

80th Birthday Commemorative Book



Selected Speeches and Writings of K.S. Sripada Raju

February 2009

Bharatiya Temple of Lansing



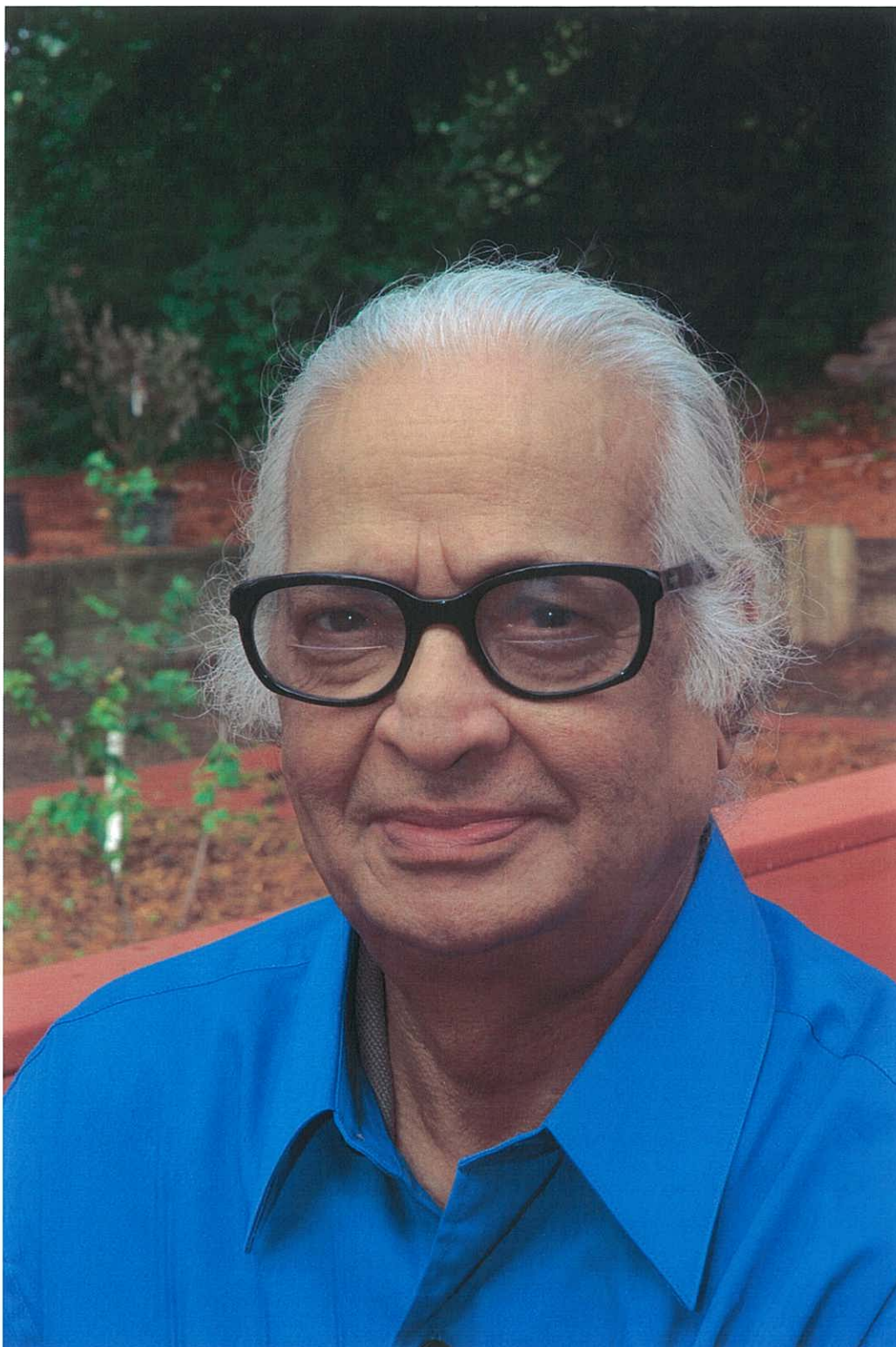
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K.S. Sripada Raju

Editor: Raman Anantaraman

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Bharatiya Temple of Lansing
955 Haslett Road, Haslett, MI 48840



Dr. K.S. Sripada Raju

(photograph taken by Sudhakar Chaphalkar on July 4, 2007)

THE GURU

भद्रमिच्छन्त ऋषयः स्वर्विदस्तपो दीक्षामुपनिषेदुरग्रे ।
ततो राष्ट्रं बलमोजश्च जातं तदस्मै देवा उपसंनमन्तु ॥

*bhadramicchanta ṛṣayaḥ svarvidastapo dīkṣāmupaniṣeduragre
tato rāṣṭram balamojasḥcā jātam tadasmai devā upasamnamantu*

The sages, aspiring to a higher and better standard,
Work with fervor and consecration;
They inspire people to do their duty with dedication.
This is the way that nations and communities grow strong.

Atharvaveda XIX.41.1

को गुरुः? अधिगततत्त्वः ।
शिष्यहितायोद्यतः सततम् ॥

*ko guruḥ? adhigata-tattvaḥ
śiṣyahitāyodyataḥ satatam*

“Who is the Guru? He who has realized the Truth and who is always intent on the disciples’ good.”

Ādi Śankarācārya, in *Praśnottara-ratna-mālīkā*

A very careful scanning and weeding procedure is insisted upon in the Upaniṣadic injunctions for selecting a Guru. The Upaniṣads say that one should approach a person who has mastered and modeled life according to the sacred scriptures and is anchored in the principle that is expansive and inclusive...To be in linkage with a Guru valuing freedom, liberty, love, and a sense of dialogue and open communication with trust, confidence, and initiative is a special gift one can give oneself in life.

Dr. K.S. Sripada Raju, in *Guru-Śiṣya Parampara* (see pages 44-45)

ॐ

॥ अभिनन्दनपत्रम् ॥

परमश्रद्धेयः परमपूज्यः परमादरणीयः परमाचार्यः परमानन्दस्वरूपः
पावनपादः पावनचरितः भक्तानांपरमाधारः गुरुवर्यः श्रीश्री १००८
डा० श्रीपादराजु महाभागानां कृतेसहस्रचन्द्रदर्शनजन्ममहोत्सवे
श्रद्धास्युमनस्तथाभिनन्दनपत्रम् ॥

सर्वपूज्यं सदापूर्णं सर्वदोष-विवर्जितम् । स्वप्रकाशं चिदानन्दं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
स्वाभावेनैव यो योगी सुखं भोगं न वान्छति । सुख दुःख विवर्जितं सद्गुरुदेवं नमोवयम् ॥
नैवनिन्दा प्रशंशाभ्यां यस्य विक्रियते मनः । आत्मक्रीडं महात्मानं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
ज्ञानाग्निदग्धकर्माणां कामसंकल्प वर्जितम् । आत्मानन्दं सुखासीनं सद्गुरुदेवं नमोवयम् ॥
द्वेष्यं नास्ति प्रियं नास्ति नास्तियस्य शुभाशुभम् । भेदभावविहीनं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
जडं पश्यति नो यस्तु जगत्पश्यति चिन्मयम् । नित्ययुक्तं गुणातीतं सद्गुरुदेवं नमोवयम् ॥
नित्यजाग्रतवस्थायां स्वप्नवधोऽवतिष्ठते । निश्चिन्तचिन्मयात्मानं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
निर्ममं निरहंकारं समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनम् । समदुःखसुखं धीरं सद्गुरुदेवं नमोवयम् ॥
वासनारहितं पावनचरितं परं ज्ञानामृतम् । आनन्दसिन्धुं विवेकमूर्तिं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
तारणं भवसागरपारकरं शरणागतसेवकतोषकरम् । अपराधयुतगुणहीनसुतां कृपयाद्यसमुद्धरमोहगताम् ॥
जीवपापसन्तापहरं परमाभयवरदं नररूपधरम् । परमसुखदं परमाचार्यं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
सर्वपूज्यं सदापूर्णं सर्वगुणसमलंकृतम् । सर्वाधारं सच्चिदानन्दरूपं सद्गुरुदेवं नमोवयम् ॥
एकरूपं महारूपं देवसदृशं गुरुदेवरूपम् । कामनापूर्णं कुलगट्टेवासिनं श्रीपादराजपादं नमोवयम् ॥
सीतानाम्नीं स्वमात्रकुक्षीं स्वनामधन्याम् । शोभनं सुबभूवुस्तुतं सद्गुरुदेवं नमोवयम् ॥

बृहदलान्सिङ्गं भीष्म पितामहदेवस्य दर्शनमात्रेण भक्तानां भवतु मङ्गलम् ।
तेषाम् पदारविन्देषु लक्ष्मणशर्मणः सुरेन्द्र भारद्वाजादि भक्तजना नमोवयम् ॥

Felicitations Address By the Temple's Priests (translation)

To the venerable Dr. Sripada Raju, the one in whom we have faith, who is worthy of worship, is well-regarded, a preceptor, the embodiment of bliss, holy, of pure conduct, reliable for students, a great teacher – to him on the occasion of the celebration of his having seen one thousand moons, we offer flowers of faith and this felicitations address.

Our salutations to Sripada Raju, who is worthy of worship, is complete, free from all blemishes, self-radiant, and an enjoyer of knowledge.

Our prostrations to the illustrious teacher who by nature is a *yogi*, who does not seek comfort, and is free from feelings of pleasure and pain.

We bow down to Sripada Raju, who is not affected by praise or condemnation, who revels in his own self, and who is a great soul.

Our salutations to the venerable teacher whose actions are burnt in the fire of knowledge, who is free from desires, who enjoys in the self and rests in happiness.

Our prostrations to Sripada Raju, who has no likes and dislikes, is above good and evil, and is free from feelings of duality.

We bow down to the distinguished teacher who does not see anything as inert, who sees everything as spirit, who is always composed, and who is beyond the three qualities.

Our salutations to Sripada Raju, who experiences even the wakeful state like a dream, is free from worries, and is spiritual.

Our prostrations to the luminous teacher who is free from the sense of “I” and “mine,” who looks alike on mud, stone, and gold, who is equanimous in pain and pleasure, and who is brave.

We bow down to Sripada Raju, who is free from conditioning, is of pure conduct, the nectar of supreme knowledge, the ocean of joy, and the embodiment of discrimination.

Our salutations to the one who lifts up and helps us cross the ocean of life, who assists those who seek liberation, and who with compassion raises us who are full of lapses and lack good qualities.

Our prostrations to Sripada Raju who takes away afflictions, gives assurance, is in the form of Nara (human being), bestows the highest happiness, and is the great preceptor.

We bow down to the luminous teacher who is worthy of worship, is complete, is bestowed with all good qualities, is the support of all, and is the embodiment of existence-knowledge-bliss.

We salute Sripada Raju whose form is one and great, who is godly and is a great teacher, has fulfilled all desires, and is from (the village of) Kulagaṭṭe.

We bow down to the spiritual master who is the illustrious son of Sītā – who is like Mother Sītā – and of Subba Bhaṭṭa.

Prostrations by (Kannan Balasubramanian) Sharma, Surendra Bhardwaj, and all devotees to the lotus-like feet of Greater Lansing's illustrious Bhīṣma, by whose mere sight devotees get blessed.

This felicitations address, an original composition, was presented by Bharatiya Temple of Lansing's two priests, Śrī Kannan Balasubramanian and Śrī Surendra Bhardwaj, to Dr. Sripada Raju at his 80th birthday celebration on February 6, 2009, on behalf of themselves and the community of devotees.

Preface

The ideal of perfect bliss and wellbeing has preoccupied human beings since the beginning, though only the sages whose minds and hearts were directed heavenward toward the light have been able to articulate it and show us the path. To that long line of revered teachers belongs Dr. K.S. Sripada Raju, who has been our community's resident Guru for over 25 years.

Dr. Raju is a teacher of the highest order, having vast knowledge of the Hindu scriptures, who lives a chaste, simple, and yet socially engaged life of service to humanity. Those of us who have interacted with him at our Temple and elsewhere can recognize the ring of truth in the following remark made by Swāmi Tapasananda of Ganges, Michigan in 2002 (and quoted on page 1 of this book): *"He (Dr. Raju) is the kind of man who, although he is brimming with knowledge, just sits quietly unless you ask him a question. But once you ask, you find that he is an unending fount of wisdom."*

We also know that Dr. Raju himself is a prime exemplar of the "open communication" approach that he believes is essential for a Guru (see his quote on the opening page of this book). He is very approachable and readily responds to all the requests he receives, even when the cumulative effect of such requests is such as would overwhelm most of us. Like the ideal Guru, he is able to clear our doubts and help us on from where we are.

Our community is blessed to have Dr. Raju live continuously in our midst since 1983 (when he returned here after seven years spent in Hawaii). Well versed in both the philosophy of Vedānta and the ritual and devotional aspects of Hinduism, he has given generously of his wisdom and time to help so many of us, young and old, advance on the spiritual path. The community, in turn, has responded to him with affection combined with respect and gratitude. His 80th birthday celebration on February 6, 2009 at the Bharatiya Temple of Lansing provides an occasion for his many friends and disciples all over Michigan to come together and honor him.

The 80th birthday celebration also has provided the inspiration for producing this book. The articles collected here cover only a minute fraction of the many talks that Dr. Raju has given over the years, but they provide a glimpse of his thinking on all the different aspects and practices of spiritual life – prayer, service, devotion to God and Guru, discipline, dispassion and discrimination, culminating in deep meditation and final liberation. The article on People's Power demonstrates his admiration for Gāndhian social philosophy. The spiritual autobiography of his early years included in this book (based on transcripts of recorded conversations) is insightful and historically interesting.

May Dr. Sripada Raju continue to provide spiritual guidance to our community for many years to come!

Okemos, Michigan
February 1, 2009

Raman Anantaraman

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Acknowledgements and Notes

The cover design for this book is the result of the combined effort of four individuals: Jayalakshmi Yegnaswamy, who in 1999 made the sketch of the (then) front view of the Bharatiya Temple of Lansing; C.K. Venkateswaran of Chinmaya Seva Samiti, Flint, MI; Amit Iyengar, a junior at Flushing High School, Flushing, MI; and Kaillathe Padmanabhan of Okemos, MI.

The felicitation address reproduced and translated on preceding pages is an original composition by Bharatiya Temple of Lansing priest Śrī Surendra Bhardwāj, with assistance by the Temple's other priest Śrī Kannan Balasubramanian. The foundation that Śrī Bhardwāj has established in Delhi, India in memory of his father – Āchārya Śrī Rāmashāstri Samskr̥ta Jñāna Peeth Foundation – honors worthy individuals every year with a felicitation address and a monetary award, and Dr. Sripada Raju is the honoree for 2009.

Swāmi Tapasananda of Lakeshore Interfaith Institute/Mother's Trust, Ganges, MI supplied the audio recordings of Dr. Raju's talks on which articles 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 are based. Eric W. Ederer of Okemos, MI supplied the audiotapes for articles 1.4, 2.1 through 2.7, and 4 (spiritual autobiography). All disciples of Dr. Raju owe thanks to Eric for taking the initiative to arrange these talks (all except 1.4, where the talk was arranged by Swāmi Tapasananda) and record them. Article 2.8 was written by Vivek Subramanian, based on a presentation by Dr. Raju. All the recordings were transcribed by Raman Anantaraman and edited by him, with input from Dr. Raju.

Among the articles written by Dr. Raju himself, 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 are from the archives of Bharatiya Temple of Lansing. Article 3.4 was sent in by Shrikumar Poddar.

The photographs are from the Temple's archives, or from Sudhakar Chaphalkar, or from Maya Dedhia.

A note about the transliteration scheme used in this book is in order. For all Sānskrit words and quotations in this book, the international transliteration scheme is used, with its diacritical marks to indicate the correct pronunciation of the letters. Diacritical marks have generally not been used in proper names belonging to present or recent times and in well-known geographical names.

All errors contained in this book are the responsibility of the editor, who requests that any errors found are brought to his attention.



This picture was taken on June 14, 1998, the concluding day of Bharatiya Temple of Lansing's 5-day Mahā Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha ceremony. Dr. Sripada Raju stands to the left of the speaker, Manohar Naga, who was explaining to the assembled multitude what was going on behind the curtains. Dr. Raju played the part of Brahman for the Pratiṣṭha ceremony - the observer who watches out for errors in the conduct of the rituals.



On June 26-27, 1999, the temple celebrated Shikhara Kumbhābhiṣekam. This picture shows Dr. Raju leading the morning prayers in front of the sanctum on Day 1.



(Left) Participating in Gurupāduka Pūjā on Day 3 (May 28, 2000) of the 4-day Jain Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha ceremony at the temple in 2000. (Right) On the concluding day (July 2, 2006) of the 3-day Navagraha Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha ceremony in 2006, Sudhakar Kulkarni is seeking Dr. Raju's blessings, with Raman Anantaraman looking on.



(Left) With Rajiv Das on the morning of September 15, 2007 during the ground-breaking ceremony for the Temple's building expansion project. (Right) Making closing remarks at the Temple that same afternoon, following a discourse by Śrī Siddheswara Swāmi of Jñāna Yogāshrama, Bījapur, India.



(Left) Convalescing after open-heart surgery in August 1994. (Right) Satsang with Maya and Ramesh Dedhia in their home in Okemos, MI.



With Shrikumar and Mayurika Poddar, who have provided a home for Dr. Raju since 1983. Picture taken by Sudhakar Chaphalkar at the Poddar residence in Okemos, MI on Independence Day 2007.

I.1. Hindu Belief and Practice

Talk at Lakeshore Interfaith Institute, Ganges, Michigan on July 13, 2002

[Introduction by Swāmi Tapasananda: Dr. Raju has been a teacher of Vedānta and Hinduism in this country for many years. He lives a very exemplary lifestyle of simplicity, meditation, and generosity. He is considered by many in Michigan to be a guru, although he himself does not make any pretense to being a guru. He lives a life of voluntary simplicity. He is extremely active in the Bharatiya Temple of Lansing in Haslett, Michigan. From time to time, he goes back to India on charitable missions to help with village improvement projects. He used to do research at the East West Center in Honolulu during 1976-83. He is the kind of man who, although he is brimming with knowledge, just sits quietly unless you ask him a question. But once you ask, you find that he is an unending fount of wisdom.]

Thank you, Swāmi Tapasananda. This is a very special occasion for me for more than one reason. Swāmi Bhāshyānanda (1917-1996), who established this monastery in 1971 and of whom I am a student, gave me an Upaniṣad book when he visited the East West Center in Hawaii to give a series of talks. He had inscribed in it: *Always talk, think, feel, and wonder about Ātman*. Ātman means the nature of Being. Thus the advice was that enquiries related to the nature of the Being should be the subject of one's conversation. A second important reason is that this year, indeed this month, is the 100th anniversary of the Mahāsamādhi of Swāmi Vivekānanda, whose teachings guide this monastery. He passed away on July 4, 1902 at age 39.

When children ask me what Mahāsamādhi is, I explain it in my elaborate way. After listening for some time, they finally say: "O you mean he passed away. Why does it take you so many words to say so?" Then I start to think about the nature of being and the nature of passing away. The principle of Ātman is not bound or dependent on such processes as birth and death. That is why we say: *Ātmaneva cintaye* – we have to think about the nature of the Being. In much of science, we have to theorize, observe, measure, hypothesize, and confirm or reject the hypothesis. But Ātman is not amenable to such methodology. The reason is that Ātman is not an object but is the very subject that I am; to look at it as an object is incorrect. Should I therefore forget about Ātman, on the basis that a thing for which no measurement is possible does not exist? There is one school of thought that says: yes, forget it. But it is better not to give up, for it is my own nature I am trying to understand, and giving up on that quest would surely haunt me. I need to prepare myself to recognize myself without the aid of the instrumental procedures that apply to objects.

To explain the term Mahāsamādhi, I have to introduce theology – the notion of God. One who always thinks of God, lives in God, relates to God, and knows that God is something that is present always and everywhere, is always with God – God will never leave that person. That is the notion of Mahāsamādhi – the great union with God. So, based on our belief system, our notion of God evolves as we grow older. But even children have some

intuitive notion of God and, by and large, they accept God. Talking about God with children is an education in itself.

It is wonderful to read the writings of Swāmi Vivekānanda. It is like taking a bath in the holy Gāṅges – it refreshes us, removes inner impurities, and reminds us of the nature of our being. Every religion has its own mechanism to remind humanity about the nature of one's being. And as religion talks about "one," it also has to talk about the "other" and therefore about the world of relations. Also about the unseen. Thus religion has to deal with ethics, philosophy, morality, etc. In the Hindu tradition, we have a way of including all such things under one unified subject. That subject is Vedānta, which focuses on the essential characteristics of the nature of Reality. In the Vedas, on the other hand, are included many more things: not only the ultimate but also the proximate (i.e. the day-to-day affairs). Every being has a right to develop – but also every being has to relate to others in such a way that the interaction enhances one's own growth while at the same time aiding in the development of others – that is Dharma. There are many Dharmas, not just one, to suit differing interests. For people who want to free themselves of all obligations, there is the Mokṣa Dharma. For those who like to live their lives in this world, there are other kinds of Dharma.

There are those who like to view life in the conventional way and others who like to view it in an unconventional way. In the conventional view, life has a definite beginning and a definite termination: life is present if certain systemic characteristics exist, such as heartbeat, brain functioning in a certain way, etc. In the eye of the law, too, there is a clear definition of what life is. Vedānta looks at life in an unconventional way. It does not accept the conventional criteria for life. In its very radical view, even when the whole world, including the law, declares a person to be dead, but that person says "No, I am not dead," then he is not dead. (Only thing is, a person dead in the conventional sense cannot say anything!) To be able to say "I am not dead" at the moment of passage, a person has to keep saying all through his life "I am the eternal one, I cannot die." This training of one's consciousness and understanding has to be continuously practiced in order to stabilize oneself at the moment of passage. Society in its kindness may provide the dying person this same message of faith, but that is irrelevant. The burden of understanding the message is on me. If I cannot understand it myself, what can books, teachers, or institutions do? Swāmi Vivekānanda's Mahāsamādhi is of this unconventional type, with no reference to the conventional ideas of life and death. Incidentally, I am spending so much time on Swāmi Vivekānanda's Mahāsamādhi because that is a way to pay tribute in this interfaith center to a person who exposed people to such thoughts in an inter-religious context.

When a realized person is meditating in the forest, saying "*so'ham* – I am He" and thereby asserting his nature, and a tiger comes and takes him away in its jaws, even then he continues to say "*so'ham*". That is fearlessness, that shows the capacity to be true to one's belief. *sa* = he or it; *aham* = I; *sā* = she. As I breathe in, I say *aham*; as I breathe out, I say *saha*. *Aham-saha* or *so'ham*. Thus I have imposed the message of *so'ham* on the very act of breathing, which is a mechanical process.

This development of awareness is the individual's responsibility; it is not the parents' responsibility or society's. Society imposes on me a sense of belonging. But at some point I have to initiate the process of disengagement from worldly life and refine the identification of my being; that is the message of *so'ham*.

Recently I was reading a book called "Inflation-Free Money," where the author says: Humans may impose constructs on me and then deal with me based on those constructs. That is the market mechanism, where money becomes one such construct. Market works on duality, that is, the existence of buyers and sellers. If by my thinking I free myself of this duality, I become free of the market forces. That is the ultimate way of doing away with the market. Market ends when there is no duality, i.e. when there is no buyer and no seller. [Question from audience: *Do you call that ideal communism?* Answer: No, for communism also works in the market, with the power vested in the state. But for the situation I am describing, there is no state and no enforcing mechanism. Let us be clear, however, that this is not anarchy. Rather, it is self-regulation.] So the whole transaction ends there; it ends because there is no need for exchange. There is no need for another power to come and regulate me; my awareness of my identity with others is so complete that there is no need for anyone else to remind me.

The topic of Hinduism has to be considered from different perspectives – in terms of belief systems, rituals, language used, idols, icons...It is a vast topic. In the time we have, I will limit myself to answering the comprehensive set of questions submitted to me beforehand by Ms. Poornima of this center.

Q1: What are the most important teachings and practices of your tradition?

To answer this, we have to survey the teachings of all those who have lived Hinduism. There is a good book, "The Apostles of Śrī Rāmakrishna," which gives brief biographies and lists the teachings of 17 disciples of Śrī Rāmakrishna.

(There is a gap in the recording at this point due to tape change.)

Q2: (not on tape; could be:) How have inter-religious conflicts shaped your tradition?

...This is how the resolution of inter-religious relations in the context of political and military conflicts has happened historically. Further, following conquests, kings would build temples to celebrate their victories and to bring communities together. We have a procedure for consecration, i.e. inviting divinity into our idols. The best of things have to be provided. When a deity is established, under the pedestal of that deity we put a lot of precious items like gold, precious metals, etc., and over that we establish the *mūrti* (idol). Those who have invested in that way know what is involved in the consecration: there is a value involved, there is adoration. Non-Hindu conquerors knew (e.g. from adherents who had converted from Hinduism) about the wealth to be had under the *mūrtis*, and that was one reason they attacked temples and idols; another was that they felt justified in what they did because they were doing it only to idol worshippers.

It took considerable time for people of differing faiths to look beyond the inter-religious conflicts and appreciate the common spirituality. Great saints like Kabīr and Guru Nānak, who were brought up in the mixed traditions of Hindus and Muslims, started a harmony-building process. They said: Pay attention to the ethical, moral, and spiritual qualities of the different religions; the same God is everywhere, whether you call him Rām or Rahīm (“compassionate one”). These great saints through their songs and writings were able to provide another source of strength to the people.

The different extents of inter-religious conflicts in north and south India have shaped the different attitudes of the immigrants to the USA from these two regions towards temple building in this country. People who have come to the USA from south India have a bigger urge to build temples. That is because there are a lot more temples in south India, where there were far fewer inter-religious conflicts. In contrast, people from north India feel: why bother with building temples? As long as one has a hall where one can gather for satsang (described in answer to Q12, see page 7) and sing bhajans, that is enough.

Movements started in Hinduism to wrench people away from purely ritualistic practices. One important example is the Ārya Samāj movement of Swāmi Dayānanda Saraswati, a 19th century figure who was a contemporary of Śrī Rāmakrishna. He came from Gujarāt. One of the principles of Ārya Samāj is the emphasis on Havan, i.e. worship through fire, such as we will be doing later today, instead of building temples and doing *mūrti* pūjā. This harks back to Vedic practices. Dayānanda also emphasized learning the Vedas and understanding them. His teachings became very popular in the Punjāb where early confrontations between Hindus and Muslims had taken place (with *mūrti* pūjā as one of the issues) and where it was more practical to practice worship through fire than by building temples. So many people in Punjāb became Ārya Samājists.

When Swāmi Dāyananda told people that they were leading a life of blind imitation without knowing why they were doing what they were doing, some of them got angry at him. He also criticized the way men treated women. One person who did not like his teaching invited him to lunch and, so the story goes, served him ground glass as a dish. He became sick and died. We are the inheritors and the heirs of all those who throughout human history have challenged traditions – of whom some have been honored in their lifetime and others have been hated.

In Bengāl, Rāmakrishna's approach to divinity was one of harmony-building – seeing the Supreme in every form and in every situation. Bengālī religious practices were greatly influenced by his teachings: “The particular way you worship does not matter – what matters is that you be spiritual.” This emphasis on spirituality is a fundamental concept in Vedānta. From Rāmakrishna's time on, helped by the spreading of his message by Swāmi Vivekānanda, the Hindu way of practicing religion all over India has been influenced by Vedāntic thoughts. The particular way you worship does not matter, as long as you retain the spiritual aspect.

In this way Hinduism, by being subjected to inter-religious encounters and consequent modifications, places emphasis on spirituality. Later on, Mahātmā Gāndhī also

contributed to harmony-building and made Hinduism become a vehicle for practicing devotion and purity. His student and disciple Vinobhā Bhāve developed this further. In short, Hinduism's journey has been to accommodate and to harmonize.

Admittedly, there are still problems. Despite the secularism promoted in the early years of independence, there is nowadays an undercurrent of fundamentalist tendencies in India. Religion historically has been one of the basic needs of human beings – something for them to hang on to. Humans have used it for uplifting themselves and also for building societies. How to separate these two functions and who is to do the separation are issues even now. Achieving this separation is a challenge that comes to every religion from time to time. Islām, for example, is a religion of peace, and yet it is difficult for people to hold on to that thought and not associate Islām with violent events involving Islāmic people. It will be hard to do this unless we go deep into the spiritual aspects and take them as the main message to guide us in our lives and in our activities and relationships.

Q3: Are there sacred religious practices in Hinduism?

Yes, whenever we build a temple dedicated to a deity, there are sacred practices. There are procedures to bring sacredness to a piece of sculpture, a painting, a symbol made in metal, or indeed any object made out of the 5 elements – earth, water, fire, wind, and space. We say: this water is not a mere chemical compound with well-defined composition; rather, it represents water from the sacred Gānges. Likewise, we say: this stone, though it is brought from a particular quarry, has the very presence of the spiritual quality of the deity that is invoked. In order to make these transformations, we have the practice of *mantras*, which are statements relating to the functional aspects of those spirits. One repeats the *mantra* not once or twice but 100's and 1000's of times; the more one does it, the greater becomes the association of the object with sacredness. The more one pours water on the *mūrti* thinking the water is sacred while reciting the *mantra*, the more sacred the *mūrti* becomes. If there is at least one person present in a group or community who feels this, then, under his guidance, others will acquire the same feeling. This is a psychological way of communication. It is based on the human need to transfer a sense of sacredness to the objects we worship.

Q4: Are there sacred music?

In Hindu tradition, there are two types of sacred music. One is the chanting of the Sāma Veda (one of the Vedas), which is a musical rendering of Vedic passages; there are people trained to do this chanting. The other is any poetical composition done by a great devotee in honor of a particular deity or principle.

Q5: Are there any sacred prayers?

Yes. Vedic hymns (*sūktas*) are chanted during worship services when we offer clothes, decorations, incense, etc. to the deities. Sometimes devotional songs are sung at such times, and they too add to the sacredness.

Q6: Are there sacred texts?

Yes. The Mahābhārata, different versions of the Rāmāyaṇa (e.g. Vālmīki's, Tulasī Dās's, and Kamban's), the Bhagavad Gītā, the Bhāgavatam (which narrates Kṛṣṇa stories), the 700-stanza Devi Māhātmyam (also called Cāndī, and used for worship of Durgā), are considered sacred. Writings of saints are also considered sacred. For example, *Rāmcaritmānas*, composed by saint Tulasī Dās in the late 16th century, is a sacred book; people worship it.

Q7: How does your tradition treat education of young people?

Education is valued and respected. But the ratio between available teachers and the number of young people who need to be taught is so lop-sided that deprivation takes place. As a result, the young people take to other ways of life. This touches on the economic sphere. During their time in India, the British established schools which taught both humanities and science and technology. Native kings also established schools, from which many people got benefited. But, by and large, in the villages there is a deprivation because of the paucity of teachers. Things are improving, but this is still a rather important problem, in my opinion.

Q8: How does your tradition treat the distribution of gender roles?

Historically, because of turbulence and insecurity in the country, women were advisedly not given the opportunity to go out and learn in unfamiliar surroundings. Like travel advisories nowadays ("do not visit such and such a country because of the unsettled conditions there"), parental advisory to daughters was: "No, do not put yourself in that risky situation." This led to some undesirable results. But during the last 50 years and more, there has been equal opportunity for boys and girls. Also, in the Hindu religious tradition, men and women are equal. Śiva and Pārvati are in one body, and so are Viṣṇu and Lakṣmi. In this regard, there has always been parity between the genders.

Q9: How does your religion honor women and the feminine aspects of divinity?

In our tradition, we look upon the Universal Mother as the one under whom everything takes place. Honoring women is one of the important aspects of our religious tradition. But, over time, deviations have taken place for reasons that are not religious but socio-political and economic.

Q10. How does your religious tradition impact your culture with regard to rites of passage such as marriage and birth and death?

It is an established tradition that when the child is in the pre-natal stage, a beneficial environment has an important influence on the unborn child. Therefore, the would-be mother is given the opportunity to listen to devotional songs and discourses on the sacred. After birth, there are well-established procedures to mark the life-cycle rites of

passage of the child: the naming ceremony, the first food ceremony, the initiation to education, to name a few. When the child becomes a youth, there are procedures for boys to be invested with certain symbols and accorded certain facilities to signify that thenceforth they will enter the educational system. (A member of the audience asks: *Only boys?*) It used to be for boys only, because of the prevalence of societal insecurity I mentioned earlier (see answer to Q8). Now things have changed. As society has become more congenial and security is no longer an issue, boys and girls now follow the same educational system.

Q11. What are the unique gifts your religion has to offer to the family of world religions?

How do I answer this? (Laughter from audience.)

In the Hindu tradition, we are free to worship the divine in any manner we please. In the Bhagavad Gītā (VII.21), the Lord says:

*yo yo yām yām tanum bhaktaḥ śraddhayārcitumicchatī
tasya tasyācalām śraddhām tāmeva vidadhāmyaham*

ya: who; *yām*: which; *tanum*: form; *bhaktaḥ*: devotee; *śraddhayā*: with faith; *arcitum*: to worship; *icchatī*: desires; *tasya tasya*: of him; *acalām*: unshakable; *śraddhām*: faith; *tām*: that; *eva*: surely; *vidadhāmī*: make; *aham*: I.

Whatsoever form any devotee desires to worship with faith – that (same) faith of his I make firm and unshakable.

I teach this to the children. They may not understand the meaning, but they like the sound of *yo yo* and *yām yām*. (Laughter.)

Q12. What are the most important practices of your tradition?

a) If you are analytical and you like to enquire about the nature of things, that is called Jñāna Yoga.

b) If you are task-oriented and like to be engaged in work that enhances the life of the community, that is called Karma Yoga.

c) An attitude of viewing others as expressions of divinity is called Bhakti Yoga.

d) A preference to look at oneself quietly through contemplation, meditation, observation, and concentration is called Dhyāna Yoga.

Which of these practices one follows depends on one's temperament. But all of them are dependent on the availability of a community that supports and imparts instructions in these practices. That leads us to identify the following practice.

e) Satsang – a gathering of supporting, understanding, sympathetic individuals – is an important practice in the Hindu tradition. Any amount of reading of books is fine, but you need to have a live community where you can share. Everyone is on the journey, so we need to help each other by sharing.

Q13. What are the most important teachings of your tradition?

I started off my answer to Q1 by talking about this.

ātmavat sarvabhūteṣu yaḥ paśyati sa paṇḍitaḥ

This passage from the Hitopadeśa means: “He is a wise person who looks upon all beings as his own self.” When you are dealing with various beings, think that you are there; put yourself in that position. This is also expressed in Bhagavad Gītā (XII.15):

*yasmānnodvijate loko lokānnodvijate ca yaḥ
harṣāmarṣabhayodvegairmukto yaḥ sa ca me priyaḥ*

He by whom the world is not agitated and who cannot be agitated by the world, and who is free from joy (*harṣa*), anger (*amarṣa*), fear (*bhaya*), and anxiety (*udvegaḥ*) – he is dear to Me.

My behavior should be such that no one around me should get disturbed; nor should I be disturbed by the world; nor subject to elation, depression, and other emotions. A person who has the temperament, the world view, the understanding, the knowledge to be free from all these psychological deviations is very dear to the Lord. These are the characteristics of an ideal devotee. Similarly, in the second chapter of the Gītā, verses 55-72, there is a complete description of a Sthitaprajña, i.e. a person who is stabilized and rooted in the nature of the Being.

(There is a gap at this point due to tape change.)

These are all important ways of looking at spirituality. Our scriptures and prayers reinforce them by repeating them in various places. For example, Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad (verse 6) says: A person who is able to see the same Being in every being, whom should that person avoid? Another example is the well-known prayer,

*sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ. sarve santu nirāmayāḥ.
sarve bhadraṇi paśyantū. mā kaścid duḥkha-bhāḡ bhavet.*

Every being should be happy, every being should be free from affliction and disease, all should realize what is good, and none should be subject to sorrow.

So I have covered the questions that were submitted beforehand. I now invite questions from the audience.

Q(live)1: Can old traditions be honored without being practiced?

A: (Pause.) Practicing – what does that mean? There should be a constant communication. Whether I repeat a mantra for a day or a week or a year, I need to come back to report to the one who taught me the mantra what effect it has had on me. It is all a way of establishing communication. How has my consciousness been able to free itself from limitation? Unless this happens, it is no use reciting the mantra.

Any good work we have done will have its effect. After I have built a beautiful temple or sung a great song or served the community with dedication, eventually that good work has to open my eyes, i.e. free my consciousness from narrowness – that is where right understanding has to come. There is an Indian saying: “If a donkey carries a load of sandalwood (a fragrant wood) on its back, of what use is that to the donkey?” Similarly, I may carry all these books and repeat mantras, but for that to be of any use, I have to get to the knowledge contained therein – the knowledge has to be absorbed by me. In the Kaṭhopaniṣad (I.2.23), it is said:

nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena.

“This Ātman cannot be attained by study of the Vedas, nor by intelligence, nor by much hearing.” The exposition continues: “He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To him this Ātman reveals its true nature.” The Spirit cannot be attained by giving a talk or listening to a talk or reading a book; it has to come on its own.

Doing service or *japa* or fasting are ways of cleansing myself; they are aids to reach the goal. By all these practices, I am freeing (emptying) myself of the limited interests I have developed over a long time. They are all *dharma*s (duties); but, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.66: *sarvadharmān parityajya* – (one must eventually) abandon all *dharma*s. The Spirit is already there and it is everywhere. I have carved my own little house, with my own interests, and I have allowed the Spirit to enter through this window or that door. But a stage has to come when the walls of my house have to come down. I have to prepare myself in such a way that I do not need any of the structures I have built; I must disband them. A lot of effort is required, however, to do this – to empty myself of my limited interests.

(A member of the audience comments: *It seems you are creating your own tradition by giving up symbols.*) Symbols are necessary, but after a while one has to be able to live without symbols. As this is difficult in human society, one must at least strive to live with a minimum of symbols. By constant enquiry, I will eventually see how my own identity becomes an obstacle to my growth; the conceptual framework I have carried till then in my head has limited me in what I have been able to receive. I have had to say until now: “Please translate, then only I can understand.” But once I have freed myself of the need for symbols, I realize that I am free to receive all messages. When I do not have any language (one of the most powerful symbols) in my head, I am prepared to receive all languages. Yes, there is fear in letting go – it takes time. But we can practice it (in small steps at the beginning).

Q(live)2: I understand that Vedānta was a reform movement in Hinduism that started several hundred years ago. Was Śrī Rāmakrishna a part of that movement?

A. (Pause.) Vedānta literally means the teachings contained in the Upaniṣads; thus Vedānta has existed from the time of the Upaniṣads. But you are asking about a movement. Well, it was Śankara, the 8th century philosopher, who started the Vedānta

movement. Vedānta existed long before Śāṅkara. But there were other traditions such as Jaina, Buddhist, and even materialist thinking in the over 1000 years before Śāṅkara which caused a lot of scholarly migration from Vedānta: scholars thought that what these other traditions said made a lot of sense. The materialist thinkers (called Cārvākas or Lokāyatas) said: The reality is that I live here; when I die, I do not know what happens; so let me enjoy life to the fullest while I live. A famous Cārvāka, Dehaviḷāpati, said: It is like borrowing money when I am alive and enjoying it to the full; after I die, the debt remains but that is not my concern. The Jaina approach was: What is presented in the Vedas (the worship practices, the meditation, the discussions) is in a language that many people do not understand. So the Jain teachers (the Tīrthankaras) developed their teachings in a people's language called *Ardhamāgadhī* (so called because it has many of the characteristics of Māgadhī, the language of the people of Magadha). Around 600 BC, Buddha also taught in a people's language called Pāli. Over time, by the time of Śāṅkara, these other traditions had developed their own methods of arguments and presentations that convinced many. What Śāṅkara did was to point out that the teachings in the Upaniṣads are very clear; they are about the nature of Reality, the nature of the Spirit, and the nature of the Being; they call upon each one of us to look closely into the nature of one's own Being; and they do not deny God. So Śāṅkara developed Vedānta in a scholarly way in order to tell the other scholars: Do not give up the Vedas; they have these teachings. And so Vedānta began to develop over the centuries.

Śrī Rāmakrishna in the 19th century received the Vedāntic message in his own way while still living in his native village. Later Vivekānanda, while a college student in Calcutta, saw Rāmakrishna living the Vedāntic way of life at the temple in Dakshineswar. He had been sent there to observe Rāmakrishna by one of his English professors in college. Their first meeting – a momentous one in the history of Hinduism – was in November 1881, when Rāmakrishna was 45 and Vivekānanda 18; their association would last for 5 years, during which Vivekānanda's spiritual life was molded. For Vivekānanda, Rāmakrishna's lifestyle matched and thereby validated the statements in the Vedas and the teachings of Vedānta. He saw the empirical evidence for Vedānta in the life of Rāmakrishna. This was a reality check for him. Interestingly, when he came to the USA and lectured on Vedānta, he talked about the principles of Vedānta but did not talk about Rāmakrishna for a long time. Vivekānanda felt that he was unworthy of Rāmakrishna and resolved not to discuss him in public or even write about him, says Swāmi Nikhilānanda in his biography of Vivekānanda.

Note that the principles of Vedānta predate Vivekānanda and exist outside of him. They are fundamental to the teachings of many great teachers starting from the time of Śāṅkara.

Now we will take a 5-minute break before doing Havan, the ritual of fire worship.

Havan

Havan is a Hindi word (derived from the Sānskṛit *havanam*) meaning “to convey (a message)”; “hava” in Hindi means the wind, and Havan “conveys” like the wind “blows.” In Vedic tradition, fire is considered to be the home of all the devas, the “shining ones,” who are the divinities supporting life and the forces of nature around us: the sun, the rain, the earth, the produce of the earth, the wind, etc. Fire is the messenger that communicates to the devas. By performing Havan, we are sending a message through fire to the divinities that govern life and the forces of nature. We say: “We are offering these items into you, O Fire; please convey them to all the devas, the life-enhancing divinities.”

Another name for Havan is “Agnihotra.” *Agni* is fire and *hotra* is the use of Vedic *mantras* to invoke the divinities. Where are these divinities? According to tradition, the moment you mention the name of the divinity, the divinity comes to wherever you are. I teach children that the moment they utter the name of God, He is there.

(There is a gap at this point due to tape change.)

God is said to be “*svataḥ pramāṇa*,” i.e. self-evident. God exists not because anything else tells me God exists. For all other things, there is evidence, e.g. for fire there is the evidence of smoke and heat. But for God the method of evidence does not work. I cannot infer God; God is there beyond the reach of logic, independent of all my methods of understanding. When we build a temple, we are modeling the evidence for God so that people can say: “I went to the temple; it is so peaceful there; therefore God is there.”

We will follow the steps described in the book *Vaidika Upāsana Vidhi* by Dr. Balvir Acharya (published by Vaidika Research Institute, Rohtak, India). We start by blowing the conch shell and reciting the Gāyatrī mantra (p. 22 of the book), which says: “Supreme Lord, the source of existence, intelligence and bliss, creator of the universe, may we prove worthy of your choice and acceptance; may we merit your glorious grace; inspire and guide our intellect in the right direction.” Then we recite the eight mantras of *Īśvara-stuti-prārthana-upāsana* (pages 25-27), which are invocatory verses to praise God and invoke Hiranyagarba (the Creator, Brahmā), prāṇa (the energy system), Prajāpati (another name for the Creator), etc. Next we light the fire in the Yajñakuṇḍa and recite the mantras on pages 28-29-30(top). Then we recite the mantras on pages 30(middle) to 38(top); during this, each time we say *svāhā*, we pour some ghee and some *havan sāmāgrī* into the fire. Next we recite the Gāyatrī mantra (middle of page 38), with a *svāhā* added to it, several times (sometimes as many as 108 times or 365 times) while offering ghee and *sāmāgrī* into the fire. Next we take some home-made sweet dish and offer it to the fire while chanting the mantra at page 38(bottom). Then we do *pūrṇāhuti* (“complete offering”) by reciting the following mantra (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad V.1.1*) several times while making the offerings of ghee and *sāmāgrī* into the fire:

*Om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate.
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate svāhā*

Om. That is fullness, this is fullness. From that fullness, this fullness came. From that fullness, this fullness removed, what remains is fullness. Svāhā.

Then we recite *om sarvam vai pūrṇāgum svāhā* (p. 39 middle) three times, followed by this passage from Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda 3.3.1:

*mayi medhām mayi prajāṃ mayyagniḥ tejo dadhātu
mayi medhām mayi prajāṃ mayīndraḥ indriyam dadhātu
mayi medhām mayi prajāṃ mayi sūryo bhrājo dadhātu*

May Agni grant me intelligence, continuity of progeny, and splendor born of Vedic study. May Indra grant me intelligence, continuity of progeny, and virility. May Sūrya grant me intelligence, continuity of progeny, and prowess that strikes fear in the hearts of enemies.

Finally, we recite the *dyau śānti* peace chant (Śukla Yajurveda XXXVI.17):

*om dyauḥ śāntir-antariḥsam śāntiḥ pṛthivī śāntir-āpaḥ
śāntiḥ śāntiḥ. vanaspatayaḥ śāntir-viśvedevāḥ śāntir-
brahma śāntiḥ sarvam śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ sā mā śāntiredhi*

To the heavens be peace, to the sky and the earth;
To the waters be peace, to plants and all trees;
To the Gods be peace, to Brahman be peace;
To all be peace, again and again;
Peace also to me!

This concludes the Havan.

Q. What are the symbolisms of the different items used in the Havan?

The ghee sustains the fire, while the *havan sāmāgrī*, which consists of powdered roots and herbs, has a purifying effect on the surrounding air; the *sāmāgrī* is as essential for a Havan as flowers are for a pūjā. Water is used both for sanctifying the procedure and as an emergency fire extinguisher (*laughter*). The sound from the blowing of the conch shell indicates the primeval sound “Om” and helps people attune themselves to the Praṇava, i.e. helps them orient themselves to the worship. It is the sound of *omkāra*. *Kāra* means “saying,” so *omkāra* means “saying om.” The Upaniṣads say that all things are *omkāra*.

Q: What are devas?

Devas are the life forces all around us. If I drink water, I get energy from the deva for water, Varuṇa. If I light a fire, I get energy from the deva for fire, Agni. In many Vedic

prayers, there is a recognition, celebration, adoration, and acknowledgement of the different energy systems that sustain us. The corresponding devas are given specific names, e.g. Vāyu is the deva for air, Agni is the deva for fire, etc. One of the famous peace chants begins:

Om śam no mitraḥ śam varuṇaḥ. śam no bhavatvaryamā.

Varuṇa is the divinity who presides over water and binds us through acts that are good. Aryamān signifies the whole geneology of one's ancestorship, both biological and sociological. We are all connected; life is connected. Where modern science has given a name (DNA) to that connectedness, the same idea is conveyed in Vedic tradition by the concept of Aryamān.

But the connections in life based on measurable things have a limitation; connections based on immeasurable things come about through God. As human beings we have to operate at both levels: we have to do things in some orderly way and thereby get connected to others; at the same time, we must be disinterested in the results of our actions so that we are not bound. Even though I am living in this world, I must be able to say: I am not the doer, I have nothing to do with the world. Attributing our actions to the devas invokes in us that capacity to renounce. That is spirituality.

Spirituality is present because that is its very nature. When people meditate and contemplate, that is the only way; one need not do anything else. That is the Highest. But to attain this requires constant effort. Without organizations like Lakeshore Interfaith Institute and the facilities they provide, this attainment is not possible.

I.2. Indian Spirituality, Part A: The Vedāntic Viewpoint

Talk at Lakeshore Interfaith Institute, Ganges, MI on May 14, 2005

Human nature is such that we accept a concept only if it is presented within a framework we can relate to. All religions have started by catering to this human need – we build a temple, we establish a symbol, we do our consecration and our rituals, and we say God is there. This is to aid in communicating the notion of spirituality for a particular situation. But God is not a system or a theory or even a concept – at least, God is not amenable to the kind of methodology we use to understand most other concepts. God is freedom itself. So the sooner we understand the nature of God and reality free of religious symbols, the better it is for us and for the world. That is where spirituality starts.

The quest for spirituality has gone on in India for a long time. Among the many ancient Indian texts that talk about the ultimate nature of reality, *Brahma Sūtras* is especially important. *Brahmaṇ* is the Sānskrit word for spirituality and *sūtra* means “guiding principle.” The book has 555 concise statements (aphorisms) that give the essence of the arguments on Brahman. Of these, the first four are most significant. They are so concise that they cannot be understood without the aid of a lucid commentary; but once understood, they will be seen to contain all the main points of spirituality as envisaged by Sanātana Dharma.

Sūtra 1: *athāto brahmajijñāsā*

Now, therefore, the enquiry into Brahman.

Sūtra 2: *janmādyasya yataḥ*

(Brahman is that) from which the origin, etc. (i.e. the origin, sustenance, and dissolution) of this (world proceed).

Sūtra 3: *śāstrayonitvāt*

The source of right knowledge being śāstra.

Sūtra 4: *tattu samanvayāt*

But that (Brahman is to be known only) on the basis of agreement or harmony, because it is the main purpose.

Sūtra 1 makes it clear that the book will present spirituality in the framework of a system of enquiry (*jijñāsā*). The seeker has the freedom to constantly question and experiment, accepting or rejecting ideas on the basis of his own experience. There is also a hint that the book is meant for those who are endowed with a real desire for attaining the knowledge of Brahman. At first, one may spend one's time in various activities that are of value to society. But ultimately one has to spend time in enquiring into and understanding the nature of reality—God or Brahman.

Sūtra 2 defines Brahman as that whence the world originates, etc. Thus spirituality is the basis even for matter; this world with all its varied and changeable forms and relations has come from that Reality. But Reality is not bound by these manifestations. Śankara

uses the term *māyā* to describe the power of Brahman that gives rise to the world. Because people usually see only the varied forms, Sūtra 2 draws their attention to the source of all things, Brahman.

Sūtra 3 declares that the understanding of the basis of all things has to be attained via *śāstra*, i.e. in an orderly, systematic, logical way. In the Vedāntic tradition, this means that Brahman is to be known only by the study of the Vedas.

Sūtra 4 states that contradictions in the *śāstras* must be resolved in a harmonious way in order to understand Brahman. In the Vedāntic tradition, this means that we must make the effort to resolve apparent contradictions between different Vedānta texts, for Brahman is the uniform topic of all. The capacity to put oneself in another's place and understand that person's viewpoint is an important habit to develop. It develops harmonious understanding and avoids quarrels. Thus the pursuit of spirituality gives humanity a touch of openness or liberality. The spirit of toleration that Sūtra 4 advocates is one of the hallmarks of Hinduism.

Among the many scholars who have written commentaries on *Brahma Sūtras* down the ages, some have confined themselves to just these 4 *sūtras*. This makes sense, for if we understand these four statements, we are well advanced on the path of spirituality. *Brahma Sūtras*, like other religious texts, uses a vocabulary that is based on specific religious concepts, for without such a basis communication is impossible. But Śankara (who, as far as we know, was the first to have written a commentary on this book) struggled very hard to free the text from its theological and ritualistic underpinnings and bring out the intrinsic nature of Brahman. That is one of his great achievements.

A very good idea of the Hindu view of spirituality is conveyed by the following description, from the *Guru Stotram*, of the spiritual Guru.

*yasyāntar-nādimadhyam na hi karacaraṇam nāmagotram na sūtram
no jātirnaiva varṇaḥ na bhavati puruṣo no napumso na ca strī
nākāro nirvikāro na hi jani-maraṇam nāsti puṇyam na pāpam
no tattvam tattvamekam sahaja-samarasam sadgurum tam namāmi*

"I prostrate to that Sadguru for whom there is no beginning, no middle, no end, no hands, no feet, no name, no lineage, no guidelines (bounding rules), no category, no color, who is neither male nor female nor neuter, who has no form, no change, no birth, no death, no virtue, no sin, no elements of creation, who is the One Truth, who is the natural homogeneous Essence." This verse denies all attributes to the spiritually realized person excepting two: *sahaja* or naturalness and *samarasam* or homogeneous essence. Wherever there is harmony, wherever there is spontaneity, that is where we find spirituality. All the attributes listed in this verse are necessary for social order. But they are all divisive and must be overcome in the quest for spirituality.

I.3. Indian Spirituality, Part B: Many Traditions, One Goal

Talk at Lakeshore Interfaith Institute, Ganges, MI on May 14, 2005

Spirituality is freedom itself. One may come to realize the need for spirituality in one's life and the benefits of practicing it in one of several different ways.

- A desire to get out of the rules and regulations of society and gain spontaneity. The thrust of our societal and political processes, as well as of science and technology, is to make everything and everybody predictable and thus remove spontaneity. Spontaneity and freedom must be found outside societal laws.
- A desire to free oneself of ethnicity. Ethnicity is one of the important attributes which humanity needs in order to survive—we cannot communicate efficiently unless we have a common language, we cannot do transactions unless we have common symbols. But upon analysis, we will see how our own identity becomes an obstacle to our growth at some point; our ethnicity and the conceptual framework each of us carries in our head limit us in what we are able to receive. Once we have freed ourselves of the need for a framework and symbols, we realize that we will be able to receive all messages.
- A desire to see the root or origin of our own being.
- The fear factor, the reward factor, and the uncertainty factor have all been used very heavily to induce people to take an interest in spirituality so that they pay attention to the things that are free from the processes that cause them fear or uncertainty.

But there is fear in letting go of the institutions, symbols, rituals, language, etc. that hold us together as a society. It is only a very few who feel the impulse to break out of the system. These bold and enterprising people—the *dhīrah*, as Kaṭhapaniṣad II.1.1 describes them—are prepared to give up the security and sense of closure that comes from being a part of the social order. They prefer to constantly question and experiment, accepting or rejecting ideas in their quest for truth, freedom, and spirituality. This flip-flop approach is generally unacceptable for ordinary interactions—for a person practicing it is not dependable. In the spiritual domain, however, this approach is essential.

Different traditions, different religions, different practical methods have been developed to guide us in our quest for spirituality and give us some insight about ourselves. There are many paths, one mountain. Think of life as a multi-lane road where each one of us has our own lane on which we can drive at our own speed to suit our convenience and needs, and yet everyone is on the path. This traffic analogy is useful for understanding how to avoid conflict with others. Everyone has a way to accomplish his or her goals; one may take a break here or a detour there, without being in conflict with others.

In Indian spirituality, there are many traditions. First, there is the Vedāntic tradition described in Part A. Some others have their origin in the idea that birth and death are miserable, so we must seek something that is beyond both; the teachers use the fear factor as the psychological inducement to make people pay attention to God and ethics. In some, there is no creator. Atheism and agnosticism too are a part of Indian

spirituality; that atheists do not believe in God does not mean that they deny the existence of a spirit that is not conditioned by anything. It is the theists who should free themselves of their limited notion of God. Buddhism and Jainism, with their independent systems of enquiry, are essential parts of Indian spirituality; but we do not have the space to discuss them in detail.

In Hinduism, the emphasis on spirituality was a key teaching of Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836-1886), one of the important religious figures of India. His approach to spirituality was one of harmony-building – seeing the Supreme in every form and in every situation. Hindu religious practices have been greatly influenced by his teachings: "The particular way you worship does not matter – what matters is that you retain the spiritual aspect." Going away from the notion of God with form and possessed of good qualities (*saguna* form) to the notion of God without form or attributes (*nirguna* form) is one of the spiritual tasks advocated by him in order to develop one's spirituality. This accords with the teaching of Bhagavad Gītā 2.45.

One point we must clearly understand is that spirituality is nobody's exclusive preserve – not even of those who believe in God. Spirituality is as open as sunlight or space; it is only when we try to capture it within a certain framework and thereby impose limitations on the concept that the problem starts. The source of spirituality is the spirit itself. By its very definition, the spirit is freedom; it is not owned by anyone. This we have to understand. And once we have understood that, harmony becomes the very nature of spirituality and quarrels are avoided.

It is fair to say that Hindu spirituality has freed itself from any type of exclusiveness and, in fact, has become so inclusive that it does not make any sense to us! Normally, we are used to drawing a line between what is acceptable and what is not. The definition of Hinduism as the world views us is also like that. Even some Hindus would like to draw a boundary and make an exclusivity of Hinduism. So they come with operational definitions such as: that person is a Hindu who behaves in a particular way. Spirituality has nothing to do with such matters. This does not mean that we should disrespect those who hold these views; we realize the use of these views for particular purposes. But we must also realize that such views do not convey the whole picture.

Thus the practice of spirituality is two-fold: (a) First, I have to examine deeply my perceptions, judgments, and interests and work to free myself of the limitations I have been brought up in; (b) I then have to look at the plurality that exists around me and realize that all of them have the same quality of naturalness (discussed in the last paragraph of Part A) that I have realized in myself. This is what I understand about spirituality. Unless I begin to live that kind of freedom of the spirit in my own life, I will look upon others as the enemy. But once I have achieved that freedom, I will be able to follow the biblical advice, "Love thy enemy." The cultivation of such a transformation in one's own life is a basic requirement to see spirituality as authentic and real and not a mere speculative or bookish concept. The value of spirituality to me is in giving me a touch of openness and liberality. For onlookers, the value is that my behavior will become an example to follow.

I.4. The Ideal Person

Talk at Lakeshore Interfaith Institute, Ganges, MI on August 28, 2005

In the Bhagavad Gītā, detailed descriptions of the ideal person are given by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in chapters 2, 6, 12, 13, and 14, and there are brief passages in other chapters as well. The reason for this plurality of presentation is that there are different types of people, with different tastes and capacities; the hope is that, one way or another, the message will get through. The different passages use different terms for this ideal person, but they all have the value of providing us a path to follow, a way to keep track of where we are on the path, and also, for those rare ones who have attained perfection, a confirmation of their own Being. In chapter 2, verses 55-72, the term used is *Sthita Prajñā*—a person of steadfast wisdom, one who has attained the highest. A few of these verses formed part of the daily prayers of Mahātmā Gāndhī because, as he said, he wanted to keep before him a model of that perfect person. Chapter 6, verses 1-10, describe the *Yogi*—a person of steady mind. Chapter 12, verses 13-19, describe the *Bhakta*, the ideal devotee. Chapter 13, verses 7-11, describe the attributes of a *Jñānī*, a person with true knowledge. Chapter 14, verses 22-26, describe the *Triguṇātīta*, one who has gone beyond the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Some other relevant verses are 16.1-3 and 18.51-53.

In this article, our focus is on the 12th chapter. To fully appreciate the teachings of this chapter, we must first consider what happens in the preceding chapter, the 11th. There Śrī Kṛṣṇa shows Arjuna His universal form; He gives Arjuna a special eye to see Him. The point is that we human beings, with our limited ability, are really bankrupt; and unless we declare our bankruptcy, understanding of divinity in its fullness is not possible. But once we declare bankruptcy (start chapter 11 proceedings!) and submit to a greater power (the justice system), we are taken care of and our condition gets stabilized. Then we can go back to business as usual, but now guided by the new understanding we have acquired. In the 12th chapter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa describes to Arjuna how one has to rise up and express one's behavior and attitudes in everyday life in conformity with that complete Reality that Arjuna has been shown in the 11th chapter.

Verses 13-19 of the 12th chapter spell out 35 characteristics of a *bhakta*. The Lord says that those who possess these qualities are exceedingly dear to Him.

Verse 13: One who does not hate any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from (the notion of) "I" and "my", even-minded in pain and pleasure, forgiving;

Verse 14: this yogi, who is ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with mind and intellect dedicated to me – such a devotee is dear to me.

Verse 15: The one by whom the world is not agitated, and who is not agitated by the world; who is free from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety, is dear to me.

Verse 16: One who is free from desires; who is pure, alert, unconcerned, untroubled; who has renounced (the doership in) all undertakings – he, my devotee, is dear to me.

Verse 17: One who neither rejoices nor hates nor grieves nor desires, who has renounced both the good and the evil, and who is full of devotion – he is dear to me.

Verse 18: The one who remains the same towards friend or foe, in honor or disgrace, in heat or cold, in pleasure or pain; who is free from attachment; and

Verse 19: who is indifferent to censure or praise, who is silent, content with anything, unattached to a place (country or house), with a steady mind, and full of devotion – that person is dear to me.

The traits listed above address the values, attitudes, and behaviors one should develop in the many dimensions of life—social, psychological, and moral. Upon examination, we will see that all the traits derive from a correct understanding of the nature of one's being. For example, take the first trait listed: a person of the highest devotion has no hatred or aversion to any being. How can that be? How can a person rise to a level where he never gets angry, never feels “this is good, while that is bad”? He achieves that level by locating his identity in a domain or a principle that has nothing to do with the input-output transactions of daily life. Then only he will be able to accept and bear with the ills of this world. As another example, take the first trait listed in verse 14, contentment (*santuṣṭaḥ*). What is the source of this contentment? It cannot come from the variable transactions of life but must be rooted in the Reality of the spirit—the thought that one is that spirit or that one is in communion with that spirit. Some people enjoy being, others enjoy belonging. The first type prefer to define their being in an absolute way, without reference to another. The second type prefer to think that they belong to another being who is full of all good and great qualities—they themselves are not that great being, but they like to express the qualities of that great being in a smaller way and be in the service of that great being. Both types derive their contentment from the constancy of their sense of being or belonging.

To absorb the teachings of these verses, we must put in the effort to free ourselves of the limited perceptions and partial vision that bind us and partition our understanding. Alternatively, we need to accept everything as part of Reality—even the things we dislike or hate. We must accept and cope with the existence of evil, of sorrow, of deprivation as manifestations of that same Reality that in some of its other manifestations we enjoy. Being able to do this has been one of the difficulties in humanity's spiritual quest. But there are people who have lived such a life of acceptance of everything, and they become inspirations for the rest of us.

Thus we see that, in these verses, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has lovingly given us guidelines to help us minimize, and ultimately remove, the distance that keeps us from Him—in other words, guidelines to practice spirituality. We minimize the distance by psychological preparedness and self-transformation. Everyone has the potential to develop the qualities listed. As Swāmi Vivekānanda repeatedly said, every being is potentially divine and all our effort should be to realize that divinity. We may differ in the degree to which we succeed, but all of us can and must pursue the qualities listed. Devotion in a person is measured by the extent of development of these 35 traits, and not by the extent of emotional attachment to a particular deity. The real measure of devotion is annihilation of ego, self-effacement, surrender. Surrender does not mean resignation, passivity, or indolence. Let us perform our obligatory duties with selfless dedication. Whatever be the outcome of our honest endeavors in life—agreeable or disagreeable—let us accept it as *prasāda* (gift) from the Lord. That is, let us try to recognize and feel the Reality above our individuality.

II.1. Ātman or Self: Why We Should Get a Right Understanding of It

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI on May 1, 2005.

The word Ātman is a Sāṃskṛit term meaning “self,” but it cannot be comprehended in terms of language or symbols. For us to conceptualize any word, it must have some reference in our sensory experience. But Ātman is not a thing like that and so we cannot conceptualize it. We cannot say: This is Ātman, go and find it. But if we cannot see it or perceive it, why should we spend time enquiring about it? It is to remove some of our own misunderstanding about the nature of the Ātman. Because we cannot conceptualize it, Ātman is open for different types of understanding and that gives rise to confusion; a dialogue or study is needed to remove the confusion.

For all other things except Ātman to have a truth-value, we need evidence. But Ātman is self-evident: there is no evidence we can produce for it nor does it need any evidence. The person who is trying to understand the nature of Ātman is himself the Ātman. Ātman cannot be divorced from the subjective agent that is trying to find out about it. The subject itself is the Ātman. However, that subject is overlaid with various other evolutionary processes. We all present ourselves in a way that is defined by us as well as by others and that changes depending on the situation we are in. In other words, the presentation of the Self – the term we use for Ātman – in every-day life is conditioned by these self-definitions and social definitions. So we need to ask: Is the Self an entity that is created or is it free from such creation? The answer is: It is both. The Self could be a created entity: our features, our demographic background, even our way of dressing, define us, and these can be changed by plastic surgery, by educational and professional attainments, etc. This is what the Self means to the vast majority of people – something that can be manipulated in order to improve one’s presentation. But there is also a Self that is independent of any process and that is absolute, unconditioned, and uninfluenced by manipulations. Only a few seekers are interested in finding the nature of this unconditioned Self, but this is an important quest in the study of the Ātman.

So when we ask about the nature of the Ātman, we have to clarify for ourselves what it is we are interested in. Are we interested in some dimensions or features of the Ātman or in the total being of the Ātman which is free of characteristics that are subject to laws, manipulations, and changes? Being that unconditioned Ātman is what I would like to be. Another name for that type of Ātman is freedom – freedom not only from all environmental and social factors but also from all types of relations, seen and unseen. Once that Ātman is understood, realized, and lived, a fulfillment takes place in a person, all inadequacies, limitations, and fears are removed, and what remains is total peace and total freedom. Many realized souls – from the hoary past to the present, in many parts of the world – have talked about this experience.

When we enquire into the nature of the Ātman, then, we do not want to go into that question without acknowledging the enquiries that have been made by past generations. Although it is not always necessary to turn to history, yet it is true that each of us is a product of that history. Each of us, knowingly or unknowingly, has been influenced by

terms, concepts, procedures, and methods developed in the past. So it is only fair that, to the extent possible, we should relate to how some of these ideas have come. I am very familiar with the Vedāntic approach to the understanding of the Ātman. Vedānta comprises both oral traditions and written texts. It has a very well presented literature on the Ātman, including the 112 Upaniṣads. Some of them are big, some are small, and in one way or another they all talk about the nature of the Ātman. The word Ātman in Sāṃskṛit literally means a thing (of unspecified nature) that takes in and gives out. Thus Ātman is life itself, for life too involves taking in and giving out in a transactional way. The Ātman expresses itself in many ways because of different conditionings – we say that the appearance of the Ātman is many. But in its essential nature, it is one total, solid, complete, whole. Some people are interested in understanding the nature of the being – “Being” is another term for Ātman – that is not fragmented or modified by thought processes. Thought fragments and divides, as the philosopher J. Krishnamurty has said. Can we see Ātman free of the memories, the prejudices, the limited perceptions and concepts we have acquired? To be free from these conditions and of our narrow interests is one of the basic requirements to understand the nature of the Ātman as it is.

The quest then is to see Ātman freed from our interests and narrow limitations. For that, preparation is necessary. The first requisite is awareness (“is there such a thing?”) and the second requisite is interest (“if there is such a thing, am I interested in it?”). Only a very few are interested in such an absolute, nonnegotiable thing. Most people are interested in conditioned things, which have some utility and negotiable value. The Ātman cannot be negotiated – even though it is the basis of all negotiations, in itself it is not negotiable. So trying to understand the nature of Ātman is an elite type of enterprise.

When we review the Upaniṣadic literature, we find that some Upaniṣadic seers have declared their helplessness to communicate the nature of the Ātman to their students. For example, in Kena Upaniṣad I.3, in the opening dialogue between preceptor and student, the preceptor begins by stating: “The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor the mind. We do not therefore know how to instruct one about it. It is different from what is known and It is beyond what is unknown.” A serious student may well get turned off by such confusing, contradictory descriptions. But as the dialogue continues, the preceptor explains how one can understand Ātman by freeing oneself of one’s conditionings, and the student’s confusion is gradually removed. We shall discuss this further a little later.

This is where an approach to understand Ātman is an approach to understand life itself. Life is not an abstract thing. A person must be prepared to live the total life, in all its complexities, all its miseries and happiness. We must be daring enough to accept life that way. Then only the understanding that comes to us is freed from all contradictions, and then we see/experience Reality in an unfragmented way. So unless one prepares oneself for that type of reaching out, inadequate, imperfect, limited understanding results and that raises various controversies and debates.

It is important to note that when we identify ourselves with the body (in terms of height, weight, age, gender, and so on), we are not measuring the Ātman but a system that is associated with the Ātman. That is where we should be very careful. When death occurs,

as far as the medical system is concerned, it can declare and certify death. Similarly, the legal system is able to certify death based on the medical report. But what happened to the person who was in this world, laughing or suffering, until the moment of death? Where did that person go? The medical and legal professions are not interested in this question. Even if the person who is declared to be dead were to declare “I am not dead,” that message has to express itself in a heart beat or a pulse or other such clinically measurable parameters for the message to be accepted by the medical/legal system.

The question we posed in the last paragraph – of where a person who has stopped functioning within our normally recognized systems goes – is taken up by theologians. They make it their business to answer the question. They say: the person who is no more here is there. They have developed their own terminology to communicate the nature of reality. They say to the relatives of the person who is gone: Do not be so sorrowful, he is with God. This comforts the relatives if they are believers in God. Thus all of theology has been developed to deal with the question of the nature of the being that is Ātman.

We now return to the Upaniṣadic literature. They conclude that the Ātman is that which is not subject to any law and is not dependent on anything; has no hunger or thirst or disease; does not need any nutrition, oxygen, or protection; and is not subject to birth and death. Some serious people, pondering these issues, become convinced of the truth that the above description of the Ātman describes the nature of their being and they live their life according to that truth. They are the people who live the Ātman, even while they breathe and face tragedies and triumphs. They have deepened their understanding of their own identity in terms of the nature of the Ātman. And once that knowledge is stabilized and expressed in everyday life, that message spreads through the community. We are the beneficiaries of that knowledge and behavior exhibited through the ages.

The people living the Ātman have come up with this statement: the main goal of human beings should be to develop the right knowledge of the Ātman or self. If a person does not do that, not only has he/she missed or postponed the opportunity to develop that knowledge but has also deprived the total life system around them of the benefit of that knowledge. This input/output benefit of obtaining the knowledge of the Ātman is what human beings should strive for. It can be obtained only by thinking about, analyzing, and eventually asserting the nature of one’s own being and then verifying that assertion. This corresponds to living life positively and it is the source of harmony, peace, strength, and courage, and all the goodness in life.

Ātman thus is the source of all goodness, greatness, and dignity in life. The values of life – honesty, truth, kindness, care, nonviolence, friendship, and so on – are all simply ways of expressing the nature of the Ātman. Understood in this way, life becomes purified and gets a fresh impetus for its own renewal and reconstruction. With this insight into the nature of the being, it is possible for humanity to provide compensation for historical wrongs, start with a clean slate, and reclaim the values of life; while, without that insight, the burden of life builds up as it is passed on from one generation to the next. This is the importance of taking an interest in the nature of the Ātman, enquiring into it, and then living it.

II.2. Yama and Niyama: The Don'ts and Do's of Life – A Conversation on Ethics

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI in 2005.

To meet the human need to live a life of purity and purposefulness, many people have compiled lists of things to avoid (*Yama*) and to do (*Niyama*). One classic codification is attributed to Patañjali Maharṣi, whose name is associated with yoga and the development of Sāṅskṛit grammar (for he is the reputed author of *Mahābhāṣya*, the great commentary on Pāṇini's *Vyākaraṇa-sūtra*). In *Yoga Sūtras*, his manual for practicing yoga, Patañjali defines Yoga and lists eight disciplines that must be practiced to enable one to live a harmonious life. The first two of these are Yama and Niyama—meaning, respectively, the actions one should avoid and cultivate. They form the basis for the practice of the other six disciplines.

In Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, the basic question is how a human being develops a way of living one's life so that ultimately it gives peace – a peace where all kinds of confusions, modifications, conflicts, and contradictions are resolved and once and for all there is no problem for the mind. That is the purpose of yoga, and that is how yoga is defined: *yogaś-cittavṛtti-nirodhaḥ* – yoga is cessation of modifications of consciousness. Our mind has a habit of getting involved in certain repetitive actions that then become a circuit in which we become imprisoned. We want to be released from this prison created by our own activities and those of others. That is what is called freedom or *mokṣa*, and facilitating that is the goal of yoga. Yoga provides a way by which one can extricate oneself from the web of constraining, controlling, conditioning environment. In order to develop that style of life, how should I conduct myself? Ethical and moral behavior aid a human being to develop the capacity to free oneself from these types of conditionings and entanglements. These behaviors are codified in Yama and Niyama concepts.

There are many commentaries written on them. Yesterday I was reading a book written by a monk of the Rāmakṛṣṇa order in Chicago, Swāmi Jñāneswarānanda, who is no more. He established and developed the Vivekānanda Center in Chicago. He wrote a book, "Yoga for Beginners," where he nicely summarizes the 10 factors of yama and niyama. Swāmi Bhāshyānanda gave a series of talks on meditation where he has elaborated on yama and niyama, and tapes of those talks are available. In recent times, yoga schools have been developed by, among others, B.K.S. Iyengār, T.K.V. Desikāchārya, and Swāmi Satyānanda Sarasvatī (who started the Bihār School of yoga). All these teachers have elaborated on the concepts of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, including its yama and niyama aspects. Patañjali Yoga has also been linked to Kuṇḍālīni yoga, which is another yoga tradition like Rāja Yoga and Haṭha yoga – these are different ways in which people have specialized in yoga practices. Also there are laya yoga, japa yoga, and other focused yoga practices. In all these yoga practices, yama and niyama are important. Thus they are a continuing tradition.

We should mention that the specific rules included in Yama and Niyama depend on the needs of the practicing environment. While all the traditions agree on the basic concept,

they have shown flexibility in adapting the number and the sequence of the rules to their needs. For example, Mahātma Gāndhi, for personal growth and for preparing himself to lead the movement for India's independence, practiced certain yama-niyama disciplines according to his needs [1]. In order to reduce religious conflicts, he had the niyama *sarva dharma samānatva*, i.e. we should accept all religious traditions as true. Followers of different faiths who lived in his Āśram had to get along well and work harmoniously. Again, in order to promote the removal of untouchability, which was the practice of excluding some groups of people from social relations with the dominant groups in the community, he added *sparsā-bhāvanā* as his final niyama – i.e. one should seek out and live with the disadvantaged community. Later, Gāndhi's disciple Vinobā Bhāve also came up with and practiced a set of Do's and Don'ts. Vinobā said: If we prepare our character by practicing these ethical and moral rules, we will be very effective in whatever we fight for in a nonviolent way. Similarly, the Uddhava Gītā (in Canto 11 of Bhāgavata Purāṇa) lists another set of yama-niyama rules [2], which are the most relevant in the context of that particular teaching.

In the rest of this article, we discuss Yama and Niyama according to Patañjali.

1) Yama, Restraint

Yama means restraint with respect to one's actions. This is practiced with respect to the following five actions.

First: *Ahimsā*, avoidance of violence or injury: *Ahimsā* means not hurting another being or system. Every being, including every human being, has developed its own way of interacting with the environment to achieve its goals and fulfill its needs. In the struggle for survival and the competition to gain over another system's opportunities to live, conflicts arise between a human being and other beings, whether they be humans, animals, insects, plants, herbs, or other life systems. Such conflicts are inherently present and their expression leads to violence. (Even when that species is supplying some needed environment for me, I tend to find or develop some alternative equipment that gives me the same benefit. This impulse to substitute for the biological being another contrived being is what has led to the development of technology.) For the present discussion, it is important only to recognize that there is a factor of violence involved in our interaction with the environment. Once that recognition comes, a human being should consciously practice nonviolence, i.e. not get involved in a killing or fighting or hurting situation.

Second: *Satyam*, truthfulness: A person practicing yoga should develop a value for truth. What is truth? Operationally, truth is speech behavior. Whatever I say in words should represent sincerely and consistently what I feel in my mind. So truth is a speech habit where there is no discrepancy between what I say and what I mean and what I feel. That is, we have to avoid falsehood, distortions, exaggerations. *Satyam* is a yama because it consists in avoidance of lapses in our truth habits.

Third: *Asteyam*, non-stealing, viz. avoid claiming another's belongings as our own. *Steyam* means taking things that do not belong to one, and *asteyam* is the negation of

that. A person has legitimate ownership only to certain things. Beyond that, he has to enquire: To whom does this thing belong? So truth in ownership is an important aspect of *asteyam*.

Fourth: *Brahmacarya*, avoidance of sensual pleasures. One's conduct should be such that always one's patterns of behavior, consumption, ways of spending time, etc. should be such as to not compromise the highest goal one has set for oneself. Any deviation from that effort is a violation of one's discipline. All our consumptions and transactions – food, clothing, reading, keeping company – should be guided by our highest goal. If any activity interferes with that goal, we should not be doing it. Essentially one of the important things in *brahmacarya* is relationship, including the sexual relationship between man and woman. The relationship should always be guided by ethical, morally accepted rules. Maintaining those rules and ethical standards is important. All this is encompassed in the word *brahmacarya*.

Fifth: *Aparigraha*, avoidance of greed. I take things only to the extent of my need. I do not accumulate beyond what is necessary for my functioning. Before I take anything, I should ask: Is it necessary for whatever I am doing? Anything in excess of that is undesirable. I should restrict myself to consume or accumulate things that are necessary for well-defined purposes. This habit of consumption and accumulation guided by the ethical rules of need is *aparigraha*. Beyond that, if I have an opportunity to get more, I should find out if some other group needs it and then give it to that group. In other words, I should facilitate the transfer of resources and opportunities so that every being is enabled to develop its capacities.

2) Niyama, Observance or Cultivation of Positive Behavior

First: *Śaucam*, purity or cleanliness. This has several levels: physical, mental, social. It includes clean habits, pure motives, and transparent expression of one's feelings. We should develop this habit in physical hygiene, community hygiene, and in all our market transactions, as well as in our thoughts.

Second: *Santoṣa*, contentment or happiness. This is the attitude of always being cheerful, and never being depressed, dissatisfied, or downhearted. Keep the notion of joy and happiness that comes from a sense of being contented. This does not mean one should be complacent. But whatever one does, the outcomes that result should make one a positive and optimistic person. This psychological quality of *santoṣa* has to be cultivated. Eventually this leads to the realization that our real nature is *ānanda*. A spiritually advanced person is always cheerful, in all circumstances.

Third: *Tapas*, austerities or a set of disciplines that facilitate sense control. To achieve the goal of right understanding and removal of confusion, ignorance, and weaknesses, we need to be engaged in activities that strengthen us. These activities constitute *tapas*. *Tapas* may express itself in various ways: study habits, consumption habits, living habits, etc. So there are many types of *tapas*. Three *śloka*s in Bhagavad Gītā (XVII.14-16)

describe in detail the disciplines that constitute austerities pertaining to the body, speech, and mind, respectively.

Fourth: *Svādhyāya*, study: We are pursuing this when we make a conscious study of our efforts and their results, review our accomplishments and failures, and review other people's successes and failures. It is a discipline involving self-study, study for self improvement, study to correct one's wrong paths and pursue right paths. Without study and understanding, all practices and disciplines become mechanical. *Svādhyāya* pattern changes with time, depending on our technological environment and the particular area in which we would like to perfect ourselves. *Svādhyāya* includes study of the sacred texts by oneself.

Fifth: *Īśvara Praṇidhānam*, devotion to the Lord. This, the final niyama of Patañjali, is the conviction that there is a power which we can understand only in a limited way but which is much more than what we think there is. And be open to the influence of that power. This also has to be developed very consistently. A person engaged in yoga must cultivate this firm belief in a higher power. If I get depressed because I am not making progress or reaching the standards I have set for myself, a sense of disillusionment and disappointment and frustration will come. In order to protect myself from such feelings, I must consciously cultivate belief in the higher power. Then I won't give up but will try again and again. To develop this positive approach, *Īśvara Praṇidhānam* is needed. It includes devotion, worship, surrender, and faith.

Swāmi Jñāneswarānanda of Chicago has said that yamas and niyamas are ways to build fences to protect ourselves as we strive to progress on the spiritual path. With yama, we first build a protective fence by avoiding certain things that would lead us astray. Then, afterwards, with niyama, we cultivate positive values within the value system we are operating in. The niyamas will take us further along the path. Finally, the yamas and niyamas do not matter – just like a tree after it is grown does not need a fence.

[1] Mahātma Gāndhī's Yama and Niyama list had 11 rules, collectively called *Ekādaśa Vrata*. This Vrata was a part of his daily prayers, and residents at his Āśram were expected to adhere to the rules. The rules are listed in Gāndhī's book of prayers (*Āśrama-bhajanāvalī*). The first five of the items are the same as Patañjali's 5 yamas. (The 5th one was called *Asangraha*, which has the same meaning as *Aparigraha*.) The remaining ones are: *Śarīraśrama*, physical labor; *Asvāda*, no emphasis on any particular taste in food; *Sarvatra bhayavarjanam*, fearlessness; *Sarva dharma samānatva*, acceptance of all religious traditions as true; *Svadeśī*, consumption of locally produced goods; and *Sparśa-bhāvanā*, removal of untouchability.

[2] Yama and Niyama according to Śrī Kṛṣṇa are described in Bhāgavata Purāṇa 11.19:33-35 as follows. Yama: 'Nonviolence, truthfulness, not coveting or stealing the property of others, detachment, humility, non-possessiveness, belief in God, celibacy as also silence, steadiness, forgiveness, and fearlessness.' Niyama: 'Cleanliness (internal and external), doing the rosary, penance, austerity, sacrifice, trustfulness, hospitality, worship of Me, visiting holy places, acting and desiring for the Supreme, contentment, and serving the spiritual master.'

II.3. Dispassion and Nonattachment

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI on August 3, 2005.

In life, each of us has to interact with our environment, which may consist of another person (with attitudes and character similar to ours or different), or a group of persons, or beings that have a different way of expressing themselves, or inanimate objects. There is a mutuality involved in these interactions. We may or may not get some benefit from those we interact with and they in turn may or may not derive some benefit from us. We have to decide whether the interactions are profitable for us or not and on that basis make a judgment as to whether to continue or discontinue the interaction.

When we talk of passion, we are viewing ourselves as entities full of feelings and emotions and interacting with our environment at the emotional level. In interaction, we invest our own being through emotions into other beings. We thereby get bonded or linked up with the other beings. When this happens, depending on the nature of the interaction, certain consequences follow. For example, if we get more energized by the interaction, we tend to continue it even when we see that this has some negative effect on other aspects of our personality. In other words, we tend to subordinate our judgment in the pursuit of that passion. Our sense of equality, sense of equanimity, notion of justice, notion to treat everyone with the same interest, all get affected. Over a period of time, those who have greater resources may become domineering, aggressive, and exploitative. These are the ways in which passion ordinarily works.

However, if our passion is directed towards a person or an environment that pays no attention to the calculus of gains and losses and is not governed by limited interests, then that is a passion worth cultivating. Examples of such positive values are: passion to promote truth, justice, and goodness; to make other people independent; to fight for freedom and the rights of all peoples and animals; to protect the environment. When passion is exercised with regard to these and other similar principles, it is a desirable value because these principles are not negotiating with us for their own interests or growth. Such interactions or relationships are unilateral in nature. Likewise, passion for the thoughts, teachings, or lifestyle of saints or martyrs is a positive value, because they lived their lives according to absolute, nonnegotiable values.

It is when we have passion for things that are limited, self-centered, exclusive, or have a negotiating property, that our scriptures emphatically make the call for dispassion. So, when deciding whether passion or dispassion is called for, we need to keep in our thinking the nature of the object or situation or person we are dealing with. Dispassion is needed when there is some characteristic in the interaction that over a period of time has the property of generating negative values. If we are already involved in the interaction without having thought through the consequences, we must struggle to free ourselves from the entanglement.

It is easy to see why, in spiritual practices, many teachers advocate dispassionate behavior. They observe people suffering because of the consequences of their earlier

conduct in the pursuit of passion without having thought things through. And they advocate the cultivation of dispassion as a remedy. Thus a spiritual practitioner's attitude with regards to passion and dispassion becomes a way to recognize where he is located on the spiritual path.

Like passion, attachment also creates problems when the attachment is to a person or an object that is not unconditional, that is contaminated with certain complexes. The attachment in such a case is a problem because it prevents one from developing right understanding and promotes confusion and wrong understanding. To those whose emotional behavior is already taking them down the wrong path, a policy of nonattachment and dispassion is advocated so that they change their conduct and get on the path of right knowledge, right outlook, and right behavior.

Practice of dispassion does not imply the lack of compassion; in fact, just the opposite is true. By practicing dispassion with respect to things that do not have the right understanding of Reality, we will locate ourselves in a state or a being that becomes the source for compassion. A clear knowledge of who one is, unconditioned by any kind of circumstances, naturally leads one to develop a relationship with one's environment that involves being very attentive and supportive – in other words, a compassionate relationship. In the absence of dispassion, what is usually called compassion is not really compassion at all but pity or some other emotion with hidden goals.

By cultivating the virtues of dispassion and nonattachment to things that are limited or governed by self-interest, the practitioner locates himself in his own true being, his true nature. It is incorrect to say that the practice of dispassion and nonattachment leads to the Ātman, because the Ātman is not an object to be obtained; every being is already an Ātman. But it is correct to say that their practice is an aid in getting rid of one's distorted understanding and improper perception of the Ātman that cloud one's understanding of the true nature of the Ātman. There is a lot one has to do to free oneself of the wrong perceptions that have been either imposed by circumstances or self-imposed by one's own ignorance. Once they are removed, we experience the Reality that is Ātman, pure, unconditioned, independent, that has not come from anywhere, that will not go anywhere, that is always there, everywhere. When we have that experience, all our conduct will be expressed in terms of behavior that is good, civic, laudable, ethical, and moral – for all these are expressions of the Ātman. That is, once we locate ourselves in our true nature, our behavior will be characterized by dispassion, nonattachment, and compassion.