

The Vital Importance of Ahimsā, Satyam, and Brahmacharya

Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī used to point out to us that the century from about 1850 to 1950 saw a flowering of great saints in India. Actually it also saw a flowering of great theologians in the West. Gurudev, of course, was one of those great saints who came towards the end of that period.

Contemporary to Gurudev, two of the other outstanding saints were Ramaṇa Maharṣi and Pāpā Rāmdās, who were somewhat unique in emphasizing one specific yoga. Ramaṇa Maharṣi emphasized the path of enquiry, Who am I? Pāpā Rāmdās, the repetition of God's name. Neither one of them fundamentally taught any other yoga.

Gurudev, on the other hand, very much taught a yoga of synthesis or integral yoga. He said that as human beings we are head, heart and hand, and that our entire being must be involved in this march towards the Divine. Therefore, in the crest of The Divine Life Society, he placed the words, Serve, Love, Meditate, Realize, representing the four principal yogas. Thus, when we think of Gurudev's yoga of synthesis, we normally think of the four principal yogas plus other yogas that he wrote on.

However, there is another part of his synthesis that may be equally or perhaps even more important than his synthesis of the different paths of yoga. At a somewhat later date he told his disciples that he wanted all members of The Divine Life Society to take a vow to practice *ahimsā*, *satyam*, and *brahmacharya*. As he was very strict in his original ideas, some of his leading disciples suggested to him that as many of the devotees are householders, they cannot observe strict *brahmacharya*. So Gurudev modified the rule in certain ways to be a practice or intention. But still he didn't back off from the idea.

Thus the practice of *ahimsā*, *satyam*, and *brahmacharya*, non-injury, truth, and purity in thought, word, and deed, is still part of becoming a member of The Divine Life Society. Why did Gurudev put emphasis on these three virtues? It was, of course, because as far as he was concerned they were the foundation of yoga and Vedānta. But the reason he wanted to have a yoga of synthesis is that we have got to bring all parts of our being along with us. We can't leave out our feelings or thinking or our will, or they will be a drag on us. And we can't leave out ethics or that will be a drag on us.

Why is it so? Because if we want to see everything as one, we have to stop treating others as objects. When we injure someone, we are treating them as an object, not as a subject like ourselves. When we lie to someone, we are treating them, not as our equals, not as our own self. When we treat a person as an object of lust, we don't see them as part of our ownself. Therefore, what is the use of trying to become one with the divine if we are not treating His manifestation as part of our own selves. Thus, our yoga of synthesis needs to include the practice, as Gurudev laid it down, of *ahimsā*, *satyam*, and *brahmacarya*.