

A FRIEND, PHILOSOPHER AND GUIDE

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Spirit, which is veritably the power of God set in motion, keeps itself ever vigilant to maintain the purpose of creation, and it never sleeps even for a moment. It is always active in working to maintain the equilibrium and order necessary for the fulfilment of the aim of creation. It is always intolerant about excesses and extremes of any kind. Whenever and wherever there is an intolerable excess or extreme, an overstepping of boundaries and limits, the Spirit begins to work forcefully and brings back the powers to move in the direction of the desirable, and sets things in tune with the purposes or aims which it has in view.

At the time when Sri Gurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj came into the limelight in this world, sometime in the earlier part of this twentieth century, it could be observed that there were certain movements in human history which required rectification. History is nothing but the march of the intentions of the Time Spirit which vigorously adjusts and adapts itself to the ultimate aim and goal towards which the entire universe is moving. At the

beginning of the twentieth century there were two trends in social movement which went to excess, and they had to be checked. There was, on the one side, an excess of traditional orthodoxy, while, on the other side, there was an extreme in the materialistic and economic outlook of life. Both these things were visible not only in India but all over the world. There were two sections of mankind thinking in two departments of life, one going to the one extreme and the other to the other extreme. The religious orthodoxy tended to isolate itself from the realities of life and set up an almost impossible set of ideals of religiosity, a type of religion which made it almost an other-worldly affair, perhaps, having nothing to do with the present life, as also bordering upon social disparities and stratifications of human society in a manner which could not have been regarded as healthy from the point of view of the aims of the Time Spirit.

On the other hand, there was the other side, viz., science, physics, technological developments and industrial revolution, all of which gripped the minds of the modern Indian youth, who gradually lost contact with the vital springs of Indian culture and began to feel enamoured of the demonstrations of modern achievements in the fields of applied science and technology. So, there was a section of people, youngsters included, which moved in the direction of the exterior world of sense contacts, social amusement and physical comfort, making it the be-all and end-all of life, as it were, ignoring the spiritual value of life altogether, on account of the glamour of Western civilisation which had its impact upon Indian culture due to the peculiar circumstances of history in which India found itself at the beginning of this century. As mentioned, there was

religious orthodoxy, even untouchability of various types, which was definitely not in consonance with the aims of the Time Spirit or the Will of God. The balance of life was swinging between the devil and the deep sea.

Whenever such a gulf of difference arises in the lives of the people, whenever there is intolerable movement of any kind, the Spirit of Time takes the rod in its hand, and it does its work in two ways. Sometimes it is harsh with people and punishes them with a tremendous revolution, an earthquake, cataclysm or massacre; it can do even that when it is angry. But, if its intentions are of a different kind, it can bring about an inward revolution of a cultural and spiritual nature, leading to the same aim, of course, and it is this act of the Time Spirit that was responsible, we may say, for the birth of such great spiritual Masters such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda. In a sense, we may say that the activities of the Time Spirit began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy himself, which marks the beginning of the revival of ancient Indian culture in the modern period.

This kind of activity of invisible forces concretised itself in various ways, and these manifestations were of various types, some visible and some invisible. The visible came in the form of stalwarts, geniuses and Masters—stalwarts such as Tilak and Gokhale, geniuses such as Swami Dayananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Aurobindo, and Masters such as Ramana Maharshi and Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. These great personages of modern times were the spirits of an inward revolution which was nothing but the hands of the Time Spirit working for a cosmic purpose. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was an embodiment of the intentions

of the Cosmic Spirit. It may safely be stated that he was Vedanta in daily life, Yoga in daily life, philosophy in action, sage and saint combined, the highest idealism shaking hands with a down-to-earth realism. That was the peculiar touch which Swami Sivananda gave to the spiritual value of mankind.

Spirituality was then confined to monasteries, mahatmas and yogis in sylvan areas and sequestered places. It had not become a part and parcel of day-to-day life. That was one aspect of the excesses. As mentioned earlier, there was the other side of it, a complete oblivion in respect of spiritual values—a thorough Westernisation, taking in only the comfort-and-satisfaction aspect of Western civilisation and ignoring the logical, ethical and other valuable principles involved in that civilisation. This dichotomy or gulf between the two excesses had to be bridged by a personality who could act as a liaison between these two aspects of human nature and activity. Persons such as Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Sri Aurobindo acted this role of bringing together the principles of ancient tradition and wisdom in consonance with present-day requirements of logic and scientific approach. So there was once again the success of the Time Spirit in its real form, not cutting itself off from the world, unapproachable and inaccessible to people, nor going to the other excess of downright crass materialism.

Sri Gurudev's approach was therefore very comprehensive, and his life was his teaching. Some, at least, of his disciples regard themselves as thrice blessed for having had the rare privilege of living in the physical vicinity of this great Master. Living with him for years and

observing him was a greater lesson imbibed by his disciples and followers than a study of books. This is a fact, and it is a great truth. A few of the disciples who had the opportunity and good fortune to be with him for many years of their lifetime had this wonderful experience of living under the shade of a father, mother and divinity manifest in human form, goodness and compassion blended in one. This is why the life of Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj cannot be fully written from all its aspects. There were so many characteristics of his life, and his close associates such as Swami Atmanandaji Maharaj say that Gurudev had several of the characteristics of Lord Krishna Himself—the multifaceted manifestation of God, a personality inclusive of everything and anything valuable in life. Sri Gurudev possessed a goodness that reached the stature of the most magnificent divinity and spirituality, at the same time coming down to the level of children in primary school and the man in the street. He was also like Lord Rama in some respects. Sri Rama was said to be *purva-bhashi*. Valmiki says, “*Purva-bhashi tu raghavah.*” Many people assume a dignity and a sense of prestige of their own which they maintain, on account of which they will not speak first; they want to be spoken to first. But Sri Rama was not like that. He would be the first to ask, “How are you?” “If you do not speak, I will speak!” That was Sri Rama’s attitude. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was like that. He would be the first to do *namaskara* to you. It is not easy to recount all the many things his lifelong disciples personally observed in his thoroughgoing technique of self-effacement and obliteration of the ego.

A Sannyasin, a Paramahamsa of the Sri Sankaracharya Order, inwardly nothing short of a Jivanmukta but outwardly behaving like anyone and everyone, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was a surprise to many of the orthodox Sannyasins living in the same area. Many of them could not understand what his attitude meant. And they could not reconcile his behaviour with the traditions which Sannyasins had to follow. A Sannyasin cannot touch the feet of a Grihastha, for instance. A Sannyasin cannot prostrate himself before a householder. It was all forbidden and regarded as heresy. Swamiji was just the opposite of it. He brought down the spirit of spirituality from its confines of fanatic orthodoxy in which many of the traditional Sannyasins got caught up, and made it a part and parcel of the kitchen, the bathroom and the latrine, the street and the shop, so that the aroma of the spirit spread in day-to-day life, in the office and the factories, not making any distinction between the boss and the subordinate, the worker and the employer. All this was a surprise and wonder indeed to people used to thinking in other ways. Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj came to overstep all barriers which separated man from man, barriers which cut off man from God Himself. Thus was his great message to people demonstrated and manifested in his own life. God should not remain separated from man. God cannot be in Vaikuntha or Heaven. He has to be with us, He has to be here and walk with us on the road when we stroll, and He must be our friend *now*. He must be a *sakha* so that we are not to aspire for a remote God but to live in God—*here* and *now*. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj's coming was to completely revolutionise spiritual aspiration and practice

by making it an affair of the daily life of every human being.
To conclude, he was Vedanta in daily life.