Yogi Dr Malik has an inspirational meeting with Sri Swami Adhyatmanandaji of the Divine Life Society, regarded as one of today’s spiritual giants. Sri Swami Adhyatmanandaji is a living genius. His life-long study and dedication to propagating the teaching of yoga and Vedanta sets him apart from many yoga practitioners. His mastery of the ancient Sanskrit texts, as well as English, allows him to impart a richness and depth of knowledge that would be difficult to access by many. His interest in this path has also led him to study other religions and spiritual practices.

Sri Swamji is a great asset in contemporary times. He is a member of the Divine Life Society and joined the Sivananda Ashram in 1972. Since then he has worked tirelessly and passionately to enrich not only his own life with the teachings of yoga, but that of others too.
Wisdom of the East

General Secretary of the Divine Life Society, Swami Krishnananda, describes him as “an ambassador of Divya Jivan Sangh (Sivananda Ashram). He is a very bright and ideal Sanyasi and the great canvasser of Yogavidya.” Pramukh Swami describes him as “a beloved of worshipful Shrimat Sri Swami Chidanandji Maharaj. By his Gurudev’s grace he has reached the peaks of spirituality. He touches the hearts of all young and elderly people.”

Listening to Swamiji is mesmerising. His voice ebbs and flows with drama, passion and a heightened awareness of the reality of life, while his command of Sanskrit and memorisation of the ancient texts is praiseworthy. During our interview he recited many passages from the Vedas, Puranas interpretations of the Vedas and other sacred texts. He sang and chanted mantras, and described their essence and power. But one thing is certain – I was sitting in the presence of a great man.

Discussing Discipline

Swamiji begins, as Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras do, by speaking about discipline. “Modern teachers they don’t want discipline, they just want physical exercise. They have no room for Patanjali because they have become a yoga teacher,” he says. Swamiji goes on to make the distinction between Patanjali and the Vedas. Whereas Patanjali codified a subject that was in existence (or so the belief is), the Vedas were not written by any one person. They are considered sacred revealed literature, divine in origin. He also notes that in the Vedas there is no actual reference to yoga per se, although there could possibly be a reference to the concept. In the Bhagavad Gita however, we find references to yoga. Swamiji cites Chapter VI, which is dedicated to the subject of meditation. It is a chapter about self-discipline and teaches how to meditate, as well as the ideas and concepts behind the practice. “Everything is explained in the Gita, which is over 12,000 years old,” he says. “Patanjali is around 2,500 years or so, the Vedas come much earlier. Patanjali and Prana go together, Prana, the Master of Grammar.” What are the Vedas principally concerned with, I ask. “The whole part of the Vedas is realizing the Absolute.”

Eight Steps

Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga are similar to the concept found in the Bhagavad Purana and the Bhagavad Gita. In the Bhagavad Purana it has been explained in detail by the sage known as Kapil Muni. He was a god in his 24th incarnation. Deva is seeking advice from Muni how to have a realisation of the Absolute. In the Sankar Upanishad, Muni is explaining Astanga yoga. Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga are also eight stages of discipline. Patanjali is very clear about it. It is old vices that create the problem. The dusting off of the physical frame is known as Samadhi.”

Swamiji explains the meaning of the eight limbs. His explanation of two – dharana and dhyana – are particularly noteworthy. Patanjali says that if you are able to keep the mind physically stable, for example your thoughts are confined to one single object for a period of time, that is dharana. If 12 dharanas are done like this then it becomes dhyana.

Swamiji goes on to define Samadhi: “In all conditions I am the Absolute, beyond the physical. You are one – inner peace, inner light. You attain, you are with that, you delve deep into that. There is no I, no me, no she, no it. Free from all these – only the bliss exists.”

Contemporary Yoga

He discusses styles of yoga in contemporary times and urges that the whole part of yoga be taught. “Teach hot yoga, Patanjali yoga or kundalini yoga and make men and women do yoga by making them perspire. Perspiration will make them lose weight. Today they feel happy and what’s wrong with that? Physically we are working, yes, but the mind is going at a slow pace. Yoga is not a science to be sold in the market – it is a one-to-one – follow our disciplines also.”

In modern times there are some yogis that advocate learning only one thing such as pranayama, asana or meditation. If you are a student who is new to yoga then this can be quite perplexing. Swamiji said: “You cannot eat dry bread, you need a little butter or cheese, a little salad, if you can toast it even better. So if you do only one thing, like the yoga asanas, then the practice is not complete. You should also do pranayama, mantra and meditation. If you are only teaching asana then it is a hand, if teaching pranayama it is only the leg, teach-
ing meditation is only the heart, but to the eyes, hands, legs, a heart, nose, ears and a soul. The whole body of yoga.

“Some people are seeking only asana, and some teach only one aspect of yoga, but this is not whole. So whatever you teach or learn, you must keep in mind what is the aim of yoga? If you are removing some sickness then asana is enough.

“But the aim of yoga is the realization of the Absolute. The individual cells should merge with the Supreme of the cosmic cells. So because of that you have to work very hard and not confine yourself to one aspect of the practice. All aspects should come together — it is a must.”

I interviewed a Swami last year for YOGA Magazine who is now well-known to thousands of people. I asked him why he advocated pranayama as being a sufficient yoga practice — why not just asana? He said that Patanjali did not mention asana. From my own reading and study of Patanjali clearly he does mention the asana, but put the question to Swamiji. “He cannot deny Patanjali mentioned asana. Patanjali said so. Your body should be steady and easy, he said. To practice pranayama you can’t be jumping and dancing.

“Swamiji confirms that pranayama can be found not only in the Vedas, but also the Puranas, Gitas and everywhere else in ancient texts. “They are used to invoke God. The Rishis used to see the mantra. Mantra has tremendous power,” he explains. “With my own eyes I have seen a guru just touch and the person is healed.”

We discuss the ancient Gauri mantra. “Come to India and see the power of the Gauri mantra. A number of people, including great masters, have advocated the Gauri mantra. Swamiji begins chanting and singing mantras in perfect melody and harmony, and then pauses and confirms, “There is no law or order — anyone can do it.

“The best mantra is the one you recite from the guru, that is best for you. You will seek and open your heart. So based on knowing your sentiments, likings and temperament he will give you a mantra. Stick to it and do not change it — mantra is like a mother — you can’t change it.”

The Divine

Swamiji begins chanting mantras with a melodious harmony and obvious delight. He then easily switches from Sanskrit to English and begins reciting verses from the Bible. He makes people feel that he is praising the many wonders of God. “Sing the praise of god — the rain god, the sun god, the water god and the mountain god — singing praise.”

But he is aware that merely singing and chanting is not enough, and gives an example of a Valentine card. “You are a whole lot of love, but there is no love in some way. Singing is not enough, so you have to interpret, the third part.” He explains, the task of interpretation is an important one. “The sages retired into the forests, contemplated, meditated and realised the truth that is the understanding, the third part.”

Then came the fourth part, “The sages asked their disciples to sit by them... come and sit next to the soul, you are not the mind, the body. You are the soul — the realization of the Absolute Truth. The last part of the Vedas — I am not the intellect, I am not so called education — chatra conscious. I am the soul, soul, soul. I am not the body.”

We discuss the ancient Gayatri mantra. “So you can sum up the Vedas and Paramanandism. The concept of the Gayatri concept of the God is only one — Ishwara — that’s all. Yes, only one. But then you ask what are the sun and moon god, and Indra? They are agencies, concepts, but actually the God is not too many Gods, God is only one God as known as Ishwara and is the concept of Vedas.”

Buddha And The Vedas

We move onto the subject of Lord Buddha. Swamiji states that Lord Buddha started initially with the teachings of the Vedas — teaching the concept of Vedas — teaching the Vedas as Ishwara and isthe concept of Veda. “So he never hedged from the Vedas, but he never believed in the Vedas — because in the name of Yagnas they started killing animals. It is mentioned in the Vedas that you have to kill. What you have to kill is your ego — not animals. So this interpretation was wrong and the practice by the ancient Brahmans was wrong by also. Instead of killing the ego they were killing animals and there was no harmony. Buddha said don’t kill animals, which was good. Buddha also practiced the seeking of the soul. Buddha never believed that the Vedas have any spiritual teachings of the Vedas. He was the embodiment of love and peace.

“But he realised that he was doing something wrong. With no food or water he was not able to get up or down, so he went to some people and say without physical fitness you can’t meditate. It is better for you to have some food. Keep the body in beautiful balance, so it can think in harmony. That is also the teachings of the Gita, too much not eating, sleeping, or talking — going to the extreme is not yoga. So Buddha has done nothing new, as his teaching is based on Krishna’s. There is no doubt Buddha was a great yogi.

There is any mention of God in Buddha’s teachings, I ask. “No. He mentioned the shunya, the soul, the atma, because the Upanishads said whatever you see, whatsoever you perceive within and without, is the Supreme God existing. So the God of the Upanishads, God of the Vedas, is not in form — it is a Purana.

“This is not neglect — you have to accept this also. Initially you need something to hold — a support in a child does, but later on when the child is able to stand a support is not necessary. Initially they are necessary, but when you are up, then formlessness is ok. So Buddha was pressing around with that. He has been accepted by the Vedantins.”

A Life Of Sacrifice

Swamiji explains how he lives his life. “My understanding since I was given yagna (immolation of worldly life) is that I get my bread and butter from the society. Thirty-eight years of my yagna is from the people’s money. So it should go back to them blood donations. I myself have donated my blood 117 times.

“Four years ago my well-wishers celebrated my 60th anniversary, and we were able to organise 300 Blood donation camps with 69,542 blood donations in just one year. Another activity of mine is

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teacher training. In my faculty I have cardiology, pathologists, orthopaedic surgeons, dieticians and yoga asana and pranayama teachers, an education psychologist, and experts in management, Patanjali, reiki and comparative study of the Eastern Western philosophies – everything we teach. Because when he (a student) goes out to teach in market it is not good if he gives wrong replies. Basic knowledge of anatomy and physiology is a must. If people don’t know this they are creating a problem in their vanity. It should not be like that. Secondly, the students must have enough reading of the literature to know about what they are teaching and the surrounding. Third they should come down to the level of those they teach in the language they understand. If I don’t know I will tell them I don’t know, sorry, I will find out for you. Don’t tell a lie. And finally they should have an interest in teaching and they should not be asking for money – it is up to God how much he will give. Yoga is not a business. Teach yoga only to those who are sincere.

“There is no scarcity of food or water – there is scarcity of character. Purity and conduct – there is no Tsunami. When the Tsunami comes and goes – but the hypocrisy is too much. Once you strive, once you struggle for the unchanging values of yours, maybe Jesus, maybe Buddha, maybe Allah, Mohammad Sahib or Guru Nanak – they all taught Peace. The Truth – non-violence. There is a need at the moment. Truth and non-violence breaking the entire backbone of society. And it is only due to ignorance as to who we are. There is no security to life. The only security is we are born to die. Leave something behind you – a fragrance of your life for the selfless service.”

For more information about Swami Adhyatmananda and his work visit www.divyajivan.org/swami_adhyatmananda.htm