

Missionary for Hinduism

Pritish Nandy Interviews Gurudev

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He wears a strange shade of Ochre, which looks almost like pink. There are silver knobs on his wooden sandals, which add at least three inches to his five - feet five. His long tresses cascade on to his shoulders framing with black and grey an intensely intelligent face. Swami Chinmayananda, 65, is Hinduism's answer to the countless young men and women who have strayed away over the years, disgusted with the meaningless rituals and the tired theology of the world's oldest living faith.

A distinguished scholar, an ardent teacher and a compulsive globetrotter, the Swami is today held to be one of the few serious and credible missionaries that Hinduism has to offer. His missions are all over the world. So are his devotees and students. And they are growing at a rate which will soon, perhaps, make Swami Chinmayananda numero uno in the glittering pantheon of gurus, rishis, bhagavans and babas who hold sway over India's millions and many abroad. In many ways, this is the best thing that could have happened to Hinduism. For the Swami is no quack healer or fast - buck merchant. He offers no miracles to lure the gullible. He makes no predictions, reads no fortunes and sings paeans to no politician. He makes no claims to being a God, except for argument's sake; nor does he offer you, for a fee, the quick route to nirvana. He simply teaches.



He is best known for his interpretation of the Gita and almost every day of the year, somewhere or the other, in Bonn or Bangkok, Bombay or Baltimore, he has a class on. He is either trying to explain Arjuna's dilemma in the midst of battle or the innate logic of Krishna's persuasion. Not all his students are Hindus. Neither are they all believers in any religion. More often they come out of curiosity to see the Swami defend a faith grown old and decayed by centuries of blind belief and senile commitment to rituals. There are the usual pot - bellied devotees who come to donate fractions of their ill - gotten wealth in the hope of buying happiness in another life. There's the same bunch of rich, semi - literate women in chiffons and diamonds who attend every religious event wearing the same moronic demeanour. There are also, thank God, the young ones, from whom the Swami derives his largest following. Pleasant faced young men, quietly listening to the voice of religion.

Swami Chinmayananda is, naturally, not his real name. He was born P. Balakrishna Menon on 8 May 1916, somewhere in the Malabar. There was nothing very brilliant about this particular Malayalee child, who grew up and eventually joined The National Herald as a cub - reporter. He joined the nationalist movement in 1941 and was briefly jailed. On release, he went to Rishikesh to meet Swami Shivananda Saraswati, to write a journalistic piece on the religion racket. The Swami persuaded the young skeptic to stay back for six months at his ashram, to see things firsthand. By the end of the six months, Balakrishna Menon gave up his name and his profession and assumed the name of Chinmayananda. From Rishikesh, at the foot of the Himalayas he went further north to spend ten years at the feet of Tapovan Maharaj, the well known sage. While Swami Shivananda Saraswati gave him his name and his robes, it was Tapovan Maharaj who educated him in the shastras.

Much of this is, of course, hearsay. There is no official biography of Swami Chinmayananda and, unlike most of the other gurus, he offers very little information about himself or his achievements in mission handouts, books or lecture papers. When I asked him about his past, he laughed it away and said, "Never ask a Swami his past. If you knew the source of a river, would you ever drink from it?" He is modest, intelligent and accessible. He speaks with a sing - song accent and often mispronounces his words. But his passion shows. "Hinduism is the religion for our times,"

he asserts with confidence.

I met him over two long sessions at Calcutta, watched him deliver quite a few famous Gita lectures, saw some of his missions, listened to him articulate his views on life and death, freedom and spiritual bondage, religion in action and the existence of God, I saw the tired lines on his face as he smiled and bore the fawning and the sycophancy of his devotees, suffered stupid questions about the behaviour of the stock exchange, drank coffee and fruit juice from persistent hostesses at half - hour intervals. " It must be tough to be a guru," I said to him, after a particularly tiresome session. " Not tough; it's lonely," said Hinduism's most famous hostage.



Q. Why do you give so much importance to the study of the Bhagavad Gita? You seem to imply that the Gita is the only way to gain insight into the Indian mind, into the Indian sensibility. Don't you think our other religious texts are of equal importance?

A. Every religious textbook is of equal importance. But I have no authority to recommend books I have not studied myself. I studied the Gita - and it was of great help to me - and, therefore, I recommend it to everyone. Unlike the other scriptures, the methodology followed by the Gita appears to be more conducive to the modern, scientific mind and the educated classes. For they don't believe in anything. They want everything to be rationally proved, intellectually defensible. And the approach of the Gita is very rational because Krishna had to address a dynamic, young, educated, intelligent man who was a born skeptic. Arjuna did not believe or understand that Krishna was an intellectual giant. It is only in the eleventh chapter that he got a glimpse - and, thereafter, his attitude changed. But till the eleventh chapter he was absolutely rational. He did not believe a word of what Krishna said. Krishna had to make him believe it by the strength of logic. This approach appeals to people like you and I. It converted me from an atheist into a believer.....

Q. You were an atheist !

A. Of course. Any intelligent, rational man is an atheist. Until, of course he is initiated into religion. So when you write and attack religious people at times, I sympathize with you because I was also like that. I also thought that religion meant ritualism. I never knew there was a science to it, that ritualism was just a bark. The outer bark of the great tree that shelters the whole community. The bark is necessary for the tree. But the bark is not the tree. That I what I try to explain to young people like you.

Q. You are often exhorting young people to search for a new ideal that would give them motivation for self - sacrifice and dynamic action. Wherein do you think such an ideal lies?

A. Each one will have to find out such a ideal. When I say you must have a good, faithful wife don't ask me where you can get such a wife. A wife you can never get. A girl you can find and make her your wife....



Q. Are you quite sure? That I can never get a wife.....

A. *(Laughs loudly)* An ideal I can never give you. You have to find out an ideal. Like, let's say, excellence in your own profession. Or a political belief, an economic system you may like to propound, a social value. Or, simply, your own moral attitude. Uncompromisingly you will have to live upto it, under any circumstance. You must be ready to die for it, if necessary, but not yield an inch. One ideal you find -- and the best in you starts coming out. Until this ideal is there, the best never comes out. You might get superficial efficiency -- but that's not enough. It's not the best.

For example, look at Mahatma Gandhi. So long as he was M. K. Gandhi he was a third - rate man with no hope of any success. All that he achieved was that he passed barristry. And that is because nobody ever fails in barristry. *(Laughs)* Now, when he comes to India.....

Q. Yes?

A. In Africa, nothing happened. African politics, third - rate.... All that he gained was that he lost his teeth. Nothing else. When he came back to India, as luck would have it, suddenly he got an ideal to pursue. Freedom for 400 million people ! Once he got that ideal and was ready to sacrifice everything else for it, look how the man's personality grew up from week to week, month to month. He was no more a four - foot or five - foot high, big - headed man with spreading ears; a chinless man with effeminate words, stammering language ... everything useless. Out of him came a brilliance -- such that he has already carved out a permanent niche in world history. History is not complete without Gandhiji's chapter. Where did he get it all from? From his so uncompromising personality ! One ideal, and the whole thing changes.

Vivekananda must have been there in Narendra. But as Narendra he was impotent -- an ordinary, useless, university student. But once he got an ideal and started pursuing it, in five years' time you saw a magnificent unfolding of his personality. Out of Narendra came a Vivekananda.

A third - rate prince, Siddarth -- a stupid fool I would call him, because at the age of 28 the fellow did not know that there was death, that there was old age, and disease in the world ! Think of the enormous ignorance of the man ! Once he got an ideal and held onto it, out of the stupid mudplaster beamed out the eternal prince of compassion: Buddha. Without an ideal to hook yourself on, that depth of possibilities in you cannot be unearthed, dredged out. An ideal is necessary

Q. Would you believe that political ideals can also help to transform the condition of our society? Straight political ideals, without any moral or spiritual strings attached?

A. Any ideal can. Not just political ideals. Artistic ones too. The belief that I can be the greatest artist -- maybe a dancer or a painter, it doesn't matter. Even if it's a musician. The best in you then starts coming out.



Q. But this can also create a great but completely amoral artist. A great musician with a fascist vision of the world. A great writer or a great painter who is committed to his work but has a completely perverse worldview which can spark off totally negative political movements. Surely, an artistic ideal is not enough. A moral stand is important for any creative person. Otherwise, he could well be taking mankind backwards. Towards fascism, for instance.

A. It is not the ideal that puts man back. It is the interpretation. You can't say that religion is the cause for wars or the disaster in Iran. Can you say that? Islam is not the cause. It is Islam interpreted in a particular way. Similarly, Hinduism is not the cause for the harijan problem in the country now. It is the interpretation of Hinduism. Caste is a universal principle -- it is man - made and you suffer for it. It's not Hinduism. Take democracy. Government of the people, for the people, by the people. But by the time you practise it in a parliament it becomes government of the people, for the people, by the people, on the people and people suffer. So, even the best things when man - handled become the worst of things.

So, don't say that Nietzsche was the cause for Hitlerism. Na, na. What Nietzsche said was that the Aryans are the best among people - but he took only that out of context and interpreted it in his own way, and damned himself. What can we do?

Q. Many people believe, Swamiji, that there is a vast hiatus today between the world of religion and the world of everyday reality, and that this explains why more and more young people are moving away from the spiritual quest and seeking their answers in the tough, materialistic world around them where survival itself is the most challenging battle. Would you agree? Would you agree that religion is a luxury in a scenario where staying alive is so difficult, particularly in the poorer countries of the world?

A. I think you are partially blind. You see only with one eye. You see only people moving away from religion and striving to find their values in materialism. You don't see the other stream.

People dropping out of universities and colleges and professions - and seeking spirituality. I got thirty students here to train in the last batch. Americans. Young boys and girls. It is they who are now running my school there, my Hindu seminary there in California. So, don't think that it's only one - way traffic.

Q. No. It's only that I still feel that this traffic of people moving away from religion is considerably larger than the traffic you speak of -- purely in numbers.

A. I wouldn't say that. It can be because materialistic attractions draw people away from religion and self - discipline

Q. But why is this vast gap, let's say, between the search for spiritual values and the quest for a materialistic reordering of society based on principles of justice and equality?

A. First, tell me what is religion. Tell me and then you'll understand. Materialism you know. It is purely selfish. I want to be one up. My happiness is all important. My wife and my children must be happy. I don't care a hoot for others. It is utterly self - centered.....



Q. But surely religion is the same. Each and every religious person is searching for his own private nirvana, his or her own self - realization. This is an equally self - centered search.

A. What does nirvana mean?

Q. Self - realization?

A. You see, nirvana is not a piece of cake that he wants to get. It is not wealth that he to put in a bank. He is trying to expand his consciousness. He wants to embrace the whole universe. Not with his hands. Not with power. Not with money. But with understanding. It's a new dimension of consciousness he is attempting. On one hand you have bhog: sensual, materialistic living. To withdraw the mind's attention from these wonders -- this dissipation in the world of objects -- and to quieten it to turn it towards the spring of life in you is called yoga. Yoga and bhog. It is not in the physical body; it is not in the place where you are staying; nor in the clothes you are wearing. It is in the mental attitude. Coated, booted, suited with beedi in hand, you can still be a yogi. A man who has got jatadhari -- which is only vibhuti all over and nothing but a *langot* -- can be the greatest of bhogis. Isn't it? It's not the physical appearance; it's the mental attitude.

So, one is expecting or demanding or hoping for happiness from the aggrandizement of things outside. To acquire, possess, embrace, indulge and enjoy the objects outside. The other is now, in this finite world, in the realm of time, I cannot have a permanent, peaceful, happy state. These are all right as recreation but the main, permanent happiness cannot be here. Thus, man withdraws his attention from the outer world and with a steady mind, through contemplation, tries to reach the higher echelons of consciousness in himself. That is religion or spiritualism.

In fact, religion is the technology by which these spiritual ideals can be reached. So without religion, spirituality is zero. Religion means.. the....the.....



Q. Wherewithal ?

A. No. Not wherewithal. The gymnasium where the mind is trained to withdraw from all these and turn towards the high. For good health, a gymnasium is necessary. Not only that; you must have good food and discipline. You must go to the gym to develop all your muscles. Similarly, in order to evolve spiritually, it is not only sufficient that we know philosophy -- which is in the Upanishads, etc. -- but we must have a technology by which we can reach there. Purify your mind. Learn the way to turn your mind away from the outer world. find out which direction you should turn your attention to.....

Q. But this spiritualism you are talking about has often been the means to social exploitation. Many practitioners of faith have, over the centuries hoodwinked, shortchanged and manipulated the weak and the gullible. Many societies have been kept under the yoke of religion for years and

years, without hope of escape or redemption. Look how the church exploited the people. Look at how Hinduism has exploited our illiterate masses and kept them shackled over centuries. Look at the track record of most religions and you will know what I mean. Where do you find purity in such a exploitative system? Why has religion allowed itself to be used as a tool for social subjugation or political aggrandizement?

A. Have you noticed that in India religion has never been organized? In the west, on the other hand, it has always been so. This is because Christianity had to organize. They had to fight with Rome. But when religion becomes organized it becomes a power -- and power has always a tendency to be abused.

Q. The state versus the church, with both sides equally corrupt

A. State versus church, right! Until at last the church won and became as tyrannical as the state was. This is natural. Now, in India, religion was never organized. Look at you. You are a Hindu, and yet you have the right to say you don't believe ! You are allowed this freedom. But if a catholic had said this, his marriage would be annulled, his children would be in deep trouble, his body would not be accepted in the burial ground. He will be under tremendous pressure. In fact, from birth onwards, he is under the pressure of the church. Namakarana ceremony, baptism, christening -- and then, afterwards, marriage, the christening of the children and so on it goes on till you are dead and your body is buried. From birth till death, you are tied down to the church. If you don't obey they can throw you out.

Q. In Iran today, the mullahs are as tyrannical

A. That is what I am saying about all these semetical religions.

Hinduism, on the other hand, is absolutely open. You, as a Hindu, you want to go to church - go. You want to go to a temple - go. You want to do only social work - do. Why is this? Because we believe that in freedom alone can perfection can be reached. Art can grow only in freedom. Art can never grow under compulsions, under government rules. Freedom is very important. You feel like meditating - meditate. You like doing puja - do puja. There are no compulsions, no shackles restraining you. You understand?

When Hinduism has been so free for a long time and the average man is not given education nor taught what is religion, slowly the whole thing becomes tainted. This happened around the 16th century in India. Power politics came into play. Religion when mixed with politics stinks. Politics also stinks when it comes into touch with religion - and religion decays when politicians enter the fray. In India, they were separate: the king and the rajguru. Dashratha, when he had problems went to Vishwamitra. Vishwamitra clearly said he had no prejudices and no party. He was impartial. He said: "This is dharma. If you think you can do it, do it. If you can't do it, do whatever you can to serve your country, and suffer the consequences.



But slowly and slowly power became hereditary - as we are now trying to do, you know! (*Laughs*). My son, my son, my son ! By the time the third generation of kings came, things went awry. The first generation really sweated and craved out a kingdom. The second generation at least saw their fathers going out to fight. The third generation never saw their fathers going out anywhere. Subsequent generations thought it was their privilege to rule. `Some people are lucky -- I am a king by birth! So, by no fault of his, he became purely indulgent. The rajguru also became the same. The fourth great grandson of the rajguru had nothing spiritual about him. He said : " All right, *raja saab, aap raja hain*, why should you get into this mess? Whatever important papers are there, I will bring you and you sign them. You have the harem and you can drink from morning onwards. That is your privilege - why deprive yourself?"

The raja said `Perfectly right !' So the raja was soon a *de jure raja*; the *de facto raja* was the minister. Now the minister wanted to hold all the reins of power in the community. How could he do so? How can you hold power in a community? You must have a party. So the rajguru -- who was a Brahmin -- brought the brahmanical community with him as his party. He became their

patron. In those days, you couldn't be a patron by giving someone an import licence. You couldn't give money because there was no money. What was available? Only land. So land was given to all the Brahmins.

Now land is a funny thing. Any amount of money you get, you can digest it, use it. What will you do after you get three acres of land? You, your wife and three children -- how will you plough more than three acres? So you need an army of workers, who must work for you almost for nothing and bring in the profit. Only then is it profitable, isn't it?

Q. So you create your own serfdom as well as your army?.....

A. Of course. But where will you get it as long as the Vedanta is prominent in your society? Everyone knows he is from Narayana; everyone is equal. So, the scripture books became dangerous for political manoeuvring in those times. So, the Brahmin class said: 'Proscribe the scriptures.' Not just did they proscribe the books, they said: 'The non - Brahmins cannot study Sanskrit.' Just as it is happening today. Ministers don't want anybody to study in English schools - while their own sons must go to English schools! (*Giggles*) You see! It's repetition. Man is not intelligent enough to think up a new mischief! (*Laughs*) He repeats his old mischiefs.

So, Sanskrit was removed. They were told: 'You are not to read the scriptures; we will tell you everything.' And what they told them was Rama Krishna stories. Five hundred years of this! Today, the brahmin doesn't even know the scriptures! For, why should he study! All the others accept that he is a brahmin. So why should he worry? So you can blame neither the brahmin today, nor the a - brahmin. Neither of them know the scriptures! They must be retaught. And that is what we have been trying to do for the last 20 - 30 years. Now I think the average, intelligent, educated man knows something of his scriptures. At least he knows the spelling of Upanishads. Before that, they had not even heard of it!



Q. But the average, intelligent Indian is also a prey to a lot of hocus pocus being peddled around in the name of religion?

A. Look. After all, if I believe my thumb is God, it does not matter. The mind returns to it and the individual gets his consolation. Why do we have all these recreations like the cinema, for instance? Are they not meant to make human society happy? Why not religion -- if it can make some people happy, give them some comfort?

Q. What about the current Hindu pantheon of Gurus and Godmen who run their private industries, not just in this land but also overseas? What do you, as a scholar of Hinduism and one of the most distinguished teachers, think of this strange, esoteric bunch of faith - peddlers? I am referring to some of the well known names like Satya Sai Baba, Balyogeshwar, Rajneesh, Mahesh Yogi, Ananda Murthi -- or even Krishnamurthy. I know I am clubbing completely different kinds of people together. But what I am trying to ask you is whether you think Hinduism deserves such a vast variety of masters who often suggest completely different routes to salvation. In fact, the routes are quite often contradictory.

A. Have you watched the followers? They are all voluntary, free. No one forces them. They follow these masters because they find some consolation. So, at different levels, all of them are valid. I know that there are too many teachers, too many masters, too many gurus in this country. But I would wish there were more.

Q. Sure. As long as they are teachers - not quack healers or exploiters of the innocent.

A. Don't think that all teachers will teach only at the B.Sc level. Or that the M.Sc level teacher can teach everybody. There are students who must be taught only alphabets, only addition and subtraction. Isn't this true? In education, there are various levels and various teachers. If the M.Sc teacher is given an elementary class to teach he will become confused, go screaming mad. The elementary teacher cannot, similarly, take M.Sc classes. So, at different levels, different teachers, different teachers are valid. They don't know beyond their levels; just as their students cannot understand beyond the levels at which they speak.

Q. But would you like teachers of religion to also educate their students at whichever level they may be -- with miracles, faith cures, materializing laddoos and Seiko watches out of nothing; or by teaching them that salvation and self - realisation lies exactly six inches below the navel? Do you think magic and group sex have anything to do with an understanding of religion?

A) It does not matter whether I believe in these things or not.....



Q. Do you think these are valid ways of learning and Self - discovery?

A. Are they not? Look at them. Go there one morning or evening and see the crowds. Don't look at the Sai Baba; Look at the people. See what an amount of consolation and comfort they are getting. Why the hell should I take it away from them? When you - the writer, the politician, the socialist, no one is giving them any comfort. This one single man moving about there, with everybody prostrating before him, feeling so very happy about it. If one can give by mere darshan so much of comfort, why do you want to take it away from them? Let them have it. Just as a few whiskeys inside him make him feel good. *Maja maja hai !* We know that drinking is not a *maja*; but the drunkard thinks that it is great fun. Rock and Roll is a head splitting noise to a sensitive musician but, then, there are youngsters who enjoy it thoroughly. Why do you grudge them their enjoyment?

Q. But that means it is a lower level of consciousness.....

A. Yes, I admit it. It is a lower level of consciousness and, therefore, they can only appreciate it at that lower level. When they come higher, they will drop it themselves. There are many who have dropped Sai Baba. they went there first. It was an introduction for them; they were stunned by what the man could do. My intellect cannot explain it. It is scientifically impossible to explain. And when you ask him, he doesn't say it is all because of his glory. He says, you can also get this power. Turn towards him and sing the song. The man sincerely does it for sometime and then drops him because he starts finding higher levels of consciousness. Then he wants to study the Gita. So he comes to me. He starts reading the Gita. And then wants to go to the Upanishads. I teach him. then he wants to go to the original. To the Sanskrit. So they go to Banaras. I know thousands who have thus streamed out -- from the lower to the higher and higher. Those who are sincerely striving to quieten the mind and experience the world. I am not saying everyone -- for everyone is not a Mozart or an Einstein. There are many science students; but there's only one Einstein.

Q. Would you believe, like some Godmen do, that liberating the libido is the only way for man to transcend his environment and achieve spiritual freedom?

A. Before answering this question, I would like to know, what is this word 'godman'. everybody uses it; it's become a journalistic lingo.

Q. Well, let me try and explain. There are religious teachers: We call them gurus. Then, there are those who think they are more than teachers: we call them Godmen. I confess the term is a bit tongue in cheek. But then, what can you do when an acharya graduates into a Bhagwan or a materialiser starts with fistfuls of vibhuti and then begins to bring out latest model quartz watches? The gurus and the Bhagwans don't like being clubbed together. What can I do?

A. But what is God? (*Laughs*) Unless you know what is God how can you call anyone God-man or man - god? Man I know. But what is God?



Q. Bhagwan?

A. Bhagwan. Does it really mean God? A Bhagwan has certain qualities: he is a man who is capable of commanding nature, who can attract a large number of people, who can cure diseases, who can do something ordinary people can't. It is someone who has that mental power to forecast things correctly, to read other people's minds. These qualities were in Krishna and, therefore, we called him Bhagwan. And since Krishna is considered an avatar in this country, by association of ideas, the word can come to mean God. I have no objection. Because, according to Vedanta,

even you, who do not know, you are nothing but a Bhagwan.

I am a man. I can prove to you right now! But because too many people are sitting here, it will not be decent. But I don't know whether I am a God man. (laughs).

Q. To get back to my question now, do you think liberating the libido has anything to do with spiritual self realization?

A. What is the libido? According to Vedanta shastra, it is the pressure of the past on you. Habit. The tendency to repeat ad nauseum one's past actions - we call it vasanas. Vasana means fragrance - the fragrance of what we have done and thought of. Whatever we do - karma - and whatever we think of, they all leave impressions on us, they pressurize us to repeat ourselves. For five years, you drink a cup of coffee at three in the evening. After that, you don't need a wristwatch. Whatever you may be doing at that time, you will crave for that cup of coffee. That is the pressure of the past. It takes away your freedom to think anything original. The average man is, therefore, only a repetitive bird, repeating like a *tota*, like a parrot.

Unless these past pressures are eliminated, we cannot rethink and review the world we are seeing around us. We see now through our own mind coloured by the past. So to recognize the world as it is and to re-estimate one's own place in the scheme of things, first cleanse your mind. All the scriptures in the world tell you this. When the mind is freed from the past, it is free to fly into newer climes and make new discoveries. Only then does the mind become meditation - worthy -- just as a plane must be air - worthy, a boat must be ocean - worthy, a car road - worthy.

Some of the greatest of men have been notoriously immoral in their activities. This is the dichotomy in their personality. So spirituality is insisting upon self unfoldment. Lift yourself by yourself. So says the Gita. For it gives you the logic behind every term used...

Q. So you believe in logic?

A. O yes ! The average man is intellectual. But the truth lies beyond the intellect. With the intellect we have to go beyond the intellect. Isn't it? So I must first convince the intellect that it is logical, only then will I consider the possibility that there is something beyond. Then there is a method by which from the intellect you can take off -- it's called contemplation. So, first, the intellect has to be satisfied. Only then can we know freedom.



Q. What is this freedom you speak of?

A. At this moment, what is your freedom? Your freedom is to go on a marked line. If at early morning bed tea is not there, you are most miserable. If at the next moment your wife doesn't smile the exact amount, you are miserable. If she smiles too much, you are worried. Why is she grinning at me? And if it is less, then she is not happy. How dangerously balanced are our joys ! Thereafter, comes breakfast. I must have the things I like. Nothing else. If it's anything else, life instantly becomes a misery. When I go to office, everybody must smile at me. Everything you do, from morning till evening, you are repeating yourself. You have no freedom at all. I can make you angry in no time. I will confuse your papers on your table, change them around, and then look through the window: I will see you dancing around in anger ! (*Laughs loudly*)

Thus, we give our strings to the world outside to pull and make us dance as it wishes. We have no freedom. The outer world dictates to us all the time. And the mind and intellect persecutes us. I am a poor slave, being kicked from within by my own equipment and from without by the world around me. What freedom are you talking about? Only the man who is detached can be free. he is like the wind.

Q. How does a man detach himself from the world around him?

A. O Narayana! That is the whole yoga, including rituals ! (*Giggles*) The rituals which you rejected, including those as well. All this is necessary in order to learn the art of withdrawing yourself. Stand apart as a witness to everything. Even anger. They are in me: I am not in them.

You must feel this. Just as an ocean does. How do you think an ocean will introduce itself? These what you see as waves are in me, but I am not in them. Each wave conceiving itself as a separate entity has a birth date; it grows, reaches its highest peak, becomes vain, then it starts dipping. 'O Lord, what have I done that this should happen to me!'. Until, at last, the small waves start eating it up. 'Millions of waves have I eaten up myself -- and now these waves are eating me up!' the downcast wave starts screaming. Like this, millions of waves are always screaming. It is these stupid waves that make the roar of the seas. Now the ocean says: 'The waves are in me, yes. Without me, there are no waves. But the sorrows and joys of the waves are not mine.' For why should the ocean be happy when a solitary wave is rising? Or why should it cry when a wave is dying?

In this way, you will have to detach yourself. The body, the mind and the intellect are in you -- but you are not in them. You are not a shareholder in their joys and sorrows. Only then can you become a man, free from the equipments of life. This is called freedom. Freedom for man. Mukti.

Q. But can a society like ours progress in materialistic terms and retain this spiritual freedom?

A. Material development is not possible without this inner development. Character is important. Why is that the Chinese and the Japanese are so good? Why are Americans good at materialism? Isn't it because they have materialistic ethics, commercial ethics. We have nothing. I am not talking of spirituality. We don't even have commercial ethics. Anything we send out from India if it has a market, never carries on for too long. They tell you soon to stop it. For the quality falls after a few consignments. All we want is to get rich quick because you know that you are becoming rich not because of your quality but because of an accident, and you want to take advantage of it.

Q. But you are now talking in materialistic terms yourself. The ideal of progress is totally western. We never had progress on an altar in our country. In fact, this western concept of progress should strike us as illusory, Maya. Why are you, a Swami, impressed by such norms of progress? Isn't this kind of progress alien to our culture?

A. No. Lakshmi is worshipped in India. But we never worship Lakshmi without Narayana. What we want now is so called materialistic civilization that is Narayana should be ignored and we should wink at Lakshmi. Be careful. Lakshmi without Narayana, wealth without character is suicidal. A young man suddenly gets money; he will damn himself. A man of character, if he has got wealth, will use it wisely.



Q. Can modern science and religion coexist intelligently -- without constantly being at war? Must they walk separate routes?

A. You are talking in the language of the 19th Century. A century back, this question was valid. It no longer is. Physics and metaphysics have merged today (*Laughs*).

Q. Are you referring to the attempts of people like Fritjof Capra to bring Western physics and Eastern mysticism on a common platform? Are you referring to books like *The Tao of Physics* or *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*?

A., Yes, yes, yes. Beautiful books. Like the one about the repair of motorcycles.

Q. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*?

A. A i Yea ! Magnificent Book ! Like our vedic textbooks. We have always had materialistic sciences studied together with religious sciences. This integration was always there in our scriptures. Ayurveda -- the medicinal science -- is a part of our Vedas. It is only through the materialistic sciences that we can reach out to the higher. We have been sent here to exhaustively chew the world around us -- to chew it and spit it out with no regrets. If a man runs after women and wine, don't blame him. Let him do it intelligently. There's nothing wrong in that.

Q. But what is life and how can one learn to face death with greater confidence?

A. With Knowledge. Even today, in Africa, they are afraid of a thousand things which we were

afraid of many years ago. Knowledge is the answer to all fears, even of death. Today you are afraid of death because you don't know what it is. Fear arises out of ignorance. You are afraid of going into a dark room. Why? You don't know. Once you know there is nothing there, you are not afraid. Death is a fear because you are not given enough time to think about it.

Q. And you don't know what lies beyond it....

A. That's right. Similarly, many people are afraid of lightning. Every lightning, they think, has their name on it. Once you understand that the lightning that you see can never strike you -- that it has already struck somewhere else - you will never be afraid. The lightning that gets you, you will never see. Knowing this, you will, thereafter, always enjoy the fireworks in the sky -- for lightning is one of the most beautiful sights you can ever see.



Q. So freedom from fear is.....

A. Freedom from everything. It is the first step towards true knowledge. Only when you are ignorant, you are afraid.

Q. Is there life after death?

A. What is death? Can you tell me what is on the other side? (*Laughs*) Death is the empty body you leave behind when you leave your body and go away. So death is a state of the body and not you. (*Claps with glee*) Who is you? Who is in this body?

Who is now experiencing everything through the body?

Q. The Self?

A. No. The mind and the intellect, the inner equipment operates through the body. Right? I hear through my ears. I see through my eyes. I experience through my body, through my senses. I am the experiencer who experiences the outer world through this body. Just as I, in my business house, go to work everyday and through my business equipment -- the phones, computers, telex -- I contact the outer world and do my business. When I gather all my equipment and move away from premises A to a better site B, I am born again in shop B. On the front of the shop A, I will write 'moved to three blocks down, left' in American parlance. For I am there three blocks down. In the same way, when you move out of this body with everything that you have -- all your equipment, your faculties -- the condition of the body is called death.

Every Body must die but nobody can die. This life of yours is just one incident in your eternal existence. You will appear again in another body, in fresh pastures, with a new body, with a new wife, with new children, new profession. (*Laughs*). *Maja hai marne mein.* (it is fun to die). Once you realise this, you will think of death as a great adventure. You will be anxious to die. *Yeh to hum dekh liya; phir naya jagah dekhega* (I have seen this place; now I have to see a new place). The only things that hold you back are your attachments. The black money; the women in your life; the fixtures.

Play. Play with everything. With money, with everything in the world, knowing that you are here only temporarily. As a sojourner, not as a native of the place. Poet, writer, translator of the Upanishads -- these are only parts of your present guise. Next time you will perhaps be a swami. Who knows?

Q. You have called schizophrenia 'Arjuna disease' in one of your Gita talks. But it is no longer a human affliction. people, cultures, nations are suffering this breakup of personality. How can mankind cure this problem and find its true identity?

A. By reading the Gita. Arjuna conquered it by listening to Krishna. In the last chapter, he says: 'I shall fight; did I say I won't? I don't remember having said I won't.' He conquered his indecision.

Q. But wasn't his indecision supremely moral? When a man refuses to fight, surely that is a moral decision in our time?

A. Such indecision is moral, true. But it can produce only disaster for the decision - maker and for the society. I won't say it's immoral but that which brings unhappiness to you and to the society is

called evil. That which brings happiness to every one is a noble, virtuous act.

Q. But the same act, at different points of history, can have totally different connotations. It can be differently interpreted. Galileo was persecuted in his time. Today, he would be a hero, if he were to make the same kind of discoveries. Scientists, messiahs, poets and philosophers have been killed at some points of history and worshipped at others for saying almost the same things. How can you judge an act independent of its time frame?



A. Your attention is on the act. I am asking you to attend on the individual. Let's take Rama walking away from the palace. When he walked away, he must have known that his father was very sensitive and might even die because of his decision to go away. The public said: 'Remain Rama ! Rama zindabad ! Bharat murdabad !'. As the modern politician, Rama could have said: 'The janata wants me: so I will stay.' But he said instead: 'I must keep my father's promise. Even though it's my stepmother. It's unjust I know, but it is a word given.' So he walked out.

The readiness to sacrifice the comfort and security of the present, to live up to the ideals you have set for yourself is noble. That is a noble act. In Hinduism, the greatness of you lies in not what you possess but what you did with what you possessed. In the modern materialistic world, what you possess is the criterion of your glory. How you got it nobody questions. What you do with it. Nobody questions. In India, we are not concerned with what you have. It is what you did with what you had. This is in our vocabulary. In North India, a Swami is still called Maharaj. What is his job? Bhiksha. A swami is a beggar but still he is called a Maharaj. Not just a Raja. A Maharaja. See how wonderful is our faith.

Q. But it is true in all faiths. When Mother Teresa gives up the securities of her cloistered existence and chooses to come out and work with the poor and the dying, surely she is demonstrating religion in action. Most of us would have no interest in Mother Teresa, the catholic nun; but everyone of us deeply respects Mother Teresa, the social worker. The only religion of our time that has any respectability is religion in action. Not Hinduism, nor Christianity, Buddhism or Islam. Theologians can go to hell, as far as the common man is concerned. We need those who actually work for social causes. For Love. Isn't this as it should be?

A. Perfect. But also remember that without Mother Teresa the nun you would never had a Mother Teresa the social worker. It is religion that is behind everything she does. So you cannot discount that. She is what she is because of her past.

Q. What is the future going to be like for man?

A. The future depends on the past modified by the present. Never ask anyone about the future. Not even an astrologer. The future is not in the sun, moon and the stars; it is not in the planets. The present is a product of the past; the future is past modified in the present. If you don't modify the past, you will continue it forever. Your future will be nothing other than the past.



Q. A last question. Do you believe in the existence of God or a supreme power?

A. Honestly speaking, if you want me to speak in an autobiographical mood, I will say I believe in God. But this question is illogical because my belief or disbelief is not going to help you or the world. You are inquisitive that's why you ask. It is my belief and you can't ask me why I believe. In belief there is no logic. I believe, full stop.

Recently, a youngster came to my ashram. He said: 'Swamiji, yesterday I listened to your talk. Can I talk to you in private?'. So I asked everybody to go out. The youngster then said: 'Swamiji, I don't believe in God.' When he said this, I asked him: Son, what God is this you are talking about? Which God are you not believing in? The fellow said: 'Swamiji, this rascal God, who is the cause of all this confusion in the world, this poverty, death, infant mortality, these wars and so much of human suffering. I don't believe in such a God.' I said: Son, in this room at this moment there are two non believers. I also don't believe in such a God'. The fellow was flabbergasted. He said: 'Then what God do you believe in?' I said: Now that's a

creative question. That I'll answer. So I clapped my hands and called everyone in -- for there was nothing private about it anymore.

Yes, you have also asked me a creative question. My answer is simple: I believe in my God. Read your own translations of the Upanishads -- read my introduction to them and you will know what that God is.