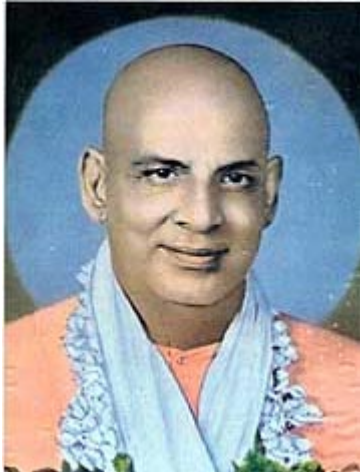


A CALL TO LIBERATION

By

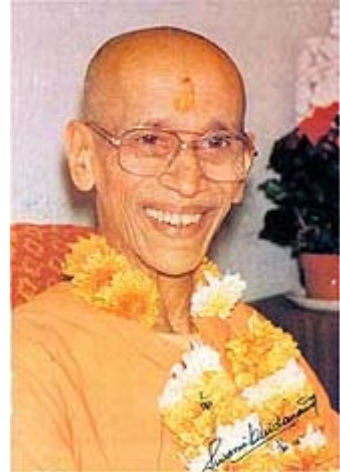
SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA



**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**



Sri Swami Chidananda

“...it is a tradition of centuries, of millenia—someone being prepared to do anything, give anything, pay any price for the attainment of the Highest.”

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In each successive generation for innumerable centuries the saints and sages of India have issued forth the call: “*uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* (Arise, awake, having reached the wise become enlightened).” In the twentieth century this timeless call was also echoed by His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda, the saintly founder of the Divine Life Society, and has been continued by the revered Swami Chidananda who succeeded him in 1963 as president of the Society.

This powerful book, like its predecessor *Ponder These Truths*, has been compiled from Swamiji's inspiring early morning meditation talks given in the Samadhi Hall of Holy Master Swami Sivanandaji's sacred Samadhi Shrine in Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. Seekers throughout the world will find within a universal message and a compelling call.

Sanskrit language words have been put in *italics*. Normally, their meaning can be understood by the context or their English equivalent which follows within commas or parenthesis. Otherwise, the meaning can be understood by referring to the Glossary.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

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Introduction

1. RESPOND TO THE ETERNAL CALL

Worshipful homage to the supreme, eternal, all-pervading Divine Reality, the beginningless and endless, the infinite and eternal Spirit Divine that is the source, substratum, support and ultimate fulfilment of all existence, even as the ocean is the source, support and ultimate fulfilment of countless millions and billions of waves upon its surface—ever remaining the mighty, unfathomable, immeasurable ocean, never perturbed by the infinite, numberless waves disturbing its surface!

Even so, the one great Reality, the Cosmic Being, the source and origin of countless millions of universes, ever remains the one, non-dual existence, the great silence, the great peace, the transcendental Reality, present and hidden as the subtlest of the subtle, beyond the senses and which the mind and intellect cannot comprehend. That Reality is the centre of your being. That Reality is your essential, eternal identity, your *nija svarupa*.

May that Reality shine forth in your consciousness as the true “I AM” beyond the little “I” that dominates our lives, that pushes us, pulls us, that twists and turns us and shoves us up and down. This little “I”, you are not.

Three words that were proclaimed by the illumined and liberated sages and seers of the Vedic era must ever pervade your consciousness, dwell in your heart, direct your intellect and guide your entire life: *uttishthata jagrata nibodhata*—Arise, awake and attain illumination. The whole of the process of your being and doing, thinking and acting, should be this process of arising, being awake and alert, and attaining illumination. Then alone we are living.

That is life—a steady onward and upward ascent towards Divine-consciousness, Reality-awareness, Self-experience, Knowledge. There is nothing higher than that, greater than that. It is the culminating pinnacle achievement of all existence. Call it *brahma-jnana*, call it Christ-consciousness, call it *satori*, call it the Supreme Tao, call it *nirvana*. It is the one, supreme, non-dual experience that liberates you forever from your bondage to yourself. It liberates you forever from this dream of being bound to a non-existent conglomeration of names and forms—this universal appearance.

The queen Madalasa rocked the cradles of her infant princes and sang this lullaby: “You are all-pure, enlightened and immaculate. Give up this sleep of delusion which makes you give value to that which has no value, to endow it with a sense of reality through ignorance. This is a great blunder. This is the darkness of the slumber of non-awareness.”

That is the call you have to respond to. That is the call of the Upanishads. Give up this deep sleep of delusion. You are the all-full. You ever shine as a centre of radiant and dynamic Divine-consciousness within your apparent physical-mental personality. Awaken to your Divinity. Affirm your Divinity. Assert your Divinity, and make life an expression of your Divinity.

This is the one and the only teaching. This is the one and the only message. Awake, answer this call. Affirm your Divinity. Express your Divinity. Make your life a dynamic expression of what you are by giving up the dream and sleep of thinking of yourself to be what you are not. That is the one great need if right here and now, in the midst of this vale of tears, in the midst of the ever-changing names and forms of this temporary universe, you are to be rooted in the strength of your true nature.

Reality never changes. You are what you are. Be what you are and make your life an expression of what you are, namely Divinity. Then life becomes true life, authentic life, real life.

May responding to this call be your one great task, great privilege. May this be your joyful duty. Blossom like a lotus in the midst of the water and mud of this *samsara*. Shine like a diamond amidst pebbles. Be wakeful amongst the slumbering, alert amongst the heedless, active amongst the lethargic, and thus transcend appearances. Become rooted in Reality and celebrate your life as a glorious overcoming, victory and attainment!

2. UNTIL THE VERY LAST BREATH

To enter into the spiritual life is a rare blessedness; it is a great good. To take it seriously and engage in active spiritual *sadhana* is a second blessedness and a still greater good. But, to persevere in the spiritual life, to be ever progressive and ceaseless in one's spiritual life, is the greatest good, the crowning blessedness.

One makes up one's mind: "Come what may, until the very last breath persists in this body, I shall not swerve from the path of *sadhana*. Until the very last breath is in the body I shall persevere, I shall dedicate myself to the divine life. I shall be a *yogi*; I shall ever be intent upon attaining the Goal. I shall never slacken my efforts, much less cease my endeavour.

"Till the very last breath I shall be a *jijnasu*, a *sadhaka*. Come what may I shall be a *yogi* till the very last. Anything else may be uncertain, but this is certain. All else may be undecided, but this is decided once and for all. I am determined that the spiritual life will be my life, the spiritual goal will be my goal. And God will be the central fact in my life. I shall live my life for God and His attainment."

Thus, if one gladly takes upon oneself, after serious deliberation and firm conviction, this "do or die" approach and attitude to life, that would indeed be the crowning glory of one's *sadhana* life. This is the greatest good; it is the supreme blessedness. And it is to such a *sadhaka* that success comes, success is sure, fulfilment awaits.

Here there is no doubt or vagueness. The Cosmic Being gives Itself to one who has totally given oneself to the Cosmic Being, to one who is prepared to live or die for That. This is for sure. One who has left everything and asks only for That, That gives Itself fully and totally to such a one. This is the truth.

INTRODUCTION

Therefore, rejoice greatly that this choice is before you. Rejoice greatly that this opportunity beckons you. Rejoice greatly that the dispensation of the Divine is that to each seeking soul belongs that for which its life is offered and lived until the last. “Those that give themselves unto Me, to them I give Myself.” This is the declaration.

Therefore, this is the life, this is the time, this is the great opportunity. Let each day be lived with the awareness of this great good fortune, with the awareness of this supreme blessedness, of this golden opportunity. Then we shall have nothing to regret. Rather, we shall have all reason to rejoice.

There is a concept in the West which is applicable to the field of heroics: “Success and victory is to those who dare.” Again: “A coward dies a thousand times, a brave man but once.” And that one death comes in triumph, in success and in victory. It is the crowning glory, and it is assured for those who dare. More than in any other field of human endeavour, such daring and dedication, such defying of death itself is called for in the life spiritual.

May the grace of God and Gurudev make you of that stuff. Coming into contact with the philosopher’s stone, iron no longer remains as iron; it becomes pure gold. Not without meaning has the Cosmic Being brought you into living contact with the sublime, life-transforming, spiritual wisdom teachings of blessed and beloved Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji. Having thus come into contact, be heroes in this strife. Dare to live the spiritual life unto the last and crown yourself with the supreme blessedness of success, victory and a life triumphant!

Part One: The Spiritual Preceptor and the Disciple

A. THE ESSENCE OF THE GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

Discipleship is a golden key to blessedness if the disciple enables the *guru* to live and manifest through his personality and life. The light of the *guru* should shine through the disciple every moment of his living, wakeful life. Then, indeed, every moment the disciple will move forward and benefit himself. He will be the gainer and progress towards the great Goal. This is the truth about true discipleship—that one makes oneself a centre in and through which the *guru* manifests and shines.

3. THE HEART OF THE GURU

We are now approaching the great annual day of worship of those who bring light to dispel the darkness of spiritual ignorance in our interior, who take us from unrealities to the Reality, who enable us to go beyond the ever-recurring, revolving wheel of birth and death into that realm of everlasting, rebirthless life. The celebration of Guru Purnima pays homage to those beings, those great ones, who having reached that abode, having liberated themselves forever, have turned back and engaged themselves in illumining others, in liberating others.

What is in the heart of these great teachers? Why do they act and engage themselves in ceaseless work when they have no motivation for acting, having fulfilled all that has to be fulfilled? They have done everything that has to be done, attained everything that has to be attained. They have no more wishes, no more desires, no more wants, no more intentions, no more *sankalpas*.

They thus revel in a state of supreme satisfaction, contentment, for they know that there is nothing more for them to do. Their hearts are full; they desire nothing. And so, if the Lord were to place before them the bounty of all His countless millions of universes and say, “Take this,” they will reply: “Keep them, for You have blessed me in a far greater manner. You have taken away from me the shackles of desire. You have graced me with the supreme gift of perfect desirelessness, perfect contentment, perfect fulfilment. What greater blessing can you offer me, O Lord?”

What could be the motivation for such beings to continue to act when there is no longer any need to act—when they have attained everything and are in a state of supreme plenitude and peace? What does the Indian spiritual genius have to say about the heart of these great ones? It says that if at all one could attribute to them any desire—if you want an explanation from your point of view—then you can say that they do have one thought, one intention, one desire, and that is that all sincere seeking souls who are in quest of the Goal Supreme may attain that goal, that they may be in the same state in which they are.

With that one urge from within—a spontaneous urge not arising out of mind, intellect, thought, feeling, emotion or sentiment, because they are established in a state totally beyond,

transcending, all these—there is a spontaneous intention of supreme love and goodwill that all may be established in the great state that they have attained by the grace of the Supreme. That is the only intention with which they act.

And, therefore, when that is the one urge that moves them to act, the least that we can do is to strive to the best of our ability to become like them, to approximate the ideal that they have placed before us by their own ideal life—to respond to their call, to become liberated here and now in this very life, not in the distant future, not in some post-mortem life, but now, here, so that even while in this body we are yet a liberated being, a *jivanmukta*.

That indeed would be the highest Guru Purnima worship, the highest expression of devotion to the *guru*. Therefore, striving with all earnestness, all sincerity, ceaselessly try to be like them, aspire to be like them and pray to them: “By my own effort and intention, this will never be possible, because of all my weaknesses, drawbacks and imperfections. May you, therefore, out of your infinite grace, complete it, make it full and whole.”

And, they are ready to do it. The great spiritual master, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, said: “Even if you do one sixteenth of whatever *sadhana* has been done through this body of mine that will be more than enough. You will attain perfection. You will become a liberated being. You will go beyond all sorrow. You will be established in a state of joy and bliss.”

Therefore, let us all be in a state of oneness, let us all join together and collectively make our life a sincere, earnest and grateful response to this great and glorious urge that makes these perfect beings wish to bestow the same perfection upon others, the urge that makes them continue to engage themselves in this great work of awakening the human world into a state of higher awareness of their divine destiny.

Be it so! Let this be your highest worship, highest devotion. Then, verily, Guru Purnima will not merely be a religious day upon the outer secular earth plane of your life, but it will be a great spiritual landmark, a spiritual turning point in your interior unto *satchidananda*-consciousness. That is what life ought to be, and by the grace of God and the loving benedictions of Gurudev, may it be so! God bless you!

4. GURU-BHAKTI

God is an unknown entity. God is an unseen entity. However, with absolutely irrefutable logic, rational argument and reason, Vedanta establishes the fact of God. And through analysis we can infer, “Yes, there must be a God; it stands to reason. It is irrational to suppose that there cannot be such a thing as God. There must be.” And scriptures also tell us that He is a Being who is sacred, who is holy, all-pure, noble and sublime. But, nevertheless, God is still for us only a concept of the mind. We have not seen God. We have not touched, nor tasted, nor smelt Him. We’ve only heard about Him. We can only infer Him. We can only imagine Him.

But then, if we are able to see in a human individual manifestations of holiness, of sanctity, of purity, of sublimity, of nobility, of goodness, of loftiness of conduct, character, nature, sentiment, thought, feeling and action, if we see something out of the ordinary—something extraordinary, something special, a manifestation of those qualities that we have been taught to associate only with God—then we say: “If such a human being can exist, God must exist. Otherwise, from whence do these qualities come which we do not normally see in anyone?” When we see this divinity, this holiness, this sanctity, we begin to realise: “Yes, God I have not seen, but godliness I have seen. All the qualities attributed to God by the scriptures, by saints and sages, in all religious contexts—those I see in an unusual measure, in an extraordinary measure, in this being. Because I have seen this being and this being is known to me, I am assured that God is. I know there must be a God.” And in the Vedic tradition the *guru* is such a being. The *guru* becomes for us *pratyaksha devata*, visible God. God reveals Himself through the *guru*.

The *guru* thus becomes the linking factor, a channel for putting the wandering, lost *jivatma*, the individual Soul, back into contact with its source, God, the Universal Soul. And just as the *guru* is a channel for the *jivatma* to re-link itself with the *paramatma*, even so, if we can create a channel between ourselves and our *guru*, then that channel will become the effecting means of receiving from the *guru guru-kripa*, all that the *guru* is—the knowledge of the *guru*, the sanctity of the *guru*, the purity of the *guru*, the spirituality of the *guru*.

And that channel is called *guru-bhakti*. That is why the significant verse in the Svetasvatara Upanishad: “*yasya deve para bhaktih yatha deve tatha gurau, tasyaite kathita hyarthah prakasante mahatmanah*—If you have supreme devotion to God and the same kind of devotion to your *guru*, then to you, the essence, the subtle truths of the scriptures become revealed.” Thus it is that through *guru-bhakti* the *sadhaka*, the seeker, the disciple, creates an effective link, a connection, a channel which enables the *guru* to share with the disciple what the *guru* has been endowed with from God.

So, we have to provide a way for the *guru* to give what he wishes to give. And that is through *guru-bhakti*, devotion, where there is no place for the ego. If the thought comes, “I have got great *guru-bhakti*,” then finished, that *bhakti* becomes cancelled, it is nullified. You yourself must become the very embodiment of that love, that devotion. There should be no awareness of some being, some person having that quality of devotion. Then it becomes a subtle spiritual ego. The very purpose of the existence of the *guru* is to remove the separatist I-consciousness, the consciousness of being a separate being or entity, and if *guru-bhakti* becomes a means of boosting and sustaining that *abhimana* (ego), *ahamkara* (egoism), then it loses its purpose and becomes self-defeating.

Thus true *guru-bhakti* is egoless, *nirabhimana* (without ego), *vinamra* (humble). Sabari was *bhaktisvarupa*. She had great *bhakti* for Rama, but she was not conscious that she was a great devotee of Rama. Neither was Hanuman conscious that he was a great *bhakta* of Rama. It was his very nature. He was an embodiment of devotion for Rama. The *gopis* of Vrindavan did not know that they were great devotees of Krishna. They said: “All we know is that He is the one object to be adored. We don’t know anything else. We cannot do anything but adore Him. We are that adoration. It is our very self. We are not different from that. Take it away from us and we will die, we will cease to exist.” They were filled with that love, not with egoistical awareness of that love.

The greater the growth of devotion and the greater the reverence for the *guru*, the greater is the inflow of the *guru*'s grace. The greater the desire to carry out the ideals and principles of the *guru* in life and the greater the keen eagerness and firm determination to carry out the instructions of the *guru* faithfully, meticulously, day after day, in one's daily activities and life, the greater is the inflow of the *guru*'s grace. Gurudev was never tired of again and again reiterating: "Obedience is better than reverence." And Vivekananda came down heavily upon mere sentiment and emotion. He said that this sentiment has ruined us. We have become backboneless; we lack a sense of purpose.

And what have the Upanishads put before us to illustrate true devotion? One disciple came to his *guru* as a young boy and the *guru* told him that it was his duty to collect firewood daily for the *havan*. He went on doing it without questioning. He was not allowed to cut green trees; and so the whole day, with great difficulty, he searched for and cut dry wood, put it on his head and returned only in the evening. The *guru* never gave him any spiritual instructions or teachings. Years went by. The disciple forgot time, until one day he realised he had become old, his hair and beard had become silver-white. Suddenly he burst into tears: "What is my fate? My whole life has passed away and the *guru* has not yet given me *brahma-jnana*." He had become old. He had served his *guru* without question ever since he was a young boy. That was his devotion.

Another disciple was asked to take the *guru*'s cattle to pasture. He had to be with the cattle all day. The *guru* did not ask his wife to prepare any lunch for him, and he did not have permission to drink milk from the cows. So the whole day he went hungry, only quenching his thirst with water. Days, months, years passed this way.

And one disciple was asked to irrigate the *guru*'s fields. He had to let the water into the fields and make sure that it did not leak out. After working the whole day, one evening he discovered a leak in one of the earthen walls. He tried to plug it with some clay. It kept leaking. He tried all methods to repair it, and finally not knowing what else to do, he decided to plug it with his own body. So he lay down, curled himself into a ball and stopped the leak. After nightfall, when he had not returned, the *guru* became anxious and so with several of his disciples went searching for him. Finally they found him in his curled up position stopping the leak.

That was the type of *guru-bhakti* they had. It was not mere sentiment. It was true *guru-bhakti*. It had iron behind it. It had immense strength behind it. It had determination, *sattvic* determination, behind it. These are a few towering examples of *guru-bhakti* in our scriptures. There are many others. They come from all traditions. They are all *sanketa matra* (indicators) of the stuff that *guru-bhakti* is made of. It is divine power, it is divine force, not merely silly human sentiment, not merely emotion.

When such *guru-bhakti* is there towards the *guru*, such obedience, such great desire to carry out his behest, biddings and teachings, then illumination automatically descends from the *guru* to the disciple. The illumination in which the *guru* is established comes like a spark flying from one end of an exposed wire to another. For when the weeping old disciple was taken by the *guru*'s wife to the *guru* and explained why he was weeping, the *guru* replied: "What! What do you mean, you have no illumination!" Immediately, the disciple became illumined. Why? Because of his total self-effacement, total dedication, his unquestioning carrying out of the behest of the *guru*, because

of the exemplary type of devotion that filled his heart: “I have come to a *guru*. I must serve him. This is my greatest good fortune.”

Thus the most effective way of deriving maximum benefit from the *guru* is to create a channel of lofty, sublime devotion to the *guru*, heroic *guru-bhakti*. And it is that heroic *guru-bhakti* where there is the greatest love and reverence combined with the highest obedience, the highest desire to please the *guru* by carrying out his instructions, that becomes the great channel for the inflow of *guru-kripa*. In that way, spiritual vision dawns and you “see” Reality, you “behold” Reality.

That is the tradition. That is the true inner dynamics of the *guru sishya* relationship through which the disciple is able to benefit in a maximum measure from the *guru*. Thus we have known from our scriptures, from our ancient *bhaktas*, from the narratives of ancient disciples, their relationship to their *gurus*. Thus we have learnt this great secret. May we all be benefited.

May the grace of all the *brahma-vidya-gurus*, from ancient times up to the present, be upon you. May you ponder deeply, reflect deeply, upon what an ideal disciple should be, what constitutes real discipleship, and become benefited thereby.

5. GURU SISHYA YOGA

It is through developing proximity to Reality and then contact with Reality, that one ultimately becomes Reality. It is only through *sparsa* (touch), it is only through contact, that a philosopher’s stone is able to turn iron into gold. If you keep it a hair’s-breadth away, the iron will forever remain iron. No matter how powerful the philosopher’s stone is, it cannot exercise its power unless the base metal comes into actual contact with it.

This lets us into a great truth: It is in developing a living contact with a source of transforming spiritual power that one becomes illumined, one becomes divine, one becomes transformed. Thus, the way to derive maximum benefit from our *guru* is by connecting ourselves to him. We do it through faith, *sraddha*. We do it through supreme devotion, *parabhakti*.

Is there an additional method of contacting the *guru*? Yes, and one that was constantly, repeatedly reiterated by Gurudev. Gurudev said: “Obedience is better than reverence.” Devotion is good. But what is the sign of devotion? What is the practical proof that you are really devoted to the *guru*? It is to be sincerely, earnestly and seriously desirous of carrying out his instructions and living according to his teachings.

To walk along the path that the *guru* has made for us and to go in the direction he has pointed out is the sign of true love and devotion. That is *bhakti*. *Bhakti* also means *seva*. *Bhakti* means serving the *guru*. And what is the greatest service that one can render to the *guru*? Try to be like him. Try to do exactly what he has asked you to do. For this effects an even deeper contact and connection. When you are living the teachings of the *guru*, you are in the deepest contact with the *guru*, you are in the deepest state of *yoga* with the *guru*.

Guru sishya yoga is present in its highest and most intense form when the disciple makes himself the very embodiment of the teachings of the *guru*, the very personification of the *guru upadesa* (instructions), the *guru ajna* (orders) and the *guru adesa* (commands). That is why Sanjaya was able to utter the concluding *sloka* of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita—*yatra yogesvarah krishnao yatra partho dhanur-dharah; tatra srir-vijayo bhutir-dhruva nitir-matir-mama* (Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of *yoga*, and Arjuna, the ideal disciple, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and firm policy—such is my conviction). When the full carrying out of the *ajna*, *upadesa* and *adesa* of the *guru* is present, everything is wonderful, everything is auspicious, everything is blessed. It is certain fulfilment and victory. Everything is certain when this type of *yoga* between the *sishya* and the *guru* is there.

This inner fact is a very important truth that is revealed in the Gita. For in the beginning, Arjuna is the very contrary of a *sishya*. He says: “I will not fight.” At the outset, he even questions the correctness of the *guru*’s teachings, because he is in a state of ignorance. He is in a state of delusion. He is in a state of deep attachment, completely entangled by himself, in himself. He is a slave of himself. He is entangled by his own emotions, his own sentiments, his own desires, his own whims and fancies, his own attachment and *bhranti* (delusion). But very quickly he is made to realise his folly. In the second chapter he says: “*sishyas-te ’ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam*—I am Your disciple. I have taken refuge in Thee. Please teach me. Please guide me. Please enlighten me. Please lead me; otherwise I am lost.” Thus he appeals to the *guru*.

Now, there itself is the first transformation. Arjuna gives up his own self-assertive state of saying “I am right,” and he is able to recognise his delusion. He does not rebel when it is pointed out by the Master: “What has happened to you? What is this type of *moha* (delusion), this *kasmalam* (dejection) in which you are caught? Are you not ashamed? Stand up! Stop this!” When he was chastised, immediately it worked. He realised: “I am doing something very foolish, something wrong.” And so he says: “I am sorry. I was not myself. I take shelter at Your feet. Please instruct me.”

Thus, from then onwards, there is established this connection where he is eager to receive, wants to be guided, wants to be taught and is willing to listen. And his earnestness and sincerity are brought out by the questions he asks: “Please, this is not clear to me. You say this, You say that. I am confused. Kindly, out of mercy, compassion, make this clearer to me.” He wants every doubt cleared. He is a *jijnasu* (seeker of Truth). Right from the start he keeps on asking, and Krishna keeps on giving.

So you must see that the Gita teachings commence when the *guru sishya* relationship has been voluntarily undertaken and fully expressed: “I am Your disciple. I take shelter at Your feet. Remove this delusion. Tell me what is good for me.” And at the culmination, when their *samparka* (contact) becomes fruitful in absolute discipleship, we have the grand last verse. What is the fruit of such discipleship, this type of *yoga*, *guru sishya yoga*, this inner connection between the seeking soul and the illumining, liberating master? The glory of it is brought out in the last verse of the Gita. If there is such obedience, if there is such oneness, *samparka*, then all auspiciousness and blessedness, all plenty, prosperity and victory become assured.

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