

Swami Sivananda

(Speech on the occasion of Jayanthi celebrations of Swami Sivananda on 24.09.2000)

I deem it a great honour and privilege to participate in the jayanti celebrations of one of India's greatest Avathar Purushas, Swami Sivananda. At the same time I am overwhelmed by a feeling of inadequacy to do justice to the qualities of head and heart of the multi faceted and multi splendoured personality of Swami Sivananda Maharaj.

It is a unique feature of Hinduism, that true to the Lord's promise in Bhagavat Gita that

*“ Dharma samsthapanarthya
Sambhavami yuge - yuge”*

He embodies himself from *yuga* to *yuga* for upholding *Dharma* in the universe. There has been no such incarnation of the divine after Buddha, Christ or Mohamed.

This is true, not only of the Avathars like Narasimha, Vamana, Rama and Krishna but of other saints and sages like Adi Sankara who had appeared on the scene to redeem Hindu religion from the dross that had enveloped and almost obliterated it. In our own lifetime we have seen Jivan Mukhtas like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Ramana. In this category, stands aloft like a beacon, the Avathar Purusha Swami Sivananda.

I said earlier that Swami Sivananda was a multi faceted and multi splendoured stalwart among the saints and sages. His mastery over anatomy, physiology, health and hygiene, knowledge of indigenous medicines and herbs, yoga, physical exercises and *Pranayama* (breathing exercises) along with his spiritual attainments amazed scientists, scholars, administrators and the yogis. There was no other spiritual leader who possessed this wide-ranging knowledge dealing with the human being. Swami Sivananda believed that man must develop physical qualities side by side with his mental and spiritual knowledge and that man must be a complete being in every way. It is a holistic approach to human life. It is superfluous for me to repeat to this audience the details of the hospitals, eye camps and cures effected by Swami Sivananda. That he was known, as “Doctor Swami” is enough to reveal the value of the medical services he rendered to the people.

Renouncing a lucrative medical practice in Malaya, Swamiji returned to India and became a mendicant in search of Truth. He was initiated into holy order of sanyasa. Thereafter Swami Sivananda has been disseminating spiritual knowledge far and wide. He devoted his time to writing, talking, preaching and practising yoga. No saint or sage any where in the world had written so profusely and on all aspects of spiritual life as Swami Sivananda had done. His clear cogent and simple style of writing is easily understood by the common man and therefore became immensely popular. He did not target elitist scholar and indulge in esoteric expositions, which were beyond the depth of the ordinary citizen.

Swami Sivananda's writing covers a wide range of subjects but he mainly deals with the Jnana Yoga, the path of Knowledge, the Bhakti Yoga, the path of Devotion, Karma yoga, the path of Action besides several others like Kundalini yoga, Hatha yoga, Raja yoga etc. Swamiji's exposition of Bhakti yoga is a masterly treatment unequalled by any bhashyakachariya. Bhakti or devotion must qualify something and does not by itself

indicate anything. We always say Mathru Bhakti, Pithru Bhakti, Guru Bhakti or Deiva Bhakti; the ultimate form of which is the complete surrender to the Supreme Lord.

From time immemorial the Alvars, Nayanmars of Tamil Nadu had sung in praise of Vishnu and Siva, Narayana Bhattadri of Kerala who wrote the immortal **Narayaneeyam**, Purandara Dasa of Karnataka, Dyaneswar and Thukkaram of Maharashtra, Vallbhacharya of Gujarat, Meera of Rajasthan Guru Nanak of Punjab, Tulsidas and Kabir of North India, Sankaradev of Kamrup, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal and Orissa, Annamacharya of Andhra, and Saint Tyagaraja of Tamil Nadu to name only a few, had propagated the Bhakti cult through out the nook and corner of India. The Lord says in Bhagavat Gita Chapter XII Verse 12

*Sreyo hi jnanam abhyasat
Jnanat dhyanam visisyate
Dhyanat Karmaphalatyaga
Tyagat shantir anantaram*

Better than Abyasa (rituals) is
Jnana(knowledge)
Better than Jnana is dhyana
(Meditation and Bhakti)
Better than Bhakti is the
renunciation of the fruits of
action ,Peace immediately
follows renunciation

Swami Sivananda says that Bhakti is easier than any other path to salvation. Rituals require rigorous austerities causing a lot of strain and stress. The path of knowledge (Jnana) can be followed only by those who had renounced the world and realised that Atman and Brahman is one entity. Action, renouncing the fruit thereof is not attainable by ordinary mortals. But Bhakti, devotion to the Supreme Being in total surrender can be practised by one and all without austerities, knowledge or action renouncing the fruits.

Adi Sankara in Vivekachudamani says:-

“*Moksha Karanam Samagryam
Bhaktir eva gariyasi*”

Among the paths to salvation, Bhakti alone is the best.

Sankara says seeking one's own self is Bhakti. This represents the Advaita thought of non-duality. According to Swami Sivananda intense devotion to the Supreme Being, the attraction of Jiva to God is like attraction of a needle to the magnet.

Swamiji further elaborates the different kinds of devotion. In the Shanti Bhava, the devotee remains in calm concentration, in Dasya Bhava, the devotee serves the Lord in every way like Hanuman. One may recall Mahakavi Subramania Bharati's poems where he portrays Krishna as his friend, mother, father, servant, disciple, guru, child, beloved and so on. The idea is that in whatever forms the devotee worships the Lord, it should be endued with total devotion and total surrender. The Lord tests the devotee till the person totally surrenders. Thus in Mahabharata, Krishna came to the succour of Draupati only when she threw up her hands, clutching her clothes, in total surrender.

Though the sloka quoted earlier, mentions four ways like Abhyasa, Jnana Dhyana and Karmaphala tyaga, Bhagwan clearly mentions that there are only two paths to salvation:

In chapter III Verse 3 Bhagwan says

<i>Loke 'smin dvidha nishtha</i>	I have said at the beginning of creation
<i>Pura prokta maya anagha</i>	that in this world there are two paths (for salvation),
<i>Jnana yogena Samkhyanam</i>	the path of Knowledge for the meditative and
<i>Karma yogena yoginam.</i>	the path of Action for the active.

In Sankara Bhashya, it is stated that of the two paths. One is Jnana Yoga which is taught for the Samkhyas, (those who possessed of the discrimination to distinguish between the Self and the Non-Self) who renounced the world even from Brahmacharya, who perfectly understood the “Truth” (in every thing) in accordance with Vedantic Wisdom, and belonged to higher order of ascetics known as Paramahansas and always abided in Brahman alone.

The other is Karmayoga, the path of action for the Yogins i.e. Karmins, who are inclined to righteous action like performing one's duties, charities, bestowing kindness and compassion etc.

When I pointed out to Swami Dayanand Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam who is a profound Sanskrit Scholar, Master of Sankrit Grammer and an expert in Sankara's Gita Bhashya, that why Chapter XII of Bhagavat Gita is captioned ‘ Bhakti Yoga’ if there were only ‘dvida nishta’. Swamiji replied that in Bhagavat Gita, the term Yoga has been used to denote a Chapter or topic and not a ‘marga’ or path. He then referred Chapter I dealing with despondency of Arjuna, which is captioned, ‘Arjuna Vishada Yoga’ and despondency cannot be termed ‘Yoga’.

Therefore, it would appear that Bhakti must inform each of the margas. Rituals (Abyasa), knowledge (Jnana) and Action (Karma) without Bhakti is devoid of merit. If a devotee chants “Gayatri Mantra” mechanically without devotion, or a Karmayogi engages himself in action without realising that he performs all his duties only as an offering to Iswara, all his activities remain mere actions.

A Jnani is one who has realised that the Atman is the same in every being and that it is part and parcel of the Universal Brahman and that Jeeva and Isa is one. The Bhagavat Gita Chapter VI Verse 30 says

*Yo Mam pasyati sarvatra
Sarvam cha maye pasyati
Tasya ham na pranasyami
Sa cha me na pranasyati*

He who sees Me in all things
And sees all things in Me
He never becomes separated from Me
Nor do I become separated from him.

Isopnishad puts the same idea differently

*Yastu sarvani bhutani atman eva anupasyati
Sarva bhuteshu cha atmanam
Tha to na vijugupsate*

Who sees all beings as himself
And sees himself in all beings
Thereafter he hates none.

Swami Sivananda is one who had realised the Universality of the soul very early in his life. All of you may know what Swamiji did when in 1950 an assailant wielded an axe to cut him. Fortunately the aim missed the target. What did Swamiji do? He did not allow the assailant to be beaten by his people; did not file a police complaint but gave him clothes, fruits, books and prayed for his reformed life. Swamiji saw in the assailant the Lord, the indweller in all beings and quoted the verse in Bhagavat Gita (Chapter X Verse 36) Is “*Dyutam Chalayatam asmi*” (Of the fraudulent, I am the gambler). Namadeva chased a dog which had snatched a piece of bread, calling it Vittala, please take the ghee along with the bread. He saw Lord Krishna in the dog. *Paramahansa* saw in an outcaste girl Mother Kali. These evolved souls saw God in every other being whether it was good or bad. Swamiji had attained that supreme state of consciousness where he saw in assailant, God Himself. He reached the state where as Gita says:

“Sarvam cha maye pasyati”

Realization of Atman in every being is the attribute of Jnana Marga. That is achieved by deepest devotion to the Supreme Being. That is why Swami Sivananda enunciated that

“Bhakti is Jnana only. Para Bhakti and Jnana are one.”

By Bhakti one enters the Lord through self surrender; through Jnana one merges with Brahman through identification. This is a unique contribution Swami Sivananda made to spiritual thought. The other important contribution is that while following the spiritual path one

must alleviate the suffering of the people. The large number welfare work undertaken by Swamiji side by side with his pursuit of philosophy is a lesson to humanity.

For the first time in the annals of the United Nations, a millennium summit of religious leaders was held recently in New York to explore the possibility of peace and harmony in the world through the interaction of religions. In the agenda there was a suggestion that universal peace be achieved by elimination of poverty. But a review of all wars shows that no war was fought for elimination of poverty. All wars have been motivated by desire for domination and exploitation, by avarice and greed and by acute desire to accumulate and possess all the wealth of the globe. So long as war continues to be recognised as a legitimate means of settlement of international differences and disputes, peace and harmony will remain a meaningless chant of pious prayers. Swami Sivananda warned humanity that peace can never be established by war. He said that it could be achieved only on the basis of the Vedic concept of the Unity at every level of existence, in every man, woman, beast and bird, in short, in all beings. The Rig Vedic dictum of 'Vasudeiva Kutumbakam', the world is a family, must be realised by the people themselves.

A spiritual solution based on the universality of the soul and that all beings are the same, has to be realised by the peoples and nations. All other efforts like Disarmament Conferences and conventions for the reduction of arms, both conventional and atomic and other instruments of mass destruction, will remain purposeless and waste. The UNESCO rightly said that war starts in the minds of men.

Swami Sivananda did not preach to his disciples to remove themselves from the society and environment but insisted on their observing certain principles while living a normal life. Again he said:

"It is my sacred creed to serve sick persons, to nurse them with care, sympathy and love, to cheer the depressed, to infuse power and joy in all, to feel oneness with each and everyone, and to treat all with equal vision. In my highest creed there are neither peasants nor kings, neither beggars nor emperors, neither males nor females, neither teachers nor students. I love to live, move and have my being in this realm indescribable."

Sivananda devoted his entire life to raising the material men to the heights of a spiritual being. He tried to disabuse the minds of the people of the orthodox practices and obscurantist beliefs. He said:

"Mortifying the body is not Divine Life.

Physical nudity and matted locks have nothing to do with Divine Life.

Divine life is not rejection of life and its activities, but a transformation of it into the Divine Being."

He was the noblest *advaitin* who walked on the Earth.

One of the great Jivan Mukhtas that our nation has produced, Swami Sivananda continues to teach the present generation and posterity through his writings. He will live in people's memory as long as the Sun shines over the Cosmos.