

L B

Generally,
Gross typ. Just a
few suggestions / typos.

AS Lord Krishna says
(Ch 18, v 48) - All human work
is imperfect, like smoke w/ fire.
We can't expect it to be perfect.
But it is well done.
RWS

Rocks Are Melting

The Everyday Teachings of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati

**Jagadguru Shankaracharya
Jyotirmath, Himalayas, 1941-53**

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Only one who is happy can bring happiness¹ to others.

One can only share what one has. To beg for money from a poor man is foolishness, for wealth can be gained only from a person who possesses it. In the same way, knowledge [vidyā] can be gained only from one who possesses knowledge. Similarly, great happiness can be gained only from God [Bhagavān] who is the storehouse of happiness.

No one can obtain happiness in worldly life [*samsāra*]² without the grace³ of God [Bhagavān]. Only those who have faith in Paramātma⁴ and in spirituality can acquire it. The rest remain in the trap of unhappiness and sorrow.⁵ In worldly life we do not find anyone who is truly happy. One who lacks something considers another who has it to be happy; but he who has that thing is also unhappy. For example, a man who does not have a child assumes the man who does to be happy, yet the man with children is unhappy for wanting something else. This shows that there is no happiness in worldly objects. The essence⁶ of happiness is Paramātma, who is *Sat Chit Ānanda*.⁷ Only by coming into contact with That which is the embodiment of happiness can the individual soul become happy. There is no other way. Paramātma is like a general merchant⁸ who can deliver any object desired without ever running out of supplies. But to obtain his favor, we must conscientiously follow the precepts of the scriptures,⁹ for nothing will come from merely reciting the glorifications¹⁰ of his name. Can anyone become a rich man just by continuously reciting a list of merchandise?

¹ The root word Gurudev employs here is *sukha*, which may be inflected as both adjective and noun.

² The term *samsāra* is sometimes rendered as "the world." Yet its meaning implies not just birth in this world, but also (as its Sanskrit root of "streaming" connotes) the flow of continuous rebirths experienced by the individual soul.

³ We translate *kṛpa* as "favor" or "grace." It can also connote "kindness."

⁴ Paramātma is the "Great Self," which when seen without illusion is none other than the Atman. It is also rendered as "God."

⁵ The term *dukkha* is the antonym of *sukha*.

⁶ *Svarūpa* is a classic term for the essential form of something or someone. Here, Gurudev says Paramātma, which exists within and without, is truly happiness, joy.

⁷ Existence (Being), Consciousness, and Bliss. It is the nature of Existence to become aware of itself, and this awareness is blissful.

⁸ English used in the original.

⁹ The term *vidhi* refers to enjoined religious rules of purity, commanded ritual actions, and proscribed interpersonal and social dynamics.

¹⁰ The term *māhātmya* denotes a specific genre of devotional praise stories.

To expect to gain happiness from worldly-minded persons is a mistake. How can he who is himself unhappy make others happy? The happiness which appears in *samsāra* is a relative happiness.¹¹ One person is happy in something, whereas another is happy in something else.

If you must beg for happiness, then you should only beg for it in a place where all happiness is available. Remember that only one who is inclined towards the Supreme [Paramātma] can obtain happiness and peace in this world [*samsāra*]. Others cannot. Seeking happiness in worldly life is like trying to quench your thirst by collecting drops of dew.

2

Fulfill life's purpose by leaving this world behind.

No one can say for how long we have carried the heavy load of life—sometimes in the body of an elephant weighing five tons, sometimes in the body of an ant, sometimes in the body of a human. This burden can only be lifted through the grace of God [Bhagavān].

Conduct yourself such that in this very life you may receive the grace of God and are not forced to return to another bag of urine and excrement¹². This will happen only when you follow the injunctions of God as contained in the *Veda Śāstra*.

Whatever your station [*varṇa*]¹³ or stage [*āśrama*]¹⁴ of life, carry on your enjoined duties¹⁵ at all times, and continue to take the name of God.

Carry on your *upāsana* [spiritual practice] regularly, morning and evening, while conducting your daily life and activities in such a way that you always benefit others.

¹¹ In the Sanskrit, *sāpekṣa* means “dependent,” or “relative.”

¹² Many sages from Indic traditions which stress freedom from the cycle of rebirth refer to the body in highly derogatory ways to shock their listener from complacency and attachment. See, for example, Maitri Upaniṣad 1.3, Manusmṛti 6.76-77, and Dhammapāda 150. We have chosen a “polite” rendering to spare the reader the shock of the four-letter Anglo-Saxon equivalents of the earthy Hindi employed in this talk.

¹³ The term *varṇa* refers to one's caste and social status.

¹⁴ *Āśrama* means resting place or stage in life; one's home is an *āśrama*, and so is a monastery. In this context it refers to the four stages of life which a devout Hindu may pass through on the path to liberation. *Brahmacarya* is the period or *āśrama* of a person's life which is devoted to education. The *Gṛhastha āśrama* is the period of householding and family life. A person who moves on to the third stage, *Vānaprastha*, becomes a forest-dwelling renunciate who retires from active engagement in the world, but still maintains links to his former identity. The fourth stage, *sannyāsa*, entails full renunciation, including the loss of one's secular identity.

¹⁵ [insert Skt or hindi fr original and DEFINE w/alternate expressions]

And if it is not possible to assist others, then at least see to it that you do not harm anyone.

It is extremely essential to see Bhagavān immanent everywhere.¹⁶ If you see Bhagavān immanent everywhere, then you cannot sin. Whatever sin you have committed in the past will thus be destroyed; but see to it that you do not commit sin once you have started taking the name of God, for it will be very difficult to free yourself from those sins which are committed after that. This is because the sins which were committed earlier can be destroyed by a mere dip in the Gaṅgā, but the sins committed in the Gaṅgā [within a holy place, or in a holy state] will be as *vajra-lepa bhavisyati*—as if set in stone. Hence, be fearful of committing sins while taking the name of the Lord.

Following your own *dharma* [fn here?] and taking the name of God [fn here?] will eliminate all the accumulated sins from your previous births, bestowing happiness and peace.

3

We have no control over the fruits of our actions.¹⁷

A thief is free to steal, but the court will determine his reward; he is subject to judgement whether he likes it or not. Man, similarly, can do as he wishes. He can choose virtuous acts, for which he will go to heavenly realms and can enjoy divine pleasures, or he can choose evil acts, for which he will go to a hell such as *Raurava*¹⁸ and suffer extremely fearsome and sorrowful results.

Human birth is considered to be a birth of action. Here we are free to act; that is, whatever action we wish to do is possible. If we wish, we can even meet in person with Paramātmā, who is omnipotent and *Sat Chit[cit] Ānanda*.

We must all reap the fruits of our actions—under no circumstances can we escape them. However, the scriptures tell us: [Sanskrit] *Dharmaṇa pāpamapanudati*, “By performance of dharma, sin is destroyed.” Hence, if someone does commit a sin at some time, he should do meritorious acts to destroy the bad karma. Virtue will increase and thereby eliminate the effect of sins. Therefore it is said: [Sanskrit] *Japato nāstipātakam*, “By repeating [*japa*] the name of Bhagavān, sin is destroyed.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. *Bhagavad Gita* 4.35, 6.29-30.

¹⁷ Cf. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.47, “You have control over action alone, never over its fruits. Live not for the fruits of action, nor attach yourself to inaction.”

¹⁸ *Raurava* is one of the 28 hells. This hell is for those who have persecuted other living beings; their one-time victims assume the form of fierce *ruru* serpents and prey upon those who formerly tormented them.

¹⁹ This is a quatrain from the fifth segment of the 108 Names of Vishnu Stotra. The full verse is: *anantam kṛṣṇagopālam japato nāsti pātakam* | [full translation]

Explains OK Intro

If an individual has committed sins, he should plunge into virtuous action and should also take the **appropriate name of God** with faith and devotion. In this fashion the accumulated sins will be destroyed, and within a short time virtue will begin to accumulate, by the help of which he will reach the true path [*sadgati*].

Even if one remembers Bhagavān unintentionally, one's sins will be destroyed, just as fire burns even when touched unintentionally. The purport of this statement: even as it is the self-nature²⁰ of fire to burn, it is the nature of God that any remembrance of Him destroys sins.²¹

Because the mind has become sullied with the impressions of countless births, it is difficult to generate love [*prema*] for Bhagavān, but even with a crude mind, if one contemplates God one can obtain his grace.

This fact must be grasped: that whatever the condition of the mind, whatever sins may have been committed in the past, it doesn't matter. The power of righteousness that resides in the name of Bhagavān makes it impossible to continue doing evil in the present.

4

Don't waste the higher powers of mind.

Nowadays people consider themselves to be highly intelligent, yet all their cleverness is focused on their bellies. All their cleverness ends up in their stomachs. Their intelligence [*buddhi*] does not go beyond their bellies. They devote all their time to bandaging the ulcers in their stomachs, and thus their whole lives are wasted. In reality, there can be no greater loss than this in a person's life.

There is no alternative to serving, and no one is free from the necessity of worship. *Sarvajña sarvaśaktimān kartumakartum anyathākartusamartha*. If you do not worship God, who is "omniscient, omnipotent, the doer and non-doer, He who is capable of anything," then by default you will serve at the feet of some king, nobleman [*rais*], merchant [*seth*], or wealthy person [*sahukar*]. If we do not take help from a great person, then we will have to take help from a lesser person. Therefore, the great-minded will depend on Paramātmā, who will assist us in this world and the next.

Regardless of how much wealth one accumulates, it will always be limited, and there is always the possibility that a change of fortune [due to *prārabdha*] will bring

gavam koti pradanānasya aśvameva śatasya ca ||5|| The complete verse also assures that the chanting will bestow tens of thousands of cows and hundreds of horses.

"By continuously repeating the name of Krishna Gopala, falling will never occur."

²⁰ We translate Skt. *svabhāva* as "self-nature", or "essential nature".

²¹ Cf. *Bhagavad Gīta* 4.37, "As a blazing fire turns fuel to ashes, so does the fire of knowledge (*jñāna*) turn all actions (*karmāṇi*) into ashes."

poverty. This shows that it is of little use to rely on one whose own position is unstable. Therefore, he is most clever who sings hymns of praise to Paramātma, who can grant happiness everywhere in this world and the next.

5

Don't attempt to fulfill every desire.

Even the great ruler Daśaratha, a powerful *cakravartin*,²² could not have all his desires fulfilled—despite the fact that Lord Vishnu had incarnated as his son [Rāma], and the divine king Indra had given him half of his throne. Unable to satisfy his desire to see Rāma crowned king, he thrashed around like a foolish bullock and died.²³ On seeing that even great and powerful ones such as these cannot fulfill all their desires, why hope to fulfill all your dreams even while sleeping, much less in the waking state?²⁴

The divine and the mundane must go hand in hand, because it would be impossible to maintain the body if you were to abandon all karma. Therefore do those things which are necessary to sustain the body, and leave aside fulfilling all other cravings. In this world [*samsāra*] there have been exceedingly powerful beings, but even they could not fulfill their desires. Therefore, do only the actions required to maintain the body, and concentrate your efforts on attaining the greater vision of Paramātma.

Trying to fulfill your desires by gaining the objects of your desire is like trying to relieve eczema by scratching. Worldly affairs are like coarse, entangled threads; as you try to remove one, the rest start to unravel. Therefore conduct the affairs of the world with deep wisdom, concentrating on the greater goal of discrimination [*buddhi*].

6

Face the good and the bad with equanimity.

²² *Cakravartin* (“wheel turner”) refers to a ruler whose power is so great that he “turns the wheel” of the world. Usually, this epithet refers to a being who rules through righteousness (*dharma*), as contrasted with the “big wheel” of Western culture.

²³ Gurudev here alludes to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the great Hindu epic about the *avatār* of Vishnu (*Viṣṇu*) named Rāma who incarnates himself as the son of Daśaratha to restore righteousness to the world through the defeat of the demon Rāvaṇa. Daśaratha's despair occurred when Rāma was forced into exile upon the demands of his co-wife Kaikeyi, who demanded that her son be coronated instead of Rāma, the son of Kausalya.

²⁴ Hindu texts identify many states of consciousness. Here, Gurudev contrasts the state of sleep (*svapna*) to wakefulness (*jāgrata*) and argues that in neither state is it possible to have all of one's desires fulfilled.

05:
"The self-nature of humans..."

A human being cannot sit quietly doing nothing for very long. The human self-nature is to continually act through the mind, intellect, vital breath, and sense organs.²⁵ Each individual, according to his latent tendencies,²⁶ will take up various activities. Hence it is natural to act.

It is a confirmed fact²⁷ that one has to reap the fruits of one's actions. The fruits of actions done within a brief span remain unexhausted even over a long period of time. Thus, the actions done in one life cannot be fully exhausted in the next, and unexhausted actions accumulate. Until one exhausts all the karma of previous lives, the individual soul must enter the womb again and again. Therefore, upon attaining human birth, one should exhaust this store of karma.

The Vedic scriptures have categorized karma in three divisions—accumulated, commenced, and current karma [that which is being created in the present]²⁸—and explained the means to exhaust each.²⁹ Accumulated karma(s)³⁰ are endless and cannot be exhausted by experience. They are removed by knowledge [*jñāna*], or by undivided devotion to the lotus feet of Bhagavān. *Avaśyameva bhoktavyaṁ kṛtaṁ karmaṁ śubhāśubham*³¹ Commenced karma can be spent only by experience; there is no other way. By dedicating current actions to Bhagavān, one can avoid bondage. In this fashion, having burnt up accumulated karma through the fire of knowledge, commenced karma by experience, and current karma(s) by dedicating them to Bhagavān (as and when they are performed), one can be freed [*mukta*] from [karmic] bondage. This state is called *mokṣa*.

If for some reason you are unable to undertake a spiritual practice [*sādhana*], and are therefore impaired with respect to attaining knowledge, at the least you should start dedicating your current actions to Bhagavān. Then the actions done in this life will not be the cause of future bondage. Along with this, you should remember that even a sage [*jñāni*] cannot escape the experience of commenced karma. Hence, the unhappy occasions which result from commenced karma must be faced resolutely. One should not lose heart even in calamitous times. In the same way, do not become negligent when enjoying happy occasions. If you act in this fashion, merit will accumulate, and you will win both this world and the next.

²⁵ Viz., *manas, buddhi, prāṇa*, and *indriya-s*.

²⁶ The term *saṁskāra* denotes the multiple past impressions created by the thoughts, desires, and deeds of an individual which carry over into other lives as latent tendencies toward future action.

²⁷ Viz., *siddhānta*.

²⁸ Viz., *sañcita, prārabdha* and *kriyamāṇa*. These three forms of karma have been taught by Advaitan sages for over 1000 years.

²⁹ Viz., *upaya*, "skillfull means" or clever approach.

³⁰ Sañcita-karma

³¹ Brahmananda Saraswati leaves untranslated this Sanskrit phrase which means, "Invariably, [the residue of] a deed [which has been] done must be experienced, whether auspicious or inauspicious."

Follow the path that makes human life worth living.

Do not waste precious time by worrying about the stomach and dwelling on the pleasures of the senses (speech, touch, form, taste, and smell). You have been carrying on these enjoyments in previous lives as animals, birds, and insects. If you continue in this way even after becoming a human being, you will remain trapped within the 8,400,000 life-forms,³² and attaining release will be difficult. Value your human birth appropriately and act with discrimination. Understand what path will truly benefit you, and act in such a way that you need not return to the prison of the womb³³.

Commit your life to virtue [*dharma*]. Submitting to the bondage of *dharma* yields great fortune. Despite having freedom of will,³⁴ don't imagine that you are free from the domain of *dharma*. If you submit to the rule of *dharma*, it will better you in this world and even elevate you in the other world [*paraloka*].

If you think you are free of the domain of *dharma*, then you will surely fall under the domain of *adharma*, and will ultimately destroy yourself. Minding your own *dharma* is the means by which human life can be fulfilling. Minding one's own *dharma* is urgent in all the fields of individual life—personal, social, political, national, and international. In all areas, if one maintains his body, senses, mind, and intellect according to *dharma*, he can avoid *adharma*.

Neglecting *dharma* means adopting *adharma*. In whatever field one neglects *dharma*, in that field *adharma* will take over, and that particular field will become sullied.³⁵ Subsequently, all the fruits of *adharma* will befall the offender alone. Only he who commits the action will be held accountable for the result. Hence, while carrying out any action—be it personal, social, or political—consider carefully whether the deed is opposed to *dharma*. Do not execute even a portion of an action which is opposed to *dharma*. Sometimes actions which are opposed to *dharma* may be profitable to a man whose intellect is characterized by aggression or darkness,³⁶ but their net effect will be

³² "Eighty-four lakh" (a lakh is a measure of 100,000) is a catch-phrase for an infinite number.

³³ In one of the minor anecdotes of Brahmananda-ji's life, he reportedly claims to remember his experience in the womb in considerable detail, recounting the discomforts that less wakeful souls normally forget. We assume that here he refers to the confining nature of worldly life, as exemplified by its compulsory cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

³⁴ We have translated *svatantra* or "one's own devices" as having "freedom of will." Brahmananda Saraswati contrasts *svatantra* with *dharma ka tantra* and *adharma ka tantra*, which we translate as "the domain of *dharma*" and "the domain of *adharma*."

³⁵ *Kaluṣita* can mean "profane, sinful, polluted, dirty, or black."

³⁶ *Viz.*, *rajoguṇa* and *tamoguṇa*.

powerlessness and disaster. In sum: following dharma is always good, and following adharma or the *dharma* of another [*paradharmā*] is always disastrous.³⁷

8

Liberation Comes From Action.³⁸

The phrase *Niṣkāma karma* should not be interpreted as indicating that one must do actions “without any desire whatsoever.” Action is simply not possible without desire. Two motivating factors are required for initiating an action: one is the knowledge of *iṣṭasādhana*, which means knowing that by carrying out a particular action one can fulfill a desire; the other is the knowledge of *kṛtasādhya*, which means knowing that one is capable of accomplishing the action. Unless one is sure of both these things, the action will not be initiated. If even one of these two is in doubt, the impulse to act will not be carried out. In this way, desire must precede the very impulse to act. Hence, the real meaning of *Niṣkāma karma* is that the action which is intentionally dedicated to God [Bhagavān] can be called desireless action. Actions whose fruits are surrendered to God do not become a source of bondage.

You have the right to perform actions, but you should refrain from desiring to reap the fruits of action. Because the individual soul has been experiencing such hardship over the span of millions of births, it has poor discrimination as to what it should request. Therefore, when it does beg, it asks in accordance with its own level. Thus if the individual soul desires to reap the fruit of its action, it will desire something unimportant. If we leave it up to God, then He who is all-knowing and all-powerful will distribute the fruits from his level, and bestow something great.

One who acts mindfully, ever devoted to Bhagavān, attains the abode of the Supreme. In accordance with law, he attains heaven, nearness to God, and liberation³⁹—permanent release from the bondage of life and death. The means to obtain liberation is to perform action while remaining free from the bondage of *karma*.

9

³⁷ See Bhagavad Gita 3.35, which assures the reader that following one’s own dharma, however humble, is preferable to following the dharma of another. “...The dharma of another brings danger.”

³⁸ More literally, “from *karma* itself *mokṣa* appears.”

³⁹ Here Brahmananda-ji employs three terms indicating spiritual attainment: *sālokya* connotes a world (heaven); *sāmīpya* means “proximity”, or nearness to God; and the more common term *mukti* means “liberation” or “release.”

Live purposefully by preparing for the future.

In comparison with the efforts they expend to know God, worldly⁴⁰ people spare no effort to become endowed with wealth, children, and fame. Such people ignore the correct means of attaining greatest happiness, and instead employ the wrong means, leading to sorrow and pain.

It is impossible to obtain happiness from worldly things. Trying to obtain happiness with the help of worldly objects is like trying to marry the son of a barren woman: how could one even prepare for such a marriage when no such person exists? When there is no real happiness inherent in worldly objects such as wealth, spouse, progeny, and so forth, then how can we hope to obtain happiness from them? It is due to lack of discrimination that we seek happiness in the wrong way.

Living becomes purposeful when one prepares for the future. If, as the proverb says—*Yadī jholī bharanā aur khālī karanā itanā hī hai*⁴¹—you live merely to fill the belly in the morning and empty it by the evening, then life is futile.

Udar (peṭ) kī jholī savere bharo aur sām ko khālī karo.

You desire to live a worldly life because you have not yet had a vision [*darśana*] of God: one should live instead for that experience.

When seeds are roasted there is no chance for them to sprout later. Similarly, when the human mind is roasted in the fire of knowledge and devotion, then there is no chance to return and germinate anew in the cycle of life and death. Therefore, try to become a devotee and knower [*jnānavān*]. But don't become that type of knower who mutters, *Śivo 'ham, Śivo 'ham, om, om*, and *Ahambrahmāsmi*, “I am Śiva, I am Brahman,” and yet retains love for *saṁsāra* in wealth, women, progeny, and so on. Such superficial knowledge produces more harm than benefit.⁴²

When people call themselves *Brahman* yet stray from *dharma* and *karma*, they lack sufficient strength to remain in that state. Hence, as long as you are not free from the love of worldly objects, do not fall into the trap of “*Brahman*,” but instead, develop devotion to God. When you practice devotion for a long time, greater desire [*rāga*] for *Bhagavān* will dawn, releasing you from the cycle of birth and death.

⁴⁰ I have translated the term *saṁsārī* as “worldly” in this teaching.

⁴¹ This glum Hindi proverb maintains, “Just filling and emptying your stomach is all there is.”

⁴² Brahmananda Saraswati here satirizes would-be knowers of non-dual, Advaita philosophy, who although still attached to *saṁsāra*, chant mantras identifying themselves with the Lord Śiva and the great universal principle of Brahman.

Free yourself from the painful cycle of birth and death.

The suffering one must undergo at the time of death is many times greater than the suffering at the time of birth. Scriptures say that the suffering at the time of death can be as intense as the stinging of thousands of scorpions at once. To bear the pain of a single scorpion's sting is very difficult. Just imagine then if thousands were to sting at once! From this we can infer the excruciating pain at the time of one's death.

Along with the pain of birth and death, there is no end to the suffering one can encounter during one's lifetime. It is impossible to free oneself from this suffering without the realization of Īśvara.⁴³ As long as one has attachment [*moha*] towards worldly life, one must return to *samsāra* again and again. Attachment dawns because of impure mental states. Hence, first one should replace all impure impulses with pure impulses, and then one should strengthen only one strong desire, the desire to realize God. This impulse must become so strong that no other impulse can arise before it.

11

Let not the last days of life be spoiled.

It is generally seen that whatever one worries about or practices for a long time is that which is remembered at the time of death. If a Vedic scholar goes mad, even in madness he will repeat the verses of the *Veda*. In the same way, during the throes of death, one will be unable to come to one's senses. At that time, it is highly probable that one will remember that which one practiced during life. Whatever mistakes that were committed in the beginning of life are already past, but not so the mistakes at life's end. It is said, "all is well that ends well"; in order to avoid mistakes at the time of death, make your preparations now. This is prudence.

12

Don't love this world and its objects excessively.

⁴³ The Lord God. According to Advaita Vedanta, Īśvara is the Supreme Being, who represents the association of the pure Brahman with māyā, and who thus appears to be the author of creation. See introduction: Taking the Name of God.

You will eventually be separated from all objects of this world. These objects, from which separation is inevitable, are not fit to be loved. Furthermore, it is unnecessary to love them. If you love them, you will weep, not only in this life, but in many lives to come. There is a story illustrating this point.

Once Maharishi Nārada went to a village where a local merchant treated him generously as his guest. Seeing his faith and devotion, the sage accepted a glass of his milk. The merchant inquired, “O Maharāj,⁴⁴ from where have you come?”

Nārada replied, “From Heaven.”

The merchant inquired, “O Maharāj, where will you be going?”

Nārada replied, “After wandering awhile in the mortal world, I will go back to heaven.”

The merchant prayed earnestly, “O Maharāj, if upon returning you could take me to heaven with you, it would be a great blessing.”

Nārada said, “Very good, we will go together.”

After a few days of wandering in the mortal world, the sage came back and asked the merchant, “Sethji, shall we go to heaven?”

The merchant replied, “O Maharāj, of course I have to go sometime, but the children are still young and innocent. They cannot manage household affairs. After a little while, when they are ready to take care of themselves, then I would like to go.”

The sage left and then returned after some time had passed. He asked, “Sethji, now shall we go?”

The merchant replied, “O Maharāj, the children have now grown up and can observe and listen to some extent, but they have not yet matured to understand complete responsibility. Next year let them be married, then I will surely go.”

After four years the sage returned and inquired about the merchant at the shop where his children were sitting. “Where is Sethji?” he asked.

The children replied, “O Maharāj, what can we say? Our father used to take care of the whole business by himself, and since he left his body we have been in deep trouble.”

Using his divine [powers of] vision, Sage Nārada observed the whole scene and discovered that the merchant had taken birth as a buffalo. The sage went to the buffalo and asked, “O Sethji, now that you have left the human body, shall we go to heaven?”

The buffalo replied, “O Maharāj, you are so kind. I am ready to come with you, but I think that the other buffaloes in the household are all so weak that if I don’t pull the lead, all work will come to a halt. Moreover, some more new buffaloes are supposed to come. Until then, I’ll carry on the work, after which, by your grace, I will surely go.”

⁴⁴ Nārada and the merchant address each other with respectful terms. Nārada is referred to as “great king,” a common honorific for a learned person or superior, and the merchant—*seth*—is addressed by his class/occupation, but with the suffix of affection, “*ji*.”

The merchant had given him a glass of milk with love, so Sage Nārada came back again after a few years to keep his word and return the kindness. However, on returning he didn't see the beast of burden. He asked the children, "Where is that old buffalo?"

The children became quite sad and replied, "O Maharāj! That old buffalo was so very useful, always leading the others. Since it died, we've been unable to find another buffalo like it."

Sage Nārada meditated for awhile, and thus learned in a vision that now the merchant had become a dog who was sitting in front and guarding his children's house. Sage Nārada approached the dog and said, "Hail, Sethji. What's new? Three lives have passed, now do you think you are ready to go to heaven?"

The dog said, "O Maharāj, you are very kind. I see your kindness on one side, and on the other hand, I see the laziness and irresponsibility of my children. O Maharāj! They are so irresponsible that if I am not here, a thief may come—even during the day—and steal from them. Therefore, I think that as long as I am around, I should guard them. After a few days, I will surely go."

After five or six years, Sage Nārada came back again. He didn't see the dog in front of the door. He asked the children and learned that the dog had died. After meditating for awhile, Sage Nārada saw that this time the merchant had become a snake, and was sitting in the basement guarding the family wealth stored there.

Sage Nārada approached the snake and asked, "Say, Sethji! Why are you sitting here? Has the time come to go to heaven or what?"

The snake said, "O Maharāj, these children have become such spendthrifts that if I were not here, they would waste it all. Therefore I think that the wealth which I have earned with such great effort should be protected; so long as I am living, it would be best to stay here protecting it. Therefore, it is necessary for me to stay here, otherwise I would be ready to go."

Sage Nārada left, disappointed. Coming out of the house, he told the children, "There is a dangerous black snake near your treasure—it could harm anyone who came near it. Therefore, you should beat it. Hit it such that the stick doesn't crush its head. Just hit it on its body. Hit it so that it does not die, but at least leaves your treasury."

Listening to the orders of the sage, the children did as he suggested. They beat the snake all over its body with sticks, and threw it far away.

Sage Nārada approached the snake and said, "Speak please, Sethji. Your children have beaten you up! Are you happy with that or not? Are you thinking of going back to that house and protecting the wealth, or now will you go to heaven?"

The snake said, "OK, Maharāj, I'm ready to go."

The moral of this story is that one who starts loving home, children, wealth, women, and so on, maintaining bondage through such affection, will have to suffer millions of births. Therefore it is said, "Don't love the things of this world excessively." If you love them too much, then you will be forced to weep for many births.

View your friends and enemies with equanimity.

No one is really a friend, and no one is really an enemy. If someone were really the friend of another, then he would always remain a friend. But instead we see that today's friend can become tomorrow's enemy. This proves that no one is either friend or enemy by inherent nature. Friends are the manifestation of our good *karma*; when the fruit of our bad *karma* appears through the agency of a person, it manifests as an enemy. Thus, happiness and sorrow both are the result of our *karma*. No one can give happiness or sorrow to anyone. Enemies and friends are merely the means through which the results of our good and bad *karma* manifest.

When the result of good action arises, then all people appear as friends and they give us happiness. When the result of bad action arises, all people appear as enemies and give us sorrow. Happiness and sorrow are both our own property; you create either one according to your own desires.

If I were to kill someone, I would receive the punishment of death by hanging. The order to hang would be given by the judge and carried out by the hangman, but they would not be punished for killing me, because the punishment we receive is the result of our own actions. Therefore the judge and hangman are not responsible for my death, and I cannot rightly regard them as my enemies.

Just as *karma* is impersonal, so also is the consequence of action, which automatically returns to the doer. There it affects the conscious mind [*cetana*], where it brings happiness or sorrow. Remember that whoever brings us happiness is just the conduit of our good *karma*, just as those who bring suffering are the bearers of our bad *karma*.

Happiness and sorrow are always our own property. Nevertheless, one who becomes the means to deliver the consequences of our actions may mistakenly be seen as the cause for our happiness and sorrow. After fully comprehending this fact, we should free ourselves from attachment and aversion. When our own property is merely being returned to us, why should we blame another? If someone becomes the conduit of good *karma*, then let them appear. We should neither love nor hate anyone. Why love or hate a messenger? The package of happiness or sorrow is ours; so why should we care about who delivers it?

Refraining from attachment or hatred toward anyone, we should peacefully experience the consequences of our previous actions. Whether they come in the form of happiness or in the form of sorrow, both are our own property. Whether the consequences for us are good or bad, we should welcome them cheerfully when they arise.

Confess your misdeeds, but keep your good deeds to yourself.

When we lie, the fruits of our rituals [*yajña*] are destroyed, and the benefits of austerity [*tapas*] are destroyed by arrogance. If we insult a pious Brahmin, we shorten the length of our own life. When we donate something and publicly congratulate ourselves for it in all four directions, then the benefit of giving goes to waste. When you wish to destroy something, talk about it. When you wish to preserve something, cover it up.

If you do something wrong but confess it to another, its effects will be diluted. Similarly, if you do something good and then talk about it, the effect will be dispersed among the people who hear of it, and its effect will be diluted.

See God everywhere and behave accordingly.

In reality, he who worships God with complete devotion is incapable of non-prescribed acts.

Oneness [*ananyatā*: "non-otherness"; identity] with God lies in seeing nothing other than God, everywhere and in everyone. When you manifest this kind of loyalty in devotion you will only be able to do things which are pleasing to the Lord. In the name of *Bhagavān* there is a power to remove sin which is greater than any sinner can withstand. *Valmiki*⁴⁵ and some other sages are good examples of this. Although they had previously been very evil sinners, they were able to leave their evil ways when they concentrated on devotion to *Bhagavān*, and thus became good. However great a sinner you may be, if you take the name of God it is certain that you will attain the path of truth [*sadgati*].

Use this instead of enjoy?

If you want to serve *Bhagavān*, look to *Hanuman* as your example.

⁴⁵Valmiki is attributed authorship of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, an extremely authoritative scripture extolling the adventures of *Rāma*, *avatār* of *Vishnu* (*Viṣṇu*). See discourse 61.

"enjoy" is old English. Not correct, only old texts.

spelling

Hanuman-ji performed all manner of service for *Bhagavān*, but asked for nothing in return. If you wish to serve God with an attitude of service and selflessness,⁴⁶ remember the example of *Hanuman-ji*. This is the true form of *niṣkama bhakti*.⁴⁷ Do that work inspired by [your] *Iṣṭa*,⁴⁸ and desire nothing for yourself.

One should work in order to serve, and to please God should be one's constant desire. Don't pour water over the statue of *Śankar-ji*⁴⁹ and then ask to receive wealth, jobs for your children, for your wife to be cured of some disease, for a raise, or for your business to prosper. If you ask for such worldly things while worshipping the *Iṣṭa*, then even that deity will withdraw from you; after all, everyone tries to avoid a beggar. That is why we should not demand anything from God. Just continue to serve Him. Should God's attention become attracted toward you such that He asks, "What do you desire?", even then say, "I want your blessing, and that you please keep watching over me, nothing else."

The result of desireless service to the *Iṣṭa* is purity of the *antaḥ-karaṇa*,⁵⁰ and the result of purifying the inner instrument is awareness of Reality. Therefore, the selfless attitude is of inestimable value. Just as fire is always immanent in wood, but becomes manifest through friction, in the same way *Paramātmā* pervades the universe and appears as a result of *upāsana*. [define or fn]

Do your spiritual practice, but during *upāsana* do not demand anything. Let God become obligated, just as Hanuman Ji did. In the end, Lord Ram himself had to ask, "Hanuman, you have done such service for me, how should I repay the debt?" This is the way to make *Bhagavān* indebted.

In reality, God can give much more than the individual soul can request. Should you make a request, then you will ask for a small thing that is in accord with your own status, but if God simply bestows, then He will give from his status. For Him who is omniscient and omnipotent, anything is possible. Therefore, do your own work and let *Paramātmā* do his, and you will lose nothing.

⁴⁶ *Dāśya bhāva*, the respectful attitude of a servant (*dāśya*) who desires only to fulfill the wishes of his master.

⁴⁷ *Niṣkama bhakti* is a formal category of Hindu devotionalism.

⁴⁸ The "desired one," referring to one's personally chosen deity. [rework]

⁴⁹ The god *Śiva*, the "auspicious one."

⁵⁰ *Antaḥ-karaṇa* is the "internal organ," or "inner instrument", often translated into English as the "heart." Since the internal organ is conceptualized as having agency and intelligence, it is also translated "heart and mind."

Do not waste power or misuse intelligence.⁵¹

Whatever you are going to do, think deeply about it before acting, because whatever good or bad comes out of it will come back to you. The strength and intellect you have today are based on your previous actions. To waste your power or to misuse your intelligence would be irresponsible.

Through good behavior and through following *dharma*, we can make our worldly life happy, as well as our life in the next world. If somebody chooses not to accept the existence of God, so be it, but if he wants to see any peace and happiness in this world, then he must see all other living beings as he sees himself. In the same way, he should follow the principles of *dharma*.

We learn from the company we keep. On seeing others do good or evil, we do likewise; perhaps without being aware of it. If we fall into bad company, our thoughts and behavior will automatically deteriorate. Not only will our lives be destroyed, but we will soil the lives of many others who come in contact with us. Therefore, it is worth the effort to keep the company of the wise.⁵²

18

Take the medicine which suits the disease.

Treatment can be effective only if the medicine is suitable to the disease. Ordinary diseases can be cured by ordinary medicines, but for chronic diseases one needs a special prescription. Humanity is entrenched in the impressions of countless past lives, and suffers from *bhavaroga* —“world-sickness.”⁵³ To free oneself from this terrible disease, one needs very powerful medicine.

The difference between a chronic disease and world-sickness (which is brought on by wrong thought, speech, and action) is that a chronic illness spoils but one human life, while world-sickness causes lifetime after lifetime of suffering. Desire is the root cause of suffering due to birth and death, and it is also the root of the great tree of *bhavaroga*. Desire alone is the root which nurtures the various branches of the tree of *bhavaroga*.

⁵¹ The Sanskrit terms here are *śakti* and *buddhi*.

⁵² The phrase is “do *satsaṅg*.” The term *satsaṅg*, which means “to sit in the presence of the truth” or “to keep good company”, may indicate a specific religious group (*saṅgha*) of good or holy (*sat*) people, or the meeting which draws persons of similar religious persuasion.

⁵³ The compound word here is “*bhavaroga*.” The Sanskrit term *bhava* comes from the verbal root *bhū*, “to become.” Thus *bhavaroga* can be translated as “the disease of becoming,” or “the disease of the world,” or “the disease of rebirth.”

This root becomes stronger life after life. To uproot it takes time—a long time of spiritual practice to bury the desires of countless lifetimes under a mantle of peace.

19

Wealth without character can never bring peace.

Because of the absence of morals [*dharma*] in education, people are losing the ability to discriminate between right and wrong. Therefore, they think that whatever they are doing is correct. The concept, "I'll go to hell if I commit sins," has almost vanished. Because of this, falsehood is now increasing throughout society. People seem to think that there is nothing more to life than sensory pleasures. Therefore, they have become unconcerned about the means by which they obtain the wealth necessary to have these enjoyments. Nevertheless, it is a moral certainty that engaging in wrong dealings for the purpose of earning money will never result in peace.

Bad habits of association⁵⁴ have reduced the morality of people in society. Nowadays people do not believe they can get by without resorting to unfair dealings. They have no faith in the future or in Viśvambhara.⁵⁵ Have faith in God, and for once conduct your affairs honestly. From doing so, you will feel contented in this life, and contentment is the true form of happiness. As it is said:

*Santoṣa paramaṃ sukhaṃ.*⁵⁶

A liar cannot be peaceful in his life even if he is as rich as Kubera⁵⁷. He will always be doubtful and his heart will burn with anxiety. Thus he will not be happy in this world, and even in the other world, he will be ruined.

20

Look to your own faults, not the faults of others.

The righteous person will experience peace in this world and in the world to come. He who acts immorally will not have peace in this world nor the next. Don't see the faults of others; examine yourself—discover the areas that are lacking, and try to improve them. If you continually examine and improve yourself, you will benefit greatly.

⁵⁴ See annotation on *satsaṅg*, teaching 17, supra.

⁵⁵ "Viśvambhara" means "all-supporting," or the "support of the world."

⁵⁶ "Contentment is supreme happiness."

⁵⁷ Kubera presides over wealth and its accumulation and is the world guardian of the north.

Never dwell on the faults of others. When we find fault with others, we pollute our own inner instrument⁵⁸ in the process—this is not beneficial to us at all. When we ourselves are repulsed by sin, why make our own mind⁵⁹ evil by dwelling on the evil actions committed by another?

When we dwell on the faults of another, that person receives no benefit. On the other hand, those faults enter into our mind and contaminate it. Please protect yourself from this. If you don't, then one day a storm will come and blow you away. Practice observing yourself every day, from morning to evening. Every evening, consider how many good and bad impulses came, and how many left. If you continue observing your own faults—slowly, slowly, they will begin to leave you. Think first about your own faults; to think about the faults of others will be very dangerous for you. Therefore, first protect yourself; then later, worry about others.

21

This world is not worthy of your love.

This world is like a *dharmasāla*.⁶⁰ To involve your mind here is a waste. Do your work in a simple way and keep your eyes on the journey ahead. It is great foolishness to entrap yourself in affairs of this world. Whatever comes your way, deal with it appropriately. In this short life it is not wise to make a fuss of things. As long as you breathe, spend your time singing the praises of Bhagavān. Conduct your daily affairs courteously. Don't get caught up in too much thinking about things. If you allow your mind to get trapped in daily affairs, then you will have to be reborn again and again, wandering amidst the 8,400,000 life-forms.⁶¹ Therefore, act with great discretion; conduct your mundane business with the help of your body and your wealth, while keeping your mind in association with Paramātma. With these priorities, you can become happy and peaceful.

22

Honor only those who are worthy to be honored.

⁵⁸ See discussion in Teaching 16 on the *antaḥ-karaṇa*.

⁵⁹ *man(as)*.

⁶⁰ A *dharmasāla*, "dharma house," is a retreat house or resting place, often associated with a temple-site for pilgrims.

⁶¹ See note to Teaching 7.

Mingling with those who lack character is like listening to the *Gīta Govinda*⁶² or *Sursāgar*⁶³ from a huckster.⁶⁴ If you wish to drink water from the Gaṅgā, take it from where the stream is clean; you need not drink Gaṅgā water from a gutter. If a teacher is of good character, then listen to him. If the words of one who lacks integrity are followed, it only serves to further undermine his character.

To be a devotee of *Bhagavān*, one must be of good character. If someone reveals himself to be of poor character, you must understand that he is not a devotee, but is only putting on a show to cheat people. Protect yourself against people such as these, and try to protect other decent people as well.

Only he who is endowed with character is fit to be respected. Sweets made with rancid ingredients will be misshapen and will even look bad, but *laddoo* made with pure ghee will have a pleasing shape as well.⁶⁵ If somebody declares that he is teaching devotion to *Bhagavān*, then he should have an impeccable character. Only then will people know that such devotion can destroy past sins and overcome present problems.

As a matter of principle, one should reject those deserving rejection and honor those deserving honor. If unworthy people are honored, then their number will increase and their stench will spoil society.

23

Nobody is here to stay.

Always keep your bags packed. We never know when the call will come. The call of death is like a warrant for arrest: there is no hope of further appeal.⁶⁶ Then and there, one must drop everything and leave. Wherever, however... one must go. Fortunately, the journey need not be difficult if you are prepared from the beginning.

He who is always ready to go cannot commit sins. Sins are possible only when one forgets the life hereafter. One who remembers always that he has to leave one day will never adopt lying and bad conduct.

⁶²This Sanskrit poem concentrating on the great love of *Krishna* and *Rādhā* was composed by a Bengali named Jayadeva in the twelfth century. The *Gīta Govinda* remains one of the most famous medieval works of Indian literature, and its songs are an important part of the devotional music and literature all over India.

⁶³ The *Sur Sagar* is one of the most popularly chanted and performed sections of a sixteenth-century Hindi telling of the *Ramayana* by the great *Vaishnava* saint *Tulsidās*.

⁶⁴ A member of the mercantile class; alternatively, a "merchant" or *vaiśya*.

⁶⁵ A *laddoo* is a round, slightly flattened and cream-colored sweetmeat commonly given to holy persons in tribute as well as offered to deities, hence the laddoo is commonly associated with religious functions and behavior.

⁶⁶ The English "appeal" is in the original.

Seeing that your fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers have departed, it is easy to understand that you, too, will one day leave this world. Since it is certain that you will leave, then why not prepare for the journey from the outset? One way to insure comfortable travel is to be sure that you do nothing for which you will have to repent while on the journey. If you are not cautious, then you will be unable to save yourself from falling.

The flow of *samsāra* is always downward. The tendencies of the sense organs are always outward,⁶⁷ and if you fall into the maelstrom of desires fed by the outward tendencies of the senses, you will lose the capacity to pursue higher thought. Therefore, you should always be careful.

At the time of your death you will remember what you have done during your whole life, be it bad or good. Recalling the bad, sinful actions you have committed, and understanding the terrible result of all these actions, you will become totally depressed. Therefore, take care not to do even one sinful action that will be regretted at life's end.

24

Worship God and receive his blessings.

Worshipping God is one business where there is no prospect of bankruptcy. It can only be profitable. But the fact is that this business, the worshiping of God, is written in our destiny. Those with less fortunate destinies will be involved in occupations where loss is inevitable.

It is strange that people work tirelessly, day and night, for wealth and other worldly pleasures, but expend almost no effort to know God. For Him by knowing whom they can gain everything, they don't have time and energy. How great is their lack of discrimination! What can be more astonishing than the fact that one doesn't focus on the very source of happiness and peace, the omnipotent Bhagavān, but struggles day and night to gain worthless worldly things. It is said, *Ekahi sādhe sab sadhe, sab sādhe sab jāya*. [Hindi] By knowing the one Bhagavān, you can easily gain everything.

If you ignore Bhagavān and try to gain anything, you will achieve nothing, and even if you acquire something, you will not be satisfied with it.

If you chase after a shadow it will elude you, but if you capture the object which throws the shadow, you will capture the shadow as well. That is why pursuing the shadowy wonders and luxuries of *samsāra* is such great foolishness. If you apprehend the

⁶⁷ In Katha Upaniṣad 4.1, Death teaches the young Naciketas, "The self-existent pierced the sense openings outward; for this reason, one looks outward, not within oneself. A certain wise one, while seeking immortality, introspectively beheld the Self (*Ātman*) face to face."

real nature of Paramātmā, the things of the world will automatically come under your command.⁶⁸ Remember always that in worshipping God there is only benefit. Whatever you invest will be returned to you with interest.

25

Don't be ungrateful to the Lord.

The One who has created you is omnipotent, and his name is Viśvambhara. He has taken upon himself the care and sustenance of the universe. Have faith in Him—He will protect that which He has created. But if you forget Him, you commit the fault of ingratitude, and then it is no wonder if He neglects you.

Kā cintā mama jīvane yadi harirviśvambharo gīyate | Nacedarbhaka-jīvanāya janānī-stanyaṃ kathā nisharet?||⁶⁹

If Bhagavān's name is Viśvambhara (the doer of maintenance and sustenance), then it is futile for me to worry in this life [about filling my stomach. If someone should doubt Paramātmā's ability to provide sustenance, then we must ask,] how is it that a mother has milk in her breasts [even while the child is still in the womb]? There cannot be a more shining example than this of Paramātmā's capacity to care for us all, that even before the enjoyer appears, the provision for his enjoyment is already complete. So have faith in Viśvambhara. The One who took care of you inside the womb will continue to take care of you even now. Don't forget Him.

26

Live your life peacefully and without much fuss.

Even great emperors such as Dasharatha [father of Lord Rāma] could not fulfill all their desires. Hence it is a complete blunder to try to fulfill all the desires which arise in your mind.

Don't forget that one day it will be necessary to leave this place. Whatever your program,⁷⁰ you must leave it behind. You will be traveling alone and taking nothing with you. Therefore, you should not trouble yourself much for the things which, one day, you

⁶⁸The following sentences don't suggest human control over the ultimate, but rather control over the phenomenal through worship of the ultimate.

⁶⁹Gurudev's translation that follows is a fairly liberal rendering.

⁷⁰The English "program" is in the original.

have to leave. As long as you live, live peacefully. When it is certain that all things cannot be completed, then it is foolish to make a great fuss about them. Continue peacefully with your enjoined duties while remembering Paramatma.

He who has created you is Viśvambhara. He protects and sustains all things. But if you do not have faith in Him, and instead place your faith in cleverness, deceit, and dishonesty, then your whole life will be turbulent, and the path ahead will also be darkened. Act in such a way that you experience peace in this life, and your future path will be bright, too.

27

A life without power⁷¹ is wasted.

Become powerful and live out your life. You have obtained a human body, so—pursuing the aims of man⁷²—become strong. Remember that you are the descendant of those *maharishi*-s who could do anything in *samsāra*. Yet even though you are the descendant of those who could create another world at their will,⁷³ you are now surrounded on all four sides by misery and chaos. If you have forgotten the treasure which is hidden in your own house, then you can only go begging from door to door.

What a shame it would be were a tiger to join a herd of sheep, start bleating, “baa, baa,”⁷⁴ and then begin thinking he was actually happy. In the same way, what a great fall if a citizen of Bharata forgets his own ancient spiritual and divine heritage, and starts thinking that happiness and contentment come from obtaining worldly objects of sensory pleasure.

To become powerful, recall the examples of your forefathers. Enter the shelter of the omnipotent controller of creation.⁷⁵ Develop your spiritual powers. Master the creative principle of Creation’s Controller.⁷⁶ Only then can you become powerful in reality, and thus become a steady source of strength. Remain convinced that even today you can be a knower of past, present, and future, and you can make all the elements and

⁷¹ The term Gurudev uses here is *śakti*, which connotes “power” (usually with religious overtones), as the spiritual power one develops through faith and austerities. As a personal noun, it refers to a goddess or the Great Goddess conceptualized as “Power.”

⁷² The term is *puruṣārtha*, generally understood to be fourfold: pleasure (*kāma*), worldly gain (*artha*), *dharma* (right action), and *mokṣa* (liberation).

⁷³ The sage Viśvamitra's creation of an alternative heaven in which to establish the king Triśaṅku is one example from Hindu mythology of the awesome power of human seers.

⁷⁴ The onomatopedic sound in Hindi is *bhen*, *bhen*.

⁷⁵ *Sarvaśaktimān jaganniyanta*.

⁷⁶ *jaganniyāmika cetana satta*.

Expand on origin and meaning
Maybe cyn this could break it down, and
note its usage.

powers of the universe favorable to you. Your birth took place in Bharata. Unlimited powers reside within you. Strive to manifest them and become powerful, with head held high.

28

Don't get involved in the controversy over form and formlessness.

The One who is without form is the One who takes every form. Just as waves appear to emerge from the surface of the ocean, the *nirguṇa* [without qualities or attributes], *nirākāra* [without form], all-pervading Paramātmā assumes qualities [*saguṇa*] and form [*sākāra*].

The very appearance of Bhagavān in a form is the direct proof of the existence of the formless. Fire is immanent everywhere in wood, but the flame will manifest only when the wood is rubbed to the kindling point in a specific place⁷⁷. Likewise, the presence of the formless, all-powerful Lord can only be established when he takes up a form. The formless, attributeless One alone becomes manifest and takes on attributes, and He in turn makes the unmanifest available to us. It is an established truth that the *nirguṇa/nirākāra* and the *saguṇa/sākāra* are one, and that through qualities and form, the quality-less and formless is made visible. Hence, don't get involved in controversies over the manifest and the unmanifest. Faith alone is the key to your well being. You have nothing to gain from inciting debates about the *nirākāra* and *sākāra*.

Wherever you place your seal of approval⁷⁸—on *nirākāra* or *sākāra*—to the *nirākāra* and *sākāra* it will make no difference. For your own welfare, have faith in something. Strengthen your faith in *Ātma* or Paramātmā, learn the necessary spiritual disciplines from a *sadguru*,⁷⁹ and according to your eligibility, take up those methods. When faith in the *sākāra* becomes strong, then the bondage of life and death will be cut, and you will lead a happy and peaceful life in this world as well.

29

Dance according to the music.

⁷⁷ This allegory is an ancient proof of *ātman's* existence, and Advaitans such as Shankara have used it for centuries to claim the equality of attributes hidden by the veil of ignorance. See, e.g., Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.7 and Shankara's commentary on the Brahmasūtra-s, 3.2.6.

⁷⁸ The English "seal" is in the original.

⁷⁹ A "real" or "true" guru, that is, an authentic teacher.

24

Don't soil the seat where you expect to sit. Whatever post you have accepted, don't degrade it. It is best to never consider any position as your own, but if you have assumed ownership of something, then take care of it appropriately. Whatever work you have taken in hand, put your full energy into it and bring it to a successful conclusion.

Accept only work for which you are fit. If you accept a lofty position for which you are not actually qualified, it will only lead to future difficulties and unhappiness. But always pay attention to this matter: whatever post you have accepted, never bring disgrace to it. Maintain excellent relations with your mother and father, so that your position as son is not disgraced. Maintain loving excellent relations with brothers and sisters, so that your position as a brother is not disgraced. Maintain excellent relations with your wife, exercising proper limits, so that your position as a husband is not disgraced. Be humbly devoted to your *guru*, so that your position as a disciple remains above reproach.

If you are working as a civil servant, conduct your work according to the law. Don't take advantage of your position and thereby ruin your good name. The gist is that whatever seat you occupy, don't soil it. In accordance to your birth, whether [you are a] *Brāhmin*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiṣya*, *Śudra*, uphold your family *dharma*. Whatever *āśrama* you hold—*Brahmacharya*, *Gṛhastha*, *Vanaprastha*, or *Sannyāsa*⁸⁰—protect the laws of each while performing your duties with dignity. Don't ever act in such a way that your place and position will be disgraced.

30

Love the Lord above all.

Don't invest your love in *samsāra*. Even after you detach your mind from the affairs of the world, you will find that they continue as before. Every kind of activity will persist. As long as you have a body, your mundane affairs are perpetuated by the unseen consequences of your previous actions [*prārabdha*]. Therefore you should not worry a bit that your detachment will result in your abandoning all action.

Likewise, you will always have preferences in the field of worldly objects and relationships. Reserve your greatest love for God and your ordinary love for the activities of the world. Day to day dealings will be taken care of by *prārabdha* [commenced karma], just under the shadow of love. When work can be carried out with the help of a simple shadow, it's a misuse to employ that which casts the shadow. If you pursue worldly objects for their own sake, then you'll find yourself at a loss. It's a dangerous thing to become personally identified with wealth, son, and wife. If love for the world

⁸⁰ See note to Discourse 2, above.

grows strong within you, then you will become bound up in *samsāra*, and your further journey will be only dark. Therefore give your foremost love to Paramātma, and keep the shadow of love for mundane affairs, so that your work here will not be disrupted and your future will be bright.

31

To be born a human is more fortunate than to be born a *deva*.

Taking birth as a *deva* is considered comparable to taking birth as any other life form. Birth as a god is attained by those who perform certain sacrifices⁸¹ and *karma*, etc. associated with divinity, with the intention to enjoy divine pleasures. The minds⁸² of the *devatas* wander incessantly because of the abundance of enjoyable things in the heavenly realms, and hence they cannot perform *puruṣārtha*.⁸³ For this reason, the human birth is considered superior, because here, by doing as much *puruṣārtha* as possible, one can eventually become one with God.⁸⁴

A human being is like a lump of pure gold, whereas gods are like pieces of fine jewelry.⁸⁵ Having been perfected as jewelry, their progression is complete, and they cannot be further improved. On the other hand, gold which has not yet been crafted by the jeweler is completely unrestricted in its potential. Hence the birth of a human being is said to be the very best birth for action. Having attained this birth, one should not act carelessly, but should conscientiously perform the best *puruṣārtha*. Fulfilling one's own *dharma* while keeping faith in Paramātma is the greatest *puruṣārtha*. Strive to become one⁸⁶ with God in this lifetime. Have firm faith in the *Veda*-s and *Śāstra*-s and keep the company of those wise people who also have faith in them. Only then will the purpose of your life be fulfilled.

⁸¹ *yajña*.

⁸² *buddhi*.

⁸³ The four righteous aims of human life: *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma*, and *moksa*. [previous note]

⁸⁴ *sākṣāt parabrahman*.

⁸⁵ Here Gurudev engages ancient imagery recorded in the Vedic scriptures and sufficiently popular that it would have been well-known to his audience. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.4, for example, teaches, "As a goldsmith, taking a lump of gold, reduces it to another newer and more exquisite form, just so this atman strikes down this body and dispelling its ignorance, makes for itself another new and more beautiful form such as that of the departed fathers, gandharvas [sprites], devas, or of Prajāpati, or of Brahmā, or of other beings." This Upaniṣadic passage continues by explaining, as Gurudev does, that howsoever one acts, so does one become.

⁸⁶ *abheda*.

Contemplate Him who can release you from your worries..

One can attain peace and happiness only when one is free from all worries. If you want to destroy all worries, then you must understand the intrinsic nature⁸⁷ of *samsāra*. By understanding the true nature of this world, you can destroy the subtle impressions of all desires⁸⁸. The nature of this world is such that once you understand its essence, it can never again generate attachment in your heart.

Worries crop up because of our love for various objects. Because of worry, one becomes restless in spite of having all possible wealth, name, and influence.

“*Citā cintā dvayomadhye cintā caiva garīyasī|
cintā dahati nirjīvā cintā dahati sajīvakam||*”⁸⁹

Worry is considered more powerful and terrible than a funeral pyre, because the funeral pyre burns the dead, but worry burns the living. Hence, try to become worry-free. Only Paramātma, who is supremely free and independent, is capable of freeing you from all worries. Thus you should worry more about attaining Him, and then all other worries of *samsāra* will be dissolved.

Continue to engage in worldly activities, but remain aware that all these things exist for the sake of action alone, and they are not worthy to be loved. If your mind gets entangled with some object and then starts worrying about it, your whole life could be spoiled. Therefore, keep your mind on Paramātma and continue to live a life of *dharma* in this world.

Right and wrong are judged by Him who knows everything.

Paramātma is the dweller within. He resides in the hearts of every person at every moment, watching each and every action. No one can perform any action without his knowledge. To think while performing an action that nobody knows about it is to imagine Paramātma to be blind. You may fool yourself in this way, but you won't fool Him.

If you have done something wrong and have escaped detection by your peers, don't think for a moment that nobody knows. He who must judge right and wrong is

⁸⁷ *svarūpa*.

⁸⁸ *vāsanā*.

⁸⁹ Gurudev's translation is almost literal: “Between the two—the funeral pyre or worry—the worse, verily is worry. The pyre burns the dead; worry burns the living.”

watching all your actions. You cannot escape the attention of Him who dispenses the fruits of your actions, and who can do nothing for the person who has ruined himself. What enormous lack of discrimination it is to try to avoid the censure of the public. If there's anyone to fear, then fear the omniscient and omnipotent. Do not perform any action which will go against His liking. His law and liking is extolled in the *Vedaśāstra*. Do not perform any such action for which permission is not given there.

You can never perform a sin if you keep in mind that Paramātma is present everywhere. Understanding Paramātma to be all-pervasive, become a person of character. Infuse purity into all your actions, purify your emotions,⁹⁰ and conduct your daily affairs in accordance with your own *dharma* and family standing.⁹¹ Only then will your *antaḥ-karaṇa*⁹² be purified. As the purity of your inner instrument grows, your resolution is strengthened, your actions will become virtuous, and your faith in Paramātma will increase. All manner of auspiciousness will come from increased faith in Paramātma. Let this be the guiding principle in all your actions, by which all good things will be gained, both in this world and in the next.

34

Observe the four appropriate states of mind.

In the life of a human being, the gross body is not as important as the subtle body. The gross body is only a frame—its controller is the subtle body: the mind [*manas*] and intellect [*buddhi*]. In accordance with the mind's thinking, the sense organs and the body act. Hence it is essential to culture the mind.

Maharishi Patanjali teaches in the *Yoga Śāstra* that the mind can be purified by keeping it always in one of four states [*vṛtti*]. They are: friendliness, compassion, happiness, and indifference⁹³.

Be friendly toward your peers; compassionate toward the weak, disadvantaged, or suffering; and happy for those who are wiser or better off than you in some way. Maintain indifference toward those who oppose or hate you. If you fail to remain indifferent toward them, it will generate hatred in your own mind.

In this fashion, maintain only these four mental dispositions. Then feelings of envy, hatred, jealousy, and so on will never arise in your mind. Purity of mind will

⁹⁰ *bhāva*.

⁹¹ *svadharmānukūla*.

⁹² *antaḥ-karaṇa*, inner instrument or mind, intellect, memory and ego; supra.

⁹³ Gurudev paraphrases in Hindi the Sanskrit maxim of *Yogasūtra* 1.33: "The mind becomes purified through the practice of friendliness, compassion, cheerfulness, and equanimity towards happiness, sorrow, virtue, and vice."

naturally increase, assuring effortless achievement in your daily affairs. Ultimately this leads to freeing the mind from sense pleasures and makes the mind inner-directed so that you can engage yourself in contemplation of the Lord.

Don't pursue supernormal powers.

Nowadays it is common for people to be attracted to supernormal powers. Very few people actually attain supernormal abilities, but many get cheated in pursuit of them. Our duty is to warn others, like a watchman in the night, so that they will beware of such charlatans. Despite the watchman's warning, some may choose to be careless. If so, they will have only their own carelessness to blame for their misfortune. For those of us who give spiritual guidance, doing the watchman's duty is our work. It is our job to keep awake and to awaken others.

Siddhis come in five ways: *Janmauṣadhimantratapaḥ samādhijāḥ siddhayāḥ—Yogadarśana 4.1.*⁹⁴

1) Some individuals are born with miraculous powers. They may have done some *upāsana* in their previous lives, but not enough to have merged with Bhagavān. This was the case with *Jadabharata*, who was a *siddha* from birth; he did not need to hear, learn, or memorize in order to understand.

2) Many kinds of *siddhis* come about through the use of medicinal herbs. When I used to live in the forests, on many occasions Kols and Bhils came and told me about the qualities of certain herbs.⁹⁵ One time a Bhil brought me a root, the use of which—even at a distance—would scare tigers away. By using certain medicines, man can live for hundreds of years. Thus many kinds of *siddhis* can come from medicines. There is also an herb that produces the power to fly in the sky when it is kept in the mouth.

3) *Siddhis* can come from using *mantras*. When the favor of the mantra's deity is gained, it will confer wonders according to its nature. This is the essence of obtaining *siddhis* through *mantras*. Ordinary people may obtain some *siddhis* from *yakṣinī*-s, or *karṇa-piśācī*-s and so on, or *bhūta-preta*-s, or trifling demigods, and they will tell people about the past and present. Or, they will do some magic and pretend that they are *siddha yogis*.⁹⁶ This is how they cheat common people.

⁹⁴ Viz., "Siddhis arise by birth, [special medicinal] plants, mantra, austerities, and meditation."

⁹⁵ Kols and Bhils are groups of tribal people who dwell in the wild regions of the Vindhya and Himalaya mountain ranges.

⁹⁶ Here Guru Dev refers to various types of scary beings in different realms. *Yakṣinī*-s are forest nymphs, *karṇa-piśācī*-s are demons, and *bhūta preta*-s are ghosts and disembodied spirits.

4) *Siddhis* can come from austerity [*tapas*].⁹⁷ Practicing *brahmacharya*,⁹⁸ fasting, and putting up with various difficulties to attain God are forms of *sattvic tapas*.⁹⁹ This leads to peace and happiness. *Tapas* done with the intent to attract, kill, deceive, or immobilize someone is either *rājasic* or *tāmasic tapas*. This will not lead to peace or satisfaction, but will lead rather to the increase of unhappiness, anxiety, desire, and anger. Due to the increase of these inner enemies, ultimately the aspirant will be destroyed. *

5) *Siddhis* can come from *samādhi*.¹⁰⁰ However, these *siddhis* are impediments in the aspirant's efforts to gain liberation while living [*jivanmukti*]¹⁰¹. With these *siddhis* can come long-lasting effects, and if one does not use them up, then they will become permanent.¹⁰²

It is not good to assume that just because somebody can show some magic that he is a *yogi*. The miraculous powers of *yogis* are very subtle, and their aim is not to attain fame, money, or other advantages. They are used only out of compassion and for the welfare of the world. We should understand these truths about *siddhis*, and thereby protect people from delusion.

Do the *bhajan* of God. If you become eligible for *siddhis*, they will seek you out.

One becomes "eligible" by conquering worldly attachments. As long as attachments for the world remain—whether for son, wealth, women, or name and fame—one will be weak. There is a proverb that even God [Khuda] fears a beggar. If you cut off attachment to the world and increase attachment to meeting the one *Paramātma*, then clusters of *siddhis* themselves will follow behind you; you will not need to search for them.

You should choose such a path that will not destroy your dignity. When there is a possibility that you can develop a direct relationship with the omnipotent *Paramātma*, then it would be your misfortune if you should instead go around chasing after some

⁹⁷ *Tapas*, from the verb *tap*, to burn, refers to forms of asceticism that "heat up" the body and produce fiery stores of energy. The generalized form indicates austerities which confer spiritual gains.

⁹⁸ The first stage of the religious path, *brahmacharya*, is the period of study that involves chastity. The term is sometimes understood popularly as sexual abstinence.

⁹⁹ The three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) are the three fundamental tendencies of manifestation that give rise to the qualities of the universe. *Sattva* generates phenomena, *rajas* maintains or promotes them, and *tamas* retards or spoils them. *Sat guna* is associated with purity and harmony, *rajo guna* with activity and passion, and *tamo guna* with dullness, inertia, impurity, and ignorance. The full range of qualities associated with each *guna* is much broader. Although most closely associated with the Sāṅkhya school of Indian philosophy, they are found throughout Upaniṣadic thought and are part of the everyday philosophy of modern India.

¹⁰⁰ Absorption in the transcendent *Paramātma*.

¹⁰² In the understanding of Hindu asceticism, the effects of *tapas*—here, *siddhis*—can be dissipated through usage. Thus, numerous stories tell of jealous and worried gods who deliberately trick adepts who have amassed such reserves of energy that they rival the gods in power.

Footnote:
Compare
with
Bhagavad-
Gita, Chapter
17.

petty *siddhis*. Understand clearly that if you pursue *siddhis*, they will elude you. If you understand *siddhis* as an obstacle in the path of your spiritual progress and thus free yourself of the desire to obtain them, then suddenly you will find yourself surrounded by *siddhis*. The best way to keep *siddhis* under your control is to continuously be inclined toward *Bhagavān* and never have a desire to use them. This is the path of self-reliance.¹⁰³ If you begin to chase after the *siddhis*, you choose reliance on another. Then you cannot be the master of *siddhis*, only their slave.¹⁰⁴ Therefore try not to be a slave of *siddhis*, but rather try to become their master. If you become the slave of *Bhagavān*, then you become the master of *siddhis*. By becoming the servant of *Bhagavān*, then all will do your service. This in reality is self-control¹⁰⁵ and the path to self-reliance.¹⁰⁶

36

Jiva and *Brahma* are One.

By removing the veil of ignorance, one can clearly experience the indivisibility of *Jiva* and *Brahman*. The difference between *jīva* and *Paramātma* is much like the difference between paddy and husked rice—as long as the husk is still there, it is called paddy, and when the husk is removed, it is called husked rice. In this manner, so long as the *jīva* is in bondage with *karma*, it is separate from *Paramātma*. When the bondage to *karma* is broken, then *jīva* and *Paramātma* are one.

Although paddy is rice, no one can cook and eat it without removing the husk. Likewise, no one attains *Brahman* without breaking the bondage of *karma*, even if they are reading *Vedānta* books and proclaiming, “I am pure, I am purified”¹⁰⁷. To take birth again is the sprouting of *karma*. The purpose of the *Veda* and *Śāstra* is to show the path of escape from *karma*'s noose. If we surrender our current actions¹⁰⁸ to *Paramātma*, then we can be freed from the cycle of rebirth. Even if not all of the husk is removed, if only a tip is torn off, that will make the kernel incapable of sprouting. Likewise, *nirmali* (a purifier) has the power to render water useful, but if you do not grind it and mix it into the water, it will have no effect. In the same way, however good *Sanātana Vedic Dharma* may be, if you do not put it into practice, then you will not be able to remove sorrow and poverty.

¹⁰³ *Svādhīnatā*: self-dependence, independence

¹⁰⁴ We have translated *dāsa* as slave, *sevaka* as servant.

¹⁰⁵ *svatantra*

¹⁰⁶ *svāvalambī*

¹⁰⁷ Sanskrit: *śuddho 'haṇi, viśuddho 'haṇi*

¹⁰⁸ *kriyamāṇa*

Renounce desire and worship Īśvara.

Whenever disappointment comes in worldly matters, the desire to attain God is born. **Bharṭṛhari**, for instance, was shocked when he learned about the infidelity of his wife. The examples of **Tulsi** and **Pingala** also confirm that only when the hope for happiness in this world is broken, do people turn toward the Supreme.¹⁰⁹ Yet there are countless fools who cling to demonic hopes¹¹⁰ despite repeatedly experiencing the uselessness of *samsāra*.

Story?

Ceaseless, careful thinking is imperative. If you think that to be without women, wealth, family, servants, and so on is sorrowful, then just examine the lives of those who have had all these things. If they have found happiness from them, then go right ahead and try to obtain them, too. Those who have all these things actually have more distress. Therefore, abandon thirsting after them. You will find happiness by abandoning thirst and worshipping Īśvara. Do not humble yourself before anyone out of the hope for happiness in this world—happiness cannot be gained from external things. The treasury of happiness lies within. Only sorrow lies without.

Those who think that objects of this world can confer happiness eventually uncover a fraud. One cannot get water from a mirage. We see water from a distance, and keep running, running, to slake our thirst. This is how it is for people who seek happiness from worldly objects such as wealth, women, children, and so on. As soon as they become engrossed in accumulating them, they become engrossed in worries.

If you want to experience happiness and peace, don't seek them in the world outside, search within yourself. The all pervading Paramātmā is the essence of happiness and his permanent abode is in your heart.¹¹¹ Therefore, seek Him inside yourself, and you will find Him quickly.

Don't complicate your life with constant planning.

¹⁰⁹ *paramārtha*.

¹¹⁰ The *pisāchini* are a category of beings who terrorize human beings. We render *pisāchini pīrciṇas* as "demonic."

¹¹¹ See *Kaṭṭhā Upaniṣad* 6.17, *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 3.20, 4.17, and *Maitri Upaniṣad* 7.7.

This world is but a way station. You remain here for four days¹¹² and then move on. When you are on the road, you never get wrapped up in plans for renovating the hotel room you are staying in—you do the things you have to do and then you are on your way. If there is something lacking in the accommodations, you don't worry much about it—you think, "We'll only be here a few days, so let's just adjust a bit, and then we will be leaving." If someone begins to arrange a hotel room to suit his tastes, he will end up spending all of his time on that, rather than achieving the very thing for which he left his city or village.

You should think of this world as a way station. Life is but a few days, so you will not be staying here permanently. Therefore, don't take great interest in the management of this world. Take interest only to the degree necessary to sustain yourself. Keep in mind that your elaborate plans for this world are unlikely to be fulfilled. Ensnared by the thread of hope, you make schemes¹¹³ in futility, thinking about them restlessly day and night, wasting time in the process—and have nothing to show for all that in the end.

However much managing you do in this world, something will always be left lacking in the outcome. Therefore it is useless to initiate vain plans which can never be truly fulfilled. The scriptures suggest that you apply yourself in moderation to meeting the requirements of day-to-day affairs, while applying yourself wholeheartedly to God-realization, with full faith that only God can give permanent happiness and peace:

Yadasmadīyaṃ na hi tatpareṣāṃ|

"What is ours cannot belong to others." Whatever lies in my destiny will surely come to me, nobody can stop it.

Maintaining this attitude, do what must be done to meet your worldly needs, while keeping God foremost in your mind and heart. This is the plan for happiness and for a bright spiritual future.

39

What is the purpose of an incarnation of God?

In the [*Bhagavad*] *Gita* [4.7], Bhagavān himself revealed the purpose of his incarnation: "When *dharma* has begun to be destroyed, to reestablish it, to protect the good people

¹¹² Brahmananda Saraswati deliberately emphasizes the brevity of the human life span. This could also reflect the Indian concept of time reckoning in cosmic days, rather than our heliocentric concept of "day." It could be a reference to the four ashramas, as well.

¹¹³ The English "scheme" is in the original.

and to destroy the wicked, as well as to reestablish *dharma*, I descend at such times from age to age.”

One can ask: If Bhagavān is truly omnipotent, then He can destroy all of creation at his very whim, so why can't He protect *dharma* and destroy the wicked without bothering to incarnate himself? The answer is that by assuming an incarnation, Bhagavān displays his awesome power far and wide, and the multitudes of his devotees gain liberation as they sing his praises. *Jñāna Yoga*¹¹⁴ is very difficult—one in a million is qualified to practice it. *Bhakti Yoga*¹¹⁵, on the other hand, is simple, and all humans are qualified to practice it. If God were not to incarnate, then how would there be any publicity for *Bhakti Yoga*?

When God assumes form it is not for the purpose of experiencing happiness or unhappiness; He takes on a body through the power of his mysterious *līlā*. Just as an actor plays different roles without becoming affected by their different qualities, so Bhagavān performs only as a role in a play.

40

Let God take care of your life.

Many people wonder how daily life can go on without their constant attention. The answer to this question can be seen in the miserly man, who goes through life spending as little of his wealth and hoarding as much of it as possible, thinking of his wealth as most important and worrying about it all the time. In the same manner, keeping your mind on God, you can carry on your daily affairs. There is no doubt that they will continue to unfold.

The answer to this question becomes clear when we distinguish between our top priority and our secondary priorities. Furthermore, we will only be blessed by God when we make Him our first priority. Paramātmā is omnipotent. Just a little of his blessing can make an individual life completely auspicious.

The omnipotent Bhagavān made this promise:

*Ananyāśchintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate|
teṣāṃ nityābhīyuktānāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahābhyaham||
(Gītā 9.22)*

This means: I will bestow *yoga* [help to obtain things which are difficult to acquire] and prosperity [*kṣema*: protection of obtained things] to those who worship me with the attitude of single mindedness.

¹¹⁴ *Jñāna Yoga* is the yoga of discrimination.

¹¹⁵ *Bhakti Yoga* is the yoga of devotion.

I suppose *yoga* = union → to unite a person with what he desires.

Maybe explanation of why "*yoga*" is used in this way. It might be confusing to some readers.

The human being spends his whole life for these two purposes: acquiring things and taking care of them. When almighty God takes the responsibility of both of these purposes, then we become free to spend our lives worshipping Him. Instead, we keep our minds continually engaged in acquiring and maintaining things, and we forget God. What greater foolishness is there?

When God has promised that He will take care of these two things, there is no reason to wonder how your daily affairs will work themselves out, as long as you establish worshipping God as the first priority for your mind. When your mind is engaged with God, your daily business will continue to be carried on. Moreover, it will be carried on quite nicely. This is the established teaching of the *Upaniṣads* and of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and it is the experience of countless devotees of God.

There is a recent story about an incident which took place maybe forty or fifty years ago in the life of a constable named Chunkai Das. This man's daily routine consisted in rising early in the morning, bathing, and reading the *Rāmāyana* for awhile before going to work. One day while reading the *Rāmāyana*, he became so absorbed, he lost track of the time. The time for his duty came and went, and only after several hours had passed did he remember that he was expected at his post.

He got up from his place of worship full of anxiety because of his lateness for duty. When he arrived at his post he apologized profusely for the problems that he imagined he had caused because of his error.

Then the soldier on duty said to Chunkai Das, "What's wrong with you? You have already handed over your charge of duty to me, and now you come back and are talking like this; what has happened to your brain, are you all right?" Chunkai Das replied, "No friend, I was distracted in my worship today. In fact I am just now arriving."

Again and again the sepoy told Chunkai Das, "You just now attended your duty, and after completing it, you handed it over to me. Before I came, you were doing your duty as usual. When your time was over, you gave over the duty to me, and just now you have returned." After repeated confirmations, Chunkai Das realized that while he was absorbed at home in the worship of Bhagavān, Bhagavān himself had come and completed his duty for him.

Then and there Chunkai Das left his job, saying, "If my Lord can take such pains for my sake, I can leave this job for his sake." After leaving the job, he went to Chitrakoot [a famous place near Allahabad, associated with Lord Rāma] where he undertook spiritual disciplines.

Many devotees have had this type of direct experience, when Bhagavān has fulfilled all their mundane affairs himself. The Vedas and śāstras emphasize that this is Bhagavān's pledge: "Whoever thinks about me with exclusive devotion, I will certainly

take care of all their mundane affairs,¹¹⁶ and the experience of devotees verifies this promise. In spite of all this, if you are not involving yourself in worship, contemplation, and meditation on God, it is a most unfortunate thing for you. What more can be said about it?

In summary, we say this: engage the mind mainly in contemplation and remembrance of God, and engage body and wealth in the activities enjoined by the scriptures. This way the life here and the life hereafter will be bright.

41

By gaining liberation you gain worldly success as well.

Do not think that *mokṣa* is the only benefit conferred by the contemplation of God. Spiritual practices will not only give you liberation, but wealth and honor also.

By performing *upāsana*¹¹⁷, one climbs the first step of listening. The second step is singing the glories of Bhagavān, the third step is remembrance, and the fourth step is to contemplate the lotus feet of the Lord ceaselessly in one's mind.¹¹⁸ But Lakṣmī fears him who prostrates relentlessly at Bhagavān's feet, [thinking,] "Let not the Lord's love for his devotee become too great."

No woman wants the love of her husband to flow toward another. Therefore, to break a devotee's concentration on Bhagavān, Lakṣmī appears to the devotee as wealth, fame, respect, and prominence, by which she may ensnare him in this worldly trap and distract him from his worship. Thus, Lakṣmī approaches devotees of Bhagavān in the form of obstacles.

The wealth for which you worry and scheme, day and night, and on account of which you skulk about to obtain cash, fame and prominence, will come to you without effort if you but turn towards Bhagavān.

If you want liberation there is no other way than through worshipping God, but if you want worldly treasures, then you should also surrender to Him. When a spiritual aspirant does *tapas*, then the Lord of heaven, occupying the seat of Indra, will become fearful; He will try to create obstacles to his *tapas* in the form of temptations. In the same

¹¹⁶ This refers to *Bhagavad Gītā* 9.22

¹¹⁷ One's regular spiritual practice.

¹¹⁸ One must hear (*śravaṇa*), sing the praises (*kīrtana*), reflect on (*smaraṇa*), as well as assimilate completely through constant surrender and service at the feet of God (*pāda sevana*).

way, the goddess of wealth also brings the aspirant riches to distract his attention from God. This resembles something you might do if a dog came running to bite you: if you toss him a morsel of bread, he will get distracted. In the same fashion, Lakṣmī tosses the devotee a piece of gold, thinking, "It would be good if he leaves my husband and doesn't come back."

The remembrance of God not only imparts liberation, but will also jolt Lakṣmī and protect you from her trickery. Therefore, do those actions which will maximize your wealth. By this we mean that through spiritual practice you can attain all the ends of life. When you begin to attract the attention of the Omnipotent, then what is not possible for you? In these times, people leave their own houses and are pushed around at the homes of the seths.¹¹⁹ They have faith in the wealthy; yet they have no faith in the Omnipotent One. Thus they stumble from door to door.

Even now the world falls in line behind one who has faith in God. Therefore, if you must praise someone, praise Bhagavān, so that the life here and the life hereafter will both benefit.

Reduce your worldly desires and increase your love for God. The right use of a human body is to embark upon that path where all manner of opportunities lie waiting.

42

Nobody in this world wants your **mind and heart**.¹²⁰

Your friends and family members look to you to fulfill their own wants and needs. Nobody wants your heart! If you doubt this, withhold from your son all the things needed for his studies, then sit beside him and say that you love him very much. Do you think he will be satisfied? Tell your wife that you always think of her and will never forget her, but do not provide her with the things she needs. Do you think she will be pleased?

In the same way, tell your dear friend who wants your help in some project, "I respect you with all my heart"—but do not help him. He will say, "Please kindly keep your respect to yourself, and please kindly try to do this particular favor for me instead."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ "Seth" refers to the class of wealthy merchants, and can also be a family name.

¹²⁰ The term used here is the Hindi word *man*, which is closely related to the Sanskrit *manas*. The Sanskrit term is usually equated with "mind", but covers some emotional function as well. The Hindi encompasses both values. In this discourse, it seems appropriate in one instance to translate as "mind", while in another "heart" is clearly more appropriate. This conundrum represents one of those instances where an exact, literal translation is virtually impossible to achieve.

¹²¹ The grammatical forms here are exaggerated in their politeness, suggesting a tone of sarcasm and an attempt at making a humorous point.

"heart and mind"

The point is that in this world, nobody wants your heart/mind [man]. Everyone here is a consumer with respect to your body and your wealth. You, on the other hand, are forcing your love on others.

Just remember that the same heart/mind which nobody in this world wants is the very implement that can help you reach Paramātma. Therefore, use your body and wealth to conduct business in the marketplace of *samsāra*, but keep your heart on the path to Paramātma. Then the activities of *samsāra* will remain undisturbed, while the path towards the ultimate goal will become clear.

Train your attention only on what is necessary. Don't entangle your heart and mind in the things of *samsāra*. Worldly activities require just a tiny bit of help to continue unfolding. Save your heart for God.

Engage your body and wealth here in this world, where they will remain after your soul departs. Engage your heart/mind, which stays with you always, in Paramātma, who is likewise with you eternally.

Where merchandise is concerned, you must pay according to its value. For ephemeral affairs you should use only your fleeting wealth and this transitory body. But your mind/heart will always be with you, even in heaven, therefore keep your mind in contact with the permanent One, Paramātma. Maintain your inner focus only on Paramātma, who pervades everything. Only He is worthy of your constant attention. There is nothing else in this world whose contact will confer permanent happiness on us.

By now you have experienced that you are always focusing your mind on wealth, women, children, or favored friends. But can you keep your attention on any of these things? Actually, you cannot train your attention on any one place for very much time at all. If your mind were actually satisfied by wealth, or by sons, then why would it ever stray? Rather, the mind can never stay on one goal; this proves that no object of *samsāra* gives it real satisfaction. You may think that something holds the key to your happiness, but within a short time, you abandon it. From this it is obvious that no object of this world can satisfy the mind.

Thus, doctrine reveals that in *samsāra*, no one really wants one's heart, and one's heart is never satisfied with any *samsārik* object—in other words, the mind/heart is not fit for the world, and the world is not fit for the mind/heart.

When the heart attains the Supreme, it will dwell there forever. After acquiring Paramātma, the heart desires nothing. Therefore, we can see that Paramātma is the perfect object of desire for the heart. Ultimately, the heart must go to That which is worthy of it.

Maximize your virtue, minimize your problems.

Conducting your activities according to the guidelines of the scriptures is a means to promote prosperity, moral development, and *mokṣa*.

Whatever something requires of you in life, your efforts must correspond. However great the *puṇya* [merit] required to cross the ocean of *samsāra*, that much *puṇya* you must acquire. If a parched man requires a large draught of water to quench his thirst, but you give him only a sip, his thirst will not be quenched.

You can acquire *puṇya* by reading religious books such as the *Gītā*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, etc., but reading alone will not accumulate enough merit to cross the ocean of *samsāra*.

We are not saying here that reading religious books is useless. We are saying that it is not enough merely to read the scriptures—you must also apply the truths that you find there to your daily life. Only then can your reading be considered useful, and can you accumulate great merit. If you want to escape from ruin, then free yourself from sin, and do not pursue human goals opposed to the *śāstra*-s. Free yourself from sin, and acquire merit—this is the way to improvement.

44

Engage your mind lightly in the affairs of the world.

For most people it is not appropriate to withdraw from the world and become totally dedicated to the worship of God. Conduct your day-to-day activities, but conduct them in such a way that they do not impede your main goal in life, the attainment of God-realization. To engage your mind in *samsāra* more than is required is a losing proposition.

If you put too much glue on a small envelope, the mess will make it worthless. Your mind is like glue, sticking fast wherever you put it. Therefore, be careful where you put it as you go through your daily affairs. Consider first the degree to which something requires your mind's attention. The main point is that we should engage the mind to the minimum in *samsāra* and to the maximum in Paramātmā.

Be careful to do things according to the *śāstra*, while at the same time keeping the mind minimally engaged. If you continually think of Paramātmā, then your daily affairs will be pleasant and the ultimate goal will also be brightened.

45

A devotee of God cannot be unhappy.

Living in the deep forest for many years, I have experienced the all-knowing and almighty nature of Bhagavān. Even where no worldly amenities exist, all the necessary amenities are provided for the sake of Bhagavān's devotee.

Can a prince experience any deprivation in his own kingdom? Wherever he dwells in the universe,¹²² the devotee of almighty God will live blissfully. After all, how can the all-powerful allow his own devotee to become sorrowful?

We have only to gain the blessing of almighty God, and through faith and devotion, be one with Him. Then He himself will take care of us. Prayer will no longer be required.

When a child is sick, does he have to pray to his father to be taken care of? Of course not. The father himself cannot bear to see his child suffer, and will do everything possible to take care of him. Similarly, when we become one with God, then He takes care of us completely. For that there is no need to pray to Him. This is the great truth behind devotion—a truth that one must experience for oneself—that the devotee of God cannot be unhappy.

46

Turn to God before your time of need.

It is inevitable that in old age, when your body becomes frail and you no longer have the ability to earn money, family members and close friends will start neglecting you. But if you take the help of God, then there is no need to depend on others. Even if you are neglected by the whole world, you will lose nothing. There is a saying related to this:

[Hindi] *Jāpara kṛpā rāma kī hoī, tāpara kṛpā kareṁ saba koī.*¹²³

For him on whom God's grace shines, help is available from all sides, because Bhagavān is omnipotent. The person who becomes favored even by an ordinary king will obtain aid from all the people of that kingdom. In similar fashion, all the powers of the world will start working for the benefit of him who turns towards the omnipotent Paramātmā.

47

¹²²*Trailokya*, literally the "three worlds," viz., heaven, earth, and the lower regions.

¹²³ This poetic Hindi couplet says, "[To] Whomever has Rām's grace, everyone gives grace."

God takes care of His devotees.

*Ananyāścintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate |
teṣāṃ nit yābhiyuktānām yogakṣemaṃ vahābhyaham ||*¹²⁴

[Explaining the verse verbatim:] “For him who contemplates Me with unswerving devotion, I myself take care of *yoga* and *kṣema*: I will provide him what he doesn’t have (*yoga*) and protect that which he already has obtained (*kṣema*).” This is the promise of the omnipotent Bhagavān. Have faith in this and apply your mind to worshipping the Lord.

Nowadays people commonly place faith in ordinary men and women, but they do not place faith in the word of God. If you place your faith in the One who is omnipotent, then the life here and the life hereafter will both be taken care of.

Consider how you are always thinking about the most insignificant things. While farming, you think about fertilizer, which is nothing but excrement; to protect your property from monkeys, you spread thorns. So given that a mind can stay busy thinking of thorns and excrement, then it is surely no big deal if one spends a little time contemplating God. The big deal is this—that the One who can bring completion to all works, the omnipotent Lord, is ready to grant the desires of his devotees.

If, in spite of all this, a man doesn’t turn towards God, then it is nothing less than a great misfortune, and what more can be said?

48

(- Japa?)
Perform *japa* and *dhyāna* nightly.
(Ishtha Devata)

It is all well and good to perform worship, chanting, and meditation during each day, but it is also desirable to do ten to fifteen minutes of *japa*¹²⁵ with your chosen mantra and *dhyāna*¹²⁶ on the **chosen form**, before sleeping. This quickens the spiritual progress.

Sit in darkness, with eyes closed, and repeat your *mantra*; then meditate on your **chosen deity** mentally, still with eyes closed. You should not envision its whole body, but rather its feet or face. The gaze of the **chosen deity** confers blessings, so you should visualize it looking at you with love and compassion, and not with its eyes closed. Thus meditating in your heart on your chosen deity, who is looking at you affectionately, you

¹²⁴ *Bhagavad Gītā* 9.22. Brahmananda-ji refers to this same verse in discourse 40, above, and 57, below.

¹²⁵ *Japa* indicates repetition of a mantra, either verbally (as in chanting) or mentally (meditation).

¹²⁶ *Dhyāna* is the 7th element of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga, the last three elements of which are often grouped under the name *Samnyāsa*. This term indicates the phases of Raja Yoga: *Dhāraṇā* (concentration), *Dhyāna* (meditation, contemplation), and *Samādhi* (union).

should repeat your chosen *mantra*. This will lead to more faith and love for the chosen deity, and the strength of this faith ultimately will help you to cross the ocean of *samsāra*.

49

Don't engage in the contemplation of worldly objects.

The land on which water is constantly flowing will not be usable, but once a dam is built, the land can be cultivated. In the same way, people whose senses are always overflowing with objects of desire become completely useless, and cannot achieve anything for themselves or for others.

Constantly contemplating worldly objects is much more harmful than enjoying them. If one enjoys objects moderately, as indicated by the *sāstra*-s, it is not very dangerous. But if the predisposition to enjoyment keeps one's mind engaged in worldly objects, then the inner instrument will become weak and unfit for spiritual contemplation. As a result, the life both here and hereafter will be spoiled. Therefore, free yourself from worldly objects—and more importantly, free your mind of them.

[Hindi] *Mana ke hāre hāra hai, mana ke jīte jīta |*

“The mind's victory is your victory, and the mind's loss is your loss.”

If your mind is conquered by worldly objects, if it has been gripped by worldly objects, then your life will become subordinate to them. A life of dependence on objects, a subservient life, will be miserable. However, if the things of this world become subservient to your mind, then your mind becomes victorious, and you will live in the bliss of that victory. Hence, become a conqueror, become independent, for the fulfillment of life is found only in independence.

Therefore protect yourself from excessive enjoyment of worldly objects, and more than that, protect yourself from constantly thinking of them.

50

Maintain the purity of your mind. [check original;fn]

All things depend solely on the mind. As the mind desires, the individual will act. Action and inaction begin with the mind, and once the mind has decided on action, be it for good or for bad,¹²⁷ it will find a way to carry it out. To the extent that the mind is pure, its

¹²⁷ *vihita-āvihita*, by the scriptures.

inclination will be towards pure actions, and to that extent [the fruits of] those actions will be powerful and long-lasting.¹²⁸ Similarly, to whatever extent the mind is impure, its inclination will be sullied, and its actions will be very weak and of but fleeting importance.

For a good life both in this world and the next, it is essential to keep the mind pure. Therefore you must keep the company of good people while forgoing the company of the bad. Daily practice of your *sādhana* and study of scriptures are important, as is a pure diet. Keep the commandments of good conduct and non-injury, and always keep yourself within the path of virtue.

51

Attachment is the root of all miseries.

Attachment is absent in the enlightened person,¹²⁹ but thrives among the ignorant. A *jñāni*'s activities will be free from attachment, and will unfold according to commenced *karma*.¹³⁰ An ignorant person's activities also will unfold according to commenced *karma*, but the actor remains bound by attachment. As the principle characteristic which identifies the ignorant, attachment alone binds the individual in the shackles of birth and death. When attachment no longer remains, the individual becomes liberated. It's like this,

*Vitarāgajanmādarśanā*¹³¹

This is the saying of the *Roga Śāstra*—it means, when attachment is destroyed, then there is no rebirth. Therefore, try to destroy this source of bondage and root of all miseries called attachment. Freeing oneself of attachment towards *samsāra* is possible only when one turns towards Paramātma.

52

Don't let fear of obstacles deter you from your path.

After knowing God, you will find that there is nothing else worth knowing. Once you have enjoyed the taste of God-realization,¹³² your mind can never become entangled

¹²⁸ *sthāyī*:

¹²⁹ *jñāni*.

¹³⁰ *prārabhdha*.

¹³¹ "Without attachment, rebirth is no longer seen."

¹³² *Bhagavatattva*.

Attouch. + H. under the
Self with a attachment of
from the...

elsewhere. How could a king desire to become landlord of a couple of villages? How can one who is immersed in the ocean of bliss desire transient pleasures, the pleasures born of worldly objects? People say, "This so and so *Māhātma* has fallen, that so and so *Maharishi* has fallen." But how do you distinguish between the small and great? *Māhātmas* have never fallen nor can they ever fall. To fall is possible only for aspirants who have yet to attain. One who has realized the Supreme can never be tempted by the pleasures born of worldly contacts. Being a *Māhātma* or an enlightened person is a question of one's level of consciousness. No one can know what state another person is in—that is self-experiential.¹³³

The Lord has said, "My three-strand *māyā* is difficult to escape," meaning that crossing it [to the other shore] is quite difficult. "But he who comes to me for shelter will cross this difficult *māyā* of mine:"

*Daivī hyeṣāṃ guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā|
māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṃ taranti te||*¹³⁴

Therefore, don't let fear of obstacles deter you from your path. Bhagavān will protect you in all ways, and will bring you close to Him. There is no need to fear a fall, just keep going forward on the path.

53

Puruṣārtha transmutes our bad tendencies into good ones.

The main aim of *puruṣārtha* is the elimination of negative tendencies and the promotion of positive ones. If any bad impulses arise, then engage your mind in chanting, singing spiritual songs, reading spiritual books, or reciting stories about the divine, and so on. This is the teaching of the Upaniṣads:

*Śubhāśubhābhyāṃ mārgābhyāṃ vahanti vāsanā sarita|
pauruṣeṇa prayatnena yojanīyā śubho pathi|| - Muktikopaniṣat*

The river of desire flows between the banks of good and evil. With the help of *puruṣārtha*, we should see that the river of desire flows only in the direction of right actions. The role of *puruṣārtha* is to turn the mind toward good tendencies whenever a bad tendency is present. If a bad impulse arises in the mind, just tell yourself, "I will take action on this thought later... maybe tomorrow." Keep postponing in this way so that the negative tendency will gradually fade from the mind. If a good impulse should arise in your mind, then be ready to act on it immediately, if possible.

Some background info on this term?

¹³³ *svasaṁvedya*

¹³⁴ *Bhagavad Gītā* 7.14: "This divine *māyā* of mine consisting of the *gunas* is indeed very difficult to overcome; those who have surrendered to me can certainly overcome this *māyā*."

Problems are close when God is far away.

Wherever the kingdom in which you dwell, you can only be happy and peaceful if you follow its laws and regulations. If you disobey the orders of the king, then you will surely be punished. The Lord of the whole universe is the universal ruler Paramātma. If you act against His wishes, you will inevitably have to accept His punishment. In this age people have turned away from God, and therefore unrest, dissatisfaction, and sorrow are increasing daily.

Divine law¹³⁵ is benevolent towards everyone. To whatever extent you follow it, you will experience happiness and peace. The *Veda-s* and *Śāstra-s* are the teachings of the Paramātma for the benefit of every human being. When we follow them, all manner of improvements are possible. By implementing the spiritual laws of the *Veda-s* and *Śāstra-s*, man can increase his power, capability, knowledge, and bliss without limit.

When you are able to sell diamonds, then why blacken your hands by touting coal? Since you are capable of worshipping Paramātma according to the *Śāstra*, and thereby can obtain endless bliss, then why struggle day and night to collect ephemeral sensory pleasures? Act with discrimination. Don't just drift along with the times, eyes closed. Day and night will pass as usual, but if you misuse even one moment, it will be a loss to your spiritual life. Therefore, immersing yourself in Paramātma, act according to your own *dharma*—this is the path of complete advancement.

Right action¹³⁶ is stronger than karma.

Your past *puruṣārtha* appears before you today as your present *prārabdha*. The happiness and sorrow which comes in your life today are the fruit of your past good and bad actions. Knowing this, act in such a way that you do not create the groundwork for future sorrow. It is certain that whatever actions you perform, you will have to consume their fruit. If you perform right actions, then their fruit will be happiness. On the other hand, if you act against the law of scripture, then you will suffer in the future.

If you want to make your future *prārabdha* good, then at this time, through the agency of *puruṣārtha*, perform ideal actions. What constitutes ideal action for a given

¹³⁵ *īśvariya niyam*

¹³⁶ *puruṣārtha*.

Footnote Dharma/Ashvina/...?

person? This will be determined by scripture. If you engage in right action according to your position, then you will be more peaceful and happy in the present and your future karma will become ideal as well.

Whatever good or bad situations are confronting you in this moment, these are surely your commenced *karma* which stand waiting to be experienced. But even commenced *karma* must be met with discrimination. If wine and meat are placed in front of you, then—understanding through discrimination that this is the fruit of past evil karma—you should reject it. Destroy the negative karmic influences by chanting and asceticism. (TAPAS)

It is the established teaching that *japato nāsti pātaka*¹³⁷

By chanting, sins will be destroyed. Therefore, experience your commenced appropriate *karma* and destroy the inappropriate through chanting and asceticism. By thus performing your daily activities with discrimination, you will advance; but if you are not careful in your daily activities, then you will wallow in the mud like a dog or a pig.

?
TAPAS
Reference
to
GLOS, or
Footnote 97,
p. 30

56

Try to be *really* greedy.

The greatest of all renunciates is the one who renounces the greatest thing possible. In this universe, the greatest thing is Paramātma. They who have given up Paramātma and are indifferent to God are the greatest renunciates.

One who works for the benefit of others is regarded as generous, while one who works only for himself, who takes all that he has earned and deposits it in a bank under his own name, can be called miserly.

A truly attached person is one whose mind never leaves the objects of attachment. Such attachment is possible only in Paramātma, who is supreme in the field of attractions. The mind of a truly attached person is absorbed in God and cannot be diverted. Be like that. There is no need to renounce the world. Increase your attachment to Paramātma and become a truly attached person.

Those who are always involved in *samsāra* are benevolent in reality, because whatever they do will be useful for others, and worldly affairs could not continue without them. On the other hand, those who have acquired great merit [*puṇya*] through charity, virtue, chanting, austerities, etc., are in fact miserly, because all the fruits of all their actions are being bundled into a parcel addressed to themselves. In the future, they alone will receive it—nobody else. Therefore only those who have done many good deeds are

¹³⁷ The phrase *japato nāsti pātaka* is footnoted in discourse 3.

truly miserly. If you become like this, you will receive great name and fame in this life, and the life to come will be taken care of as well. This is the teaching of the *śāstra*.¹³⁸

57

Stick with the One, then you will not have to flatter the many.

Make your main chosen deity the all-capable Bhagavān, whose very nature is bliss. Be one-pointed on Him, and then you will lack for nothing. If you hold on to the One steadfastly, you will be freed from flattering the many. Otherwise you will go from door to door like a stray dog wagging its tail, and your precious life will be used up seeking food and clothing. The stray dog may get bread here and there, but gets kicked around everywhere. He who has not accepted a chosen deity will remain an orphan, even if he has money and comforts.

The meaning of unswerving devotion to the chosen deity is simple: if worldly activities come up during your time of worship, you ignore them until your worship is finished. Make liberation your primary goal and keep worldly activities secondary. Have faith in the pledge of Bhagavān, then you can keep your head high both here and in the next world.

Ananyāścintayantomāṃ ye janā paryupāsate

teṣāṃ nityābhīyuktānāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahābhyaham || [Gītā 9.22; previously cited in discourses 40 and 47]

It means, “For him who thinks of me with an undivided attitude, I take care of *yoga* [acquiring those things which are not yet obtained] and *kṣema* [protecting those things which are already obtained].” This is the pledge of Bhagavān. Having faith in this, you will always be happy.

58

This world will go on without you.

Many great warriors and conquerors have come and gone; time swallowed all of them. Most have been totally forgotten, yet this world continues like a perennial stream. While here you are intelligent only to the extent that you do your own work. Put your wholehearted effort into attaining Paramātmā, who is existence, knowledge, and bliss.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Vedic doctrine as recorded in scripture. [check for first instance and fn]

¹³⁹ *Sat Chit Ananda*.

Try to fulfill this effort in any way possible. Don't get entangled in the vicious cycle of worldly attachments, because this world will go on without you anyway. Don't pursue the mirage, and don't light your own funeral pyre.

Is it wise to leave your own house a mess while trying to clean the houses of your neighbors? First do your own work, and then you can help others.¹⁴⁰ Complete that work for which you have come into this world. If you do not take care of yourself first, but foolishly waste your time trying to take care of others, you will regret it at life's end. Wisdom consists in making the best of both this world and the next. This is possible only if you consider that your primary goal in life is to obtain liberation. Make liberation primary and make all other good acts of the world secondary. Carry out praise, worship, meditation, and adoration regularly; consider them to be your primary activity. Then you can take some time from those activities and carry out worldly activities which you deem worthy. Follow this formula—otherwise you will be cheated.

59

Don't sell a diamond for the price of spinach.

After incarnating through 8,400,000 life-forms, you have obtained this rare human body. Don't waste it. Each moment of life is very valuable. If you don't understand the value of this life, you will have nothing in hand, and in the end you will weep.

You are a human being. Therefore you have the power to discriminate between good and bad, and you can accomplish the greatest human goals. Don't think of yourself as weak or fallen. Whatever has happened in the past, understand that it was done unknowingly. But now be careful. Try to understand the responsibility of human birth and act accordingly. Discern for yourself what is right and what is wrong. Adopt the good and reject the bad.

If, as a human being, you fail to reach God, then you have sold a diamond for the price of spinach. You do not worship Paramātmā for His sake, but to remove your own sorrow, lack of peace, ignorance, and lack of power. Paramātmā is all knowing, omnipotent, and the source of limitless bliss. Through *upāsana*, you become able to capture these qualities. The fulfillment of this superb act is the real purpose of the human birth. If you make no effort toward this, then you have cheated yourself.

60

¹⁴⁰ This resembles the Biblical injunction to first remove the log from your own eye so that you can see to remove the mote from your neighbor's.

You will not find happiness in the ocean of sorrow.

Cultivate your relationship with Paramātmā, who is the source of limitless power. This is the only remedy for your poverty of spirit. *Samsāra* is not something to be known, it is something to be forgotten. The more you try to understand this ocean of sorrows, the deeper into sorrows you will plunge. To think that by comprehending *samsāra* you will attain happiness and peace is like expecting to find light by delving into darkness.

This world is an ocean of sorrow. It is impossible to become happy through wordliness; to love *samsāra* is to sow the seeds of your own unhappiness.

Yatra snehī tatra dukkha snehoduḥkhasya bhājana|

“Don’t love this world. Just do your daily duties.”

Treat this world as you would treat an enemy. When an enemy comes to your door, you welcome him more graciously than a friend, because a friend will not be concerned about etiquette, whereas an enemy will point out even the smallest breach of protocol. Therefore, an enemy should be welcomed with complete decorum. Thus, in this world you observe all formalities, but inwardly you remain aware that you are in enemy territory. Don’t become too friendly toward this world, because you are in danger when *samsāra* becomes desirable in your mind. Don’t try to know too much of this.

61

Don't be so concerned for those who care but little for you.

You should accept as certain that one day you will have to leave this world, and that you will be taking nothing with you. Knowing that nothing can accompany you when you go, spend your remaining time here in peace. Don’t make yourself restless over trivialities.

You can count on your daily bread, because that is taken care of by the past *karma* that you are required to bear in this lifetime. That very *prārabdha* will find you no matter where you may be, so there is no need to worry. And if you are worried about others, then just ask yourself: Why are you running here and there, working for the benefit of those who kick you when you are down?

In this world, everybody will be friendly to the fortunate. “Everybody is happy to be brother-in-law to the prosperous, but no one will claim relationship to the unfortunate.”

Maharishi Valmīki’s original name was Markandeya. He used to rob travelers to feed and clothe his family. Once a group of rishis¹⁴¹ came his way and Markandeya attacked them also. The rishis told him, “We will not run away, but before you rob us,

¹⁴¹ *Rṣi*: Seer, or Vedic sage.

ask your family this: ‘Are you ready to share the bad *karma* acquired through robbing others? Or do you just want the wealth?’”

Markandeya inquired of his family members as instructed. All of them said they did not want the bad *karma*, just the money. “If you are earning all this money by committing sins,” they said, “then only you should bear the negative consequences.”

Upon hearing the reply of his family members, Markandeya understood the whole thing and decided, “Whatever mistakes I have committed so far I must now correct. Life is short and I cannot afford to waste it any more.”

Then and there Markandeya began uttering “Rāma, Rāma,” according to the instructions of the rishis. He sat on a seat and became so deeply engrossed in the *bhajan* of Bhagavān that white ants made an ant hill—a *valmīka*—around him. When he emerged from the anthill, his name became Valmīki—*valmīkodyavaḥ vālmīkaḥ*.¹⁴²

The gist of this story is that resorting to unlawful means, even for the sake of others, will ruin your life both in this world and the next. Hence it is wise to perform your worldly activities honestly, and to spend your time peacefully singing praises to the Lord.

62

How could the son of a demon become a devotee of God?

After being defeated in his war with the *Deva*-s, the *Asura*¹⁴³ Hiraṇyakashyapu went to the forest to acquire greater power by means of *tapas*. At that time, his wife was pregnant. Meanwhile, Indra thought that Hiraṇyakashyapu’s son might become more powerful than his father, and he would create even greater trouble for the *Deva*-s. Therefore, he decided to kill the child immediately after its birth. With this objective in mind, Indra carried off the pregnant wife of Hiraṇyakashyapu.

As she was being abducted she started to lament, and they happened to run into Sage Nārada, who asked Indra, “Where are you taking this defenseless lady? And for what purpose?”

Indra replied, “This is the wife of Hiraṇyakashyapu, and she is pregnant. By destroying the child who will be born to her, I will be removing a source of future trouble for the gods, so that’s why I am taking her to my world.”

Nārada said, “From her womb, a great devotee of Bhagavān will be born, and he will be unconquerable, so release her.”

Having heard Nārada’s words, Indra released her and departed. Nārada then took her to his ashram, where he narrated devotional stories of Bhagavān day after day.

¹⁴² Sanskrit: “he who emerged from an anthill: Valmīka.”

¹⁴³ In the Vedic literature, the *deva*-s are gods, the *asura*-s are demons.

A pregnant woman's environment, including the things she hears and sees, has a great effect on the child in her womb. When this child, whose name was Prahalada, started going to school, he told his classmates about wisdom and meditation as well as stories of Bhagavān. The other children asked, "You study with us, yet these things are not taught here, and you live in the company of demons, so you never get the opportunity to receive this kind of education, so how have you come to learn the wonderful things that you are telling us about?"

Prahalada revealed that he learned all those things by listening to the stories narrated by Sage Nārada while he was in the womb. "After returning from the *āśrama*, my mother was in the environment of demons, so she completely forgot all those teachings, but I remembered everything. That is source of what I have been telling you."

The son of Hiraṇyakashyapu, King of the Demons, had heard the conversation of *satsanga*¹⁴⁴ while he was still in the womb, and so he was born the King of Devotees. Even today, if pregnant women live in a righteous and devotional atmosphere, they can give birth to a Dhruva¹⁴⁵ or Prahalada.¹⁴⁶ But nowadays they don't have time for religious stories or religious philosophy. Instead, they occupy their minds with movies and trashy books. This leads to the birth of misbehaving, characterless children who cause their parents to weep from the day of delivery. The pregnant mother's religious culture and faith in God influence the unborn child. To give birth to a brutish child is one thing, but to give birth to a child who can develop great powers of moral discrimination, then we must nourish the mother in an atmosphere of holiness during pregnancy. After the ritual of *garbhādhāna*¹⁴⁷ according to the scriptural rules, protect the woman from *rajasik* or *tamasik* things. The expectant mother's emotional well-being will endow the child in the womb with superior qualities.

Prahalada was sure that God is everywhere, and on this point his mind was without conflict. Wherever he looked, he saw his deity—even in water, soil, and fire.

¹⁴⁴ Good company—usually meaning the company of saints, sages, or spiritual seekers. [see previous fn]

¹⁴⁵ Dhruva's father King Uttanapad had two queens. The elder Queen Suniti was Dhruva's mother, and the younger Queen Suruchi was Uttam's mother. Suruchi wanted her son Uttam to become king, and because King Uttanapad preferred Queen Suruchi, he did not disagree with her even though Dhruva was older and was the rightful heir to the throne. Once young Dhruva went to sit on his father's lap along with his stepbrother, Uttam. But Queen Suruchi scolded him that only her sons could sit on the King's lap, so he should pray to Vishnu that he might die and be reborn as her son. Dhruva resolved to get a personal response from Lord Vishnu, and he went deep into the jungle to meditate. Narada tried to dissuade Dhruva, but Dhruva was steadfast, so the sage taught him the art of meditation. Lord Vishnu finally appeared before Dhruva, blessed him, and told him to return to his kingdom. Meanwhile, King Uttanapad repented the injustice done to Dhruva and was happy and relieved at his return. When King Uttanapad became old, Dhruva was crowned king, and ruled wisely for many years. At death, he was blessed by Vishnu to take the position of the steadfast Pole star in death, viz., Dhruva Nakshatra. (Visnu Purana 1.11-12)

¹⁴⁷ The *garbhādhāna* is a ceremony preceding impregnation.

This simple faith of a five-year-old scion of Bhārata¹⁴⁸ was the reason that fire, water, etc, could not hurt him. If the Indian people come back to their established truths, then no power in all the three worlds can trouble them. But they have forgotten the things of their own house and have become completely impoverished. When the almighty Paramātma again favors them, then all the powers of material nature will favor them as well.

Whatever means were used against Prahalada became favorable to him. When they had thrown him into fire, then he said with a smile,

*Rēmanāmajapatām kuto bhayaṃ sarvatāpaśamanaikabheṣajam|
paśya tāta mamagānnasannidhau pāvako 'pi salilāyate 'dhunā||¹⁴⁹*

It means, "Where is the fear of the person who chants the name of Rām? This (*Rām Nām*) is the medicine to remove all types of sorrow. O Father! See how now the fire near my body acts like water," indicating that it cooled instead of burned.

The point is that so long as you lock up your chosen deity in a tiny tin box, then you will suffer accordingly, and you must endure it like a cripple. When you see your chosen deity everywhere, then whatever approaches comes as your chosen one, your friend. This is an established truth: if one's faith is firm, then whatever approaches will become like the person himself.

Patanjali, the author of the *Yoga Śāstra*, has written:

Ahimsā pratiṣṭhāyāṃ tatsannidhau vairatyāgaḥ |¹⁵⁰

If one has strong faith in nonviolence, then the lion, tiger, and all harmful animals who approach will abandon their wild nature and become nonviolent. But our faith should be very strong, our trust in Paramātma should be firm. Don't follow someone just because you see that he has a brass pot in his hand.¹⁵¹ "The washerman's dog belongs neither to a home nor the riverbank."¹⁵² Our actions should be based on clear thinking. We should not give up everything for the sake of filling our bellies. All types of animals—even insects and birds—take care of their bellies. If, as a human being, you are worried about your belly, then what is the greatness of the human birth? Indians never give importance to their bellies. Here first preference is always given for the spirituality.

Maharishis of old who lived on nothing but fruits and water had the capacity to make even world-ruling kings obey their commands. In those days there were devotees who used to eat *halva-puris* and *rabaḍī-malāi*,¹⁵³ but the sages knew that if they ate

¹⁴⁸ He who is a descendent of Bhārata, the name of ancient India.

¹⁴⁹ The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* contains one of the fullest early renditions of the Prahalada story in Sanskrit.

¹⁵⁰ *Yogasūtra* 2.35, viz.: "When one is firmly grounded in non-violence, all hostility will vanish in one's presence."

¹⁵¹ The brass pot is symbolic of an ascetic.

¹⁵² This somewhat enigmatic saying refers to the working dog of a *dhobi*, which neither stays in the house nor is a stray. These dogs protect the *dhobi* and keep them company; the dogs are not pets, but simply "adopt" an owner in a kind of symbiotic relationship.

¹⁵³ Rich, creamy dishes reserved for special persons and occasions.

halva-puri and such things their intellects would become clouded and would make them fall. If the intellects of individuals such as Bhīṣma¹⁵⁴ can become clouded due to impure grain, then what could happen to the people of today? So to keep the intellect pure, one should always remain aware of the purity of one's food, and with the help of Bhagavān, one should try to sustain oneself with a *sattvik* lifestyle.

Why do we hurl abuses on Holi Day?

Today is Holi Day.¹⁵⁵ You should understand what this is all about.

The demon Hiraṇyakashyapu had a sister named Holika who did extreme tapas to receive a special boon. As a result, she could not be burned by fire, but whomsoever she took with her on her lap as she entered the fire would be incinerated.

Hiraṇyakashyapu had become exhausted from attacking Prahalada (whose purity was a threat to the *asura-s*) and he was unable to trouble him at all—he had thrown Prahalada down from mountaintops and Prahalada merely laughed; dunked him in water, and Prahalada emerged smiling; thrown him into fire, but he was unburned. Hiraṇyakashyapu had done all this, yet his efforts failed—Prahalada would not abandon worshipping Bhagavān. Then Holika said, "Bring him, and I will burn him to ashes." She placed Prahalada onto her lap and sat down. A fire blazed up in all four directions. But the power of Prahalada's devotion was such that Holika was reduced to ashes and Prahalada came out of the fire smiling.

On the occasion of the Holi festival, people hurl abuses and use obscene words, all of which are intended for the Holika. These insults are like hymns to demons, because demonic powers are pleased with words of this kind. From this practice, Holika's memory is kept alive. On this festival day we are reminded that one may be very powerful, like Holika, and may even have fire and the other elements under his control, but if he goes against a devotee of God, then that very power will destroy him and will save the devotee. This is the secret of hurling abuses on the holiday of Holi.

Throwing colors on Holi is a gesture of happiness. People greet each other and express their joy that the powers which tried to destroy a great devotee like Prahalada were themselves annihilated. This is the celebration of the annihilation of that demoness who was torturing the devotee Prahalada. This is the greatness of Holi.

¹⁵⁴ A great hero of the *Mahābhārata*.

¹⁵⁵ Holi falls on the first day of Chaitra (March/April). During the days leading to Holi, revelers splash water and colored powders on passersby, all in the spirit of fun. On the eve of Holi, the full moon night of Phalgunā, young men sing and dance around bonfires in the streets.

Divine mercy flows toward the destitute.¹⁵⁶

God is supremely compassionate, and his mercy flows to the humble. Man should try to please the Lord with his humility, by worship or by carrying out his own enjoined duties while offering their fruits to Bhagavān. If one cannot carry out such karma and worship, then at least one should become destitute. Who is destitute? Whoever is without support in this world is destitute. Bhagavān is the sole support of those who are bereft. This is his great compassion. The person whose attachments to *samsāra* are totally gone—who no longer relies on the support of a wife, children, money, friends, etc.—this destitute and humble person will be supported by Paramātma, who supports the whole world and is friend to the poor, the destitute, and the weak.

Draupadi was defenseless during her disrobing [in the court of ~~Dhritarashtra~~].¹⁵⁷ Nobody was there to protect her. In her misery she called out to Bhagavān, the friend of the forlorn, who protected her.

All must reap the fruits of their past actions, but those who are without support gain a special right, such that they ususally don't have to suffer the fruits of their sins. Hence, if you cannot carry out any other practice, then at least become humble.

When you become humble, then the world will appear as real as a magician's money. There may be a heap of millions of rupees, but when it is announced, "This is a magician's money," then even the most miserly, greedy person will not bother looking at it. Similarly, when you become completely destitute, you will not have any attachment to anything whatsoever in this world. When you call on Bhagavān—without any attachment to *samsāra* and in a state of true humility—then you will be worthy of Bhagavān's compassion. Now it is only a question of delay from your side. The Lord is always ready to take care of you.

Due to lack of *satsaṅga*, people are not able to make use of this compassionate quality of God. Furthermore, whatever little people gain from *satsaṅga*, doesn't stay in their mind.¹⁵⁸ The reason is lack of purity in food.

This still seems
out of place. Maybe don't
miss it something

¹⁵⁶ The term *dīn* can be used both as an adjective and a noun. Its meanings can be rendered: humble, destitute, or poverty-stricken, or a person characterized by such qualities.

¹⁵⁷ In one of the greatest scenes of the *Mahābhārata*, Draupadi is lost to her husband's cousin Duryodhana when wagered in a crooked dice match, and she is forced to endure disrobing in the presence of all the great generals in the assembly. Calling on Lord Krishna to preserve her honor, Draupadi's *sari* is magically lengthened by him, saving her from public nudity and further dishonor.

¹⁵⁸ *antaḥ-karaṇa*

Just as looking at food will not appease one's hunger, listening to the glory of the name of Bhagavān by itself will not give happiness and peace. Nowadays it has become very popular to chant the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This is definitely a meritorious act, but chanting alone cannot give full peace and happiness. But if just one verse of the *Gītā* is understood, or one fourth of a single verse, then auspicious results are possible.

Never underestimate the power of taking God's name.

You should remember Bhagavān for your own benefit, not for Bhagavān's. The Lord never becomes pleased with anybody, nor angry. The individual remembers God only for his own welfare.

There are many methods of remembering God. One has to learn this from his Guru according to one's own aptitude.

Kabir was a great devotee of Rāma. He constantly sang the name of Bhagavān Rāma. Throughout his daily activities, even while carrying out his weaving, he chanted, "Rām, Rām, Rām." By continuously taking the name of Bhagavān like this, he developed unshakable faith and achieved perfection in the name.¹⁵⁹ There is an interesting incident which reveals exactly what this perfection in the name is all about.

Suffering people go to *Mahātmā*-s only after they have exhausted all other means, like Ayurvedic masters and doctors. Once a leper who thought that his disease was incurable came to Kabir's house. At that time Kabir was not at home, and this leper explained his situation to Kabir's wife. She felt compassionate and told the patient to chant the name of Rām three times. Then the leper explained that he had taken the name of Rām thousands of times, but nothing had happened. The lady insisted, "Do as I say." When he had taken the name of Rām three times, his body became totally cured. He became extremely happy and left, praising the glories of Kabir along the way.

Kabir happened to be returning on the same road, and heard this person saying that anyone with a problem should go to Kabir Sahab's house. Kabir greeted this gentleman and said, "I am Kabir. From now on, if you tell anybody about your being cured, you will have problems, and you will never be well again."

After saying this, Kabir returned to his house and assumed a sad appearance. Any woman who is devoted to her husband can bear anything except his sadness. This is the

¹⁵⁹*Nāma siddha*, "mastery of the name," is a specific kind of spiritual achievement which involves mastery of the name of god as one's *mantra*. The tradition of *nāma siddha* can be traced from the Naths and *Siddha Yoga* traditions through the modern day Sikhs, who hold Kabir to be one of their most dear saints and illustrative masters of the Name.

sign of *pativratyā*.¹⁶⁰ She asked Kabir about his sadness, and Kabir said, "The thing is this—you have made Bhagavān's name very cheap. By taking Bhagavān's name just once, he could have gotten a divine body, so why did you make him utter it thrice? It's possible that your asking him to repeat it thrice is because you did not have sufficient faith in the name of God."

The point is simple: Bhagavān's name has such great inherent power to destroy the effects of sins that nobody could ever commit enough sins to exhaust its redemptive capacity. The fire has such great capacity to burn that nobody could ever accumulate sufficient wood to exhaust it.

Harirharati pāpāni duṣṭacittair apismṛtaḥ||¹⁶¹

When one remembers [Him] even with an evil mind, Bhagavān will destroy one's sins. Hence continue to do good actions, carry out all enjoined duties, and keep remembering God. This way all past sins can be destroyed. But one should not continue committing sins while taking the name of Bhagavān. After all, what profit is there if one continuously withdraws whatever one deposits in the bank?

66

Maintain purity in your diet.

Faith is hindered by lack of experience. Thus the persistence of worldly thoughts makes it difficult to think consistently about God. Bhagavān has said:

*Maccittā madgata prāṇā bodhayantaḥ parasparam |
kathayantaśca mām nityam tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca*||¹⁶²

The sense of this is, "Attach your thoughts to Me." Do not think of *samsāra*, but of Paramātmā. We should think of Him at all times and in all situations, not leaving any gap in the mind for anything else to creep in. The main cause for the intrusion of worries is impurity in our diet. With regard to the purity of food, Dhanarjana has said:

*Akṛtvā parasantāparāṃ agatvā khalamandiram |
anullaṅghya satām vartmaṃ yadalpamapi tad bahu*||

This means that if we go through our lives not harming others, not associating with bad persons, and not plunging the *Ātman* in entanglements, then whatever small amount we earn will be plenty. If you make trouble for others while earning your money, that wealth will remain behind after your death, but the harm which you have given to

Seems to imply
That "food" means
The last
paragraph
makes sense

¹⁶⁰ *Pativratyā* is the auspicious state of a woman who has vowed (*vrata*) to be supportive and true to her husband (*pati*), making him her end in life and even treating him as her chosen deity.

¹⁶¹ Sanskrit: Even remembering Hari with an evil mind destroys sin.

¹⁶² *Bhagavad Gītā* 10.9: The thoughts of my pure devotees dwell in me, their lives are fully devoted to my service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss from always enlightening one another and conversing about me.

that person will tag along with your subtle body.¹⁶³ Therefore, don't act in a manner that will force you to lug the baggage of sin when you leave.

The meaning of *agatvā khalamandiram* is this—if you associate with base people, your intellect [*buddhi*] gets spoiled, and once your intellect is spoiled, a fall is certain.

Buddhināsāt praṇasyat: Direct association with base objects is very precipitous. So going to the home of the wicked for the purpose of making money is forbidden.

The meaning of *anullaṅghya satām vartmam* is this: That path which is in accord with the *Veda*-s and *Śāstra*-s given by good people should not be violated.

If a situation arises in your daily dealings where you have to come into contact with a base person, then you should approach him just like you go to the toilet—do the job and leave. Nobody lingers in the toilet for long. If you discipline your intellect in this way, then there is no chance to fall into association with a person of poor character. A pure mind approaches Paramātmā, but an impure mind wanders through various types of emotional states. Therefore, through pure food, we should try to purify the mind. For instance, we should give much more attention to cleaning grains. If you maintain proper diet, it is easy to keep the mind in association with Paramātmā, and the mind becomes pure. With a pure mind, even in this world you will experience happiness and peace, and you will obtain the best path in the next world as well.

67

Avoid further births as a human.

Now that you have obtained a human body, you should not hold open the possibility that you will come back again to the womb. If you continually return to the womb there is no point to human life, and the purpose of human birth has not been served.

Individual souls [*jīva*] are infinite in number, but according to the Puranas there are 8,400,000 [84 *lakh*-s] different species. The *jīva* wanders through the 8,400,000 species, and then attains a human body.

Envision a big circular compound composed of 8,400,000 rooms. A blind man has been living in one room and wants to come out. Thinking that there must be a door somewhere, he guides himself along the wall from one cell to the next. Just as he reaches the gate, he removes his hand from the wall to scratch an itch, and he misses the gate by walking further.

The secret behind this story is that the blind person is the embodied soul, and 8,400,000 rooms are the species. The human species is the exit by which one can escape the enclosure. When *jīvātma* comes to the gate—the human species—he starts enjoying

¹⁶³ *Sūkṣma śarīra*, the subtle body which survives death of the gross or *sthūla* body.

wealth, women, children, etc., and this is the itching. Like the blind man in the story, he misses the opportunity for exit while scratching his itch.

The *sāstra* says again and again that a human birth is very rare. This does not mean that when we get this rare human body we should pursue wealth, children, and the enjoyment of maximum worldly pleasure. Then there would be no point in the human birth being rare. Humanity is the *karma* [action] species and other animals (like insects and birds) are the *bhoga* [enjoyment] species. In the *bhoga* species there is no accounting for actions. But whatever action *jivātma* undertakes with the help of a human body will be taken into account and there will be a result for every action. Therefore the human species is very difficult to attain. After transmigrating through 8,400,000 *bhoga* species we get this human body. Having gained this human body, we can perform such actions as will help to escape the cycle of birth and death. Thus the wandering of *jivātma* will come to an end and there will be no further chance to suffer in the womb.

Scripture says that if a human worships Bhagavān, he goes to *deva loka*¹⁶⁴; if he worships the dead body, then he goes to the place of *pret loka*¹⁶⁵: *Bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā* [Here Brahmananda-ji paraphrases the Gita, 9:25.]

By doing japa and tapas, one attains godhood [devatta]. But the aim of a human being should not be to gain birth as a god, because even the most powerful among the gods, even the king of all the gods [Indra], displayed a lack of discrimination and desire for worldly enjoyment. And when he could not fulfill all his desires in heaven, then he came to the mortal world and troubled Ahalya¹⁶⁶. When this is the story of the king of the gods, then what will be the condition of his subjects? Therefore, we should prostrate to [worship] them from a distance.

Furthermore, the duration for which an individual soul remains in heaven also has its limitation.

Kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṃ viśanti

After exhausting all its *puṇya* [merit], the *jīva* has to come back to the mortal world, and even while dwelling in heaven, all do not share an equal degree of happiness. Each revels in luxury according to the *puṇya* he has accumulated. Therefore, when the gods see other gods enjoying more than they are, they become jealous. In heaven, too, we find jealousy, ill-will, and hatred, which are the causes of unhappiness. We should not desire to go to such a heaven at all.

Even the gods [the *deva*-s] also desire to have a human body, which is like unshaped gold. With a good goldsmith, one can turn gold into a valuable ornament. Such an ornament can raise the value of the gold to the highest level. Gods in heaven are

¹⁶⁴ *Devaloka* is the world (*loka*) of celestial beings (*deva*-s), usually rendered in English as “gods”, or “deities”.

¹⁶⁵ *Pret loka* is the world of ghosts (evil spirits or demons).

¹⁶⁶ Indra once assumed the identical form of the sage Gautama to take advantage of the renunciate’s wife, Ahalya. (See, e.g., *Valmiki Ramayana Balakanda* 47.)

more like such ornaments than they are like pure gold. Once an ornament is made, the value of that gold is fixed. The human species is like pure gold. If he finds the perfect goldsmith [great *guru*], a man can attain infinite bliss—or he can become Paramātma Himself. If this happens, the purpose of the human species is fulfilled.

68

It is the nature of the devotee to see only God.

All devotees who are enraptured with the divine are *Vaiṣṇava* devotees. Anyone involved day and night in stealing, cheating, and other evil activities cannot become a *Vaiṣṇava* just by declaring himself a devotee of Viṣṇu.

Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Sūrya, Śakti¹⁶⁷, etc., are the limbs of Bhagavān. When the devotee of Śiva says, “My Śiva is the only God,” and the devotee of Sūrya says, “Sūrya is the one true God,” then this is like the story of the blind people who tried to describe an elephant. One grabbed the trunk and said, “This elephant is like a pestle¹⁶⁸.” Another caught hold of its ear and said, “This elephant is like a fan.” As the saying goes, “The blind began to quarrel on seeing the elephant.” One who knows the complete, true form¹⁶⁹ of an elephant will describe it neither as like a fan nor like a pestle.

In the same fashion, one who has truly understood the Godhead will never say that only Śiva is the true form of God, or that Gaṇeśa alone is the true form of God, or that Lord Viṣṇu with His four arms is the true form of God. One who is acquainted with the divine truth¹⁷⁰ will say this: in all these various forms, one Paramātma is manifest, and the five deities are different aspects of Him. In reality, worship of any deity is worship of Bhagavān. This is the established teaching of the śāstra.

69

There is no sin in changing one's guru.

Some people say that once you have taken up a *guru* you should not change to another. This is not an established teaching of the śāstra, but rather a mental concoction. One takes a *guru* for one's own welfare. As long as one has not realized Bhagavat¹⁷¹, one's

¹⁶⁷ Siva (Shiva) is the great ascetic deity, famous as the destroyer of the universe. Ganesa (Ganesh), the remover of obstacles, is the popular elephant-headed son of Siva and his wife, Parvati. Surya is the solar deity, invoked in early Vedic hymns and still honored in morning ritual ablutions. Sakti (Shakti) is the goddess Power, who takes form as the consort of each male deity, as well as the great warrior goddess.

¹⁶⁸ A large wooden club used to pulverize grain in primitive cultures.

¹⁶⁹ *svarupa*

¹⁷⁰ *Bhagavat tattva*

¹⁷¹ This is an abstract (rather than personal) form, translatable as “the divine”.

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guru can be changed. We don't see that the devotee of a *guru* always studies in the same class out of fear of taking a new teacher. Just as one changes a class, so the change of a *guru* is natural.¹⁷² The former *guru* is not insulted. Moreover, he will still be respected as a *guru*. But to advance in learning, one must accept discipleship to new *guru*-s.

Sukadeva, son of Vyāsa, first aquired knowledge from his father, then he learned from Śankara¹⁷³, and then he learned from Nērada. Finally, he went to take discipleship from Janaka. Therefore to think, "I have taken up this *guru*, and I will not take another," is a completely worthless idea, and an obstacle to our welfare. One should not waste one's life by accepting this type of ridiculous argument. Countless lives have been spent wandering throught various births; now, after obtaining human birth, one should be careful.

Learning the nature of spiritual practice from higher and higher *guru*-s, and carrying out all the actions according to *Veda* and *Śāstra*, worship the Lord with *bhajan*-s and *puja*. Then you will certainly cross the ocean of *samsāra*.

70

Without knowledge of the Self, you will remain ignorant.

This world is like a huge coal bin. The more you associate with it, the blacker you become. Let the objective reality remain as it is. Take what you need from this world, but don't invest your love in *samsāra*.

The objects of *samsāra* are not obstacles, but your love for them is. The people of this world are not worthy of your attachment. Increase your attachment instead to Paramātma.

First learn about yourself¹⁷⁴ and then try to learn about Paramātma. If you know all about the world, but nothing of yourself, you will still remain ignorant. What is the use of learning about another while staying ignorant of oneself? It is foolish to accumulate garbage in your own house and then try to clean the houses of others. The day you begin learning about yourself is the very day that the poverty of your mind will disappear, and you will experience happiness and peace.

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¹⁷² *svabhavika*

¹⁷³ Another name for the god Siva.

¹⁷⁴ Brahmaṇanda-ji is speaking informally here. Although the Hindi *apeksa* is indeed a personal pronoun, it would be inconsistent with the entire body of his teaching to suggest that he meant something other than *Atma* in this instance.

60

By forgetting your nature, you get submerged in the sea of sorrow.

Just once take a look and ask, "Who am I?"

Whatever you have experienced in *samsāra*, all that is different from you. Body, mind, intellect, breath, and so on—all these things you see as your own. It is said, "my body, my mind, my intellect, my breath." Clearly, you are master of these things you consider as yourself, but your existence is different from them, like your house, or your temple. The temple is yours; but you are not the temple. Similarly, body, mind, intellect, breath, and so on—all these things belong to you, but they are not you. You are different from them. You are *Sat Chit Ananda*—being, consciousness, bliss—a ray of Paramātmā. But due to lack of discrimination, due to ignorance, you have built up such a strong association with the body-mind-intellect and so forth that you have started thinking these things to be your true form.

Even if you should lose a hand or leg [*karmendriya*], you would still live, and should an organ of knowledge [*jñanendriya*] such as an eye or ear be lost, then you just become blind or deaf. Your existence is not ended by the loss of an organ of action or knowledge. When you are suffering from a very painful disease, then you might say, "If I breathe my last, I'll be happy," reflecting your belief that all *samsāra*'s pains will come to an end when your life breath leaves. Thus, even your prana is different from you—that is, you are not the life's breath. Whatever we see and can experience, we are nonetheless separate from. Understand that whatever you can forsake is different from you—your true form is that which you cannot acquire or lose. You are a part of that permanent consciousness, *Sat Chit Ananda* Paramātmā, whose essence is purity, intelligence, and freedom, the witness and experiencer of all. When we experience that our true form is different from the world—body, senses, breath, and so on—then even while living in *samsāra*, we will be freed of sorrow and grief.

To experience your own nature, have faith in the Veda and Śāstra, and having accepted the aid of a true *guru*, worship according to his instruction.

Take instruction only from those who are qualified.

When people undertake spiritual disciplines, but fail to heed the ritual injunctions for correct practice, they may find that the results are not favorable. First we should consider the proper source for spiritual instruction. We should not just take up something that we happen to see and find interesting. Rather, we should let the *śāstra* be our guide.

not also the true form of Bhagavān? Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇacandra said, *Mṛgānām ca mrgendro 'ham.*¹⁷⁷

I will tell you from my own experience what happens to those who, having been inspired by the greatness of chanting Om, do that practice alone. Listen up.

If the repetition of the syllable Om is done twice, four times, or even twenty times daily, nothing special will happen. But if two or four thousand repetitions of Om are done daily, then worldly tendencies will become weakened within a short period. Arsenic is poison; if it is eaten in small quantities, nothing will happen that quickly, but just a little too much will be fatal. Similarly, if repetition of Om is done in large numbers, with concentration and devotion, then worldly tendencies will definitely be weakened. One's daily earnings will be reduced, one's wife and children may become sick, and some may even die.

Five or six years ago I had gone to Lucknow for the Lakṣa Caṇḍī Yajña.¹⁷⁸ At that time, an old lady came up to me, accompanied by a few people. Those people told me that this Mata Ji was a great devotee who carried out worship, *japa*, etc., the whole day. But they also said that a few days previously her two grown sons had died. In reply to this I inquired of her, "Are you chanting the syllable Om?" She said, "O Māharāj! That is my very support, I chant it all day." I said, "OK, you have destroyed *samsāra* through chanting Om, now don't abandon it." You see, it will destroy that thing to which you are attached; that is the result of chanting this syllable Om.

This is the reason why householders are not permitted to perform the chanting of Om by itself. Looking out for their welfare, the scriptures do not grant them permission. If chanting the syllable Om were good for householders, then there would be no reason for the scriptures to prohibit it for them. The syllable Om is prefixed to *mantra*-s for the purpose of auspiciousness. But another point is that ladies are prohibited to use a *mantra* with the Om syllable. Where men are given *mantra*-s starting with Om, women are given *mantra*-s starting with *shree*.

Bhagavān Śankara, while giving instructions to Pārvatī, said that *mantra*-s with the Om syllable are like poison for a woman, and *mantra*-s without the Om syllable are auspicious for women. One should understand that Śankara-ji was advising his own wife, but he kept her from the Om syllable. If the Om syllable were beneficial to the female gender, then why wouldn't Śankara-ji have taught it to his own better half?

Et cetera?
or
"and so
forth."
etc. is for
Reading
text,
not for
text of
discourse.

Tradition reserves guruhood for the Brahmin caste.

When you want a child, you don't just pick one up where you find it. You have to marry according to the rules and regulations and go through the rituals of pregnancy. Only then will you have a suitable child. Similarly, any work done according to the prescribed rules of ritual will produce the best results.

There is a saying: "Take superior knowledge, even if it comes from the lowly." This approach leads to disaster, and has only become popular since pot-makers, oil-sellers and the like have started becoming teachers.¹⁷⁵ It used to be that the highest wisdom could never go to one whose nature was base, and if somehow it did, then he became uplifted. How can wisdom and baseness coexist? Where light can shine, no darkness remains.

When you want to drink Ganges water, why drink from a gutter? Why not drink directly from the flowing river? If you want a child, then why not give birth to a legitimate child? If you want right knowledge, then why not take it from the right place?

73

Chanting of the syllable Om is not for everyone.

Many people will begin a spiritual practice after reading or hearing about its greatness somewhere. Often they do so after barely glancing at the rules of the shastras and without considering their suitability or unsuitability. Some, thinking that chanting the syllable Om is a very powerful meditation, start practicing on their own. After all, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Bhagavān certainly said, "I am in the syllable Om."¹⁷⁶ But if you want to meditate on the true form of Bhagavān for that reason, then why not catch and keep a lion? Is that

¹⁷⁵ Here Gurudev does not use the term *guru*, but rather *śikṣaka*

¹⁷⁶ *Bhagavad Gītā* 7.8, 9.17; see also 8.13.

¹⁷⁷ *Bhagavad Gītā* 10.30: "Among beasts, I am the lord of beasts [the lion]."

¹⁷⁸ A *Lakṣa Caṇḍī Yajña* is a recitation of the goddess's most famous text, the *Caṇḍī*, also known as the *Devī Māhātmya* or the *Durgā Saptasatī*, 100,000 times. We have not been able to pinpoint the exact date of the *yajña* referred to here, but several of this type were sponsored by Swami Karpatri (a disciple of Brahmanda Saraswati) in 1947, '48, and '49. This is not, however, the *yajña* referred to in the 1944 LIFE Magazine article.

The *śāstra*-s do not mention guruhood for women. Gargi, Cuḍālā, Sulabha, etc., were all *janani*-s¹⁷⁹ as well as *yoginī*-s,¹⁸⁰ but nowhere is it found that they had made anyone their disciple.

Anyone can obtain knowledge by performing *bhajan* and worship of Bhagavān, and all can obtain knowledge when these practices are fulfilled. Everyone is eligible to practice devotion to Bhagavān, but not all can become gurus. Brahmin-s, Kṣatriya-s, Vaiśya-s, and Śudras can all become disciples, but only male Brahmins may become gurus. Women are not authorized to become gurus [regardless of caste].

King Janaka Videha was a very great wise man, but because he was a Kṣatriya, he never tried to become a *guru*. When Śukadeva was sent by his father (Vyāsa) to Janaka, for learning wisdom, Janaka inquired, "Why have you come?" Śukadeva-ji said, "My father sent me to take discipleship and learn from you." King Janaka replied, "You are a Brahmin and I am a Kṣatriya, so I am not authorized to teach you. How can I teach you when it would be against the *śāstra*-s?"¹⁸¹

Then Śukadeva said, "You are a Kṣatriya, so to give charity is your *dharma*. The *Śāstra*-s have given you permission to give charity; therefore you may give the knowledge of Brahman¹⁸² to me on that basis." After listening to this, Janaka seated Śukadeva on a higher seat than his own, worshipped him, and gave him *Brahma Vidyā*¹⁸³ as an act of charity. But Janaka did not give this instruction as a guru to a disciple. Such was the respect accorded by society's wise leaders to the ordinances of the *śāstra*-s. Nowadays Kayasths, Vaiśyas, oil sellers, and even liquor merchants¹⁸⁴ put on the different colored garb of a *sādhu* and are eager to take on disciples. In this way both the guru and disciple will have their downfall. These things I am saying are in accord with the *śāstra*-s; I am not telling you my own mental concoction.

Rely on virtue, not on cleverness.

Yaṁ yaṁ vāpīsmaran bhāvaṁ, tyajyante kalevaram|

¹⁷⁹ The term used here is *janani*, one who knows.

¹⁸⁰ Define

¹⁸¹ See discourse 69. Gurudev did not actually say that Śukadeva became Janaka's disciple. Whether this distinction is significant or merely a finesse, we leave to the reader.

¹⁸² *viz. Brahman* Brahman is the term for the ultimate ground of being, Godhead.

¹⁸³ Supreme Knowledge

¹⁸⁴ The *kayastha*-s (a Hindu community of mixed origin) are known for their role as a clerical interface with the political powers that have ruled India in various periods, such as Muslims and the British. Vaiśyas are of the merchant class. Oil sellers and liquor merchants are far less prestigious groups.

Tam tamevaiti kaunteya, sadā tadbhāva bhāvitaḥ||

We who are here are no more related than the boats on a river.¹⁸⁵ Wherever you find yourself, in whatever condition, act wisely. Everyone here has his own "program."¹⁸⁶ If you probe deeply, then you'll realize there is nobody who can really be called a friend. One sees instead that it is always a case of "me" and "mine." In reality, in this *samsāra*, when one's own state is unclear, how can one assist another? All life is transitory, like a drop of water on a leaf which can fall at any moment. Wherever one has taken birth according to his past *karma*, there he must bide his time and practice *dharma* while remembering God. By all means, perform all necessary actions, but perform them wisely so that they do not become obstacles along the path to the other world. Wisdom is that which enhances both this world and the next. To gain wealth by cheating someone is not wise, and is in fact foolishness. Can one who is unclear about his own future ever be called wise?

Our advice here is: don't cheat, even if you are cheated. Have faith in virtue. Do not depend on cleverness and dishonesty. Act in *samsāra* in such a fashion that the work here goes on and the next life is also enhanced. This is possible only if you continue with your own duties and continually remember God. If you act in this way you can free yourself from the bondage of birth and death and be liberated from this body of urine and excrement. Otherwise, you must keep returning to *samsāra*.

76

Base your actions on the *Veda* and *Śāstra*.

People spare no effort to obtain wealth and progeny, but they do not make comparable efforts to get an *ācārya* [master]. One who has an *ācārya* will obtain all peace and happiness. However, just accepting someone as an *ācārya*.¹⁸⁷ will not make him one. Only one who has all the qualities of an *ācārya* can be regarded as such. Only one who is already an *ācārya* can bring another to that status.

*Śruti-smṛti mamaivājñe, yastomllanḡhya vartate|
ājñocchedī mamadrohī, madbhakto 'pi na me priyaḥ||*

This means, *śruti* and *smṛti* are my commandments. If anyone transgresses these, he is not dear to me, even if he is my devotee.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ The meaning here is exactly opposite to the Western "all in the same boat."

¹⁸⁶ The English term "program" is in the original.

¹⁸⁷ In this discourse, Brahmananda-ji is making a distinction between *guru* (teacher) and *ācārya* (master).

¹⁸⁸ Gurudev gives a good literal translation of this passage.

Hence *śruti* and *smṛti* [*Veda* and *Śāstra*] should be considered primary, as they are the commandments of Bhagavān.

The teaching I am giving here is strictly according to the *Veda* and *Śāstra*; it is not someone's mental concoction. I never advise anyone to follow my words. If you start listening to my personal opinions, then you will become accustomed to listening to the Śāṅkarācārya. If a foolish person should happen to sit on this chair, you will listen to him as well. Following someone's personal opinions will not lead to any good, but minding the words of the *Veda* and *Śāstra* will. Therefore I say, do not make a habit of listening to a Śāṅkarācārya's personal opinions, but listen to the *Veda* and *Śāstra*, which are the commandment of Bhagavān.

The devotees of Bhagavān must definitely follow these scriptures, which are his commandments. As long as one has not realized Bhagavān, it is necessary to follow their instructions. Once you have realized Bhagavān, then you yourself will become *Bhagavadrūpa*¹⁸⁹; and at that time there will be no question of following orders.

77

Those who seek knowledge should approach a guru.

Tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurum evābhigaccheti

Samitpāñiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham||

—*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12

Here every word has two meanings. One is the direct meaning of the words, and the other is the implied meaning.

In this teaching, the direct meaning of the word *tat* (in *Tadvijñānārthaṃ*) is *māyopādhi caitanya deva isvara*¹⁹⁰—Bhagavān Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Śakti, and so on, who are Brahman with form¹⁹¹. The implied meaning of *tat* is complete Brahman, who is beyond *Māyā*; the attributeless¹⁹², formless¹⁹³ Paramātma, who pervades all animate and inanimate forms. Thus *tat* explicitly represents Paramātma with form and with attributes¹⁹⁴, and implicitly represents the formless, attributeless Parambrahma as well.

Those who are interested in deeply understanding this should go to a *guru*. One should not approach the *guru* empty-handed, but should take some fruit and flowers. One should approach only a *guru* who has fully understood the meaning of *Veda*-s and *Śāstra*-

¹⁸⁹ Divine form.

¹⁹⁰ "The intelligent divine Lord with the attribute of *māyā*."

¹⁹¹ *sakar*

¹⁹² *nirguna*

¹⁹³ *nirakar*

¹⁹⁴ *saguna*

s¹⁹⁵ and who, through the *Veda*-s and *Vedānta*, is established in Parabrahma

Paramātmā¹⁹⁶. Only one who has both these qualities can be called a *guru* and *ācārya*.

The *guru* is the boat which helps us to cross the ocean of *samsāra*. It is very rare to get a *sat guru*¹⁹⁷ in this world, despite the multiplicity of options. *Veda*-s and *Śāstra*-s are full of mantras, of which there is no shortage. However, the mantras given in books are like a heap of bullets. There may be hundreds of varieties of bullets piled up, and one may also have a gun, but they will be useless unless someone can advise us which caliber to use. As a skilled hunter uses different caliber bullets to hunt a lion, an elephant, or a deer, similarly only an experienced *guru* knows which mantras are to be given to whom. Having observed the capacity and inclination, and so on, of a disciple, and in accordance with their eligibility, he determines mantras which would be beneficial for the devotee.

Nowhere in the scriptures do we find a teaching that gurus should go to their disciples. Nowhere do we find a teaching that disciples should send a car to bring their *guru*. Disciples should go to their *guru*; this is respectable. However, since gurus have come to depend on their disciples for their livelihood, *guru*hood's respectability has been besmirched. Who is a *raj guru*¹⁹⁸? They are *raj goru*. (A *goru* is an animal.)¹⁹⁹ Such a *guru*, like a king, will have a lot of property, he will begin riding in cars, and what's more, he will begin to enjoy heavenly comforts to the extent that he will even drop his own *puruṣārtha*. He stops thinking about the welfare of his disciples, and does not bother even if they are bound for hell. Tulsidas had rightly written:

Harai śiṣya dhana, śoka na haraiḥ meṃ guru ghora naraka māṃha para||²⁰⁰

How can sorrow be removed? The śruti says, *Tarati śokamātmani*²⁰¹. The one who knows the Self crosses the ocean of sorrow. Thus when a disciple approaches a person who is well-versed in the scriptures and is firmly established in Brahman, he will attain knowledge of the Self. This is an instruction given by *śruti*.

If the *guru* cannot give *ātma jñāna* to the disciple, or if he fails to make him see Bhagavān, but instead continues to use his money, then definitely he will go to a terrible hell. If I accept someone as my disciple, then I work hard to help him obtain the knowledge of the Self or to have the vision of Bhagavān. In case the disciple is not capable of accomplishing this due to his own unfitness, then in order to save myself from going to hell, I do not take any financial or other services from any disciple whatsoever.

Once I was at the Kumbha Mela in Prayaga [Allahabad]. There in one of the meetings I said, "I've been thinking – my business is new, but it is going very well."

¹⁹⁵ *srotriya*

¹⁹⁶ *brahmanistha*, which literally means: firmly rooted in Brahman.

¹⁹⁷ A "true teacher", or Self-realized perfect master. Also seen as *sadguru*.

¹⁹⁸ "*Raj guru*" usually indicates one who is *guru* to the wealthy.

¹⁹⁹ *Guru Dev* is making fun of *raj guru*-s.

²⁰⁰ "My wealth is stolen, my sorrow isn't ended; so my *guru* is with me in a terrible hell." From the *Ramcaritmana*.

²⁰¹ Literally, "the *ātma*-knower crosses sorrow."

Having heard this, some sādhus commented, “We see no transactions being conducted. This is a sarcastic remark at our expense.” Thinking this, some people came to me and asked, “Maharāj, in a store there is buying and selling, but you are not involved in transactions. So what to you mean by your statement?” I replied, “I also give and take, but my transactions are different from yours. You people all deal in money, but I deal in something more valuable.”

No doubt you have seen how two wealthy persons in a dispute are ready to sacrifice their entire property to win the case, but neither will bend before the other. Whatever happens, they will not bow their head before anyone else. This very head, which they refuse to bow even at the cost of their complete destruction, they will bring and touch to the very floor before me. They have nothing more valuable than this to give me. In this way we take their most precious offering and in return give them the path that will lead to their welfare. What is meant by bowing the head can be understood only by that person who had never bowed his head before anyone. One whose head bows this way and that way, he does not know the value of bowing, and such persons value money more than this. Bowing the head represents surrendering the ego and surrendering one’s own existence. It is wrong to consider money as more valuable than this. We take the ego²⁰² of the people and give them the path that leads to their salvation. This is our transaction.

78

Who can be called a *Jagadguru*?

In this world, we find two types of people—believers and atheists. For the atheist, there is no *guru*. We find two types of faith among believers. Some people have faith in the manifest aspect of Brahman and some have faith in the unmanifest aspect of Brahman. Only one who is capable of being a *guru* for both can be called a *Jagad Guru*.

Among the gods with form, there are five supported by the *Veda*-s: Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya, and Gaṇeśa. A *Jagadguru* is someone who can nurture knowledge of these five manifest gods, and can also teach those who instead espouse the unmanifest and formless. Those who teach the practice of just one god among the five are like a doctor who can only treat a few ailments, or a poor medicine man who keeps vials of medicine for different diseases and calls himself a civil surgeon²⁰³, though he doesn’t even have the status of a compounder [pharmacist]. If someone gives his son the name Rāma, nobody will object. But giving the name of Rāma will not confer the status of Rāma²⁰⁴. Similarly,

²⁰² *Ahamkara*, literally, “I-maker”.

²⁰³ The English “compounder” and “civil surgeon” are in the original.

²⁰⁴ i.e., God.

if someone writes *Jagadguru* at the beginning of his name, who can stop him? But if you want to meet a true *Jagadguru*, then you must go to the one from whose door no devotee of any god leaves disappointed.

In modern times, the different sects (*sampradaya*²⁰⁵) have hierarchized spiritual practice devoted to Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu, etc., which is improper. Among these five gods, there is none smaller or greater than the other. Every god is capable of benefiting his devotee in the same way, and therefore every worshipper is *Vaiṣṇava*, because every god is an aspect of the supreme Bhagavān. The Lord himself has explained:

*Jñānaṁ ganeśo mama cakṣurarkaḥ
śivo mamātmā mamaśaktirādyā
vibheda buddhyā mayi ye bhajanti,
mamāṅgahīnaṁ kalayanti mandāḥ*||²⁰⁶

Ganesha is Bhagavān's head, Surya is his eyes, Shiva is his *ātman*, the goddess Ādyābhagavatī is his *śakti*. Thus, if someone does not consider these four gods to be the different parts of the body of Bhagavān [Vishnu], and practices with the attitude of difference between them, then he is not worshipping Bhagavān, but butchering his limbs.

It is very clear that whoever denies Ganesha, even if a devotee of Vishnu, is cutting the head off Bhagavān Vishnu. If a Vishnu devotee denies Shiva, then he is cutting out the soul of Bhagavān Vishnu. Similarly, one who denies Devī renders Bhagavān powerless. Thus, those people of today's sects who envy and hate others, and call themselves Vaishnavas, or those who worship Shiva and call themselves Shaivas and refute Bhagavān Vishnu, are neither *Vaiṣṇava* nor Śaiva—they are just conceited. A *Vaiṣṇava* is one who is a devotee of Bhagavān Vishnu:

*Viṣṇaurataḥ vaiṣṇavāḥ ūrdhvapūṇḍhvatvaṁ vaiṣṇavatvam*²⁰⁷.

Naturally, anyone who worships Vishnu is a *Vaiṣṇava*. But anyone who worships any deity can also be called a *Vaiṣṇava*. Whenever anyone does the spiritual practice of any god, he becomes a *Vaiṣṇava*. The entire theistic world is *Vaiṣṇava*.²⁰⁸

Those who apply vertical marks [to the forehead] and call themselves *Vaiṣṇava* while calling others 'non-*Vaiṣṇava*' are out of touch with reality. They are insulting Vishnu. Similarly, if any spiritual practitioner of Shiva or Shakti thinks that he is not a *Vaiṣṇava*, then it is also his mistake. In this world, there is no believer who is not a *Vaiṣṇava*. The communalist²⁰⁹ rhetoric of sectarian spokesmen isn't helpful to them or to others.

²⁰⁵ A *sampradaya* is a lineage of devotees who follow the teachings of a specific spiritual leader.

²⁰⁶ "Ganesa is [my] knowledge, my eyes are Arka (Surya), Siva is my atman, my sakti is Adya. Those who worship me, thinking we are different, foolishly make me limbless."

²⁰⁷ "A Vaisnava is a person who wears vertical sectarian marks."

²⁰⁸ If Vishnu is the supreme (in the inclusive sense), then He is Lord to all believers.

²⁰⁹ In contemporary India, communalist rhetoric is the divisive oratory by which one group proclaims its own position of privilege with respect to another group, often for political reasons.

Cultivate good company.

Śukadeva expounded the *Bhagavata* [*Purāna*] and thousands of people heard, but among the thousands of listeners, only Parikshit achieved *mokṣa*. Many listened to Gokarna, too, but only Dhundhakari became liberated. The question naturally arises: when there is sufficient rain everywhere, why is just one man's thirst quenched? The answer is that *mokṣa* depends on the mind. Whatever one dwells on, then the mental impression of that thought is strengthened, and the bondage or freedom of an embodied soul depends on it. *Śruti* and *smṛti* give the established doctrines:

Mana eva manuṣyānām kāraṇam bandhamokṣayoḥ—śruti

Dhyana eva manuṣyānām kāraṇam bandhamokṣayoḥ || Yajnavalkya smṛti²¹⁰

We should continue to think and reflect on the doctrines and teachings we hear in the company of the righteous.

By hearing the words of the devout, one's ears will be purified. But if no further contemplation is done on those words, they will either remain there in the ear or they will go in one ear and out the other. The basic purpose of *satsaṅga* is to purify the mind. Mind is the primary thing here. If the mind remains impure, the life and death cycle will continue. If instead the mind becomes pure, one attains liberation. Maharishi Yajnavalkya says that *dhyāna* [meditation, concentration] is the cause for either liberation or bondage. Meditation is achievable only by the mind. If the mind becomes pure it starts meditating on Bhagavān, and thus one attains liberation. But if the mind remains impure it gets entangled in bad tendencies, has futile worries, and starts concentrating on unnecessary things. Thus, it keeps one wandering in the circle of *samsāra*.

One can become a Mahātma even while staying at home.

One can become a Mahātma wherever one lives. No one becomes a Mahātma by simply wearing other clothing or by applying some marks to the forehead. Dress and other externals will not lead to the ultimate good, whereas faith will certainly lead to it. The state of a Mahātma is determined by the state of mind. So stay wherever you are, but

²¹⁰ "Verily, the mind itself binds or releases human beings."—*Śruti*. "Verily, meditation itself binds or releases human beings."—*Yajnavalkya smṛti*.

change the direction of your mind. Think less about *samsāra* and think more about Paramātma.

Nowadays people think a great deal about things they should not waste their time on. One should primarily contemplate Paramātma; instead, people contemplate worldly objects. That is why they are unable to experience peace and happiness. If you apply your vital breath²¹¹ to worldly activities and enjoyment of the senses, then your lungs are like the bellows of a blacksmith. Hence take care of your vital breath and apply yourself to Paramātma.

First generate faith. You already have sufficient faith in money; that is why you are able to think about it. When you have faith in Paramātma, then you will start contemplating Him. You must realize that money and all the objects of *samsāra* will remain here, while you have to carry out your future journey alone. Prepare for that future journey at this very moment. Increase your faith in higher goals, and increase your love for that ever-blissful Paramātma. Show superficial interest in the things of the world, which will always remain here, and place primary faith in the ultimate goal, which will remain with you.

Once you discover that a tantalizing heap of money was actually created by a magician, the temptation to take it will wither, and you will no longer covet it. Like the magician's money, all the objects and relationships of *samsāra* are transient. Therefore, carry out all daily affairs according to societal expectations, but do not reserve a place for these things in your mind. Keep your mind free for the imperishable Paramātma, whose very essence is bliss. Always keep Bhagavān in your mind and never transgress the bounds of propriety—this is what it means to be a Mahātma.

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It is more important to purify the intellect than to accumulate money.

If you were to expend half as much energy in purifying your intellect (see original) as you expend in accumulating money, your children would benefit greatly. If your intellect is pure, your children can experience greater peace and happiness even with less money. However, if your intellect is impure, your children will become entangled in bad habits and will fall into unhappiness and sorrow—regardless of your wealth and property. Therefore, try to purify your intellect first, and then earn your money.

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²¹¹ *Prana*: "life" or "life force". **MORE HERE**

Without knowledge there is neither *Bhakti* nor *Mokṣa*.

Many births are required to work out the karma generated during one human lifetime. That is why the *jīva* has such a large balance of accumulated karma. To exhaust it all would take innumerable births. If the *jīva* wanted to exhaust all this accumulated karma through experience, it would have to remain in the cycle of birth and death until the accumulated karma is destroyed. But *jñāna agni*, the fire of knowledge, can exhaust the huge mound of accumulated karma instantly. The awakened ones call the person who has burned all accumulated *karma* with the help of the fire of knowledge a *paṇḍit*.

*Jñānāgni dagdhakarmāṇaṁ tamāhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ budhāḥ*²¹².

If someone kills another within the flash of an angry moment, he will either be hanged or receive a very long prison term. From this example, we can see that even when an action is completed within just a few minutes, it can take many years to work off the karma of that action. Just think how many births it will require to work off the karma from the actions done in the span of one entire life. This shows the greatness of the knowledge which can destroy accumulated karma.

*Yathaidhāṁsi samiddhogṇirbhasmasātkurute 'rjuna|
jñānāgni sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasātkurute tathā*||²¹³

This means that just as the fire's flame burns all traces of fuel to ashes, the fire of knowledge burns up all accumulated karma. Therefore, destroy accumulated *karma* with the fire of knowledge and experience commenced *karma* peacefully.

To acquire that knowledge which can burn up all accumulated karma is the highest goal. After gaining that knowledge, there will be nothing left to be done.

*Jñānām ṛtena ṛptasya kṛtakṛtyasya yoginaḥ|
naivāsti kiṁcikitartavyaṁ asti cennasa tattvavit*||²¹⁴

For the knowledgeable one, it is written, "If he desires something, then he should chant the *omkāra* for it."

*Buddha tatvena dhī doṣa sūnyennekāntavāsinaḥ |
dīrghaṁ praṇavamuccārya manorājyaṁ vilīyate*.²¹⁵

After gaining knowledge, one obtains *videha mokṣa* when released from the body²¹⁶. But for *jīvan mukti*, one must take recourse to the practice of grasping the Self.

Supreme knowledge is direct and immediate. It is knowing—from the study of the *śāstra* and *guru*-s—the one, unique *Paramātmā* which pervades all creation as

²¹² "He whose actions have been burnt in the fire of knowledge is called by the awakened: *paṇḍitam*."

²¹³ *Bhagavad Gita* 4.37: "As a blazing fire turns a log into ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge burn to ashes all karmas."

²¹⁴ Guru Dev's introduction to this phrase is a fairly literal translation of this verse.

²¹⁵ Again, this is almost verbatim.

²¹⁶ *Videha mokṣa*, literally "bodiless release", is the state of release attained only after the body is cast off. This is in contrast with *jīvanmukti*, enlightenment while still living an embodied existence.

Seems that other terms were available to this word. Implies a drawing man attitude. Is "embracing" an alternative?

typo

satchitananda and is the very embodiment of unbounded knowledge. This type of certainty—wisdom devoid of doubt—is direct²¹⁷ knowledge.

Prahalada said, “My God is fully immanent in all, everywhere.” Of this he was certain, so day and night he dwelled on thoughts of Bhagavān. Until one knows Bhagavān, how can one perform His *bhakti*? To accept that God is everywhere in creation is knowledge, and to apply oneself to his service and devotion is *bhakti*. To see Him appear in one place directly through *bhakti* is *vijñāna* [wisdom], and to become absorbed in that state is supreme devotion.

83

Do good works without hesitation.

The *jīva* has been experiencing *samsāra* for many, many births. It is only natural, therefore, that its tendencies have become worldly. To turn its tendency toward Paramātmā and away from *samsāra* requires effort. In reality, the aim of life is to stop the mind from involvement with this world. If one engages in the spiritual practice of Bhagavān and in thinking and speaking about Him, the mind will start dwelling on Him, and after some time, it will withdraw from *samsāra* on its own.

In our daily affairs we should adopt a strategy of quickly attending to good works and things related to the divine. Should any wrong thought arise, on the other hand, we should try to postpone it to another time by saying, “I’ll do it tomorrow, or the day after next.” In this way, wrong action can be continuously postponed.

84

If you want God’s blessings, invite Him into your heart.

The all-pervasive, formless divine being,²¹⁸ is incapable of action; it is merely a witness. Only when it manifests itself in one place with the help of *māyā* can it take some action in *māyā*-’s world, which is characterized by three *guṇa*-s.²¹⁹ When fire remains unmanifest in wood—even though it’s all-pervading—it can do nothing for us. But when we ignite the wood at the appropriate place, then we can use its flames as we see fit.

²¹⁷ *aparokṣa*

²¹⁸ *bhagavatsattā*

CROSS REFERENCE

Similarly, only when (through our spiritual practice) the all-pervasive divine being manifests in some site—only then can He be of help to us.

Spiritual practice is a staircase by which the devotee climbs to God, and God climbs down to the devotee. Only through *upāsana* does the spirit of Bhagavān (which abides in all animate and inanimate things) manifest itself in one place, thus becoming able to act in accordance with the devotee's desires. Only when the formless, unmanifest pure existence manifests itself in a form with attributes can any activity unfold. Hence if you want to receive Bhagavān's blessings, then carry out spiritual practice and make him manifest, either inside or outside. Only when Bhagavān manifests in one's heart will all the poverty of life be eliminated.

85

If you want to be happy, approach the ocean of happiness.

You can acquire something only where you can find it. If you want money, you must approach the wealthy; if you want wisdom, you must go to the wise. If you want to buy pearls and diamonds, you have to go to a jeweler's shop, because you will not find them in a vegetable market no matter how hard you search. Similarly, if you want peace and happiness you must approach Paramātmā, who is the essence of peace and happiness. Otherwise, no matter how hard you pound your head against the ground, no matter how hard you labor in *samsāra*, you will not be able to obtain peace and happiness.

However hard you may strive to gain peace and happiness by earning money and acquiring recognition, you will be handed an equal measure of sorrow and restlessness. You may think, "If I can just get this particular object I will be happy," and then when that thing is acquired, you may think, "Now I am happy." This kind of imagining is another matter. Just understand that peace and happiness are in none of the objects here.

By falling into the exuberance of *samsāra*, you have forgotten Paramātmā, who is unlimited and full of bliss. Because you have distanced yourself from Īśvara, you have become unhappy, and that unhappiness will leave only in His presence. You have lost yourself so much in the things of the world that you have become deluded about your very nature. You cannot answer the question, "Who am I?"

What can be said about a madman who is so insane that he has forgotten his identity and cannot recognize his own true nature [*svarūpa*]? Such a person could enter a dark cave in search of light. This is what it's like to search for peace and happiness in things of *samsāra*.

If you want to be happy, then approach Paramātmā who is the ocean of happiness. Only by approaching Paramātmā can you obtain peace, happiness, and glory for this

world and the next. As darkness surrounds a person bereft of light, so unhappiness and troubles surround a person who turns away from Paramātmā.

86

Pray to Bhagavān without fail, whether the mind likes it or not.

If you remember the Lord, even with an impure and wicked mind, your sins will be destroyed—just as you would burn yourself if you touched a flame, whether you intended to touch it or not. To love Bhagavān is difficult because the mind has been spoiled for so many lifetimes.

Sit to do *bhajan-s*²²⁰ without fail. If the mind wants to run here and there, let it run, but don't get up and run after it. Sit to do *bhajan-s* and do not worry if your mind wanders. Continue to sit counting each round on the rosary with that very mind. Don't think, "My mind is too scattered," and then get up. The mind can develop concentration gradually, and you should not worry. But one thing is essential to pay attention to, and that is to continue the *bhajan-s* to Bhagavān, yet at the same time, guard against committing sins. Do not think that because prayer to Bhagavān destroys sins that you should feel free to commit a few more. If you keep committing sins, those very sins will draw you away from your prayer to Bhagavān—this is certain.

87

Is it best to experience God through knowledge or through perception?

There are two ways to meet with God. In whatever way He comes before you, and in whatever form He appears, just accept Him. Whether He manifests himself to you or remains formless, be strong in your faith. But for everyday purposes, you should choose one spiritual practice as a basis and follow its rules. Basing oneself in a particular practice clarifies things. If you wish to keep faith in only the formless state, the mind must become your eye. Remember, it is necessary to adopt and follow a particular spiritual practice. Through spiritual practice and meditating, love for one's chosen deity increases, and when love increases, the chosen one is seen directly.

(E)sta Devak

²²⁰ Although Brahmananda-ji specifies *bhajan-s* in the text, he is clearly using the term as a general indicator of spiritual practice.

75

Don't get involved in philosophical confusions.

People debate many concepts related to *bhakti* and *jñāna*. Some argue that devotion is superior, and some that knowledge is. Only those who don't know the true meaning of *bhakti* and *jñāna* feel this way, seeing devotion and knowledge to be opposed, and are willing to fight over it. It has been said that to know Paramātma is *jñāna*, and, having known Him, to worship Him is *bhakti*.

If you don't know Him, then how can you worship Him? You see, it is very clear that without knowledge, *bhakti* is not possible. Neither those who are against *jñāna* and in favor of the *bhakti*, nor those who favor *jñāna* but oppose *bhakti*, are aware of their own spiritual blindness. How can one trust the testimony of the blind? We can only trust the words of someone who can see.

Some people fight over the distinction between the manifest and the unmanifest.²²¹ If you believe that Paramātma is almighty, then how can you say, "He isn't manifest," or "He remains unmanifest." To believe that Paramātma is almighty, but to insist that He is unmanifest only, is a complete contradiction. When you say Paramātma is completely free and independent, then how could you believe it is not possible for Him to take *any* form, or to think He is not able to do something? To explain how God exists both with qualities and without, I would like to give one example. *Agni*²²² is everywhere; *agni* is even in water.²²³ *Agni* is in every solid thing. Fire is in wood. There is no place where fire does not exist. We know without doubt that fire is all pervasive. Just like fire, Paramātma is all-pervasive.

Fire exists unmanifest even in a splinter of wood. If you put the splinter into the fireplace and pray for it to burn, it will not. Until fire takes form from formlessness, it can be of no use. Fire may exist without qualities, but [in this state] it will be useless for you. Similarly, the unqualified, unmanifest Parabrahma is all-pervasive in all creation, and like the unmanifest fire, it is useless to you. If anything is to be accomplished in this world, it will only be done by the manifest Brahman. With the help of the *guru*, the disciple can light the splinter from within and make use of this manifest form as he sees fit. As long as

²²¹ The terms throughout this discourse being translated as "manifest" and "unmanifest" are *sākār* and *nirākār*.

²²² Fire. Personified, it is the Vedic deity, *Agni*, the fire god, or personification of the fire principle.

²²³ *Agni*, the deity of fire, is often identified as the Child of the Waters, an ancient deity Vedic sources share with the Iranian Avesta. Introducing her translation of a Vedic verse dedicated to the Child of the Waters, Wendy Doniger writes, "As the embodiment of the dialectic conjunction of fire and water, the child of the waters is a symbol central to Vedic and later Hindu cosmology." (*The Rig Veda*, Penguin Books, 1981, pp. 104-5) In the mythology, *Agni* appears in the form of lightning born of the clouds which bring the rains.

Bhagavān does not manifest himself from the formless, He can do absolutely nothing for us. In the same context, the *Bhagavad Gītā* says:

*yadā yadā hī dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata|
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham||*²²⁴

Ātmānaṃ sṛjāmi means, “When I take form from formlessness.” When? “When *dharma* is on the decline and *adharma* is on the rise.” Why does the Lord have to take on a form from within the formless? It explains this by saying,

*Paritrāṇāya sādḥunāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām|
dharma saṃsthāpanārthāya saṃbhavāmi yuge yuge||*²²⁵

“For the benefit of the good and to destroy the evil, I manifest myself and I establish *dharma*.”

Don't take the word *sādhu* here to mean those who wear ocher robes or sectarian marks on their foreheads or sacred rosaries. The meaning of the word *sādhu* is this – *sādhus* are good-natured people with good hearts, who respect the limits set by Vedas and Shastras and who have faith in their own enjoined duties and follow them. Bhagavān's *avatār*-s are for the welfare of those people.

If Bhagavān does not assume a manifest form, then the world cannot be orderly. The nature of a thing determines its use. For example, if you bring a microphone²²⁶ and place it in front of me, but I sit silently, then it will serve no purpose. The unmanifest is like me sitting silent. If I always sit silent, what benefit can there be for you all? No profit can be derived from the unmanifest Bhagavān until He assumes a form. I am telling you the way it is. I must explain these teachings strictly as they are told in the *Veda* and *Śāstra*, and not to expound my own thinking. My duty is to explain the teachings clearly. In this respect, I do not care whether the words are pleasing to one or irritating to another. I neither need to please nor to antagonize anybody. Still, I question those people who propound only the unmanifest. In fact, I also accept the unmanifest, but not the unmanifest alone. I ask those who propound only the formless: Can any profit be derived from the unmanifest fire which is hidden in a piece of wood? Please show me any bread cooked by an unmanifest fire. The formless is only Being.

I would like to ask those people who meditate only on the formless, how have you meditated on the unmanifest? The mind can only concentrate on an object of meditation, so how can one make the unmanifest an object of meditation?

Concentration [*dhyāna*] on the unmanifest is not possible. If someone says that he concentrates on the formless, it is like saying that he is going to attend the wedding of the son of a barren woman. Well, the son of a barren woman does not exist, so how can he marry? When there is no form or outline to the unmanifest, how can one make it an

²²⁴ Whenever *dharma* declines, O Descendent of Bharata, and *adharma* prevails, then I take birth
²²⁵ To deliver the pious and destroy evildoers, and to reestablish *dharma*, I appear in age after age. [cite]

²²⁶ English “loudspeaker” is in the original.

object of meditation? To collect the mental formations, some foundation is necessary. Whatever is taken as the mind's foundation, that becomes the form.

Formlessness is beyond all the trios, namely: meditation, meditator, and object of mediation; and knowledge, knower, and object of knowledge. Meditation on the formless is mere mockery. Only those who do not understand the principle of formlessness can talk about *dhyana* on the formless. The principle of formlessness is merely for understanding; it is the principle of existence, but the world cannot derive any benefit from this principle. Can anybody derive any benefit from an unmanifest son? Can anybody go to an unmanifest school and study? Can any minister²²⁷ sit on an unmanifest chair? Can anyone cure a disease with an unmanifest medicine? Can anyone be pleased with unmanifest food? The unmanifest is a completely useless thing. It cannot be used for any purpose. That is why the argument about formlessness is thoroughly useless.

The unmanifest is like a seed kept locked in a box. What is the use of it? But if you sow it and do all the things required to grow it, then it will give flowers and fruits. Until then, what's the benefit of a seed?

The formless Paramātma is all-pervasive. For example, if a room is full of furniture, the unmanifest fire is within the furniture's wood. If the room becomes dark, that all-pervading unmanifest fire cannot remove it. But if some of the furniture is ignited, the unmanifest fire can be made manifest, and the darkness of that room will be eliminated immediately. But as long as the fire is not manifest, it will not be useful in the daily affairs of this manifest world. Only when the formless manifests in some form will it be useful to the world.

If Paramātma should assume form, would He become your beast of burden, to do whatever you wish? He is extremely independent. *Veda* says, [Sanskrit]: *So 'kṣaraḥ parama svarāt*.

This means, "He is the indivisible²²⁸ which cannot be destroyed [Om]."

Paramātma is supremely independent. Those who think "He is the unmanifest and is not manifest," or "He is manifest, not unmanifest," have not understood the teaching about Paramātma's essence. Taking one side or the other, they start fighting. We should not become involved in the argument about manifest and unmanifest. The One who is manifest is also the unmanifest. The unmanifestness exists merely for the sake of understanding, but the manifest exists for the welfare of the world.

The manifestation of Paramātma is like the manifestation of fire, which is latent everywhere within the wood, but only appears as flame when we rub two sticks together. Only then do we realize that there was unmanifest fire in the wood. Similarly, when undifferentiated, unmanifest Paramātma manifests itself, all our doubts about it vanish.

²²⁷ English "minister" is in the original.

²²⁸ The word *akṣaraḥ* means "that which cannot be divided/destroyed." Here, the phrase is used to refer to the mantra syllable om and its identity with Brahman.

Only one who manifests fire by rubbing two sticks of wood together can say without doubt that fire resides in the wood. When fire manifests as flames, one can be completely certain about the unmanifest fire in the wood. If it is not possible to produce a flame from wood, then we cannot speak about unmanifest fire in the wood with full conviction. Only when the Lord manifests himself can we say with full confidence that He must exist in unmanifest form. With the help of the manifest form, we have evidence of the unmanifest. Otherwise, how can anyone know the unmanifest?

As fire manifests from the invisible to the visible, so also Paramātmā manifests itself from the invisible to the visible. It is completely invalid to say that the manifest (*saguna*) does not come from the unmanifest (*nirguna*). Due to the influence of the *nirguna* proponents, sin has increased significantly in society, because these people don't accept the manifest Bhagavān. Thinking that the unmanifest cannot hear or see anything, they act as they wish. They don't understand the meaning of sin and virtue.

89

We must reap what we have sown.

Whether today, or after ten years, or after ten births, it is certain that we must reap the consequences of our actions. Whatever the action, be it large or small, there will certainly be a corresponding result. This is certain:

Apūgṛā-pūnyapāpanātī, khaiva-phalamastute

If an action is powerful and demonstrates great virtue or great sin, then the result of that action will come in this same birth, within a short time. Actions of ordinary virtue or sin may produce their results after a longer period. But it will never happen that we will escape the result of any of our actions.

The One who delivers the result of our action is all-knowing. Action is mechanical, likewise its result. He who administers the result of every action is the conscious Paramātmān, dwelling within it all, the knower of everything and all-pervasive. He keeps perfect account of every action done by every person. According to the action, He delivers the result. You can prevent the people around you from seeing your actions, but you cannot prevent Paramātmā from seeing. Not a single action can be done which can be kept from his eyes. Therefore, don't do any action which you believe to be a sin. Don't forget that sinful action is the cause of sorrow. Whatever action we do, the result of that action will return to us. If you perform right action, the result will be happiness, and if you perform wrong action, you most certainly will suffer. If you plant the seed of an acacia tree, it will bear thorns, not mangoes.

Whatever is in your mind, speak and act accordingly.

In those days when I was living in the solitude of the forest,²²⁹ I frequented a temple at Reva, on the bank of a nearby river. One morning a man from a neighboring village came and worshipped in the temple, after which he approached me and asked the following question: "Maharāj, knowers²³⁰ attain liberation by the power of their knowledge. Devotees cross [this ocean of *samsāra*] by the power of their devotion, and the destitute take the help of Bhagavān, who is the protector of the oppressed. So which people go to hell?" I told him, "I'll give you the answer tomorrow morning."

The next morning, the man returned to the temple and started praying before Bhagavān, saying [Sanskrit]:

Pāpo 'haṃ pāpakarmā 'haṃ, pāpātmā pāpasambhavaḥ . |

He continued praying in this fashion for quite some time—"I am a sinner. I have committed many sins. My Ātma is full of sins. I am born out of sin..." and so on. When he had finished, and was approaching me, I told a Brahmachari, "Throw this sinner out. Where has such a sinner come from so early in the morning? No one should see his face,²³¹ so remove this evil person far away from here, and quickly."

After moving a little away from me, he started telling the Brahmachari, "I am not such a sinner as Maharāj thinks." When I heard this, I called to him and told him, "I am not calling you a sinner; I am answering your question from yesterday."

"When I called you a sinner, you felt very unhappy. From this it can be understood that you do not consider yourself a sinner. But every morning you come before Bhagavān and start saying, *Pāpo 'haṃ pāpakarmā 'haṃ*. You were speaking this way before the Lord, but in your own mind you don't consider yourself to be a sinner. This type of person, *manasi anyat, vacasi anyat*, the one who believes one thing but speaks another, goes to hell. And this is the answer to your question. You should speak what you think, and act accordingly. Only then will you deceive no one, and you also will experience peace and happiness."

Do not entangle your mind in the things of this world.

²²⁹ See introduction. This is apparently in the approximate time period when Brahmananda-ji was visited by Swami Rama.

²³⁰ Brahmananda-ji used the term *jñāni*.

²³¹ It is considered unlucky to see a sinner early in the morning.

It is not correct to entangle the mind much in *samsāra*. You need to act with discrimination. We have only three things in life: body, mind, and wealth. If these three things are utilized properly, then there will be no occasion to repent. Let bygones be bygones, but take care that from now on things will not be spoiled. If you rely on the Vedas and scriptures, then you needn't fear that you will lapse. The time will come anyway when you will have to leave this place. Therefore you should accumulate only the wealth and riches which will be useful in the next world.

Wisdom consists of using things properly. The utility of mind lies only in contemplating the Lord. Contemplating worldly things is a misuse.

Benevolent activities and spiritual disciplines constitute the proper utilization of the body. Creating trouble for others, theft, etc., are misuses of the body.

Similarly, the proper utilization of wealth is in employing it for good activities. Using it for wrong desires is its misuse. *Dēnaṃ bhogo nāśaḥ*.²³² Wealth is used in three ways. One is to spend it in charity, which may be of three types: *sattwic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic*. *Sattwic* charity [*dāna*] gives the best results. Another use of money is to spend it in enjoyment. Wealth that is not enjoyed or given in charity will end in the third possibility, meaning it will be dissipated.

The meaning of enjoyment here should not be confused with the way people are using wealth for enjoyment nowadays. An extremely luxurious life is not right. Even enjoyment must be within certain ethical limits. The mind can never be satiated by sensory pleasures, and no one in fact should expect that one day it will be satiated that way. Even if the senses are withdrawn and one refrains from action, the mind will not be contented. It is just impossible to get satisfaction and contentment through enjoyment. This principle will not change if one enjoys a bit or one enjoys day in and day out. If you drink a cup of wine or ten bottles, it is the same.

If you really want to get intoxicated, get high in such a way that you never have to come down. What is the use of the ordinary way of getting high, where you lose money and even the high wears off?

The intoxication of God realization is permanent. We should seek the kind of intoxication that never goes away, even after the body is cast off.

In human life you must base your actions on proper thinking. Don't just act out of old habits in the same way you hang around with old chums. You should act after thinking about what you have to gain or lose. Some people don't go to satsang because they think they must swear off meat or alcohol. What greater madness is there than to let such fears deprive you of the company of the wise? When you yourself are not able to drop out of such habits, then you should cultivate a better quality of association. In good association lies the possibility of real gain. To remove the darkness, take the help of the

²³² "Charity, enjoyment, destruction."

light. In presence of light, darkness will depart on its own. Your struggle should be to desire the light. Therefore, removing the mind from *samsāra*, you should turn it toward Paramātma, and place your faith in *Veda*, *śāstra*, *sādhu-s*, and *mahātma-s*.

We say, first serve *samsāra*, and after that, serve God²³³; then this world will not be obstructive. Serving *samsāra* is nothing but knowing its true form. In the beginning, the world itself becomes the *guru*. When even family members such as your own son insult you, then you become detached from the world.

Therefore, beware from the very outset and practice keeping your mind directed toward Bhagavān.

As long as we are capable of earning money, worldly people love us. But you will not always be strong; one day old age will come, so why should you not understand from today what family members are going to do with you in the future? At this moment we think they love us, but when that stage comes, we will be filled with regret. Then we will say, "My son is not listening to me, my daughter-in-law is not listening to me, those for whom I have done so much are now insulting me."

This being the case, why should we do that which will result in tears later? From this moment forward we should become careful. In *samsāra*, nobody belongs to anybody. Everyone stays together for their own benefit. As long as someone wants something, they will be affectionate towards you. So before you become disillusioned with these people, turn towards God. If from this moment on you do Bhagavān's spiritual practice, then you will not be concerned about insults from your family members. The one worthy of love is Paramātma, so love Him, and then you can be happy.

92

If you wish to reach God, rely upon his name.

Hanūmān was an unparalleled devotee of Lord Rāma, and he served Bhagavān endlessly. His devotion was unwavering, yet he desired nothing in return. One does not have to tell a great devotee what to do; he just anticipates and spontaneously carries out the appropriate action.

Lord Rāma sent Hanūmān to bring news about Sītā, ordering him only to conduct reconnaissance. Nevertheless, Hanūmān burned Lanka and challenged Rāvaṇa to a war; he knew that Rāvaṇa had to be destroyed and that doing this would make Bhagavān happy. Bhagavān has said,

Durācārato vāmi mannāmbhajanātkape |
sālokyamuktimāpnoti na tu lokāntarādiham ||

²³³ This somewhat resembles the New Testament teaching, Render unto Caesar...

Complete phrase?

“O monkey, even if my praises are sung by an evil-doer, he will obtain *sālokya mokṣa*²³⁴ rather than endure rebirth.²³⁵

In *sālokya mokṣa*, there is still some delay before merging with Bhagavān, but one is freed from taking birth again in any womb. Such people do not return to *samsāra*. Even wicked people who start worshipping God become virtuous, but this does not mean that worshipping God gives one license to keep perpetrating evil acts. How can one who worships Bhagavān remain a wicked person?

To reach Bhagavān, rely upon His name. The Lord is ready to make you his own, but the failing is ours. Bhagavān takes care of the world with three hands, but keeps one hand empty. This is like women who bear water, stacking two pitchers on their head, holding a rope in one hand,²³⁶ but keeping the other free. When the child starts crying to come into the mother's lap, then the mother says, “Catch hold of my leg so I can lift you with one hand.” None of her duties are interrupted. Likewise, all the activities of creation, sustenance, and destruction are taken care of by Bhagavān, and he also keeps one hand free for the sake of his devotees. But don't just presume that you will be lifted after grasping Bhagavān's feet. To serve and worship, to do his *bhajan*—these constitute “catching Bhagavān's feet”. If you make Bhagavān your own, then He cannot stay far away from you. Through worshipping Bhagavān, the body is cast off, and the poverty of many lives will be destroyed.

Sorrow has only apparent reality.²³⁷

²³⁴ Viz., “release within a world,” the heaven which according to the *bhakti* tradition is in close vicinity to the manifest god.

²³⁵ Gurudev teaches that the disciple must make some effort to reach the divine, who will respond with gracious assistance. This concept of *bhakti* has often been likened to the “monkey” school of devotion, so called because a baby monkey grasps its mother as she carries it. In contrast, the “cat” school of devotion holds that the devotee is as helpless as a kitten, scooped up by the nape of its neck by its mother and carried whither she wills.

²³⁶ Communal wells do not generally have ropes attached to them, so the people who use the well bring their own rope and bucket to draw water.

²³⁷ Gurudev is concerned here to discuss the levels of reality taught in the Shankaracharya tradition to clear up potential confusion on the stance of the “real” and “unreal.” Gurudev uses the term *prātibhāsika* here, connoting “that which only appears to be real.” In Śankara's view of reality, *prātibhāsika* corresponds to elements within phenomenal reality. For example, dreams are phenomenally real, but less real than waking experience. The misunderstanding of a rope to be a snake is less real or true than understanding a rope to be a rope. Hence, sorrow certainly exists on a phenomenal level; but our understanding of it can shift, such that once one realizes it only affects those aspects limited to phenomenal reality, and the ultimate is unaffected, freedom results. The ultimately real—which never changes, and is ever true—is *paramārthika*, which corresponds to Atman, Brahman, and Paramātmā. Gurudev introduces the concept of *paramārthika*

Nowadays people everywhere seem to lack happiness and peace. The reason for this is the scarcity of real knowledge, as is clear to one who thinks with discrimination. External situations cannot influence us as long as we work with determination towards equanimity. Only when we accept within our mind the proposition that external situations give happiness or sorrow—only then do they make us happy or sorrowful. If we can continuously maintain the awareness that we are beyond the gross, subtle, and causal bodies, and that we are pure *sat-chit-ananda Ātma*, then, we cannot experience sorrow in any situation.

We cannot avoid the experience of our commenced karma. Both the enlightened and the ignorant have to experience it. The only difference is that the enlightened experience *prārabdha* cheerfully, be it good or bad, while the ignorant experience it weeping. When it is certain that everyone has to experience commenced karma, then why not take it cheerfully? In reality there is no sorrow. It has but apparent existence, which is a mere by-product of delusion. It is like the case of seeing a rope in a dark room and imagining it to be a snake, due to which one experiences all the fears associated with the snake. Were you to see the rope in the light of the sun, you would neither worry nor fear nor tremble. Imagine someone in the company of some people who mistook a rope for a snake and became afraid. In the same way, a true knower may be in your midst, and sorrow cannot shake him.

If you discriminate, you will understand that the rope was the same for all. But the one who has seen it in the light will have no fear when he sees it in the darkness. The deluded, failing to comprehend its real nature and thinking it to be a snake, will be afraid and sorrowful. If by some means the delusion were removed, then their fear would disappear as well. This clearly shows that the reason for the sorrow is delusion. Delusion can be removed, and therefore the sorrow can be removed. If sorrow were not born out of delusion, and if it had ultimate existence,²³⁸ then even the Creator could not remove it, because that which is real can never become non-existent.

Delusions can be destroyed in two ways, as illustrated by this same example of the snake and the rope. With the aid of a lamp, one can see the real form of the rope, and thereby the illusion of the snake can be removed. No one will be afraid of the rope. It was only the illusion of a snake which caused the problems of fear, trembling, etc. Direct knowledge of the underlying reality removed its unreal aspects.

in the following paragraphs. As Gurudev puts it, "that which is real can never become non-existent." This "non-existent," which has no reality whatsoever, is the *asat*, literally the "not-is" or "not-true," the opposite of the truly real. *Asat* corresponds to the logically impossible, whose classic example is the son of a barren woman.

²³⁸ *Paramārthika* is the ultimately real. In Shankara's thought, this is the level of *ātma/Brahman*.

Does he say
english etcetera
You know, like Yul
Brenner in the King of I.

The second method of destroying delusion is to have firm faith in the words of the person who knows. By having faith in the words of him who has seen the rope in the daylight and who understands its nature correctly, fear can be removed.

Through *viveka* [discrimination], *vairāgya* [nonattachment], *mumukṣa* [desire for liberation], and *shatsampatti* [the six treasures²³⁹], the *jñāni* obtains *samadhi* and thereby attains direct knowledge of the world and of Brahman. He knows that Paramātma pervades every form, whether *ātma* or non-*ātma*. Thus, although he remains in the world, he is beyond duality. By virtue of the knowledge gained in *samādhi*, he never feels any agony in daily affairs, because where ignorant people see danger, the *jñāni* sees Īśvara. For all the moving and unmoving, the single foundation of all the world is Paramātma. When we come to see that the rope is the foundation of the snake, our fears dissipate. Similarly, when we understand that the foundation of the world is Paramātma, then there will be no place for fear.

Even those who lack a spiritual practice (and are therefore incapable of direct knowledge of Paramātma) can, to a great extent, have their sorrow removed—if they have faith and trust in the *śāstra*-s and the works taught by a true *guru* established in Brahman. As long as there are misconceptions in the inner instrument, even with the aid of thousands of devices, there will never be relief from sorrow. If you serve liquor to a distressed man and render him senseless, he will forget his pain for as long as he remains drunk. But when the effect of the alcohol wears off, he returns to his sorrowful state. Similarly, it isn't possible to get rid of sorrow by engaging the mind in worldly objects.

Knowing *ātma* will destroy all sorrow forever. This same consciousness is known by different names: Paramātma pervades all living beings in the form of *ātma*; there is no difference between the two. That which is *ātma* is also known as *caitanya jīva*. The difference is only conditional.²⁴⁰ Consciousness linked with condition is called *jīva*, and that consciousness which is free of all conditions is the *ātma*. The difference between *ātma* and *jīva* is like the difference between husked rice and unhusked rice. While still in the husk it is called paddy, and when the husk is removed, it is called rice.

The practical difference between paddy and rice is that when paddy comes into contact with water and mud, it can sprout. But however long husked rice remains in contact with water and mud, it will not sprout into a plant. Similarly, as long as the bondage to good and bad action is present, the *caitanya jīva* will appear, and when the bondage due to actions is dissolved, there is awakened the pure *ātma*. Rebirth of *jīva* is the sprouting. Good and bad *karma* is like the husk enclosing the *jīva*. By removing the

²³⁹ In this section Brahmananda-ji discusses Vedanta's traditional requirements for supreme knowledge. The Six Treasures are *Śama*: mental control; *Dama*: control of the senses; *Uparati*: abstinence; *Titikṣā*: forbearance; *Śraddhā*: faith; *Samadhana*: mental equilibrium.

²⁴⁰ *upadhi*.

outer husk, the grain cannot sprout. That is, if good and bad karma are renounced, then rebirth will not take place.

As long as the husk remains, we have only paddy. Even though the rice is inside, no one can boil and eat it, and anyone who tries to boil the paddy and eat it will be considered crazy. Similarly, as long as the bondage due to *karma* is not destroyed, the *jīva* will be deprived of the experience of supreme bliss.

The individual deluded by the force of ignorance gets entrapped in bondage. The great delusion of ignorance can only be removed by true knowledge, for which it is essential to have both scriptures and a *sadguru*. Knowledge of the *ātma* cannot be attained without the help of the *guru*, even if an individual struggles hard throughout his life.

Consider the example of ten people who crossed a river together: their leader insisted on a head count to insure that all had made it across; when he only counted nine, they all began weeping, thinking that one person had drowned while crossing. Then a Mahātma came and removed their delusion. When the Mahātma made them count again, he told the leader, *Dasavim tvam asi*, "You are the tenth," and then their sorrow disappeared. Similarly, only through the *guru* is it possible to become enlightened about *Tat tvam asi*.²⁴¹

Strengthen your faith in the existence of Bhagavān and his all-compassionate nature. Courageously face commenced karma and continue to do your enjoined activities as appropriate to your caste and stage of life. As you continue to practice your own dharma, your inner instrument will be purified, and only then will you gain the worthiness to attain knowledge of *ātma*. You need not abandon your daily affairs for the sake of obtaining knowledge. Continue your daily affairs of the world [*samsāra*], but don't entangle your mind in them. *Samsāra* is not the cause for bondage, rather it is the attachment you have developed in the world [*samsāra*] which is the cause for bondage. Hence, renounce attachment and enjoy imperishable happiness. I am not speaking merely from book knowledge, I am speaking from my personal experience. If you follow these things with faith and fortitude, then certainly you can become happy.

Only the Self-realized can cross the ocean of sorrow.

When we look at this world with discernment, we see that there is not an iota of happiness there. Feeling happy in *samsāra* is something like feeling happy while your

²⁴¹ Gurudev is making another pun. Playing off the phrase, *dashavim tvam asi*, here he refers to the famous verse found in numerous *Upaniṣads*, "you are that": meaning, you (viz., your *ātma*) are Brahman.

mother-in-law insults you. Abuse is abuse—how can it make you happy? Still, there are some people who desire the undesirable, like the drunkard who has fallen into a gutter and feels comfortable staying there. Even if someone tries to grab his hand and pull him out, he wants to stay put. It is the same with those who feel happiness in this world, even though there is not an iota of happiness in its objects. *Samsāra* is only an ocean of sorrow. It is written, *Tarati śokamātmavit*, the knower of the Self passes over the ignorance which is nothing but sorrow. *Shruti* says: *Ācāryavān puruṣo veda*. “Only one who has an *acharya* or guru knows *puruṣa*.”²⁴² It does not say “The one with wealth knows *puruṣa*,” or “The one with a son knows *puruṣa*,” or “The one with a wife knows *puruṣa*,” and so forth.

Hence, in order to cross this ocean of sorrow, the ocean called *samsāra*, it is essential to obtain knowledge of the Self.

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Try to cross the vast ocean of becoming.

Every individual wants to be happy in this world and in the next. Even the atheist, who does not believe in the next world, wants to be happy and peaceful here. Believers want peace and happiness in both worlds, but these cannot be obtained merely by wishing. Desire propels one to act; peace and happiness can be obtained only with effort. Therefore when you try to obtain peace and happiness, your efforts should be legitimate. By “legitimate” I mean that which is laid down in the *shastras*. Some poet said:

*Na pītaṃ jāhnavī toyam
na gītaṃ bhagavad yaśaḥ
na jāne jānakī jāne jāne
yamāhvāne kimuttaram ||*²⁴³

Til now I have not drunk the waters of the Gāṅga, so now I must drink and see what happens. If by drinking the waters of the Gāṅga all my sins are destroyed, then as a result my intellect will be purified; when my intellect is purified, love towards Bhagavān will increase. Such waters of Gāṅga are available here. Such simplest of the simple means are available here.

Contemplating Bhagavān’s love of devotees and singing are ways to praise Him.

To kill Hiranyakashyapu,²⁴⁴ Bhagavān manifested Himself from a pillar—a little like using a cannon to kill an ant. For Bhagavān, however, it was nothing special. Bhagavān could have easily changed Hiranyakashyapu’s disposition had He wanted.

²⁴² Literally “person” in ordinary use, but in its philosophical sense, it is the *ātma*, abiding Self, soul, or spirit. From the view of Advaita Vedanta, Paramātmā is the one and only *puruṣa*.

²⁴³ I have not drunk Jahnavi’s water, nor sung the famed *Bhagavad Gītā*; I do not know Janaka’s daughter (Sītā), so how should I answer Death?”

²⁴⁴ See teaching number 62.

But it was Prahalada's nature that whenever he was thrown into something, he became the same element as that into which he was thrown. So when he was thrown into fire, he became fire. How can fire burn fire? When Prahalada was dunked under water, he became water. But Bhagavān did all this in order to generate faith in his devotees, to keep them encouraged. To spread his glory He manifested Himself directly in front of Prahalada. Worldly people can say, "Why must Bhagavān spread his own glory?" But this was all due to his all-encompassing love for his devotees, so that in the future, they would sing his praises about this glorious event, and cross the ocean of becoming. For this reason alone Bhagavān manifested Himself to Prahalada in the form of the Man-Lion.²⁴⁵ During Draupadi's distress, Bhagavān actually became her *sari*.

By remembering the Lord, contemplating and singing about Him, the intellect will become purified and faith in Bhagavān will dawn. The means to know God is to have faith in *veda*-s and *śāstra*-s. If you do not have firm faith in *veda*-s and *śāstra*-s, then you will not have firm faith in the very existence of the Lord. If you do not have faith in the existence of Bhagavān, then doubt will remain, and a doubting person cannot thrive in this world or the next.

If you do not know God, and if you do not have faith in Him, then where will you search for Him? If I want to go to a place called Rām Nagar, for example, I will search for it on a map and will find it. If I want to stay in Ātma Bhavan,²⁴⁶ the *veda*-s and *śāstra*-s are the road map. With their help, you will find God. However, just knowing God is not sufficient, you must experience Him. Experience is essential.

Solitude is a very good means for finding God. Hence, remain in solitude and become an experienced Mahātma. Even worldly people can follow this—not just *sannyasi*-s—since even Mahātmās emerge from *samsāra* itself. Mahātmās don't come out of holes in the ground, but from some mother's womb. Today they may be engrossed in sinful activities, but tomorrow they can become the highest of Mahātmās.

Once I was chanting the *Upaniṣads*. A Paramahansa came and said, "What? You still worship and recite?" I was very surprised. I told him, "I am more surprised than you, because even though you are retired,²⁴⁷ you are still bustling around offices. I am in a particular station of life, *sannyāsa*. You call yourself a Paramahansa, but a Paramahansa is supposed to be beyond all stations of life. Keeping track of who is philandering in *samsāra* and who is carrying out worship is not your business. Your duty is supposed to be always staying in your own Self-nature. I am the principal;²⁴⁸ I carry out worship and other things in order to teach others."

²⁴⁵ *Narasimha*.

²⁴⁶ *Ātma Bhavan*, literally "abode of the Soul." [A building with this name was maintained by the King of Banaras as a rest house for religious figures.]

²⁴⁷ English "retired" is in the original.

²⁴⁸ English "principal" is in the original.

The point is that the mind is so dishonest that one can cast off worship with the help of Vedānta, and not even realize that one has slipped. Good and bad actions always continue to come up according to commenced karma, so spiritual practice must necessarily continue as well.

As long as commenced *karma* remains, one has to take up some work or another. Therefore, perform actions only after discriminating their propriety, and always while contemplating Bhagavān. The *śāstra* determines the propriety of an activity. This is not decided by some committee.²⁴⁹ Rely on the *veda*-s and *śāstra*-s to be your supervisor as you continue to carry out daily affairs. Keep your mind on Bhagavān. When the end comes, die with Him on your mind. If you fail to do this, you will have failed to do anything – despite having been safely seated on the boat, you will have drowned in the river.

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Paramātma is the sustainer of all.

Nobody will stay in this world forever. It is more like a lodging place. Your presence here, and the rare opportunity of a human birth, have empowered you to cross this ocean of becoming. Only with this [human] body can knowledge and devotion arise. If you fail to face this now, then when will you? The Lord is omnipresent, but we are present only in a particular location. Hence the all-pervading Paramātma has to be made manifest through *bhakta* in one particular location [here]. Only then will we succeed. What is unmanifest, and what is manifest? Fire is inherent within an entire piece of wood, but will not burn on its own. If you just put wood in the hearth, and would like to make flatbread, can it cook? Once the wood is lit, and you make fire appear, then you can do whatever you wish.

Paramātma is undivided in all space, time, and matter. There is no such thing anywhere in which the Lord is absent. But even though He is omnipotent, there is one power He doesn't have. Even if He wants, He cannot separate himself from us. Yet despite our being inseparable from God, we are still unhappy—so you tell me, whose side is mistaken here?

Take the example of Draupadi in her time of distress. All her five husbands, each a great charioteer, each more valorous than the last—Kripacharya, Dronacharya, and the others—just sat there while a lady was dishonored. See the resignation of the worldly. What greater shining example can one find than this? You can get some help from a

²⁴⁹ English "committee" is in the original.

father, son, brother, sister, or husband, but complete help is impossible from them. If the Lord doesn't come to our rescue in our times of trial, all our relatives will give up. But for Paramātma, we have no support. It's absurd to feel that someone else will protect us. When great warriors gave up in resignation without helping Draupadi, what is the point of counting on your own helpers? Maintain only polite relations with those in *samsāra*, don't become attached. Bhagavān came to rescue Draupadi only when she gave up hope in all the worldly people around her. In the case of Prahalada, He manifested himself from a pillar.²⁵⁰ This shows the omnipresent nature of the Lord. But we don't benefit from the pervasive Bhagavān. You cannot do your work with the fire inherent—but unmanifest—in wood. For work, wood has to be ignited so the fire is manifested in a particular place. Similarly, only when one makes Paramātma manifest in a particular spot by *upāsana* will there be benefit. For Bhagavān to manifest himself in a particular place is not difficult because He himself declared [*Bhagavad Gītā* 4.7-4.8]:

*Yadā yadā hī dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata|
 abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham||*²⁵¹
*Paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām|
 dharma saṃsthāpanārthāya saṃbhavāmi yuge yuge||*²⁵²

Not only this, but he has also said [*Bhagavad Gītā* 4.11:

Ye yathā maṃ prapadyante tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham|

This means, "However one remembers me, so do I remember him." What a great assurance Bhagavān has given. If we do not want Him even now, then alas it is our great misfortune.

Caste prejudice is for the ignorant.

One's birth is determined by one's *karma*, but Bhagavān's compassion is not. Anyone—whether Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, or Śūdra—can attain God if he strives for Him with intense feeling.²⁵³ Only a human being can praise God, but for this one does not have to be a Brahmin. A *bhakta* can belong to any of the four *varṇa-s*, but an *acārya* cannot. With regard to this, Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya proclaimed:

Yāvadvittopārjana saktastāvannijaparivāro raktaḥ,

EXPLANATION would be useful here

²⁵¹ "Whenever *dharmā* declines, O Descendent of Bharata, and *adharmā* prevails, then I take birth."

²⁵² "To deliver the pious and destroy evildoers, and to reestablish *dharmā*, I appear in age after age."

²⁵³ See *Bhagavad Gītā* 9.32.

insert verse

Paścājjivati jarjara dehe vārttām ko 'pi na pṛcchati gehe ||²⁵⁴

Therefore,

Bhaja govindaṃ, bhaja govindaṃ| bhaja govindaṃ mūdamate||

“Praise Govinda, praise Govinda, praise Govinda, O foolish minded!”

Whoever one may be, to whatever caste one may belong, one should become extremely cautious that before growing old one has worshipped Bhagavān in full measure. Only this will lead to ultimate good. Wellbeing is not assured by mere birth in a particular caste. Wellbeing is possible only through the worship of Bhagavān, and that can be done by any human being. It is completely untrue that only a Brahmin can become liberated. If one has devotion towards Bhagavān, that is well and good. Otherwise even a Brahmin can be eligible to go to hell. And a devoted Śūdra can attain Bhagavān. From the viewpoint of the Supreme, there is no Brahmin, no Kṣatriya, no Vaiśya, and no Śūdra. In the ultimate goal, there are no differences; they only exist in mundane life.

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To abuse those who abuse us is not correct.

Kṣamā khaḍgaḥ kare yasya, durjanaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati.

This means: One who is holding the sword of forgiveness cannot be troubled by the wicked.

Aṛṇe patite trahiḥ svayamevopaśāmyati.

“Where there is no piece of straw, what can a spark do? It will die out on its own.”

Similarly, wickedness done to a forgiving person will stop on its own. Therefore, one should always take the attitude of equanimity.

One should carry out all actions while remaining in one of these four attitudes: friendliness, compassion, cheerfulness, and indifference.²⁵⁵ One should not rely on any other attitude. If you follow this advice, you will not experience occasions of peacelessness.

There are some issues regarding the misuse of wealth. The number one²⁵⁶ misuse of wealth is spending it on wicked activities. The number two misuse is failing to apply

²⁵⁴ This is the fifth verse from the 30-verse-long *Maha mudgara-stotram*, also known as *Bhaja Govinda-stotram*. [say what?] *IN SW verse in English*

²⁵⁵ Viz., Yogasūtra 1.33: “The mind becomes purified through the practice of friendliness, compassion, cheerfulness, and indifference (the equanimity that comes from disinterestedness) towards happiness, sorrow, virtue, and vice.” These four qualities [*maitrī, karuṇā, mudita, and upekṣā*] are also the four cardinal virtues of classical Buddhism.

²⁵⁶ Gurudev uses the English expressions “number one” and “number two” in the original.

one's earnings toward preparations for the future. Even if wealth is not spent on bad activities, failure to use it for good activities is still a misuse. Thus the number two misuse occurs if the money is not spent on bad activities, but at the same time, it is not spent on good works, either.

The proper use of wealth is the first: that is, spending it only on worthy activities. One should always endeavor to make proper use of this life. Nowadays people waste their most precious time in unnecessary arguments of caste and sect. Taking birth in one caste or another is a fact of life, but those who entangle themselves in forming groups of castes are turning their backs on Bhagavān. Wherever one might have taken birth, he should try his best to come out of the prison of birth and death. One should not continue to support another prison called caste. One should profit from caste and sect to this extent—adopt whatever good things are recommended in the *Veda-s* and *Śāstra-s*, and stay away from and abandon whatever things are prohibited therein. This way, caste pride is meaningful. Have certainty that a good thing is only that which is in accordance with *Veda-s* and *Śāstra-s*. Nothing will become good or bad according to our thinking. That is good which *Veda-s* and *Śāstra-s* declare to be good, and that is bad which they declare to be bad.

If you desire wealth, then collect that wealth which can accompany you [after death]. What is the use of accumulating wealth which is temporary²⁵⁷ and has to be left behind in this world?

One thing is certain: due to lack of discrimination, [there is] *dhanāśā jīvitāśā cajīryato 'pinajīryate'*²⁵⁸ The desire to acquire wealth and stay alive will not depart even from those on their death bed. Here's an illustration.

Once there lived a very old lady. Somehow she survived by selling pieces of firewood picked up from here and there. Her life was full of misery. One day while picking up firewood from the forest, she became greedy and picked up so much wood that her bundle was too heavy to lift onto her head, even though she tried many times to lift it. In the end, she gave up all hope. Out of disgust she said, "If Death were to come somehow, then I would be free from misery." She had barely uttered these words when Death appeared in front of her. Death asked, "Tell me, dear mother,²⁵⁹ why have you called me?" The old lady asked, "Who are you?" Death said, "I am Death; you called for me, so I came." The old lady said, "Very good, you have come, I called you to carry this bundle."

The point is, no matter what state a person may be in, if he's still breathing, he does not want to die. But if one lives just by eating and drinking, such a life is of no use. Life will be meaningful only if it is lived in such a way that it prepares one for the future.

²⁵⁷ English "temporary" is in the original.

²⁵⁸ This is the Sanskrit phrase, "wealth and living."

²⁵⁹ Here Death addresses the elderly woman as *Mata Ji*, "Dear Mother," a form of respect.

If life is devoted only to the enjoyment of sense pleasures, and thus to acquiring sin, then it is better to die than to live.

You should always remember while carrying out daily affairs that even if your activities cannot benefit anyone, then at least they should do no harm. Along with this you should carry out at least some amount of worship and contemplation of God. The mind is always fickle. But whether the mind is concentrated or not, one should spend some time in worship and prayer. If your mind is not focused now, it will become more sharply focused in a few days, but you must keep doing it. If you drink water from the same glass, after a few days, you will become fond of that glass, and if you are offered water in another glass, you tend to inquire, "Where is that old glass?" Similarly, after just a few days you will come to love the walking cane that you constantly hold in your hand. In the same fashion, as you continue to chant the name of Bhagavān, you will start loving it like that glass and walking cane. For this reason, even if you are not able to keep your mind concentrated, you should continue to chant the name of Bhagavān. Let the mind go where it will.

99

Be free of both giving up and acquiring.

What can you renounce?

From the very beginning, the world [*samsāra*] is already given up. Sound, form, taste, smell, etc., whatever other materials are there, are already different from you. Their existence is separate. When the world [*samsāra*] is different from you anyway, then what can you give up? Even before you can give them up, they are already given up, as they are different from you. Because of this, thinking or talking about giving things up is false, a kind of empty boasting. What is the glory in slaying the slain? Will anyone shoot a dead jungle beast and say, "I have hunted a tiger"? Someone saying, "I have given up such and such thing" is just like that. In this world [*samsāra*] everything is already given up. Nothing can be designated as a thing fit to be given up. All things, by their own nature, you have already given up.

What can you acquire?

There is nothing fit to be acquired in this world. What can you acquire? Whatever things you may see, all are unreal, like the magician's money. There is no real substance in them. A thing can be called fit to be acquired if it gives peace and happiness. All objects of the world [*samsāra*] are transient, and all will end in separation. The sorrow which we get when we are separated from them will be much greater than the happiness which we get while acquiring them, and even the changes we undergo in acquiring them

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give sorrow. Thus the union will ultimately end in sorrow. That is why no object here is worth acquiring. In this world [*samsāra*], there is nothing at all worth acquiring.

If you look towards the essential nature, then you can see with the sentiment, *Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma*—“This whole world is Brahman.”²⁶⁰ There is nothing other than this essential nature. Thus, if everything is the same as your essential nature, and there is nothing different from this, then what can really be acquired? In this fashion also, there is nothing to gain in this world [*samsāra*]. Thus, however you look at it, there is nothing fit to be gained in this world.

That is why it is said you should not desire to acquire or give up anything. Refrain completely from giving up and acquiring. When you have no desire to acquire or give up anything, then you will be free from your past tendencies and will become established in your essential nature. Thus, contemplate and firmly understand in your mind that there is nothing to be given up or gained. After establishing this thought, immerse yourself in the bliss of your essential nature. Therein lies the fulfillment of human birth.

100

Lack of discrimination leads to endless difficulties.

The all-blissful, omnipotent Lord dwells in the hearts of everyone, inseparable from all. Even so, people seem to be unhappy and to lack peace. Yet all of the unhappiness and turbulence in the world is due to only one thing—lack of discrimination. The treasure house of peace and happiness, Bhagavān, resides within,²⁶¹ but because of lack of discriminative thinking, people search outside here and there for peace and happiness. They think that acquiring various physical things will lead to happiness, when this is actually the root cause of all misery.

What more can be said when even Draupadi herself was deluded? When Dhushasana leapt up and began trying to disrobe her, she turned to each one of her great warrior husbands, and also to the great father Bhishma. When nobody could move from their seats to help, then Draupadi understood that in her time of trial, no one could be of real assistance. Even the greatest physical strength will be useless at such a time, and all one's supporters will turn their faces away. Realizing her helpless situation, she remembered Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa and she called out to him, “O Protector, O Dweller in Dwaraka!”

Now, think on this: if Draupadi had been using right discrimination, she would not have addressed the Lord as one who stays in Dwaraka. Bhagavān is ever-present

²⁶⁰ Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.14.1. This is one of the “great sayings” or *Mahāvākya*-s of the Upaniṣads.

²⁶¹ Compare with New Testamen: The kingdom of heaven is within you.

within one's own heart. Instead of seeing God within herself, she called Him from Dwaraka. This is lack of discrimination. Not to consider the omnipotent Lord as Omnipresent is the greatest of non-discrimination. Just because of this, people suffer greatly and fail to receive the grace of God.

Only when Draupadi's *sari* started growing did she understand that the Lord had come. Then she said, "Bhagavān, you delayed a bit in coming." Bhagavān replied, "Draupadi, I was in fact right next to you, but you called me from Dwaraka. So first I had to go there and then come back, which was the reason for the delay."

It is clear that Bhagavān is omnipresent and is ready always to shower his grace on his devotees.

Ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham|

"Whoever worships me in whatever way, so do I accept it²⁶²." This is the pledge of Bhagavān: *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.11.

Carry out your spiritual practice with conviction in the all-pervading nature of Bhagavān and become a fit vessel for his grace. Then you will be free from unhappiness and anxieties once and for all.

101

Selfishness is predominant everywhere.

Selfishness is so predominant in the world that if human skin should become useful for some purpose, it will be removed from a dead body and only then will the corpse be sent to the funeral pyre. There is no doubt about this.²⁶³ As long as one fulfills people's selfish desires, they will all respond with respect and love. Bhagavān Ādi Śaṅkarācārya rightly said [from *Bhaja Govindam*]:

*Yāvat vittopārjana saktah tāvannija-parivāro raktah,
paścāt dhāvati jarjara dehe vārtā ko 'pi na prcchati gehe ||*

This means, as long as one has the capacity to earn, one's family members show love. But when old age comes, and the body is totally spent, then nobody in the house will even inquire about him. Therefore, *Bhaja govindām, bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam Muuḍha mate||* Therefore, "Worship Govinda, worship Govinda. Oh foolish one, worship Govinda."

102

²⁶² Gurudev offers the Hindi translation of Bhagavad Gītā 4.11 ab before uttering it in Sanskrit.

²⁶³ It is possible that Brahmananda Saraswati had learned of Nazi atrocities in the death camps, but it is more likely that he is remarking on vile behavior associated with the funerary caste (the *Doms*).

Materialism cannot give peace and happiness.

All material prosperity is nothing but the unfolding of *māyā*. Trying to obtain peace and happiness through engagement with *māyā* is like trying to search in the darkness without a lamp to guide you. Just as you can't kill a snake by taking a stick and pounding on the ground above its lair, you cannot remove the anguish of the subtle body by acquiring objects for physical pleasure. Happiness and unhappiness reside in the mind. If you insult a sleeping person, he will not feel unhappy, because at that time his mind is absorbed in *avidyā*.²⁶⁴ This means that the mind alone experiences happiness or unhappiness. Therefore, as long as the mind remains unsatisfied, anxiety cannot be dispelled. As long as the mind wanders, it cannot obtain the all-blissful Bhagavān. Just as you give toys to little children to divert them, you can divert your mind with wealth, a wife, children, name and fame, etc. But these things cannot satisfy the mind. The mind will only be satisfied once it obtains the biggest possible thing. Paramātmā alone is the greatest of all things. After knowing Him, nothing else is worthy of knowing.

103

Have faith in *prārabdha* for your livelihood.

Yadasmadiyaṃ na hi tatpareśām

We are certain to get whatever is our fate. No one else can get it. This is an infallible law according to the *Karma Mīmāṃsā Śāstra*. I have experienced this many times myself. Your fate will follow you even into a thick, uninhabitable forest, where no human can even be imagined. Commenced karma's effects will also follow there. When *prārabdha* is over, then the body will be cast off. One thing is certain, that as long as one is embodied, commenced karma must be experienced. There is no doubt about this. Therefore, to be worried about one's own ability and welfare indicates one's forgetfulness about his past accumulations.

Whatever has been earned in the past will remain available. Whatever money has been deposited in the bank can be withdrawn. What is to doubt about it? As for the money you deposit in *samsāra*—sometimes a bank can fail, and go under—but the fruits of your actions will be deposited in a bank that can never fail. That is the inexhaustible treasury of the omniscient, omnipotent One, in whose accounts there cannot be any mistake. Therefore, whatever you have done, you must experience the results, bit by bit.

²⁶⁴ Ignorance.

Whatever comes to you is your commenced karma to be experienced. But whatever comes along should be experienced with discrimination. The only difference between a human being and an animal is that the animal cannot discriminate between what is proper and improper. As you are all human beings, you should discriminate between proper and improper action as you conduct your daily affairs.

Never let social pressure (or shyness) lead you to act in such a way that you will accumulate sin, which will spoil the path ahead. Whatever actions you have carried out earlier, you are experiencing their fruits. Taking a lesson from this, improve your future by acting in the best way now. Don't start supporting both the good and bad actions of a person just because he is giving you food and clothing. *Jākara khāi, tākara duhāi.*²⁶⁵ Dogs act like that. A human being should act only with discrimination. Support only proper actions, and if you cannot oppose improper actions, at least remain neutral.

104

Carry out good actions as much as possible.

The bliss born out of the realization of *ātma* is possible only through the control of the senses, not through the enjoyment of sense objects.

The senses experience sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell. Since the senses are all extroverted, they can obtain only knowledge related to external things. The senses cannot gain the knowledge of internal matters. *Ātma* is that which is closest to us—it is always available and never absent from our experience. Nevertheless, we are not able to see it, nor are we able to know it. How can we see the One who sees everything? The eyes see everything but they cannot see themselves. To see them, a mirror is required.

The mirror to see *ātma* is the inner instrument [*antah-karaṇa*]. *Antah* means inner, and *karaṇa* means the tool to obtain knowledge. Because it is the means to inner knowledge, it is called *antah-karaṇa*. Only if the mirror is clean will the reflection be clear. If the mirror is unclean, the reflection will be obscured. Similarly, a pure *antah-karaṇa* reflects *ātma*; people whose inner instrument is impure cannot see it. Therefore it is essential to purify *antah-karaṇa*.

It is ignorant to be proud of one's caste, sect, beauty, youth, wealth, reputation, etc. As long as one doesn't cast off such vanities, how is knowledge of the soul possible? Only when ignorance is destroyed will knowledge about the Self be gained. An ignorant person thinks that he is different from *Paramātma*, and that the gross body is his true self.

²⁶⁵ We are unable to provide a clear translation of this apparent Hindi colloquialism. *Taakar* is to taunt, and *duhaai* is to invoke or the act of milking. It may be a mildly vulgar folk saying.

How about an unclear translation?

What⁹⁷ is being said?

Spelling

He becomes attached to the perishable things of this world. Because of this he grasps one thing or another, and remains unhappy.

The *śāstra*-s and gurus say that this world is illusory.

The 'illusory' is that which can be seen, but has no permanent existence—like a rope mistaken for a snake in dim light. Despite the error, the appearance is convincing. Until one discovers the reality of the rope, the illusion will remain—even if one conducts an *aśvamedha* sacrifice²⁶⁶ and spends tens of thousands of rupees to get rid of it. The only method to remove it is by bringing a lamp, and seeing the actual form of the rope in its light. Once the knowledge of the rope is awakened, the individual will no longer be able to see it as a snake, even if he tries. Similarly, he who has awakened to the knowledge of Paramātma will not be able to see this world as real. Only an ignorant person takes it to be real.

The illusory nature of this world can be understood only if one wakes up from the sleep of ignorance. In order to wake up from this state, one need not go to the forest. If one could actually obtain knowledge merely by living in a forest, the Kol and Bhil tribal peoples²⁶⁷ living there would not be such great fools. Solitude is useful when it is employed in spiritual practice intent on removing this ignorance. The spiritual practices to remove ignorance should be obtained from a *sadguru* and the *śāstra*-s. But how can this ignorance be removed if one does not have sufficient faith in *śāstra*-s, and in the words of mahatmas? Thus, it is necessary to cultivate faith.

*Asaṁśayavatāṁ muktiḥ
saṁśayāviṣṭa cetasām
na muktirjanma janmānte
tasmād viśvāsamāpnuyāt||*

In summary, the meaning of liberation is to not return to this world [*samsāra*]. The second meaning is that one is not touched by sorrows.

He who doesn't have the latent tendencies and attachments toward wife, children, wealth, respect, fame, etc., can definitely experience *ātma*. Only one who has understood *ātma* in its essential form will be able to cross this ocean of sorrow.

The inner instrument is sullied by latent tendencies [*vāsanā*-s], therefore it is essential to destroy these tendencies. One should not try to satisfy the latent tendencies by enjoying sensory objects, because *Na bhūto na bhaviṣyati*—it's never happened, and it never can. Satisfaction is possible only through discrimination, whether you do that today or after ten years. The senses can be pacified only through discrimination. Through

²⁶⁶ An elaborate sacrifice with royal origins featuring the sacrifice of a horse (*aśva*), ordinarily sponsored only by the rich and powerful for great desires. This seems to be a humorous allusion to the snake sacrifice of *Janamejaya*, which is the first major event in the great war epic, the *Mahābhārata*.

²⁶⁷ The kols and bhils are groups who live in the vast range of forests in the Vindhya mountains, a range which bifurcates north and south India. Gurudev spoke elsewhere of wandering in the Vindhya regions, so here he may be speaking from his own experience and assessments of the forest dwellers' nature.

enjoyment the latent impressions will be strengthened. If itching could be cured by scratching, then we might likewise hope to satisfy the senses through enjoyment of objects.

Everyone knows that nothing comes along with us after death. Our own body goes only as far as the funeral pyre. But have faith in the Vedas and shastras, and then one thing will follow you. Only the good and bad actions of this life follow a person to the next world. Those who have performed good actions attain higher worlds, and those who have done bad actions go to hell. Therefore: as much as possible, carry out good actions.

105

Make appropriate use of this earthly life.

There are three things in this world [*samsāra*]: body, mind, and wealth.²⁶⁸ When body, mind, and wealth are properly employed, then there is no prospect for distress. If they are not properly employed, one experiences anxiety. However, there is no school or college to teach their proper use.²⁶⁹

Wealth culminates in three ways. That which is not given in charity, or used for one's own enjoyment, ends up in the third way, which is its dissipation. Tulsidas has written, *So dhana dhanya, prathama gati jākī*. This means that wealth which is spent in the first way [charity] is useful. Tulsidas-ji spoke only of wealth, but I say, *So tana dhanya, prathama gati jākī*, and *So mana dhanya, prathama gati jākī*.²⁷⁰ This means that body and mind are useful when devoted to charity.

The best use of the body is to engage it in worship of Bhagavān. The eyes should see the form of Bhagavān, the ears should hear of his glories, speech should praise Him—every one of the sense organs should engage in matters related to Bhagavān alone. Even one's breath should be engaged exclusively in the worship of the Lord. The primary aim of the mind also must be to continuously engage itself in Bhagavān. We have already observed that wealth should be given in charity—but even before considering charity, one should be sure that this wealth has been earned through right means. It's wrong to earn money without regard for the propriety of the means of earning. If wealth is earned

²⁶⁸ This is a poetic triad: *tana, mana, and dhana*.

²⁶⁹ The English terms "school" and "college" are Gurudev's own.

²⁷⁰ The verse continues, "*dhanya punya rata soī pākī, dhanya dharii soi jaba satsangā, dhanya janma dvijabhagati abhangā*" viz., "Blessed is the wealth given in the first way [charity]. Blessed and auspicious is the mind devoted to piety. Blessed the time spent in *Satsanga*. Blessed the life devoted to caring without interruption for the twice-born."

(Ramcaritamanasa, Uttarakanda 127, p. 661, *Tulsidas's Shri Ramacharita manasa*, Edited and Translated by R. C. Prasad, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1990.)

through sinful actions, then even though the wealth itself will remain behind, the fruits of the sins will accompany the person [after death] and will not leave him. That is why one should not commit sins while earning wealth. The sins will not remain behind with the money. Hence one should think carefully while earning wealth.

One *māhātma* had obtained a *siddhi* by which he was able to tell both the good and bad actions of any person who approached him. Once I happened to meet him by chance. I told him that thinking about the sins of the world was a great loss. To think about the bad actions of others, when one should be engaged in the contemplation of God, is a misuse of the mind. "And after becoming a *sādhu*, that there should be such misuse of the mind!!"²⁷¹

Another great misuse of body and mind is to begin supporting castes and sects. You have obtained the body of a human being in some caste or another, be it Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, or Śūdra. Everyone is eligible to remember God, regardless of caste, and everyone is eligible to become close to Him. There will be some class²⁷² differences, but this is not something which should be over-emphasized. Wherever your birth has taken place, it's over. Now you should try to live in such a way that you will not take birth again. You should not waste your precious time in supporting the caste in which you have taken birth. This world is like a way station. After coming here you should work for the main goal, not to develop this place you are merely passing through. In human life, it is improper for the mind, which is supposed to be engaged in Bhagavān, to be engaged in wrong or trivial activities.

106

Activity must be coupled with discrimination.

The Lord of this indivisible universe, the all-blissful, *satchitananda*, Bhagavān, has been revealed in the *Vedas*. By taking up the path of the *Vedas*, one can know Him. The *Veda* is *Apauṣeya* [not manmade], it bestows divine sight. To see the divine true form of Bhagavān, divine sight is required. The vision of Bhagavān's true form cannot be had with this gross physical eye. As Bhagavān taught Arjuna in the [*Bhagavad*] *Gītā*

Na tu māṃ śakyase draṣṭum anenaiva svasakṣuṣā|
*Divyaṃ dadāmi te cakṣuḥ paśya me yogam aiśvaram||*²⁷³

²⁷¹ The Hindi is a sentence fragment, with two exclamation points, neither of which are found elsewhere in the text.

²⁷² English "class" is Gurudev's own.

²⁷³ Bhagavad Gītā 11.8. "But you cannot see me with your own eyes. I give you divine sight. Behold my glorious yoga."

The attainment of divine sight is the ultimate goal. This is how human life is fulfilled.

Only elemental things (the gross physical) can be seen with the physical eye. In fact, different capacities of vision are required to see the different aspects of the world. Not all things can be seen with the same way of seeing. Consider, for example: mother and father, brother and sister, wife, etc., all have similar physical bodies. Is it possible to see all of them with the same vision? Mother is seen with one vision, whereas sister and of course one's wife are seen with different vision. Furthermore, the same object is seen differently by different people, according to their level of understanding.

Similarly, spiritual practice also differs according to the differences in each person's eligibility. The root of all *Vedas* is *praṇava* [AUM]. But not all are eligible to chant this mantra. *Praṇava* is pure Brahman. Only a *sannyasi* who has given up all attachment to physical things and who is thus a *samyakanyāsī* is eligible for its practice. For him there will be no attachment or hatred for the things of this world [*samsāra*]. He stays alone, aloof, one apart from everything. Only such a person is eligible to chant the pure *praṇava*. A householder who has attachment towards his household, wife, and children, is not eligible to chant the *praṇava*. This is because the intended results of chanting the *praṇava* are to become the purified Brahma, devoid of maya, whose true form is solitary *sat, chit, ananda*. The *japa* of *praṇava* will not yield good results for a householder, but instead will lead to destructive and inauspicious results. That is why it has been enjoined that householders should not utter the *praṇava* by itself, but rather, they should link some mantra with *praṇava* and chant them together. Hence, *praṇava* should be prefixed to a mantra and then chanted. This method is authorized. Unauthorized practice will have no power to transform the heart, and all one's efforts will go to waste.

Generally people say that their restlessness of mind is not diminishing and that the mind is not settling down. But restlessness in the mind can be reduced only by carrying out one's various daily and enjoined duties. They don't do this, and then they imagine that by sitting in meditation, they will immediately attain success – how can this work?

The mind flows towards sound, touch, sight, taste and smell, and it becomes impure through continued contact with sense objects. How can it move toward purity? The mind's movement is something like that of a dog. Desiring happiness, it runs here and there, sometimes pursuing some sight, sometimes some smell, sometimes some touch, sometimes some sound; the dog-like mind runs around, and cannot settle down. When one is always enjoying sensory objects, how can one enjoy *ātma*? Only if one abandons objects and turns towards *ātma* will one become an enjoyer of *ātma* rather than of sensory objects. He whose mind is bent toward Bhagavān will not run off to see the cinema. He who starts loving the beauty of Bhagavān will not even bat an eye at any object of the world [*samsāra*]. One who starts enjoying the imperishable happiness in touching the feet of Bhagavān will not desire the touch of physical things.

So turn this mind, which has been running like a dog after beauty, taste, smell, touch, and sound, in the direction of some manifest form of Bhagavān. Devote yourself to the pleasure of his service. Learn to offer incense to Bhagavān, and accept all offerings as his grace [*prasād*].

107

One who has forgotten his goal will miss the path.

The ultimate goal of human life is to obtain the all-blissful, the omnipotent, the very essence of knowledge: Paramātmā. One who always remembers the supreme goal and follows the path laid down by *veda-s* and *Śāstra-s* in order to achieve it—who engages his whole being, his body, senses, mind, intellect, etc., according to the path laid down in the *Śāstra-s*, and thus strictly leads his life according to *dharma*—he alone in reality is using his free will properly, and he alone is really fortunate. Only such a person will be able to fulfill all his desires, and he will definitely reach his ultimate goal, without any doubt.

Once you have determined your ultimate goal, seek the help of an expert in that subject. Endowed with faith, make one such person your guide so that you can benefit from all his experience. Be diligent so that all your life's activities are in harmony with the achievement of your ultimate goal and do not become a hindrance.

Every moment of life you should be alert, lest you stray from your path. Do not forget that your daily affairs can lead to the ultimate. If your daily affairs are in accord with your eligibility as dictated by the *śāstra-s*, they will hasten your progress toward your goal. If your mind becomes entrapped in sense experience and becomes a slave to its desires, then your daily affairs will not be in accordance with the limits set by the *śāstra*. They will remove you from the right path and will take you away from your ultimate goal.

Consequently, it is necessary to always remember your ultimate goal, follow the guidance of an experienced guru, and—ever alert—act in accordance with the path of reverential surrender to the guru's feet.

108

He who turns toward God will lack for nothing.

102

The Title here is also the
First sentence.

All his sorrow and misery will be destroyed. Similarly, by the association with saints, all the sins, misery, and poverty will be totally eliminated.

Taking recourse to *satsaṅga* gives rise to discrimination. It awakens one to what is proper and improper, meritorious and sinful, *dharmik* and *adharmik*, and to cognition of one's duty. That is why one who participates in *satsaṅga* is saved from *adharma* and engages himself in right action. Saved from sin, he will carry out meritorious activities.

Established doctrine decrees, *Dharmaṇa pāpam anudati*, that by practicing *dharma*, sins will be destroyed. Similarly, *satsaṅga* also destroys sin.

The sorrow and anxiety which naturally scorch the human heart are cleansed and pacified by sitting in *satsaṅga* and by listening to discussions about Bhagavān. The inner instrument of one who does *satsaṅga* will naturally become peaceful.

Through *satsaṅga* the human being turns towards the omnipotent, all-capable Bhagavān. One who has turned towards The Lord will lack for nothing in the world, and all his sorrow and misery will be destroyed. Similarly, association with saints will totally eliminate all sins, misery, and poverty.

Śubham astu nityam.²⁷⁴

Maybe it should be repeated
as the first sentence.
Otherwise, it begins in
awkward way.

²⁷⁴ "May goodness always prevail." This benediction may have been inserted by Tiwari in the initial publication in Hindi.