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**KNOWLEDGE  
AS MEANS  
TO FREEDOM**

**SWAMI KRISHNANANDA**

# KNOWLEDGE AS A MEANS TO FREEDOM

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## **PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, **'Knowledge as a Means to Freedom'**, consists of Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj's discourse given on the 3rd of July, 1977, delineating the aims and ideals of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

## **KNOWLEDGE AS A MEANS TO FREEDOM**

If our search is for freedom, knowledge is regarded as an endeavour towards the achievement of this freedom. The institutions of the world, whether they are educational, social or political, are instruments for the implementation of this endeavour towards the attainment of human freedom. From this point of view, it is difficult to believe that mankind has different ideals before itself. There seems to be a convergence of ideals, in spite of the diversity of approaches which appear to characterise the efforts of people. An investigative analysis into the structure of the human mind and its longings would certainly reveal that there is a basic similarity of character in the needs of people and the effort on their part to gain greater and greater mastery over the techniques of the achievement of this freedom. This may be also regarded as an advancement in knowledge. So, the increase in knowledge is, in a way, equivalent to the increase in the capacity of a person to achieve freedom. But freedom from what,

is the basic question. If this question cannot be answered, we cannot also know what knowledge is, and impliedly what education is, because education is the process of the acquisition of knowledge. So, one thing hangs on the other. If we cannot know what we are asking for, what we are in search of and what is the sort of freedom that we expect in our lives, we cannot also know what is the knowledge that we seek in life. Consequently, we cannot know what should be the educational process. Everything will topple down if the central aim is not clear to our minds. If we have a concept of an Academy in this Ashram, it is certainly not going to be an institution of a social kind, because we have many of such institutions in the world. It is not going to be a series of studies in the fashion of the age-old system of the several branches of learning. While all these learnings, arts and sciences, which we gain in the educational institutions of the world, are good in themselves and necessary as far as they go, since they help us to get on in life in some way or the other, we must know that the intention of mankind is not merely to get on in life, because many can get on beautifully in life on the surface level and yet be very unhappy at the core of their hearts.

Our intention, in consonance with the intention of Sri Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and masters of that calibre, has certainly not been to tread the beaten track of social tradition or even personal idiosyncrasy or sentiment, but to find out some ways and means of unfolding the mysteries that seem to be at the background of the longings of mankind, and to provide them with a true enlightenment, which is perhaps a better word than knowledge. For this purpose, we may have to proceed from one degree of reality to another degree, gradually. It has to be reiterated, at the outset, that we are not to interpret knowledge as information about some particular subject. Truly speaking, knowledge is a percentage or degree of absorption of one's life into the character of one's knowledge. Knowledge is valuable to that extent alone to which it can be accommodated in one's personal life and remains as a basic foundation for one's search for the ultimate purpose which one is apparently longing for. It is very easy to be comfortable in life. But it is difficult to be happy in life. Society can deceive us into the notion that we are well off. When we conform to the standards of social ethics and idiosyncrasies, naturally we are supported by society. But society is only one segment in the vast circle of human

endeavour. It is not the whole of the reality that is pictured before our minds.

What we call institutions, academies, societies, universities, colleges, etc., are certain convenient forms introduced to educate people to acquire the true knowledge of life which will make them really free and happy even when they are absolutely alone. These institutions have utterly failed to achieve this purpose. It is no use being free to move in society with the help of an army or a band of policemen. That is not freedom. Freedom is a kind of fearlessness that comes out of the acquisition of the wisdom of life, which again is identical with the reality of life. Thus, whatever groups we form in the social pattern such as institutions, academies or universities, they are not going to serve their purpose as long as they satisfy only the instincts and the sentiments of the groups of people we call society, but do not cater to the needs of the soul.

The soul is not a department of the body. Likewise, I should say, the Academy here is not a department of The Divine Life Society, but it is the soul that works as the incentive behind every kind of activity, which we call a department, and is the vitality which supports the entire structure. It is not one branch of learning. It is here that we

have to draw a distinction between the concept of an academy here and similar concepts that may be elsewhere. We are not going to teach physics, chemistry, mathematics or any particular branch of approach in the line of education, though these branches can be accommodated into the curriculum, provided they are conducive to the development of its ideal—the wholeness which we call Knowledge.

From this point of view, it will be difficult to find either teachers or students, because the whole approach is quite novel and unique. If this approach is not going to be understood and implemented, it would be of no use; for, we would then be starting another high school or college, as anyone else may start. Well-to-do people start high schools and colleges. It is not a great asset to mankind, because they are going to teach the same stereotyped humdrum of the branches of studies which we have anywhere in the world. If what we learn cannot make us free and confident in our own self, that knowledge of ours is worthless. Let anyone touch one's own heart and say one is free—free from anxiety, free from harassment from the atmosphere in which one is living, and free from suspicions and doubts as to the capacity of one's own self in the achievement of one's purpose. No one can be

confident about these things. It means to say that our learning has not been up to the mark. They are only convenient contrivances to live a comfortable life in society. We can be rich in mind and also rich in reputation. We can be the centre or target of the applause of society, which is another way of being deceived by society. But all this is not going to help us when the last call comes.

The whole purpose of the establishment of The Divine Life Society, and incidentally of the Academy that is in our minds, is not to play a joke with life or become important in human society. It is not that we boost up one more institution among the many others in the world, but to provide an atmosphere or an environment or a suitable set of circumstances which will enable us to proceed further in the art and science of contacting Reality.

Here we come to a very important question: What is Reality? If the art of contacting this ideal of Reality is the great science of life and if that is what we call yoga, how many of us can have a clear-cut conception of the ideal which we call the Reality? It tantalises us like a mirage and recedes from us like the horizon as we try to approach it. As we grow, our ideas of the very ideal change in our minds and we have doubts as to what it could be. So, naturally,

we are unable to adjust ourselves and adapt our personal lives to the ideal that we are holding before us. It is the first and foremost duty of every seeker who regards himself or herself as a student of the Academy here, to see that his or her mind is very clear about the ideal. As I underline this very purpose of the Academy, I cannot believe that Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj has had any other idea in his mind, ultimately, except the liberation of the Spirit—moksha, as he would call it.

There are many great things in this world which are wonderful from their own point of view and necessary in their own station. But, they are all preparatory and contributory processes to the great achievement and attainment which we call Freedom, moksha, which is the aim of spiritual life. The Divine Life Society or the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy is nothing, if it is not a centre for providing facilities for the enlightenment of the spirit, or the human soul. Naturally, when it is concerned with the human soul, it is not concerned with male and female, east and west, north and south, etc., but it is concerned only with the spirit of aspiration, genuineness of approach and sympathy with the nature of Truth. All these are difficult things even to comprehend, apart from their being practised or put into our

own daily experiences in life. The conception of Reality, as I mentioned, is the rock-bottom of the very endeavours of knowledge, which again is the process of the achievement of Freedom.

There are different degrees of the one Reality, which we will recognise as we proceed further and further and examine our experiences of life. When we were asleep, it was one kind of reality; and when we were dreaming, it was another kind of reality. When we are awake now, this is also another, different kind of reality. So, which one are we going to regard as the Reality? Anything that we come into contact with or anything that gets absorbed into our consciousness as a part of our experience, goes by the name of reality. So the wisdom of a teacher and the shrewdness or the tact of a disciple lie in the acceptance of the degrees of reality, by which it is meant that we have to move from stage to stage. We should never imagine that we are in a level higher than the one in which we really are. Pride is of no use here, and any kind of self-complacency has to be ruled out. We are before God, as it were, and not before any man. We can deceive man, but we cannot deceive God. We cannot deceive even our own selves. So it is no use believing that we are something other than what we really are. Whatever

be our learning, it stands not before the eye of God. We know it very well that it will also not stand the trials of life, which is also one of the ways we can test the efficacy of our knowledge. When we are in great trouble, in hot water, our present knowledge is not going to help us, which means to say that we have learnt nothing, ultimately. It has been a self-deception throughout, for we have been under the notion that there has been a gradual increase in the content of knowledge.

It is difficult to be free in this sort of approach to things, because we have unfortunately been hypnotised or brainwashed, as it were, right from our childhood, into certain traditional ways of thinking by the society and the community in which we live. We are Brahmins, we are Khatriyas, we are aristocrats, we are princes, we are of royal families, our father was an Inspector of Schools—such and similar ideas are introduced into the pattern of our thinking. Further, there is something which spoils every effort at learning, viz., the seeking for ‘outcome’ of this learning, “What will my knowledge bring?” This is what every student asks himself when he enters into a school or college. By this he expects some material output from the learning that he gains or the knowledge that he

acquires. We are always accustomed to think in terms of human society and material gain, and much more than that—our egoistic satisfaction. It must bring applause and recognition. What do we mean by ‘recognition’? It is recognition from people. We don’t expect recognition from asses or donkeys. Well, we can imagine, we want recognition from the species to which we belong. That is our wisdom! So, this is a basic defect in the very approach to things. We are still humans, and we want to be applauded by human beings only. We do not bother as to what the gods in the heavens are thinking about us, or what a dog is thinking about us here. What man thinks about us, is the only important thing. It is like a frog thinking about the frogs’ world. Under these conditions, we are not going to escape the clutches of Yama, or death, which means there is no escape from the process of transformation, destruction and reincarnation unless we change our ways of thinking.

The de-hypnotisation of our mind is our first duty. It is difficult to believe that one would be easily successful in an attempt at such a kind of de-hypnotisation. How can we forget such ideas as: “I belong to the Ramakrishna Mission”, “I belong to The Divine Life Society”, “I am of Sankaracharya’s

order”, “I am of Ramanuja’s order”? Even great thinkers are unable to extricate themselves from these parochial ways of thinking; and these are not going to cut ice before God. Yet, we care a hoot for what God thinks about us, if only mankind is going to support us! Now, this attitude that we are going to be happy only among human beings, irrespective of what God or Nature is thinking about us, is a great travesty of things. So it is that the wrath of Nature is coming upon us in the form of death, in spite of whatever humanity has been thinking about us. We might have been carried in palanquins, kept seated on thrones by the great men of the world. But, death is not going to spare us. What is death if not the anger of Nature that has come upon us on account of our disregard for her laws? And the laws of Nature are nothing but the fingers of God working in the world. We have to be introduced into these mysteries by people who have already trodden the path, who have seen the pitfalls on the way and the obstacles that may come upon us. And then, we should gird up our loins to tread the path, which we will find to be a hard nut to crack when we actually try to enter.

If this ideal could be brought home into the minds of people, if this Academy can be a humble

nursery of this lofty approach which is multifaceted and many-sided, excluding no aspect of approach to Truth, and free from a parochial approach of every kind, that would, of course, be the real satisfaction of the Founder. Hence, it becomes imperative on the part of both teachers and students of the path of the Spirit to place themselves in the atmosphere of that which they are seeking. This is a very important point to remember, again. We are always in the presence of the ideal which we are seeking and contemplating in our minds. Since God is that ideal, we are in His presence. And one could imagine what sort of psychological attitude one will have to develop and entertain in the presence of that Being which is our ideal. The ideal is not a future one. We always say that God is eternal; naturally, God is not in time. So, a thing that is not in time, cannot also be regarded as something in the future, because the future is a part of time. So it is a continuous present. It is just here. We are under the very nose of That which we are seeking. Wrongly we are under the impression that it is in a distant future, which means to say that it is far off even in space, which again implies that God is not seeing us. So, how many ways there are of deceiving oneself! The forces of Nature are very vigilant, active and intelligent. They are not sleeping,

they are not closing their eyes, and they are not blind. As I have already mentioned to you, these are nothing but the ways in which God's fingers operate in this world. The awakening of oneself into this fact is perhaps the entry into the path of spiritual life. Spiritual life does not necessarily mean living in an ashram. It does not also mean going to a church, nor does it mean living in a convent. It is not any kind of institutional rigidity that we introduce into our own personal lives. This kind of rigidity, however, becomes a necessity just as medicine becomes a necessity to a sick person. But it does not mean that a person should go on taking medicine throughout his life, even when he is healthy. Similarly, it does not mean that institutions are a necessity for all times. They are necessary even as schools and colleges are necessary. You know well that you will not be in a school or college throughout your lifetime. It is absurd to think like that.

So, Freedom is the final word of this entire approach. And institutional training and discipline in an academy of the kind in this ashram is a preparatory step in the achievement of the final aim of personal freedom, which cannot be isolated from universal freedom. You are not going to be always a teacher of spirituality, nor are you going to be also

a perpetual student in the Academy. You are going to be a child of God, in the end. We cannot forget the ideal that was in the mind of Gurudev. Those who had the opportunity of living with him for a protracted period and had an insight into his ways of thinking would be able to gather as to what was the ideal before him. It was not name and fame that made him establish this institution. He needed nothing of that kind. What could one gain by others' saying that one is great? Certainly, it was not money either. It was something else which always escapes the notice of onlookers, because they look at the body of the institution and the personality of the individual. They cannot look at the mind of a person and cannot see the spirit of things, because these always elude their grasp.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to be cautious in our daily thinking to see that the purpose for which we began our initial enterprise does not escape our notice later on, due to the clamour of the social atmosphere or even the demands of personal instincts. Towards this great aim, we have to move slowly, gradually, missing not a single step in the long path of development. There is no double promotion here. It is a compulsory movement from one step to the next step—one step only at a time, and not two

steps. This is because no unnecessary thing exists in this world. An unnecessary step can be stepped over, but such a one does not exist. Every atom in the universe is a necessary thing for the development of the whole universe. And so, we have to pass through all the stages. We have passed through eighty-four lakhs of yonis, as the scriptures tell us. Scientists also tell us that we have passed through the stage of inanimate matter, the vegetable kingdom, the animal world and human life, etc. All these are different ways of saying that we can advance only gradually, stage by stage, and there is no jump from a stone to a man, for example. It has always been a gradual and systematic ascent. Likewise, from mankind to God is not going to be a sudden jump, unless there is an inward refinement of personality through the various levels that we have to ascend. This requires knowledge as to what are these further levels. This is the type of knowledge that we have to acquire in an academy of this kind.

So, we require experienced people to teach. We do not want professors. They are not going to teach anything, because they are only bookworms. The teachers in the Academy should have insight into the nature of what they are going to teach, and naturally it is a difficult task. We know this

very well. If everything had been so easy, everybody would have attained Freedom. There would have been liberation for all and paradise in this world, as people have been vainly expecting. Ramarajya would have been here. That is not going to be so easy on account of the very nature of things. It is a hard job and difficult indeed in every respect, externally as well as internally, because to think in terms of the requirements of the laws of God is not given to ordinary laymen. Therefore it is that people find it not easy to gain success in spiritual life as they imagine in the early stages of enthusiasm. The laws of God alone operate in the world, and nothing else operates. An acquaintance with the nature of these laws is a primary necessity. But we are acquainted with only social laws, political laws, personal laws and communal laws, rules and regulations of our own making, all of which may not have much relevance. But they assume relevance when they are tuned up to the higher purpose in the mould of which they have to be cast. Human laws, regulations and discipline are supposed to be reflections of the higher ideals that we are going to aspire for. It does not mean that there is any gulf between God and the world. There is a gradual ascent from the world to God. It is a process of evolution. So the studies

in academies of this kind are going to be absolutely novel. From the point of view of this envisagement that is in my mind, I doubt very much whether it can function in this manner so easily. It requires a strong foundation, hard efforts and a body of thinkers along these lines, and it also requires real and sincere interest in the whole affair. It is not a slipshod matter.

All these considered, it requires serious thinking by each and every one of us. We are not going to study books merely. We are going to enlighten ourselves in the art of living which is the preparation for God-life that we are aspiring, for the purpose of which people are coming here. Many sincere students come from abroad as seekers. They seek enlightenment into the nature of divine living. Naturally, it is difficult to contemplate all at once all the aspects of the approach to the final goal of the Academy. But let us remember the words of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj who said, "Well, I have put the seed; let it take its own shape. It will sprout into a tendril, grow into a plant and become a tree. It may take fifty years, or it may take three lives. It does not matter." A gardener does not think that he himself will eat the mangoes from the plant that he plants on the soil. He knows that he may not live

for so many years. Similarly, it does not mean that we, as individuals seated here, will reap the fruit of this effort. It is a cosmic endeavour in the interest of God's ideal itself, and with the blessings of the Almighty, success has to be there where sincerity is at its background. This is my humble belief.

If our search is for freedom, knowledge is regarded as an endeavour towards the achievement of this freedom. The institutions of the world, whether they are educational, social or political, are instruments for the implementation of this endeavour towards the attainment of human freedom.

—SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



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