain potencies and purity, when it detects selfishness, self-centredness, passion, greed and craving, has the power to eliminate all these within oneself.

If one thinks: "I am praying that everyone may be happy; that everyone includes me," then selfishness loses its meaning and greed loses its charm.

One knows that the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient Divine will fulfil all needs without the necessity for greed.

When such selfish activity has come to an end within oneself, the self also ceases to be an intruding factor and the heart in which the self does not stir as an intruder is a temple of God, God Himself.

When you reach that point, you are in holy communion with the Divine.

That is the end of prayer.

May all be well; may all enjoy peace.

May all enjoy fulfilment.

May all auspiciousness attend all.

May all be happy. May all be free from ailment.

May all behold what is auspicious.

May no one experience unhappiness.

Lead me from the unreal to Reality.

Lead me from darkness to Light.

Lead me from death to Immortality.

27th June Indiscriminate Discrimination

Prayers are prayers addressed by man to God!

Why do we label them Hindu prayers, Muslim prayers or Christian prayers?

The language is different, but the content, the message, is the same.

We use even these words - Hindu, Muslim, Christian indiscriminately.

Out of these our mind fashions images, masks.

These masks then collide, bringing about disharmony, conflict and violence.

Someone defined Hindu as one who has banished 'himsa' (violence) from his heart.

A Muslim is one who has surrendered himself to God.

A Christian is one who loves God and loves his fellowman.

Three words whose meaning is identical, if you are sincerely looking for the meaning and not for the excuse to distinguish yourself from the other and to distinguish yourself above the other!

Such indiscriminate discrimination is a sign of ignorance.

But what is ignorance?

It is not an object or an entity which is supposed to obstruct our vision.

Ignorance is a type of knowledge that tells us that we are looking in the wrong direction or through wrong glasses which pervert our vision.

(Hence it is denoted by the negatively worded a-vidya or a-jnana in Sanskrit.)

We are looking: but not in the right direction and in the right perspective.

We do not bother to 'meet' a brother-seeker professing another faith; and even if we do meet him, we look at him and his faith through the glasses of prejudice and indiscriminate discrimination.

If we abandon this we might still see the distinguishing characteristic of 'our' faith, without even wishing to distinguish ourselves or consider ourselves as superior or inferior!

Allah in Arabic is God in English and Isvara in Sanskrit.

The words are different, the languages are different, the spelling is different: but they connote the one Truth.

The mind, when it analyses itself, will not easily accept its defects.

The thief will not confess his hidden guilt to you!

You will have to take him to a magistrate or a policeman who will get the truth from him.

Only buddhi or God can discover one's faults.

28th June Do You Want Happiness? Give It!

A young American friend said to me, "I need love, lots of it, to make life worth living."
Quite so.

But this love is within yourself; hence the eyes close and the mind turns inward when you are in the presence of your beloved or your God (in the temple or in your meditation).

The external 'source' was but a provocative agent.

He, she or it lifted the lid covering the inner fountain-source: and love flowed - from yourself, towards the other person - and you thought it came from the other person!

Not only you, everyone in the world needs love: you have it only when you give it.

We have all heard and we have all said a million times over that everyone seeks happiness in this world; and the holy ones have reminded us again and again that that happiness is within us, not in the external world or objects.

That is what Yoga or Self-realisation or God-realisation is about.

It is possible to look at this question from another angle, as follows.

I seek happiness. So does my neighbour.

If I think that my happiness lies in his (or her) doing what I want, so does his happiness lie in me doing what he (or she) wants!

It is at once plain that if happiness is mutual, giving it is easier, more practicable and less of a problem than demanding it.

One can certainly go on from there and learn to be happy in making others happy, in giving happiness to others, to all.

But this giving must be truly giving and not a forced or a hypocritical giving, with one eye screwed on what it brings.

Even here, the happiness that one seems to 'get' from outside is truly within oneself and the person who makes you happy helps you in an indirect way to find it.

When you discover that you are happiness then you constantly give happiness and thus you are never unhappy.

Love and happiness can only be given out, and this is possible only if you are love and happiness.

Perhaps there is no reincarnation.

For the Self (soul) is not born, nor does it die.

It is the body that dies and there is no rebirth for that body.

We make ourselves a new suit as soon as the present one is discarded.

When Moses was banished into the wilderness, it was an opportunity for him, not banishment.

29th June To Reach Beyond Self

Wise men all over the world realise that any religion worth the name must take every man and woman beyond the self.

To talk of 'brotherhood' within the different and often divergent religious folds is to sow the seed of discordance and disharmony.

Many of the religious leaders of the world unknowingly and unthinkingly (and therefore unwisely) commit this grave error: when, for instance, Mr. X risks his life to save Mr. Y, the religious leader might say, "What a noble example of Christian charity!"

Very true indeed, and the remark is entirely justified.

Perhaps even he did not intend to imply that such charity is not to be found in the practice and percept of other religions: but alas, the mis-leaders who profess to follow the religious leader interpret the statement to imply such comparison and such condemnation.

There is no doubt whatsoever that such perversion is the work not of the religious person, but of the utterly irreligious person.

It is also true that such an irreligious person is capable of perverting anything that the religious leader might say or do - even to the ludicrous extent of exclaiming, "Behold, my leader says that all religions are the same; he respects all holy men; and therefore he is superior to all others and all the others are knaves and fools," without realising that thereby his irreligiousness does incalculable harm to his own leader.

It is therefore good that every true and sincere religious leader all over the world should hold up 'human brotherhood' at every turn, at every opportunity.

This human brotherhood transcends the self even in its most extended form as a religious community or community of religious people.

Beyond the limited self is the infinite in which all distinctions dissolve.

When two people quarrel, what does a yogi do?

If he joins one or the other, he prolongs and intensifies conflict.

He might look within to see where judgement and the wish to join one arises.

Beyond his own ego is Peace.

Stationed in it he might just look at the fighters.

Then antagonism might dissolve.

But if he recognises this as the effect of his love, his ego is up and everything is lost.

30th June The Secret of Harmony

Question:

When a wife (or a husband) is interested in yoga or a spiritual life, and the spouse is not, and so resents it, what should one do?'

Swamiji:

Naturally, it is good to realise that "You asked for it!"

You chose to get married; you loved and still love your spouse, and you want this harmonious relationship to continue.

Otherwise, the question does not arise.

Millions of marriages break up on other (and flimsier) grounds, but it becomes a real problem particularly to those interested in a spiritual life, whose conscience is awake and questions one's actions and motives.

When the conscience is asleep, the mind rationalises everything with the greatest of ease.

In any relationship there is some interaction - give and take.

Sooner or later expectations build up.

One's reasonable expectations are considered unreasonable demands or compulsion by the other.

But we do see that we serve one another anyway - either feeling compelled to do so, or as a duty, or out of love.

Is it not possible, then, to do whatever one does, out of love?

Yes, it is. Why not?

We do what we do because we love the other person - and because we wish to be love, incapable of violence - not with a desire to please the other.

It is not possible to please all - not even a spouse - always.

When you try to please another there is no love in you but a lot of effort.

Moreover, all this may raise the expectation still higher, bringing displeasure closer!

Hence the yogi practises ahimsa (non-violence).

If you eradicate all violence, all wrong motivations, and all expectations from your heart, you will be love.

Expectation is violence; to resist expectation is violence, too.

But it is possible to refrain from expecting that the spouse should not expect you to do what he or she expects you to do.

Being a yogi, it should be easier for you to understand the other!

Otherwise, what sort of yogi are you?

Must you always fulfil everyone's expectations? Can you?

When you can, you will.

If you cannot, but if you are a yogi full of love, the other person will surely understand.

Well, there will always be some who will not! So what!

'Agree with thine adversary' is a sacrifice also!

1st July True Freedom

Guru means 'light'.

God, Guru and the inner reality or Atman are synonyms.

That inner light is nameless and formless.

It is the limitation of our own vision that sees that light as a form.

The form of the Guru is the manifestation of the Grace of God, the light of lights.

Only grace can thus condescend to descend to our level and appear to us in a form that is easy of our comprehension.

In fact, that which dispels the shadow of the 'me' is the light, the Guru.

In the very silent presence of the guru, ignorance is dispelled.

Words are distracting, disturbing and unnecessary superfluity.

Yet again the Grace of the Guru supplements non-verbal communication with verbal communication, because we are deaf to the enlightening eloquence of silence.

The Guru is the light of God that has assumed a human form, by the Grace of God, in answer to our own inner aspiration and prayer.

That light dispels the haunting shadow of ignorance, which is the 'me'.

Only that which is beyond the 'me' (the Guru) can know how and when this has been achieved.

The 'me' does not disappear easily.

It is capable of creating its own delusions even of enlightenment, liberation or nirvana.

Therefore, the Guru adopts suitable means for the eradication of this 'me'.

The Guru's behaviour and teaching may even appear contradictory: that is the way in which He deprives the 'me' of all support.

Hence, the scriptures warn: "Do not look into the merits or the demerits of the commands of the Guru.

Obey implicitly." It is often the inner tyrant (the self) that demands freedom from external authority and determines what that freedom means.

True freedom is freedom from self which is realised to be nonexistent in the light of the inner Reality, which is the Guru.

It is the awakened intelligence that realises this inner Reality.

This awakening of the inner intelligence (or chit-Shakti) is Shakti-pata.

One who brings about this awakening is known as the Guru.

However, this Shakti-pata does not take place unless there is self-surrender; until the disciple has come to the end of his own resources and is able to approach the Guru humbly in total devotion (which is of the heart and not of the intellect), and to establish a channel of direct communication by means of loving and devoted service to the Guru.

It is when the disciple learns to listen to the Guru 'with the ears of his heart' that the Guru is able to transmit the highest truth direct to the very heart of the disciple.

2nd July Dharma and Salvation

By holding people together, dharma promotes prosperity.
We are no longer selfish and narrow, bigoted and egotistic.
We love one another; we serve one another; we promote the welfare of all and each other.
Thus is the prosperity of mankind ensured by dharma.
Dharma holds the different aspects of our own personality together.
The man who leads a life of adharma (opposite of dharma) has an unintegrated personality.
He is confused, worried and disorganised.
Dharma integrates his personality and thereby promotes peace, happiness and harmony within.
It holds or binds man to God.
Thus is our salvation assured.
Thus this 'holding power' brings about prosperity and salvation at the same time.
Dharma and salvation are like the two banks of a river, with wealth and pleasure flowing as the water of the river.
So long as the water flows between the banks it brings prosperity and happiness to the people and cattle.
If the river breaks the banks, then the very same water becomes destructive to both people and cattle.
To do good to others is dharma.
To harm others is adharma, its opposite.
Who is the 'other'?
You will remember the parable of the Good Samaritan that Lord Jesus taught.
We have an equally grand statement in the Bhagavad Gita: "Sarvabhūtahiterataḥ" (keenly interested in the welfare of all beings - human, subhuman, superhuman!).
For, "the good man with a large heart regards the entire universe (i.e. all beings) as his family."

Compulsion means I am compelled to do something.
When you isolate this compulsion from external sources - he, she, it - and transfer it to God and the Devil, both of them are in you.
There is dichotomy there.
In that dichotomy, am I the doer or am I the compeller?
This is the most fundamental question which seems extremely difficult.
So we look around and think that compulsion comes from someone else - that because I am living in an ashram I am compelled by the authorities of the ashram; because I am living in a community, I must obey the structure of the community.
It's convenient to see the compulsion coming from someone else.
That is not compulsion.
It is coercion, violence - because if we love one another then you don't have to compel me; you just have to indicate and I love to do it.

3rd July Guru

Who gets enlightenment, - and how?

How do I know whether what I consider 'knowledge' is not again merely ignorance, whether my 'self-awareness' is not just another 'ego-trip'?

The happiness I think I enjoy - of any spiritual experience I think I have - might be simply ego-experience!

What I regard as 'peace' may in fact be dullness.

I cannot by myself discover, understand and overcome ignorance (avidya) and ego-sense (asmita).

I hear and I believe that God is Omnipresent, ONE, - yet in my vision there is infinite diversity!

Assistance is required to get out of avidya and asmita.

The Guru is the person or experience which makes this possible.

The Guru is whoever or whatever provides the inner answer to the questions facing us:

"How am I caught in this world? What is my relationship with the objects of this world?

Who am I? What is I?"

The enlightening experience that enables me to see the answer - Truth - is the Guru.

Whether the light shines in the form of a human being, or an animal, or an object, or as an event in nature, or in the outer world, or as an inner experience - the Light that dispels the darkness of avidya is Guru - 'remover of darkness'.

To be able to recognise the Light when it comes, I must at least know its opposite, that is, what it is to be trapped in darkness under the influence of avidya.

Aware of the existence of confusion within me, I am constantly expecting someone, something that will remove this.

I must be in a continuous state of respectful expectation - ready whenever it comes, alert not to miss it, as it could be anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Anything is possible!

And I might not recognise It - like the cousin of the Buddha, who was so close to the Master and despised him through familiarity!

No-one can save you from yourself.

A Guru is necessary, but no-one can do it for you.

You must be aware of all your conceptualisation and rationalisation, false but convenient judgements and 'explanations', so that the light - when it comes - does not slip through your fingers, as the mind interprets according to its limited limiting lights!

Whilst the Guru-experience is necessary, it needs in conjunction my respectful, alert readiness to 'catch' It!

Yoga is whatever helps the unenlightened individual to true Enlightenment - and the Guru is what enables him to see the Light.

4th July Thoughts on the Guru

Spiritual awakening is the guru (which is discipleship), but it needs confirmation and direction.

When this inner awakening (or discipleship), the personality of the guru and inner experience of the utter futility of activity based on ignorance (which is ahamkara 'I am body' idea) come together, there is moksha.

The ignorant-egoistic disciple may seek knowledge other than Self-knowledge from a Guru. He is like the banana stem which is hard to ignite.

The Guru's Grace and Shakti will help mature him into coal and then into petrol.

In spirit the three are one - it is matured vegetation that becomes coal and then petroleum. A bodhisattva should not aspire for his own salvation; for then he entertains the false notion of self.

He strives for enlightenment for the good of all sentient beings.

When he attains enlightenment he realises the non-existence of 'self' - hence no one is ignorant or bound in his eyes.

All are enlightened.

Hence he does not have to take birth again to free other sentient beings.

To the spiritual aspirant, periodic 'recharging sessions' at the feet of an enlightened master are important.

Only the Guru can knock down the self-image that insidiously forms in us and redeem us from the self.

Gurudev Sivananda had that power.

It is impossible for us to get rid of the self-image on our own; often we fail to recognise even its formation.

Hence it is most essential that as often as we can we should bathe ourselves in the dust of the feet of the enlightened ones.

All God-men are one in essence.

However, Gurudev and Baba Muktananda are especially so.

Baba travelled a lot.

Gurudev's message has travelled the world over though he remained on the Ganges bank.

Gurudev spoke with his pen.

Baba wrote with his tongue.

Gurudev asked us to "See God in all".

Baba gave us a new commandment: "Treat one another as God." "Do not break anyone's heart because that is the real house of God."

In the glare and blare of everyday life we soon forget this great teaching.

It is then time to run to the Guru and recharge the inner spiritual battery.

5th July Obstacles in Spiritual Life

My Guru, Swami Sivananda, was once asked, "Since You did not live with your Guru, since You led an independent life during your sadhana, what were the obstacles that you encountered and how did you overcome them?" Gurudev smiled and said, "I had no obstacles at all."

How is this possible?

Perhaps the key lies in the fact that whatever discipline He undertook was natural to Him. It wasn't forced upon Him either by others or even by Himself.

It was the natural fruit of an inner vision.

If the inner being sees a truth, then there is no struggle.

"I must know the Self and be free. I must realise the Self now."

With this as the uppermost thought, all obstacles were wiped away.

There was no struggle, no temptation to revert to a life of ease and status.

His sustaining power was, "I must realise God now."

He was determined to realise God here and now, and whatever He did was based upon this.

With the inner direction fixed, all the disciplines like asana, pranayama, japa and diet were natural and bore fruit. Minus this basic direction, carrying on some practices will never yield fruit.

This is what is called burning desire.

Not fireworks which flare up and disappear, but a wood fire, burning silently, constantly, giving warmth and illumining everything around it.

In our case, in the beginning our zeal and enthusiasm are overwhelming.

But in six months it is gone; and we swing to the other extreme when the reaction sets in.

In his case the burning was constant, without noise, without show or fuss.

Such a fire burns itself out completely.

The fire, "I must realise God now" was all there was.

There was no looking back.

'Back' had been burned and there was only forward.

In His own words, "When shall I be free?

When 'I' ceases to be."

When 'I' is burned in the fire of enquiry.

He does not use first person, but third: when 'I' ceases to be.

Here there is no identification with ego but simply active observation, observation in itself.

Light that shines without a source, because this light is omnipresent.

These were not just words, but truth, and truth that emerged from the crucible of life.

Living truth.

And when truth becomes living truth, that living truth experiences no difficulty whatsoever, no obstacle whatsoever.

6th July Re-definitions

'Disciple' is an error in spelling.

Discipline is the word.

Discipline must approach the Guru.

Guru is 'the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance'.

Discipline must approach that light; then there is right perception.

If 'pupils' approach the Guru there is contrary result.

The pupil closes up in the presence of light and opens wide in darkness!

It cannot receive light.

The Guru inspires the discipline.

To inspire is to breathe in.

Inspiration comes from breathing in.

To breathe in, your lungs, your nostrils and the whole respiratory mechanism should be open to receive the Guru's inspiration, your innermost self must be open, too.

This is symbolised by the lotus in Indian religious sculpture.

Even more vital to inspiration is expiration: you cannot breathe in if you have not breathed out completely.

Expiration means death, too!

Unless 'I' dies, you cannot receive anything, no inspiration is possible.

The ego must go - that is why it is called (y)e-go!

When the ego is gone and all the old fossilised ideas and mental furniture which we had wrongly labelled knowledge have been shed, the inner being is pure and disciplined.

It is ready to study.

Discipline also means 'study'.

To study, the mind must be steady; discipline means this too.

To study is not to acquire and accumulate 'knowledge', but to find the truth, to find the answer, to find the reality.

To find is not to think.

Thinking can only be 'of' something; it can never be of the thing itself.

The thing itself, the answer, the truth has to be discovered.

Discover is to uncover.

It is there.

It has to be uncovered.

And it is found, not by the 'I', but by the inner Eye.

In the light that is the Guru, this Eye opens.

This does not involve exchange of ideas, but right perception - 'darshan'.

We go to the Guru to have His darshan, not just to see Him or His physical being, but to see the reality inspired by the light that He is.

May the Guru enlighten your innermost being!

'I' is never free, but when we identify ourselves with 'Him', then we are free.

7th July The Reality Within Us

I read of a tragedy that struck a great cathedral in Chile's Santiago in December 1863. Two thousand people died on that day and in that cathedral.

The story concludes: "When the Chilean Government announced that the cathedral would be rebuilt, enraged crowds began tearing down the tottering stone walls...

In the end the Government, bending to the people's wishes, agreed to raze the ruins and dedicate the site as a memorial to the dead".

In a library elsewhere I read a volume which describes a European seeker's hunt for a Guru in India.

He found none.

His fruitless quest turned him away from God towards the modern world's potent substitutes: alcohol and the almighty dollar, sex and scientific progress.

A letter I have just received from a sincere friend narrates how a sick man went to a swami credited with miraculous powers; spent much time and money, but returned with the illness minus the money, plus a positive hostility towards the swami.

Lord Krishna's words in the Bhagavad Gita come to my mind: four types of people worship the Lord - the sick, the greedy, the inquisitive and the wise.

If they are sincere, all of them will eventually be absorbed into the fourth type.

But if they are not sincere, if they seek the protective walls which they then erect to provide themselves with a security which they do nothing to deserve; if they use God's or guru's grace as a cheaper substitute for expensive medical treatment; if they egotistically and critically hunt and thereby drive away from them holiness and godliness, they will only materialise the scepticism, ungodliness, hostility to spiritual truth and disillusionment which lay hidden in their heart, behind the selfish motive.

Yet, the disillusionment is good, for it saves others from the illusion!

We humbly seek the Guru because we are sincerely aware of our spiritual insufficiency and the Guru is therefore our only light.

We surrender our little self to God and wait upon Him, because He is the Reality within us, the little self being just a shadow, a mirror-image which owes its very existence to the Substance.

Such motiveless, desireless, unselfish love is wisdom; all else is ignorance.

8th July Guru and Disciple

We need the soup, but in its preparation the ladle plays a vital role.

We need correct understanding and we need someone to stir us from time to time, in order that our understanding might be mature, well-cooked and clear.

You think the ladle is disturbing the soup - it does not, it mixes it better!

Somebody is worried when a great and holy man says: "Abandon all external gurus, the real guru is within you". True.

One's Self (not self) is one's Guru.

Always (except in rare exceptions) one's attention has to be guided towards this Self by an 'external' guru.

Come to think of it, even this 'external' guru is but the manifestation of the inner consciousness made external by the special need of the human personality which can only perceive an external object.

There is no object, for the entire universe is within you - you the Self, you the Infinite Being.

I worshipped My Guru, Swami Sivananda.

Right here in front of Me I have sandals blessed by Him, which I adore.

Do I worship these inert objects?

Did I worship the physical form of Swami Sivananda? No, no.

To give you an illustration: I am an inert candle and I approach the flame - immediately I touch the flame, I realise that I am myself that Light!

This is initiation.

This is the relationship between the Guru and the disciple.

The flame is the Guru; the candle is the disciple.

The combustible substance is within the candle, no doubt, but it needed the flame to bring it to the surface, to inflame it.

If the candle said, "I possess the ability to burst into a flame, I do not need an external flame," it will continue to live as an inert substance.

Gurudev adopted a wonderful attitude!

He insisted that every seeker must have a Guru who must be literally worshipped as God: even as the early Christian fathers had commanded young Christian seekers.

In fact, the disciple will be attached to the Guru, which may be the only way in which the disciple will be able to snap other worldly attachments.

'The guru should not be attached to the disciple,' was Gurudev's warning.

This effectively prevented the disciple's attachment developing into an obstacle.

9th July Hail! The Light of God

At the time of Guru Purnima, our minds and even more so our hearts turn to the Divine Guru in love and adoration, for it is a day of renewal.

In these days when everything is moving fast, the shadows of spiritual ignorance move in very fast too, overshadowing the light of truth that forever shines in our hearts.

And it is a day of rededication.

Surely, it is enough if we dedicate ourselves to the Guru once.

But in our ignorance we often 'think' we do all this, while deep within us we deny the Guru.

Not everyone can be a Guru.

Not everyone is a disciple.

When you think of Guru, it is impossible not to think of Sri Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Baba Muktananda Paramahansa.

In Them the Guru was resplendent.

They are shining lights of God.

In Them the divine is radiant.

Through them the divine radiates across time and space.

People in distant parts of the world are inspired and spiritually awakened by them.

They live in millions of hearts and they shall continue to live in the hearts of disciples for all time to come.

Only he is a disciple whose heart is filled with the Guru; there is no room in it for the ego.

This happens when the true seeker 'sees' in his Guru the light of God, nay God Himself.

In that light the ugly shadow that terrorised the seeker's life till then vanishes.

The 'I' is absorbed in the Light of God - Guru.

There is the indescribable realisation that the self, God and Guru are three words that indicate a single truth.

isvarogururatmeti murtibhedavibhagine vyomavatvyaptadehaya sri daksinamurtaye
namah

Salutations to the Guru Dakshinamurty who, like indivisible space, pervades the three forms known as 'God', 'Guru' and 'Self'.

May the blessings of all the great gurus of the world be showered upon all the blessed disciples of the world.

You, I, he, she and it are like the beads of a necklace, and the thread interpenetrating the whole is God.

10th July The Qualified Student

When a disciple sits near the master and asks the right question or listens with intense receptivity, what takes place between them is Upanishad.

The truth however is not in the master's pocket - it is in you!

The answer is in you, but because you are unable to discover it for yourself you go to a spiritual teacher.

What is the problem that the student should experience within himself to qualify him to go to the master?

Why should a man go to any spiritual master at all?

The spiritual teacher can do nothing if one is satisfied with the type of life one is leading.

Only when one's present life itself poses a problem, when one finds no satisfaction in it or in the world, can one meaningfully enter into a dialogue with a spiritual teacher.

Understanding of this distinction is called viveka.

My Guru Swami Sivananda said: "There are many spiritual teachers in this world, but there are not many disciples."

A disciple becomes fit to approach a master only when this dissatisfaction has arisen in him; it is then that he really turns away from worldly pleasures and ambitions i.e. there is vairagya or dispassion in him.

But first comes viveka, dissatisfaction, questioning: "Is this real? What is life? What am I doing here?"

What can really make me question this world?

Almost nothing!

One can suffer in this world, one can have all sorts of misfortunes, but there is no guarantee that they will inevitably give rise to viveka.

Only the right understanding of the impermanence of all that we seek in this world and intuitive faith concerning the existence of something beyond this can really and truly produce virtue.

When the student endowed with all this goes to the master, he possesses virtue, self-control, control over the mind.

This virtue is natural to him.

Virtue must be born of right understanding, of a right sense of values.

All these are based on what is known as mumukshutva or an intense longing for liberation.

That aspiration is there only when one knows that somehow one is caught and that this bondage is intolerable; then the disciple goes to the master and asks him: "Please tell me where and how I am caught and how I can find release?"

11th July The Fundamental Question

Only one who has discrimination, dispassion, humility and sincerity is able to grasp the true meaning of a master's teachings.

When the qualified student approaches the enlightened master, he may ask a question; but if he is virtuous and wise, he will not ask out of curiosity.

He has worked on the problem with the powers of his own mind and found no answer, and so he asks the Guru.

For the problem to be real for him, the student must come face to face with it in his own life, and use his own resources in the search for the answer.

Then, realising them to be inadequate he comes to the Guru in the right spirit as a seeker. In the Kena Upanishad there is a beautiful illustration of this.

The student goes to the teacher and asks: "O Master, who ordains that the eyes should see and that the ears should hear? Who is the one, that guides all these? Who enables life to live and the mind to think?"

The master merely gives one little hint - that the controller of all these functions is one.

(Note that the student comes and asks a particular question. In the Upanishads the master always takes him from there, from the point where he already is. He does not go off at a tangent and start talking about God.)

The sage leads the student one step further, saying: "Look within yourself, and you will find something there which enables you to see - that is the power of seeing. This power of seeing is the essence of sight itself. It is the same essence that enables the ear to hear. It is your life, it is your mind - it is the mind of your mind, the breath of your breath, the eye of your eye. The eyes cannot see it, but because of it, the eyes see."

It is - and therefore everything functions.

It is - and therefore the mind thinks.

It is - and therefore life lives.

The master continues: "You cannot know that with your mind, so do not even try to use your mind to find out what it is. It is and therefore the mind functions - and therefore the mind cannot comprehend it!"

This story teaches us two lessons.

Firstly, that Divine Grace is necessary in order to see the Truth, and secondly, that our whole being functions only because of a certain intelligence.

It is and therefore you think.

It is and therefore you ask the question: "What is it?"

When the question collapses there is Enlightenment.

Enlightenment is not something new - it is not something created by your enquiry, but something that happens when confusion comes to an end.

When confusion comes to an end, then the infinite alone exists and this is called Brahman (God).

12th July Entering the Hall of Self-knowledge

The qualifications necessary for discipleship are fundamentally based upon sincerity. The tradition is that when there is this sincere inner questioning I go to a Guru. In order to ask a question sincerely, I must have reached the end of my own resources. I must have come to the cross-roads, to the point where my whole being says: "I do not know the answer to this, I do not know the way."

Only such a person can go to the Guru.

What does the student do when he approaches a guru?

There are a number of possibilities, but one common factor is dialogue.

Either the disciple asks a question, or the Guru volunteers a statement - in either case dialogue ensues.

During this dialogue the disciple listens (this is called sravana).

It is beautiful.

Only if his whole being is questioning will listening take place.

All his energy is in hearing only.

He does not think, he does not feel - nothing functions except his ears.

If you have ever listened with this concentration, you realise that this hearing is of a special quality.

What is the next step after hearing?

Having sat near the Guru and the dialogue having come to an end, the mind begins to work.

In the presence of the Guru the mind was totally absorbed in hearing.

But now, as you are alone or with some other disciples, the mind is working (manana).

It is possible to resolve the arguments within yourself alone or with the help of another disciple who heard the same teachings.

You came to the master as a living question and now you are the living answer.

In the Bible there is a beautiful expression, "Knock and it shall be opened."

You go to the Guru and knock.

You do all this (sravana and manana) and suddenly the door is opened.

That which appeared to be a stone wall opens up.

This is nidhidyasana - total atonement or enlightenment.

Sravana means hearing the teaching and manana means saturating the whole mind with the teaching.

When the mind is thus saturated, whatever you are thinking will be in accordance with the teaching.

What has happened?

Your whole body was the question and now your whole being is the answer, because your whole mind is saturated with the teaching.

13th July Swami Sivananda

Swami Sivananda's physical energy, mental energy and stamina enabled Him, at the age of 67, to go round the whole of India, to undertake an intensive two month tour.

This was a super-human achievement.

All this was due to the regular practice of pranayama and asanas and a well-regulated life. This still may not solve some problems.

We may be practising all the yoga asanas, we may be eating excellent food, but look at our faces - something that was seen in Swamiji's face is missing.

Radiance and extraordinary attractiveness were there, however ill Swami Sivananda's body was.

I am speaking not only of the ordinary little influenza, I am talking of when he was at death's door with a bout of typhoid.

He had been confined to bed for about 20 days.

He was not used to that, so one day he told some of us, "Ah, I think I am alright now.

Take Me to the verandah so that I can see the Ganges and the Himalayas."

We literally had to lift Him off the bed, He could not walk.

We brought Him outside and He sat in His easy chair'.

If you looked at His face then, it was as though there was nothing wrong with Him.

He was radiant, beautiful, laughing and joking with us all.

After an hour or so, He asked to go back to bed.

He planted both His feet on the floor and said, "Wait, I will try to get up myself."

He lifted himself off, then collapsed back into the chair.

Probably you and I would have had a heart attack - "Oh, what has happened to me? Twenty years ago I was so strong."

Regret, remorse, despair, depression. But there was no hint of that.

As He collapsed He started laughing, "Oh! The legs have lost their strength."

It had nothing to do with Him - the legs had lost their strength.

That is an extraordinary feature where even an aging body does not dampen the spirit.

It is not the pain that is painful, but the inner resistance of 'why should it happen to me?'

14th July Behold! Gurudev is Within

So the ringing voice is silent.

The majestic form has vanished.

We shall no more see the gigantic figure of Swami Sivananda clad in orange, shod in canvas shoes, stride with measured long steps, bag in hand, ready to distribute fruit, wisdom and work to us, His beloved children.

That child-like giggling, with the tummy quaking with convulsions of joy - a laughter so wholesome that tears of joy bedimmed the sparkling eyes; a laughter that radiated the bliss of God to all, can be heard no more.

But the light of Sivananda is inextinguishable - it shines in the heart of humanity today, without a lampshade and so the brighter for it.

Gurudev is the manifestation of God.

God is the supreme immutable reality.

He dwells in us.

The physical was His own maya.

The impersonal reality is His own self.

The end is perhaps shocking - but that is not the end.

It is a beginning.

The builder worked outside, He was on view.

He created an inside and He has entered it.

Now He works inside, out of external view, but more truly and purposefully active therefore.

Gurudev has moulded us, given shape to shapeless masses, laid stone upon stone in us and built a shrine, entered it and is now busy at work in there.

Look within.

Behold, Gurudev is within you!

15th July The Key to God consciousness

What is the inner climate of the Guru Purnima?

On this auspicious day we remember the Guru and some of us rededicate ourselves to the Guru.

There is a bold and beautiful declaration in the yoga Vasistha: "He is a Guru Who is able to give rise to God-consciousness in the disciple by a look, a touch, by verbal communication or by grace."

The Guru is one Who removes the darkness of spiritual ignorance.

It is not a sin to be unenlightened as long as we are looking for the light.

Guru is a thing that happens, and when it does, you realise unmistakably: "This is He!"

He reveals the truth, God or reality in your own heart.

In a manner of speaking, this inner revelation is the Guru.

The function of the Guru is the transmitting of Shakti.

Shaktipata is an extremely simple yet profound expression which literally means dropping Shakti.

The Shakti is the power of enlightenment.

The Guru is an enlightened person Whose power is poured into the disciple.

But, does it then entirely depend upon the Master's Grace?

There seems to be a decidedly strong suggestion that whereas the Guru's awakening Grace is there, it will become effective only to the extent that you are a true disciple.

Gurudev Swami Sivananda once told someone: "It is easy to find a guru, but it is very difficult to find a disciple."

What is the cause of enlightenment?

When the disciple's heart has become perfectly pure then God-consciousness arises in that heart.

Vasistha uses a double negative to state: "Guru does not produce God-consciousness in you, but God-consciousness does not arise in you without a Guru."

What is important is that the heart should become pure.

Therefore the spirit of discipleship is extremely important.

Wherever a true disciple is, there is the Guru.

That true discipleship itself is the Guru and hence, in a characteristic way, Gurudev emphasised that you cannot do without a Guru.

Simultaneously, He said: "Don't be a Guru." In that lies the truth.

Then you will see the whole universe as your Guru.

That is what I saw in Gurudev Sivananda.

He himself treated everybody as His Guru from whom He learned something or the other.

The great and mighty Guru felt that He was everyone's disciple, an eternal student.

In such a spirit of discipleship dwells the highest wisdom, the key to God-consciousness.

16th July Conviction, Confusion, Clarity

Learned Arjuna, who considered himself wise got confused and experienced dharma-sankata (psychological conflict).

Only an imbecile idiot and an enlightened sage are free from dharma-sankata.

All of us are puzzled often: especially when we have been exposed to the teachings of different authorities.

Even if you avoid this by following a single authority (the 'cult' mentality) it is not always easy to know how to apply the teaching to real life situations!

This is because you cannot apply teachings.

Therefore, when a real life situation arises your convictions are shaken.

This is excellent.

Convictions often convict you of killing the spirit of enquiry (which is wisdom).

Shattered conviction is experienced as confusion.

When this happens, you have no alternative but to seek the lotus feet of an enlightened Master and seek guidance, as Arjuna did.

But the seeker must learn the art of listening (hearing with the heart); if the intellect intervenes it registers convenient instructions and conveniently forgets others.

If the heart hears, the Word becomes flesh, living truth abides in the heart and the seeker obeys the Master's commands without a second thought!

It is not even obedience; for the disciple sees no alternative.

It is not obedience because it is not external compulsion or even persuasion.

There is total surrender.

At the moment of total surrender, the Master alone reigns supreme in the seeker's heart.

There is oneness.

There is enlightenment, because the Master is enlightened and the seeker has merged himself in the Master.

Suddenly there is clarity out of confusion.

You - not you, but the Master in you - do what is to be done.

The best service that a devotee or disciple can render his Guru is to grow in His likeness. While a total metamorphosis may be granted only to a few blessed ones, it is possible for most disciples and devotees to reflect at least certain aspects of the Guru's glorious personality.

With Gurudev Sivananda this ideal is brought within the reach of all because He was a dazzling multi-faceted personality.

Each of His disciples and devotees saw and admired one or a few of them.

Surely there was something in the disciple that responded to that facet.

This response grows into a responsibility - the ability to respond with one's whole being.

17th July The best worship

One tends to grow into the likeness of the person or the object one worships, provided of course the worship is not a mere imitation or a show or conformisms, but the inevitable consequence of one's own love and conviction.

Jesus, Buddha, Rama, Krishna, etc., came to be worshipped by sincere devotees out of pure love; and then the worship was continued in the hope that the lesser devotees might develop such love and grow in divinity.

But then, the film stars come to be worshipped; and one can easily see in the life-styles of the modern youth the ease with which they are growing into the likeness of the film-stars. Next only to the film stars, the peoples of the world today honour, adore and almost deify and worship the military heroes killers or defenders (depending upon from which side you speak!).

History exalts them.

Politics holds them before the public eye, decorating them and glorifying them in order to recruit more of them.

No wonder that more people think of war than of peace and Godliness.

O lover of peace!

Worship the Guru Who is the Light of God, and turn away from the worship of the gunman who is the devil's agent, a messenger of darkness.

It is only by His Grace that one can even know when one has a Guru; otherwise there is 'neither a guru, nor a disciple'; and when the disciple has totally surrendered himself to the Guru, once again there is 'neither a guru nor a disciple'.

In the words of Sri Shankaracharya one feels 'chidanandarupa sivoham sivoham' (I am infinite consciousness).

We seek the Guru.

But then we have our own notions and ideas which block our vision.

Not all cowherds may be Krishna; but one of them may be.

Not all princes may be Buddha; but one of them may be.

Not all carpenters may be Jesus; but one of them may be.

God or Guru does not have a stereotyped behaviour.

"Do you love God?" asks Gurudev.

If you love God with all your heart and soul you will recognise Him, whatever be His appearance and behaviour.

18th July Tuning In to the Teacher

When we go to a Guru we don't argue.

This is a hypothetical presumption: supposing the bee alights on some kind of a flower which doesn't have nectar.

What does it do? It takes off.

If you go to some holy person and you cannot relate to that person, take off.

Find another open flower which is waiting for you. No problem.

Humbly approach the teacher, serving in whatever manner you can.

It is not that the teacher is in need of your service, but it is through that service that you tune in.

The entire trick lies in tuning in to the teacher, tuning in to the holy man.

It is then that the knowledge begins to flow.

Unless you are on the same wave-length you won't receive the message.

But, even if you are on the same wave-length, another difficulty arises.

The holy one's experience cannot be transplanted.

So, when you are on the same wave-length with the Guru, He guides you in such a way that you seem to be close to the truth.

Be very careful here.

The Guru points out the truth as if it were very near to you.

If you have been with someone as enlightened as, for instance,

My Guru Swami Sivananda, you will appreciate this.

In the presence of this Master you feel that the truth is here.

But, go away and what happens to it?

It's gone!

This spiritual reality is not a substance which can be transferred from one to the other.

The Guru, Who has walked this path and therefore knows it, is capable of bringing you close to it or enabling you to feel that you are close to the truth.

If you are aware all the time that it is still His realisation, His experience, not yours; that you are still oppressed by the tyranny of the mind while He is free; that He has shown you that the truth is so close; then you are aware that you must be very cautious in the handling of it.

You realise, "I must endeavour to get into that stream without disturbing the environment. I must sit there with intense awareness, concentration, contemplation, humility, love and affection for the teacher, for the truth, for the reality, for God or whatever it is.

With all that intense love at heart and intense yearning, I must surrender myself to that knowledge, to that wisdom, so that..."

You cannot complete that sentence - it does not become yours, perhaps you become part of that knowledge.

The only thing that you may experience is that the mind is no longer capable of terrorising you.

As long as the body exists and the mind functions, there has to be this extraordinary vigilance, alertness, and that is part of what is called enlightenment.

19th July The symbol of wisdom

The folding of palms in greeting might well have numerous meanings: the coming together of the opposites, the ideal love-relationship between 'you' and 'me' in a free (not locked-fingers) association (not held apart), and "I greet the divine in you".

What is that 'divine-in-you'?

This is answered by the great jnana mudra or chin mudra: bring together the tips of the thumb and index finger with the other three fingers straight and together.

God is not the three.

Hence they are excluded and the so-called ego (the index finger) bends (surrenders) to meet the Lord (symbolised by the thumb).

What are the three?

The physical body which is but the product of food and shares the perishable fate of food, the mind which is the supermarket called knowledge, the confluence of very many influences or conditioning factors, and thirdly, ignorance in its literal sense of non-knowing.

It is on account of ignorance that the so-called ego (the index finger) comes between all these and the omnipresent divine.

The ego-sense has no separate existence.

Its realisation of this truth is surrender, and the instant completion of the circle (when the tips of the index finger and thumb are united) which is the realisation of the infinite.

The 'three' are excluded only from the point of view of the assumed individuality.

When this bluff is called, there is no longer 'my' body and 'my' mind.

Then all matter, including the body, is seen to be God's own cosmic body; all mind is understood to be the cosmic intelligence which is non-different from the infinite consciousness.

Hence we worship and adore even the physical body of the enlightened sage, our own guru.

They say that it is only the human being who is endowed with an intelligence that distinguishes it from other living creatures.

But does it?

How much of that intelligence is awake?

How much of our own daily life is utilised in other than what we superciliously call animal activities - eating, drinking and so on?

In what way are we better than those living beings who are considered inferior, or is it merely presumption?

If we have intelligence, is it awakened?

Are we leading exactly the same life as other animals, with an added burden called an intellect?

Are we even aware of where we are going or what we are doing?

20th July Upanishad

Upanishad takes place as a dialogue between the Guru and the disciple.

This is a purely personal adventure; it is not possible to enter into a dialogue when there is a crowd.

There is another important factor in dialogue - unless the teacher and the taught, the Guru and the disciple, are on the same level of understanding, dialogue does not take place.

How does the disciple come to the same level of understanding as the Guru?

Through devoted service a communication channel is established.

Then it is possible for the Guru to transmit this knowledge by a mere nod of his head.

Without devotion or love, service is impossible, useless.

The Guru is not going to reward you materially, so for what reason will you serve him, unless you are devoted to him?

Devotion and affection, plus service, open the channel of communication.

21st July What are We Here For?

Is there a purpose at all to life?

The question of how best the purpose can be served (which means choice, and then the decision) comes later.

You are building beautiful houses hoping that a roof over your head will provide security. Does it?

Have you met some of those millionaires who have big houses?

In those days when I was young, that itself was supposed to be the ultimate in security.

You have a big house and so you are secure, and then you discovered that that was not security, it was insecurity - the larger the house the greater the area in which the robbers could operate!

You could hide yourself.

Then you had to install burglar alarms.

Where is security?

All right; you are safe - but then they kidnap you on the roads.

Absurd! We even go so far as to secure a dead body in a box and keep it safe!

Then there is the latest craze of deep-freezing people.

You see the total, ridiculous absurdity of the life that we visualise for ourselves.

Because somehow we think that there is a purpose, and I am hunting for that purpose.

The mind itself suggests a purpose.

'My purpose is to serve all.'

What do you mean 'serve all'?

What do I serve?

Do I serve soup?

How do I serve?

What is service?

I know of quite a number of social workers, swamis, holy men, who serve humanity by telling them, "You shouldn't do that, you shouldn't do this, you know".

Serving, elevating them, uplifting them.

They haven't asked these people whether they want to be uplifted or down-trodden!

Have they ever found out what people want, what they need?

What is uplifting?

If you don't mind my saying so, all of us are undergoing this 'toilet training' until we die.

Someone or other is telling us all the time, "This you should do, this you shouldn't do".

And just as the diapers are around the baby, we also have got all sorts of diapers around ourselves - head to foot!

And we are never allowed to be ourselves.

Is that what is called service?

Is that what we are here for - to tell one another what we should or should not do?

Nothing is absolutely true but there is some truth in everything.

22nd July Guru Dakshina and the Honey Bee

Unable to answer our questions, unable to find a door, we go to the Master.

Therefore, the sage says: "It is blessed to be born human.

It is blessed to experience the longing for freedom from the tyranny of the mind; and thirdly it is indeed a rare privilege and bliss to enjoy the company of the holy one."

So, in a spiritual desert (which the world is fast becoming today), to enjoy the company of a holy one, if only for a little while, is like an oasis.

It is strange that we should consider ourselves far superior to what are called sub-human species.

If you contemplate the relationship between the bee and the flower, you will probably understand a lot more about this expression 'company of the holy one' than anyone else can teach you.

There is a longing in the bee for nectar.

The flower blossoms and the bee goes straight to it - a bee-line.

Then, watch - this is something very beautiful.

The bee alights on the flower.

How sweet, how soft the landing is.

And it takes just the nectar from the flower.

Just that, nothing else.

Nothing else of the flower is disturbed.

And, in the meantime, it carries the seed from this flower and brings about cross-pollination.

That is what these holy ones would call Guru Dakshina or Guru Seva - service to the Guru.

You are not a parasite.

You get something from the holy man, do a little service for Him also, but without disturbing anything, without in the least affecting the health, the sanity or the sanctity of the flower.

I think that for a human being with all this arrogance built in, it is almost impossible to imitate the bee.

The bee's relationship with that flower is like the company of the holy one.

Having got the nectar, go on, build your own honeycomb.

It is when you are bothered by this thing called loyalty or disloyalty that you indulge in this most regretful thing that distinguishes the human spiritual aspirant from the bee - criticism.

The bee sings and the human being stings.

And the stinging is directly attributed to the fact that you feel some loyalty problem.

Any Guru worth the name would love and encourage the seeker to find the truth, like the bee, from whichever source is within his reach.

May we become the bee and gather this honey, the honey of knowledge, from any source that we can.

23rd July Relationship With the Guru

If you are too greedy, if you hang on to this flower and keep sucking it dry, then you may yourself be consumed.

This lesson is important.

When we go to these holy ones, do we seek their company in order to find an answer to the question that has been bothering us - the question being 'how to be free of tyranny of the mind?'

Or, do we go to this person to develop some other sort of relationship?

The disciple and the Guru can have so many types of relationships, some liberating, leading us towards this freedom from the mind, and some leading us exactly and precisely in the opposite direction.

Therefore, one has to be extremely cautious.

What happens between the disciple and the Guru?

Paradoxically, enigmatically, ironically, Self-knowledge is so simple that it has to be taught.

It is not so mystifying, it is not even so enigmatic.

If there is some dirt just below your eyes, it is quite possible that you can't see it.

You have to seek someone else's help to find this dirt.

That, perhaps is why we go to the Guru.

The problem is so simple and yet it sticks to our fingers.

Krishna gives us three hints: go and surrender yourself to the Guru.

This is a spiritual thing, just like the bee alighting upon the flower.

Fall at the holy one's feet - basically, morally, spiritually symbolically surrendering the innermost being with this feeling: "I have looked but I can't find an answer to the question, 'How shall I be free from the tyranny of the mind?' So I surrender to you. Please, help me."

If the surrender is there, you would question in order to learn and not question in order to argue.

Is it possible for a holy man to confer 'instant holiness' on every one of his disciples and followers (Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati refers to them as 'swallowers!')?

If these disciples and followers are also on the same wavelength, then such communication is certainly possible: in their case, it is probably as much to their credit as to the credit of the leader that the communication takes place.

These indeed are extremely rare!

24th July to bee or not to bee

The guru brings about an awakening.

It is easy for the Guru, for He is the Light.

It is impossible for the self, for the self is the shadow of ignorance.

However, this awakening does not take place unless there is self-surrender, until the disciple has come to the end of his own resources and is able humbly to approach the Guru in total devotion (which is of the heart and not of the intellect) and to establish a channel of direct communication by means of loving and devoted service to the Guru.

It is when the disciple learns to listen to the Guru 'with the ears of his heart' that the Guru is able to transmit the highest truth direct to the very heart of the disciple - the light of the Guru's Grace dispels the shadow of ignorance, and there is spontaneous enlightenment.

Another important factor and truth which is explicitly stated in one of the religious texts called the Bhagavatam is: like a bee, gather honey, knowledge and inspiration from every source you have access to.

If your spiritual aspiration is keen and if you have experienced that bee-flower relationship with a holy one, you will know that you can derive inspiration from many and yet build one honeycomb no matter from where this nectar is brought.

All the saints teach us the same message in different ways.

These blend into you.

If they don't, it is your fault, not theirs.

Remember this very carefully.

If you are a bee you will know how to collect and gather honey and not make a mess of it. Serve each one from whom you have received some knowledge and generate that honey within yourself.

The honey itself is the knowledge.

That is the greatest service you can render to the master himself.

The master is thrilled.

He is happy that you turned out to be a first-class student.

Naturally you would never compare one master with the other.

The bee does not do it.

This is a destructive progression:

1. Give me the privilege of serving you.
2. Let me organise your work for you.
3. Let me organise your life for you.

Beware of this ego-play.

This is what pollutes and poisons all human relationships.

25th July The Enlightened One

It is by watching the actions of an enlightened person that we realise that our images of an enlightened person are mostly wrong.

Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita specifically cautions against building such images.

"The wise man must live in exactly the same style as the unwise man."

So there needn't be this external distinguishing mark where one is shaven, the other is not shaven; one wears this kind of dress, the other wears another kind of dress.

In the ignorant man there is attachment, in the enlightened man there is no attachment.

The moment you hear the words 'attachment' and 'non-attachment', you are once again slipping into some kind of an image.

It is possible to understand these only when this inner light is bright and it prevents the arising of any false identification in the sense of false relationship with other beings.

"This is my view" or "I have no view" - is it possible to drop all views, to drop even the dropper?

Only then can one understand how an enlightened one behaves.

In Gurudev Sivananda there was absolutely no ego consciousness, so that He could change from moment to moment as if it didn't matter at all.

Only He could know what He was.

Holiness is something like the aroma of a flower which comes from within.

The aim of yoga, if there is an aim, is to enable us to be exactly what God meant us to be, and to do exactly what He meant us to do without ego interference.

There is no answer to the question, "What does God want us to be or to do?"

That can only be discovered by discovering God.

To discover is to take the cover of the ego off! "I want this, I want to be like this."

That can be removed.

When that cover is removed from all departments of our life, then the light of God shines brilliantly in His own way.

Finally, it is only by Guru's and God's Grace that this may be possible, because eventually it is only by grace that this ego cover can be lifted and the inner light be discovered.

26th July You are the World

Why do we want to run after happiness?

Happiness comes in life, enjoy it.

Don't hold it, let it go.

It is not necessary for you to hang on to this shadow because you are the reality of which the shadow is projection.

How do you get rid of the shadow?

Yogis are not very dogmatic, but they point out that the only way is to turn towards the light.

The shadow is gone.

You will not see it unless you turn away from the light again.

Can we live with our inner vision trained on this inner light all the time?

We are not asked to abandon something which is real.

The yogi is not such a fool that he wants us to abandon this world, abandon this body, abandon living in a house.

What are you going to do?

Can you abandon this world?

Wherever you go the world is still there, because you are the world.

'You are the world' may have other interpretations, but even if we are able to appreciate it, the simplest connotation is enough for us.

What is the body?

The body is the same as the earth or the vegetables that you eat - or the vegetables that those beings ate whom you eat.

The vegetarians take vegetables first hand, the non-vegetarians second-hand.

So, your body is made of nothing other than what the world contains already.

Your life breath is one with the air of the whole world.

Your intelligence is shared by all other beings in the universe.

You are not something special.

So you are the world, you are part of the world and this is the inescapable truth.

There is no need to run away from this truth.

27th July Form versus Truth

The 'devil' does not invent anything new at all.

All discoveries are essentially divine; for when you lift the cover (which is always ignorance) what you discover is Truth.

Einstein, who discovered the principle on which nuclear bombs are based, was a pacifist and believed in God.

He discovered a divine law.

In Indian parlance, he was a rishi (sage).

But the 'devil' takes charge of the application of the principle, and it administers the law.

The rishi is pushed aside, his sane advice ignored, and humanity cuts its own throat.

This is the lesson we learn from history and legend alike.

Both in Mauritius and in South Africa I have had the good fortune of meeting holy men of different religions, particularly Hindus and Christians.

I go to temples and churches and take part in the worship of God.

The purport of the hymns, whether they are in English, Sanskrit or Tamil, is the same.

The purpose of the liturgy is also the same - to lift the human heart to the lap of God.

We sit together, and feel we are all one.

That is the Truth.

As soon as we leave the places of worship, however, we completely ignore the lesson we learnt, and clinging to the form, assert that one form of worship or one form in which the Truth is expressed is superior to another.

Why is that?

Whereas the discovery of the divine through prayer is divine, the application of this discovery (formalised religion) soon passes into the hands of the 'devil'.

In India we have continually battled against this.

The Upanishadic rishi warned against clinging to forms and losing the spirit.

Lord Buddha put an end to disputations in the name of the one Truth, by diverting man's mind to practical life.

Swami Dayananda rescued the spirit of religion from the diabolical grip of sectarian formalists.

My divine master proclaimed that religion or yoga was not a matter for discussion but for diligent daily practice.

This is the only way to keep the 'devil' at bay: practise yoga and do not make a cult of it.

Lord Krishna's statement that the masses follow the leader refers more to social and political leaders, not exactly to a spiritual man.

If the spiritual man feels that he is a 'leader', he is feeding his ego.

How can he set an example to anyone?

28th July Changing Moods

A correspondent writes: "My moods change, so my state of being is not serene."

True. We do pass through these states.

We momentarily forget that 'states' should pass, leaving the 'being' intact.

The being cannot be changed; and the state of being has to.

But we can hold neither! The holder is the being who cannot obviously hold himself.

And a state of being held, turns into its opposite.

The whole joke lies in seeing the changing states as changing states; and in realising that the see-er is - all expressions like changing and unchanging being irrelevant.

You do not have to give up the world for all this.

That would mean changing the states and getting into a changeless 'state' which is absurd.

But it does mean realising the subtle distinction

29th July Man or Machine?

A man is known by his companions!

For they do in a subtle way influence us.

They awaken and vivify the tendencies (good or bad, desirable or undesirable) latent in us.

A saint kindles saintliness and a criminal provokes sinfulness in us.

But for them, the respective qualities would have 'died' in us.

My Guru Swami Sivananda used to say that similarly even inert objects like dress and furniture can alter our behaviour.

A man wearing simple sandals walks gently and the same man with fashionable shoes has a different gait.

When we talk of civilisation today, we imply a greater accumulation of or intimate association with the Machine. Does the machine civilise us?

Does it evoke civilised behaviour in us? Perhaps not.

If you are sitting next to me at a table and if, while getting up to go, your foot happens to touch my leg, you at once apologise, "Oh, I am sorry".

You are polite and courteous, because you were in association with me, another human being.

Assuming that a few minutes later you are driving a powerful, big car, and I happen to come in your way on my scooter, you will in all probability knock me down and then if I am conscious, swear at me for obstructing your path!

You have become a machine for the time being.

If you live constantly in the company of machines you will begin to behave like a machine, think like a machine and have no feeling, like a machine.

Civilisation and progress are not evils in themselves, but injudicious abuse of machines that civilisation and progress symbolise can lead to evil consequences.

Man should turn to nature, to simplicity, to humility, to humanity.

Man should turn to God, the indweller and the inner ruler of humanity.

Then will he become a peace-lover, radiating and promoting peace.

When there is tremendous increase in population (increased man-power), the logical conclusion is that more of this man-power should be constructively used.

But we complain of population explosion, at the same time inventing machines which one man can operate and do the work of a hundred men.

This would have been more appropriate in underpopulated countries and centuries.

30th July Dissatisfaction

We seem to be seeking, looking, searching for something all the time.

That is a beautiful thing called dissatisfaction.

It is not so dreadful as we make it sound.

Dissatisfaction will continue to exist as long as we look for satisfaction.

That, I think, is axiomatic.

It is this mad exertion to remain at peace that disturbs peace.

There is nothing to seek.

Why is it so?

The very seeking takes you away from it.

Hence the famous commandment, 'Be still; and know that I am God!' 'Be still' is the most important thing.

Can the mind be made to remain still?

If the mind is to remain still, then there is no more seeking for satisfaction, no more hunting for peace or happiness in this life.

Can the mind be made still?

That's nonsense because mind is merely another name for restlessness.

Whenever you are able to observe the mind, it is restless.

Sometimes the very observation seems to make it restless.

You are not aware of a thing called mind, but you are aware of a thing called restlessness.

That which is there is here already, and that which is here is there already.

When this truth asserts itself, then perhaps the restlessness of the mind will cease and the seeking comes to an end, for there is nothing to seek.

You and I are not isolated antagonistic beings, you and I are nothing but these dancing sub-atomic particles.

At that point the mind, baffled, comes to a standstill and cancels itself.

The mind ceases to be mind.

Meditation is when the mind entertains no thought of an object.

You cannot be a participator in this whole game and yet be an observer - that is a contradiction.

You must abandon the observer status and jump into it.

The only thing that happens at that point is that the seeking has come to an end.

You want neither happiness, peace, satisfaction nor security and therefore you have all that.

It is not a pessimistic or defeatist theory because the mind is not satisfied with the theory that there is no satisfaction in the world.

So, it has to go through the entire circle and come back to the starting point, having abandoned the search it finds itself in it and there is peace.

Be neither an optimist nor a pessimist.

Blow the 'mist' and get clarity.

31st July The Art of Listening

In the teacher's presence, many people experience a great surge of energy; they even think that they are enlightened!

But when they go away, that feeling also goes away.

How can this problem be solved?

And how does one revive that feeling later on?

Superficiality taints every aspect of our life.

We go to listen to a great teacher because of our superficial curiosity, not out of a serious spirit of enquiry.

We do not listen to him: the communication is on the intellectual or verbal level.

And, whatever he says we translate within our own mind into concepts and conclusions.

For this is how we have trained our mind and converted it into a filing cabinet, every new idea being neatly linked up with the previous ones and put away.

That is not listening surely!

It is possible to know that one is not doing this while listening, but it demands tremendous discipline, though not in the traditional sense of the word.

It is possible for us to know that our whole life at present is plagued by concepts and conclusions.

That knowledge enables us to listen without conceptualisation.

Then you listen to a statement like: "The end of suffering is the beginning of wisdom," without making a concept or an image but you see the truth of it directly.

And this truth becomes yours.

Then you do not lose it.

You need not be reminded of it.

If, on the other hand, you make a concept of it or an image of it, you are given a technique to practise in order to revive it, and the practice of this technique makes you dull and the energy is lost.

So to listen without conceptualisation is the art of listening.

One who knows it has the key to the mansion of truth.

The very act of listening is to him the seeing of the truth.

The truth thus seen is never lost.

The symbol of fire has its importance in the practice of yoga.

Fiery aspiration is steady upward flow of awareness.

No obstacles can stand in its way.

It consumes all evil.

It feeds upon evil.

Fire transmutes dark, cold, inert wood into glowing, warm and living fire.

1st August no place for conversion

Hinduism, which has a ceremony or ritual for all sorts of things that may happen to us, does not have a ritual for converting people of other faiths into Hindus.

The reason is obvious - it was not encouraged.

Even the more non-revolutionary 'conversion' of people from one school of thought to another within the Hindu framework, was discouraged, unless this was born of full inner conviction and understanding - in which case it was obviously the 'carry-over' of past birth. Even if the path one walked was found to be defective, it was left to a sage or man-of-God to bring one over to the right path, without confusing him or shaking the foundations of his beliefs.

This was most important.

Lord Krishna gives a stern warning in the Gita: "Do not unsettle anyone's beliefs, but give them a proper direction".

We find this attitude prevalent even among the early Christian missionaries who exhorted the people to adopt the Christian way of life, while they gave 'a Christian significance to such of the extant pagan ceremonies' as were deep-rooted in the hearts of the people.

That certainly is wisdom.

Why does a man want to be converted?

Except in very rare cases, he is impelled by a very strong inner conviction.

The man seeking conversion runs away either from the moral standards of his own faith or from the spiritual challenge that his own faith offers him to realise perfection; and while running away, he raises a bit of dirt and dust, betraying his own ignorance and foolishness. Proselytisation weakens the religion practising it.

The wise path is confirmation: this is what my Master Sri Swami Sivananda adopted.

Even when on account of past births, one feels drawn to Indian philosophy, My Master, without disturbing one's own faith, supplements it with the wholesome art of yoga.

The Christian becomes a yogi (mystic) but remains a Christian.

He is not converted but rather confirmed in his faith.

Don't disturb a man's faith, but say "You are quite right".

But add a little thing extra and one day he will become a saint!

2nd August What is Your Purpose

Has my life any purpose at all?

Does it need to be manipulated either by myself or others so that I might measure up to some kind of a standard?

When I am measuring up to a standard I am struggling all of the time.

You know how these standards are set, don't you?

Someone takes what they call the average.

Average intelligence Have you ever met someone with an average intelligence?

The average intelligence doesn't apply to anybody.

Either you are above average intelligence or you are below average - nobody has 'average' intelligence.

How do you live in this world?

Is there a purpose in all this?

Must I measure up to a standard?

Set by whom?

And this fashion seems to be changing continuously.

Not only your hairstyle changes, thinking fashion also changes.

I don't know if you are subject to these 'decadent' cataclysms - decadent in the sense of 'once in a decade' another cataclysm takes over.

Now it is psycho-analysis, and now it is primal scream, and now it is transcendental meditation, and now it is...

Every few years something gets hold of us and all of us swing.

The standard has changed - which means it was not standard - it was 'runnered'!

If it was standard it must be standing.

This standard seems to be running and all of us are chasing one another to keep pace with this changing phenomenon.

Who sets the standard?

How do we discover this?

How do we discover what the purpose of life is, and if there is a purpose at all?

And therefore, the first question which seems to be of great importance is for each one of us to ask ourselves, or to ask life itself, "What is your purpose?"

Let alone understanding or experiencing another's feelings (of pleasure or pain, heat or cold) one cannot even recall and truly experience one's own previous experience of such feelings or sensations.

When someone walks on burning sand, you do not experience the heat on your sole, you cannot even truly remember or revive the feeling.

You recall the word which represented the experience to you, and you infer that that expression applies to the other person's present experiences.

3rd August A Time for Everything

The person whom I hate and who is evil is able to see, think, live, breathe and do what he does, because of God; just as I am able to do these things because of God.

Here the energy flows in one direction, there the energy flows in another direction.

That's all.

When the energy flows in this direction it appears to the other crowd to be destructive.

Sometimes Krishna explains this very beautifully: "When the balance is upset, when it looks as though one would swallow the other, then the divine force manifests itself to restore the balance."

No God, no incarnation, no Shakti, nothing in the world has ever been able to annihilate evil once and for all.

If that were possible no other incarnation of God would be necessary!

There is always what I call Noah's ark.

God wishes to destroy the world.

Then suddenly there is a change of heart and he keeps two of everything as samples.

If he had destroyed even those and created something new, maybe even better than before, it would have been marvellous.

But it's never done.

Then you realise that it is not consciousness or God or the energy that is at fault.

This energy has to flow and dance everywhere, and occasionally it takes turns - which to some look evil - and there is conflict.

When this conflict becomes a terrible conflagration, then God incarnates to redress the balance: the Shakti itself manifests.

He who knows that there is a time for everything is never frustrated.

That understanding is brought about by the direct realisation that the energy that makes all these things happen in the universe is one and indivisible, and that energy is beyond me and you.

'You' is one spark of that energy; 'I' is another spark of that energy.

You are as much his creation, her creation, as I am.

Suddenly this 'mineness' is gone.

You are God's child and I am God's child too.

A vain person has no time for God, and virtue loosely clings to him because he recognises it.

4th August Pragmatism or Idealism?

Advertising has become a fine art of the twentieth century.

It is as old as time.

One finds it in the scriptures: they glorify heaven and offer its delights free to those who adhere to certain moral codes, which are often measures intended to promote social welfare.

History however, bears witness to the failure of this approach.

Advertising aids 'promotion', which is a synonym for salesmanship.

The other side of advertising is the promotion of the baser elements in man - selfishness, greed and dishonesty.

Thereby a confusing if not conflicting situation is created: whereas one endeavours to promote happiness and social welfare, the promotion of selfishness and greed effectively destroys these.

Advertising rests on the theory that it is pragmatic.

It produces immediate results.

The sales and the popularity increase, the profits increase and there is perhaps a temporary pleasure to the consumer.

Whether or not the commodity was responsible for this, the advertiser has the satisfaction of owning the advertised product, of belonging to the popular movement or of adopting the current fashion.

But something intangible, yet precious, has been lost: innocence.

Unfortunately, even religion, philanthropy, co-operative endeavour, social service, meditation and other yoga practices are caught in the same net.

We are told constantly "Do this, you will gain that."

There is disaster if the hopes thus raised are shattered in real life: but even if they are invariably fulfilled, this approach only intensifies selfishness and corrupts the human heart.

One is then unwilling to do anything unless some reward is guaranteed.

Advertising may be justified in the promotion of merchandise, but it is good to avoid it in human conduct and behaviour in social and religious spheres.

Idealism is more appropriate there.

Lord Krishna advocates pure action in the Bhagavad Gita: "To be active is your birthright."

So do what you have to do; the reward is not your concern.

There is great beauty in this ideal.

It achieves social welfare and human happiness without promoting selfishness and greed.

5th August Exploitation is Vicious

Two young singers died one after the other.

One was male and the other female, but both of them were top pop stars.

The people acclaimed them, applauded them and thus persuaded them and encouraged them to sacrifice themselves.

But whether they were happy or not, nobody cared.

Their friends admitted, "They were not happy in themselves".

Yet, they sang, they entertained, they brought happiness (however momentary) to their patrons.

Theirs is not an unusual story.

These subtle persuaders and deadly exploiters are found everywhere in the world, in all walks of life.

They are in positions of power and prestige.

They are the rulers of the world who wage wars (of course with the blood of young people, not their own); they are the builders of nations (with the sweat and toil of the young people, not their own); they are the adored heads of mighty institutions and leaders of powerful cults, whose loving arms embrace their hard-working and hard-worked followers (whose loyal and unselfish service is applauded and who are consigned to their own solitude and suffering once they are unserviceable).

Modern society has divided itself into two camps - the exploiter and the exploited.

The exploiter often expounds altruistic ideals, they are the hidden persuaders!

Of course, the philosophy is sublime; and it is even possible that the exploiter believes in it.

But the exploiter's own moment of truth comes when he is confronted with the other man's needs - physical, mental, social and spiritual.

The tune changes.

Unselfishness, oneness, renunciation, spirit of service, love, etc. yield place to other convenient philosophical doctrines.

The singers are silent.

Their exploiters are looking for others.

How long will this go on?

Till the exploiters are silenced by the cold hand of death.

And then, on the other side of the fence, they will have to face those whom they exploited; their hypocrisy is unmasked. O fool!

Will you be able to face your own darkened soul?

How will you look into the face of the pure and powerful souls whom You exploited here?

Listen to the voice of Gurudev Sivananda and live in the constant realisation of your oneness with all.

Give more than you take, serve more than you are served, love more than you are loved.

6th August Obstacles to a Religious Life

There are two serious obstacles to a religious life.

The first and foremost is the assumption 'This is the answer'.

Such an assumption signifies that there is inattention or laziness which tempt the investigation to be abandoned in favour of pretended certainty.

This assumption is very different from the clarity of an uncluttered mind which blossoms in enlightenment - and enlightenment is not its description.

The other obstacle is a tricky motivation.

Indeed, it is the sorrow, death and destruction that one observes in life in the world (whether this is one's own experience or one's observation) that triggers the investigation. But, if this motivation is allowed to dominate the investigation, it might lead to strange results.

However, if there is energetic and single-minded investigation, one will soon realise that pain is inextricably related to the pursuit of pleasure, and that death and destruction exist inextricably related to life and construction.

In other words, sorrow, death and destruction are 'life seen in fragments'.

If, by the Grace of God (for here there is no help, not even self-help), one is sustained beyond this understanding, Life reveals its meaning.

What that revelation is, is a great secret, known only to you.

7th August Burning Desire

My Guru, Swami Sivananda, was once asked, "Since You did not live with Your Guru, since You led an independent life during Your sadhana, what were the obstacles that You encountered and how did You overcome them?"

Gurudev smiled and said, "I had no obstacles at all."

How is this possible?

Perhaps the key lies in the fact that whatever discipline He undertook was natural to Him. It wasn't forced upon Him either by others or even by Himself.

It was the natural fruit of an inner vision.

If the inner being sees a truth, then there is no struggle.

"I must know the Self and be free. I must realise the Self now," with this as the uppermost thought all obstacles were wiped away.

There was no struggle, no temptation to revert to a life of ease and status.

His sustaining power was, "I must realise God now."

He was determined to realise God 'here and now', and whatever He did was based upon this.

With the inner direction fixed, then all the disciplines like asana, pranayama, japa and diet were natural and bore fruit.

Minus this basic direction, carrying on some practices will never yield fruit.

This is what is called burning desire.

Not fireworks which flare up and disappear, but a wood fire, burning silently, constantly giving warmth and illumining everything around it.

In our case, in the beginning our zeal and enthusiasm are overwhelming.

But in six months... gone! And we swing to the other extreme when the reaction sets in.

In His case the burning was constant, without noise, without show or fuss.

Such a fire burns itself out completely.

The fire, 'I must realise God now', was all there was.

There was no looking back.

Back had been burned and there was only forward.

In his own words, "When shall I be free? When 'I' ceases to be, when 'I' is burned in the fire of enquiry."

Here there is no identification with ego but simply active observation, observation in itself - light that shines without a source, because this light is omnipresent.

These were not just words, but truth, truth that emerged from the crucible of life.

Living truth.

When truth becomes living truth, that living truth experiences no difficulty and no obstacle whatsoever.

8th August Sivananda's Yoga

Without entering into conflict with conflicting theories, our Master Swami Sivananda sought the subtle middle path which reconciled them and brought into healthy use their beneficent principles.

Hence, in the practice of yoga asanas, his commandment was: "Perfection, without strain," and in the practice of pranayama, "Inhale, retain, exhale, as long as it is comfortable."

The wise student of yoga neither forces the body nor leaves it alone; he educates the body and gently guides the indwelling intelligence to perceive the hidden potentialities.

This may often (not always) be achieved by a repetition of the particular posture, instead of holding it for a considerable time; and every subsequent repetition improves the ease with which the posture is executed, for the intelligence within discovers (and thus removes) the obstacle.

There is no pain in this process; and therefore there is no resistance at all.

The will-force is not used.

There is an inner awareness which detects the obstacles and removes them - whether these obstacles are sluggish, disused muscles and joints, or tension brought about by wrong habits of living and thinking.

Once this is done, it is a joy to hold the posture "as long as it is comfortable," in the words of Swami Sivananda.

The 'comfort' must induce and inspire the body to hold it 'long'.

All this is discipline, which is the characteristic of the disciple.

It is up to the disciple to study his own mind (which is what discipline means) and see for himself how it throws up doubts and distractions.

The light for such self-study is viveka or vigilance.

Such vigilance keeps the distractions away and the doubting intellect at bay, so that the heart may be open to the Guru.

The Guru is everywhere at all times, for He is the light of God, and His Grace is freely available to all at all times.

This wisdom filled every aspect of Gurudev Swami Sivananda's teachings.

Non-violence is neither violence nor its true opposite which is total inertness or passivity.

It is an inexpressible 'something' which eludes your grasp and description!

May His grace lead you into its discovery!

9th August

Divine Life

The most important principle which we should constantly remember and which should govern any one of our thoughts, words and actions, is that we ourselves are instruments in the hands of the Higher Power.

It is not easy because our own little human self, the ego, bursts in every little while - sometimes in a tragic way.

Tragic because at such times our own selfish little personality projects itself in the garb of the divine, which is terribly confusing.

Hence meditation is vital.

In meditation when we are still struggling to still the mind, it is essential to use a formula. It is like self-hypnotism or, as I would love to put it, self-dehypnotism.

We have fooled ourselves long enough that 'we do'; and we have fooled ourselves long enough with the idea that if we want to, we shall not do it.

Against both these wrong hypnotic suggestions, we dehypnotise ourselves with the counter-suggestion: 'Not I, but God does'.

Having dehypnotised ourselves, we make sure that we neither get behind our life and start pushing it, nor stand in front and obstruct its course.

These two together must act as a constant motive-power in our life: on the one hand, regular meditation in the morning, and on the other, living as His instrument.

Every morning we re-dedicate ourselves to the divine, making ourselves humbler than the smallest blade of grass, humbler than dust... and yet more powerful than all the divinities of the world by virtue of our oneness with the Supreme.

It is this that has made the supermen and superdivine beings in all walks of life.

It is when the ego is pushed out of the way and neither used as a prodder nor an obstruction that the divine flows through the personality!

'Lord! Thy will be done, not mine.'

This suggestion must sink deeper into our consciousness during the morning meditation.

In the helter-skelter of our life it is possible for everyone, even for the greatest spiritual giant, to lose the thread of this consciousness now and then.

And therefore all religions insist we should sit down and pray, if possible five, if possible fifty times a day, so that this consciousness of the divine functioning in and through us, becomes constant.

At the end of the day it is good to review the day's activities: "Today has not been ill spent, in as much as I have endeavoured to lead the divine life".

Every day we strive a little harder till we reach the Supreme, till we are not even conscious that we are instruments in the hands of God.

10th August Religious Life versus Divine Life

The world has never lacked good people.

There are many religions (in fact too many!) in the world today claiming countless adherents.

All that is good, excellent, wonderful, super-wonderful.

But spiritual life or divine life is a different life.

Spiritual life can grow out of a religious life, out of a good life, and even outside of a religious or a good life.

That is, it is possible for a man who has had no religious training at all, for an atheist, to be suddenly awakened to the existence of the Supreme Spirit.

It is equally possible for a man who has not been good to get a sudden inner transformation and awakening.

In religious life, as it is popularly understood, religion is one part of life - prayers in the morning and evening, regular visits to the temple, observance of fasts and festivals, etc.

In divine life, the entire life is divinised.

In a good life goodness is adhered to as a ritual, as an end in itself.

In spiritual life, this goodness is founded on the right spirit.

This does not mean that divine life or spiritual life is opposed to a religious or a good life: on the contrary, it is the fulfilment of a religious or an ethical life.

Goodness becomes more stable when founded on spiritual life; religion regains its significance when life is made divine.

But the spiritual life is definitely opposed to worldly or materialistic life.

It should awaken in us the consciousness that we are in truth the Immortal Spirit.

It should result in our expressing our essential divine spiritual nature in our thoughts, words and deeds.

This demands keen discrimination, intelligent dispassion and firm determination.

This demands an ability to make sacrifices, a daring spirit of adventure and a willingness to make the necessary psycho-spiritual experiments which might cost us not only the pleasures of this worldly life but our life itself.

All this is possible more easily when our spirit (not only our body) is young, than when the senility of pessimism and infirmity has overtaken us and we cling to the false security of riches and relations.

11th August

Make Your Life Divine

There is too much of spiritless living nowadays.

The little spirit that is evoked now and then is mostly unhealthy and negative, generated by false sports and amusement, political and economic struggle.

What a great loss!

Lord Krishna reminded us that we can transform every one of our daily actions into a joyous and thrilling spiritual adventure, if only we put the spirit into it.

This is what my Gurudev Swami Sivananda called 'Divine Life'.

He explained and defined Divine Life in the following words:

Within you is hidden God

Within you is immortal soul

Kill this little 'I'

Die to live

Lead the Divine Life.

Divine life is the divinising of the entire life, recognising God to be the source, sustenance and goal of our life.

When we plead that God should be put back into our life, we only pray that the ignorance which created the illusory distinction should realise that our life is truly divine in its origin, progress and destiny.

This spirit makes all the difference.

Without it your service at home, office or hospital may be a tiring task.

With it, even cutting sugarcane and carrying heavy loads in the harbour may become soul-satisfying service of the omnipresent God.

None except you can put the spirit back into your life.

Any activity, whether it is ministering to the sick, or preaching the gospel, or working on a political platform, or just scavenging any job can be sublimated, transmuted into yoga.

No job, no works no activity is superior or inferior.

None is to be lauded or condemned, provided the spirit is maintained.

If the spirit is not there, even a swami teaching in his glowing garb might be paving his way to hell.

If the spirit is maintained, even an illiterate peasant cutting sugar-cane throughout the day, might ascend to God-consciousness. it is the spirit of the divine Omnipresence that is vital to our life.

May you all lead the Divine Life here and now.

12th August Diagnosis, Then Cure

As in disease, so in life: the diagnosis is the most important and the most difficult part of treatment.

If we concede that our sufferings spring from causes outside us, we try to remove those causes by reforming the world.

If we feel that it is the heat of the summer that worries us, we air-condition our room.

If we find that someone criticising us worries us, we try to silence him.

If we think our suffering comes from the policies of a certain government, we work against it and topple it.

But soon we realise that the remedy is worse than the disease!

As my Gurudev Sivananda used to put it humorously, "The operation was successful, but the patient died!"

The air-conditioned room makes our bodies too sensitive to even a slight change in the temperature.

In trying to silence our critic, we create more.

We discover that power conferred by position and authority corrupts all, and that one government is as good or as bad as another.

We continue to suffer, groping for the real cause which is not outside us, but within us.

It is 'desire', 'craving' in all its shades right up to its subtlest form as 'will to live'.

Looking at the functioning of our own bodies, we can easily arrive at the conclusion that conscious desiring is unnecessary (and is perhaps a hindrance) to the proper functioning of our vital organs.

It is enough for us to realise that food is not digested and blood does not circulate because we desire these.

In our own body, there are certain functions which are voluntary (e.g. movement of our limbs, speech, etc.), others which are involuntary though to a limited extent they can be voluntarily controlled (e.g. breathing and elimination) and yet others which are completely involuntary.

In the same way, life in the world goes on whether we will it or not.

The major part of it is beyond our control.

We have some power to modify some phenomena and alter a few.

By systematic training it is possible to so tune our conscious being to bring it into perfect alignment with Nature.

We shall then entertain no desire at all, and yet be as active as our own heart which beats day and night without our desiring it and perhaps without a personal desire of its own.

First, all evil desire should go, then personal desires and ultimately all desire.

Then there will be an end to suffering.

13th August The Life of Life

What is psychology?

Psychology is truth concerning the psyche.

Usually, they say that psyche is the mind, though perhaps it means a lot more than that.

Surely mind itself means a lot more than what we have come to regard as mind.

Superficially it is the thinking instrument, but what is that power, what is that energy that makes the mind aware?

What is the content of awareness?

What is the meaning of awareness?

What is the meaning of consciousness?

This is what we should try to discover.

This discovery is made by insight that which sees into oneself, into this awareness, into this consciousness, into this mind.

The Keno Upanishad hints that that supreme principle within which enables all these to happen is God the mind of mind, the life of life.

The religious quest is directed towards the realisation of God.

How do you know what God is?

If you already know what God looks like, you know God.

Then what are you looking for?

If you do not know God at all, how will you recognise Him if you see Him?

Both ways you are caught.

To avoid this impasse they introduced the Guru - Jesus Christ, your Guru, or Buddha, and He points out, 'This is God, bow down'.

Now comes a difficulty.

Will you accept that or not?

You might think: 'What is He trying to do to me, is He cheating me or indulging in some kind of mesmerism, hypnotism, black magic?'

This is because you have no faith either in God or the Guru.

If you have no faith in the Guru you will suspect whatever He says, even when He points to God - which means you are not sincere, mature or eager in the first place.

Therefore in both yoga and Vedanta they insist upon maturity.

In ancient times the enlightened ones remained incognito, unperceived, unrecognised.

They 'veiled' themselves so that only the mature disciple went to them in a state of readiness.

Then it was very easy for Them to indicate the truth and the disciple was enlightened.

That is perhaps what was meant by the Holy Ghost.

In German the word 'geist' means mind, so the Holy Ghost is a purified, mature, sincere, virtuous mind; a mind that is ready and eager, which naturally seeks the truth.

In that natural search for the truth you may need some help, which comes to you as your Guru, as God almighty, as the Son in Christianity.

So the Holy Ghost takes the help of the Son (or the Guru) and finds God (the Father).

14th August Creating a Hermitage Within

There is a rather strange aspect of human nature; when we have something we want something else, and when we do not have it we miss it and long for it.

Life or fate or karma throws you in the middle of a fish-Market and you have to live there. You begin to think "Oh! if only I could get away to a nice quiet place where I could meditate seriously for twenty-four hours! I am interested in attaining God-realisation but there is the family, the business, this and that! If these could be taken care of and I were free, I would sit and meditate all day and night."

Then you are brought into a situation where all these things suddenly come into your life. There is all the seclusion, privacy and non-distraction you wanted; and what happens? You discover the distraction is not outside.

The 'distractability' is inside.

If you have this 'distractability' you will be distracted anywhere.

How can I have a completely impenetrable fortress where I will not be distracted - not only now, but forever? Provided you have the strong wish, through the materialisation of this wish, one is able to create for oneself a 'hermitage' - which is a nice way of saying you can stay wherever you are.

Take the example of a yoga camp where a big percentage of distraction is absent.

You are here for only a short time.

Why don't you enjoy it?

Why don't you watch yourself and see whether you have any interest in life other than the fish-market?

You were accustomed to that before you came here.

Do you indulge in the same small-talk - in the same behaviour pattern?

Can you release yourself from the fish-market and find a new interest?

This is point number one.

If what you are doing here is a mere extension of what you were doing there, there is no sense in coming here.

Being here also gives you the opportunity to look within and see whether you were really serious when you wished for seclusion.

Can you, in this atmosphere, pull yourself completely away?

Do you really want to change or are you merely bluffing yourself?

Will you use this opportunity to unmask your sincerity or insincerity and look within and face yourself?

In a camp situation one can, even though it seems to be painful.

Only fools think that knowledge and action are two different things; knowledge must be followed by action.

15th August Spiritual Renewal

Seeker:

During these days of retreat here I received exceedingly rich spiritual gifts.

I am not too shy to call it a spiritual fruition.

The spiritual growth is clear enough to be felt.

From here I could go straight to a hermitage and the bliss would continue.

But we all have to go back to our daily lives, which for some of us is hard.

For this going back we need a word of strengthening.

Swamiji:

Every sincere spiritual seeker has felt this at some time or other, until we discover that the 'hermitage', when it becomes one's home, might fail to further one's spiritual growth.

It is not the fault of the hermitage but the inevitable fruit of the problem one transports to the hermitage!

The problem is oneself, the self, the 'me' at the door of the home.

I remember the words of Gurudev Swami Sivananda, "You will find good and evil even on top of Mount Kailas".

When will 'I' leave 'me'?

But why should I pick it up at all?

Why do I pick it up?

On account of ignorance, of selfishness and of foolishness.

Oftentimes we wake up after we have been trapped: even a rat will not be trapped if it sees the trap - it only sees the cake!

We seek the pleasure and awake to find ourselves trapped.

If we can keep awake all the time we shall see the trap from miles away, and not rush into it.

This is done by daily, and if possible hourly, spiritual renewal, whatever be the method or non-method you wish to adopt.

16th August Right Action

Question:

There are times when the boundary between right and wrong is obliterated.

There seems to be no such thing, except for the honesty and sincerity that is within oneself.

Swamiji:

We can, of course, rely on nothing else.

While living in society we have to obey social laws and norms or face the consequences.

Obedience to authority is not even obedience, let alone wise or right action.

In the very concept of obedience there is inner resistance, fragmentation of the personality, and therefore violence, which is bound to spill over sooner or later as disobedience.

In love there is no obedience.

There is total harmony, individual and social, and hence no resistance.

There is direct action.

But such love (not of someone or of something) is extremely rare.

It is of God, it is God.

While this love is not there and when obedience is seen to be lacking in the spirit, one has to turn to what is prestigiously (in the right sense of that word - deceptively) called conscience.

However, when this word is called into the service of action, it is usually qualified by 'my' conscience.

'My' conscience is the handmaid of 'me' which is 'memory'.

This conscience is therefore an unsuitable arbiter of wisdom in action.

It is not difficult to see that such conscience is basically egotistic, selfish and hence untrustworthy.

Therefore, he who rejects 'external' (scriptural, parental or guru's) guidance should be careful enough to avoid the 'promptings of the conscience' and probe deeper to come face to face with the innermost springs of action. If your heart is pure and mind transparent, this is immediately realised.

In most of us, however, neither of these may be in an enlightened state.

The state of confusion prevails.

While there is no clarity, there is also an anxiety not to do the wrong thing.

What is right action?

The essential factor in right action, say the greatest of scriptures, is 'not to hurt anyone'.

This is righteousness in essence, according to Sage Vyasa.

But, is it enough not to hurt intentionally?

Or, is it necessary also to consider possible consequences and avoid even unintentionally hurting another?

Also, is it possible that everything that we do may directly or indirectly hurt someone, even when this was not intended?

Can one ask oneself, "Have I looked at the problem from all possible angles to ensure that all foresee-able factors have been taken care of?"

This enquiry is endless, unfathomable and pathless.

17th August Nature and Culture

Nature is complex in her simplicity.

She loves those who try to understand her and receives them into her bosom (the grave); the rebellious conquerors of nature, too, receive from her the same treatment.

Nature remains a mystery.

Every philosophy that the understanding man has proclaimed as truth has been falsified before the ink is dry on the thesis.

This is perhaps inevitable when the ever-changing human mind endeavours to study nature in which change is constant.

Helplessly whirling on this merry-go-round, man invents what he considers permanent values.

There are permanent realities which are not man's invention and which do not care to be discovered by man.

However, the permanent values invented by man are his creatures and therefore share their creator's character - impermanency.

Confused and impermanent man, having created such values and having envisioned permanency in them, is scared to death even to think that they might be threatened.

Man struggles against the inevitable.

The inevitable is the reality!

This reality takes no notice of the private wishes and aspirations of puny, ignorant man.

Man might call his creatures 'tradition', 'culture', 'nationhood', or even 'philosophy'.

But, his creatures must inevitably share his characteristic - confusion, ignorance, impermanency and hopelessness.

Unwilling to admit this, successive generations of men have invented other philosophies.

One school of philosophers have challenged another school and declared that their invention is more permanent and truly real and totally universal!

All this inevitably leads to conflict, to aggression and to violence.

Ironically the man-made values are the first ones to go in such a conflict.

The natural change is brought about, the unnaturalness of the means arose out of human ignorance and unwisdom.

Conflict is born of ignorance.

Wisdom sees different forces as cooperative agents.

Wisdom is synthesis.

Wisdom recognises that even the threatening pull in the opposite direction' is inevitable when the pendulum swings, and this recognition acts as the moderating influence.

Conflict is avoided, coexistence is realised and cooperation made possible.

Aggression yields place to Love.

Love is God.

18th August Swami Sivananda's Satsang

Since this satsang is conducted in the name of Swami Sivananda, it is appropriate to mention that this was the pattern, the method, that the Master himself instituted. In summer the satsang used to be conducted on the verandah outside Swami Sivananda's room.

It was not very large.

It could accommodate about 20 people and, in those days, there were not even 20 in the ashram, and there were just a few visitors.

By that I hope I have indicated that satsang is not something which will ever become overcrowded and, perhaps it should not be overcrowded.

It will not be overcrowded because it will not appeal to everybody in this world, not even to all the people who profess to practise yoga.

There was no electricity so we had one of those hurricane lanterns on a small coffee table. Precisely on the dot of satsang hour Swami Sivananda would open His door and walk in like a shot, and sit on His appointed seat in the middle of the two rows.

He wouldn't talk to anybody, wouldn't look at them, nothing at all.

Then immediately the person at the head of the left row started the 'Jaya Ganesha'.

As soon as that was over the person sitting next would read from the Bhagavad Gita.

Even the hurricane lantern was so veiled with paper that the light shone only on the book, otherwise it was darkened.

He would read one chapter of the Gita, with or without translation, and on the conclusion of that he would sing a chant (kirtan).

All of us would follow in chorus.

Then the little table with the lamp would be passed on to the next one who had the Upanishads.

He read a few words from the Upanishads and chanted.

All of us followed him in chorus.

The table is pushed on.

Like this, three or four scriptures were chosen, and each person reading it followed it with a chant, which we followed in chorus.

And as soon as the last person had finished he would nearly put out that paraffin lamp and put it to one side.

Then everybody would sit in meditative mood and one after the other everybody had to lead the chorus.

If you have a whole bookshelf of cookery books, it will not appease your hunger until you apply the recipes and cook something!

19th August Satsang: Listen With Your Heart

You have heard hundreds of lectures, you admire the speakers, "Oh, marvellous man, he speaks wonderfully..." but... nothing changes, nothing at all.

I met 95 year-old Swami Gangeshwarananda in Canada.

At that time they were organising a convention somewhere in the southern states and I was told that he was also on the list of invitees.

I asked him, "Swamiji, are you going?"

He said, "Oh no, no, no. I don't believe in these conventions. Self-realisation is not given in these conferences. Speaker after speaker after speaker after speaker - and you don't even know who spoke! Self-realisation is not in these conferences. It is a good thing, it arouses some kind of curiosity, enthusiasm, it's impressive."

Impressing means 'pressing in', but nothing really happens.

So talking, talking, talking, the whole thing is forgotten before the talk is concluded.

By his style of satsanga, Swami Sivananda had eliminated this talking boredom, at the same time pointing out that whatever anybody is going to say anywhere in the world is all there in the scriptures that have already been introduced: the Bhagavad Gita, the Srimad Bhagavatam, the Bible, the Yoga Vasistha, the Koran.

We have heard them, we have ignored them; so are people going to ignore the person who is talking, the fool who is going on talking.

You may ask someone who was at the ashram in Swami Sivananda's times, on how many occasions Swamiji delivered a lecture.

Hardly any!

In the life of the ashram, probably Swami Sivananda would have talked, delivered a lecture three or four times a year.

He was a listener.

He let other people talk.

If someone wanted to talk - talk!

Because as far as he was concerned it is a waste of time.

The knowledge is there in the Gita, the knowledge is there in the scriptures.

Read them!

And see what kind of awakening is produced by reading them.

And read them in the right spirit, listening with your heart to the message contained in them.

That was the beautiful style that Swami Sivananda gave us.

If we work from God's Light, Love and Wisdom we shall work better.

20th August Spiritual Organisations

When teachings are taught they are not understood, but misunderstood.

When someone like my Gurudev said, "Spiritual institutions are a dire necessity," someone else jumps up and says: "I have understood what the Master means".

The shadowy personality, the ego, thenceforward takes over - and censors further teaching to suit itself.

The ego has 'understood' the teaching and henceforth becomes the Master's self-appointed messenger or interpreter.

If the Master had also said something else like "Beware of institutionalism," the ego assures itself that such admonition is for the other fellow.

Of course, spiritual organisations are necessary: it is easy to see in Nature that all living things are organised, that nothing living is without 'organ'.

It is through an organisation that a teacher works and teaches: in other words, the instrument used by the teacher is the organisation.

In olden days there were the 'gurukulas', the hermitages,- and later the Buddhist Sangha and later still the ashramas, etc.

There were organisations which naturally grew around a great teacher during and after his lifetime.

But what makes them 'spiritual'?

Here we run into difficulties, for the spirit cannot be defined at all.

If the spirit is absent the 'organism' dies.

Of such an organisation whose founder had passed away, the great wise Rajaji said to me, "When the life has gone, the shell remains: but the dead shell is hard to break".

The ego converts the shell into a real hell.

In such a hell, one ego dictates rules for the weak to obey and the strong to violate.

This inevitably leads to polarisation of the ruler and the ruled, to conflict, to power-struggle - it is not a spiritual organisation any more, but an organisation (yet more dangerous because it wears the 'spiritual' mask and commands - literally! - the adoration of the weak-vested interests).

A spiritual organisation is a necessity, but a dangerous necessity.

If you are constantly alive to the danger, your spirit is alive too, and you are not trapped.

God be with you as Wisdom.

21st August

Satsang with Swami Sivananda

When someone leads the singing in satsang, I follow in chorus and think I am an expert - I know everything, but that is an illusion.

When you ask me to lead, what happens?

I fumble - then I realise that I was suffering from a false assumption - which is true of our whole life.

We assume, "I can do that, I can do everything!"

Try to do it!

That was Swami Sivananda's message.

Satsang had to go on, whether you were a novice or an oldster, a visitor or a non-visitor, a millionaire or a pauper - each man, woman or child had to lead in the chanting and, because of this, it is better that the satsanga is not too overcrowded so that everybody has a participating chance, not merely in chorus, but everyone has to do something.

And so this thing goes on, like an assembly line.

Now let us say it is her turn to lead the chant, and if she is quiet for 10 seconds, another would not be allowed to take over.

When there was an ominous silence for a few seconds it was only then that Swami Sivananda would interfere.

He had a flashlight and he would take that and press it.

It came right on your face: "Go on, go on," he would say.

"My voice is not good."

"God knows your voice is not good. It is no news to Him! Go on, sing!"

Even in this little bit of dialogue he would not waste one word so that the atmosphere would not be disturbed.

Everybody had to do it, and when the last person had finished his chanting Swamiji would conclude the satsang.

He used to suggest that those who participated in the satsang quietly walked back to their rooms in the same mood, without disturbing that mood by chit-chatting and gossiping.

That was the style of Swami Sivananda's satsang.

Though it changed later on, I have the feeling that that was what he liked, because firstly, it creates a mood in us and secondly, it brings home to us the realisation that the talking that is being done now is a waste of time.

22nd August What is Life?

In the great scripture called Yoga Vasistha, Rama went on a pilgrimage and came back a thoroughly disillusioned person.

It is normal to be shocked by this word 'disillusion'.

You come into contact with a religious man or leader, thinking that he is great and enlightened, and then at some point you are tempted to say, "I am disillusioned," as if it is a misfortune, something shocking and undesirable.

But I'm afraid I love that word disillusion.

It implies that you are under an illusion and that illusion was knocked away.

One should love to be disillusioned!

Rama came back disillusioned.

Many of us are in that position.

You have everything, all the good things in life, and you don't know what poverty, suffering or sorrow means.

But when you travel with the eyes and ears open, you are exposed to the realities of life - realities which are very different from the assumed realities which we hold dear to us.

In the first section of the scripture, which is devoted to Rama's analysis of life,-we are given a complete and beautiful picture of life itself.

What is so charming about this life?

When you are a child you are the plaything of everybody, not an individual.

Crying seems to be your constant occupation and the one reason for your being here on earth.

What a miserable condition, says Rama.

But still, that doesn't last for long.

In fifteen years you become a young man, but then you have other problems.

Many scriptures say that God created everything in pairs, but they are given birth to in different places; a boy here and a girl there.

Each one runs after the other.

It looks exciting and this chase continues for several years.

There is only one way of putting an end to it, and that is to possess each other.

So they get married.

Does that end life's sorrows?

No, it multiplies them.

Previously I had one, now I have two.

And in order to cure myself of this headache I bring about a third, hoping that the third will somehow take the two headaches away.

Such is life.

Then Rama also examines this phenomenon called the ego, the sole slave-driver in the world.

You can escape from and rebel against all your masters except this one, the ego.

It drives you relentlessly and remorselessly.

What is life?

Am I born here merely to fulfil the whims and fancies of something which I have imagined to exist - me, my soul?

Is that life?

Ambition, desire, craving - these are the real slave drivers.

Is it possible to live in peace and enjoy life while this slave driver is behind me all the time?

These are the fundamental questions concerning life which haunted the life of the prince.

And please remember that he was considered an incarnation of God.

23rd August The Snake is Its Tail and Mouth

Unless you frequently visit hospitals and infirmaries you forget the magnitude of human suffering.

If you are part of the establishment of hospitals etc., you become immune to such suffering.

But an occasional encounter with human suffering powerfully brings home the great truth which I have often heard from the lips of Sri Gurudev: "Your intellect fails when confronted by the magnitude of human suffering."

We pray and we struggle to sustain hope and faith, and surely these do work in the case of some sick people who are able to endure the suffering bravely.

Hoping for a better life, they endure the suffering.

Faith in the unknown diverts their attention from the tyranny of the known.

But unless based on truth, these act as palliatives and tranquillisers, and by mitigating the pain they lower the vitality.

Only a clear and direct comprehension of the truth can really and truly free us from suffering.

That truth embraces not only the present suffering, but all its causative factors - which are the pursuit of pleasure, insatiable ambition, immoderate enjoyment, dissipation of physical and mental energies, an imbalance not only in diet but in work and rest, disharmony internally and psychologically, as well as externally in one's relation with others.

When you see the whole truth concerning suffering, then you drop the cause and effect!

When you see that the lovely tail and the dreadful mouth both belong to the same cobra, you do not touch the tail and you are not bitten by its mouth.

Even in other fields of human life and activity, unless we take a complete and total view of every problem that confronts us, we shall go round in circles for ever, solving one problem by the creation of several other problems.

Truth is not partial: which means it cannot be divided into 'cause' and 'effect', and it does not favour one and frown on another.

We do what we want to do.

If it turns out to be good, we take the credit for it; if it does not we say, "It is God's will".

For instance, if it is a cake we take it; if it is a snake we put it on God.

Hence perhaps Siva has so many snakes on his body!

24th August Let Life Take Over

Whoever created the world and 'me' did not intend that I must be miserable.

It depends upon me.

The moment you see this truth you begin to examine life to see what it is that makes you unhappy, miserable. Again it is basically these two - love and hate.

Must all relationships be either swallowing each other or antagonistic hitting each other?

Can we live without clinging and kicking?

Unfortunately, these things have become so commonplace, so acceptable today.

We don't mind extremes of emotion, but we don't like calm, tranquil life.

We have reached such a state of perversion that we value those things.

We have begun to mistake possessiveness for love.

If you see that jealousy makes you unhappy and it arises directly from this sense of possession, if you want to avoid the pain that jealousy causes, you will drop the whole thing.

You cannot keep only one part of it.

It is quite simple!

This does not mean that you are indifferent to the world, or you hate the world (that's impossible).

What happens is delightful, beautiful.

I don't see any difficulty or problem in this, nor do I see that such a life can be unhappy, sorrowful or miserable.

Such a life is full of joy.

You take the fullest advantage of every spell of happiness that comes your way, but you don't cling to it.

If it goes, it goes.

Therefore you are safe from the terrible distress that formerly possessed you when happiness left you.

The second third of life's misery is expectation.

You are expecting another spell of happiness to come.

That expectation is more excitement, more tension.

If it doesn't come you are miserable.

If it comes and it is not up to your expectations, you are miserable again.

What must you do?

Drop the expectation and let life take over.

If it has to come, let it.

Why should you worry about it now?

You don't get hung up on past unhappiness or happiness.

You don't get hung up on the future happiness or unhappiness.

You're just left with the present happiness or the present unhappiness.

Then you are quite happy!

Like the shell-frames of spectacles, some people will only bend if they are in hot water!

25th August The Law of Karma

The Law of Karma makes me at once responsible for my own present state - for my present suffering or misfortune.

It is vital to understand this.

So long as I blame others for it I am immature, and my life vain grumbling.

Since I am my own tormentor (enemy) and my own saviour (friend), do I not become self-centred, selfish? No.

A mature man looking constantly within realises that an impure mind and heart torment him.

So he becomes good.

Good actions proceed from his innate good nature.

He is looking within himself.

He knows that his own suffering is brought on by himself.

Does he then say, "Others suffer because of their own Karma"? No.

Because he is not concerned, he does not judge.

He only sees the suffering of others.

His goodness spontaneously responds to relieve that suffering.

26th August Intelligent Divine Life

Why are we taught to regard the whole world as God and all our actions as offering unto the Lord?

Because that again is a yajna (sacrifice).

It is not a total yajna but it is a part, a sample.

Unless the whole life is transformed into divine life, it's still hopeless, useless.

But why do we indulge in all this?

Because we can see the result immediately.

While seeing it, if we are alert all the time, it is possible at one stage to suddenly see this truth: with me or without me, and more without me, the world goes on better.

That is because the 'me' does not exist at all.

Hoping that one day the inner intelligence would arrive at this truth, the sages invented all these little sacrifices, yoga practices and techniques.

You go on doing this, one day you will surprise yourself by arriving at this truth: "Huh, I thought there was a shadow here on the wall, it isn't there. Even so, I thought this is my wife, my son, my house, it's not so any more. My God! Maybe the whole thing is imagination!"

When there is thus no attachment and no motivation, the egosense drops away.

Does it mean that one would become inert, lazy? No.

Because what holds back also is the ego-sense.

What says "I won't do," is also the same ego-sense.

The motivation of restraint is as good as or as bad as the motivation of action.

That is why the rishis invented the 'havan' ceremony and called it 'yajna'.

It has nothing whatsoever to do with yajna according to the Gita interpretation.

But some intelligence must some day ask, "I am pouring this ghee into the fire, what does this fire give me in return?"

Nothing. Ashes.

Why is this ghee poured there?

The same ghee that is poured into this body makes it grow but one day this body also is going to be cremated.

What is happening to this ghee right now is going to happen to this body a little later.

It will be reduced to ashes.

If nothing comes out of that fire, nothing comes out of this body either.

Why should I cling to this body and feel that this is 'me', 'my' body, 'I must make it live'?

Can I drop this body as I am dropping this ghee into the fire?

Can you also drop everything and reduce every action to ashes?

When will you do that?

When you discover that the ego which motivates this action does not exist, that pure action takes place not because 'I want', not because 'I don't want'.

If this 'I' which says 'I do' is seen to be non-existent, then your problem is solved.

Then what is called God's Will will prevail.

27th August The Fragment and the Totality

Wisdom and intellect are completely interrelated.

If your intellect is dull, the wisdom that is derived through that intellect is also dull.

The dull intellect thinks that one point of view is the absolute truth which means that you think that your point of view is the only truth in the whole world.

It may refer to your concept of God, your religious doctrine, your community, caste or religion.

He who imagines that one fragment of existence is the totality of existence, has a dull intellect.

When you hear this, perhaps in your heart you feel that this is the basis for the yogis' tolerance.

Tolerance is an inadequate and insufficient quality.

We saw in the life of Swami Sivananda that he never exhibited tolerance.

There was, of course, not the slightest trace of intolerance in Him, but He was not tolerant.

He had His own faith, He had His own deity (if you wish to call it so), His own method of adoring God, His own philosophy, His own teaching, His own ashram, His own disciples; but He loved, appreciated, admired, revered and honoured all other doctrines, all other points of view, all other philosophies and all other saints of all the religions of the world - not in a spirit of condescension or tolerance, but (that is the most beautiful thing) in the fullest realisation that 'that is this'.

It is not even a feeling, - 'This is my point of view and that is your point of view. You can have it.', but the fullest realisation that your point of view is the same as 'my' point of view.

We are both looking at the same truth.

There is no difference.

In Swami Sivananda's vision there is or there was or there will always be only one truth.

That will be seen by diverse people from infinitely diverse points of view and each one is exactly the same as the other.

I am proceeding towards enlightenment with dedication.

That movement itself seems to cut a path; and that becomes to me a method, a technique.

28th August Only God Knows How

My guru often pointed out, "Serve someone self-forgetfully."

If you are able to reach that point of self-forgetfulness in the service of even one person, then it is possible for you to acquire a taste for it, and this period of self-forgetfulness might become more and more permanent, more and more expanded.

In the course of time you may not only forget the self, but find out that the self does not exist.

This again is possible only when that which is called karma yoga is combined with meditation, prayer and all the rest of it.

The master suggests a certain inner approach of constant meditation, and observation.

This may or may not be so easy for all: where it is not the yogi suggests some kind of an auto-suggestion.

That is again based on the understanding that you are what I have taught myself you are.

First you were a total stranger, then I am introduced to you by somebody.

Now the relationship of a friend develops.

What is it that has made you my friend? Thought.

So if I start thinking now that you are a manifestation of God and go on thinking it, it is possible that one day I'll really see God in you.

As you go on, you realise that there is disharmony inside.

We see this in our relationships too.

I think he is my friend, but when that friendship is put to the test, something cracks.

That 'but' butts in and creates some disharmony or shows that there is some disharmony within.

In the same way I think, or I teach myself to think, "I am nothing, it is God who does everything, but..."

The 'but' comes up again.

God does everything, but if there is a garland, put it around 'my' neck!

'I am nothing' but this self comes up - you become aware of this contradiction.

There is deep, deep within each one of us this feeling 'I am so and so' and that has to be shaken.

You can adopt any sort of yoga practice you like, or you can attack it from all sides at the same time.

Though some of the yoga practices are considered to be easier than others, all are always slippery.

The self can get into any dress, take any form, and still it becomes self.

Only God knows how to make it non-self.

If someone is suffering and you want to help, it is good to tell him that the soul is not suffering, but is full of bliss.

Offer consolation at all levels and ask, "Can I help you?"

Don't just talk philosophy - it is cruelty.

Put yourself in his position.

29th August Life - The Interminable Bridge

If we can face life, look at it and understand it for what it is, suddenly we realise, "I was frustrated because I had entertained hopes and ambitions".

In the real world of life there is no room for hopes and ambitions at all.

There's plenty of room for action - which is inevitable - but hopes and ambitions must lead either to distraction, (occasionally), and to frustration, (more often).

If there is frustration, and at that very moment you are wise enough to look within and to see this frustration, you immediately see that the frustration is not related to you, but to the hope that was entertained.

Where there is hope there is frustration - the frustration belongs to the hope.

Life goes on.

So, the other attitude is one of wisdom, where wisdom discovers this truth:

(1) that life goes on regardless, and

(2) that where there is hope there is frustration.

If there is no hope at all, one can be extremely active, live a full life; and when that life decides to put an end to this body, to whatever you and I call a life-span, it doesn't matter.

This is an interminable bridge with millions of spans.

When you are driving on a bridge, you don't count the spans do you?

That's it.

Drive along the bridge without even bothering to look at the spans.

That is possible if one understands life itself and understands that action (karma) is inherent in life and that karma might keep throwing up its own results which in turn become causes of other results, but 'I' have nothing to do with it.

When this understanding arises, you are instantly freed.

Freed from what?

From nothing: from some sort of foolish idea that you had previously entertained.

That is what they call freedom or liberation, which is the goal of yoga.

Guru and discipleship are both necessary - each one hundred percent, not fifty-fifty - like cup and tea.

Neither is more important than the other.

If we are not able to assimilate knowledge, then we are no better than a donkey, who can also convey books from one place to another.

30th August Buddhi Yoga

Our endeavour to assimilate the truth will inevitably seem to involve contradiction. We pray: "Thou art omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient," but our actions deny this. This is because we have not discovered and assimilated that truth.

Is it healthy to allow ourselves to be so hypocritical?

Perhaps yes.

For example, I do not want to teach, yet I see that some of you want me to, so I am trying to oblige you.

I can see a contradiction, but so long as I am aware of this contradiction in myself, there is no contradiction.

On the other hand, if I pretend and convince myself that I am a great Self-realised sage come here to enlighten and save, then I am a hypocrite.

If I know why I am doing this, then that awareness - which is aware of the contradiction - is free from the contradiction and hypocrisy.

Our effort should be to assimilate the truth and not let it stay as an almond with shell.

Cracking this nut of truth is called yoga.

Krishna calls it buddhi yoga.

Without buddhi yoga all the traditional yogas that we practise become a travesty: hatha yoga becomes gymnastics, karma yoga becomes social service, the devotional practices of bhakti yoga become sentimentalism, meditation becomes hallucination or day-dreaming and jnana yoga becomes an intellectual game.

In between the senses, the mind and the ego, is the buddhi which is nothing but a reflection of the Light of the Self.

The buddhi merely co-ordinates the function of the mind, and makes a recommendation to the ego to act.

Individualised, the intelligence is naturally caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is trapped by the mind and the senses, and the discriminating faculty or the buddhi itself is perverted and confused.

Is it forever doomed? No!

This is where Krishna's buddhi yoga becomes meaningful.

The mind is superior to the senses; and the discerning intelligence, the buddhi, is superior even to the mind.

Beyond that buddhi is the Cosmic Intelligence, of which individualised intelligence is but a small fragment.

Drop this fragment.

Let it realise that it is but part of the whole.

When the buddhi becomes united with the Cosmic Intelligence, then the ego (which takes its cue from the buddhi) makes decisions that are no longer deluded.

One no longer functions as a crazy individual fighting against the rest of the universe, but works in total harmony with the entire cosmos.

31st August The Problem With Problems

A correspondent has written about problems, their understanding and solution.

Nothing can really be understood intellectually.

The intellect only thinks it understands.

The intellect creates the problem and then it thinks that it has produced a solution or, if the solution is suggested by someone else, it thinks it has understood the solution.

All this unfortunately is in the field of ignorance.

If the problem concerns an action, the solution is action, too, and is not a question of words and formulae.

"All I understand is that only this moment counts," says the correspondent "and to understand this there must be awareness moment to moment of that inner consciousness."

There is a snag here.

The inner consciousness is the awareness and you cannot make it the object of your awareness.

When the obstacles that stand in the way of the awareness - which is the very nature of the consciousness - are removed, the awareness exists and shines in its own light.

It is obvious that an imposed solution is a problem, whether this imposition comes from your mind or from the mind of another person.

Hunger does not arise in the mind but from a deeper level; the mind merely calls it hunger. Unless something happens at that deeper level no change is possible in the hunger-satisfaction pattern.

Is it possible for the intelligence to probe the very source of all this?

That is what is meant by saying, "If this is what you want, have it, but watch it and know what you are doing."

It does not suggest that what is done is right or wrong.

'If this is what you want' you will of course have it, without anyone suggesting you should.

From the moment the urge is noticed, is it possible to watch it and to discover its deeper source?

If this is possible, then in all probability it will drop away.

The watching intelligence is free from anything unnatural.

Spiritual life or sadhana is a great art.

Every stroke of the brush matters very much - we should carefully plan it and do every action after great thought.

Thought, word and deed must be delicate and purposeful.

1st September

Undying September

September is with us again.

Sept (meaning 'seven') embers.

The Veda glorifies fire as seven-tongued.

The blazing fire is Sivananda.

The following are the seven tongues of flame that radiated from Him.

They are the seven (sept) embers now.

But they are undying - if we can but see, and fan them into a mighty flame of Sivananda in ourselves.

Sivananda was (and is in you):

1. The Enlightened One Who held no dogma, not even the dogma of no-dogma.
2. The Liberated One Who embodied freedom, Who freely allowed freedom to all, and (in the realisation of His own freedom) did not demand such freedom for Himself.
3. Incarnate love which was unbounded by compulsion to love or to be loved.
4. The Blissful Sage Who revealed that in security there is insecurity, and lived insecurity, secure.
5. The Give-Ananda Who gave, and gave thanks to others for giving Him an opportunity to give, and gave others such opportunities, too.
6. The Guru of all Who saw His Guru in all, and considered Himself Guru of none, but an eternal disciple of the Universal Guru that He was.
7. The Divinity Who 'realised or actualised the divinity in all, by showing how to lead the life divine by diving into life to discover the divine.

Perhaps, someone will rename 'September' into 'Sivananda'.

Siva (auspiciousness, goodness) and ananda (bliss, delight) have their source and goal in these sept-embers. If we remember the seven embers every day, our days which are numbered may yet witness the undying embers burst into the flame of enlightened life.

May Gurudev make this possible.

2nd September

Gurudev

In a few days we shall commence the celebrations of the birthday of My Gurudev, Swami Sivananda.

He is the Light of our life.

We often use this expression, without for a moment realising what it means!

Gurudev is Light.

The Light illumines.

It is not concerned with, nor is it responsible for, what we do with or in that illumination.

We, the followers, often err; and I have heard many people blaming their Guru for this or that - "He should have done so and so"!

The light is impartial, but that does not suit our narrow mind.

We expect the Enlightened One to pat us on the back and kick others in the pants.

Worst of all, light hurts the owl's eyes.

We who are accustomed to darkness find it hard to face the Light.

What glorious opportunities we miss in life because of this diabolical instinct!

His Light shines on our life.

The Light has already reached the destination; it is the (our) destination.

But, we shall not know that unless we tread the path and reach the destination.

We do not want to do that; we expect our Guru to Self-realise for us!

He is the Light of our life.

Every thought, word and deed that proceeds from us must be illumined by that Light.

We should learn to look at our own life in the Light of our guru.

Then does He truly become the dispeller of darkness ('gu' for gloom; and 'ru' for remover - hence, remover of the gloom of darkness).

May His light shine for ever.

Thank you, September, that you come at least once a year.

You bring with you the sacred memory of my Master Swami Sivananda.

You kindle the fire of inspiration in our hearts, revive dying hope and rejuvenate withering aspiration.

In the ashram we used to worship Him on the 8th September, bathe His feet in milk and drink the purifying charan-amrita.

Luckily, in the ashram such opportunities to worship Him were afforded almost every alternate day.

We need to worship Him in our heart, every morning, and drink the ambrosia of His words.

Then shall Sivananda be reborn in our hearts to live for ever.

3rd September The Great Truth of Vedanta

All the systems and the codes of ethics have been reduced to perversions; all the religions of the world have become putrid accumulation of dogma and ritual.

Whatever man captures dies.

Whatever he hoards smothers him.

What he seeks destroys him.

Objective phenomena are interpreted by one's own self.

Everything in this world is 'related' to oneself, evaluated on the touchstone of one's own self.

To the extent they are related to one's self - either through love or through hate or through fear - their value is exaggerated.

Life's problems therefore do not spring from the external objects, but from the triple factor of love, hate and fear.

Life and its problems, objective phenomena and their value can therefore be understood as they are, only if we understand these three factors.

Fear is not inherent in the objects feared, but comes into being within me in relationship.

This fear, if not understood for what it is, will continue to infect all relationships, as it goes in search of a cause.

Even so in the case of love (in the sense of sensual infatuation) and hate.

Hence it is vital that one should turn within oneself to see what this fear is.

What is it made of?

When the light of this enquiry is turned onto fear within oneself, one is looking at this fear.

One is becoming more and more aware of this thing, this sensation that one calls fear.

The 'I' seems to stand aloof and look at the fear.

It is as if in semi-darkness one is facing one's own shadow and fears that it is somebody else!

As the sun of awareness arises on the horizon of one's consciousness, this distinction disappears.

In a flash one realises: "The fear and the 'I' are of one substance."

Even so with other aspects of life.

This vital awareness dispels the shadow of distinctions which has been created by what we have unfortunately called 'knowledge'.

Hence, this science is called Vedanta.

'Veda' means knowledge, and 'anta' means end - in other words, where knowledge of diversity ends and pure awareness is.

In the light of this awareness alone does life have meaning.

This awareness brings ethical discipline into being, without the do's and don't's and the perversions they give rise to.

This awareness is the very soul of religion.

With it, life becomes light and love.

Without it, life is misery.

4th September Vedanta

The word-meaning of 'vedanta' is 'the end of knowledge' - the end of knowing. Vedanta is the coming to an end of accumulated knowledge, so that the intelligence that responded in the first instance to a challenge in life, and which resulted in experience, becomes fresh.

When this knowledge comes to an end, the original intelligence shines in all its purity. That is true vedanta.

The book that we call Vedanta probably belongs to prehistoric times and represents dialogue.

'Upanishad' has been translated as 'sitting near': you sit near a master and ask a question with the right attitude of a true disciple and the master answers your question.

Or the master may himself ask you a question.

Somehow, in this close encounter between the disciple and the master, upanishad happens.

Thus, each disciple got some enlightenment from his master and it is possible that the disciple, in his turn, communicated the same message to someone else.

Many people got the message.

Some assimilate it, some merely registered it mentally, so that it became a scripture.

When is a scripture born?

When I cannot assimilate the truth.

If I can assimilate the truth, it becomes me, it becomes Self-realisation.

What I cannot assimilate, I remember.

When I have truly assimilated something I do not even record it.

What for? I am that!

In ancient times, when wisdom could not be assimilated, it was transmitted by word of mouth.

When memorisation was difficult the information was copied out.

This can be seen in every religious stream.

A man of God comes to unify the different sects and interpretations: "Forget all this, come back to the truth.

This is the truth" - making it as simple as possible.

But eventually division arises again amongst philosophers and theologians with diverging views of the God-man's own teaching.

That is because people argue about words and names - including those of the supposed authors, places and times of the events described.

Buddha said: "If you have a headache, you are not interested in any philosophical discussion.

All that matters to you is getting rid of the headache."

That is basically the Indian attitude.

It is possible that Krishna lived five-thousand years ago - it is possible that he lived only five hundred years ago.

What is the difference?

Only a zero!

This kind of discussion is a waste of time.

Using the scripture, if I have to, can I get beyond all that?

If I can, then that is vedanta.

5th September The Path of Wisdom

Moral and psychological discipline is essential in every spiritual aspirant, whatever path he chooses.

On the path of jnana or wisdom, it is indispensable.

There are no other guidelines, no guard against self-deception and no preventive to perversion.

Hence, in ancient times, the truth was jealously guarded and imparted by an enlightened guru to a qualified disciple (adhikari).

The rest of the discipline in jnana yoga is a face to face dialogue which is almost a confrontation.

The intensity of this dialogue is kept high by the intensity of the mutual affection between the guru and the disciple and their earnestness in the quest of truth.

The guru is the omni-ever-present light of God which is revealed to the disciplined disciple in response to the latter's longing for self-knowledge.

The guru may appear in many forms, any form.

In the Kathopanishad, the guru is 'death'.

When the spiritual aspirant faces death with unflinching courage and remains undetected in his spiritual quest by either material or heavenly goals, death reveals the truth concerning the self.

The self or the truth (which is symbolised by Om) is beyond 'this' and 'that', beyond the concepts of the real and the unreal; but it is the very experiencer of all experiences.

It is only because the experiencer, in ignorance, looks outside that the ignorance is perpetuated; when the hero turns his gaze within he is not deluded.

The need is to awake and to remain alert and then to approach the guru, for the truth is subtle and is in the middle, between the notions 'I am the experiencer' and 'I am not the experiencer'.

The guru may even be 'other than human agencies'.

The instruction may also take many forms: the disciple may question and the guru may answer.

The guru may indicate the truth and then prod the disciple to meditate and discover the truth for himself.

Though the usual form is one of dialogue or monologous instruction, there are instances where the truth is revealed in a debate form.

This is the vital part of jnana yoga: that the teaching be heard by a qualified aspirant equipped with 'the four means'.

The aspirant should then reflect and meditate on the truth so that it may be assimilated.

It then becomes a living truth, which means the truth (and not the personality) lives and acts.

6th September The End of Knowledge

Vedanta literally means the end of knowledge.

All that I have known must come to an end.

It is very important that this should not be misunderstood.

We are not talking of rejecting anything.

Knowledge comes to an end as foreign matter at the moment of assimilation.

That is vedanta: you do not talk about the Truth - you are Truth talking.

Today nobody is interested in Krishna's message.

There is only talk about the glory of Krishna.

No one gives you the teaching of Buddha, they merely glorify Buddha as a person.

Little of what Jesus said is taught in churches, but we hear a lot about what other people said about him! Learning what someone else has said about something else is what I call foreign knowledge - knowledge that belongs to somebody else.

It is not part of me, it is not me.

When that 'knowledge' comes to an end I am born and from thereon I do not have to quote 'So-and-so' - I am 'So-and-so'!

When knowledge does not remain mere book knowledge (i.e. when it has been assimilated)

I no longer think about that knowledge and plan my action, but knowledge itself acts.

I no longer say that I am a follower of Buddha: by watching my actions one will know that this is Buddha acting.

I no longer have to state that I am a Christian: one sees Christ in me.

This is vedanta, the end of 'knowledge'.

Where and how does this knowledge come to an end?

Knowledge cannot come to an end in the sense that you forget.

As long as your brain functions normally, it stores what has been received.

Knowledge comes to an end only by being assimilated.

Then bread, for instance, is no longer bread - it is me.

The bread has gone - the body has been made.

Digestion and assimilation of food happen naturally, but what must I do in order to digest and assimilate knowledge?

I have to acquire knowledge of life - whether indirectly through study of the scriptures or directly from life - from the scripture known as the world, as life itself.

When you put a piece of bread into your mouth you need two jaws to grind it.

The two jaws referred to here represent the upanishad.

That is, you dialogue with a holy man.

If you have a lower jaw (experience) you need an upper jaw: someone who will enable you to chew over this knowledge acquired by you through books or experience.

This is called upanishad and means 'sitting near' someone, to enter into dialogue with him.

7th September Yoga is the Middle Path

To find God who is omnipresent, one needn't undertake a pilgrimage, search or do anything but merely dissolve the self, illumine that self.

A shadow can disappear if you flash a light on it, illumine it.

The shadow of the ego or the self must in the same way be illumined: then its truth is seen.

The truth is that it is not there.

Something else is there.

What was previously considered to be the self or 'I' is not there; it was not there, but something else was there.

In order to arrive at this understanding, no specialisation is effective.

One can become a great jnana yogi and talk beautifully, but the heart may not be developed and life may flow in a completely different direction.

One may do good and think that he is doing karma yoga, but his intelligence may be completely dull and his ego may still feel that he is a wonderful person.

In the same way one may pretend to be a great devotee of God or a great hatha yogi, or raja yogi.

Each in itself will only promote the self or the ego.

Therefore my guru insisted upon combining all the spiritual practices that you can ever think of and thus avoid the arising of this ego.

In all things the extremes are comparatively easy.

It is easy to abstain and it is easy to indulge; but it is difficult to be moderate.

Hence Sri Krishna declares in the Bhagavad Gita that yoga will banish sorrow in the case of one who is moderate in eating, drinking, activity and enjoyment.

Somewhere between mad materialism and sleepy spirituality is the path of wisdom, the path of yoga.

On account of its subtlety, it cannot be pointed out as 'This is it'.

It can only be described as the Middle Path.

It is not broad, like the huge middle class in society.

It is the finest centre, the middle, the imperceptible truth.

Can we, in all things, find the subtle middle path?

Then we shall see God.

Things are not what they appear to be, and yet are not nonentities.

Between the concept of void and the concept of matter is the Self.

When you look at an object and divest it of materiality, and when it vanishes, resist the temptation to call it 'unreal' or allow it to pass out of your consciousness.

What you 'see' with your inner vision is the Reality, the Truth, Brahman, Atman, Allah, Christ, Siva, Tao or God.

Gurudev reminded us constantly that we have taken this human birth only to realise this Truth or God.

Even our worldly activities are meant to help us reach this goal: "We should realise God now, in this very birth, nay this very moment!"

8th September The Uniqueness of Sivananda

8th September is Gurudev's birthday.

While He was on this earth in His physical form, He himself took the leading part in organising it, as if it was somebody else's birthday.

He did not suffer from false modesty, which is a type of vanity so poisonous that it has no antidote.

It is also possible that by encouraging His disciples and devotees to sing His praises, He trained them to see God in and through a human form.

It is as if he said, "You say I am your guru, and yet you readily find fault with me.

Here is an opportunity, the birthday, when you forget your fault-finding habit and see something good in me.

When you have learnt this in your relationship to me, you will know how to see God in all."

Gurudev insisted that a true seeker should not run away from life, but learn from it.

Virtue and wisdom cannot be separated from life, which is activity, movement.

It is the ego that looks for results, rewards and reciprocity.

Gurudev was free from this.

His life was the ever-flowing stream of pure action, without the least egotistic notion of 'I am doing this' or 'I will not do this'.

In fact, He did not even say "I am an instrument in God's hands".

The 'I' did not exist at all in Him.

Therefore, His actions were unpredictable.

His life was as God willed it, without a pattern and programmed behaviour.

In fact, it was this total egolessness that made Him the purest human being that lived in recent times.

The purest human being is not one who does this or that, who performs miracles or some sort of superhuman deeds, but one who is what God created him - a human being - without ever wishing to be something else, somebody else; in a word, egoless.

His devotees claimed that He was an incarnation of God, and that He performed miracles as if they were quite natural to Him.

He always said, "God does this."

In His own life, in His habits, in His behaviour, He was utterly natural and child-like.

There was neither forced restraint nor hypocritical showmanship.

He was utterly transparent without the least flaw of egoism, so that the Divine Light poured through Him without the least hindrance.

I think this is why His birthday is celebrated long after His physical body has been withdrawn, and by people who have never even seen His physical being but to whom he is spiritually very close.

9th September Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love

Every time I come across, "And foolish men regarded Him as a mortal," in connection with the incarnation of God, I am reminded of Gurudev.

How foolish we were to regard You as just a mortal man and not to see that You were 'adorable Lord of Mercy and Love', clothed in the semblance of a human being, out of that very Mercy and Love, so that we could see You, touch You and serve You.

The human mind superimposes human qualities on the divine.

So, we saw in you our own human nature reflected; we saw that You were also eating, walking, talking, smiling, frowning and working like us.

How few of us had the insight and intuition to look beyond these and realise Your divine glory.

Lord Krishna, it is said, playfully held the Govardhana hill up for several days.

And you, Lord, held the heavier burden of a world-wide organisation and bore the responsibility for your disciples' sins of omission and commission with positive delight.

To pick up 'dropouts', failures, destitutes and vagrants and to mould them into saintly sadhakas, was a miracle that bewilders even siddhas.

Your Love was the alchemy which won all by its immeasurable and inexhaustible power to transmute.

When we Your children erred or did something that disappointed You or that was displeasing to You, what mercy and compassion shone in Your sorrowful but all the same beautiful eyes.

On a few occasions You could have been impatient.

As impatience stirred in You, something stirred in us and we were alerted.

If You had been patient even then, we would have been irretrievably lost.

On rare occasions, You put on the expression of anger.

You became a pillar of fire.

That fire consumed our foolishness, our complacency and our small pride.

If the disciple had to go, it was the sacrifice of Sati; even that disciple, purged of all dross, returned to You sooner or later.

While You lived, apparently like a human being, You had nothing to call Your own, You did nothing for yourself, You had no self, because You were (and are) the self of all beings.

Hence You were Love.

Neither love nor compassion can be understood, if one had not seen them in You.

Your love flowed to all, human and subhuman, sentient and insentient.

Even when You asked us to do something, Your voice was soft, loving, pleasing and pleading.

When You walked, Your Feet loved the earth.

Your touch was a caress even to the fountain-pen, spectacle case and walking stick.

To You there was nothing other than Your Self.

We called You Gurudev or Swami Sivananda.

We sang Your glories, much to Your amusement.

But only You know Who You are.

10th September From Duality to Oneness

Wherever we start in our search for the Truth we must remember that these are words. You have heard a lot of words, but you have not known the meaning - not the meaning as given in the dictionary, because that is also a mere word - meaning in the sense of the Substance, the Reality.

Candle is a word and this (pointing at the candle) is the substance.

If you say, "A candle, is a cylindrical thing, made of wax, with a wick in the centre," that is mere paraphrasing.

We have still not got out of the trap of words.

So, what is regarded as true meaning?

The meaning is the thing.

That is what is important.

Therefore, as we accumulate these words, we must remember this great Truth.

Then comes experience.

When we play with these experiences we should also remember that even that is not the Truth, because the experience is the experience of the description that we have had before. So when he tells me that Krishna has yellow clothes and is playing a flute, I close my eyes and visualise Krishna like that.

One day I experience the presence of Krishna.

Then I come and tell you, "I have seen Krishna."

Now, there are at least three separate things: Krishna, me, you.

I see Krishna and I am telling you.

Obviously, if you were Krishna I wouldn't need to come and tell you.

I know what Krishna is - it is not me, nor is it you.

Therefore this God seems to be so small that he doesn't include you, nor does he include me.

That is the type of Krishna which many people can 'see' easily.

In spite of all these experiences, there is still this undercurrent of restlessness.

I am not quite satisfied with this experience, I want a better experience.

It is possible for me to see this Krishna and to want nothing else - to neither talk to you, nor even to myself?

That is the ultimate Reality.

Is it possible for you to get hold of this one experience and make it Absolute?

Then the seeker is gradually led on to the realisation of the Infinite.

That is where the word as word comes to an end; that is where knowledge as knowledge comes to an end; that is where the experience as experience comes to an end.

That is Vedanta.

'Veda' means knowledge, 'anta' means end.

Do not ask, "Why did I do it?"

You may get a thousand consecutive answers which will confound you.

Ask "Who did it?" At least there can be only one answer.

11th September Vigilance and the Spiritual Path

One can get lost anywhere.

A man renounces the world and leads an extremely ascetic life and what one may call spiritual life, for years, and then suddenly something happens - he falls in love with a deer! When this happens to us, if we are not at the same time vigilant, the mind produces its own philosophy: "My duty is so and so..."

What is vigilance?

What does it require?

What is meant by vigilance?

Vigilance does not mean tying ourselves with a set of 'do's and don't's', but looking within and seeing what it is that creates all these problems.

This looking within is meditation, and has to be constant.

We go and live in an ashram, but even there it is forgotten - a few days later the spirit somehow evaporates; it is not easy at all.

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from our poor little stomach.

We have been growing right from childhood till today.

For this growth, naturally, food was essential.

The stomach seems to say, "Give me only as much as I can assimilate at a time; and if you give me just that I will contribute to your growth.

Then after five or six hours, throw in something more and once again I will handle that."

The process goes on until we become men and women.

Possibly the same principles apply to spiritual growth.

Though we seem to have met each other a year ago, the bodies that seem to see one another are not the same bodies - a lot of changes have taken place.

Millions of cells have been shed and created, and in the same way, intellectually and spiritually we have moved away from where we were last year.

(I am only saying 'moved away' - it doesn't mean that we have progressed!)

Something has happened - we have passed through some experiences and they have made some changes in us, so that we are looking at a different world, because the inner world, the inner observer is different.

So, even if we are living in an ashram and leading what we believe to be a spiritual life, frequent renewal sessions are very important.

When the force gained by a physical-mental-moral- intellectual discipline destroys the logic-barrier within, intuition begins to flow.

12th September That is the Truth and That Thou Art

Though I think most of us do not even think about our own body, it is possible for us to question our own origin.

After all, how were we conceived?

On the day we were conceived, we were probably just one cell.

That cell broke and multiplied, broke and multiplied, broke and multiplied.

But already, on the very first day of conception, the entire structure the body would eventually take was already contained in that fertilized ovum.

What is that?

What is that Intelligence that regulates the multiplication of these cells?

We do not question this because we think it is Nature, we think it is God, we think it is something.

How is it that when the cells keep multiplying, my nose only comes up to this length?

The cells can go on multiplying, multiplying, multiplying ...

That is the Self.

It is not 'my' self because you started growing in your mother's body, or probably before that.

So it is not my intelligence.

It is Intelligence.

That is the Self.

That thou art.

This Intelligence saturates the entire creation.

That is the Truth - that is the Atman, that is the Self, That thou art.

You are the Essence.

You may think, 'I am an Indian,' 'I am a Swami.' Another person thinks, 'I am a German', 'I am a yogi'.

But these differences do not exist in the Self.

Have you seen the ocean?

All rivers flow into the ocean; the Ganges flows into the ocean, the Rhine flows into the ocean, the Thames flows into the ocean.

But when they have gone and mixed with the ocean, they become the ocean.

Do they lose anything?

Before they joined the ocean they were small rivers and once they have joined the ocean they become the ocean.

They are no longer small.

They are infinite.

Even so, when all these finite creatures become one with the Self, they become Infinite.

That is the Truth, That is the Self and That thou art.

"Enter your mind into Me," says Lord Krishna.

When a doll made of salt dives into the ocean to measure its depth, when does it touch the bottom?

The very instant it dissolves and loses its separateness it touches the bottom.

Nay, it is the whole ocean.

13th September Vedanta: Another View

Someone described Vedanta as a 'no nonsense religion'; the following thoughts occurred in consequence:

You (the human being) helped trees grow.

You give them of your substance, which is their nourishment.

You cut them down and turn them into pulp and paper.

You 'consume' them in many ways.

You and they are parts of a beginningless endless cycle.

You use this paper to convey a message.

You author the message you (another) assimilate it.

(Your) mind makes the message.

The message makes (another's) mind up.

There is this cycle of interchange everywhere all the time.

An end which is a beginning of another end.

When you read this message, where does the knowledge go?

If it stays with you, undigested or ill-digested, it will be thrown up either rejected or repeated.

When it is well-digested (assimilated), it ceases to be knowledge - it ceases to be not-self (in terms of immunology) - and it becomes Self-knowledge or knowledge which is self.

That is vedanta!

Veda (knowledge) comes to anta (end).

It puts an end to all your ideas.

It challenges your confusion which gives rise to the basic ideas, which are 'This I am' (meaning the body) and 'This is mine' (the objects related to that body).

Vedanta is non-sensical.

You cannot reduce it to a rational laboratory experiment, for it is not a rat.

It is the ending of all that you think you know.

Hence the sensory inputs and the sensory experiences are scrutinised by an intelligence beyond the ego and tested in the laboratory of life itself.

Vedanta is religion without an article (a, an, the) limiting it.

It is not a religion "for discussion at a Club," in the words of Gurudev Swami Sivananda, but it is religion of the heart, religion of love.

God, love and vedanta are beyond the reach of the senses and the mind.

You can be virtuous only if you

(a) see the danger in non-virtue and

(b) you observe the non-virtue without emotional involvement (thus avoiding self-pity and self-justification), and see the utter foolishness of it.

14th September Jnana

Jnana is considered to be of two distinct types.

One is known as paroksha jnana and the other is aparoksha jnana.

The scripture and the teacher are said to be the source of paroksha jnana.

Paroksha literally means 'somebody else's eyes'.

So paroksha jnana is wisdom which belongs to other people's eyes, it is not yours!

What the teacher says is true to him, not to you, it is of no relevance whatsoever to you - but people foolishly believe that that is some kind of wisdom which is of great use.

I don't know if you have seen this phenomenon: supposing you phone someone in Bombay: "Hello. The sky is very clear here. How is it there?"

He answers "It is raining."

"Oh, I see."

You see nothing!

The sky is clear here.

What do you mean by saying that you see it is raining?

It is merely a figure of speech, a bunch of words that mean nothing.

That is paroksha jnana.

'Aparoksha jnana' is a fantastic word. It is merely 'not someone else's vision'.

They do not say that it is your vision, that that which you see with your own eyes is jnana.

No, that which you see with your own eyes is not jnana: that which you hear with your own ears is not jnana; that which you 'cook up' with your own brain is not jnana.

What is jnana?

Keep quiet! You will understand.

So, someone else's point of view is useless to you and it is quite possible that your point of view is equally useless to him.

'Sat' is the reality.

Sattva is the characteristic of that reality.

It is not the true reality itself, because reality cannot be grasped - but it is that which is very close to reality.

In terms of the example of coloured lenses, it is the ultraviolet lens.

It is clear.

There is no tint, no colouring.

It is transparent.

Whatever is sattva is transparent, it doesn't distort.

There is no distortion of the truth, but it is not the total reality, it is only one point of view.

Scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita give a graphic description of the conflict between Good (Love) and Evil (Veil).

They also suggest possible solutions.

The problem is essentially the same today and so is the solution, too.

On the other hand, unless you see the problem, you sense the danger, the problem is neither real nor urgent to you.

Therefore the solution - the scripture - does not apply to you.

15th September The Absolute

There are two important truths demonstrated in a particular section of one Upanishad which are often ignored.

One is that perhaps there is gradual Realisation.

Another is, that whatever is meditated upon or realised as the Absolute, is Truth.

This is accepted by the Indian devotee of God.

For example, the sage Narada in his Bhakti Sutras describes forms of love which could be regarded as hate.

You can love God even if your relationship is hate!

It sounds contradictory, but it is not.

The idea being that love is some 'whole-souled relation with God'.

In other words: love me or hate me, but don't ignore me.

In the same way, here we are told that if you get into any one of these categories and expand it to the absolute degree, there is Enlightenment, because in the Absolute there are no distinctions.

Twenty-five plus infinity is equal to two-thousand plus infinity.

The infinity is the most important factor here.

Once the equation is stretched to infinity, there is no distinction between two infinities.

Therefore, Infinite Love or Love Absolute is equal to Hate Absolute.

In the same way meditate upon the word as the Absolute.

That means, in that meditation there is no movement of consciousness.

That is the Absolute.

But you ask: "Is there anything higher than this?"

There is something within you that does not accept the word as the Absolute.

At every step it seems that there is perfection.

Once you have stabilised yourself in that perfection, you are looking around to see if there is something more.

The sage Sanatkumara in this Upanishad then says, "All this seeking is based on the search for happiness.

You have come to the teacher seeking that happiness - the happiness in which there is no trace of unhappiness and no restlessness, because it is not possible to lose it."

Where is that happiness?

If you meditate upon the word as the Absolute, you can have the same happiness.

If you meditate upon the ego, the will or hope etc., as the Absolute, you will taste that happiness.

But in all this, there is duality: 'I and the object of meditation'.

Beyond that is the abolition of this duality.

If I sit here and lick honey for the next hundred years, that taste of sweetness will eventually come to an end, but the sweetness of the honey itself never comes to an end, because the sweetness and honey are not two different things.

They are one.

That is bhuma, the Infinite.

That alone is Bliss and that alone is Peace.

16th September Unbroken Awareness

It is not that the yogi does not think or is afraid to think.

Thought is mental action and has its place in life.

Action belongs to life.

It is only when thought or emotion, memory or imagination determines action, that there is confusion.

Thought is used in the initial stages of meditation, to turn awareness towards itself.

This is vitarka.

Hope, fear, frustration, anger and so on are not allowed to find a cause to express themselves; their presence as the cause is recognised.

Then they are observed: this is vicara.

Vicara is the intensely active movement of awareness-energy.

Even the emotions are realised as such movement of awareness-energy.

This recognition frees emotion from the terrifying label; and there is intense delight.

Of course, the observer continues to be.

In all this there is some effort.

But the observer minus an object to observe needs no effort to be aware.

Hence now the effort ceases.

The observer aware of itself is awareness.

All that is left now is the potentiality of objective experience - the samskara.

Samskara is formed in the absence of self-knowledge when we invent a purpose to life, a function for God and the role of the understander or interpreter to the self.

Vritti is the understander, the measurer.

There is an extraordinary faculty in the understander to register as memory, impressions of experiences and expressions which are impressive!

These completely and tragically distort the pure action of the intelligence that indwells life.

Memory has its own proper field of activity; but when it is allowed to interfere in life and in relationships, it is destructive.

The understander can also indulge in imagination.

Ignorance is imagination: otherwise, how does ignorance arise in pure intelligence?

Ego-sense is imagination too: how does an ego exist apparently independent of the totality, the undivided intelligence?

Likes and dislikes, craving and hate, are imaginary.

Imagination gives rise to fear and thus to hope, and calls all this the 'future'.

By directly comprehending all this, the understander is understood to be but a shadow.

For dispelling this shadow one of the methods suggested by Patanjali is 'unbroken awareness' spread over the eight limbs of yoga.

Without such awareness, these practices may be counterproductive.

17th September

The Subtle Middle Path

The world is full of counsellors.

Half of them ask us to suppress our emotions, and the other half suggest that we should freely express them.

All this has been tried and found wanting.

Suppression leads to explosion.

Expression may seem to 'bring it all out' but it also digs it in deeper (like a tree which grows up and down at the same time).

Isn't there a third way, the middle way between these two? Yes.

That is neither suppression nor expression, but knowledge.

The emotion is in me, it is me, so its knowledge is self-knowledge.

It has two aspects which are complimentary - abhyasa and vairagya.

Vairagya is turning desire or any emotion upon itself.

When you seek to find answers to questions like "What is the emotion?" "Where is it?" "In whom does it arise?" that itself is meditation.

Abhyasa is the other side of it.

It is the practice of the eight limbs of yoga.

Both vairagya (which also means removal of mental colouring) and abhyasa enable us to discover the colouring of the mind which throws up these emotional states.

In order to discover this we enter the mind, go past the impurity, the perversity, to our own natural state.

It is there that we discover the truth that fear, hate, etc., are born of a non-existent diversity, a division between 'me' and 'the other'.

In sleep no such division exists and hence no fear and no pain either.

When life and consciousness are not divided into subject and object, experiencer and experience, there is no fear and there is no pain.

Pain ceases when contact ceases, when division ceases (not by avoiding contact through self-hypnosis, drugs, etc.).

Thus the practice of yoga is said to promote enlightened living.

This is surely a delicate art, and yoga is a delicate art.

It is easy to see that every aspect of work in the field of yoga (and of life itself involves this delicate balance.

There is a subtle middle path between the extremes of licence and tyranny (which is freedom), between weakness and domination (which is humility), between rigidity and liquidity (which is flexibility), between cold indifference and cruelty (which is love), between revolution and stagnation (which is evolution), between obedience and rebellion (which is cooperation), between formality and familiarity (which is affectionate respect).

To find this subtle middle path is yoga - but to find this in oneself, not to look for it in others!

18th September

Vichara

Fundamental to all the spiritual practices is vichara.

Without vichara there is no spirit in any practice, in anything that we do.

The word 'vichara' is derived from the root 'car' - to move: it implies movement - the car also moves.

'Vi' as a prefix denotes 'very efficiently'.

So vichara is 'to move very efficiently'.

In thinking or reasoning the thinking is not smooth and undistracted.

When you are even mentally arguing the pros and cons, you are jumping from one to the other.

But in vichara there is no such jumping.

To begin with, you think of the pros and cons, all the factors involved; then there is internal argumentation or internal dialogue, and finally you come to the conclusion of logic.

You realise that one can go on arguing like this for the rest of one's life without really coming to grips with the problem.

Instead of beating about the bush asking why this or that happened, I want to know what it is.

So instead of analysing a psychological factor or an emotion, is it possible to become directly aware of what it is?

The risk in analysing is that if you ask the wrong question and take the wrong road, you go far away very fast.

If you have a Master sitting in front of you, he can probably knock you back; otherwise there is danger.

But the question of 'What?', which is the essence of vichara, does not have this difficulty.

If there is unhappiness or sorrow in me, I am not going to ask 'Why is it there?' or 'How did it arise?' but 'What is it?'

What happens when this question arises in you is vichara.

The moment the question arises, you realise that instantly there is great attention.

If at the same time there is intellectual cooperation and emotional involvement, there is tremendous energy.

But even if at least they do not interfere with this process, it can go on.

It is only when the intellect obstructs this vichara or the emotion runs away from this vichara that you are lost.

Vichara is complete in itself and must form part of any practice that we undertake.

That means we must be intensely aware of whatever happens.

And that is yoga.

19th September What am I?

Vichara helps meditation because vichara needs one-pointedness and introversion of the mind.

The mind must be introverted so that both during the practice of meditation and at other times, the yogi may be aware of the thoughts and the emotions that arise in him.

Whilst these thoughts and feelings are still there, is it possible to be aware of them?

What are they, what are they made of?

When this becomes clear non-verbally, then the question becomes "What am I?"

You are serious about this enquiry, you have tremendous energy.

The energy is derived from the non-dissipation of the mind.

You will find that that itself is enormous energy.

If at that moment your spirit is high, the emotion is also participating in this, then the energy is tremendous.

If your mind, your heart, the emotion and life itself all come together and function as vichara, there is nothing that this cannot achieve.

They have an expression in English: "Thinking, feeling, willing."

For us it is more appropriate "Thinking, feeling and living".

In ordinary language, thought is in the head and feeling is in the heart.

There is another expression called 'gut level'; that is what we are looking for.

The energy is in the solar plexus.

Actions really emanate at the gut level.

That is the centre of vitality.

If these three participate in this vichara, then there is tremendous energy and this awareness seeks the answer to the simple question: "What is this thought, this emotion?"

This awareness is interested in the truth, not in its description or analysis.

In order to do this very effectively one needs not only inner peace and tranquillity, but environmental peace and tranquillity also.

If we are serious, God's Grace will provide even that.

This awareness is like a search-light looking, looking everywhere and when all the darkness of ignorance has gone from the surrounding area, then the same awareness turns upon itself.

What am I?

There is no answer to that - or perhaps there is an answer, but only you will know it!

Self-awareness and ultimate God-consciousness being the aim of yoga, even yoga asanas can be pressed into its service.

While doing the asanas, cultivate a physical self-awareness.

And, while becoming aware of the physical potentialities, offer the marvellous energy, flexibility and movement that each asana involves as a flower of gratitude at the feet of the Indweller.

20th September Gurudev is Love

September is the month of Gurudev Swami Sivananda's birth.

He descended into our midst, became one of us without condescending to do so.

Love does not condescend.

Love radiates.

Love shines.

Love is.

Into our every-day life love infuses a glory, a glow, a divinity.

Love makes life divine.

Life continues to be life.

Divine life has no external trademarks, but the spirit is unmistakably divine.

When life becomes divine, the spirit is of love.

Spirit cannot be described.

A description of love is its destruction.

It is. It glows.

We could not fail to see it in Gurudev.

He was love. He is love.

Where there is true love, there Gurudev is present.

This spirit of divine life which is love was present in every one of Gurudev's thoughts, words and deeds.

Nothing in His life was laboured, strained or artificial.

Everything was the flow of this love.

There was wholeheartedness in everything that He did.

When He spoke to you, you were sure that He cared for nothing else in the world.

When He worked (whether writing letters or books, giving instruction about printing or despatch of books, discussing the affairs of the ashram or the world-wide community of disciples) every detail was lovingly attended to, as if nothing else mattered.

He made no distinction between means and ends.

All this is description.

Volumes have been filled with descriptions of His divinity.

On His own birthdays people came from everywhere and right in front of him sang his glories and 'told him' (and us) how His grace had transformed their lives and saved them.

And He sat there, nodding His head, smiling or making appropriate responses as if they were singing someone else's glory, the glory of God as love who dwelt in their own hearts and flowed towards Him.

He radiated love; and He basked in the warmth of this universal love which had its fountain-source in Himself.

It is happening today, regardless of His physical presence or absence.

His physical personality was magnificent and magnetic.

If He walked through a market He would attract everyone's attention, even if they had never heard of Him or of a swami.

It was not merely the physical proportions, but there was that something in Him.

That something is, even now, and it will continue to be, as long as there is love in the human heart - for Gurudev is Love.

21st September Lord, What Am I?

Vichara is the light that illumines all that we do in our life - all the thoughts, words and deeds.

There is guidance as to what should be done and what should not be done, what should be renounced and what should not be renounced, without attachment.

In that light one realises what one's own unique position in life is, without comparing, without feeling superior or inferior to others.

Thought becomes inspiration or inspiration becomes thought, and emotion becomes devotion.

The vision is freed from division, diversity is seen as identical with unity and unity with diversity.

I remain I, without feeling somehow that I am different from you.

I am what I am meant to be, I do what I am meant to do, but without distinguishing myself from you. How to bring this about is the business of yoga.

The secret of what My Guru Swami Sivananda called Integral

Yoga is integrating the entire personality, sacrificing the entire personality, making the entire personality sacred.

The whole personality is offered to God, so that life is as God meant it to be.

God is that intelligence, that power which created you, me and everything.

I didn't ask to be born, how is it that I was created?

That 'I' does not know what it is and therefore it is asking all the time, "Lord, what am I, what am I supposed to be, what am I supposed to do?"

In that enquiry lies our salvation.

When this light of inner enquiry is bright, then what happens in our life is integral yoga.

That is very beautifully defined in the Bhagavad Gita: "May your mind become Me," may the mind become totally saturated with God - "Love Me".

Where is that 'Me'?

'Me' is everywhere.

God is omnipresent, so "Love Me," means love all.

Any love that is restricting is not love.

I cannot love you and hate your enemy; then in my heart there is a division.

"Do everything for My sake," or realise that all your actions spring from God, flow towards God.

"I salute the God in you, in everyone."

In this way, when your whole being is totally united with this omnipresent God, you reach Him, you realise your non-difference from the Omnipresence.

Then your whole life is dedicated to or devoted to God and what was known as the self dissolves in the Infinite.

We are all cells in the cosmic body of God.

One life, one body.

22nd September Life as God Willed

When the mind considers something as pleasure, that assessment itself creates the climate for the impression, the samskara.

Is it possible to go through life without the mind regarding experiences as pleasant and unpleasant?

Life has its own procession of experiences, and the senses act and react on those objects and experiences in a natural way.

There is a piece of chocolate on your tongue; naturally there is salivation, the chocolate is dissolved and it goes in.

If you put a small piece of very hot curry or potato on the tongue, it quickly comes out. In these two experiences there is no judgement, no assessment; the mind, or thought, comes in later.

Very often this 'later' is not half an hour later, but one five hundredth of a second later, and therefore we think that the thought arises immediately.

If you observe something very keenly, you'll see that between the experience and the recognition of this experience there is a period, one brief moment, of darkness, of ignorance, of unawareness.

Out of that unawareness arises 'This is pleasant', or 'This is not pleasant, I hate it.'

If that period of ignorance or unawareness was not there, there would not be the consequence of the recognition of pleasure and pain.

Therefore, only when this insight is constantly alive and awake is discipline possible.

Then life becomes natural 'as God willed it'.

You and I live exactly as God wills we should live, which means that the ego or mind does not decide what I should do or I should not do.

The mind is nothing else than all these samskaras.

When all these 'scars' which have been imposed upon the intelligence are removed, what is, is the original stuff - intelligence, God.

When on that intelligence, as it were, these samskaras get formed, then what you call mind arises.

The mind is really not completely and totally different from this intelligence or insight; this inner intelligence and the samskaras which form the mind, are all one substance.

When the content of the craving is enquired into, it is seen that it is non-different from the mind, the intelligence.

This craving for experience, the recognition of an experience as pleasure, arises as a result of ignorance.

If that ignorance is avoided in the first place and one is awake inwardly, neither the recognition of something as pleasure, nor its subsequent samskara and the craving would arise.

23rd September True Practice

How does the mind become holy?

If the mind becomes holy, who makes it holy?

Does it make itself holy? How?

Psychology is meant to find the answers.

The psychology of yoga demands that we should directly understand the mind, not think about it.

Thinking about thought will lead you nowhere.

There is another method which is often recommended and which may be very useful in its own context.

That is, never mind about this filth in the mind.

Pour some good ideas into it and then this filth will go away.

I am not discouraging this.

Even Gurudev Swami Sivananda liked it very much, but there are some 'ifs' and 'buts'.

If you pour a whole pint of milk into a filthy vessel, will the filth go away? No.

What must you do? Look at it, see that 'This is filthy.'

Then you will know how to clean it.

However since the mind is not material like dirt, the 'seeing' (awareness) itself is the cleaning.

The psychology of yoga demands that you should look at the mind, become aware of it - not think about it.

Studying the states of the mind is also useless for our purposes.

Instead is it possible for us to look directly at the mind and to become aware of it?

That is the psychology of yoga.

Both the philosophy and psychology must immediately manifest themselves in practice.

If you are totally dedicated to wisdom (philosophy) and if you directly understand the mind (or directly become aware of it) then you are practising yoga.

It is not as though you must first understand the philosophy and psychology and then go somewhere and practise yoga. No.

While you are doing this you are practising yoga.

The truth of yoga will manifest itself in your daily life if you are sincere, earnest and keen.

Though Swami Sivananda has left an enormous amount of literature for the transmission of the theory of yoga and vedanta, He did not set great store by a theoretical or intellectual understanding of yoga or vedanta.

If I close my eyes now, I can almost see and hear Him emphasize: "Yoga and vedanta must live in you. Your daily life must be vedanta."

The difference is that if you are translating the yogic or vedantic doctrines in your daily life, you know that you are practising yoga, you know that you are applying the principles of vedanta to your daily life.

But, if you are living yoga, if you are living vedanta, then you do not know.

Others may discover that you are a yogi or an enlightened person.

That was what He wanted us to become.

24th September The Divine Life

Krishna exalts enlightened action at every turn.

Action is inevitable, but it should be sanctified by jnana.

Jnana is not ordinary bread-winning knowledge, it is wisdom, insight.

This jnana "cannot be attained in the university" in the words of Sri Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

It is a revelation by the divine.

Insight is not the end product of the individual's effort or investigation, but it is revealed knowledge or wisdom.

The tendency to use this knowledge converts revelation into tradition - trading in revelation.

This is how knowledge (yoga or jnana) is lost in course of time.

Until all motivations - even the altruistic ones - are dropped, true insight is not gained.

However, the all-merciful Almighty 'descends' again and again to revive insight.

Avatara is 'descent'- a Divine Incarnation, one's own guru (who is the descent of the divine grace embodied), and even the sudden flash of insight (symbolically descending from the crown of the head or the sahasrara into the heart via the ajna or the eye-brow centre) in response to a deep gut-level aspiration (symbolised by the rising triangle in the manipura or the navel centre); their meeting at the heart or the anahata is the new revelation, symbolised by the two intertwining triangles.

Such a descent re-establishes dharma.

Dharma is not only righteousness or the performance of one's duty, but it is the balance or the force of equilibrium continually disturbed on account of the dynamic nature of creation.

When the balance is so altered that the very nature of the creature is threatened, there is the descent of light - the inner light of insight.

The aspiration that brings the light down is not born of inefficiency or laziness, but the understanding of the truth that by its very nature the inner light which is beyond mind cannot be understood by the mind and that, therefore, the guru-experience alone is valid - all else is ego-trip.

Hence, Krishna commands: "Seek the enlightened ones; they will initiate you into wisdom and insight."

In that insight, when the individuality is recognised to be indivisibility in which duality seems to exist, there is the direct realisation of a oneness that transcends all description.

God alone exists.

Christ alone exists.

Buddha alone exists.

Atman alone exists.

Whatever be the word used, the realisation of this truth creates no problem.

25th September Something Which is One

Self-realisation is considered to be the goal of yoga and vedanta.

In that case, what is the self?

Do you have a nice image of the self seated in the heart, shining, resplendent like a tube lamp?

The self or the subject is 'That which cannot be seen'.

Then how are you going to see it, to realise it?

Because you can become aware of what can be seen, you say that it is an object and that it is not the self.

Yet there is a dreadful misunderstanding or confusion that the body is the self.

Whatever happens to the body you assume happens to you - "I am suffering", "I am happy", "I am hungry", "I am full".

Whether you use these expressions or not there is an inner experience which still identifies the self (subject) with the body (object).

That is wisdom which directly perceives a certain oneness in diverse beings - in all beings.

As Gurudev very beautifully put it in the Universal Prayer: "Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms".

When we became swamis we put on these orange clothes and changed our names.

A name is merely like a collar you put around your dog in order that you may recognise it and not throw a piece of bread to another dog.

It has no more value than that.

Many great saints did not have names at all.

A saint doesn't need a name.

He doesn't have a bank account, a passport or legal documents.

But in order to recognise him you give him a name.

So, name and form are creations of your own mind, meant to make your life easy.

This does not imply that diversity is somehow affixed to reality.

If you go to the ashram kitchen right now you will see a mountain of roti, rice, and vegetables which will be consumed by all of us and will become all of us.

The same mountain of rice becomes diverse bodies.

It is one, yet later it somehow appears to be different, diverse.

That which recognises this is wisdom.

He seems to be he, I seem to be I, but in and through this there is something which is one, indivisible.

This hall seems to be a certain entity, the library another, the temple a third, and so on.

But if all these walls are pulled down, that which was, is, and ever will be, the space being forever indivisible. That which recognises this is wisdom.

All else is non-wisdom.

26th September The Direct Path

The 'world' is from God and it exists in God.

The individual is essentially divine.

God is very close to each one of us.

He is the subject, though He is without even becoming a 'subject'.

There is no subject-object division in Him.

He pervades all and therefore transcends all.

It is the subject-object division which arises in ignorance that gives rise to a host of other such divisions; and Krishna asks us to destroy this tree of ignorance by non-attachment.

But we cling to its many branches.

We name them 'pleasure' and 'pain', 'happiness' and 'unhappiness', and then enter into a relationship with them.

We love some and hate others, thus courting endless agony and anxiety.

We have tried to remedy this situation by cosmetic adjustments, hypnotising ourselves into one or the other of the various psychological moods.

But the problems do not go away!

We have unwisely ignored the simple path - which is to turn to truth.

What is the truth concerning pain and pleasure, happiness and unhappiness?

Are they real entities?

What would they be if the words and their corresponding psychological concepts were absent?

Surely, pure awareness in which a movement of energy takes place.

This pure awareness is divine and this movement of energy in Him is His nature.

There is experience and expression, whole and holy.

Out of this realisation arises spontaneous action, not to be confused with blind, mechanical, impulsive action.

Life is never dull.

It is not a monotony, but it is greatly enriched by this realisation.

We may continue to use the words 'I' and 'you', but the meaning that arises in our hearts is something beautiful - it is love, pure and divine.

We may still use words like 'pain' and 'pleasure', but there is an inner recognition that there is but pure experiencing - the dread of pain and the pull of pleasure go.

We may still use words like 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'; but we recognise that they are transient shadows that one need not hold back or push away.

God alone is.

There are no two realities.

The sun shining in hundreds of swimming pools constitutes one sun, not many.

God alone exists and is reflected in His own cosmic consciousness.

27th September Speaking of Meditation

I do not know what meditation is.

What I 'say' is not meditation, but a description of it.

The description is a shadow, not the substance.

The technique that we teach and learn is a technique, not meditation.

True meditation is a complete inner freedom - free from the dead past and the unborn future.

It is what we sometimes refer to as 'unpremeditated action'.

Such action is pure and spontaneous.

For instance: you walk into the yoga school without anticipating anything and you are warmly welcomed and eagerly requested to speak.

This is what happens throughout our life - but we miss the delight and the surprise by bringing our hopes, desires and expectations with us.

These in their turn give rise to their own reactions which may be elation and depression, satisfaction and frustration - all of which are necessarily related to the dead past.

Is it possible for us to enter the Hall of Life every day, every moment of every day with unpremeditation, so that the mind is fresh to experience the purest delight of living?

When we enquire into this, we see that such a possibility is beyond the 'me', the ego-sense with its own petty hopes, fears and cravings.

We see that perhaps the 'me' itself is non-different from the aggregate of these hopes, fears and cravings.

To be able to transcend these and therefore to transcend the 'me' is not to create another image for the 'me' to rest in, but to discover that the 'me' is the limited, conditioned fragment of the infinite, unconditioned whole.

The 'I' can only realise this fragmentation because to the fragment such fragmentation is the only truth.

The finite cannot realise the Infinite.

The intelligence that is in deep sleep is the intelligence in which the dreams and the visions are experienced, which is the same as the intelligence that thinks and functions in the wakeful consciousness.

In consciousness, however, there is no such division or limitation.

It is the 'I' that casts the shadow of limitation.

But the shadow is not the substance or the truth.

The whole enquiry is meditation, which is therefore unceasing.

The enquiry itself is the enlightened living - the light in which the unreal is seen as unreal and hence non-existent.

That the 'reality' alone exists is not for the ego even to say.

28th September The Black Hole

The New Age Consciousness, especially in the Western World today, is bursting through the Black Hole of spiritual awareness!

'Black Hole' is merely symbolic: it is a mystery since it cannot be seen.

According to physicists there is a strong probability that black holes exist.

They are the intensest known gravitational fields or points.

Light emerging from the black hole bends and falls into itself, returning to its own source.

There is a further speculation that whatever falls into this hole or field entirely loses its identity, but may emerge (in all probability) into another space-time paradigm.

The same physicists have also come up with a very interesting new theory of 'the holographic model of the universe' (everything contains everything else in its entirety).

Perhaps the two 'probabilities' can be combined into the pratyahara and pralaya phenomena.

The Yoga Vasistha mentions several pralayas ('pralaya' may mean dissolution, as in 'entry into the black hole' or reabsorption).

We can now holographically relate the black hole probability to several everyday events:

1. Birth: The Upanishads declare that man himself is reborn as his own child.

If you contemplate the process of conception and birth, you realise that it is really the father (perhaps 35 years old) entering into the intense gravitational field (of love) and emerging a little later into a different time (a new-born baby) and with a different space.

2. Deep Sleep: Awareness enters into the black hole, emerges in dream after dream, and then into the waking state (we think nothing has changed, though the world has undergone great changes before we wake up and the time we slept just vanished into a moment).

3. In death we enter into a black hole, to emerge God-knows-where-and-when-as-what.

4. In meditation: The phenomenon of light falling upon itself resembles pratyahara.

Samadhi is, exactly, entry into the inner gravitational field of devotion-meditation where all identity is lost.

The meditator emerges enlightened.

From the conditioned to the unconditioned.

5. The enlightenment-experience may be the 'final' black hole – called atyantika pralaya.

In addition to all these, the earth may enter into a nearby black hole, the solar system into another, and (at the end of the life of Brahma the creator) the entire creation may enter into its own black hole in cosmic dissolution!

May you enter the Enlightenment field before that, now itself

29th September Darshana - Direct Seeing

What is philosophy, what is psychology, and what is meant by the practice of yoga?

We should understand these basic terms very carefully, otherwise we assume an incorrect meaning and get lost.

If you understand the simplest meaning of the word, it is possible to see the truth in it.

For instance, what does the word 'philosophy' mean?

'Sophy' means wisdom, and 'philo' means love - devotion to, friendship, affection.

So philosophy means a total love for wisdom.

If that is not there then we are wasting our time.

Philosophy is not a text book or a syllabus that you study at college, but the total dedication to the search for wisdom.

Someone, very rightly (according to me), said that there is no philosophical system, we are philosophy.

Some have tried to construct some sort of philosophical systems into the Upanishads according to the Western pattern, but that is not possible.

The philosophical system that the Westerners are thinking of is a very rigid pattern, there is neither wisdom nor affection in it.

It is just a book, it does not inspire wisdom in you.

It confuses the mind, disturbs the heart.

Western philosophers have always regarded philosophy as a sort of intellectual gymnastics, where you are considered a great philosopher if what you say is terribly confusing.

Gurudev Sivananda discouraged this type of dry intellectualism.

Philosophy is not intellectualism.

Wisdom is a simple thing and one must see it directly - not think about it.

Thinking about wisdom is a waste of time, like thinking about food at lunch time.

Hence, in India, yoga and vedanta are known as darshana - direct seeing or experience.

Alertness is possible only when you sense real danger.

For instance, if you are standing on the roof of a building, try this.

Stand in the middle of the roof and then go over near the edge.

Do you not feel an unpleasant creeping sensation now?

Are you not more alert now?

Yet just before reaching the danger spot we are complacent; just as the waters of a river about one hundred yards upstream from a waterfall appear to be completely calm, unaware of the awaiting fate.

30th September The Heart of Receptivity

It is not possible to understand yoga and vedanta through books, but only when you live with someone like Swami Sivananda who embodied the truth of yoga and vedanta where you see it, not just think about it.

There is a big difference between a class and a lecture situation.

The more incomprehensible a lecture is, the greater the impression produced, but then there is no understanding.

In a class we are all seeking and working together, and if someone who is speaking is not able to communicate with those who are hearing, it is a waste of time.

If the listener dozes off, there is no feedback.

The energy of the speaker comes from the listener.

The following beautiful verse is recited before the daily reading of the Bhagavad Gita:

sarvo 'panisado gavo dogdha gopala nandanah

partho vatsah sudhir bhokta dugdham gita mrtam mahat

The Upanishads here are likened to a cow.

The cowherd is Krishna.

The hearer (Arjuna) is the calf who draws out the milk.

In other words, this verse suggests that even Krishna would not have been able to release that wisdom if Arjuna had not been receptive.

There is an interesting legend to make this clearer.

The Bhagavad Gita was taught on the battle-field just before the war commenced, and in that stress situation Arjuna did not have time to sit down and contemplate the message.

Long afterwards Arjuna sought Krishna again and said: "Many years ago when we were about to fight, I collapsed and you gave me a brilliant exposition of philosophy. I have forgotten that. Won't you repeat it?"

Krishna replied: "I was in a different mood then, because you were in a receptive mood. It is not possible to recapture it now. But I remember vaguely what was said: so I'll repeat it."

This is the scripture called Anugita.

It is the class situation that brings out the inspiration and communication, so whatever the speaker says the hearer has to understand very clearly.

When the student also works as hard as the teacher (not merely sits there) it is possible for both together to understand the philosophy, the psychology, and the practice of yoga.

1st October Divine Optimism

The two words 'yoga' and 'jnana' are often regarded as completely different and distinct. In the Bhagavad Gita you have these two used almost interchangeably as synonyms.

What is yoga?

Krishna says: "That, having realised which you do not crave anything, and established in which the greatest calamity doesn't have the least effect on you. That is yoga."

That is jnana also.

It is perhaps very easy to say this, and of course easier to listen to it, all this; it is perhaps not terribly difficult to apply this to your daily life and endure small losses and misfortunes; but what is hinted at here is perhaps very different, very sublime, very holy. I saw this in the life of our divine Master, Swami Sivananda.

What would normally have destroyed our peace of mind and our tranquillity, what might have made us insane (not merely have a nervous breakdown), did not touch him at all.

It is not as though he recognised these as calamities and reacted one way or another - in a saintly or not-so-saintly way.

He was endowed with a certain insight, a certain vision of the truth concerning life and the world, so that he looked at those events in a light that is very different from ours.

During the few years I was at his feet there was a financial crisis at least once a year in the ashram.

After some time even we became immune to it, but not in the sense in which he was.

He almost looked forward to the next financial crisis.

In one such extremely grave situation we observed the way Swami Sivananda behaved and it was extraordinary.

On his face you could see not resignation, not acceptance, but the recognition "This is God's will.

This is as it is, as it should be.

Isn't it marvellous that God has given us this wonderful gift of a collapse?"

So, while the others were looking at the dark side of the picture, to Swami Sivananda himself only the bright side existed.

He wasn't even aware of the dark side.

This is something extraordinary.

I do not know if it is possible to put it into words - one had to see such a phenomenon as Swami Sivananda to understand this.

There are three kinds of peace: the peace of the grave; the peace of the idiot; the peace of the knower of God, the sage.

We want to know that peace - the peace that passeth understanding.

2nd October Is Truth True?

Question:

If truth cannot be known, is truth true?

Swamiji:

What is truth?

Is there a truth other than a truth concerning something, an object?

All truth concerning an object is a point of view and an opinion.

If this is an opinion and merely a point of view, is there a truth other than this, and can that truth be known?

Or in other words, can a thing be known for what it is?

A thing cannot be known for what it is, and this is the latest quantum physics: that the very observation alters the character of the object being observed.

At what point can you really say, "I know this"?

Before you say, "I know this," the thing has undergone a change.

So, can an object be known as it is without being altered by the observing consciousness?

Not possible.

If that is not possible, then what needs to be known or understood is who the observer is.

The observer can be known only if the observer can be objectified.

How can the observer be turned into an object?

If you contemplate along these lines you come to not quite a dead end, but to a state of expanded consciousness which at once includes all objects (including all opinions of all objects) and a light that seems to illumine both the subject and the object - the light that is the subject which illumines itself and all objects without itself ever becoming an object.

And there you stop.

Consciousness has expanded itself so widely as to include all this without excluding anything.

Am I aware of this consciousness?

No, obviously not, but since consciousness is consciousness there is no unawareness in that consciousness.

If you are aware of consciousness there is a division, and that is either your point of view, your object or your thought.

Consciousness is either that which is the subject without an object, or that which is between the subject and the object, which links both these and in which there is no division into subject-object.

When yoga speaks of virtue, it merely suggests that you should look at your own life.

Become aware of what you are.

We have too long and too morbidly indulged in 'Thou shalt, thou shalt not'.

Virtue cannot be imposed upon one from outside.

3rd October In Quest of Truth

Question:

Are students of yoga allowed to question the scriptures and the teachers?

Swamiji:

Yes, of course.

Krishna specifically recommends questioning.

But there are several types of questioning.

The true seeker is on a quest, and for him questioning is most important.

Another type of questioning is of the curious: there is no harm in this, for it will lead to a greater understanding of the truth.

Then there is questioning based on doubt.

Doubt may be destructive, though a healthy doubt may save a genuine seeker from a charlatan.

Destructive questioning is when an aspirant asks questions in order to show-off his knowledge and expose the ignorance of the master.

This destructive questioning might elicit only gracious indifference on the part of the master.

In ancient days, books were not recommended; knowledge of the truth had to be learnt 'by the (h)ear(t)'.
Hence the knowledge was known as sruti and the process sravana.

The student approached close to the master (sitting close was upanishad) and became one-

big (h)ear(t) (which is what sravana meant).

He imbibed the teaching through every avenue, through all the senses and through his very innermost being - verbally, and, what is even more important, non-verbally.

If the teaching is directly absorbed, well and good.

Otherwise, it remains the Master's truth (paroksa jnana).

There is unclarity in the student.

He tries to 'chew' it within himself, he discusses it with fellow-students; finally he asks the Master himself for clarification (all this constitutes manana).

Then deep contemplation (nidhidhyasana) enables the truth to be assimilated and it becomes living truth not dependent upon belief in the words of another (aparoksa jnana).

This whole process is yoga; all else is ego.

Belief arises from ignorance and an innate abhorrence of ignorance.

Belief is like a shirt to cover the ignorance.

If you want to grow it won't do to shed your shirt or make a larger one, but to promote growth inwardly.

Promote abhorrence of ignorance by keeping on the quest of Self-knowledge.

The philosophy of yoga does not indulge in prohibitions and injunctions, but promotes awareness.

A disciple says: "I am your disciple, and I want to do only what you approve of. I have done such and such. I hope you approve."!

4th October Contemplate and Do

Quite a number of very holy men refer to themselves in the third person: "Give this something to eat".

If you do that you have not used the word 'I', but look within and see if there is a thought or a feeling with you that 'My body is hungry'.

What is it that creates this confusion?

That is avidya.

You are still thinking.

As long as the mind is thinking you are unable to see it.

Seeing is very different from thinking.

For instance, when this book is held up, first you see something.

Then the name and form arise as soon as you begin to think about it.

But without thinking you can still see it.

Similarly, are you able to see this confusion without thinking about it?

Wisdom is not a gimmick.

Removal of avidya is not a gimmick but a very real problem which has to be solved in a very real way.

Only vidya (or jnana) is an antidote to this avidya.

One attains vidya or jnana through viveka.

Viveka or unbroken wisdom is when you are so steadily and firmly established in this wisdom that it is continuous, whatever you are doing and wherever you are.

If that arises you will not mistake what is impermanent for permanent.

You know that the body is impermanent - use it, live in it nicely, wisely - and when the time comes, drop it.

You do not think that it is permanent, but that does not mean that you are asked to think that it does not exist!

It does exist, but it is not permanent.

That is pure vision, clairvoyance.

When this viveka becomes continuous there is comprehension of the reality as such, and the heart (or this awareness) constantly seeks the reality.

That is the nature of wisdom.

Krishna also suggests this in the Bhagavad Gita, when he commands Arjuna "Therefore at all times contemplate me and do what has to be done."

Wisdom and action must go together.

It is in and through life that this wisdom has to be realised.

Swami Sivananda used to impress upon us.

"This is not only possible, but easy, and its benefits are incalculable."

That which befriends this wisdom, which forever seeks this wisdom and doesn't want to be separated from this wisdom, is true philosophy.

Yoga is the art of self-discovery, of being oneself.

5th October the Beauty of Appropriate Action

The sattvic buddhi knows nivritti and pravritti.

(One leads you away from involvement in the world; the other leads you towards involvement in the world.)

The sattvic awakened intelligence knows what has to be done.

Krishna says, "Do what has to be done", but doesn't define what has to be done - it is left to you.

What you have to do is very different from what I have to do.

It is a waste of time to imitate one another.

The awakened intelligence does not do that.

Swami Sivananda in the thirties lived in Swargashram among the great yogis of different types, and yet did not imitate any of them.

He took it upon Himself to serve them all.

Whenever there was satsang He arranged the platform, carpets, cushions etc., so they could all be comfortable.

He knew, "This I can do".

They had their special faculties; He had something else to contribute to that company of saints (that was his genius); with the result that He outshone them all - but that was not His intention.

What has to be done and what has not to be done must be very clear, and therefore imitation has to be ruled out.

The intelligence that is sattvic knows what has to be feared and when the fear is psychological, pathological, unwarranted, irrational.

One had to observe this in a great master like Swami Sivananda to know where self-respect ends and arrogance begins, where timidity ends and humility begins.

One has to learn the difference between meekness and weakness, when to bend down and when not to, when to fear and when not to.

Both bending down and not bending down can be attributed to arrogance.

Here one sees the beauty of appropriate action - and it needs an awakened intelligence which is sattvic.

The behaviour of our master was incomprehensible to us, because we looked at him through our lenses, and they were not pure.

Swamiji was not afraid of public opinion, but that did not mean that he defied public opinion.

These are two different things.

We may be afraid of public opinion and so avoid action, or we may defy public opinion to assert ourselves.

We have a rigid pattern of behaviour.

Swamiji took into account public opinion, social customs, the spiritual goal, the end, the means - and these were all reflected in his conduct.

6th October Religious Instruction

In Rishikesh there are so many ashrams presided over by enlightened masters. Daily we are privileged to sit at the feet of these masters and they speak to us, individually or collectively.

Or do they?

When these great masters talk to us, do we understand?

No doubt, we understand the words, because we have installed on the pedestal of our brain cells images which correspond to these words which are used.

But this is useless.

There is no understanding.

It is jugglery of words or transliteration (not even translation).

These are days when religious organisations all over the world are being besieged by calls for vernacularisation of prayers and explanations of doctrines.

What follows is not to be treated as a doctrine to be debated, but to be seen for what it is - a mere statement or plain truth.

A 'pastime' is euphemism for 'dangerous abuse of time'.

The worst of pastimes is polemics.

It is futile, but its refutation is worse still.

Hence I do not indulge in polemics.

But can we, each one of us, endeavour to understand why religious instruction has so far failed everywhere in the world?

Why is it that people who understand the words understand nothing.

The teaching concerns truth.

Your mind is filled with thoughts concerning health, wealth and filth.

How can such a mind understand or respond to such sublime teaching?

But then the trouble is you think you understand.

You praise the teacher.

He ought to be surprised to hear that the student could understand what he himself has not understood!

But if he is as foolish as you are, then he thinks that he is a great teacher.

And so goes the circus.

Even if God Himself stands in front of you to teach you in your own mother-tongue and in your special dialect, you will understand nothing if you are not properly tuned to the teacher.

Have you noticed how mothers, in order to pacify their babies, give them a sucker?

In the same way, when we start weeping, someone gives us a philosophy or religion, and pretty soon we're sleeping and not finding the truth!

7th October Holy Man! Give up jealousy

While the pragmatism of the materialists unites them, the dogmatism of the spiritualists divides them.

The former's goal is immediate profit and even if the unity is not long-lasting, it is spectacular: like America and Russia fighting side by side to crush Hitler.

The religious people, on the other hand, have an abstract ideal which to all but a handful of truly spiritual heroes might mean nothing more than hallucination.

To each man of religion his vision is the only truth and all else untruth to be actively denied and destroyed.

This fissiparous tendency is often evident in spiritual organisations.

The leader of each religious group is more eager to broadcast the others' faults than even to beat his own drum.

The result, as we have seen throughout the history of the world, is growth of irreligion.

Sometimes it cuts into the organisation, creating parties within its membership.

It may generate personal dislike of jealousy.

These undivine qualities don idealistic mantles: the undivine jealousy, is admired as vigorous dedication to the 'Cause', in defence of which a spiritually advanced brother has the courage to denounce another!

The immediate appreciation it evokes in the hearts of one's own unspiritual associates who are clever enough to reap a harvest of personal profit prevents one from shedding the mask and seeing the Truth.

It was Gurudev Sivananda who demonstrated in his own life that every spiritual aspirant and leader should combine in himself the most ardent devotion to his own path, vision or ideal, and the wisdom to let every other spiritual aspirant or leader similarly pursue other paths or ideals.

If we adopt this principle, we shall be able to unmask jealousy and such other undivine elements that may rear their heads within us and deal quickly with them.

The world's moral (and therefore basic) problems are nothing if the religious forces get together, instead of tearing humanity apart by mean-mindedness and jealousy.

May Gurudev's light shine brightly in our very souls.

There is a popular saying in Sanskrit that 'one should not behave contrary to the social norm, even if one is sure that it is not unethical': but that applies only to social or religious leaders whose example is followed by others, not to great saints and yogis, whose ways are not for us to judge or to emulate.

8th October Sivananda's Meditation

To meditate upon the guru is to meditate upon God.

Every disciple is asked to contemplate the guru before doing anything, and thus link his consciousness with the guru's several times a day.

Krishna reveals to us that meditation is not such a rare thing.

He reminds us in the Gita (II-62) that we often "meditate or contemplate objects of pleasure".

Such meditation leads to self-destruction.

Throughout the scripture, of course, Krishna deals with meditation for self-realisation or enlightenment. Krishna points out that "Some people behold the self by the self in meditation".

Here and throughout the scripture the emphasis is on 'seeing' (pasyati pasyanti).

"He who sees God or the Self in all, and all in God or the Self," is a devotee, yogi and so on.

This is the way, and this was Sivananda's meditation.

We saw that Gurudev was fond of the Vibhuti Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita (10th chapter).

'See God in all' - that was his mantra.

Not to think "I see God in all".

How does one know that one sees God in all?

How does he who sees God in all behave?

Does he see God in all except in himself?

If he sees God in all, including himself, how does he function as if dualistically?

This is the supreme paradox and mystery which can really and truly be understood only if we see the truth embodied in someone like Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

In Him we saw clearly illustrated the twin bhavas (realisation): narayana-bhava (see God in all) and nimitta-bhava (God is the indwelling reality, and the body and mind are instruments in His hands).

This attitude, this perception and this realisation constitute real meditation.

They cannot be practised, cultivated or applied.

They have to happen - of course, by the grace of God and Gurudev.

We are worried because we give this life-time here too much of importance, too much of value.

We are prepared to commit the greatest crime in order to fill this short span of life with as much comfort as possible.

If we lift our vision a little higher, and view the progress of the soul itself, from life to life, it is then that we become wiser.

9th October A Revelation of the Divine Mother

The Durga Saptashati is a small text of 700 verses - the same number as that of the Bhagavad Gita.

Perhaps the number 700 and its association with the Bhagavad Gita were deliberately contrived to illustrate one of the most emphatic declarations of Sri Krishna concerning Divine Incarnation.

The whole universe is depicted and conceived of as a play of contrary forces, which frequently create an imbalance.

To restore balance the Divine incarnates again and again.

Thus we are told in the Durga Saptashati that after a long, long penance of self-negation, when the seeker had a vision of the Divine Mother, he prayed to her: "Please relieve me of ego and egoistic relationships."

This is surrender.

Perhaps to bring home to us a strange problem, the scripture tells us that even the breath-taking austerities of the king could not eradicate the extended ego: hence the king prayed to the Divine Mother for power and position - there was no surrender.

So, first there has to be this inner awakening, and in that awakening this awareness keeps watch over all one's thoughts, words and deeds.

Life doesn't change overnight, but as life flows on this awareness, the monitor, detects our defects and shortcomings.

Whether they go away immediately or not, they begin to hurt and hurt and this hurt is very good.

We become more and more intensely frustrated and dissatisfied with what we are, not with what we have. When even to live seems impossible, then there is a revelation of the Divine Mother.

To pretend to have surrendered before this happens is pretension, not surrender.

Surrender must happen in its own good time.

First you were bad, then you struggled hard and you became good.

Then you struggled harder and you became better.

Completely free of all evil qualities, you were the embodiment of all good qualities - and immediately you became worse because you were full of vanity.

That is the time to surrender, and from there on surrender flows and all that you do flows to the feet of the Divine Mother.

When someone else is in trouble, we talk wonderful wisdom; but when the trouble comes to us! Ah!

10th October The Sequence of Prayer

With what we consider to be our own firm conviction in their efficacy, we recite our prayers and chant mantras.

For very good reasons our ancient sages have inculcated in us the faith that their very repetition would save us from sorrow.

By this the texts have been preserved, and this faith persuades us to study them till the prayer becomes alive in us.

Some may regard the whole thing as superstition.

But, Gurudev Swami Sivananda had great faith in the Devi Mahatmyam (Durga Saptashati).

Faith is different from belief.

One who has never seen burning fire may be told that it is hot.

He believes that statement.

But when he draws near a real fire he feels the heat.

He now has faith in the truth that fire is hot.

If he comes into direct contact with it he knows.

One hears that the Durga Saptashati is a powerful mantra or prayer.

One participates in the ceremony with devotion.

Then one experiences grace.

Then faith is born.

One may then continue the devotional practice and experience the truth.

Often our prayers are answered.

But the answered prayers stop us from praying.

We are satisfied that the prayer has been answered and therefore we cease to pray.

This is invitation to disaster. Wise men, when their prayers are answered, immediately give thanks to the Lord for the grace shown. This is wisdom.

There is something more.

If one sincerely realises that "I could not make it myself and hence I prayed for divine grace; and it was on account of the grace that I succeeded.

The success belongs to the divine" then there is true humility and continued prayerfulness.

This is the key to the continued reception of grace and continued success.

When we say that lightning is the work of the gods (echoed in the Bible: 'Behold, he scatters the lightning about him' - job 36), you answer: 'But we know scientifically how lightning is caused.'

This is true: we do not deny your physical analysis.

When I lift my hand it is possible to give a physiological explanation of which muscles contracted and which stretched, and how the hand was raised.

But don't forget that the muscles obey the command of my intelligence .

Similarly in nature (God's body) everything takes place guided and governed by his intelligence.

Science and religion are reconciled.

All the scriptures that have been handed down to mankind are maps of Life. The problems dealt with are problems that we face every day: sorrow, grief, disappointment, confusion, attachment.

What are they?

How do they arise - that is, what are the internal causative and contributory factors?

A knowledge of the answers to these questions might enable us to deal with these notions and emotions without inviting them, succumbing to them and thus aggravating them.

Defeated, disowned and disgraced by kith and kin, a king and a trader sought the counsel of a sage.

They were unhappy, but they kept affectionately worrying over the unhappiness of their kith and kin! Mysterious is mind.

Do we love to be unhappy?

Is it possible to look at unhappiness, sorrow and attachment without blaming others or even oneself, and discover what they are made of (just as the substance of the objects seen in the mirror is mirror or glass)?

All experiences arise within us; hence we should learn to look within.

Three factors obstruct our vision:

(1) Pure undivided awareness (or: God-realisation, witness consciousness, choiceless awareness, observation without an observer, self-knowledge, Christ-consciousness and so on) is 'asleep'. In the absence of Self-knowledge, 'the other' is experienced as real, and

(2) our mind and senses pursue pleasure and thus wallow in the impure divided consciousness.

(3) When the reality of inner experiences and so on is sought intellectually - hence, vainly - there arise sophisticated distractions - the noble pursuits of philosophers (and scientists), priests and politicians!

In the three episodes of the Devi Mahatmya we are given a graphic teaching of how to deal with these three so that we might be able directly to become aware - choicelessly - of the stuff of consciousness.

Such awareness itself is the destruction of distractions and the realisation of the unpollutability of the undivided essence.

It is the instant ending of sin and sorrow.

There is natural holiness.

All life is recognised to be already divine.

The mind and the senses are sanctified by the 'touch' of the divine; they are incapable of diabolical activity and evil vanishes from their view.

The entire universe is realised to be the expansion of chit-shakti (the power of consciousness - the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotence of God).

We are all one in Him.

This is Love.

12th October The Battlefield is Full of Demons

How to acquire this inner vision which, without changing anything extraordinary, brings about a total and complete change?

The vision is turned within to examine what this 'mineness' is, how it arises, where it arises.

There is no sense in calling it an illusion.

That it is an illusion may be revealed to you in God's good time, but for the present it is there and very, very real.

Pursue it.

As you pursue it, unless you are highly mature, you may not perceive the 'mineness' itself. But you will perhaps become aware of the various aspects of this 'mineness': attachment, craving, desire, anger, foolishness, lust, hatred.

All of these come out.

Can you already apply this marvellous philosophy that these are all movements of energy in consciousness?

Then you might run into serious difficulties.

When you find that greed is your problem, become more generous.

When you find that short temper is your problem, become a little more patient.

That's enough.

There is a challenge and there is an appropriate response.

When these things are moved out of your way and you see that in spite of all your exercises the problem still exists, then suddenly this Raktabija - the demon who apparently cannot be overcome - is formed.

At that point, your whole intelligence gets frightened because you have been battling and battling with your own evil qualities and you think you have made the grade, but you see the battlefield is full of these demons - they are all there in different forms waiting to pounce upon you.

As Gurudev would say, "Your vanity has multiplied" the vanities of humility, charity, kindness, efficiency and learning.

Whatever you thought was good has been turned into vanity and eventually becomes evil.

If you are wise, that wisdom trembles: "What am I going to do?"

Surrender is meaningful only at this point.

Until then, if you detect unhealthy, undesirable qualities in yourself - battle.

Find appropriate remedies.

As Gurudev would say, "Cultivate good qualities to replace the undesirable ones."

Then you really see that that is not enough, because whatever you do is all turned into ego, vanity.

Then surrender arises.

13th October The Divine Incarnation

All the descriptions of gods and demons, heavens and hells and so on are just figures of speech, there is nothing in it.

If you want to go to heaven, please do, but if the scriptures can be trusted, these gods are in constant fear of being dethroned and of demons hunting them out, just as the earth is revolving, heaven and hell also seem to be revolving.

For a few years all the so-called gods rule the heavens and then comes a revolution and the demons are ruling the heavens.

The scriptures say that periodically the demons invaded the heavens and drove the gods away.

Quite possible.

The gods are radiant, they have the support, the grace and the blessing of God.

How is it that they can be driven out by demons?

Once you feel that you are supported and protected you become arrogant and evil.

This is the greatest danger.

You become arrogant and vicious and therefore weak, so that the demons come and attack you and drive you out.

This is one interpretation.

Another interpretation is also possible.

The devas are ruling the heavens and with the passage of time they become more and more arrogant.

They are the demons, and where they live becomes hell.

It need not be a very specially assigned corner of the universe, but where the majority of people are vicious that itself is hell.

This divine power - Durga, Christ, Buddha, whatever you wish to call it - when it descends into the world of diversity, has only one aim, only one purpose.

For the destruction of evil God incarnates Himself again and again and again.

It does not mean that since we are performing all the ceremonies, pujas and so on we are the saved ones.

There is no protection at all against wickedness.

Wickedness must be removed, and if you examine yourself very carefully, you see that all viciousness, wickedness and weakness spring from this one single, simple word - 'mine'.

It is only grace that can remove it.

Can I, on that score, neglect to do anything?

Then I am accepting and rationalising this mineness.

So I have to struggle hard against it and then come to the precipice where I say, "Lord, not my will, Thy will be done. I don't know how to deal with this. I have done everything possible to overcome it. It is not possible for me. 'Me' cannot overcome 'mine'."

It is then that there is an incarnation of this divine Power within you and that which was not there is realised to be not there.

14th October

At the Feet of the Divine Mother

As part of the ritual recitation of the Durga Saptashati, we take special note of an inspiring half-verse.

The Divine Mother, the Cosmic Energy, is endowed with several special potencies which are for a very special purpose, thus stated in the half-verse: "For the removal of the body of the demons, and to bestow upon the devotee the boon of fearlessness".

This is surely what tempts us to repeat the prayer, the feeling: "I am a devotee eligible for this boon of fearlessness."

But then, if I discover that I continue to be a prey to fear, to a sense of insecurity, sorrow and suffering, then surely it is not because the law of grace has become inoperative in my case, but because I am not a devotee.

Devotion to the Cosmic Power and fear (and all the rest of it) do not go together.

If the latter is present, then devotion is not.

If I am no devotee, then I partake of the nature of demons (if we are honest we shall discover that we all carry a little demon in our own heart and mind).

And what does the scripture say?

The Cosmic Power removes the 'body' of the demon.

This does not mean only the physical body, but the mental, intellectual and karmic sheaths as well.

This action of the Cosmic Power is made manifest in our own life in different events which the ignorant mind, the demonic mind, interprets as 'old age' (which removes pride of youth), 'poverty' (which removes the arrogance of wealth), 'illness' (which removes our reliance on physical strength), 'dishonour' (which removes the veil of vanity).

If the mind and the heart are able to see these events as actions of divine grace instead of as calamities, we are instantly transformed into devotees and we become instantly eligible for the boon of fearlessness, which is granted to us without the least delay.

Sounds simple, but often it is not that simple.

For suffering and even its understanding do not lead to enlightenment which alone ends evil.

Only when all actions and endeavours in life have a single direction, when all these are made to flow towards the divine, does the ego come to an end.

Anything taken for granted, including domestic relationships, is dead.

15th October

Thy Will be Done

'Surrender to God' is an oft-discussed but easily misunderstood topic amongst religious and spiritual seekers.

It is assumed to be the easiest and the most direct way out of the sorrow inherent in life, and an entry into the Kingdom of God.

The assumed simplicity of surrender is because it does not involve physical effort or expenditure of time or money.

It seems to be an entirely inward process; hence, it is easily 'attained'.

But only in one's imagination.

For, real self-surrender is not difficult, but tricky.

We tend to forget a great truth illustrated by Draupadi's predicament in the Kaurava court.

She did not surrender to Krishna and call upon Him prematurely.

Even so, it is impossible for a living human being to realise the futility of effort before having made that effort.

If you have not tried your best, the ego is unwilling to accept defeat; and this is an essential condition to true self-surrender.

When this condition is fulfilled, surrender happens and grace flows; there is absolutely no doubt that whatever happens from there on is realised to be the operation of grace.

However, if one is sincere, it is possible for one to derive an insight into one's own being even when one merely professes to surrender to God.

This is what we learn from the Durga Saptashati.

The ego, which considers itself righteous and holy, does not easily admit of a necessity for total surrender to God; for such a person is ensnared in his or her own self-esteem.

When this self-esteem is challenged, he turns to God, but not before being worsted in the battle with the hidden diabolical forces within himself.

This happens again and again.

For, the surrender is often hypocritical if not imaginary.

Hence, paradoxically the very attempt to surrender seems to end in giving a boost to the ego; for it is the ego that thinks it has surrendered itself to God and (the blasphemy of it) is protected by God, whereas true surrender asks for no protection.

Thus the inner battle goes on.

First with the forces of the grossest form of the ego, then the struggle becomes more intense and closer to oneself - the identification with family, property and position.

When these are also seen to be an imaginary extension of a fundamental error, the spirit of true non-attachment arises.

The last to go is the fundamental error - the feeling 'I am the body'.

All other misconceptions are based on this fundamental error.

16th October The Unapproachable Fortress

During the nine days of Durga Puja, God is adored as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati: the three fundamental functions of cosmic energy.

Energy is indeed indivisible, though its functions can be not only varied but apparently contradictory.

The indivisible manifests as the diverse; all contradictions harmonise in the indivisible.

This is considered a great secret because of the human intellect's inability to comprehend the totality.

Hence the need to resort to an approach that is beyond the intellect but not irrational.

Hence again, the need to worship, to adore and to love the Godhead represented by Durga.

The word 'durga' itself has several meanings, definitions and interpretations.

The meanings can be as varied as 'a fortress' and 'unapproachable'.

Paradoxically, the same divinity is a fortress that provides ultimate security and that mysterious energy or reality which is unapproachable by the human intellect.

This indeed is the challenge.

To dare to approach the unapproachable, and by total surrender enter the fortress.

The insecure salt doll gains absolute security when it surrenders itself to the ocean.

That is adoration of Durga, Durga Puja.

The extensions of the ego have to be examined and realised to be unreal by oneself.

Does God's Grace come into this at all?

Perhaps yes.

Material losses, failure, dishonour and social and domestic hostility, may all be God's Grace, if you look at these from the point of view of a true seeker.

However, the meaninglessness of extended ego has to be realised by the intelligent seeker without waiting for a miracle to save him.

But the fundamental error ('I am the body') can be overcome only by Grace.

Hence, the emphasis in the teachings of Lord Jesus and Lord Krishna that one should forsake all worldly relationships and connections and seek Him.

When the seeker reaches this stage - and only then - he realises that self-effort is futile thereafter.

He has done all that he could do.

This realisation gives birth to the true spirit of self-surrender.

(At this point the seeker may realise that it was Divine Grace alone that made self-effort possible right from the start.)

Surrender is indeed the easiest and the most direct path to God realisation.

But all other spiritual practices precede it.

17th October The Play of Cosmic Forces

We are normally unaware of the cosmic being whom we call God.

But we are aware of cosmic energy.

It is this energy that creates, sustains and brings about changes and thus maintains the cyclic process.

These three functions are attributed to aspects of one indivisible cosmic energy.

Energy, by its very nature, is dynamic, moving, flowing and ever-changing, without ever undergoing a change in its nature as energy.

The source of this energy is visualised as Durga.

When the energy, by an infinite process of combination and recombination, brings about the infinite variety of beings and objects of this universe, we call it Lakshmi.

One who recognises this treats everything with respect.

He gains wisdom.

Wisdom is Saraswati.

Thus, when this energy flows, there is unity in diversity, prosperity under all conditions, and wisdom which is Self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge reveals the divine ground of the infinitely diverse phenomena.

However, built into all this is a mysterious potentiality of ignorance.

As the beautiful story in the Kena Upanishad tells us, even the gods fall victim to this mysterious ignorance; and the individual who is but an integral part of the movement of total energy, thinks that he is an independent doer of actions.

Pride enters into him.

When this perversion arises, the cosmic balance is disturbed and there is conflict.

Even this conflict is a mere play of cosmic forces from God's point of view.

For, nothing can be outside of Him.

However, from the relative point of view, there certainly is conflict - and the conflict is between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.

In this conflict they who turn to the divine for grace and help are the beings of light.

The aggressor performs this signal service to the humble by humbling pride and directing the heart of the humble towards God.

In response to heart-felt prayer, the divine manifests again and again, when and where help is needed.

Everyone within the field of the divine influence is redeemed - the saintly and the sinful, for energy is one and divine.

All life is divine.

All beings are cells in the body of one God.

18th October Pray with Sincerity and Wisdom

There is an interesting episode in the last section of the Durga Saptashati.

Two mighty demons drive all the gods away from heaven and take charge of it.

The gods who were driven out suddenly remember a boon granted to them by the Divine Mother: "Whenever you are in trouble think of me and I'll come to your help."

It's an interesting boon which guarantees that you'll get into trouble!

Remembering this boon they start offering a prayer and the prayer is very interesting: "We salute that Divine Mother who is intelligence, power, energy, sleep, the creative energy, craving, thought, memory, patience, peace, confusion or madness in all beings."

It is a very interesting thought that wherever there is conjunction of consciousness and energy, there is the Divine.

All that you can think of is the conjunction of consciousness and energy; the two are inseparable.

You cannot have consciousness without its inherent energy.

Whether you call it a good thought or a bad thought, both are thoughts.

Good fortune or misfortune, both are fortune.

It depends which end of the stick you are holding.

When you lose, somebody else gains.

There is nothing other than just a movement of energy in consciousness.

If we think "Ah, that's a beautiful philosophy. I can do what I like".

There is the snag.

You may say that there is no difference between kindness and cruelty, except that kindness will beget kindness and cruelty will beget cruelty.

Are you prepared to treat what you receive in the same spirit in which you give?

If you are cruel to others, are you prepared to receive cruelty from others in the same spirit in which you gave it?

Only when the inner vision of sameness arises does this philosophy make sense.

Prematurely applying this philosophy is useless.

It is words without sense or meaning.

The inner vision is necessary and if the inner vision is not there, whatever you do, however much meditation or worship you do, all is 'water off a duck's back'.

It doesn't touch anything.

We cannot serve two masters - God and Mammon.

Choose one as a master and let the other be your servant.

19th October When the Heart Becomes Heaven

When the very fact that we regard something as 'mine' begins to hurt, then that heart becomes heaven, the abode of God.

There is something good in our lives, however wicked we may be.

In fact, it is the existence of that goodness that leads to this rationalisation.

It is something that stirs in you, that says, "I shouldn't do this."

That stirring is divine.

So, in a way, if you feel frustrated and dissatisfied, that frustration and dissatisfaction is divine - hang onto it.

When this cry of frustration becomes intensest, the Divine manifests itself.

Instantly there is Divine Grace.

One of the signs of this frustration or dissatisfaction is that it does not seek to fill the vacuum of dissatisfaction.

You refuse cosmetic solutions.

It is then that something fearless and courageous, awakens in you and says, "What on earth am I doing here and what is this cosmetic treatment going to bring me? At worst I may die. That's good. No problem." Suddenly you realise that this is the fundamental truth which you had forgotten.

This is what is separating you and me all the time.

What sort of cosmetic treatment are we undergoing?

Now that dissatisfaction has brought about an inner awakening - a little window has been opened on the truth concerning life.

That is the stirring of the Durga within.

If one is prepared to face the truth, even if there is only one small glimpse of it, just one little hole in the roof through which the light streams in, if one is prepared to hang onto it, then even one's failure in life can be welcomed and greeted as grace.

The heart that is looking for the pearl of truth is not interested in shells anymore.

That is the criterion, that is the sign that the inner awakening has taken place.

If it's not there, a little more struggle is indicated.

Without anticipating anything, without any hope whatsoever, is it possible for us to experience this inner agony that "I am trapped in this 'mineness', in this sense of possession, in this spirit of dominance and, my God, I can't get out of it!"

When the heart bleeds, cries aloud in prayer, it's then that Durga, the supreme power, manifests itself in our own hearts and there is enlightenment.

20th October Maya

What is Brahman?

Brahman is God.

What is God?

In our search to understand anything, we always construct mental pictures comparing something we do not know with what we think we know.

We use descriptions: 'long', 'small', 'high', etc., but all these are measures.

Measuring limits, but in order to understand anything, I have to measure, to compare.

That measure is maya.

If we want to understand what maya is we have to measure measure!

If my measure is wrong, everything it measures is wrong!

I cannot really understand maya beyond seeing that it means measuring, limiting.

From this standpoint I can again enquire and try to define Brahman as 'Cosmic Being', using the notion of cosmic to remind myself of His Infinity.

This also introduces a limitation!

By stating He is infinite, I have indicated that He is not finite.

The mind is caught in this trap of measuring, defining and thus confining.

Understanding that all description is a limitation, one may drop the measuring instrument and catch a glimpse occasionally of the Immeasurable.

Realising that what we are talking about is beyond description and comparison, we also see that to understand the immeasurable, we have to get out of the measuring!

By measuring it out, by going through maya beyond maya, I understand that there is no blue 'dome' covering the world, but I still see the sky as blue; but coming face to face with the fact that there is nothing there, I drop the false idea I originally had.

Once I have recognised there is no real pool of water in the desert, (realised the illusoriness of the illusion), though it still appears to be water, I know it to be in fact a mirage.

I have to work through the appearance of maya to get beyond it.

God cannot be affected by anything I do.

The fact that I try to measure Him, cut Him into finite (to me comprehensible) pieces does not cancel His Cosmic Nature!

Just as water is water (be it muddy, tea or the body of a swami or a thief, the spirit, whatever it may appear to be, never becomes filth, but is forever pure Spirit.

Once we realise that the Cosmic cannot be measured and thus limited, but that throughout our life we cannot help measuring and limiting (conceptualising), this measuring disappears.

When I realise that all my concepts and beliefs are nothing but measuring, the illusion that measuring had for me is gone.

I have realised that the unreal is unreal.

To know that the unreal is unreal is Realisation.

21st October Maya - The Basic Limitation

The concept of illusion gives rise to a lot of misunderstandings.

Maya is a limitation or conditioning that is inherent in all creation.

The eyes can perceive only a small segment of the spectrum - the ears can hear only a few decibels of sound - i.e., they are not even as efficient as the machines that we have invented!

This is how it is: there is no fault here and hence no remedy is called for.

The mind ('my mind') too, is limited and conditioned - by the enormous stuff that has been fed into it birth after birth.

It is loaded with this memory and so responds to this as a computer would.

The intellect which is individualised cosmic consciousness can function only within the logic barrier.

It is obsessed with the 'why', and it invents reasons and explanations which somehow satisfy it.

The intellect may even 'accuse' the mind and the senses without realising that the accuser is also the accused! It is also conditioned.

No amount of physical or mental activity can uncondition the body, mind and intellect.

With ruthless perseverance the seeker must drop the conditioning by the 'neti-neti' method.

Any effort at transforming the mind will leave the problem untouched - even as dough can never be free of form, even if it is just a shapeless mess!

22nd October Know the Subject; Know the Object

The word 'subject' is subject to all sorts of interpretations.

Subject is the one who studies.

Subject originally meant self and studying the subject meant self-knowledge.

What do you mean by the question: "What subject did you study in college?"?

You go to college to study the subject! Yourself!

Not mathematics or physics - they are of no use.

But while studying mathematics you are studying yourself.

So why are these things called subjects?

Subject is the studier, the student.

Now, instead of studying oneself in relation to the object, you 'master' the subject, and that which is mastered becomes 'subject'.

Then subjection is abstracted into a thing in itself - slavery.

Until you begin to object to that.

What is the object of this objection?

The object of this objection is the subject which subjects this object to subjection!!

Eventually and gradually you turn towards the subject and that is precisely the process of yoga.

Having been completely lost in the mire of maya, you pull yourself out and 'turn towards yourself.

Then at some stage you are bound to wonder, "Am I an object of myself that I am able to observe myself?"

But still that seems to make sense at some point - when you observe your own nature, your own characteristics, your own defects and shortcomings etc.

You realise, "I am angry," "I am attached to you" and "I am full of hate and jealousy".

Then this observation is going to make some change there also - an exact parallel to the quantum physics: all observation brings about a change.

And if you are able to observe your own qualities, whether they are good or bad, those qualities undergo some change.

So, while observing what is euphemistically called 'oneself', a change takes place.

When the observation becomes a bit more intense, one has to wonder at some time, "How did I become my own object? With what can I observe myself and know the truth concerning myself?"

When that burning question arises there is an inner explosion and an expansion of consciousness that is indescribable.

23rd October Maya is Incomprehensible

The substratum for maya is Brahman or God.

This supreme power pervades the whole universe.

In fact, the universe is just one vibrant mass of whirling energy.

But somewhere this whirling vibrant mass of energy takes a certain form, and mysteriously there arises a feeling in relation to this form, 'I am'; whereas in truth there is nothing but a whirling mass of energy - energy which is alive, aware consciousness itself in motion.

That which is unable to experience this truth is maya.

This illusion exists wherever the reality exists.

It is merely a matter of perception.

This maya is incomprehensible to the human mind because the human mind is part of the confusion.

How does this mini confusion deal with the maxi confusion?

It is an absurd game.

Here the intellect has no relevance at all.

Illusion cannot be understood or fought against.

You will fail.

Then, must we go on living under the illusion that the body is me?

We have tended to regard maya as something outside ourselves which prevents us from looking inside and beholding the omnipresence within.

But if we turn our gaze, it is possible to peel away layer after layer of the 'me' and come to the direct realisation of that which is beyond the me, whose shadow is the me.

It is then that you realise this divine omnipresence whose effervescence is called the world and all the experiences that 'we' undergo in this world.

Bring about this inner awakening now and sustain it as long as the body lasts.

I am not against formalised religion, because I see from history that everyone who condemned formalised religion has been made to found a religion in spite of himself.

Buddha, for instance, condemned formalised religion, but today there is Buddhism.

One cannot but appreciate the need for a form in worship, but that form by itself is a dead body.

If I need a form and I cling to that form, it is like sleeping with a dead body.

I must make sure that the person I am sleeping with is alive!

So we need neither the form alone nor the spirit alone, but a spirit in form, a form enclosing the spirit.

If spirit is infused into these forms - Christianity and Hinduism - they are wonderful.

24th October

The Supreme Effort

Maya is so powerful that even the greatest of jnanis is overpowered.

It should be so easy to cross this ocean of samsara or maya, but the difficulty is that we are fighting with something that does not exist.

Maya is not real, or it is inexplicably real and unreal like the reflection in the mirror or the shadow on the wall.

You cannot say it doesn't exist and you cannot say it exists.

That is where your brain and intellect fail.

There is only one thing which can deal with that shadow and that is light, and the parallel is that it is only investigation or self-awareness which can deal with this illusion.

What is waking up and how does one wake up?

Two paths have been taken by seekers: one is the path of enquiry, jnana marga; the other is the path of surrender.

In the case of jnana marga you do not bother about maya at all, but investigate what the reality is.

That is rather a bold approach.

Surrender presupposes that you have endeavoured to understand maya, but you have come to feel that you cannot understand it.

You admit that you are attached to your family, your friends, etc. and you cannot understand how this mysterious maya works.

Face the facts.

Try to get rid of it; and when it doesn't go you surrender yourself, knowing that maya itself must reveal its nature.

That maya itself must make itself non-maya, because the substratum for that maya is Brahman, God.

When you flash a light on the shadow on the wall you don't see the shadow anymore in its place you see the wall.

Even so, if you surrender yourself to maya, realising the inability of the mind and the intellect to solve this problem, then the truth will be revealed.

That surrender itself is supreme effort.

So you surrender to this maya, not knowing what it is.

You realise that it is not possible for the intellect, the mind or the ego to know what this maya is.

Instantly this illusion has gone.

That is a mystery which one has to experience.

When you say you don't know what it is, you don't call it anything anymore.

The problem disappears without any effort but the supreme effort of self-surrender.

Hope has been described as a good friend of man, because it keeps You alive and kicking.

But it is the enemy in the search for knowledge or truth.

25th October

The Truth That Comes From Within

We try to rationalise this problem of what is called illusion and if we discover that it is impossible to rationalise it we try to reject it which is another form of rationalisation.

When you bring something which is beyond reason into one or other of these two categories, to be accepted or rejected, you have got to rationalise it.

Neither of these works, and so you go from one frustration to another.

In this world, 'I am' is a simple fact.

We may place different definitions upon this simple expression, 'I am'.

You may think you are the body, a psychological or spiritual entity; whatever definition is placed upon those two simple words, 'I am', is undeniable.

But this thing called 'mine' does not exist even in the sense of 'I am'.

You may say "I am the body," and there may be some philosophers here who say, "You are not the body, you are the immortal self."

Materialists might say, "There is no soul or spirit, you are the body. Look after it nicely and you will live a long healthy life."

Both are right, but even that much of truth cannot be attributed to the expression 'mine'.

You cannot accept it, that's silly.

You cannot reject it, that is equally silly.

Why do you reject something which does not exist?

That means that the mind has rationalised it and accepted it in a left-handed way.

Now it's trying to push it away.

It is a wasteful effort.

There are billions of 'I am's.

'You are' is only another expression which really means 'I am'.

As long as this diversity lasts all these 'I am's are independent and maybe from the absolute point of view all these 'I am's blend into one super whole or totality.

Having heard that, can I apply this truth as if it were some kind of cosmetic stuff?

Truth cannot be applied, it has to be realised.

It has to come from within.

It must be realised and become the living truth.

When the body is in a state of good health, the mind and its operations become clear.

Yoga enables you to 'see' your own mind, to observe your own mind.

When the mind is calm and peaceful and you are able to observe it, it is clear.

That clear mind is transparent.

A transparent mind reveals the inner secrets.

There one discovers what one is.

That is the goal of yoga.

26th October Realise That Nothing is Mine

Maya can work in various subtle ways.

It can make you a jnani, a highly intelligent man, a successful person or a brilliant Yogi. But you are still being twisted by maya: "I am not attached to anything here. I want to renounce everything."

But you are attached to this image called yourself!

Even a devotee or a good man can lose his head: "I'm a very good man. I am full of virtue and devoted to God."

Whenever some such people appear on the scene my mind almost immediately says, "So what!"

A little meditation on this pulls the ground from under all our so called endeavours.

What are we striving for in this world?

Even in striving for good things, being good or doing good, there is already strife, egoism and vanity.

They will come in through the back door, and it is possible for a good person to destroy his goodness by being proud of it.

Previously, your vanity was confined to "This is my wife, these are my children, etc."

Now all that is gone - but nothing is gone.

The same ego continues to identify itself with other things: "This is my ashram, these are my disciples, these are my books and I am so great. Though physically I am five foot seven inches, my spiritual stature is fifteen thousand feet!"

It's very much like saying, "I am blind in the left eye, you are blind in the right eye."

What's the big deal?

We are both one-eyed monsters, never mind which eye is lost!

Instead of engaging in such jokes, is it possible for us to come to a clear understanding that here is a problem that the mind cannot understand?

Is it possible for you to look around and realise that nothing is mine?

But ultimately you are caught somewhere - caught in the body, in your own little personality: "This is my body, this is my personality. I am this."

How does that go?

Two things seem to be necessary simultaneously: surrender to this divine power and at the same time investigation of the truth.

Then we gain divine grace which flows through surrender, and that grace alone enables us to investigate the truth and bring about enlightenment.

If we are not interested in God, He is not interested in us!

27th October Detecting Maya

This thing called 'mineness' or the sense of possession is so pervasive that it is not possible for the human mind, however brilliant it may be, to comprehend it.

You give up what you think is an obstacle but carry the obstacle with you.

The man who has renounced his wife thinks of her more often now than he used to before.

So, what has he renounced? Nothing.

That is the mistake we commit, but for grace.

Grace is necessary to see that this 'mineness' can come round and round and round - it has so many forms.

Gurudev used to say that you cannot directly see maya but you can detect maya through her own lieutenants.

For instance, if you are jealous, tackle that jealousy.

It has its root in egoism, but the ego is not seen.

Tackle this jealousy and the ego will come out.

You are craving, tackle that craving, the egoism comes out.

In the same way one has to deal with all the different manifestations of the ego.

No one can convince another that this sense of possession is demoniacal or that it even needs to be dealt with.

We have not only accepted the sense of possession - 'mineness' - as truth, as fact, but we have also crowned it by saying that it is perhaps the greatest saviour in the world.

"It is because we are attached to each other" we don't say attached, we 'love' each other - "that we serve each other and promote each other's welfare and that is what has made the world what it is."

You might add that the mess in which we find the world is due to this attachment also.

It demands grace to even see this for what it is: a danger to peace of mind, sanity, happiness and enlightenment.

When grace descends into us and we are able to observe this, then we don't see grace or the reality of God or consciousness.

What we see are our own defects and weaknesses, the million ways in which we cheat ourselves, justify and rationalize our actions, our behaviour, our mode of life.

And very often we shy away from it.

It frightens us and we think that merely turning our gaze from it will make it go away.

It doesn't go away.

The very fact that we have to rationalise it shows that there is something wrong there.

We never rationalise a fact.

I don't justify myself for breathing.

Similarly, why must I go about saying "I am an instrument in the hands of God"?

If I am an instrument I may not even know it, only He will know it.

So, without getting into all these traps, grace enables you to be aware all the time.

28th October The Lord's Maya

On the auspicious day of the Birth of Lord Krishna, we read the Story of the Nativity from the Bhagavatham.

We are reminded in it that Maya was also born at the same time, at the Lord's own command!

God and Maya manifest at the same time!

It is even more mysterious that the Lord who has immortalised Vasudeva in the holy mantra (Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya), made Vasudeva exchange Him for Maya!

All these are worth deep contemplation.

We shall then realise the beautiful truth expressed thus by the royal sage Bhishma: "I salute the Lord who as Moha confuses beings by the bonds of affection and attachment, for the furtherance of this world."

All this is His Play which needs light and darkness.

It is not our play, however.

The most revered saint Swami Harisharananandaji (one of Gurudev's senior disciples) used to remind us in his talks: "When Vasudeva had the Lord in his hands, the fetters fell away, the prison doors opened, the fierce guards fell asleep and the river Yamuna gave way; but when Vasudeva held Maya in his hands, his arms were fettered again, the doors closed and the guards awoke."

The meaning is obvious!

Sure enough we (the pleasure-loving ego or the salvation-seeking soul) resent the bondage; and we loudly protest that Maya is a terrible power of illusion.

Lord Krishna Himself gently cautions us: "You cannot overcome Maya, for Maya is My own (Power or Energy)."

Maya is not illusion (a non-existence); but it is a different kind of reality.

It is the Lord's Energy.

Deep contemplation on this simple truth enables us to realise that we need the grace of Maya every moment of our lives.

That is what the Durga Saptashati or Devi Mahatmyam reveals to us.

We are assailed, not by God's Maya, but by the demons created by our own ignorance and stupidity.

These demons threaten all that is good and noble in us, and therefore they cannot be overcome by our ego-centred activities.

It is God's Maya that overcomes these diabolical forces.

It is Maha Maya that promotes all that is good and noble in us.

Hence, Lord Krishna reveals that they who surrender themselves to Him surrender themselves to His Maya who thereupon affords them safe passage (even as the river Yamuna did).

Not otherwise! Hence, Lord Krishna Himself enjoins the worship of the Divine Mother Durga.

May Her light illumine our path.

29th October Brahman

The Infinite is That which cannot be measured.

Not only in the sense of measuring by some kind of instrument like a scale, tape or a test-tube, but that which cannot be measured even by the intellect or the mind.

That which can be measured is naturally smaller than the measuring instrument.

So the Infinite cannot be measured by any other than the Infinite.

In relation to the Infinite, even the mind is finite, and there is what is called 'measuring' (maya) which is beyond the mind.

Therefore maya cannot be understood.

Maya is that foolish idea with which the finite tries to measure the Infinite.

When a person, a human being, thinks: "I can see God or know God", that thought itself is maya.

One who reaches up to that point and knows that which is Infinite cannot be measured, has reached the state of ultimate wisdom.

How does one describe the Infinite when all description is finite?

The guru, the teacher in one of the Upanishads, gives a vague definition: "That from which all beings become manifest. That in which all these beings exist, That into which they all return when they leave this embodiment, That is Brahman."

It is as unclear as any other statement in the world.

That is the teaching - because the Infinite cannot be described.

What is it from which all beings are born?

What is it by which all beings live?

And where do these things return to?

Easy - earth, food.

What is this body?

This body is made of food.

And how was this body born?

It was formed from the food eaten by the mother.

So I was born as a result of eating food!

How do I live now?

Naturally by eating food!

And when I die, I go back into the earth.

So the disciple answers: "Food."

The disciple feels, "This is the ultimate truth, the Infinite."

Having come to this understanding, he comes again to the teacher.

By merely looking at the student the teacher knows what the student has done.

The student says, "Sir, teach me what is the Infinite."

But now the guru does not want to teach any more.

He says: "Go, go, meditate, meditate."

What matters is not how much water is in the ocean, but how much your bucket can carry.
What kind of vessel have you got and how much can that vessel contain?

30th October The Ocean of Light

Legend has it that Ganga was once a celestial river and a great monarch (Bhagiratha) brought it down to the earth in order to redeem his ancestors from a curse.

At every step there were insurmountable obstacles, but Bhagiratha was unflagging in his zeal to fulfil his sacred mission.

He performed penance standing on one leg for thousands of years.

With the help of Lord Siva, the king brought the celestial river down to the earth.

But his trials were not over.

He and Ganga met with many more obstacles.

The austerities had to be renewed with redoubled vigour, till the holy waters of the celestial river flowed over the ashes of the king's ancestors who were instantly redeemed.

All things are possible for self-effort.

I can even now hear Gurudev's exhortation: "Exert. Do purushartha".

He Himself was an exemplar of unceasing purushartha (Self-effort).

We often talk of self-surrender prematurely, as a cover for our laziness and cowardliness.

Self-realisation is not for the weak, declared Swami Vivekananda.

"Exert, achieve, and then renounce," said Swami Ranganathananda in a thrilling address.

It is in the fullness of one's achievement that there arises the knowledge or understanding that it was all due to divine grace; in that understanding there is intelligent and dynamic self-surrender.

Ganga is brought down to the earth by divine grace.

But the mission is not over!

No one can afford to rest on his oars at any time.

As long as there is energy in the body and the mind, as long as there is the least experience of individuality, so long self-effort, in the right understanding that all things are made possible by divine grace, should not be abandoned.

It is possible to bring Ganga to Perth in Western Australia via the Indian Ocean.

It is possible to flood the heart of man with the ocean of light, the light of Self-knowledge.

If you are integrated, every moment of your life is divine, every moment of your life is meditation.

Meditation is not something that is practised for the 'atonement' of your sins.

Atonement, at-onement, is yoga.

No form of atonement is effective until this at-onement is felt.

31st October

Oases in the Desert

Whenever I read or speak about the Mahabharata, I am overwhelmed by a depressing thought.

The hundred wicked Kauravas acted as one man, hardly ever arguing, hardly ever even disagreeing with one another and ever-willing to overlook their differences of opinion. On the other hand, the five noble Pandavas spent too much of time and energy arguing (almost bickering!) among themselves.

I can understand this, justify it, but cannot appreciate it.

'Good' people in the world are more eager to reform one another; they expose one another's faults in the name of truth, honesty, sincerity, etc.

Criticizing one another is considered a demonstration of moral courage.

All that is excellent.

But what they tend to forget the whole time is that they have forgotten the real problem: the Kauravas (wicked people) multiply proliferously.

If the leaders of world religions combine their energies, pool their resources and work in harmony, they will succeed in clipping the wings of Satan.

Will they get out of their own shell and take a broad view of the world?

No one for one moment would deny that in every part of the world there are good people and there are not-so-good people.

But it is doubtful if there is any justification whatsoever for the sweeping generalisations which we, in our ignorance, often make.

If you move around the world, you might be surprised how hazardous such generalisations are.

There are good people throughout the world: of this I have no doubt.

It is high time we gave up making sweeping generalisations born of our own ignorance and prejudice and made a special effort to link up with the divine forces of love, harmony, unselfishness and divinity which exist throughout the world as oases exist in deserts.

Among materialists, you will find many spiritual beings; among atheists you will find devotees of God; among the superstitious you will find highly intelligent beings; among fanatics you will find those who are full of love and tolerance.

The fact that they exist surrounded by the opposites makes them more valuable and precious: oases in deserts.

1st November

Self-forgetfulness

Question:

I was just wondering about escaping from oneself.

Is it possible?

Swamiji:

There is an unpleasant feeling, and you want to escape from unpleasantness, not from yourself.

You want to escape from the unpleasantness of being alone or lonely.

You cannot run away from yourself, you are carrying this 'myself' all the time - you have no choice.

You cannot escape from it - the whole thing is you.

I can hear my voice but it is me - I am talking and I am hearing.

You feel bored, you feel lonely, you want company; so you can run away from the room but you are not running away from yourself.

It is the mind that moves - which means you are imagining that you are moving away from the centre.

To 'run away from oneself' means just this: the attention instead of flowing towards one's centre tries to stray into some sort of object during that period.

You 'forget' yourself.

In a state of sleep you 'forget' yourself (it is merely an expression, but there are not too many alternative expressions).

So, when you are distracted you forget yourself, or you move away from the centre.

You want to go to sleep.

You don't want to be aware of what goes on within you.

This is one form of diversion or self-forgetfulness where there is movement away from the centre.

Awareness is like space.

In that, there is what is called self or ego.

This self acts like a wall, it seems to divide awareness or consciousness into within and without.

But what is internal, external?

There is no meaning in those words, there is only consciousness - the self seems to divide that consciousness.

It is the self that is bored, lonely, unhappy and it wants to divert itself, run away.

But it cannot run anywhere, it merely projects its awareness towards an external object and 'touches' it, experiences it.

So, you were bored or unhappy and then projected your awareness onto something, and because the self went to sleep during that projection there was happiness - the happiness of sleep, nothing more.

But that thing doesn't last forever, and sometimes that thing itself throws your attention back to yourself.

God's Will will flow more freely without an ego-centred resistance.

2nd November

The Wisdom of the Tortoise

It is very difficult to live always in a state of awareness and to become aware when the awareness is about to be lost.

Our mind is clear and sharp, and then suddenly a distraction comes.

Yogis all over the world insist that to be able to do this requires grace.

Whether you call it God's grace or guru's grace it doesn't matter what it is - at that one point one has to fall back upon grace.

Grace does not mean dropping of self-effort, but grace itself becomes self-effort and self-effort becomes grace.

At that moment when this distraction is about to strike you, is it possible for you to gather up your strength at that point and cling to this awareness, to God, to the guru, or whatever it is?

Therein lies the secret.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says:

"When like the tortoise which withdraws on all sides its limbs, he withdraws his senses from the sense objects, then his wisdom becomes steady." (II:58)

The picture given here is of a tortoise.

Normally the tortoise has its head and all the limbs out.

As long as it is not threatened it sticks its neck out and the limbs out, but when there is a threat, at that very instant it is able to withdraw the limbs into the shell.

I'm wondering why it is that you and I - human beings - the crown of God's creation and all the rest of it, are unable to do this, whereas a tortoise is able to do that.

A tortoise is able to sense danger and the moment there is a threat to its life it pulls itself in.

You and I, when there is a threat, stick our neck further out.

Why is that?

And yet we call ourselves highly intelligent.

It's so simple: live in this world with all your limbs out, enjoy yourself if you want to, be happy, be as happy as you want to.

But the moment that happiness is threatened, 'pull yourself in'.

Is that difficult?

Like this tortoise, when that happiness is threatened pull yourself in quickly.

Don't even look round to see from which quarter this unhappiness is coming, or it may be too late.

If you are unaware of the activity of the mind, you are trapped.

If you are aware, it is humiliating - something which is nothing enslaves you more thoroughly than the 'solid' realities of the world!

3rd November

The Spirit of Satsang

The point in satsang is not to think of numbers, not to think of the value and who comes and who does not come.

Even when there were many people in the Ashram in Rishikesh, the people in the satsang were only few.

People who were living next door would not attend satsang.

But Swami Sivananda was never perturbed about it, never scolded people.

He felt 'That is their business. They come and go when they want.'

Total freedom!

But He was there and, very often, there were only two or three people in the satsang.

When you hold satsang, as far as possible read source scriptures.

Do not go for any commentaries and things like that, for then you get 'polymix'.

Go to the sources.

From there, can we get closer to the truth?

That is what satsang means.

Can we draw a little closer to this truth by communing with these words?

If that is possible, we are blessed!

So, one must understand the spirit.

Once you get into the spirit and go on listening to it, then something happens.

The penny drops - occasionally, and not on every occasion, and not on every page that you read.

Sometimes the penny drops here, sometimes there.

There is a time when I understand that, there is a time when I understand this, there is a time when I understand a third thing.

If it has to happen, it has to happen!

For instance, I have read the Yoga Vasistha once while translating it, once again while reading it through, once again after publication, but still when I listen to it suddenly, as Swamiji said, there is a shock.

"My God, I didn't think of that before!"

So this satsang must be kept going.

There is a message, there is beauty, there is a shock, there is a revelation.

That is called satsang.

So, I request you to listen to the readings and, where possible, where you can, and even where you cannot, join in the chorus.

If you are a little far away, have your own satsang: small scale, large scale.

Swami Sivananda often used to say, "You need only one - one plus infinity - God is there with you."

One plus infinity is more than anyone could imagine - so carry on.

If this habit can be formed then it can bring great blessings to our life.

4th November

Light in Darkness

Light needs a dense material to reveal its nature.

At night only the stars twinkle because only they - the dense mass of matter - can reveal the light; light-rays pass through space without illumining it.

The planets would not twinkle but for the light of the sun.

In themselves they are dull and dark.

A great South Indian devotee thus spoke to the Lord: "Lord, I am a destitute without you; and your supreme compassion needs me - a weak and undeserving sinner - in order to shine. So, we are both indispensable to each other!"

What a bold and true statement!

Lord Krishna underlined this when he declared that mutual aid is the secret of commonweal.

Gurudev Swami Sivananda commanded: "Serve all with atmabhava; feel that the Lord has come to you in the form of the sick, the poor and the suffering to give you an opportunity to purify your heart by service."

Swami Muktananda Paramahansa has given us a new mantra: 'let the other person be God to you' in continuation of the similar mantras found in the Taittiriya Upanishad.

As you light the little lamps on the Diwali morning, kindly remember this: the lamps shine because of the surrounding darkness.

The darkness is illumined because of the lamps.

They need each other.

Neither is superior, but both are complimentary.

We are all limbs of one Cosmic Being.

We need each other.

It is the little ego that exploits this need for self-aggrandisement and later gets caught in its own net.

Hence, Gurudev Swami Sivananda sang:

Within you is hidden God,
Within you is immortal soul;
Kill this little 'I', die to live;
Lead the divine life.

Divine life is enlightened life: and that light reveals that we need each other!

May the Lord illumine your heart!

5th November

Message of Light

The ancient's 'saw' truth, incorporated it in pleasant rituals to ensure its perpetuation and the moderns enjoy the pleasantries (thus depriving the ritual of its life) and faithfully preserve the embalmed rite!

Diwali is no exception.

Lest it be misunderstood, it is good to remember that what is pleasant need not necessarily be the antithesis of the good.

The body of the ritual is pleasant; the spirit is good.

Both together make it whole, holy, healthy (the three words are synonyms).

The darkness of the night is dispelled by the light that is kindled on Diwali.

A single wick-lamp may not be powerful enough to illumine a whole street, even as a single pious action may not bring about illumination of the self.

But it is possible to illumine the whole street with strings of little lamps (Diwali), even as, if all the little acts of one's life are holy, there is illumination of the self.

The lamps enable us to see objects hidden in the darkness.

The light of the sun enables us to see the world outside during the daytime, and at night the same light of the sun reflected by the moon and stars illumines the earth.

An inspiring mantra in the Katha Upanishad declares, "The sun, the moon, the stars and the flame do not illumine 'that', but it is 'that' which makes them luminous."

What is that? Sight.

Light is useless in the absence of sight.

But, what do we mean by 'sight'?

Surely, the eyes, the retina, the optic nerve, the brain-centre, are not capable of 'seeing'.

These are all present in a corpse which does not see.

Enquiry into this is meditation.

Who is the seer?

What is the light which is the inner sight?

Is it an 'organ' or is it the nameless, formless but luminous spirit?

Is there a focal point within where the inner light is fixed, or is the inner light the Infinite itself?

And finally, if it is the Infinite, why is there all this feeling of 'I am' and 'This is mine'?

Deep contemplation of this is spiritual enlightenment - the real Diwali!

In dream - any dream - all dream objects are the dreamer.

Yet the dreamer isolates himself and is even scared to death of the objects!

Similar is the waking dream called the world.

6th November

The Light That is the Self

Without light, sight is blind; and without sight, light is darkness.

Light, again, can lead, mislead or distort: it can create mirages and optical illusions, and it is good to realise that light is in a way responsible for the creation of shadow.

Only when the sight is clear and clever can truth be seen as truth and falsehood as falsehood, without confusion.

In life we are familiar with several forms of sight, apart from eyesight and its defects.

We know people who have brilliant hindsight: they are the ones who are always looking back at the past, with regret, remorse and useless brooding.

Their whole life is a perpetual mourning, and this veil of mourning compels them to neglect the present opportunities and then mourn them when they are also dead and past.

There are others who are reputed to have great foresight.

They read the future, and they are so clever that they can avert a calamity before it befalls them!

They take great precautions; and since these precautions have no troubles to deal with, the precautions themselves create the troubles, become the trouble.

Few there are in the world who see the danger of these two sights, and who see that only insight is infallible.

One who has insight has the divine sight which is the highest wisdom.

The divine sight or insight is the Inner Light, the Light that is the Self, 'atma-jyoti'.

This Inner Light is ever alert and eternally vigilant; and it is sufficient to deal with every problem that arises in life as it arises.

This alertness or vigilance is not tension, it is the very opposite of tension.

It is only when you anticipate trouble and flex your muscles that you become tense.

If your finger happens to touch a hot stove, the intelligence in it at once pulls it away,

without any tension: even so the Inner Light is capable of dealing with all situations as they arise, if there is no ego-interference.

May the Inner Light shine forever in you.

7th November

Belief and Beyond

It is said that everyone loves light - except owls, thieves and prostitutes.
There is something more to it than meets the eye.
Most human beings are allergic to light.
Light in life is insight, wisdom.
Wisdom does not brook mechanical existence.
Insight reveals inconvenient truths and asks embarrassing questions.
When ignorance is bliss ... ? we close our eyes - as the owl does.
We prostitute the truth to suit our heedlessness; we rob life of its wisdom.
All this gives rise to a belief system.
Belief is inevitable, as are axioms in mathematics and a boat to cross the seas.
But only the blind reconcile themselves to an existence in darkness.
Wisdom leads those who are endowed with insight to the realisation of the belief.
Such a realisation is a mere step beyond the belief-system.
Such a belief is thus picturesquely described by sage Vasistha as a higher form of ignorance that strives to eliminate itself.
It is a healthy state of ignorance which reveals that there is light at the other end of the tunnel.
Belief is religion, belief is dharma in the sense of established religion - full of doctrines, theories, and so on.
Dharma holds the community together, prevents the individual from disintegrating.
But it is also a habit (dress) worn to protect oneself.
However, it is not oneself.
Hence, it should be treated as the means, the end is Self-realisation - the direct experience of the belief believed in.
Insight enables belief to fulfil itself in Self-realisation.
It does not militate against even organised religious institutions but puts the spirit back into them.
Light does not drive away or destroy darkness - it reveals what is.
Belief is a ladder that helps you get to the roof, to rest on the ladder is childish.
But right belief is a ladder that helps you get there, thank God and thanks to the belief itself.
May the Divine Light illumine your innermost being!

Is it possible for you to realise, one hundred percent, that whatever opinion you have - even if you are tempted to say it is the truth - is at best your opinion, and nothing more? If you can admit it to yourself you have won sixty percent of the battle.
Then you are not vehement any more; you are not dogmatic any more; you are not assertive any more; you are not arrogant any more.

8th November

Serving the Guru

There was something in Gurudev Sivananda's personality which is indescribable. You may call it love, you may call it divinity - but it was that that made us do what we did. Nothing else mattered.

I don't know if it's possible to repeat that experience to anyone else.

I may serve you, but in that there is always a 'because', and that 'because' is shifting sands; whereas when I serve my guru it is because I love him and there is no other motivation. There is a constancy in that because it is in me, it is entirely mine, it doesn't depend upon him at all.

I don't care if he loves me, I don't care whether he protects me or not, I don't care if he honours or dishonours me. I don't care what he does - pleases me displeases me - nothing. I love him, I want to serve him in exactly the same way as you would serve your baby there it is firmly rooted in love, devotion; and that devotion has a spiritual quality.

Minus this, secular service is not full, there is something lacking in it - it is a sort of contract.

If it is possible to serve without any motivation at all, that is divine, and that is what I would call devotion.

There should be no 'because' at all.

I serve you, period.

But if you have to have a 'because' - I serve you because I love you or am devoted to you, which means it is all in me and does not look at you, into you; it is not dependent upon what you do towards me.

If that is possible, there is love.

Then you are free; in that service there is freedom - I am free to serve you because I don't expect anything in return.

'Adoring' is the word here.

When it becomes adoring, you are not even a servant, you are a devotee.

Here devotion is love.

It is not a master whom you fear, it is a master whom you love.

When God is mentioned, the modern man feels that he is asked to eat humble pie!

Somebody before whom he, an intelligent being, is asked to bow down.

No: God is that intelligence itself - only something which is his intelligence minus its corruption, his own Self.

God is.

That which exists is God.

The wall exists, it is God.

Only that which has always existed.

If it was not the wall, it was the brick or the mud, or the earth element, or the power latent in it, or the intelligence inherent in that power - that is God.

The inescapable reality.

9th November See This Truth

Svadhya (study of scriptures) is necessary and sravana (hearing) is necessary, hence discourse is necessary - but not for their own sake.

They are ladders to be quickly ascended and discarded.

Gurudev therefore built these into his satsang pattern, but discouraged them when they degenerated into what he called 'lingual diarrhoea' and 'itching ears'.

There is not much that you do not know.

Moreover, when you hear something new, especially what your selective mental receptor disapproves of, you do not listen.

There is danger here, for when you do not listen you distort and destroy or destructively use what you hear.

This danger can only be avoided when you are mature enough to be sincere, to realise that Self-knowledge is not the product of external prod but inward sight, and you have the courage to face up to your own weakness or wickedness.

When you do this, then that weakness or wickedness (in one word 'me') is not allowed to distort what is heard.

When the instruction is thus listened to, you see the simple truth that the source of your insincerity was an ambition to have the cake and eat it at the same time, to hold the light with one hand and darkness with the other, to cling to craving which is the source of pain and to aspire for supreme bliss.

The very seeing of this truth decides the issue.

10th November

Be Simple

Krishna's message in the enlightening ninth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is intriguingly simple, tantalisingly enigmatic, and pre-eminently practical.

But such is our complicated brain-structure and the devastating power of our culture that we resent simplicity and deliberately make life difficult.

Why do we complicate our lives?

Take the case of food, and our eating habits.

We eat food in order that we may be able to digest it, so that it may nourish us and keep us in good health.

But then, we look to others to decide what food is good for us.

Even so with all other aspects of our lives - our life-style, relationships, religion and so on.

Looking to others for guidance is not bad in itself if we realise that the others and their theories are at best sign-posts.

They are useful, but we cling to theories as if they were truths.

We forget that the problem plagues us, not them!

Since the attention is diverted from the source of the problem within us, to the theories of others that may or may not be relevant, there is great confusion, unclarity and hence continuing sorrow.

Krishna points out that God dwells in all as the not-so-obvious reality - not to tempt us to speculate what it may be, but to alert us to the need for proper investigation.

We begin with the obvious, which is sorrow, unhappiness, disharmony and conflict in our lives.

All this is obvious, but their source is not so obvious.

If it seems obvious to you, you discover that you blame someone else, the environment, your karma, or the stars!

You try to get rid of some, and get out of the others.

But there is no end to sorrow.

Its cause is not so obvious; and whatever it is, it keeps producing results - sorrow.

Patanjali allows the use of thought and logic to arrive at the end of thought and the conclusion of logic.

When these fail to recognise the not-so-obvious cause of sorrow, you learn the art of looking within, observing the source of sorrow.

Only one thing seems to be clear: 'I am unhappy', whether the cause is internal or external.

If 'I' is absent, as in deep sleep, unhappiness ceases too.

But, then, what is 'I'?

When you look for it, you cannot find it.

If the 'I' is nowhere to be found, sorrow is nowhere either.

This discovery leads to great joy.

However with the next experience, 'I' arises again.

This time it is not so deadly.

You have the key to the problem.

You can dispose of it quickly.

When you find a firm foothold in Self-realisation the awareness in you is able to stop the sorrow before it arises.

It is simple, if you learn not to complicate your life.

11th November Meditation

Meditation is the direct immediate observation of the arising of the “I”, the ego, without a mediator.

A mediator is merely another distraction.

Even words, descriptions of meditation, may be distractions.

Meditation is observation, without descriptions of any type that will give you an image of what it “should be”.

What you and I practice while we are seated in a meditation posture is meant as a help.

But even while talking, while eating, while looking at anything, one should watch the arising of the “I”.

Where does this feeling, the thought, “I am talking, I am seeing him,” spring from?

This questioning is to be done continuously, not only in the morning and the evening.

There is the assurance of the great masters (which can again be a danger) that it is possible for us to extend this consciousness through to our dreams.

If we continually observe the arising of the ego-sense during our waking hours, whatever we are doing, then even while dreaming there is the enquiry, “Who is dreaming, to whom is the dream occurring?”

So eventually even while one sleeps, there is this continuing self-consciousness.

This continuous awareness, which runs through all states of consciousness, is called samadhi, the fourth state of consciousness.

12th November

The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

We should progress.

It is very essential.

Life is movement.

Growth is expansion.

The expansion takes place in nature on two levels.

If you contemplate the growth of a tree, you will realise that as its branches spread out, its roots go deep and spread out underground, too.

Minus the roots, the growth above - even if it were possible would wither away and might become a menace.

No-one would dare sit under a tree without roots.

Yet the whole of humanity today lives in such a state!

Knowledge has branched out in many directions.

Luckily, these branches are laden with fruits.

But is this tree of knowledge rooted in firm soil?

Are we safe in its shade?

Or are we going to be crushed by the weight of the tree we have grown, by the weight of the very fruits we have longed to enjoy!

Where is Knowledge rooted?

In knowledge of Self.

Knowledge of 'the other' is external growth or expansion.

Knowledge of Self is inner growth in the depth of our being.

The two together are the greatest blessing to mankind.

The science that enables us to gain this inner knowledge of the Self is yoga.

Many techniques have been evolved to bring about this discovery.

Some insist on world and life-negation; others extol total world and life-acceptance.

The former leads to inertia, the latter back to materialism - not because of their intrinsic lack, but because understanding is lacking in the practitioner.

However, there is one scripture which describes both the methods but insists that understanding is necessary.

Equipped with this understanding, man recognises the existence of the world, but is not lost in its glamour.

He recognises the need for growth and expansion, but does not neglect the rest.

That scripture is the Bhagavad Gita and that yoga is called buddhi yoga, the 'yoga of understanding'.

If we study this yoga of understanding we shall see that the scripture, though in Sanskrit, is not the monopoly of the people of any faith, race or nationality, but is the nourishment that all men need.

One need not go to the Himalayas or other places, nor abandon one's own occupation (whatever it is), nor confine oneself to the meditation room - for It is everywhere.

It is not a situation among situations but the basis of all situations.

It is not a state among other States of consciousness, but the reality of all the states.

Such is the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita.

13th November

Faith, Honesty and Sincerity

In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna exalts adherence to scriptural injunctions.

Even this injunction is not adequate for a sincere, honest and earnest person, because the scriptures (even where all of them agree, which is rare) state only general principles and leave the interpretation open.

However, Krishna does point to another alternative.

It is the path of sraddha (faith: or, honesty and sincerity).

However, this sraddha itself may be of different qualities - sattva, rajas and tamas (pure, passionate or stupid).

Since "the person is his faith" as the Bhagavad Gita says, this classification of faith characterises every aspect of one's life; and the Bhagavad Gita details this classification (which is worthy of a close and deep study).

Honesty and sincerity demand that we should carefully investigate the nature of our faith and let this investigation itself guide us in our actions.

Surely, no one wants to lead a stupid life, and even the passionate aspire for purity.

However, the vital factor here is the intense, deep and constant awareness that is set up within oneself.

This awareness acts as the candle that looks for the switch to the supreme inner light in which alone right action happens spontaneously, without doubt or hesitancy.

14th November

The Teachings of Buddha

The teachings of Lord Buddha were based, not on any scripture or religious tradition, but on Self-realisation, i.e. his own direct experience of the truth.

Buddha did not follow any scriptural injunctions, but, so to say, scriptures followed him. This does not necessarily imply that the scriptures that he did not follow are therefore invalid!

But it does mean, however, that scriptures are validated by personal experience, and till such personal experience is gained it is unwise to accept or reject them blindly.

This is the purport of many of the Upanishads, too!

"The goal is unshakeable freedom of mind," said the Buddha.

Sri Krishna points to the same goal and declares the same methods in the Bhagavad Gita.

This path is 'The Middle Way'.

I have heard many people speak of the Middle Path as though it is broader, smoother, straighter than the National Road!

The Katha Upanishad speaks of it as 'ksurasya dhara' (the razor's edge).

The Middle Way demands eternal vigilance and constant effort.

It is too irksome for the extremists who either accept a certain standard of asceticism, pat themselves on their backs and go to sleep; or others who conceive of a God or a metaphysical category like Brahman or Atman and, since they can answer any question concerning the category, they consider themselves sages.

What you conceive of is your offspring and not your deity!

One can get used to even the most tortuous forms of asceticism, and it may cease to hurt or thin the mind - if that was the original aim.

In a very different context, and perhaps starting from a very different premise, Mahatma Gandhiji arrived at the same conclusion: "Man can change his temperament, can control it, although he cannot eradicate it. Change and control, therefore, require constant effort and eternal vigilance."

One who walks The Middle Way will, therefore, be perpetually 'mindful' (to use a favourite Buddhist word).

Then desire, aversion and fear do not bring about an action; every action is thoroughly deliberated, weighed in the scale of mindfulness, and performed in the full consciousness that it is right and should be performed.

The follower of Lord Buddha does not circumvent this process even when he feels that he is established in the Noble Eightfold Path and is therefore incapable of straying from it!

There is no such thing as a permanent guarantee: you have to be eternally vigilant and constantly striving so long as this life lasts.

15th November

I Am

In the Bhagavad Gita it is said:

"When like the tortoise which withdraws on all sides its limbs, he withdraws his senses from the sense-objects, then his wisdom becomes steady." (II:58)

The tortoise is enjoying life, which means whatever happens is natural and inherent in life. He's not running after something.

You can see very well why the illustration is given.

The tortoise doesn't run after any pleasure.

But no-one can say that the tortoise therefore does not enjoy at all.

It enjoys as much pleasure staying there as running around.

That's why the example of the tortoise is given in the Bhagavad Gita.

Enjoy yourself, stick yourself out when there is some happiness, but when that happiness is threatened, pull the indriyas (the senses) back.

For if thought or the mind suggests that 'That is the object of my pleasure and that is running away, and unless I pursue it and capture it, I'll be miserable', that is when you are looking for misery and unhappiness.

Pull yourself in!

"I was here before this; and I'll be here after that." Correct. Quite simple.

You had a very happy experience so you stuck your neck out and enjoyed it; that is flowing and now it has passed.

Don't pursue it, pull your neck in.

"I was before this experience arose, I am now and I'll continue to be after this experience has ceased."

That's all.

And there's absolutely no possibility of unhappiness there, there's no longing, there's no expectation, there's no craving either.

The craving has been nipped in the bud.

I was before this experience arose, I am - and therefore this experience arose - and I will be after this experience has passed.

If I am not, where could this happy experience have arisen at all? No.

I am the source of that experience.

In the same way, this can be extended to cover all emotional upheavals - this way one learns to cancel out the upheavals even before they arise.

16th November

You are the Ocean

There is a beautiful picture painted in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita:

"He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean which, filled from all sides, remains unmoved; but not the man who is full of desires." (II:70)

In the case of the tortoise illustration we are given a hint at how to deal with a craving that threatens our mental equilibrium.

Let's say the threat has already arisen - that is when the tortoise withdraws its limbs.

We go on from that kind of experience to another experience of that kind, one threat to another threat.

Is my life then going to be one of sticking my neck out and pulling it back?

Is there not an end to it?

Krishna says, "Yes, there is an end to it."

That end is: when you can remain like the ocean into which all desires enter, there's not even a threat.

The ocean doesn't pull its neck in, it's exposed; and no-one has so far been able to threaten the ocean, because it is infinite.

So when you realise the Infinite, desires won't arise in you at all; even if they arise, they would arise only in the Infinite - going up there and coming down immediately, rising within you and falling within you.

So that there is no external threat, in fact there is no threat at all you are the ocean into which all the rivers empty themselves.

The rivers here stand for your desires, your life's experiences.

All life's experiences enter into you, flow into you, into the Self, so there is no distraction.

If there is a thought of happiness you realise that that is also happening within you.

If there is a thought of unhappiness it is also another thought that arises in you.

If there is an ocean of love, that arises in the same consciousness; if there is an ocean of fear, it arises in the same consciousness.

These things have lost their original meaning.

When you become imperturbable like the ocean, even if there is an excitement you are still the ocean.

Millions of waves may be there, but still the ocean remains ocean.

At that point there is neither 'stick your neck out' or 'pull your neck in' or 'withdraw your limbs'.

There is nothing.

You are the ocean.

Which means you are constantly aware and never unaware even for a single moment.

What happens from there on is life itself.

17th November

When Goodness Becomes Inevitable

What we need in life is a certain simplicity, which is not something you can hang on a tree and reach towards.

Holiness, harmony, yoga, love, God - none of these can be positively described or grasped. Happiness ceases to be happiness the moment I hold onto it.

When I hold tight to it, it is dead.

The same is true of the thing called holiness.

Holiness means to be whole.

Harmony, holiness and yoga all mean the same thing.

If I am whole there is no problem, there is no difficulty, there is no conflict or contradiction in my life.

It is only when the mind says something, the heart says something else and life flows in another direction that we are torn into many bits.

We all think wonderful thoughts, but deep down inside there is non-acceptance of these concepts produced by our thinking, and life is bewildering.

The mind says one thing, the heart says something else - in which direction should life flow?

This is the problem, a tug of war all the time.

The conflict is within me, not outside.

I see some problems outside, but they are a reflection of what is in me.

Yoga is merely a technique to find a solution to this problem of inner conflict.

It has nothing to do with any religion whatsoever.

The yogi is constantly vigilant, discovering himself all the time.

When he knows that it is only the mind-stuff that is changing all the time, he is able to observe these changes that take place within and see that he is free from it.

Then a revolutionary change takes place in the whole personality.

This light that has become aware of the substance that changes, realises that it is free from such changes which take place in the substance.

A tremendous revolution takes place in the whole being.

Then by nature he is good - he neither wants to be good, nor wishes to be good - goodness becomes inevitable.

We are one with our neighbours: the isolation is the product of ignorance.

When we shed this ignorance and experience and express this sense of unity with our neighbours, we enjoy peace and prosperity all round.

18th November

Frustration on the Path

Just as breathing does not stop, no matter what you are doing, even so it is possible for the awareness to remain brilliant within you, it is possible for this insight to be alert within you all the time, without distracting your attention from whatever you have to do.

You are talking, and while you are talking something is observing you, the awareness is there merely pointing out that there is a danger.

Will such a life be frustrating?

There is frustration built into any spiritual life.

If you study the life of Jesus Christ or Buddha you see it through and through.

Frustration is half of this process of spiritual awakening, because we are trying to deal with something that is fundamental.

Until you become enlightened, this frustration will keep you company.

And that's very good company!

We are not frustrated because we are unable to deal with this shadow.

Intuitively we realise that it is merely a shadow, it doesn't exist, yet it haunts us so terribly.

You can't get at it.

It's like a phantom pain in a limb that does not exist.

So this frustration is likely to keep you company for a long time - or until you reach enlightenment. You are not frustrated then, not because the frustration has gone, but you yourself have disappeared.

In Self-realisation your problems are gone because you yourself are gone.

Till then this despair and frustration will continue: the pangs of separation that the lover suffers when the beloved is away.

To an earnest seeker of the truth, the closer you are to the state of enlightenment the greater the frustration.

As you move closer to this light of truth, everything worries and hurts you.

Then something becomes finer and finer and you find that, literally, it's almost impossible to live.

Everything seems to hurt you - even a thought seems to be a sin.

That is the stage when even to live seems to be a tragedy.

When the false little 'I' disappears, there is Enlightenment and the realisation that the soul is at-one with the Supreme Being - the goal of yoga.

This is the promise of yoga: health, peace, prosperity and Enlightenment.

19th November

Wisdom

Wisdom lies in understanding the totality of life, the truth concerning life, and in not being distracted by one or the other events that are also part of life.

This is the beauty - and this is the difficulty.

The problem is that the distraction is not something apart from life.

If you observe very carefully you will notice that the distraction arises only because at that moment you are not interested in what is going on.

In life also all our distractions - and therefore all our foolishness - arise only when we are not interested, not wise, not paying attention to life itself.

The distracting influence also is part of life, just as pleasure and pain are part of life.

There is no life which is completely free of pleasure and pain.

These are experiences that are granted to everyone.

When you are wise there must be an inner joy; when this wisdom is absent there must be some restlessness.

Wisdom is your best friend.

According to the Bhagavad Gita: "You are your own best friend and you are your own enemy.

You are your own best friend when you have won yourself over by yourself." (VI).

It does not mean that you conquer - 'to conquer' means that you fight with someone and put him down and sit on him.

When someone stronger than you thus conquers you, you want to get up and kick him off!

That is what the mind (or whatever it is in you) does when you conquer it.

'Winning over' is quite a different thing.

Swami Sivananda's approach was to wean your mind from running astray and win it over, so that it naturally does not pursue pleasure.

Such a mind becomes your friend.

When this happens there is wisdom.

When you hear the word 'philosopher', you hear the two words 'philo' and 'sopher' - 'suffer'.

So the philosopher who analyses man, God and world, suffers.

He has found neither wisdom nor peace.

If you want to be philosophy (which means that you are in love with wisdom) the path is quite different.

Within yourself there is an inner joy which is quite different from pleasure.

Pleasure disturbs the mind but this inner joy enables the mind to rest.

Having found this wisdom, one is not disturbed at heart.

20th November

Vision Without Division

All our experiences and expressions contain an element of truth and an element of falsity. The false is our own opinion, our ideology and our concepts.

The truth is 'what is'.

This is eternal and infinite and therefore beyond the reach of the intellect, which is limited and restricted by time and thought patterns.

When there is ignorance of the truth, a concept arises: 'I do not know and yet I think it is such and such'.

This thought creates a division in ourselves, in our society and in whatever involves thought - including the question of human survival - thus threatening it.

Where does thought arise?

It is no use looking to thought to provide an answer to this question.

Do we have anything else?

Surely, yes: it is that which is awake when 'I' am asleep.

It is continuous, unbroken, eternal and infinite.

It is there even in our waking state.

However, the play of thought and the incessant clamour of our ideas, opinions, fears, loves and hates claim all our attention and obscure the Infinite.

There is nothing wrong with thinking itself, nor even with the ideas, opinions and concepts.

They are like the waves of the 'ocean'.

The waves do not in any way minimise the reality and the importance of the ocean.

It is when the waves are taken to be the ocean that a confusion arises.

That is not true. It is false.

'Wave' is a word or a description and a 'wave' does not exist independent of the ocean.

However, the ocean is real and in that context the wave is real.

When, similarly, one realises that all our experiences and expressions are false in themselves and that the consciousness on which they are based is real, a new vision arises in which there is no division.

This vision without division does not put an end to any aspect of life, even as it is not necessary to stop the waves in order to see the ocean.

The totality is the truth.

Falsehood is the assumption of totality by the fragment.

It is the self ('I') that creates 'the other'.

When in the inner light (the vision without division) the shadow of self ceases to exist, there is no 'other' either.

That is love.

The essence of enlightened living is love.

That is yoga.

21st November

Work is Worship

The truth has been revealed again and again by the Lord and it will continue to be thus revealed.

Gurudev echoed this truth.

He regarded it as his own mission and his own vision, his work and his worship.

He listened to everybody: he often declared that he was an eternal student, eager to learn from everyone, and from life itself.

He was a voracious reader.

But unlike most of us, he reflected on what he had seen, read or heard.

All this was infused by his spirit and seen through his vision.

Soon, he conveyed his spirit, his ideas and his vision through his writings.

In spite of the fact that there are hundreds of highly inspiring scriptures which we have inherited, we still remain ignorant and there is still no radical change in our nature, because the revelations of the scriptures do not enter into all parts of our being.

We handle them as a printer handles his material, as a job to be done.

To Gurudev Sivananda this was a good start!

Our bodies are engaged in such spiritual activity.

Soon, because we read such highly elevating material again and again, the intellect is won over.

But even this does not inspire us to live a truly spiritual life.

The heart has to be won over.

Gurudev was a postmaster in the art of conquering our hearts.

His affection and his love were truly limitless.

His encouragement and his patience were boundless.

He made us all feel that we had truly understood the truth, even if we had just learnt the use of the words.

He encouraged us to deliver lectures, to speak about the spiritual truths to others.

So, during such exercise we discovered our own lack of spiritual experience.

He made such experience seem within our easy reach.

He treated our faults lightly.

Our hearts were conquered, the truth he had presented in his works, and the mission was complete.

I believe that this is what is needed in the religious field today.

We need not be discouraged if we can only grasp the truth intellectually and our own lives fall far short of perfection.

We might even thank God for our imperfection - that gives us enough opportunities to strive harder for perfection!

The very work (dissemination of spiritual knowledge) in which we are engaged provides us with enough opportunities to reflect and meditate.

The knowledge which we endeavour to spread becomes more and more fully integrated into our lives.

It becomes jnana yoga, the yoga in which the truth comes to life in us - the word is made flesh.

22nd November

With Grace Freedom Arises

I have a funny theory.

The Bible says "God made the world and he saw that it was good."

Obviously it was good and it is good even now.

But in such a good world as God created, why is there so much unhappiness, suffering and pain?

He must be capable of avoiding them.

My theory is that pain and sorrow, whether it is physical or psychological pain, were introduced into our lives merely to train us and to help us look within.

Otherwise it is very difficult to look within.

Where am I going to look?

Can you, without a shirt, feel the centre of your back?

It's very difficult.

But let one small ant crawl there and you can pinpoint that spot on your back.

You become aware of it.

In the same way sorrow is there in order that we may be able to look within and see that where it hurts, what hurts and what it hurts, is the ego.

As long as it hurts, there is some problem within.

This hurt is meant merely to turn our gaze within and help us find it.

I am reminded of a very beautiful saying of Vivekananda in connection with renunciation: "Work hard. Get something and then renounce it. Otherwise, what does a beggar have to renounce?"

So work hard, become good, very good, better.

Then say, "It's not me, it's God. This is not mine."

At that point all the evil qualities which met their match individually in the good qualities are seen as just the play of the mind, nothing more.

'I am' is not me and 'I am' is not mine.

'Mine' is seen to be non-existent and 'I am' is absorbed into the Divine.

That is moksha.

If you feel that 'This is my body' or 'This is my house' and you are quite happy with that, nobody, no god, can take it away from you.

One must reach that point where it hurts.

It is then that you discover that however hard you work it's not possible for you to get rid of the ego, because the hard work needs some sort of a result: psychic powers, spiritual experiences, visions and so on, and this ego owns all of them.

"You are mine, these are my experiences, this is my philosophy, my teaching."

Even that should hurt.

Then you are ready for grace and that grace instantly frees you.

23rd November

What is Violence Made Of?

I must become intensely conscious of the aggression in me which is searching every day for a cause.

One day it will find some social injustice, the next day it will find some religious intolerance or dogma, and another day a domestic problem.

I go on day after day, finding one excuse after another for the expression or manifestation of this violence within me.

It is not only within me, it is me.

I must become intensely aware of this.

From here meditation starts.

All the breathing techniques and mantras are mere aids - very powerful and valuable aids, but aids.

I must know how to turn my mind within.

I must know what it feels like to look within, and therefore I create the mantra, I visualise the form of God, etc.

But to discover the inner personality, I must first become intensely aware of the cover, which is beastly.

However, I am not ashamed of it because it is me.

This violence that I have seen is a cover and I, in order to lift it, must know what the violence is made of.

I must know its inner substance and so I use a mantra or the image of God.

I wonder if those who meditate have ever thought about this.

When you visualise an image of God within, you see it sitting there quite real, but have you ever asked yourself what it is made of?

Even while looking at me, you can visualise a picture of Buddha or Jesus Christ within you - what is it made of?

Don't say mind, or imagination because we don't know what that is.

'Imagination' simply means 'image in'.

But what is it made of? Paper? Stone?

When I ask myself that question I acquire the ability to see my own mind-stuff.

And therefore, when I look at this violence again, I know what it is made of.

But this is another tricky thing - just before a soldier takes off in his bomber he takes leave of his girl and his heart is full of love, from head to toe he is only love.

But soon he is ready to bomb and kill everyone in sight.

How does this happen?

One minute I am full of love and affection and the next I start bullying.

Are these changes going on within me or am I changing from moment to moment.

One minute I am love, then I am jealousy, next I am hatred.

But once I am able to look within and see this cover, I have discovered the most vital and wonderful truth, that the mind is one, and this one substance undergoes constant change.

The seeker within 'me' is subject to one or the other of the three qualities of nature - sattva, rajas and tamas.

Swami Sivananda was insistent that one should remain constantly aware of which guna (quality) prevails within.

Naturally, when the awareness is thus trained and awakened one moves closer and closer to sattva; rajas is flavoured by sattva, and tamas is kept at a minimum.

Sattva is something close to truth, reality - sat.

If your awareness is of a sattvic nature there is almost immediate grasping of the reality.

Rajas not only means activity, dynamism, but also dusty - a dusty mirror does reflect, but it is not a clear reflection.

Tamas means total darkness, inertia and an unwillingness to put forth effort.

We can visualise these three as coloured lenses.

Each colour gives the object a different appearance.

If you have understood the beauty of the three modifications of buddhi - the transparent lens, the distorted lens, and the darkened lens - then you will naturally understand that whatever is learned from a teacher or a scripture, is not learned at all!

You are listening to a teacher or studying a scripture, your buddhi - your intelligence - is awake.

Are you learning?

How do you learn?

You hear with your ear - hear, ear.

Right in the middle of that word 'learn' there is also the word 'ear'.

So in order to learn you need the ear.

But what we call the ear is just a piece of flesh.

Where is the ear?

There is another word with ear right in the middle - heart.

You hear with your heart.

So if you really want to learn, the ear with which you learn is in the heart, and that heart should wear a transparent lens.

Before you can attempt to even hear the truth you must become an adhikari.

In the beginning of the Yoga Vasishtha it is said that an adhikari is one who feels 'I am bound.

May I be liberated'.

He who is firmly determined to be liberated can derive inspiration from this scripture, otherwise it makes no sense.

Philosophy is the love of wisdom.

Wisdom has to arise within in an aparoksa way - not 'my' point of view nor anybody else's point of view.

For aparoksa jnana to arise, it is possible that you and I need an external help - like a scripture or a teacher - but unless we make sure that we at least have sattvic buddhi, the wisdom that is derived from the scripture or the teacher is likely to get lost or heavily distorted.

25th November

When There is Neither Hate Nor Love

What is this thing that refers to itself as 'This I am'?

Even as this question arises you are baffled, you are confronted with something which you had for a long time assumed to exist.

What is this 'I'?

How did it arise in the first place?

It doesn't matter whether you are a swami or not, a holy or an unholy person, educated or uneducated. Everyone feels 'I am' and therefore everyone is capable of looking within and finding this 'I am'.

The yogis might insist that unless your heart and mind are pure you won't be able to find the answer.

That might be true.

But it might also be that the very act of turning to find what this 'I' is, is capable of steadying the mind and purifying the heart.

If you learn merely to look within, then that very action brings about steadiness of the mind and purification of the heart.

Immediately I begin to look within I feel unsure and therefore reluctant to relate myself to anything or anybody.

I am not saying there is no relationship - something happens so that there is neither love nor hate.

All the evil actions that proceed from us are directly related to one of these emotions.

When there is neither love nor hate, what is popularly known as evil action is impossible.

What flows from there on is natural, the manifestation of life-force.

26th November

Play the Game

When the Indian sage says: "The creation is the Lord's Leela (play)," the serious and earnest rationalistic believer in God and His purposeful creation is disappointed and disgusted.

Is God such a childish being?

"Are construction (including the creative demolition that precedes it) and preservation, evolution and revolution, heartbreaking search and back-breaking toil life challenging; and surviving death, disease and destruction just His play?" asks he in cynical contempt.

But why should he assume that play does not involve all this?

Ask any Olympic champion, a successful dancer or musician, circus performer or member of a dramatic troupe: they are engaged in play and they know what it means.

Play is not idle fun or stupid or easy going purposeless activity.

Play involves rules of the game, within which the players have ample scope for the use of their free-will which must be used!

Success and failure are vital parts of the play: everyone cannot 'win'; and losing the game involves no disgrace.

One who understands the rules of the game well and plays his role without undue anxiety to win, wins.

In this world-play, the Lord is the originator of the game, the umpire, the field, the starting point and the winning post!

As an inspiring religious formula says: "The Lord does everything, with the help of his own divine energy and strength, unto Himself, by Himself, for His own satisfaction."

The work that lies ahead of us is His worship.

He uses us as His instruments; He provides the right sort of help and brings about the right conditions in order that His mission may be fulfilled.

What that mission is, is hidden in the lap of God.

Don't try to bet on this or that.

Life is an experiment (which is the use of freewill in the play), but gambling is forbidden!

Life is for living.

Idleness is for the dead.

But there should be a time and place for work, for worship, for play and to pray.

One without the other is unbalanced 'development' (that itself is a misnomer).

Yoga insists upon all-round development, yoga will bestow the peace on us which will make the raised standard of living meaningful.

Question:

What can the yogi do in order to promote peace in the world?

What can he do in order to bring about a healthy change in the social order?

Swamiji:

The yogi discovers in meditation that peace is within oneself and that order is within oneself, too.

He also discovers that it is when the I-thought arises that this peace and this order are disturbed.

Selfish thoughts, feelings and ideas flow from there on.

The yogi also realises that all this has to be discovered by oneself.

You cannot make another person see all this.

The yogi, therefore, endeavours to find peace and order within himself, and to rest in them and to let them shine in their own light, thus enabling others who may be so inclined to see them.

He does not force others to be peaceful: such an attempt is self-defeating because the others cannot find peace under pressure and the force disturbs the yogi's own inner peace.

Question:

Does it mean that the yogi does not care for the world and that he is interested only in finding peace within himself?

Swamiji:

Of course not.

When he has discovered peace and order within he also realises that there is disorder around him.

When he realises the inner peace, he overcomes selfishness.

Unselfishness naturally inspires him to serve all and to help all to realise the same inner peace and order.

This, therefore, becomes his very life.

However, he helps and serves more like a bus driver than like a school-master.

He does not determine your destination, for that would be violence.

He guides you and helps you get from where you are to where you choose to go.

He is like the sun.

He is the light of peace in which you are free to find your own.

Question:

All this is nice theory, but has it any practical value?

Swamiji:

When you discover yourself in that light, you discover the truth.

You realise that even the ideas concerning peace and order and the ways of bringing these about are not your own.

When you see disharmony around you or social injustice around you, you think you know the solutions.

But, if you look within in the light of meditation you realise that these solutions are not yours but they belong to other theorists and therefore they do not work for you, the problems remain unsolved and your solutions become problems.

When in the light of yoga you discard all these, you find peace and order.

They are your own.

They are real.

In that discovery you have found a remedy that does not become a disease and that does not generate a reaction worse than the original ailment.

28th November

Look Within

Is it possible to learn our lessons directly from the only teacher that we really have - life?
Instead of looking to someone else for a theoretical diagnosis, to look directly at the problem itself?

Theories are born of man's quest for a solution to the immediate problem of sorrow.
But who created this problem?

I myself.

Trouble does not come from outside.

We do not need theory.

Look at it directly - here is my sorrow; it arises in me.

This may not be easy for everyone.

It needs a certain maturity of intelligence, a certain ability to focus one's attention on the source of sorrow while undergoing that sorrow.

This may be difficult while the pain is still there.

Therefore, the theories and belief systems will take us to a certain point, but the solution must be found inside.

Sorrow is experienced very clearly - I know I am miserable.

So, if instead of trying to destroy all my external enemies I readjust the thing within myself that responds to external circumstances, the problem is solved.

No one is my enemy.

In the Yoga Vasistha it says, "To pave the whole world with leather, you need only put on a pair of shoes."

Instead of trying to manipulate the environment to suit myself, why not readjust the self so that it does not get hurt?

Is there a state of mind, a state of awareness where one is not hurt or sorrowful at all?

Let us observe what it is that gets hurt.

Look directly, without any theory whatsoever, merely look within to see where the hurt is experienced - totally unrelated to the external provocation.

I am hurt, or whatever it is that says 'I' in this body, that is hurt.

But what is it that says 'I' in this body... eyes, heart, stomach?

There is no 'I' and therefore there is no hurt!

I discover that the truth is extremely simple.

Yet since body consciousness is there, it is possible that I will be hurt again.

'I' arises and whenever it arises it gets hurt.

But if I have found the key, what does it matter if someone locks the door?

It is as simple as that.

And all the theories that man has invented are meant only to lead us there, to the discovery that 'I' is not.

When we realise that simple truth, confusion disappears.

Clinging to an object is an unconscious fear.

29th November

Self-awareness is God

Truth is brought out clearly when we consider shame.

Are we ashamed when we are naked? No.

In our own privacy there is no embarrassment at all.

Perhaps, we are ashamed when others see us when we are naked? No.

When we are fast asleep and our clothes are in disarray and our body is exposed, and when others see us thus, we are not ashamed.

But, if as someone is looking down at us we suddenly wake up, we are terribly embarrassed, ashamed and shy, and blushing cover our nakedness.

In other words, when we were aware that our nakedness had been exposed to other's view.

We are not worried if we are fools: we are not worried even if others know we are fools; but we are upset when we are aware that others know we are fools.

A stage of refinement should come in the course of our spiritual progress when we are able to gain this awareness without the intervention of others.

The student of yoga, at one stage, is watching himself; he becomes aware that he is watching himself.

Perhaps at this stage he becomes extremely sensitive, often yields to pessimism and despair.

For the first time he has discovered his own nakedness.

But his vision is coarse still.

Suddenly the viewing-point shifts.

Instead of the centre watching the circumference, the circumference watches the centre.

By a mysterious, unimaginable and indescribable process he becomes aware of the Awareness.

He realises the supreme glory of that Awareness.

The defects, passions and foolishness belonged to the circumference, not to the centre.

Yoga is like a dark tunnel.

On 'this' side you stand and wherever you turn you see 'others' (objects).

Self-knowledge is absent.

You enter the tunnel.

You do not see anything (object).

But you know you are, and you see because you are able to walk, to think, to know that you are!

You go out on the 'other' side.

Now you know you are and you also know All is.

The objects appeared, disappeared and reappeared.

But you, the Self-knowledge, remained unbroken.

In Pure Awareness there is no sin, no suffering, no evil, no veil.

That is God.

Goodwill in our heart is the will of God – God-will.

30th November

Tune Oneself to the Guru

The great masters often isolated themselves from society.

Even if they did not do so physically, they achieved a psychological isolation by behaving like a fool or ignoramus.

Seekers who were mature sought the company of the masters and received instruction and knowledge.

Such maturity is purity in thought, word and deed.

However, this procedure excluded the vast majority of human beings from the hall of wisdom.

They were entertained by lesser teachers; unfortunately such entertainment later came to be known as wisdom!

Truth was neglected.

The reaction to this was the trend that is prevalent even today.

It is euphemistically called 'knowledge explosion', but in reality it is 'literacy explosion'.

We know a lot of words.

We can talk as if we are religious, spiritual, intelligent and enlightened, but our life belies all this and reveals the truth which is otherwise.

How can we tune ourselves to these great masters so that their music is heard in our hearts and the truth they utter becomes our living truth?

It is easy.

First and foremost we should abandon the foolish habit of translating what we hear in terms of the symbols that are familiar to us.

We should have the courage to admit that their symbols are unfamiliar to us.

We do not understand their teaching, even if the words are extremely simple.

This confession commences an inner search within us.

"How is it," we ask ourselves, "that the simple truth that the master thus propounds and which he obviously embodies in himself is impracticable to me?"

In the light of this enquiry you yourself will discover that either the mind or the emotion rebels against the teaching.

Hence it remains unassimilated and it turns into poison within.

The seeing of this truth concerning oneself is itself the removal of the psychological or emotional obstruction.

You begin to experiment.

It is possible if you have a healthy curiosity and seriousness blended.

You might fail.

In fact you will fail, (remember that), but it is not failure.

It is a pointer to the area of weakness which needs to be strengthened.

The search itself is success.

The intelligence is awakened.

This is immeasurable success.

This is religious instruction of the future: to hear the truth, and having heard the truth, to examine oneself in its light.

When areas of darkness come to light there is light and no darkness.

When the seeker takes delight in this, there is no limit to that delight.

1st December Dividing Walls

Again and again light streams into our life.

Krishna declared himself to be that Light; Buddha was referred to as the 'Enlightened One'; Jesus said, "I am the Light".

But the light hurts so we erect walls around us for protection.

Protection from whom?

The only enemy we have is ourself.

In the Gita Krishna said: "You are your own friend and you are your own enemy."

But it is painful to see oneself as one is, so we look outside.

However, all relationships reveal oneself.

So, whether I am an ascetic sitting inside a cave keen on discovering the Self, or whether I am a busy-body trying to uplift and save all humanity, if the light is within me, I soon discover that the world is nothing but a mirror in which I am able to see myself.

Every wall you and I have erected, sooner or later becomes a dividing wall.

We believe these fences and hedges are necessary - a child needs protection.

Perhaps they are, but they are imprisoning us, endangering our life and our whole existence.

We even erect walls around the divine beings who came to enlighten us, and are thereby dividing ourselves, our society - he is my friend and you are my enemy - and every one of us indulges in some visual thinking that those vicious people will be killed.

(Not me, I belong to the right side of the throne of God!)

Hindus believe that the next incarnation, Kalki, is imminent.

Buddhists believe that Maitreya Buddha is to be expected very soon.

Christians believe in the second coming of Christ.

Moslems believe that the Messiah is coming and Jewish people are very eagerly expecting the arrival of the Messiah.

Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, reminds us again and again: "The Light of all lights, this Consciousness, this awareness, which illumines and is the highest kind of knowledge - not knowledge of an object, but knowledge in itself - is within you. Find it there!"

Probably that is what the next incarnation of God might be: not an individual floating down from the sky, or a nuclear illumination, but an enlightenment of the human heart, an evolution of consciousness in the human being.

It is towards that Light that the light streaming in is leading us.

May this Light shine in our hearts forever and ever.

2nd December Mind, Matter, Time and Space

How did the mind ever become aware of the outside material world?

Through the body, through the avenues of the body.

I am able to see you because of the eyes.

I am able to hear you because of my ears.

When these have stopped functioning there is no apprehension of the external material world.

That's quite simple, isn't it?

You and I know that it is possible to build a world of our own in sleep - that faculty is still there - don't call it mind, we don't know what it is all about.

We go only on things you and I are clearly aware of.

You are not clearly aware of the thing called mind, but you are clearly aware of the thing called body and how it is sustained - how it builds itself, does the repair work, elimination and all the rest of it.

You are aware of that, so go on with that.

This body may not need another 58 years to disintegrate, but it will still take some time.

If it is not burnt, buried or thrown to the dogs it will take some time because decomposition needs some time. A composition needs some time and decomposition needs some time; and then slowly it disintegrates.

But nothing comes and nothing goes - that means the faculty which was associated with this fellow called Swami Venkatesananda which was able to dream up the whole of itself within itself.

Now that the body has gone the contact with the external world of matter is also gone.

(External means external to the skin.)

So the world does not exist, but not quite ... just as, when he was in this body, he was able to go to sleep and dream ('go to sleep' means disconnect the senses from apprehending the world of matter outside) and then create a dream world of his own; in exactly the same way, at that point too (of death), now that the world has been disconnected by the cessation of the functioning of the senses, this Venkatesananda starts dreaming.

And that becomes a new world!

In that world that fellow functions.

For how long?

What is time, what is space?

So, nothing has come, nothing has gone.

3rd December Nothing Comes, Nothing Goes

Swamiji:

In this space, whatever is called Swami Venkatesananda sits and talks to you: and then the body stops breathing, that's all.

But nothing leaves.

Nothing comes and nothing goes, right?

Death does not come from somewhere, and life doesn't go from here.

Nothing leaves the body, nothing comes into the body.

The body disintegrates, decomposes, because that's the normal thing to do.

It's doing that even now.

Since it's not able to get any nutrition from outside there's no building up anymore so there's breaking down.

Question:

The mind is breaking down too?

Swamiji:

It doesn't seem to.

There's no breaking down at all for the mind.

But you don't even know what the mind is.

Go step by step, if you jump even two steps you miss out.

This thing called Swami Venkatesananda sits and talks to you.

But if I don't eat for the next few days, the building powers of the body are slackened, correct?

And since the body ceases even to breathe, the building process comes to a complete standstill.

Since neither the building nor coherent force (which keeps the limbs together, cells together, molecules together) are functioning, they begin to fall apart.

It's the most sensible thing to do!

But nothing has gone, and nothing has come in.

This must be repeated as a formula every half a minute - nothing goes out and nothing comes in.

And what is is, and what stays stays.

And what stays is now unrelated to the outside material world.

The divine presence, being everywhere, is in you, in me, in all the infinite creatures, flowing everywhere.

Therefore, there is inevitable interaction.

When the interaction is one of love, the result is happiness; if it is one of attachment the result may be frustration; if that interaction is one of hate, jealousy, fear, the feedback, is one of unhappiness.

This is what we mean when we say, "The world is a mirror that reflects us".

If you look at the world with love, it reflects happiness towards you, if you look at the world with hate, it reflects unhappiness towards you.

4th December The Unchanging Equilibrium

What is adharma or unrighteousness?

Something which dominates something else and thus disturbs the balance.

The spirit of domination is evil and invariably tries to influence another, and to influence another is to violate your dharma.

The pull between dharma and adharma is there constantly, and the thing called 'avatara' or manifestation of God is also constant.

The disturbance of the equilibrium as well as the restoration of the equilibrium are actions, but who are the actors in this drama?

What you think is action may not be so and what you think is non-action may be the real action.

Don't try to understand this at all with your brain or with your ego.

When the equilibrium is disturbed, the intelligence that becomes aware of this disturbance restores the equilibrium.

If the attention is focussed on the equilibrium, the disturbance does not last.

It still continues to be, it still continues to arise in you because life is life; but the equilibrium is restored in a split second and that is called 'avatara'.

By intense inner awareness or by the attention being directed all the time at the equilibrium itself, immediate restoration of the balance is possible.

Let your attention be on the unchanging equilibrium.

Constant awareness of this unchanging equilibrium is what is called jnana tapas, i.e. the austerity of wisdom.

This austerity of wisdom is all-purifying.

It purifies all the disturbances that take place in your life because that is the light in which the shadow-play is enlightened.

The shadow is still there, but it is not seen.

As long as life lasts, the swinging between balance and imbalance, tension and non-tension, light and darkness, go on; but in the light of this inner intelligence that shadow play is not seen.

One who understands this is instantly freed from doubt and also from intention, attachment to action (or the feeling: 'I do this') and from longing for the results of the action.

His is the natural life.

5th December Desire for God

A correspondent mentions the apparent contradiction in the teaching that one should be contented at heart and yet have a burning desire for God.

The trick lies in the answer to the question, "What is God?"

If God is treated as some kind of an external object or person, the desire for God is as good or as bad as a desire for a car.

But if God is understood as the very self of oneself, as the reality of one's being, then the whole position changes.

Then desire for God only means a keen aspiration to understand oneself.

This Self-knowledge does not arise if the mind is distracted and the heart disturbed by discontent and desire.

Again, if one is able to observe oneself in the midst of distraction and desire, to find out the content and reality of such distraction and desire, the discontent ceases and tranquility prevails.

One is able to see clearly the difference between desire for an external object (which is accompanied by restlessness of the mind) and the desire or aspiration for Self-knowledge (which tranquilises the mind and leads to clearer perception).

6th December Transcending Sorrow

The question of God's existence does not seem to be relevant to our daily life. Yet the great ones have somehow thought fit to introduce this inexplicable and extraneous concept called God into our lives. Why?

It is not difficult to see that our fundamental problems arise from the 'me'.

God does not seem to enter our lives either to cause happiness or unhappiness.

If the 'me' that creates endless problems could be understood, we could transcend sorrow, for that which both causes and experiences sorrow is the 'me', or the mind.

Perhaps mind is only a word, yet it creates - not sorrow, but the thought of sorrow.

This sorrow is merely a thought, yet having projected it, the mind feeds on it becoming more and more unhappy.

This is the most undignified way for a human being to live.

Though sorrow is just a thought, can we wipe it out?

Unless we can find its source, we cannot deal with it.

Can we manipulate it?

With what?

Can we drown it in drugs or alcohol?

It will only come up stronger.

If it is masked, it will only smell worse.

We seem to be trapped.

When drowning in quicksand, it is impossible to kick oneself out.

When that fact is realised, we begin to look for something that transcends.

In the lives of each of us there are occasions when thought is transcended.

One is the simple phenomenon of deep sleep.

In deep sleep everything seems to function except the 'me'.

We wonder, is it not possible to transcend the 'me' without falling asleep?

What is it that is awake during sleep?

Can we not live on that plane, not caught in the world created by the 'me'?

The state beyond the 'me', beyond thought process, which is awake during sleep, is given the name 'God'.

That God which is beyond sorrow is not in the clouds, but in us.

That which is deep within yet unaffected by sorrow, transcending the me, transcending all that causes unhappiness in our lives, is called God.

By rising up to that point within ourselves, we transcend sorrow.

The great ones have suggested that if we can find our way to that centre of our being, it is possible to live in this world without being subject to sorrow.

7th December Is Life a Battlefield?

Is life a battlefield of problems, unhappiness, sorrow?

Has whoever created this made it inevitable that we should all be born here to suffer?

It doesn't sound logical to me at all - I don't know if it does to you.

There is another way of looking at it - maybe a little unorthodox, but it helps.

Is life here miserable or not miserable, or possibly a mixture of both?

If it is not miserable there is no problem, so forget it.

Now there are these two possibilities: one, that life is inevitably miserable; or two, it's a mixture - sometimes misery, sometimes joy.

Let's look at the first possibility.

If you accept that life is miserable, instantly you become happy.

If you realise that this world is one of incessant and unending misery, then living in this world you are not miserable - you have understood that this is indeed the nature of the world, so why be unhappy about it?

Once you know this you do not expect anything other than that - which means that all your unhappiness springs from expectation of something that is not.

Why does the mind expect to gain something that the world does not possess?

If that expectation is dropped there is happiness, joy, bliss.

Now the second possibility: either life is a mixture of happiness or unhappiness, or it depends upon how you approach it.

Both these things are possible - you can be happy here and you can be miserable.

If you go on repeating this a few times, suddenly you realise, "My God, it depends upon me!"

One who has no goal at all does not attain anything, he does not achieve anything.

There is no goal and there is no reaching the goal; there is no success and there is no failure in his case.

Success exists in him only in the sense that there is a successive passage of time, progression of time; success in the sense that one comes after the other.

Therefore, to him, it is a question of perpetual success.

One who has thus discovered the non-existence of the ego-sense, as the actor in this drama here, behaves in this manner and therefore, he is not bound at all.

Brooding is good!

If you are emotional, do not express it, do not suppress it, but brood over it as the hen broods over her eggs - with great love, attention, concentration and alertness.

The hen does so!

Such is meditation which leads to the creative breaking of the shell (thought or concept) and the living truth emerges, instantly, independent of 'you', the 'me' or the brooder!

8th December The Embodiment of Wisdom

Raga-dvesha means attraction and repulsion, love and hate, like and dislike.

This necessarily depends upon the feeling 'I am this body' or 'I am this personality'.

You cannot say that raga-dvesha is independent of the 'I am the body' idea - the cause is in the effect, the effect is in the cause.

When the 'I am the body' idea is absent, for instance in sleep, there is no raga-dvesha.

So, this unwisdom or non-philosophy gives rise to the ignorant feeling 'I am the body'; that extends itself into 'I like this, I don't like that' - and all that it involves.

One of Swami Sivananda's oft repeated declarations was: "The world is nothing but raga-dvesha. Remove raga-dvesha, there is no world."

When He said this, there was light.

All this seems to be very simple and very easy if you merely listen to the words and indulge in hallucination; or it seems to be impossible if you suddenly become too serious and visualise the application of these truths and their consequences.

This is because we tend to put the cart before the horse.

It is impossible for us to realise that these things are possible unless we come face to face with someone who is an embodiment of this wisdom we are talking about.

Such a one was Swami Sivananda.

If you had lived with Him it is quite possible that you might even have misunderstood that ambition, hope, was His driving force, that He was always working towards a goal that He hoped to reach - to have a huge ashram, to be known throughout the world, and so on.

But if you knew Him intimately, if you were able to observe Him without projecting your own infantile philosophy upon Him, then you could see that His action was pure action.

It was not motivated by fear and therefore there was no hope at all.

He wasn't afraid to fail, He was not afraid that His mission would fail.

There was no fear in Him at all.

Fear leaves you if there is no hope, and hope does not arise if there is no fear (they go together).

He had no fear and therefore did not hope that this would happen or that would happen.

In Him there was no fear and no hope, no hate and its counterpart of love.

His love was something quite different.

His love arose in the supreme wisdom of the recognition of universal oneness.

9th December The Touchstone of Enlightenment

The touchstone or the characteristic of enlightenment itself is that it never sleeps, it is never taken unawares.

The price of freedom is this unwinking vigilance - in the words of my guru Swami Sivananda, 'eternal vigilance'.

Eternal vigilance, in the beginning, looks like a discipline.

But, once you have found the key to this whole spiritual movement, eternal vigilance is natural.

Until this freedom from the tyranny of the mind becomes natural, one needs company of saints and holy ones, which is regarded as supreme blessing.

If you and I could appreciate this blessing that has been showered upon us, I am quite sure that we would instantly transform ourselves into so many bees and imbibe the nectar - and become honey.

The body, the mind, the emotions, the senses and the life-force seem to impose a whole lot of limitations upon us.

They seem to draw our energies and enslave us.

One has to experience as a fact that we are being enslaved by some unknown forces, maybe within ourselves, maybe outside.

The mind cannot be seen and yet this thing called 'mind' enslaves us so thoroughly it is disgraceful.

How to be free from the tyranny of the mind?

It is this question that is considered to be 'longing for liberation'.

Liberation is liberation from the mind.

When we come into this field of finding freedom from this mind, or the ego (both mean exactly the same thing), how do we go about it?

In other words, who is seeking this freedom from whom?

Is the seeker also the mind?

Does the mind want to gain freedom from the mind?

What does it mean?

In answer to this question philosophers have invented all sorts of theories.

We are not concerned with whether all these theories are true or not.

All that we are concerned about is: are we getting any closer to clarity?

Even if there are millions of gallons of water in the ocean, you can only take as much water as your vessel can hold.

Similarly, even though God is infinite, you can experience Him - for the present only through your finite mind which is limited to name and form.

God does not need the form, but your mind does.

God does not need your worship, but you do.

10th December Ever Alert, Ever Aware

What sort of awakened intelligence is it that can derive inspiration from the scripture or the guru?

The awakened intelligence that is sattvic knows what is bondage and what is freedom; what are one's limitations and to what extent one is free.

It needs great humility and almost impossible courage to understand this.

When one says egoistically, "I don't feel this cold," (though inwardly he is shivering), that is arrogance.

Another person says, "This cold is terrible. I can't bear it."

He is weak.

Where do these meet?

How to distinguish one from the other?

Once again you have to see it manifest in a great being like Swami Sivananda.

If it was cold he put on an overcoat.

He did not indulge the body, but gave it what it needed, and made it work.

If one is able to see through all this, then one can recognise that that intelligence is awake, and it is pure and sattvic.

Such a person is capable of deriving wisdom from everything in this world.

All beings become his guru.

When he talks there is perfect communication, when he looks into a scripture it becomes immediately clear - to him, and when he talks to an enlightened person there is perfect communication.

The insight or the inner light lifts the veil.

No evil, no sin, can challenge this light.

The densest darkness has no power to challenge the light of a small candle!

And, there is no other way to get rid of the darkness: nothing but light (the inner light or insight) will do.

In this spiritual or inner adventure we may help one another.

We of course need a guru or spiritual preceptor, but more than everything else, we need grace of God (for God is the inner light).

But self-effort is of supreme importance.

However, when you reach perfection, the mission of the guru or the avatara is fulfilled and you suddenly realise that the Lord (and his avatara), guru, and the innermost being, are (and have always been) of one substance.

The inner equilibrium is restored; harmony with the environment is restored; and nature is returned to its natural state, to remain ever alert, ever awake and intelligent.

11th December Enlightened Living 1

The life of a yogi (or enlightened living) is not something unusual, strange, unnatural or supernatural.

It is the most natural life.

Unnatural life is when I want it to be otherwise.

When doubt (samsayam) arises as to whether I am doing what I am meant to do or whether I must do something else, then there is something unnatural.

When doubt enters our life it seems to interfere with the natural flow of life, because we are hesitating and therefore interfering with the natural flow of life.

In a life free from doubt, there is jnana, natural intelligence or supreme consciousness.

In Nature everything seems to flow constantly - even time cannot be altered.

Doubt disturbs this constant flow by foolishly endeavouring to halt it.

This causes indecision and vacillation and then we tend to blame others for our failures.

Can you justify your foul temper, saying it is natural to you? No.

If it is your nature, then you will be so twenty-four hours of the day, even during your sleep!

So if there is an aberration like anger, fear, etc., one must enquire within oneself and see whether it is one's nature or another extraneous factor interfering in the natural flow of life.

Duty should not bind you.

Duty should free you.

When I say "I am duty-bound," I am not happy, I am miserable.

Why does the sun shine?

Because it has no because!

Can our life also be like that?

Can I live, work, function and participate in all aspects of this life without a because arising?

This is the first lesson taught by the sun.

The second lesson is that the sun has no partiality and therefore no motivation to win somebody's admiration!

Can I shine like the sun because there is no 'because' and shine equally upon all because there is no 'because'?

Such a life is very tough.

And in such a life, where am I looking?

In myself, into my own heart and mind.

Such a life involves an unwinking, unblinking observation of oneself, knowing that the only thing that disturbs the equilibrium or clouds the inner light is yourself, motivated by fear, love and hate.

When these three are completely and totally absent, your life is enlightened living.

Such a life is itself a great blessing.

In such a life there is delight, joy, bliss.

What is painful the body will naturally avoid.

Suffering is automatically, almost by reflex action, kept out of life; and therefore in enlightened living there is perpetual delight.

Perhaps there are methods, but it is only after trying out some techniques that one realises that no method or technique is really necessary or that the discovery of Truth is not the end-product of every practice.

But one should not go to sleep saying "There is no method, since the Truth alone exists," then you will be a fool all your life.

The other attitude that most people adopt is also risky - that of merely adopting a technique.

You are caught in the technique: you are so busy doing, that there is no time, energy or inclination to wonder "Why am I doing all this?"

Mere blind action is labour.

According to the Bhagavatam, if you go on doing the most wonderful, glorious, religious or social action without devotion to God, your life is a real waste.

But, on the other hand, one also has to realise that that Truth has to be discovered and the discovery means some kind of movement.

I have to discover it and that discovery itself may be seen as an action. Why?

Because life involves action.

Is it possible while living to discover the Truth and to keep it in sharp focus?

If you see it very clearly and cleverly, then you see that action and knowledge are coexistent.

Does action lead you to knowledge or enlightenment, or does knowledge guide your action?

Action being life and the very meaning of life being the discovery of that meaning of life, enlightened living suggests some kind of a base for the other: 'I must have enlightenment in order to guide me in my life, or I must live in such a way that I may reach enlightenment'.

How to see the two as one without necessarily denying the existence of one in favour of the other?

That's the important thing.

In Sanskrit, 'sannyasa' means 'placing very well', not necessarily 'becoming a swami'.

How to place this knowledge in such a way that every action is enlightened action?

If this Truth is discovered, you are never again subject to delusion.

You are ignorant now: that ignorance will go, but the actions will remain exactly as they were before.

When the misunderstanding is removed, Truth remains Truth.

Don't try to guess what Truth is before you remove the misunderstanding, because that is the misunderstanding.

Discover the Truth.

If for this discovery you have to adopt some technique, do so.

Life being action, the life dedicated to the discovery of Truth will necessarily be flavoured by that dedication; and such a life will follow a certain course of action which will suggest a method.

13th December Enlightened Living and Dharma

What is dharma or righteousness?

What is unrighteous?

This question can never be conclusively answered by anybody though this problem has been discussed from the dawn of creation till today and will probably go on for a long time. Dharma may not mean what you and I, or our ancients, or those who are coming after, or they who rule the nations of the world, determine as righteous action.

Dharma, especially in Buddhist scriptures, is what makes a flower a flower, as distinct from what makes cloth, cloth.

Why is wind wind and why is water water?

The answer is dharma.

The essential characteristic of each object is its dharma.

But we see that the universe does not consist of only one object.

There are different substances with different dharmas and since these different substances co-exist in this universe and this coexistence involves constant interaction, and since such interaction is bound to bring about some disturbance somewhere, each disturbance is immediately followed by a balancing action.

Basically and fundamentally, nature is in a state of balance.

It does not allow any disturbance to get out of hand.

That power that is released to restore the balance is divine.

Nature is composed of day and night.

In the same way, the jiva comprises jnana (wisdom) and ajnana (ignorance).

In each substance there is something which is stable, which does not alter and something which can be influenced and pulled.

And it is because of this that a disturbance is possible.

Our body contains a stable element called life and also an unstable element called health.

You can disturb that health, but the stable element life, as long as it exists, is able to overcome that ill-health and bring back health.

I have to live and live an enlightened life.

I have to see that what I call day is also composed of night.

These two forces, light and darkness, exist in each one of us and there is a constant tug-of-war between the two.

Nature in a state of balance maintains a certain tension and that is life, livingness.

If that much of tension is not there, you would collapse like a rag doll.

When that tension is in a state of balance there is absence of tension.

For example, when you find your own centre of gravity while sitting or standing, the body feels extremely light.

So, when all the substances in this universe with their different characteristics are in their natural state, there is perfect balance.

When that balance is disturbed, the Divine manifests itself.

14th December The Animal in Man

There are any number of meanings in which the word 'animal' is used.

Technically, 'anima' means the soul.

The animal is fairly pure; it is man who is grossly perverted.

So, the animal in man may very well be the purity of the soul itself, the purity of being.

However, in common discussion, when we talk of the animal in man we talk of human perversion; that is, when a human being imitates the nature and behaviour of other beings which we call animals.

In order to be able to understand this, one has to understand the proper role of a human being in this creation.

The animal and the tree always do what they have to do, what nature meant them to do.

But the human being tries to do what he wants to do.

There is a desire motivation here.

Very soon he discovers that he cannot always do that and immediately there is conflict, because he does not know whether he should do something or whether he should even wish to do it, wish not to do it, or wish to do something else.

So he chooses between the path of wisdom and that of non-wisdom.

That is where the problem lies.

In animal existence there is no choice, but in human existence there is an illusion that there is choice.

It is the ego that thinks it has the choice and that it has to make choices.

At that moment the motivation enters into the thought and action, and there is confusion.

The action is deliberately directed towards a result and if you succeed you are excited, if you don't you are frustrated.

Excitement is one type of confusion, frustration is another.

One who seeks enlightenment should see that the motivation springs from an erroneous understanding that 'I' have a choice, and whatever choice 'I' make is stupid.

Then there is a sudden suspension of the choice-maker.

Nature has already endowed the objects of creation with their specific properties.

The very nature of clay is that when moulded in a certain way it can give the feeling that it is a wall.

You can't mould water.

So, whether a man is saintly or sinful, he does nothing more than utilize nature's properties in a certain way.

When the choice-maker, called the ego, is suspended or eventually dispelled, then we become absolutely pure.

It is then that we become what a human being was supposed to be according to the Bible:

"Made in the image of God."

15th December Consciousness Dreams and the Infinite Arises

When sleep comes to an end in the morning, what is the first thing that happens to you?

Have you experienced this, or asked this question?

You say you woke up, but what does it mean to wake up?

Do I become aware of myself, or do I become aware of the bed, the pillow, or do I become aware of you, the other, or all these simultaneously?

Sages who have examined this phenomenon have said that first the 'I' thought arises: 'I am'.

That consciousness was there, even when you were asleep, so that if you were sleeping and I tickled your foot, the foot would withdraw.

You were not conscious, but there was consciousness.

This consciousness was homogenous, undivided within itself and therefore there was no awareness of itself.

When you woke up - which means when sleep came to an end - the first thing that happened was that this consciousness began to be aware of itself am'.

The whole thing happens so fast that you don't notice it.

'I am', then suddenly you feel the pillow under your head, so 'I am sleeping on this bed', or, 'There is somebody sleeping next to me, my husband or wife'.

So the feeling, the awareness 'I am' comes, and at the same time almost, 'You are' and 'They are' arises, and the world arises in the same consciousness.

It is not my consciousness and therefore I cannot manipulate this world.

People have tried this, especially during the days of LSD experimentation.

This world is not the creation of your consciousness, or perhaps there is nothing called your consciousness.

This is the work of consciousness.

Consciousness dreams here.

Consciousness becoming aware of itself as all this, is the universe; and since that consciousness is infinite, it is infinite in every way.

Why are there such a variety of faces, colour of hair, skin, size?

What a mysterious thing it is.

If you have taken a walk in the bush you might begin to wonder, why are there such a variety of leaves?

Who is interested in that variety, that diversity?

This is merely the work of infinite consciousness expressing itself infinitely without desire.

16th December The True Nature of the World

When the Infinite becomes aware of itself there is infinity everywhere in infinite ways, without any rhyme or reason.

This is what the master points out again and again.

Awareness, becoming aware of itself, creates an apparent division within itself.

The division is not real, because it is apparently created within itself when consciousness becomes aware of itself.

That is the world.

Since it is not your consciousness that has created this, or since you do not have any consciousness independent of the totality, you cannot create a world.

You can only dream up something and become involved in that dream.

You think you are - 'I am'.

And that 'I am', being repeated again and again, seems to be the truth.

This is quite simple, and this is what happens to our relationships.

For example, take a young man and woman.

This man travels on this side of the road and that girl travels on the other side.

They don't even know each other.

Then they look at each other, that's all.

The next day they say 'Hi'.

That's all, nothing more.

Slowly they begin to think of each other as boy-friend and girl-friend.

The thought becomes more and more firmly established and very soon they become lovers, and husband and wife.

Has anything changed?

Nothing has changed, except that the original thought has been repeatedly thought over and over again.

By merely being repeatedly thought over and over again, that which was merely a thought, a concept, has somehow become the truth.

Our whole life is like that.

If one sees this as truth, then those depressing thoughts with which we start an analysis of the world disappear.

The world and life may still be exactly the same, but something that was haunting us has stopped haunting us.

It's a beautiful thing if we can undertake the journey and not merely try to grasp the final product of the truth.

If you undertake the journey, if you look at the world and become disgruntled with it, become desperate, then you begin to understand the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world.

Then you arrive at the understanding that neither I nor the world can exist independent of one another.

The world is I, I am the world.

17th December Direct Experience

Scriptures and teachers, fasts and festivals, discourses and dramas serve a very useful purpose.

They sow seeds of virtue which even the vicious people occasionally pick up, though they participate in the festivities or handle scriptures for several disparate reasons.

The seeds germinate into 'the other point of view' with which the wicked do not easily and readily agree.

Wise ones do not argue.

Argument only begets more argument, not understanding.

But the initial encounter is not entirely futile. Gathering knowledge becomes a sort of hobby with some of these worldly people - they are no longer so wicked.

They are often not persuaded to act on that knowledge - that is a frightening prospect to them.

There is no loss however.

The germinated plant has to grow..... in God's good time.

The next is a rather interesting, ironical and paradoxical phenomenon.

The young tree may yet produce some blossoms and may provide some shelter.

At some stage he who has some knowledge of spiritual 'ideas' is eager to share these with others.

They are ideas not experiences.

The sharing may have its own unspiritual motivation.

Yet, it is a movement in the right direction.

Sooner or later, the 'truth' of the teaching is brought home - life has its own magic cure (pain!) for the blindness of stupidity.

Everything and everyone matures - and maturity instantly transforms 'ideas' entertained into 'truths' to be lived.

On the other hand, even unselfish religious men may find themselves in a strange predicament.

Unavoidable reasons may prevent them from acting according to their own teachings.

Yet, they realise that the truth is true - even if it is not reflected in their own lives.

They are not reluctant to proclaim the truth, even if it is 'against' themselves.

For instance, during a winter in Rishikesh Swami Sivananda addressed a gathering of spiritual aspirants.

It was cold and his body was ailing.

He was clad in an overcoat.

Yet he roared: "Blessed are they that are clad only in a loin cloth."

However, it is when one has had direct experience of a truth that his or her words have the power to bring about a radical transformation in the hearts of his students.

Such was Swami Sivananda.

His teachings move the responsive heart, transcending time and space, and without the need for a personal encounter.

18th December Freedom! But Who Enslaves?

'Freedom' is not free!

It is twisted and distorted by everyone that has approached it.

It is conceived by limited and narrow human intellect.

That is torture enough.

But then it has to be expressed, squeezed out, expelled and thrown away - freedom is thrown away by those who wish to express it.

He who demonstrates this freedom becomes a demon, and the freedom becomes a travesty.

Is there a freedom completely free of this conception and expression, this distortion and perversion?

Such freedom cannot be described, for what is described is not freedom.

Freedom is a spiritual quality inherent in every being.

Freedom is 'being'.

Freedom is inherent not only in the human being, but in every being.

To be, therefore, everyone has an inalienable right; and no one can possibly take it away.

However, saying it is quite different from seeing it.

Saying it causes confusion; seeing it brings about a fusion of our consciousness with the Truth.

When thus the being is seen, bondage falls.

That bondage was a futile negation of being.

That bondage was born of insecurity, of a feeling that my being is threatened by your being and of a desire to protect my being against such a contingency.

The whole of this is based on want of insight - sight in its literal sense, an inward vision, the third eye.

In the darkness that prevails in the absence of this insight, insecurity, fear, desire and the activities created by these appear.

This darkness is our real oppressor.

The sense of insecurity, fear and desire are the fetters that we have forged with which to shackle our own freedom.

No one else is responsible.

No one else can free us either.

It is because we have wilfully forfeited this freedom that we do not look in the right direction to regain it!

We look for a remedy outside ourselves, imagining that the cause is outside, also.

Yet since darkness is not real, all these factors are not real either.

Thank God!

Therefore look within to see who is bound and what is bondage.

In the words of my Gurudev Swami Sivananda, "Die to live."

Look at the dead man: he has no anxiety, no fear, no desire, no disease, no doctors, no creditors, no enemies and no friends.

If while living we are as free, we have found the freedom that alone has any significance.

19th December Immortality

Man is immortal.

And you do not have to believe in any mythical individual soul to know this!

It is possible that immortality is not only on the physical-material level.

The sperm or seed is not just physical matter but is also the abode of energy and of consciousness.

So, the energy alone is transmitted in some cases.

A man who has not married and thus reproduced himself might transmit his energy in other ways.

For instance, by serving his fellowman in such a way that the spirit of service is awakened in the other.

Or, one's consciousness may be transmitted to another in numerous ways.

Artists, scientists and poets transmit their consciousness, which fertilises the receptive mind, and thus reproduce or perpetuate or immortalise the 'donor'.

This fertilisation, therefore, may take place by physical contact, by a mere look, or even by intense focussing of attention - by sight and by sound - by sensory channels or extra-sensory channels verbally or non-verbally (as J.Krishnamurti puts it).

20th December Past, Present, Future

As long as you are trapped in the belief in time, there will be problems and tensions.
To say that there is a past is even grammatically wrong - there was a past.

Can you live in the past?

You can't. It's gone.

Past is vaguely carried over as memory.

Vaguely, because I do not remember all that happened.

There is a tremendous lot of distortion.

Things that did not happen can also be remembered as if they did happen.

So there is no past, only memory.

Is there a thing called the future?

Again, grammatically, there will be a future.

There is no future.

We hope there will be a future; we hope for continuation of 'me'; we hope, because there is a fear that it may not be so.

Where there is no fear, there is no hope.

If there is certainty, there is neither fear nor hope.

Where there is fear, hope arises to mask that fear.

And these two - hope and fear - together conspire to create a thing called the future.

It doesn't exist.

And ... to live in the present - before I say the word 'present', it is past.

There is no such time called present.

Does life need this trichotomy called past, present, and future?

Is life not complete unto itself?

Memory may be there, but the past is totally irrelevant to our lives.

Therefore, can I not look at myself now, and see if it is possible to bring about a radical and instant change?

Directly to see what makes me do what I do?

If so, there is an end to it, instantly, and I arrive at the core of my being.

When you touch this core you don't need memory, hope or fear.

You enter a timelessness which is life.

When you see that life is timeless, consciousness is timeless - life flows in consciousness, that is sufficient unto itself.

You are once and for all free from haunting memories, hopes and fears.

Let life proceed and there is no problem because life is rooted in that which was, is and will be - which is God.

That which is, that which was, will be able to handle any situation in the will-be!

What does the teacher do when the student has placed before him a beautiful analysis of life, such as Rama does in the Yoga Vasistha?

He would probably be tempted to appreciate and reward him.

The master does, but says, "Not yet. A

ll that you have said is true, but there is one element which is missing.

That is, you have not investigated and discovered who it is who entertains all these ideas."

What is the difference between an intelligent understanding concerning life on earth, and despair and depression?

What is the role of intelligence in this game?

You have seen that life is passing, you have seen that everything that is built is destroyed, all that has a beginning must have an end.

All this is clear.

But who is examining all this, who is analysing this life?

And what is your motivation, what are you going to do about it?

In simple words, you have seen that life is so terrible, but what are you going to do about it?

Can you change it, or are you going into the closet to sit and weep there?

Is it possible for you to withdraw from life?

What is the world and what is your relationship with the world?

Who are you, and how do you withdraw from life?

These are the fundamental questions which the master asks.

Before I can really and truly solve the problem of sorrow on this earth, I must find the answer to the more fundamental question, 'What am I?'

What is this world and what is our relationship?

Who am I?

When I ask that question, why do I point to this shirt?

Don't tell me that I am the shirt.

Nor am I this body.

This body was obviously made of potatoes.

Why does everybody point to me here and not there?

This is a big question.

Why do I consider this a hall and not a pumpkin?

Why do I consider that this is evening and not midnight?

What is time, what is space, what is thought?

Why do I think the way I think?

Or, much worse, why do I think?

Even that is not certain.

If these questions arise in our hearts, if these thoughts concerning life haunt our very dreams, then the beauty of the Supreme Yoga is realised.

We have to come to the end of the tether, we have to experience despair, we have to go right down to the edge of the precipice, ready to be knocked over.

Then you know what danger is, then you know what grace is, then you know what lies beyond what is called life.

22nd December The Light of Truth

Cosmic consciousness is like brilliant light, like the sun.
It shines, and when it shines it illumines everything in the world.
It does not need another light to illumine itself.
It is pure light in which there is no shadow.
That which is consciousness cannot be said to be unconscious.
Awareness being awareness is aware - not of itself, not of others, but aware.
Unfortunately, the awareness in our case has descended into a subject-object relationship and a consequent fragmentation.
So, the path lies through observation or enquiry, but it is important to bear in mind that any object is objectionable.
An object is an object, but as truth it is objectionable.
And so we must push it aside and try to look deeper within to see that I have turned the subject into an object.
Truth is true.
One should not be satisfied with anything that presents itself as the truth.
Anything to which someone may point out as true should not be accepted.
Even if the mind suggests, or a thought suggests - which means 'I think this is true' - even that is suspect.
If it is possible to think of it, it is a thing - what you think is a thing; that is, an object and not the subject.
And all objects are projections of a subject or parts of a belief system - ideas, opinions, fragmentation of some sort of knowledge.
Since it is not unfragmented whole truth, it is not true.
It is like a bucket of seawater you can bring here.
It is of course water from the Indian Ocean, but it is not the Indian Ocean.
If you believe in it there is no harm, but that is not true.
If you believe that something is the ultimate truth, OK, go ahead.
But can the ultimate truth be known? No. Is the ultimate truth unknowable? No.
We are aware of an awareness which is not divided into subject-object.
Even in the darkest chamber you know that you are alive. How?
How do you know that your head is still on your shoulders?
There is an awareness at that point which is incontrovertible, you cannot argue about it.
That sort of awareness is there even in our ignorant day-to-day life.
On the basis of this, it is reasonable to assume that even the ultimate truth is not unknowable.
You know you exist? How?
By the same token the ultimate truth knows that it exists.

23rd December Is There a Purpose?

How can a simple thing be made complex?

Did you ever think of that?

You are here and we are here too, and perhaps the purpose of our getting together - if there is a purpose at all - might be served beautifully if we just look at each other, smile and go away.

Yet there is first a suggestion (I wanted to say 'illusion') that there is a purpose, and then I have to decide how best this purpose can be achieved.

Because I think quite a number of possibilities exist.

An extremely simple thing is getting more and more complicated.

There is a purpose and, to serve that purpose, quite a number of possibilities exist and someone has to make a decision.

What we have never bothered to ask is, 'Is there a purpose at all?'

(It sounds a bit primitive to enquire into this fundamental thing.)

Have we gathered together for a purpose?

If so, who determines this?

If there are 50 people, there are at least 75 purposes - because some of us have two or three!

Each one has a different purpose, a different attitude, a completely different outlook.

Once we have assumed that there is a purpose (because the complicated mind refuses to see, or ask itself, 'Is there a purpose to it?') we assume that there is a purpose for which we have been delivered into this world.

If you will forgive my being light-hearted, the only purpose is that I was a burden to my mother.

She wanted to get rid of this thing!

It could have been as simple as that - and once the delivery has taken place her problem is solved.

My problem need not arise.

I am here.

The art of 'awareness' is very much like the awareness of a thorn that has entered your foot and cannot be removed.

You are extremely vigilant not to aggravate the trouble and while you do your work, you are ever careful not to let the thorn go deeper into the foot, to hurt you.

For how long?

For a whole life time!

This art of continuous self-watchfulness can be learnt and mastered.

If however there is self-condemnation or self-pity, the mind will refuse to watch; and if there is self-justification the whole purpose is defeated.

24th December A Greeting: A Prayer

It is customary during Christmas and New Year to wish one another all happiness and joy. We might even feel nice about it since we have been wished it by so many of our friends, it should be so.

But that is wishful thinking!

Christmas comes again and with it, thoughts of Jesus Christ.

But deeds have fallen into disuse and a lot of words are poor substitute for good works.

All over the world, people are eager to keep Jesus out of Christmas: it is a time to enjoy life, and Truth is a thorn in the flesh of most people, even as it was in that of Pilate.

"What is Truth?" asked Pilate.

It was framed perhaps as a question; that was the original mistake.

It should be used as a statement: What is Truth.

A genuine spirit of enquiry, search and research, a seeking, a knocking and an asking.

We have replaced these with ready-made packages of dogmas and doctrines, lids and labels, prejudices and privileges.

Says Dr. Radhakrishnan in his highly inspiring work Eastern Religion and Western Thought: "Jesus had an abhorrence of dogma and never encouraged the metaphysical and theological complications which are responsible for a good deal of casuistry, intolerance and obscurantism; and also explains that "The teaching of Jesus had for its aim the making of spiritual souls who are above the battle of creeds and of nations".

May we be reborn as spiritual souls this Christmas!

Jesus was the 'Word made flesh', Truth made flesh.

Yet, what is truth? What, What, What?

Let us keep asking "What?" and answering "What" till we find the Christ in our heart.

Sanjaya, the wise man, declares in the Bhagavad Gita - "Where there is Krishna, the Lord of yoga, and where there is Arjuna, the wielder of the bow, there abides success, prosperity and security."

This however is no sectarian teaching; nor is it limited to a certain period of history.

Yoga is the meeting of Krishna and Arjuna.

It is the union of sight and light, of the seeker and the sought, the knocker and the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord of Yoga waits for you within yourself.

The seeking, the knocking and the seeing are Arjuna: but this seeker should be vigilant, alert and alive, 'the bow strung and the arrow fixed'.

At this auspicious time of the year I greet you with "Happy Christmas" and immediately I pray to you, "Be alert and vigilant. Seek. Knock. Find! The Lord is seated within you."

25th December Yoga and Christianity

Christmas comes once a year.

A year is long enough for us to forget its significance.

In fact, every morning the average man is subjected to a landslide of irreligious debris which effectively submerges any little religious thought he might have striven to plant in his heart earlier in the day or the night before.

The newspaper, the radio, the journals, the television and the telephone bring these irreligious influences right to his bedside.

Lord Jesus cautioned: "The kingdom of heaven will not give entrance to every man who calls me 'Master, Master'; only to the man that does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

How does one know what the will of the Father is?

On some general principles the Holy Bible is forthright and it states that will in the most unmistakable terms - for instance, 'Love thy neighbour' (and the parable of the Good Samaritan reveals that the neighbour need not belong to your faith or community).

But there are other questions where a correct interpretation of the Biblical guidelines may be needed.

Whose interpretation?

And how does the interpreter himself arrive at the Lord's will?

Of course, prayer is the answer.

Lord Jesus cautions again: "But when thou art praying, go into thy inner room and shut the door upon thyself and so pray to thy Father in secret.

When you are at prayer, do not use many phrases."

Prayer is not what often goes by that name in most religious traditions, but in fact it is meditation, communion with the Lord.

This is what 'yoga' means: communion, not as a ritual, but as a spiritual exercise.

To be holy one has to achieve 'wholeness'.

To achieve 'wholeness' means resolution of all conflicts and all duality.

In fact, that is communion!

Hence communion is holy; and if you are holy, you are in perpetual communion.

This is possible only if you 'see' Jesus in your heart, if He is 'born' in your heart, and if, in the words of Krishna's Bhagavad Gita, you do total self-surrender so that He and He alone will be the reality in your heart - He who is the Universal Being, in whose love we are all linked and made one Whole.

May Christmas witness this miracle in your heart and in your life!

26th December Love Your God With All Your Being

With the approach of Christmas and New Year, people's minds and hearts turn to Jesus Christ.

We recollect his exhortation to love one another, and to 'love your enemy'.

We look around - there is no love even among friends!

We look within - in our hearts there is everything but love.

Yet, we think we love.

During a week-end Yoga seminar in Stellenbosch (held in a Roman Catholic monastery) a friend suggested that the talks should be on 'love'.

We think we can talk of love.

We think love is physical and we endeavour to make love metaphysical.

But love eludes us!

Narada in his Bhakti Sutras defines love vaguely as 'supreme love for That'.

(That stands for God.)

We do not know what God is, but we know what 'others' are.

We are aware of our 'love' for others.

Narada tells us to 'love God with a love that far excels all other loves'.

When confronted with this exhortation, we begin to look within and discover that our earthly relationships are all polluted, corrupted and tainted by lust, greed, selfishness, vanity and possessiveness (jealousy), and that we have associated love with all these base emotions.

We realise that our love of God should be totally free of all these.

Since we have no such relationship with God, it is possible to free our love of God from all this.

Of course, we pollute our love of God with our petitions, but He has His own ways of weaning us away from this weakness.

We are made to realise that what we need has already been provided by Him, and that He does not always respond to our foolish prayers.

This realisation frees prayer from the petitioning spirit.

In pure, supreme love, we pray: "Thy will be done."

A miracle takes place.

When this 'supreme love of God' comes to dwell in our hearts, all contrary feelings are banished from it. Neither hate nor fear can dwell in the heart which is filled with supreme love of God.

Unbeknown to ourselves we find ourselves in a position where we love all: there is no other emotion in our heart.

May that supreme love be awakened in your heart in the New Year.

27th December Kaivalya (Freedom)

'Kaivalya' means 'one alone', independent of everything else.

What is liberation?

In aiming at freedom, how do I relate to others?

Can I go on oppressing someone else?

As long as there are these two - dominator and dominated - freedom is nebulous.

What is meant by freedom?

Some call it 'nirvana', which is literally 'blowing out the flame'.

While the flame is burning, there are two things: the oil and the flame.

It is the oil that makes the flame.

When the flame is extinguished, the fire (the energy), the burning potential, is still there in the oil.

But now instead of two, there is one: one alone (kaivalya).

If I watch carefully what goes on in my life, I see that the feeling of happiness results from someone's kind actions (words or deeds) towards me.

When, on the other hand, I receive insults, I am unhappy.

There is pleasure on the one side, pain at the other.

What have I got to do with it?

Am I involved in this?

Whether you erect a 'beautiful' building or an 'ugly' structure, space is still space, omnipresent, independent of what is, was or will be in it.

Watching myself I note that I am happy when a hope, a wish is fulfilled.

When frustrated I am unhappy.

Where are happiness and unhappiness?

They are directly related to hope.

As long as there is hope, there must be disappointment, suffering.

As long as there is desire to be happy, there must be unhappiness.

As one goes on seeing all these polarities, one realises one's freedom.

When I have no hope, I have no despair; once I am free from the desire to be happy, there is no more unhappiness for me.

As long as there is still duality: 'I' and 'another', this 'I' is subject to happiness, and its opposite.

Therefore the yogi goes deeper into his consciousness in order to understand what this 'I' is.

He keeps on asking.

Then, by the grace of God and by serious practice of yoga, one realises that perhaps the thing I have been calling 'I' is like the room.

Within the room, outside the room and through the walls of the room only space exists.

And yet in that one space, somehow I imagine the existence of a partition, a small room.

What is this room?

Nothing but imagination, an idea.

What is 'I'?

Nothing but imagination or an idea.

When this knowledge arises, then the idea of 'I' as a finite being disappears.

With the realisation of the indivisibility of one Cosmic Being, there is total freedom or kaivalya, because then there is consciousness of only One.

There is no other.

That alone exists neither I nor you.

There is oneness, freedom.

28th December Thoughts on Tantra

That the sexual act is associated with places and forms of worship is open to several interpretations.

It is quite possible that the period when this happened was characterised by super affluence and associated with vulgarity which had such a pervasive influence that it invaded religious sanctuaries, too; or that religion was so neglected that only sexual exhibition would attract people to resort to religious practices; or that sexuality was regarded as an integral part of life (to be given no less, and of course, no more value than as such); or, at the other extreme, the act of union - not only of the human male-female but union on a cosmic level - is the power manifestation of the divine, forever veiling and unveiling itself (like day and night), forever splitting and uniting (like the atomic particles and cells of the body), such separation and unity being the divine play and the inevitable preliminary to the creative process in which Being and Becoming themselves are inseparable.

We might have completely lost nature's message.

Something that nature wishes to prevent us from experiencing is naturally endowed with a sharp sensation.

The pure reaction of the intelligence to this is hardly ever seen - except perhaps in a little baby.

But, later on, thought invents its own code, overriding nature's message, and suggests that it is something of an obstacle to overcome and builds an image of heroism around this concept.

The experience is still painful, but thought intervenes every time and hallows it - till it becomes a deadly habit.

Tantra may even be a 'return journey'.

By re-interpreting these habits as neither pleasure nor pain, it tries to elevate them to the neutral state where it is possible to experience them with the pure unbiased intelligence. It may also be that, recognising the impossibility of conveying the pure spiritual truth of oneness to the sophisticated intellectuals, the sages presented the truth in symbolism which would immediately revolt the intellectuals and would appeal to the simple, pure-minded.

(I have often resorted to humour while addressing a mixed crowd of eager-young and rigid-aged, so that the latter rejects the whole thing as buffoonery and the former gets the message.)

This may even be the best approach, as otherwise if the message is rationally presented the intellectuals sprint to the defence of this ignorance, and a lot of energy is wasted in pointless polemics.

29th December Spiritual Awakening

When does one spiritually awaken, and how does this happen?

There is a big difference between being aware and thinking one is aware.

What does it mean to be awake to the truth, to the reality?

How does one know what reality is?

And, even when you think you know the reality, is that the reality or is it your own concoction?

Some scriptures give vague characteristics of this inner awakening, but no definite clue to the question: how is it brought about?

It is brought about when you contemplate the truth concerning life.

However, right from childhood you are told that you are a girl or a boy, a South African, an Indian or whatever, and therefore you don't feel any need to investigate life's meaning.

Swami Sivananda often said, "When you get knocks and blows in the daily battle of life, then your mind is duly turned toward the spiritual path."

This is true in the case of some but not all (otherwise there would be millions of seekers!).

So, what is it that turns a person's attention upon himself so that this investigation may commence?

To this question there is no answer.

A spiritual awakening has to happen.

One does not know how it happens and therefore we say, "God's" grace.

We don't know the origin but we know the characteristics.

Once this inner awakening has taken place one cherishes it like a priceless gift, and once it has taken place it is insatiable, burning everything it touches; which means it has absolutely no obstacles.

Any obstacles become fuel making the investigation burn more furiously.

That is perhaps one of the reasons why our guru Swami Sivananda once remarked that he had no obstacles at all in his spiritual practice.

This inner awakening is able to digest, assimilate and utilise everything - good, bad or indifferent.

They who complain of obstacles on their spiritual path are not awake.

This inner awakening has a two-fold thrust.

There is great enthusiasm which arises because of what you call faith, and there is also tremendous doubt, so you do not blindly accept anything that can be verbalised or intellectually grasped.

Thus you cannot abandon the search for truth nor accept anything as the final or ultimate reality.

From there on you may lead your own life.

Your religion, family relationships or social status do not matter.

Once this inner spiritual awakening has taken place there is no mistaking it and it leads you inevitably towards enlightenment.

30th December Immortal Self I Am

This is the ABC of truth in relation to the body: This is A body. Let it B body. Then you C body - but not 'my' body.

"I am neither mind nor body. Immortal self I am."

Mortal life is a straw caught in a gale and yet its immortal essence is the space unaffected by the gale.

Mortal life is bounded by life and death, but the immortal is unborn and deathless.

A glimpse of the immortal makes you fearless, and realisation that all life is mortal makes you equally fearless.

We are dying all the time.

There is a lovely couplet in the Bhagavatam: "You have only one constant companion. He was born with you - Death."

Whatever is born must die.

Our body is dying constantly, but 'I' cannot die.

O Life! What are you?

With the ticking of the clock, the rising and setting of the sun, the changing of the calendar, where are you leading me, unborn, deathless, immortal soul?

You are unbearably exacting in your demands, yet those who have eyes can see that eating is not to appease hunger (hunger is never appeased), but to rediscover the Self which is beyond hunger and thirst, sin and suffering.

Life is for Self-realisation, the antithesis of selfishness and self-aggrandisement.

Life's goal is immortality, beyond the world.

Be good, do good are the way of preparation; serve, love, meditate, realise, are the steps.

Cosmic love is the key.

This is the truth, this is the Self.

This will make you free, here and now.

31st December My Prayer For You

Bhagavad Gita:

I am the Self seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings. (X:20)

Bible:

In Him we live, and move, and have our being. (Acts 17: Vs. 28.)

May God bless you all with health, long life, peace, prosperity and spiritual enlightenment. May you all walk in the Light of God, with God, with your hand in His, with the whole of you in His palm.

Live in God; love in God; serve God in all beings.

May that Supreme Being dwell in your eyes and in your heart, seeing His own Self in all; seeing God Himself in all.

May we thus swim in the ocean of bliss.

May that peace that passeth all understanding dwell in your heart, radiate from every pore of your skin, bathing everyone who comes within the circle of your aura with that inexpressible peace.

May harmony radiate from you, dispelling the darkness of disharmony wherever it is found.

May bliss radiate from you, dispelling the gloom of suffering, misery and pain - physical, mental, moral and spiritual.

May God lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from mortality to Immortality.

Assert every moment of your life: "I am the immortal Self. I am not the body. I am not this finite, limited mind. I am the immortal Self."

May you be established in that Self-realisation right now.



VENKATESANANDA: A TRIBUTE

*Guru brahma guru vishnu gurur devo maheshwara
Guruh sakshat parabrahma tasmai sri gurave namah*

Guru Brahma

'Guru is Brahma the Creator'

From people scattered all over the world, Swamiji created a 'family' of seekers, dedicated to his work and the search for truth; through his devotees he created Trusts to publish his books, every page of which is illumined by his wisdom and his own unique way of presenting the Eternal Truth. Revered Swami Jnanananda once remarked: "His lectures flowed like the Ganges"; and, like the Ganges, each time the 'water' was fresh and new, with his own unmistakable flavour.

In Mauritius and Australia, ashrams were created with his own special touch — the murtis and statues were placed outdoors in the garden so they were always surrounded by fresh flowers; he didn't like to see flowers plucked unnecessarily. In Mauritius there are Sivananda schools, Sivananda roads and streets and a beautiful Sivananda stamp.

It is said in the *Varaha Purana, Part 1, Chapter 58*

Mata 'ntara pravistanam api bhaktir bhavisyati

'All people from all over the country and abroad, people belonging to different faiths, too, will participate in Lord Venkatesa's festivals and will develop devotion to Him.'

Swamiji was the instrument in making this possible. In his centres all over the world there are murtis of Lord Venkatesa, and Venkatesa Puja is done regularly.

Swamiji 'created' the idea of satsang without a master present, so

that *wherever* he was, satsang in the various centres would go on just as if he were there. His wonderful translations of the major Indian and Buddhist scriptures, presented as they are in the unique form of daily readings, made this possible — as also the fact that he never allowed his personality to intrude into the satsang atmosphere so that there was no feeling of loss when he was not there; but, of course, when he was present there was that extra light and inspiration which was an inseparable part of him!

Swamiji rarely gave instructions or made requests — except about mundane day-to-day matters; but he would drop a hint. If we picked up the hint the full unstinting flood of his attention would be there. Not the smallest most insignificant factor would be overlooked. (If we did not pick up the hint his love was unchanged. If we tried but did not succeed, or abandoned the project, there was never the slightest reproach or disappointment. It might have worked out — it didn't; he dropped all thought of it.) For instance, when we were planning to present Swami Madhavananda with a cake at his birthday satsang, Swamiji wanted to know every detail of the planning of the actual cake making; he supervised the construction of the frame which supported the cake; he supervised and made suggestions for the decoration, candles, etc; he taught us a chant and made us rehearse it several times (with much laughter); and we had to rehearse also the carrying of the heavy cake, planning the easiest route to the Samadhi Hall. He worked out the timing so that we arrived at the most appropriate moment, he organised a messenger to keep us informed of the events in the satsang and he checked that the person who was deputed to light the candles had a fresh dry box of matches. He asked us to dress in our best clothes for the event, he even arranged us in order of height — shortest at the front — and he made the whole proceedings such fun that we felt as if it were our birthday celebration! (If the cake toppled and the decorations caught on fire it was because of our incompetence at carrying out his instructions, not because of any oversight on his part.)

Sometimes, however, his grace alone enabled things to happen. For instance, in 1971 he dropped a suggestion that Perth should have an ashram. When the idea was taken up his grace enabled the Sivananda Ashram in Perth to grow and flourish, so that in a few years we have a magnificent building, a beautiful big new hall and a press — all of which grew without drives for funds, and seemingly without much effort.

Gurur Vishnu

'Guru is Vishnu the Preserver' in all His aspects:

As *Krishna the irresistible delighter of hearts* Swamiji's love flowed unstintingly to all; and, as in the case of Krishna, his 'lilas' sometimes bewitched, bemused and confused us. His wisdom, laughter, humour, thoughtfulness, compassion and that particular 'something' that radiated from him delighted all who knew him. In those whose hearts were troubled he created peace and acceptance. No-one could remain in his company for long without feeling their worries fade into insignificance — and then one wondered what the problem had been!

Like Krishna, what he was in essence was hidden from all. The longer one knew him the more one realised that one knew him not at all. He made everyone feel special, yet no-one was special to him; or everyone was!

As *Rama the embodiment of righteousness* all the virtues effortlessly had this abode in him. His loving care and foresight towards all his friends never failed. He did nothing that was not for our ultimate good, even if at the time it seemed to our small minds to be incomprehensible. Mostly we discovered his wisdom only in retrospect. If we had problems and wrote to him about them he usually answered promptly, though sometimes he would give no written reply but the answer would come without the need for physical communication from him, transcending time and space. Often before even mailing the letter the answer would come in some mysterious way — either in a letter that day from him, from a chance conversation, from a passage read at satsang or a sudden inspiration in meditation.

Swamiji gave us lots of work to do once we had shown that we were eager to serve him, and the only reason he created the work was to enable us, through service, to be on the same 'wave-length', so that communication was possible. He could have easily had his books professionally typeset and beautifully printed, but that would have meant that so many people would not then have had an opportunity to serve him while he travelled extensively. But with the bookwork we were always kept busy in his service and in tune with him. What blessings he showered on us through this bookwork! We were (and are) constantly dwelling on his thoughts, constantly feeling his presence, and at the same time slowly growing in spirituality while becoming familiar with the scriptures and philosophy of yoga.

As *Venkatesa the destroyer of sins* he looked at us 'through the corner of his eyes' (only with love). And even without complete surrender to him his compassion protects us so that our troubles come only to 'thigh level'. We do not drown in our troubles. (Lord Venkatesa, after whom Swamiji got his sannyas name, is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. There are two extraordinary features — the face is covered and one hand points to the feet while the other gracefully rests at thigh level — which denote that God can only look at his devotee through the corner of his eyes, and if one surrenders to Him one's troubles come only to thigh level.)

Gurur devo maheshwarah

'Guru is Maheshwarah (Siva), the destroyer or redeemer.'

Swamiji destroyed all our misconceptions and illusions; he had none of his own. If one were to say (with a long face), "Swamiji, I am disillusioned," he would be delighted: "Wonderful. That is the best thing that can happen. Throw away all your illusions and look for the Reality." He constantly saw the Reality behind the names and forms; his every action flowed from that realisation. He lived in that Reality.

The aspect of *Rudra* was seen very rarely. Only if someone was misguided enough to try to manipulate him or do something against Swami Sivananda's mission, was this aspect manifested (and his 'hiss' was something terrible to witness!), but if he was misunderstood or badly treated there was no reaction — except perhaps a gesture of absolute humility and self-effacement. He could be a very stern disciplinarian, but it was always what the recipient needed for his spiritual growth, never because Swamiji was angry.

Guruhsakshat parabrahma

'Guru is verily the supreme Brahman Himself'

We saw the beauty of his form; we basked in his love and laughter; we were stimulated by his wisdom and clarity of thought; we were enchanted and delighted by his play on words to make obscure spiritual concepts clearer; but in all that, we glimpsed only a ray of his Light, and only occasionally were we aware of the depth of the Ocean that he was.

Tasmai sri gurave namah

'Prostrations to that Guru.'

May our hearts be purified that he may dwell there always.

Swami Venkatesananda

Parthasarathy (as Swami Venkatesananda was called before he entered the holy order of Sannyasa) was born to the pious and noble parents, Sri Srinivasan and Srimati Lakshmi Devi, in a village called Koil Venni in Tanjore District, South India, on 29th December 1921. Many incidents happened in his childhood and boyhood which reveal his inborn divine qualities. The boy's mind began to turn to devotion and love towards Lord Venkatesa of the famous shrine of Holy Tirupati. When Parthasarathy was a boy of twelve years, he came across books written by Swami Sivananda who was destined to become his spiritual Master and Living God. In course of time Parthasarathy held a responsible position at Delhi as a personal assistant to highly influential Secretary to the Government of India. But the call of the spirit was irresistible. His contact with Swami Sivananda through books had developed into contact through frequent letters. Then it flowed into regular visits to the holy Ananda Kutir, whenever Parthasarathy managed to get leave from his office duties. The personal contact with the Master soon overwhelmed Parthasarathy and he cut off all bonds that bound him to the secular life, renounced a promising career and offered himself as a dedicated Sevak (servant) at the lotus-feet of his Divine Master Swami Sivananda.

Coming thus into the spiritual fold of Swami Sivananda at a very young age, Parthasarathy took to the renunciate in the year 1945 when he resigned the excellent position he was holding. He came with the specific intention of placing himself entirely at the service of Gurudev's Universal Spiritual Mission, with intense devotion, utter dedication and unparalleled spirit of service. He soon made himself indispensable to worshipful Gurudev, especially, in his global spiritual dissemination work. From early 1945 up to the time when he breathed his last, his entire life was whole-souled absorption in the sublime good work of Gurudev Sivananda. Parthasarathy was ordained as a monk on 8th of September, 1947, the sacred Diamond Jubilee of Sri Gurudev. He became Swami Venkatesananda.

The Swami was a versatile personality. He placed his great talent in the service of the holy Master. He was one of the pillars of the Divine Life spiritual movement. At a certain period he was the very right hand of worshipful Gurudev. Such was the great confidence reposed on him by worshipful Gurudev, that every morning, when Gurudev stepped out of his little cottage on the banks of the holy Ganga, he would first go directly to Swami Venkatesananda's room situated right in front and sitting there, he would many a time consult him and seek his opinion on matters concerning Jnana Yagna (dissemination of spiritual knowledge) and publishing activities of the Society and at times on other important matters as well.

He was a tower of strength to Sri Gurudev during the latter's unique "All India Spiritual Awakening Tour of 1950" which had electrified the entire nation and powerfully stirred up the spiritual consciousness of millions of

people creating a wave of religious awakening and inspiration throughout the country. Gurudev declared about Swami Venkatesananda: "He is the Crest-Jewel of my Mission. He is the resplendence of my work. Will I see anyone else shine brighter than him! Surely none have I seen so far. He is a tower of strength to me and my Mission." During the tour he took down notes of every word spoken by Sri Gurudev at each centre and has brought a voluminous work "Sivananda's Lectures: All India Tour."

He came especially to work vigorously in the correspondence section of the Ashram. One can say that volumes of typewritten material connected with correspondence is to be turned out, even during night hours by this Swami. The entire career of his in the Ashram was devoted to writing, recording of Gurudev's speeches and editing the day-to-day messages and conversations of Gurudev which he did to the point of perfection and perhaps most of the Sivananda: Day-to-Day that we have these days recorded are the works of Swami Venkatesananda, principally. After tireless service and winklessly working in the Ashram for Sri Gurudev's glory, his main mission was to bring glory around the aura of Gurudev's Centre, The Divine Life Society, which task he fulfilled very commendably. He has produce a superb work entitled "Gurudev Sivananda" which is not merely a detailed biography of Swami Sivananda but also an authentic record of the history of the Divine Life Society, - a reference book involving great labour.

The Indian devotees in South Africe, headed by Swami Sahajanandaji Maharaj, required a powerful spirit of the Divine Life Society to enthuse them and Swami Venkatesananda was the man chosen by Sri Gurudev for the fulfilment of this Mission there. Thus in 1961 Swami Venkatesananda was deputed to South Africa, where he did a marvellous work. Reports came from there Swami Venkatesananda shook the whole of South Africa and he hoisted the banner of Sri Gurudev's Mission. After working there for some years, he moved to other countries - Mauritius, Madagascar, and some countries in Europe, - and later on to the East, particularly to Australia. Most of his later days were spent in South Africa only, where again he did vigorous literary work, writing and compiling excellent text books on philosophy, Yoga and scriptures. He produced more than 50 books covering a wide range of subjects pertaining to philosophy, religion, metaphysics, ethics, self-development, spiritual Sadhana (spiritual practice), the different Yoga paths, Gurudev's special teachings, comparative religion, psychology and the different scriptures like the Ramayana, Srimad Bhagavata Purana, Yoga Vasishtha, the Gita, the Devi Mahatmya, etc., the very latest volume being a compilation of the teachings of Lord Buddha, entitled "Buddha Daily Readings." No other single disciple of worshipful Gurudev has made such an admirable, substantial contribution on such a scale to the great Master's world-wide spiritual ministry of the present-day mankind. The crowning glory of his contribution was the spade-work he prepared of the "Complete Work of Swami Sivananda" in 18 volumes, of which 6 volumes have been printed under the auspices of the Birth Centenary Celebration by the Divine Life

Society, Freemantle Branch of Australia.

A scholar without ostentation, a writer without pedantry and a speaker without idiosyncrasies, Swami Venkatesananda has made himself lovable and valuable to all. As an exponent of Yoga, as an Organizer of Bhajan (singing of the Lord's Name) Group, as an inaugurator and promoter of a Society Branch, as an editor and prolific writer of many books, as a versatile genius, he always carried distinction in serving the cause of the Society in many countries of the world.

The great saintly soul passed away on the 2nd of December, 1982 at the Sivanada School of Yoga, Johannesburg, South Africa. In the special services offered at the Rishikesh Ashram, Swami Chidananda paid the following tribute to him: "I offer my homage to the sacred memory of our departed brother Revered and Worshipful Sri Swami Venkatesanandaji Maharaj whom his own pre-monastic, earthly, physical mother used to regard as younger brother of Chidananda-like Rama and Lakshmana. He was unparalleled and versatile genius, Chronicler-Editor. I pay my reverential homage and my most loving prostrations and adorations to one who had become in many ways an integral part of this Ashram, a part of our very lives and, as such, he is within the hearts of all those who have been closely moving with him, and in the hearts of all of us enshrined as an inseparable part of our inner being. He had the rare capacity of endearing himself to everyone, to children, to his equals, to the venerable old and to everyone. He is the universal being. He was in harmony with all. The part that he had played in Jnana Yajna work or the dissemination of spiritual knowledge by teaching and preaching the spiritual culture of India, the knowledge of Vedanta and the science of Yoga to the people all over the world, is something unequalled. He was a tower of strength to Gurudev and one of the greatest contributors in his World Awakening Mission, both from the Ashram and later throughout the world after Gurudev's physical passing."

Speech delivered by Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj on the 26th December 1954, at Sivanandashram, Rishikesh, for the celebration of the 34th birthday of Swami Venkatesanandaji

The Ideal of a Sadhaka

To have such a fiery renunciation and the spirit of service: what is it due to? There are people of 50 and 60 who do not get such ideas. What is it that made Swami Venkatesananda renounce the world and adopt this life? That is, I think, good Samskaras and virtuous qualities. He had been a Sanyasi in the previous birth, leading the divine life, leading a Sattwic life on the banks of the Ganges, studying the Upanishads, Brahma-Sutras and Gita. I am not saying this to glorify him; but to point out to you that here is an example before you. Every one of you should, in this life, try to do virtuous deeds, practise Ahimsa, Satyam and Brahmacharya, to have aspiration—intense aspiration—and burning Vairagya. You may not have it, but you will have to cultivate it by Satsanga, study, enquiry into the nature of the Self, reflection. That is your foremost duty.

These people may or may not deliver lectures. Look at Sri Krishna Ashram of Gangotri; the very life of such people you will have to watch—their simple food, simple living, their love of Japa, Kirtan and meditation, and their Vairagya. Vairagya is the greatest wealth, the real wealth, which weans the mind away from the objects of the world, which is a strong weapon to cut off all the attachments that you have for the world. For such a man of Vairagya, there is no world, no object of sense-enjoyment can attract him. When you become a district-judge, you rejoice; when you get a little thing of this world, you rejoice; when you have accumulated a little bank balance, you rejoice; but look at these people: they know that you cannot have eternal satisfaction in these objects but that you can have it only in the Atma, the Innermost Self that resides in the chambers of your heart.

*Jyotishaamapi tat jyotih tamasah paramuchyate,
Jnaanana jneyam jnaanagamya hridi sarvasya vishtitam.*

That, the Light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable and the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all.

These things of the world do not attract them, because they have got the spiritual wealth of good Samskaras, through enquiry and reflection. You must possess Vairagya which will lead you to the attainment of the Atma, the inexhaustible spiritual wealth.

But you do not have aspiration! The mind is full of evil tendencies. You may be endowed with a little talent; and you will be puffed up. The mind is veiled. There is Avarana. In spite of your intellectual faculties and talents, you will not be able to understand and realise the Universal, Cosmic, Supreme Being, whose nature is Satchidananda. You can get many Oxford University graduates, but not many Jivanmuktas who have realised the Self—that is the

supreme veiling power of Maya. You know; yet you will not be able to understand it! There is something beyond these senses, mind and intellect; the Supreme Soul, full of Bliss, the only Reality! How many educated people have understood this, and are trying to realise it? How many have got even an aspiration to realise it? That aspiration is the real wealth.

Aspiration. Renunciation. Meditation. These will make you a king of kings, emperor of emperors – *kaupenavantah khalu Bhagyovantah*. Very few have realised this, and very few are attempting to realise this. Because, they are satisfied with the little toys of this world. They have not got the supreme subtle Vichara-Buddhi which is the greatest wealth of man. That comes through selfless service, study, meditation, enquiry, Satsanga. Nobody wants this! How many people want the wealth of the Atma? How many are attempting to possess these qualifications which are necessary?

How many intellectual people try to sit in Padmasan and do Japa and meditation? People don't know what Padmasan is! They do not know what Prana is, nor the relation between Prana and the mind and the will. They want to become scholars. Their mind will run in that direction only. Their goal is an American degree. If a doctor becomes an "America-returned" specialist, he will get Rs. 32 as his visiting fees. God has given you an intellect. You must understand the magnitude of human suffering. What is the nature of this world? What is the mind? Ask yourself. Then only will you become a great man. He is a great man who tries to possess Vairagya, who tries to practise the Sadhana-Chatustaya. Equip yourself with Viveka, Vairagya, Shat-Shampat and Mumukshutwa. What is Viveka? People do not know. They will deliver lectures on engineering! Maya will make your mind work along the external grooves. It is its duty. Maya hides the real and makes the unreal appear as real. So, you want only external things.

Ye hi samsparsaja bhogao dukkha-yanaya eva te,
Adyantavantah kaunteya na teshu ramate budhah.

The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only generators of pain, for they have a beginning and an end, O Arjuna; the wise do not rejoice in them.

The pleasure that is derived through contact of sensual objects is verily the womb of pain. You will have to meditate upon this; then only will you get the discriminating intellect, which will make you bold with the power that is born of the wisdom of the Self. Cultivate discrimination and dispassion. That only will make you bold. Otherwise, moving along the sensual grooves, you will lose everything.

God has given you this chance—this human birth—to rise above sensual things and to realise the goal of life. How many of you are attempting to do so? Mere study of the scriptures will not do. You can talk. But, have you got that burning Vairagya, the burning aspiration, which Lord Buddha had, which Raja Gopichand had? Then only can you become the king of kings. If you do not attempt to possess these, then you fail in your duty.

You forget this truth. It is difficult to give up, to renounce these sensual

objects. But, if you are sincere, the path will be easy; it is easy for those who resort to Satsanga, who close their eyes and make a little enquiry: “What is this world, what is the goal of life, what is mind?” Only such enquiry will lead you to everlasting peace. Very few people do this. You will have to generate these Samskaras now, just as Venkatesanandaji did—and so he has come here.

This clearly proves there is rebirth. You come down here with your Samskaras. You wanted to become an engineer; God has given you birth that will enable you to fulfil your ambition. But this will not give you satisfaction. In your old age you will suffer from all sorts of diseases and lead a miserable life. Your mind is full of evil Vasanas. How many selfless acts have you done?

How many people try to do selfless service? All are selfish. Close your eyes and practise self-analysis and find out for yourself what are the various kinds of impurities that are lurking in the mind, and what are the good qualities that you are possessing.

Amanitwam adambhitwam ahimsa kshaantiraar javam,
Acnaaryopaasanam saucham sthairyam aatmavinigraha.
Indriyaartheshu vairaagyam anahamkaara eva cha.
Janmamrityujaraavyaadhi dunkhadosha-anudarshanam.

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control, dispassion, egolessness, perception of the evil of birth, death, old age, sickness and pain.

Are you trying to cultivate these virtues? Even to possess one virtue, and give up the little tea-habit, how difficult it is! How many good acts have you done today? Which evil quality is troubling you? You must know. That is the thing which will make you a real man, a Superman.

How many of you are keeping the spiritual diary? What is your spiritual progress, compared with the previous year's? These are the things that matter. He is the greatest man, a real sovereign and emperor who is striving to answer these questions. He may not possess any wealth or treasury; but he who possesses dispassion, discrimination, serenity, spirit of selfless service, spirit of sharing with others what he has—he is the greatest man. Man is generous to himself, He can spend any amount on the saree of his daughter; but his heart is very small, because he has not cultivated the spirit of charity. He cannot share with others what he has. He closes the doors and takes first-class Bourn-Vita.

To his friends he may give a little. To servants he will not give even water! Such is the nature of the great man who has got a number of factories! Analyse yourself. You have a small heart, and a small intellect. Your world consists of only yourself and four or five relatives, and perhaps a few friends who will help you when you are in difficulties. No. You must have a large heart. You must become one with the entire mankind. You must share with others what you have. Every day, as soon as you get up, ask yourself: “How many good actions was I able to do yesterday?” and resolve to excel the previous day in doing good to others. Thus would you evolve rapidly.

Practise patience, tolerance and endurance. These are the qualities you will have to develop. Then you can become fearless. He has practised these already; so they have become the basic traits in him. If you cultivate these qualities and acquire the spiritual wealth, whatever you want God will give you. Spiritual wealth alone will make you king of kings. You will be freed from all sorrows when you see the One Common Consciousness everywhere. You must have Sarvatma-Buddhi. Then you will be free from sorrow, pain and delusion. Then you will enjoy supreme satisfaction, perennial joy and immortality. That is the goal.

The little sensual pleasure is no pleasure at all. When there is a patch of eczema, you scratch yourself and seem to enjoy it. Later it bleeds, and you suffer from intense pain. Similar is the case with the pleasure derived from sensual objects here. You must have a bold understanding to ask yourself: "Is this really pleasure?" and arrive at the conclusion that it is no pleasure at all. Study the phenomenon of deep sleep; that itself will give you the knowledge that you can get real joy and peace only when you go beyond the objects of this world. In deep sleep, there are not objects, and there is no objective enjoyment. Yet, you enjoy great bliss and peace there. You say: "I slept well; I enjoyed my sleep; but I did not know anything." In spite of the absence of the sensual objects, you got the homogeneous experience of bliss. This joy is not to be had in the sense-objects. The third cup of milk produces retching and vomiting. If it is really pleasure-giving, it ought to give you that homogeneous experience, eternal and everlasting. It is only to the dull-witted, gross persons that the worldly objects appear to be pleasurable. For a man of discrimination, it is no pleasure at all.

Real happiness you can have through meditation, with a pure, concentrated mind, filled with Sattwa. People may write articles and theses; but how to convert Rajas into Sattwa? No one knows this. Nobody practises introspection. As soon as you get up, you put on your suit and go to the office. In the evening you go to the club and at night go to sleep. Where is time for you to introspect? Only regular and systematic introspection will enable you to control the mind; and only he who has controlled the mind will be able to enjoy real happiness. Only when the mind is filled with Sattwa, you can have concentration of mind. In a Sattwic mind alone does real Atmic enquiry arise. He alone can discover the answer to the question: "What is my real essential nature?"

Are you the body? No. The body is a perishable object made of five elements; so you are distinct from the body. Similarly, you are not the Prana, and you are not the mind, either. In dream the idea of the body does not exist, and yet you exist; in deep sleep even the mind vanishes, and yet you exist. When there is great fear or shock, the mind does not function. Therefore, it cannot be the ever-intelligent Atma. These are the enquiries that you should pursue. Regular introspection, Japa, Kirtan, meditation, Atmic enquiry, only these will make you strong and really wealthy.

It is your important duty to try to realise the Self in this life itself. This is

your foremost duty. This only can remove your worries, cares, anxieties and make you blissful at all times, under all conditions, and all kinds of environments.

Meditation is very difficult. Before attempting to meditate really, you should equip yourself with the virtues enumerated under Yama-Niyama. Be truthful. Practise non-injury. Practise Brahmacharya. These are all the things that you will have to cultivate, little by little. If you are earnest and sincere, everything will become easy.

Have a programme of life. Know what is the real goal. Do not imagine, “When I retire, I will be able to do Japa and meditation.” When all your energy is squeezed out, you will not, in your old age, be able to sit even in Padmasana for a few minutes. When you are young, you must meditate, and practise enquiry. Study Yoga-Vasishtha, Viveka-Chudamani. Yoga Vasishtha will raise you to supreme Brahmanhood and make you the real king of kings. He who is full of desires is a beggar of beggars; he is a slave of the senses, slave of the Indriyas, slave of emotions. Try to rise above all these and then you can attain to the realisation of oneness or unity, and realise the fearless Atman.

The Atman is fearless. There is no anxiety, no worry, no misery in the Self, where there is neither east, nor west, neither south nor north. In the Self there is neither hunger nor thirst, no old age or death; no Tuesday or Monday. He is Sat-Karma and Sat-Sankalpa. Only if you attain this Atman will you be free. That is your essential nature. Tat Twam Asi, you are That, my dear children.

But the realisation of this Truth, Tat Twam Asi, is not so easy. By selfless service you will have to purify your mind of the dirt which has accumulated in it; and then steady the mind through Upasana, and through the Grace of the Lord the veil (Avarana) will be removed. This, our Venkatesanandaji has done.

When we celebrate the Birthday of Venkatesanandaji, we are celebrating the Birthday of the Supreme Being. We worship, we remember the One Common Consciousness which, through the veiling power of Maya, appears as all these,—like the blueness in the sky, like a snake in the rope. You will have to enquire. You have been overwhelmed by these little appearances, by these names and forms; there is an ocean of peace, Satchidananda, behind these. Eko Devah Sarvabhuteshu Gudhah. That One Supreme Consciousness is hidden in all these beings, like butter in milk. He who is able to see the one Light of lights, he alone really sees. Otherwise he is blind. Study the Upanishads, Atma-Bodha, Tattwa-Bodha. Cultivate reverence to teachers, reverence to saints, reverence to Sadhus. They only can redeem you. The Sanyasin is Sakshat Narayana Himself. He who is able to infuse into you discrimination, has placed you under a debt of gratitude to him, which you cannot repay in millions of lives. Your mind runs along the sensual grooves. He who is able to turn your mind away from the sensual grooves—you cannot very easily repay the debt you owe him. He who is able to infuse into you a

little aspiration and to turn your mind slightly from the sensual objects, you cannot repay without Sadhana the debt you owe him. Such are the people who wear this gerua cloth. Glory to these worthy children of Sankaracharya, Dattatreya, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanatkumara. He who is not able to understand the one all-pervading Presence, whose mind runs along sensual grooves, is a burden upon earth, however great he is intellectually, and however wealthy he may be. He who is not filled with discrimination and dispassion is a burden upon earth. But he who is able to turn the mind from the sense-objects, who is devoted to the Omnipresent Indweller, is a saint. He is a saint who has understood the real significance of the Four Mahavakyas: Prajnanam Brahma, Aham Brahmasmi, Tat-Twam-Asi, Ayam Atma Brahma. You are not this small being of 5'4", with all sorts of cravings, Vasanas and Trishnas (these have made a beast of you), but Tat Twam Asi—thou art That Satchidananda Atman. Only he who has not understood this runs after the sensual pleasures which appear to taste like nectar in the beginning, but eventually turn out to be poisonous.

Understand the magnitude of human suffering. Understand what this world can give you—only a little sensation, titillation of the nerves. If you waste your life in these little things, how foolish you are! You have forgotten the goal of life. One anna of pleasure is mixed with fifteen annas of pain. Can you recognise this as pleasure?

So many virtues have to be cultivated. So many scriptures have to be studied, not only for the sake of knowledge and understanding, but for the sake of practice. Remember:

Vihaaya kamaan yah sarvaan pumaamscharati nihsprihah, nirmamo
nirahankaarah.

Sa shaantimadhigachchati, indriyartheshu vairagyam Anahamkara eva
cha, janmamrityu-jaravyadhi dukkha doshanudarshanam.

The man attains peace, who, abandoning all desires, moves about without longing, without the sense of mine and without egoism, indifferent to the objects of the senses, reflecting on the evil of birth, death, old age, sickness and pain.

Are you keeping these as your ideals before you? He who is free from cravings and temptations, he alone will enjoy peace. Your endeavour must be daily to find out "How much Ahamkara and Mamakara have I got?" You will have to repeat these formulas every second and annihilate desires, Ahamkara and mineness. Then you will enjoy real peace.

Are you attempting all this? Have you got this ideal before you? What are the obstacles? When you want to eradicate I-ness and mine-ness, you must feel within and have devotion to the ideal of Atmic realisation. Keep the goal always before you. Then comes control of Indriyas. The man who has controlled the Indriyas gets Supreme Peace. This is the real science. This is the Brahma Vidya taught by Uddalaka to Swetaketu, by Yajnavalkya to Maitreyi. These Upanishadic truths must enter your very bones and nerves. Then you will have selflessness, egolessness, desirelessness, Vasanalessness,

Trishnalessness. Then only can you be called a human being.

God has given you a chance. When you have strength, knowledge, beauty, health, etc., and when you have been provided with books, teachers—everything—if you do not attempt for Self-realisation, then God is not to be blamed.

People have begun to ask: “Where is God?” He is everywhere. It is absurd to ask for proof of the existence of God. Who created the mind with its several faculties? Who pumps blood in your heart? Who causes the peristaltic movements? He is the All-pervading Essence. He is hidden in all these things, like oil in the sesame seed, like butter in milk, like electricity in the wires. God is Swatah-Siddha. The mother says: “Here is your father”—you don’t ask her for further proof. Similarly, you will have to repose faith in the words of the scriptures and the sages. God is everywhere; He is in the Light, in the Sun, in the Moon, in the Stars, in every speck of creation.

He who is sincere, who has aspiration, he will realise God. Every man is selfish. Therefore, Shastras say that you must do charity. By charity you purify yourself and you recognise the all-pervading Atman. You grow in unity and oneness. Charity gives rise to knowledge of the oneness, the unity of Consciousness.

There is time yet, if you start doing the right thing from this very moment. But you must apply yourself seriously to Sadhana. How many of you are getting up at 4 o’clock in the morning and contemplating upon questions like: “What is the world in Infinity?” If you are attempting to have knowledge of Infinity, will you waste your time in reading newspapers? No. Even an attempt at the realisation of the Self raises you to Brahmaloaka. Actual realisation takes you beyond sorrow, once for all; Tarati Shokam Atmavit. Such a man becomes Brahman Himself: Brahmavit Brahmaiva Bhavati. He enables others to cross the ocean of Samsara: Sa Tarati sa Lokan Tarayati. All sorrows are banished from you even when you think of the Atman: Aham atma Nirakarah Sarvavyapi Swabhavatah.

Do you get this knowledge in your Universities? You should exert yourself to acquire this Brahma Vidya. That alone can make you bold. The whole wealth of the Lord belongs to you. All divine Aiswaryas, all Siddhis and Riddhis roll under the feet of the sage of Self-realisation. That you should attempt to become. Repeat formulas like: Ahan-atma Nirakarah Sarvavyapi Swabhavatah; Jnanamritam Suddham Atindriyoham. Even the mere repetition of these formulas makes you fearless and helps you to cross this ocean of Samsara.

There are three kinds of impurities in the mind. One is Mala (dirt) which is removed by the practice of Karma Yoga. The other is Vikshepa (tossing of the mind) which is removed by Bhakti, and the third is Avarana (veil of ignorance) which is removed by Jnana Yoga. Thinking, willing, feeling all these must be developed harmoniously; then only will there be integral development. That is your duty.

You should not merely study the scriptures and deliver lectures; but you should also discipline the mind. Whatever the Gita teaches, you should put into practice. Simply lecturing on Brahma Sutras will not do. If you are not given due respect and honour, you will lose your balance of mind. Not only study and lecturing; you should introspect, analyse and find out what virtues you should develop and what defects you should get rid of. That leads to Brahma Jnana,—not mere study. Develop humility. Cultivate the spirit of selfless service. You must watch for opportunities. If a man is lying down on the roadside, hungry and thirsty, you must run to him with a cup of milk. Otherwise your study of Brahma Sutras is useless. You should not bring in Vedantic arguments to support your Vedantic indifference here! One man said to the other: “My house is on fire; please come and help.” The latter replied: ‘Well, friend, this world is unreal. Where is house, where is fire?’ This is sheer foolishness. The world is unreal . . . for whom? For a Jivanmukta. If sugar is a little less in coffee, you will know whether the world is real or unreal for you. It is only when you discipline yourself through untiring selfless service, that Atma-Jnana will arise in you.

Venkatesanandaji is not a small boy. All the Ashram work he is doing. I must tell all this, so that other people may be inspired to emulate his example. He has not uttered a single word that could displease me. If I want to get some work done urgently, the next morning it is ready; he would do it sitting up the whole night. He has no ego. He will never say: “This is not good.” He is pleasing in manners. We should always try to please everybody. People generally bring in the story of the donkey, the old man and his son, in support of their argument that it is not possible to please everybody. This is wrong. I always try to please everybody, whatever be the nature of people. When a man comes to me, I find out what is good in him and try to please him. Though it may not always be possible, you must try to please all to the maximum extent open to you.

One old man wants to take Sanyas. He is still postponing it. “You have got Moha for your son,” I said. “Yes, I have,” he says! Look at the force of Samskaras. He who is living with Sanyasins in this birth will gather sufficient Samskaras now to take Sanyas next birth. One girl has come here; she has taken Sanyas. I thought she won’t be able to pull on and, therefore, refused to give her Sanyas. The Sanyas-spirit sometimes comes and goes. She observed Satyagraha; she did not take food for three or four days. Her mother came to be and said: “Give her Sanyas.” Her father also blessed her. Then I gave her Sanyas. Such is the force of good Samskaras. It won’t allow you to lead a worldly life. When spiritual Samskaras begin to take effect, it is like the atom bomb bursting.

Venkatesanandaji’s letters are full of honey. Our Professor Swami Sadanandaji is a great critic; and he is all-appreciation for Venkatesanandaji’s letters. They are preserved in the iron-safe by those who receive them. He does not even prepare a draft; he sits at the typewriter, and the letter is at once ready. No stenographer will be able to compete with him. Many are

coming; but if I say one thing, they will write something else. That is one kind of “stenography”! But Venkatesanandaji; even if he hears once, it is quite sufficient for him, he will reproduce the speech beautifully. He has a very acute grasping power; there is no confusion in his brain. But for him all that I say,—not only I, but many others like Dr. Graham Howe, Prof. Burt, Sri Satchidanandam Pillai, Major-General A.N. Sharma, and others who have delivered lectures here—would have been lost. He is a man to be adored.

I told Venkatesanandaji, when I was at Roorkee: “Don’t always refer to me as Gurudev, in your talks; just say Swamiji, that will do.” He said: “If I say ‘Swamiji,’ it does not express the Bhav of my heart; it creates an illusion of equality with Gurudev.” Then I allowed him to continue to refer to me as Gurudev.

The work he does, other people won’t be able to do. So many books and pamphlets are coming out of the press—all through his work only. He has written my day-to-day talks in Four Volumes, yet to be published; he has also written my life-sketch and the “Bhagavad Gita for Students” which is very much appreciated by all. He has performed much austerity, Tapas, in previous births also; and he has rendered selfless service to Yogis, sages and great people. This has taken the shape of his talents, his kindness, good qualities and good Samskaras. I have seen people here; when they have a little talent, their head swells. Whoever may come, I make him a lecturer, the cashier and most important man, in order to encourage him, the new inmate. But some people’s heads swell. Venkatesanandaji is not like that. He is humble and egoless. Similarly, Swami Chidanandaji also; therefore, everybody loves him.

He, Swami Chidanandaji and the others, are the people to continue the work of the Divine Life Society. Every man is useful; and Venkatesanandaji is useful in his own way. Just as in the body there are so many cells, tissues, etc., and life is sustained by their harmonious working, similarly if all of you work harmoniously, together, you can do grand service to the world.

He is overworked, and there is nobody to help him. The work he does is very great. During the All-India Tour, Venkatesanandaji was working day and night. He was given a small room in the Tourist Car. He had not even a proper place to sit and work. Yet he has produced the huge volume “Sivananda’s Lectures: All-India Tour.” But for him this book would not have come out at all. Saradanandaji also contributed a lot to this book. He used to ascend trees and buildings in order to take photographs. He is also working in his own way; and he is a genius. Thus is the work carried on by all these people. May God bless them all with health, long life, peace and Eternal Bliss!