

Brother Satyananda -- Sunday Satsanga – Lake Shrine Temple, October 2, 2011

It is important and good to love life, to love family and friends, but that love comes and goes: have you noticed? And it's hard work to keep it alive and we were born, we brought with us into this life a standard for a higher love. We wanted something that would last, something that would continue with faith. Brother said he came into this life with that deep desire to have a long-lasting enduring love, and it was only when he found his spiritual path, his Guru, that personal connection with God that he began to recognize that love that he had been seeking.

And so we want to seek a higher love while we are loving life while we are loving our family and loved ones. Yet we want to seek a more perfect love and our Guru says that more perfect love can be found in meditation. So when we are going into meditation we are setting aside the limitations of our daily life and we are connecting with our true soul nature and ultimately we are beginning to open up to awaken our new loving relationship with God. So every day we take time to meditate and to commune with God, and in that deeper communion we begin to experience and realize that loving relationship with God.

1) What is the SRF monastic order all about?

Paramahansa Yogananda founded the SRF monastic order in the 1930's about a decade after he came to this country and it is an extension of an ancient order called Sannyas or ultimate renunciation. It comes from ancient India, thousands of years B.C. so this ancient order from India predates Christian monasticism. And actually Christian monasticism draws essential vows and values from ancient India, so it has been an evolution of spiritual vows there for all world orders. Paramahansa Yogananda, as you read about in *The Autobiography of a Yogi*, took his vows of Sannyas from Sri. Yukteswar and then according to the traditions in India, an ordained sannyasi in these orders can start his own order with his own disciples, and so Paramahansa Yogananda drew upon that. From ancient times there were branches of the ancient order of sannyas that would be described by geography—order of the mountains, order of the rivers, order of the plains and the oceans, and since Swami Sir Yukteswar is Swami Sri Yukteswargiri, which is Sanskrit for mountain, Paramahansa Yogananda is giri, and when Brother goes to India he is Swami Satyanandagiri.

There are about 130 men and 130 women—there might be a little bit more now as Brother's numbers are a little bit dated. SRF is growing. Some are coming. Some are going. That's a part of life. But SRF is gradually growing. They also have about 2 to 3 dozen men in India serving. It's hard to get women in India. Indian family traditions don't let women come into ashrams. Women and eldest sons are hard to get for monastic life.

Traditions are changing and monastic orders are changing in the sense that they are becoming more modern and they are living more modern lives. They may be in the order for a decade and the President may offer to them a vow of sannyas, so they have a period of initial training and development and then the President may offer them a vow of sannyas and when they do they take the ochre cloth and a name a Sanskrit name.

So Brother has a legal name and a Sanskrit name. His Sanskrit name is Satyananda. Sat is truth—part of the Vedic trinity: OM TAT SAT. Truth in eternal existence. And ananda is joy or bliss. So his name means Bliss through Eternal Truth. So they all take monastic names that have meanings that relate to their monastic path, their spiritual path in life and what they are striving to achieve.

Brother wants to say honestly that he has been a monastic now for 36 years this past August. He loves his monastic life. He's always loved it. It's been very natural to him and he advocates considering a monastic life for anyone who may be free from material attachments and ties and family obligations and so forth. There's a beautiful segment of the Mother Center website with several pages on the monastic life, what it requires and what it offers. Men and women who may be interested are invited to enquire.

Brother was at an Interfaith Conference in New York City and he connected with the Archbishop of Crete. He was there participating. After a number of years in the monastic life you connect with other monastics and you learn how much you have in common with your dedicated life and they were having lunch together. Before lunch was served there was a deli platter in the center. There were some canned black American olives there and being a Mediterranean the Archbishop really loved olives and he took his fork and he speared an olive and he held it up and he said "Swamiji you come to Crete and be my guest and I will serve you really good olives."

And then he made an analogy, holding up the fork and shaking the olive and he said you know in our order in Crete a young monk coming into the monastery is like planting a sapling of an olive tree. They put it in the ground and stake it so it grows tall and is not swayed by the winds and the rains and they also surround it by a protective fence so the wild animals can't come and eat it and after about 3-5 years an olive tree begins to mature and produce and we say this is much like the young monk who comes into the monastery, that after a few years we protect him and help him to grow straight and give him a chance to mature and then in 3 to 5 years he will begin to produce spiritual fruit.

"Isn't that good?" Brother asks the congregation. And he says that that is true even in the SRF monastic order, that it takes a little time for a monk or a nun to be comfortable and do the true spiritual work they came to do. And you see the fruit that is being born there.

There was a salesman out of the lonely road and he ran out of gas. He looked around and saw a monastery down the road, and so he walked down to the monastery and he walked into the front lobby and he stopped stunned. There was this beautiful music in the lobby but it wasn't coming from anywhere. It was coming from everywhere and the more he listened to it the more beautiful it got. It came and went with this glory. A young monk came into greet him and the salesman asked him "what is this sound? I just want to know what it is and where it comes from." And the young monk said "yes, it's very special, but I can't tell you what it is because you're not a monk." And the salesman couldn't believe this. He said "Come on. You know this is so glorious I want to know more." And the young monk said "I'm sorry. You're not a monk. I can't tell you."

So the man got his gas and he went back home but this memory never left him. He needed to know what was the source of the sound. So he decided finally that he would go join the monastery. It was the only way. He had to be a monk. He went back to the monastery and said "Sign me up. I have to know

the source of this glorious sound. I can't live without it." So he signed up and said to the Bishop, "Can I now know the source of this glorious sound?" "I'm sorry. You're not yet a monk." It took six months of trial. So he lived six months enjoying this beautiful sound. He couldn't get it out of his mind. He needed to know the source.

After six months he signed his papers, took his vows and went to the Bishop and asked "Now am I a monk?" The Bishop replied "Now you are a monk." The new monk asked "Can I now discover the source of this glorious sound?" "Yes" the Bishop replied and took a key and they went downstairs and labyrinthine corridors and the sound was swelling and increasing and they came to a big door that light was shining through and the Bishop smiled took out his key gave it to the man who opened the door, and the light came flooding through and the sound was overwhelming and gorgeous. He fell to the floor with tears in his eyes and finally he witnessed the source of this secret glorious sound.

But Brother can't tell us cause we're not monks! (audience roars with laughter!) Brother asks the congregation: "Are you interested in monastic life? We'll sign you up!"

Our Guru says about himself personally "As a monk my life has been offered in unreserved service to God to the spiritual awakening of hearts with his message."

2) A Question from Brother's travels to Europe a year ago (but it's very common the world over—he says he thinks we'll relate): I enjoy meditation and feel peace and love which flows from within but when I get involved with my daily life, with work and family I get energetically absorbed and my spirituality seems to drain away. I feel vulnerable and often very tired. Do you have any advice for me?

This is a challenge that we all face. And Brother does have some suggestions because this is something that he has been working on himself. When we meditate, especially when we do scientific meditation techniques of pranyam and kriya yoga—at the end of the meditation you feel a special presence a vibration that is there, that is growing out of the silence. It may be quiet; it may be subtle, but it is there. If you sit and you concentrate upon that vibratory presence with your body, heart and mind, it begins to grow and become more manifest. And out of that manifestation you can concentrate upon it. Put your attention on it and try to identify with it. And then in silent prayer ask God, "Lord let this vibration, this presence of yours be with me throughout the day. And when I do forget and it slips away from my memory, let me recall it back again, that I might live with this vibration of your presence."

Then as you go out into the day you'll be able to carry it just a little bit. And then of course you become involved with daily life, with the drama and you forget, but then it comes back to memory again. Stop and invoke (Brother likes to use the word invocation because with invocation it is not just a prayer, it is an act of will and you place yourself mentally and emotionally back in your morning meditation, reconstruct in seconds, at will, that vibratory presence in your body, heart and mind. Ask "Bring that back to me Oh Lord." And you will feel it beginning to flood slowly into your being. You can resurrect the feeling of God within you in the midst of your daily activities in this way.

Because you see we move out into our daily lives and it's a matter of habit and we begin to identify ourselves with our environment, so in our meditation we are identified more with the stillness, with the

presence of God with us but when we go into activity we shift. We actually begin to identify more with our environment and as a result this very real but subtle presence of God kind of slips into the background. It's still there, but we're not focused on it. And so the trick becomes keeping it a priority at the center of your being. Consciousness awareness—it's there. You can concentrate on it. You can remain centered in it, if you choose it. And so the trick here to is to train yourself to constantly choose it.

And this is especially good when you are going into a difficult situation like a confrontation with someone, you have an important meeting—there's something going on that's very intense and you have to engage with it. Before you walk in the doors, before you engage with that stop and invoke that vibrational presence of meditation. Ask God to be with you and then you know feel that it is with you, an act of will—say “Be with me now. Let me feel now what I have felt in meditation” and you will feel it beginning to come with you, and then walk into the room centered in that, identified with that, and as you engage with the environment and the people in it instead of identifying with their emotions, their thoughts, with all the drama going on keep your priority on your inner self. This is Self-awareness with a capital S for Soul-awareness.

And as we concentrate upon that as a priority of identification then what happens is that our sense of perception elevates and we become more intuitively aware. So we are not isolating ourselves in any way. We actually become more sensitive to those around us. But we do so from a higher level of relation. So this is something that is very much worth practicing. It takes practice but it is a powerful virtue that can be usefully employed in our daily activities. Try it just a little bit and you'll see that there's a tremendous potential here, and it's something that you can work on, so gather the peaceful presence of God in meditation, feel those vibrations, offer in prayer, asking God to keep them foremost in your consciousness. Move into life holding them as a priority in personal identification as long as you can. When they disappear stop and invoke them to bring them back and before you go into important engagements prepare yourself in this way and then try to sustain it as a primary sense of identification and truth and you will see that you gradually establish a strong centeredness in this God-presence within.

3) People ask Brother how do they find God. When people, family and friends, ask how do you define God what should I say?

Brother has a simple answer, a transcript taken from a web-radio interview with a New York host who had a New York state of mind. He was a nice guy but kind of cynical maybe but he was interested and he said to Brother “You know we see a lot of teachers come through this town, siddha yoga, hatha yoga, learn to relax seminars, meditation workshops—you name it. What makes you different from all of these?” So Brother said Paramahansa Yogananda teaches methods of meditation to achieve contact with God. And the host said “well, yeah, assuming God exists.” And Brother replied “It's okay to assume God doesn't exist. Let your own experience prove it to you.” The host said “Oh really. Well okay then. In your experience what is God?”

Brother said “I can tell you in one word.” The host replied “One word? What word is that?” Brother replied “Bliss.” The host said “that sounds good. What do you mean by that?” Brother asked “Can you

remember the last time you felt really really good?" The radio host replied "Well, yeah when you know the last time my girlfriend and I did you know what." (the audience laughs loudly) In response to the laughter Brother remarks "This wasn't Howard Stern." Brother asked the host "Can you imagine a response greater than that?" The host replied "Well, I suppose so" Brother then asked "How about a million times greater?" The host replied "Now that one is beyond me," so Brother said "the joy of your best life experience times one million—that's bliss." And that's what you seek in meditation.

Relief from stress is just the beginning. The little peace in heart and mind—just the beginning. Most people don't go further because most people don't teach how to go further. With SRF methods you can expand yourself into the bliss of God-consciousness as far as you want to go. The radio host responded "That sounds awesome. Totally. So what time will you be giving a lecture in New York City?"

So if anyone asks you what is God tell them that you can tell them in one word: Bliss. We need soundbites. That's Bliss. Happiness beyond ever new joy as Guru describes it. And that's something that we dig deeply in discovering in meditation, something that flows from within us as a resource, something that is enduring and sustainable.

4) Brother Satyananda you meet and talk with younger people, now what about us older folks? Do you have a word of advice and encouragement for those of us who have more years behind than in front?

Well what do we call us? Older? Senior? Mature? Brother likes to call us veteran Yogis, how's that? That's pretty good. Veteran Yogis. For the veteran yogis Brother has four suggestions:

- 1) Life is short—don't waste it on pettiness. We spend so much time on petty little things. Not only the pettiness of others, but let's face it folks, the pettiness within ourselves. We start obsessing about things that don't really matter. We bypass the little beautiful things for little meaningless things and we spend endless time on them. As we get older time becomes more precious. And we don't want to spend time on pettiness. For Brother eradicating pettiness is like weeding the garden. It's like pulling out tiny little weeds that can grow and take over, so that you can keep the garden beautiful and free of weeds. So be one that looks to avoid pettiness in life, so be patient with others but also be able to recognize and discriminate when pettiness arises and patiently try to weed it out of your life and hopefully encourage others to weed it out of their lives. So life is short. Don't waste it on pettiness.
- 2) Give up something inside that causes you grief. Each one of you has something right now. Life does that to us. We carry these burdens longer than we need to or want to. Grieving is important. It's a part of being human. Things happen. Tragedies that seem tragic to us. It seems unfair and it seems unjust. We develop issues with God. Whatever. But there needs to come a time when we move through that grieving. And we reach an end to it and move forward. Don't grieve too long because this holds us back spiritually. Unrelinquished grief follows us beyond the portals of this world. You can take your grief with you. You no longer remember in the future, in

the astral; in the next incarnation you don't remember the cause but you still carry the grief. And so it's important to us to relinquish inside grief that has come to an end.

And Brother has worked on this. Just because he lives a monastic life doesn't mean that he doesn't have difficulties and challenges—he does. But he has, to be honest, become very impatient with grief. He is a human being so he will feel something inside as a result of some difficulty or challenge that doesn't go well. Or he might be offended or something. He might feel some sorrow, but he also feels impatient. He wants to work it through. He wants to offer it God. He wants to purge it out of his system and move forward. So he suggests having this sense of wanting to move forward with your grief. On the road a burden that is ready to go—you have to use your will-power to say “I no longer want it in my life. I am creating suffering for myself. I am holding onto something that is keeping me back spiritually. Lord, I offer it to you. Take it from me.” So the best way to transmute grief that is ready to be relinquished is to offer it directly to God. And then a great miracle happens because the grief itself becomes an empowering force that draws us closer to God. It is an offering that is so personal only God can receive it. And so offering grief deepens our relationship with God. So life is short. Don't waste it on pettiness. Give up something inside that causes you grief.

3) Choose wisely to create strength and well-being. After the half-way point in life you know yourself pretty well. You know yourself very well and you know what makes you strong and you know what makes you weak. It's time to start making really wise choices, really wise choices, and that means choosing thoughts that strengthen you, avoiding emotions that destroy you—this is within your power. We do not have power to control events. We cannot determine and regulate what other people do to us. We can control how we respond. And it's really important, and we see how the sorrows and burdens build up through life—they are actually within our control. And we develop patterns of thoughts and patterns of feelings that have power to weaken us.

There is always the choice there, and Brother has seen it within himself, to choose thoughts that inspire and strengthen you and to embrace and identify with them or to allow himself to ignorantly and unwisely choose thoughts and feelings that weaken him. And Brother has seen in his work as a minister of SRF, as a disciple of his Guru, that he cannot afford to be weak. He cannot. So he is constantly sorting and constantly choosing and part of his vows and renunciation as a monk, as he was talking about earlier, is to renounce thoughts that weaken him and renounce emotions that could potentially destroy him or cause him to be depressed and weak. So wisely choose thoughts and feelings that strengthen and nurture your spiritual life. This is very important.

From the Bhagavad Gita Krishna says “as the brimful ocean remains ever constant even though waters enter it from all lands so the man of spiritual peace absorbs all experiences and remains ever full of contentment.” And our Guru says “the ordinary person has no peace; his shallow mental reservoir is constantly roiled by the inrush of sensory stimulation. In the spiritual person there is a sea of contentment in which the whole consciousness is immersed. Everyone should try to become an ocean of peace by bringing within themselves the rivers of joy from the ecstasy of God. Study of scripture, serviceful activities and nurturing spiritual desires and ambitions.” Brother likes the word nurturing. We have a choice as to what we nurture within. Choose wisely what you nurture. You have those thoughts.

You have those truths. You have inspiration. You have good qualities. You have virtues. Recognize them. Nurture them. You will grow stronger. Avoid that which makes you weak and choose that which makes you strong.

4) Do everything with love. There's a story of Mother Teresa that Brother likes. She was having lunch after mass with a Catholic Father at a chapel in Boston, a small one. They had mass in the morning and she was sitting in the rectory in the back. They were having lunch and every now and then a knock would come at the back of the kitchen and he would go and come right back. This happened several times and finally Mother Teresa said "Father, what are you doing?" And he said "Oh Mother I have for a long time, as an act of my service to our Lord made sandwiches in the morning and then after mass people who are hungry come to the door and I give them sandwiches." She said "that's so sweet Father. Christ must be very pleased with you." The priest said "well I would like to think so but honestly Mother, I've been thinking maybe it's not worthwhile. Maybe people are always hungry and I'm not making a difference and I'm feeling rather dry over this and I don't if I should continue or not. I don't know. Do you have any thoughts Mother as to what I should do?" And according to the story Mother Teresa reached over and put her hand on his and said "Father, give sandwiches with love." And so even the little things in life, you know, we have to discriminate between what's meaningful and petty, but even the little things in life, the things that we do automatically, the things that we take for granted, the things that seem to have no inherent meaning of their own, the little things that come and go and disappear—do everything with love. There's a great power that grows out of that. If we invest our love, even in small proportion on everything that we do we will find the meaning growing into a great spiritual contribution to our lives.