

What Gurudev Taught

If we are asked what Gurudev Swāmī Śivānandajī taught, we might likely answer that he taught Be good, Do good; and to practice non-injury, truthfulness, and purity. He also taught us to practice yoga: to Serve, do karma yoga, to Love, be devoted to God, to Meditate, to Realize—to make God real through enquiry and study.

Is that much different than other spiritual teachers or traditions? It was Gurudev's pithy way of expressing what he knew. What is it that the great ones know? What is their characteristic? How do we achieve it? The great ones above all are aware; they are awake. And what they are aware of leads them to fearlessness and that fearlessness becomes a peace that is beyond understanding.

The essence of all teachings, of all religions, of all spiritual life, are things that all of us want even if we have no interest whatsoever in spirituality. We want to be alive, awake, aware. We would like to be fearless, and we want an inner peace. But then, whether we have any interest in religion or not, how do we achieve it, how do we become truly aware? Awareness is always there. We're even aware in deep sleep, though we don't know it at the time. We all know we have such a thing as deep sleep, so awareness is there.

But then, the scriptures say that mind is the cause of bondage and liberation in the human being. In other words, our minds have to understand where our highest welfare is. Our highest welfare is being alert, aware at all times, and if we are constantly thinking of ourselves, remembering the past, thinking about the future—what we want—then our awareness is dull. It is lost. We're not truly aware of what is going on in the world around us. We've lost our alertness.

When we spend too much time watching television, we lose that precious awareness and alertness that is the part of our nature that is meant to be aware of inner promptings, inner guidance, that is meant to sense what is going on around us, that is meant to be aware of opportunities for service or for profit. Awareness is the key. Being awake is the key. But that true awareness needs to be cultivated. And one of the best ways to cultivate it, one of the necessities is to live a good life—to Be good and Do good.

We also need to be aware of the inner truth that there is a oneness everywhere. Ultimately we discover that that oneness is looking after everything and that brings a fearlessness, a fearlessness that comes from perfect trust in that oneness. That leads to a deep peace that is beyond anything we can normally understand. Thus no matter what tradition we follow—or if we don't want to follow any tradition—if we are wise, we will cultivate pure awareness, which will lead to fearlessness and a deep peace.

Being fully awake is what Swāmī Śivānandajī wanted for all of us and why he wanted us to be good and do good, and why he wanted us to serve, love, meditate, and realize.