

## Swāmī Paramārthānandājī's New year [2018]



*om sadāśiva samārambhām śaṅkarācārya madhyamām asmad ācārya paryantām vande guru paramparām om*

First of all, I wish you all a very happy, healthy, peaceful, prosperous, successful new year 2018.

Today, the topic that I am going to talk about is, “the glory of *sanātana dharmaḥ*”. *Sanātana dharma* is popularly known as Hinduism. *Sanātana dharma* is a compound word, consisting of two words, *sanātana* and *dharma*. And the word *dharma* is a significant word, with many shades of meanings. And, I will refer to three meanings that are there in our tradition.

The first and formal definition of *dharma* given by the traditional *ācāryā*, *jaimini maharṣi* in his *pūrva mīmāṃsa sūtrāṇi* is, “*codanā lakṣaṇaḥ arthaḥ dharmaḥ*” - anything revealed by *vedā* is called *dharmaḥ*. This is the definition given in *pūrva mīmāṃsa sūtram* by *jaimini maharṣi*. *Arthaḥ* means, the teachings or message. Coming from which source? *codanā*. The word *codanā* in that *sūtram* means, *veda vākyāni*. *Lakṣaṇam* means, *pramāṇam* - a source of knowledge. *Codanā veda vākyam eva lakṣaṇam, pramāṇam yasya arthasya codanā lakṣaṇaḥ arthaḥ*. Anyway, leaving aside the sanskrit words, the final meaning of this definition is, *dharmaḥ* means, vedic teaching. The definition of *dharma* or the definition of Hinduism should be, vedic teaching is Hinduism or *dharmaḥ*.

Then, the second and third meanings are based on the *benefit* of following the teachings of the *vedās*. If the humanity or society follows the vedic teachings, what are the benefits that we will get? One is, the benefit at the cosmic level, the outer level. And the other is, the benefit at the internal level.

The benefit at external level is, maintenance of harmony and peace at all levels - at individual level, family level, social level, national level, international level - that which preserves peace and harmony is called *dharmah*. *Jagataḥ dhāraṇāt, dharmah*. Derived from the root *dhṛ* - to maintain or sustain. Vedic teachings are called *dharma*. Because, *by* following that we can maintain / sustain peace and harmony at all levels. So, the second meaning of *dharma* is, that which maintains harmony.

The third meaning of *dharma* is, not only it maintains peace and harmony outside. But it maintains peace and harmony within ourselves also. A *dhārmic* person - the one who follows *vedic* teachings - can enjoy peace of mind, he can enjoy a joyous life also, which is called *dharmah*, otherwise called, *puṇyam* at the internal level. All these three meanings are there for the word *dharmah* or Hinduism.

And, it is called *sanātana*, because we believe that these teachings have been given by the Lord Himself, through the medium of *ṛṣis* -

*yo brahmāṇaṃ vidadhāti pūrvaṃ yo vai vedāṃśca prahiṇoti tasmai |*

*tagṃ ha devaṃ ātmabuddhiprakāśaṃ mumukṣurvai śaraṇamahāṃ prapadye || [śvetāsvatara]*

It has originated from the Lord Himself. Therefore, it does not have a beginning. And since the Lord is the originator, the Lord is the maintainer also of this *dharma*. In the *bhagavad gītā* [11.18] Arjunā says, "*tvam avyayaḥ śāśvata dharmagoptā*" - you are the protector of this *dharma*. And since the Lord is the protector, it will survive rest of the time also. Therefore, even though *sanātana dharma* may face several challenges - throughout the history it has faced, even now it is facing - but, in spite of all this challenges this *dharma* will survive, eternally. It is beginning less and it will be endless also. And, being eternal it is called *sanātanam*.

The second meaning of the word *sanātanam* is, that which is ever valid and therefore which never goes out of date. It can never become obsolete at any time. It is always valid not only in this generation but, in the generations to come also it will remain valid. Therefore, eternal and ever valid teachings of the *vedās*, is *sanātana dharma* or Hinduism. So, what is the definition of Hinduism? Eternal and ever valid teachings of the *vedās* is *sanātana dharma*.

And, these teachings have been later elucidated, expanded and clarified by several later secondary scriptures also, like *smṛti*, *itihāsa*, *purāṇa* etc. All those secondary scriptures are also considered to be part of the *vedā* only. Therefore, when I say *vedic* teachings, it includes all the teachings of the supportive scriptures also.

Now, the question is, what is the glory of these teachings? We have been learning the teachings of the scriptures for years. Therefore, the teachings are endless. But, today, being auspicious New year day, auspicious because, we have done the *pūjā*. We will try to remember some of the salient teachings of the *vedās*, especially the ones I appreciate.

The first and foremost teaching the *vedā* gives us is this - this entire world or universe in which we are born is the most wonderful infrastructure that any human being can conceive of. This universe is the most wonderful cosmic infrastructure which any human mind can conceive of. Not only it supports life, but it has got all the resources for our physical growth, emotional growth, intellectual growth, spiritual growth - for all of them provision is there in this wonderful creation.

Therefore, never take this creation for granted. As human beings we have got the intellectual resources to appreciate the wonder called this universe. If at all there is any ugliness in the creation, it is only within a small negligible area where human beings are there. If there is any ugliness, anywhere in this vast cosmos, the ugliness is only in a small negligible area where human beings are there. That means, ugliness is our contribution. Otherwise, the cosmos, the universe is the most wonderful infrastructure, governed by countless principles, without violation. Not only physical principles, but the law of *karma*, called the moral principles also. *śāṅkarācāryā* in His *brahma sūtra bhāṣyam* for *sūtra* 1.1.2, describes this world as -

*asya jagato nāmarūpābhyāṃ vyākṛtasya aneka karṭṛ bhokṭṛ saṃyuktasya pratiniyata deśa kāla nimitta kriyāphalāśrayasya manasāpy acintya racanā rūpasya janma-sthiti-bhaṅgaṃ yataḥ sarvajñāt sarvaśakteḥ kāraṇād bhavati, tad brahmeti vākyaśeṣaḥ I*

Whether you study at the micro level or at the macro level, World is the most wonderful infrastructure, *manasāpy acintya racanā rūpasya* - which we cannot even remotely visualize. Therefore, the scriptures say that, *as intelligent human beings* we should give time to appreciate the glory of this creation. Therefore, *vedā* is never tired of describing the wonders of the universe. We have been seeing in *taittirīya upaniṣad* first chapter - *anuvāka* 1.7.1 - several descriptions of the universe -

*prthivyantarikṣaṃ dyaurdiśo'vāntaradiśaḥ I agnirvāyurādityaścandramā nakṣatrāṇi I āpa oṣadhayo vanaspataya ākāśa ātmā I ityadhibhūtam I athādhyātmam I prāṇo vyāno'pāna udānaḥ samānaḥ I cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ mano vāk tvak I carma māṅṃsagṃ snāvāsthi majjā etad adhidhāya ṛṣiravocat I*

- anything you take in the external world, or any organ you take in your own body, talk to the relevant specialist, they are still studying every organ, dividing and dividing and dividing, and every part of the organ requires life-long study and so they are not able to complete. The more we look at the creation - outer or inner - it is a wonder. Therefore, may you - as an intelligent human being - appreciate this universe.

Not only that, *vedā* prescribes certain regular activities, in which we acknowledge the contribution and express our gratitude through a token offering of water, called *tarpaṇam*. One of the most popular - vedic ritual is, *nitya sandhyāvandanam*. In that, right from young age, we are only asked to appreciate the glory and the wonder of the this creation, which supports and nourishes us. And the centre of the solar system being Lord *sūryā* Himself, daily *sandhyāvandanam* is, the appreciation of the contribution of the Sun. Without Sun, life is impossible. "*ādityam tarpayāmi, somam tarpayāmi, aṅgārakam tarpayāmi, budhaṃ tarpayāmi*" - planets we remember, the Sun we remember, water we remember, fire we remember. Appreciate, Acknowledge, Express gratitude.

And, as even we appreciate this cosmos, this infrastructure more and more, this appreciation will get gradually converted in to admiration, and admiration will gradually get converted in to reverence. Not only I talk about that, but as even I talk about that, my hands will join in reverence.

*namaḥ savitre jagadekacakṣuṣe I jagatprasūṭī sthiti nāśa hetave I trayīmayāya triguṇātma dhāriṇe I viriñci nārāyaṇa śāṅkarātmane I*

For me, *brahmā*, *viṣṇu* and *śiva* are none other than the *pratyakṣa sūrya devatā*. Appreciation to admiration to reverence. This universe is not only a gift of the Lord, this universe is the very manifestation of the Lord Himself. Even in this *ganeśa pūjā*, one of the words used is *namo namo ganeśāya namaste viśvarūpiṇe* - this whole universe is the manifestation of the Lord.

Therefore, a vedic person is one, according to whom, the appreciation of god and the vision of god does not require closing of the eyes but vision of god is by opening of the eyes. Therefore, 'where do I see god?' if you ask, a Hindu will say, 'where do I not see god?.' This divinisation of the world is the first and foremost lesson of the *vedā*. Don't imagine god is an extra-cosmic thing, existing somewhere exclusively, but it is the one available in and through in our every perception. This is the first lesson - *sarvam viṣṇumayam jagat*.

Then, the second lesson that the *vedā* gives is, this cosmic infrastructure has got an already inbuilt harmony in itself. We need not create harmony. We need not harmonise the world. And therefore, *vedā* tells the human being, that what is requested of you is, don't disturb this natural harmony. No new harmony is needed, it is inbuilt. The only request to the human being is that, don't spoil the harmony. This request is uniquely given to human being only, because the only living being who can abuse, exploit and destroy this very infrastructure, the only living being who has the power to do is, the human being. All the other living beings in the form of other animals and plants never violate the harmony. They have got instinctive and inbuilt program by which they live, grow and die, without disturbing the harmony. A vast forest will be in absolute harmony, until we, the great ones enter. The vast ocean will be in wonderful harmony, until we enter. Badrinath, Kedarath - all those places will be in wonderful harmony, until we enter. Wherever we go, we destroy the harmony, we destroy all other living beings, and in the process, we destroy ourselves.

And therefore, *vedā* instructs, 'Oh human being may you be responsible' All the *dharma śāstrams* and instructions are given not to the local buffalo, not to the cow or horse. All the instructions are given to the human beings only. And, all the values are reduced to two basic principles. "*ślokārdhena pravakṣyāmi yadyuktam grantha koṭibhiḥ paropakāra puṇyāya, pāpāya para pīdanam*".

So, never hurt the infrastructure or never disturb any living being which is part of this infrastructure. If you can contribute positively wonderful, *para upakāra puṇyāya*. If you can, you do. Otherwise, at least follow *ahimsā* to the maximum extent. Take to *para upakāra*, by avoiding *para apakāra*. This is the foundation of all the values of life, "*ahimsā paramo dharmah*".

Therefore, the second important vedic lesson is, be a responsible member of this cosmic orchestra. When a chanting is going on, in a particular *śruti*, there are some people who are stone deaf. The *śruti* they don't understand. When everybody is chanting *akaṇḍa mandalākāram* in a particular *śruti*, he will say that in a rough voice. You will feel irritated. But, he does not know what is the *śruti*. Similarly, the whole cosmos is a music, it is a rhythm, it is a harmony. Let us join it and live a life in a responsible manner. This is a *dhārmic* life, which makes a person a Hindu. So, the second lesson is - Be responsible. The first lesson - Gratefully appreciate & acknowledge this creation.

The third lesson is, since we are drawing resources and support from this cosmic infrastructure, we will have to give back. As a taker from the cosmos, I have to give back also. The humanity has the responsibility to contribute to the structure. For this contribution alone we have got a fantastic scheme, called *pañca mahā yajñāḥ*, which I am never tired of talking about. Because, I consider it as the most glorious scheme. These 5 *yajñās* are -

1) *deva yajñah* - we start the day contemplating upon the cosmic wonderful infrastructure you have, looking upon it as the very body of *viśvarūpa īśvarā*. In every *mantrā* that is said. As I have quoted, *laṃ pṛthivyātmane gandhān dhārayāmi / haṃ ākāśātmane puṣpaiḥ pūjayāmi / yaṃ vāyvātmane dhūpaṃ āghrāpayāmi / raṃ agnyātmane dīpaṃ darśayāmi / vaṃ amṛtātmane amṛtaṃ mahānaivedyaṃ nivedayāmi / saṃ sarvātmane sarvopacārapūjāṃ samarpayāmi*

When we are doing various *upacārā* to the Lord, we are saying this. 'Oh Lord I am offering *candanam*, visualising you as the manifestation of *pṛthivi*. Similarly, every *upacārā* only reminds us that bhagavān is available in the form of the *pañca mahā bhūtāni* and their products. I gratefully acknowledge this gift and make a prayer that everyone who is part of this universal infrastructure are like my own family. *Mātā ca pārvatī devī pitā devo maheśvaraḥ, bāndhavāḥ śiva bhaktāśca svadeśo bhuvana trayam, śivabhaktāśca or viṣṇubhaktāśca*. The entire creation, with living and non-living beings, let there be peace and joy. *Sarve bhavantu sukhinah*.

I start the day not by remembering my small family. But, I expand my mind to remember my largest family. If we start the day with *deva yajña*, my narrow mind will expand to accommodate the whole universe. This is *deva yajñah*. Start the day with remembrance of the Lord, not as a small idol in your room, but the Lord as the live universal organism.

2) The second one is *pitṛ yajñah*. god has given this infrastructure and this body that I have. The human body (I have) has come to me because of my parents. god is the *sāmānya kāraṇam*, parents are the *viśeṣa kāraṇam*. Because of them only I am here and I am able to appreciate. Therefore, show your gratitude towards the parents. *Mātā pitṛbhyām vapuśo janakābhyām udānvaham namaskaromi vijñāna janakābhyām* - not only they have given me the body, they have given me the wonderful education and culture. And therefore, I revere them, I do *namaskāra* every day; and take care of them in their old age. They supported me when I was a child. It is my responsibility to reverentially support them when they need me. This reverential service that I do to my parents is called *pitṛ yajñah*, which is the responsibility of every single Hindu, the *sanātana dharma* follower. Because it is said, for every *pāpam* there is a *prāyaścitta*, but for ingratitude there is no *prāyaścitta*. Therefore, be grateful to the macro, be grateful to your immediate source also, the parents. It is called *pitṛ yajña*. Not only while they are alive, even after their death we have to remember and acknowledge.

3) Then, the third one is *manuṣya yajñah*. I remember the contribution of all other human beings - because of the farmers, grains are available; because of weavers, clothing is available. Food, clothing and shelter - they are all because of other human beings contributing to me. Therefore, in return, I have to share whatever resources I have with others, which is called *manuṣya yajñah*.

4) Thereafter, *bhūta yajñah*. Not only human beings contribute to our welfare, even animals and insects and worms. The lowly earth worms are very, very valuable. We think it is nauseating, but the earth worms are making the land fertile. Thus, from worms onwards, birds onwards, everything contributes. Trees give us the oxygen, which we breathe. Thus, I am aware of the contribution of every plant and animal, and I contribute to them also in whatever manner I can. That is called *bhūta yajñah*.

5) Then, finally *brahma yajña*. I am enjoying these wonderful teachings *because of* the vedic scriptures. And the scriptures are there because the *ṛṣis* - in an endless *paramparā* - in spite of so many calamities and problems, they have preserved them. Now there are so many technological advancements for preservation. But in the olden days, they had to preserve in the mind when even the writing had not come. The entire *vedā* was received orally, preserved in the head and transmitted to the next generation. And even when the writings came, not our computer and all. They had to take the palm leaf and they had etch every letter. Remember, the *vedā*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhāratam* [one lakh verses], all these, the *ṛṣis* have preserved. The *ācāryās* have preserved. In spite of the onslaught of other people trying to destroy these also, somehow the scriptures have managed to survive. Therefore, I have to express my gratitude to the *ṛṣis* and the *ācāryās*. That is called *brahma yajñaḥ*. *Brahma* here means *vedaḥ*.

Not only should I acknowledge, I should do my best to preserve this knowledge for our own future generations. Thus, *pañca mahā yajña* is the best scheme provided by the *vedās* themselves for contribution to this wonderful infrastructure. This is the third lesson. What is that? Be a contributor. So, be an appreciator. Be responsible. Be a contributor.

And, the fourth and final vedic lesson. The *vedās* point out that, if only we receive, understand and assimilate the vedic teaching and understand the principle by which the entire cosmic infrastructure is functioning, not only this knowledge will help us in living a meaningful life, but this knowledge will be useful in going through the later part of our life also, which is ageing and so on. But that is also an integral part of living. And once we understand the infallible principles of the universe, we will know how to accept those also very gracefully, without resistance. Because, the greatest challenge in life is going to be confronting the old age and death. The best preparation is, assimilation of the cosmic laws. In the *bhagavad gītā* - which is an extract of the vedic teaching - Lord *Kṛṣṇā* tells -

*mātrāsparśāstu kaunteya śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ |*

*āgamāpāyino'nityāstāmstitikṣasva bhārata || [BG 2.14]*

So, we have to understand and assimilate that everything that arrives in our life, they all will have to leave us, one by one. The things that will come to us will have to go away from us or we have to go away. The people who enter our life one by one, also will have to leave one by one; or, we have to leave them. In our own body, every faculty in our body gradually came - right from conception onwards, various faculties of *jñānendriyams*, *karmendriyams*, all these faculties gradually came. And, gradually these faculties will have to go also. Finally, the very body which we have acquired in time will have to go away. Every arrival will be followed by departure. Every union will be followed by separation. These are the infallible laws of this cosmic infrastructure. As long as we remember these laws, we can age gracefully and accept these events as very, very natural events. They are not extraordinary events happening only to me, about which I have to complain. Nothing can be complained about.

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca |*

*tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvam śocitumarhasi || [BG 2.27]*

Death is transition of life from one body to another. It is transition of life and it is not end of life. Then we will ask, why this transition? Answer is very simple. Because after sometime, this body becomes worn-out and it is not capable of expressing life, any more. Therefore, naturally, the worn out body will have to be replaced by a fresh, new and efficient body. *Kṛṣṇā* gives the example,

*vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro'parāṇi |*

*tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇānyanyāni saṃyāti navāni dehī || [BG 2.22]*

when the clothing is worn out we get a new clothing. It is good news or bad news? It is a good news only. Similarly, death is not *amaṅgalam*.

*yamāya dharmarājāya mṛtyave cāntakāya ca |*

*vaivasvatāya kālāya sarvabhūta kṣhayāya ca |*

*auḍumbarāya dadhnāya nīlāya parameṣṭhine |*

*vṛkodarāya citrāya citraguptāya vai namaḥ ||*

There is no *amaṅgalam* in this creation. Thus, life is beautiful, growth is beautiful, ageing is beautiful, death is also wonderful. We can go through all these with a cheerful face, if only we assimilate this message.

If we don't have the emotional strength to go through these experiences, for that also the solution is there in the infrastructure, (about which I talked about in an earlier New Year talk).

*Oṃ namo bhagavate anantāya*, let us chant the *īśvara nāmā* and draw strength from the very infinite creation. With that strength we can go through all these things with emotional strength and with a cheerful face.

Therefore, I consider *sanātana dharma* is a wonderful gift from the Lord. We are fortunate that we are born into this. Let us thank god for this and try to follow the teachings. First learn it and then follow the teachings to the extent possible. With this prayer I conclude my talk.

ॐ पूर्णसदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते । पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

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*Transcription by M/s T.Śrīnivāsan & P.Bālasubrahmaṇyam, and edited by students of Swamiji*

