

# **Discourses/Articles**

by

**Swami Krishnananda**

**The Divine Life Society**

**Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India**

## **THE INNER WORLD**

All desire is a tendency to unite with externals. And this external may be a physical object or a psychological condition. Physical objects constitute the usual attractions of sense, we may say, on the animal level. We should not forget that man has also the animal in him, though kept in check due to social restrictions and one's own egoistic ambitions which temporarily forget the requisitions of the senses. But this, the egoistic level, is often far more weighty than the sensory, at least in a class of people whom we term the intelligentsia, though this weight is outweighed by the sense-urge when the individual is not in the good books of society or is cast out as an unwanted element or is disregarded for some reason. Those who always live in social circumstances and wind round themselves some sort of prestige – you may call it false, if you like – develop an exteriorised self and adore it as the real one. Others who are mostly accustomed to solitary life have a chance of confining themselves to the voices of the within, whether this within is the sense-world or the spiritual. This is why spiritual seekers, ascetics, hermits and the like, have, in the pursuit of the higher ideal of the Spirit, to face the dangers of the downward pulls of sense on being presented with the least opportunity for their manifestation. And this may be due to lack of vigilance – remember, no one can be always vigilant throughout one's life, and there are moments of slackness of watch even in the most powerful aspirants of the religious Ideal – or the excessive impetuosity with which the sense-objects reveal their attractive natures. The ego has, generally, no meaning when it is not associated with society to offer it adulations, though, very rarely it can pronounce grand judgments on itself, even when it is alone, sheerly by imagination of the extent of its achievements. But the senses do not require social approbation or patting; they are happy even if no one would know them. In fact they hate being known to others. Their essence is a selfishness of the narrowest kind, restricted to the personality or the individuality alone. Animals do not want praise from others; they are satisfied if their senses are satisfied. And the animal man, who is the sensual man, needs no society for his delights. He would rather wish that the society know not his enjoyments.

But the purely social man is the egoistic man who would hide his sense-passions for another ideal which he regards as superior to the merely sensual. Thus we have patriots who would die for their country, the so-called reformers of the community, the 'public' men whose self is in what others think of them, the rulers, the lords, those who wish to be carried on palanquins along the synagogues, the lovers of name and fame and power. Here the lower sense-urge is put down by the ego-urge. Let it be pointed out that this urge of the ego is in no way superior in quality to the sense-urge, though the society is prone to think so. For the sense-urge has physical objects for its target, while the ego has psychological objects for its aim. The obsession, as far as it is a factor of personal bondage, is the same in both the cases. The ego may manifest itself as the assertion of prominence as a head in the family, as an important person in the community, as a

leader of the nation, as an international figure steering the course of large groups of mankind, as a renowned scholar or an advanced Yogi. It is all the same – just so many layers of the ego. Physical objects tie down the senses to their promising shapes and contours, and the psychological conditions of importance, honour, respect, fame, authority and superiority over others confine the ego-sense to their tantalising greatness. *The sense and the ego are like the devil and the deep sea*, between which the seeking individual is caught, and whichever way it moves, its fate is sure to be destruction.

Desires, again, have three degrees: the brute, the rational and the spiritual. The first is the subhuman side of passions that are bent upon having their fill, though the world may go to dogs. Such violent desires of the animal nature, the savage instincts, have no regard for the good of the individual concerned, for their objective is only satisfaction, even if the individual is to die immediately after the satisfaction. These are what we call the immoral natures, so much condemned in the science of ethics and morality, for they have no concern with the welfare of others. Their motto is ‘each for himself, and devil take the hindmost’. This is naturally an intolerable attitude, and no one would like the behaviour of such a person. This is not good either for oneself or for others. This is the extreme side of desire.

But there is the higher aspect of desire, which is refined and is necessary as a prophylactic in the evolution of the lower man into the higher. As in homeopathic doses, so in the fulfilment of these controlled desires, man achieves a gradual mastery over them, not by utter and downright negation, which is not practicable, but a restrained satisfaction of their demands with the full consciousness that its aim is the final overcoming of all desire, for the devil must have its due when we have not yet seen the face of the Divine. It may look like a shrewd tactic of the intellect to get out of the clutches of desires by befriending them, as a policeman would catch a thief by identifying himself with their group. But this is just what it is, and it is a necessary stage, though not the final one. This is also the instruction of the Bhagavadgita, that one should be moderate in enjoyment and restraint, activity and self-absorption, wakefulness and sleep, sport and seriousness of conduct, and not go to extremes either way, for it is not the Yoga way of life. Equanimity, harmony and balanced conduct is Yoga. It is the teaching of Aristotle that the *mean* is virtue, and virtue is not either indulgence or starvation.

The good and the virtuous is just what is essential for a healthy life of body and mind and spirit, and inasmuch as there is no universally laid down standard for this *mean* or the *via media* of action and conduct, its test has to be a personal sense of freshness and buoyancy of spirit, a feeling of health and joy within, together with a continuous stream of the flow of unforgetting consciousness of the supreme Ideal of life. Aristotle differs from the extreme rule of Plato that all poetry, art, music and enjoyment is a vice and that virtue is a strict puritanistic abstention from enjoyment. Practical men know that too much of puritanism has its undesirable reactions, and we should avoid extremes, as the Buddha felt and taught. And there is no one to tell us which is the extreme and which the moderate course in any given instance; this has to be judged by oneself personally with the greatest care and understanding. Hence the need for adequate education and training for leading a successful life of personal upliftment and social work in the light of the Divine Ideal towards which all creation is moving. When this

Ideal is forgotten, virtue has no value and is as bad as vice. Either one should have a proper Teacher to guide him at every step or one should be well endowed with an understanding to enable him to stand on his own legs and walk unaided to the goal. Else there is the chance of miscalculation and losing grip over one's senses and the ego, and the result is a fall.

The highest form of desire is when it is sublimated into a spiritual activity of the universalised consciousness. This is seen in saints and sages of all countries who do not make a distinction between God and the World. Their enjoyments and their sufferings are not theirs, they are of the universe, they have a universal body, for all that they see is the manifestation of God. They eat and rejoice and seem to have the normal enjoyments of a human being, but their minds are lifted above the realm of personality and the mire of the earthward pull. These are the great saviours, the incarnations, the prophets, the messiahs, the masters and the guides of humanity in its spiritual quest. Such men look like any one else outwardly – they have a body, they have their personal and social lives, they are sometimes householders with large families, they play and talk and laugh and eat and drink and bathe. Yes; but their minds are differently constituted. Sometimes they are seen in silken robes and royal costumes like Janaka, at others they are like insensible idiots like Jadabharata. They may be householders and ritualists like Vasishtha, Yogis and meditators like Jaigishavya and Dattatreya, romantic pleasure-lovers like Saubhari, encyclopaedic writers and teachers of humanity like Vyasa, or unconcerned sages in union with the Supreme Being like Suka. But they have all equal knowledge and the power to create, destroy or transform things at their will (*Kartum akartum anyatha va kartum saktah*). In the personality of Sri Krishna we have a marvellous blend and synthesis of the inscrutable ways in which the divine superman lives and moves in this world. Their lives, their speech, behaviour and action are all super-rational mysteries, and here they are free from the connotation which is applied to the term 'desire' in normal life, for here desire is inseparable from universal existence. It has ceased to be an externalising tendency and is once and for all consumed in the blaze of the light of the Absolute.

But this is a very remote ideal and we need not be afraid that it is anywhere near us. To achieve this all-engulfing and incomparable realisation that melts down the ego is an uphill task. Let us go into some detail.

Rarely does a person get fired up by a spiritual aspiration. We studiously use the term 'fired', because it is often in this manner that the spiritual ideal seems to beckon the human mind. It does not come with long discussions and premeditations, correspondence and notice. It wells up within, one does not know how and when. And when this happens one's perspective of things suddenly changes, and there is altogether a different psychological world created before one's eyes. No persuasion or argumentation will succeed in diverting a person away from this changed view of things, once this 'fire' catches him. It is indeed a blazing, all-consuming power, and nothing on earth can have the strength to resist it.

There are aspirants, seekers, 'Sadhakas', who have been affected by this 'contagion' of Spirit, and cannot again be brought round to view life in a different way. When you see a thing clearly before your eyes, no argument against its existence would prevail. 'The heart has its reason, which reason does not know', said Pascal. The logic of the

heart is more weighty than that of the intellect. And no force under the sun can have the courage to face its penetrating influence. Such is the nature of what the spiritual aspirant sees with an eye that is peculiar to him, an eye which animates from within the eyes with which he sees the world outside. We may say, he is 'affected' by something he knows not, perhaps, and perchance knows on rare occasions. But no one, at least in the beginning stages, can know it definitely or understand the way that it is following. It is a difficult situation, and some mystics call it 'the dark night of the soul', where the soul is awakened from slumber, but still gropes for some time, not seeing the path clearly. The first chapter of the Bhagavadgita is an epic description of this necessary condition of all seeking individuals on the path.

In exceptionally fortunate souls, there arises, subsequent to this condition of utter helplessness and a self-surrender forced on them due to complete spiritual oblivion attended with a feeling for the need of some help, the higher stage of consciousness where a Teacher, a Master or a *Guru* manifests himself, as portrayed in the second chapter of the Bhagavadgita, and he points out the way. But we should not forget here the warning that "perhaps one in several thousands of persons strives to reach the Goal; and some one from among those who thus strive, knows, after having attained perfection, Truth as it is." And there are, therefore, many who do not obtain a suitable Teacher or a guide or see any light above them. They struggle but do not succeed due to some unknown inner obstruction. But their souls do not find satisfaction, they having been 'fired up' once in their emotions. The fire seems to have gone and left them cold, but that supernal emotion has left also a peculiar impression, and this makes life unhappy both ways.

Here lies the danger. Here it is that aspirants have what is generally called a 'fall'. Here it is that they go neurotic and 'eccentric', become egotists, gluttons, and victims of passions of various kinds, notably sexuality, irritability and anger. They may even turn into kleptomaniacs without their knowing it, greedy for silly things of the world, develop inordinate longings for what even an ordinary man of the world would regard as unimportant. It would not be a surprise if some of them become harmful anti-social elements, as they have lost grip over their conscious and subconscious behaviours. This is an interesting psychological state which needs careful attention and study. We need not much concern ourselves here with those blessed ones who have had their higher illumination and the path clearly pointed out to them, those Arjunas who have found their Krishnas. But it is necessary to study these more unfortunate ones, who are still in the 'dark night', and are groping in a confused state of mind.

Now we do not mean that all men who are regarded as cultured, educated or 'sane', as mankind understands these terms, are really normal in the true sense of the word. Everyone is *equally affected*, and hence it is called normalcy. If there is one who thinks or acts differently, he is called abnormal, or even insane. For us the plebiscite is the standard of correctness. You may call it the herd instinct of the sheep. It is not without some meaning that the great Bhartrihari said: *Unmattabhutam Jagat* (the world has gone mad). Well, if everyone is mad, there can be no such thing as sanity in a world of such beings, other than what is normal from their own general condition. But we are here referring to a different order of abnormal persons, who cannot fit into the general 'normalcy' of the mind of humanity in this world, but who have rather a 'disintegrated' psychological personality, wherein one has no control over any part of oneself, there is

indeterminacy of behaviour at any given moment, and one has no set conscious goal before one's vision. To cite certain examples of the strange ways of the minds of such persons:

One might suddenly begin to feel that it is essential to organise a large group of followers and do a lot for the transformation of mankind from its present state. When this effort is launched upon and is easily seen to fail in the achievement of its objective, there might arise the feeling that mankind is stupid and is not worthy of any attention, and precious energy should be utilised for a better purpose. There might come in a period of inward absorption, at least an attempt to effect it, and a segregation of oneself from human society, though for a short period. Now the consequence of this might be a restlessness of spirit, a desire to mix with people again, and talk and talk one's head off as a reaction of seclusion. There are, again, those who, when they see two people talking to each other would butt in unceremoniously and enquire what the matter is. These are small things, but have a great meaning. However, the society is not going to satisfy the soul which has lost itself and there is disgust and occasionally a feeling of inferiority in the light of one's not having attained prominence in any field of life. One might then try business, with a strong tinge of love for wealth, supported by the logic that some money is necessary even for a saint to maintain himself. But business fails and it is not everyone that is a good businessman; it requires knack and pluck. Then might arise the idea that everything seems to be a wild-goose chase, and melancholy is the result. The further outcome might be an urge for anti-social acts done publicly or secretly and shame is the one thing to which a disintegrated personality is totally immune. He is not himself, and his acts are not his, from a strictly analysed psychologist's point of view, though the person concerned, himself, might regard all his acts and feelings as normal and self-directed. Anti-social behaviour is not always successful, for society takes precaution to curb it. Then one may go erratic and insane, for there is no outlet for the urges which have gone amuck. At times he may be brooding, sitting for long hours doing nothing, sometimes speaking loudly and in a raised spirit, sometimes blurting out what he thinks are facts, at other times regarding all others as inferior to himself in some way; or he may get obsessed with a sense of possession even of such trifling articles as a waterpot, a walking stick, a mirror, or a handbag. There are those who suddenly imagine that they have some enemy aiming at them constantly, and very often it happens to be the nearest person or one whom they see very often. There is also the positive side of this obsession by which one gets terribly attached to some person or persons for reasons he alone knows, and begins to see one's beloved and cherished ideal in that person. This person becomes the obsession of the mind, thinking and dreaming of nothing but that day and night. Now, this is not love or affection in the usual sense; it is an unhealthy attitude, because this attachment may, at the least *imaginary* opposition or neglect on the part of the other person, change into hatred, and the dear one may become an enemy overnight. These are, of course, extreme cases of behaviour, and are not common even among highly distressed persons on the path. But this chance cannot be ruled out, and is one of the dangers that have to be encountered on the way. There are those who hear voices, see spirits, or persons standing in front of them, visible, of course, only to their eyes, and there is the complaint that these voices, spirits or persons are their enemies who always torment them for no cause whatsoever. If anyone admonished them against the belief in such imaginary causes of trouble, he himself might become their enemy from that day. Everyone is looked upon with suspicion, as if one is caught in an enemy's camp, and everyone around is set against oneself. These are psychopathic

conditions, and may have several causes: (1) hereditary acquirement, (2) frustration or a shock received in early life, (3) buried emotions the expressions of which is taboo in the society in which one lives, (4) desire which cannot be fulfilled under the existing social or political law, (5) misguided and misapplied energies along lines which have led to an all-round failure, (6) the rise of spiritual emotion in an unprepared and inadequate receptacle of mind that does not receive training under an able teacher or has not brought about in any other manner a sublimation of the animal and human urges rumbling and rioting within. Though psychotherapists may be able to handle the first five cases, the last one mentioned is difficult to manage, and may defy even the best doctor. But a spiritual doctor may, with some effort, succeed in reaching some beneficial results. Not that it is easy to acquire spiritual masters of this calibre, but it is not an impossible accident.

Mostly, aspirants become introverts or extroverts, sometimes of an extreme type, to their own peril and self-destruction. They either lock themselves up in rooms or roam about in society, finding no rest anywhere. Now, there are highly advanced sages who would prefer to live in locked-up caves, or distant forests; but these are mature deliberations of understanding minds poised in the higher self-control which sees no necessity or value in things external to the universal Self. The so-called psychological introverts are different altogether; they hide themselves from the human eye due to a morbid inward state, which fact becomes clear from the observation that it has its reactionary phase, viz., the extrovert condition that intrudes itself into the behaviour some day. Let us remember Shakespeare's wise saying: "Genius to madness is near alike; a thin partition divides them both".

Blind faith is as bad as an obsession. It is harmful to one's own inward progress and is a nuisance to the happy life of the society. Sometimes these blind believers are a great trouble to others, especially when they insist on others' acceptance of their beliefs. All conduct which does not respect others' views and feelings, which cannot understand others' problems and difficulties, which has no care for others' good or welfare, should be considered as unspiritual in its essence, whatever be the importance of the person possessing such a nature. Also, any conduct which is ruinous to one's own higher upliftment, which is suicidal in any sense of the term, which is psychologically pathogenic and harmful either to one's body or mind, should be regarded as unspiritual. For spirituality, let it be remembered, is the most wholesome life of an all-inclusive conscious expansion of one's being in the healthy feeling of a joy and a sense of power in one's Self, which language cannot express or describe fully. It is the beginning of a universal Self-Possession, where creation seems to seep into one's existence, and in a flash of consciousness, man achieves awareness that his entire nature, physical and intangible, is bound up with all life that throbs and pulsates everywhere. In the lofty reaches of spiritual experience, one becomes all-inclusive, is included in all, and cognises and realises everything. This experience is super-sensory, super-mental and super-intellectual, and here the personality tends to disintegrate and one feels like being swept into a sphere of vaster implications, plumbing abysmal depths, scaling dizzy heights, viewing vast vistas unknown on earth. There is a sensation of Power which affects every particle of one's nature, and one is bathed in the Light of indescribable brightness. There is an awareness of the interpenetration of all things, and one is simultaneously in all places. Every single detail is exactly known in its own place, and in its minute detail, in its relationship to the Whole. Everything becomes crystal-clear,

light shines separately from each single point in space, not merely from some orb like the sun from somewhere in distant space. One becomes immortal.

We do not hint that spiritual aspirants, in the initial stages, will have any such experience, but this grand ideal is placed before the seeking soul so that it may become its touchstone, its yardstick, in testing and measuring the quality and extent of its experiences and achievements. Unless one's life and conduct reflects in even the smallest measure an intelligible relation to this Goal set forth, one can be sure that there is something wrong in the whole structure of *Sadhana*, and a thorough investigation of its fibre has to be done immediately. Else there is every possibility of the rising of that psychological tearing up of one's life as a whole, as detailed above, a most undesirable thing to be envisaged by anyone with commonsense.