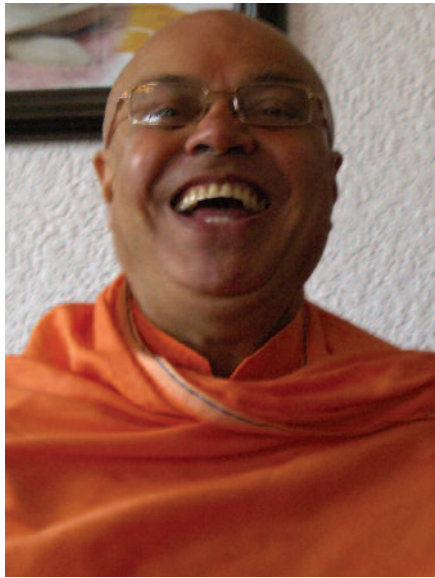


SRI SWAMI ADHYATMANANDAJI

A Life Divine



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.



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 Shrimnat 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 Prani go together, Prani, 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 dhayana.

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 be a whole individual you also need 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 then the perception must be clear – 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 just pranayama as being a sufficient yoga practice – why not just asana? He said that Patanjali did not mention asanas. From my own reading and study of Patanjali clearly he does mention the asanas. I put the question to Swamiji. “He cannot deny Patanjali mentioned asana. Patanjali said so. Your body should be steady and easy, he said. To practise pranayama you can’t be jumping and dancing. You have to be steady. Like you make yoghurt from milk, there are essential practices to turn the milk into yoghurt, so too the subtlety of the mind is a clear concept. Your aim is essential. But asana you cannot deny.”

So how did you get interested in yoga, I ask Swamiji. “That is a very serious question,” he replies. There is a long pause before he begins reciting all the names of his masters and gurus. “I was regular visitor to sanyasin. We were invited to Delhi to hold a yoga demonstration in a hall where 3,000 people can sit. But they wanted to hold a 25th Jubilee of all the Divine Life Society in India so Swami asked me did I know about yoga and I said I didn’t, so we started talking about it in 1973. I was very stiff then.

“I know how to teach, but I cannot do anything perfect, I told my master. He said do that much – my first exposure to a teacher in yoga asana was in the Indian Army in 1974 in the Divine Life Society. This was my yoga camp.” From then on Swami became more and more immersed in the practice and study of yoga. “Today universities and industries learn from us,” he says.

The Power Of Words

The practice of mantra is so old it can be traced right back to the *Vedas*. Swamiji confirms that mantra 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 Gayatri mantra. “Come to India and see the power of the Gayatri mantra. A number of people, including great masters, have advocated the Gayatri 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 receive 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 chanting verses from the Bible. He makes the point 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 sending a card to convey your 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 forest, 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 – chitta conscious. I am not the ego, I am not the senses of the knowledge. I am the untrading beauty of the soul, truth, bliss absolute. This is the fourth part of the last message of the Vedas. Don’t be egoistic. God wins the ego.”

Swamiji delightfully recites stories and parables from the *Vedas* explaining his statement. He then moves to the ancient *Kathopanishad*. This literature is about sacrifice. Swami’s voice has rhythm and there is evidence of a control of his breath. He sings the stories in English and Sanskrit. “The soul does not die,” he explains. “The *Upanishads* bring the ultimate understanding that you should seek the soul. Seek the eternal. Seek the truth... By seeking you shut up your ego. Be kind and courteous, love, give, verify, meditate, realise and know thyself, and pray. This is the central message of the *Vedas*.”

I ask where there are any references to God then in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. “He only talks about Ishwara Pranidana – surrender to the God – but he has not given any forms to the God. He said kindly surrender to the Supreme Divinity, that’s all. He has not mentioned the form of the God; that he has 16 hands or that he has a form like a tiger, elephant or weapon, nothing of the sort.”

A Serpent’s Power

We move onto the subject of kundalini. Is it a myth or fact? Swamiji is clear in his answer. “Kundalini is serpent power, not confined to the head. It is in the spine, like a rope, and in the sacrum and sacral plexus. It’s like a seesaw.” So what is the best way to make it rise upwards then, I ask. “Constant regular practice of meditation will help to make the kundalini rise... it is the ascent of the spirit of the energy.” The energy must not be wasted, states Swamiji. “What is the worldly check these days? What did I eat, how much did I drink? And so on – food and sex is not life. How to come out of this? You can do so slowly from the lower basins to the higher ones. The *Gita* says there are three different ways to lead you towards the problematic life, not to the way of peace and harmony not to the blessedness, but to a problem. That is the desires of lust, anger and greed. So to come out of this you are supposed to be kind to the system that sustains the discipline.

He names a number of his masters whose kundalini has been raised, and explains: “Kundalini awakening is a constant and continual actuality... it is not a myth, but a pure science... Mentally there are different levels – when kundalini is raised it is like an extra machine. It is not a small matter. With their eyes closed they know everything, even from a distance because it is like an antenna... For the path – go to the guru and follow his footsteps, sit with the learned people and study the *Vedas*, especially the last chapters.”

On Modern Hinduism

So are Hindus the followers of the *Vedas*? Swamiji refers to the ancient sage Acharaya Shankar who was very passionate about his discipline. “Before he passed away into maha samadhi his disciples asked, why don’t you sum up your teachings because you have taught so many things – who will remember them? So he has taught five stanzas.” Swamiji recites the stanzas and then interprets them into English. “Among the first stanza – follow the teachings of

the *Vedas*. Let your each action be a worship to the God and give up the desire of possession.

“What we see in modern Hinduism it is not exact teachings of the *Vedas* because we have so many ups and downs in India. Sometimes scriptures can be open to misinterpretation. Yet *Vedas* remains the root cause and foundation of the cultural heritage of India. The *Vedas* were kept intact – but the teachings came down in the 18 *Puranas*.

“Then these are further sub-divided – this is your *Purana* – kindly be a helping hand to mankind. This is your omen, this is your life – humanity. The Hindu believes in the *Purana*. You can sum up Hinduism, as my Swami used to say as: ‘singularity, regularity, absence of vanity, sincerity, simplicity, veracity, equanimity, fixity, non-irritability, adaptability, humility, tenacity, integrity, nobility, magnanimity, charity, generosity and purity. This can lead you to immortality.’

“So you can sum up the *Vedas* and *Puranas* in these 18 words. The *Vedas’* 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 known as Ishwara and is the concept of *Veda*.”

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 Truth. “So he never budged from the *Vedas*, but he never believed in the *Veda Yagnas* – because in the name of Yagnas they started killing animals. It is not 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 Brahmanas 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 practised

the seeking of the soul. Buddha never diverted his mind from the fundamental 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 didn’t know what to do. Some people 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.”

Is 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 negligent – you have to accept this also. Initially you need something to hold – a support as 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 is not messing around with that. He has been accepted by the Vedantas.”

A Life Of Sacrifice

Swamiji explains how he lives his life. “My understanding since I was given sanyasa [renunciation of worldly life] is that I get my bread and butter from the society. Thirty-eight years of my sanyasa 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 230 blood donation camps with 69,542 blood donations in just one year. Another activity of mine is



tree plantation around the globe. Wherever I go I do plantation of the tree. I also write articles and attend lectures. At my Ashram we have a beautiful meditation centre, where we run six classes every day, along with reiki teaching and giving groceries to the poor, we try to work very hard. My master is Sivananda. You cannot meditate for

more than 12 hours otherwise you feel as if you are idling. So find something that will give you purity of the heart, give it simplicity – you will be humble, noble.

“We inspire people for dead body donation also. We welcome everyone from around the globe, both those who can pay and those who can’t. We hold

teacher training. In my faculty I have cardiologist, 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, Muhammad 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