

[PETER ALTER]: And the slating statement just indicates that the interview has started. And then we'll go from there. Okay, very good. This interview is being conducted on 8/7/2025, by me, Peter Alter and --

[SARAH LEVENSTAM}: Sarah Levenstam.

[PA]: Okay, on behalf of the National Indo-American Museum. Sir, if you could start by just stating and spelling your name for us for the transcription.

[SWAMI ISHATMANANDA]: S w a m i, Swami, I s h a t m a n a n d a, Ishatmananda.

[PA]: Okay. Very good. Thank you. In what year were you born?

[SI]: That was 1954.

[PA]: Okay, very good. And where were you born?

[SI]: In Kolkata.

[PA]: Very good.

[SI]: (Inaudible) India

[PA]: Very good, thank you. Ah, could you please tell us about your family of origin, parents and siblings, if you have them?

[SI]: So my father was a doctor and he was busy visiting different places. So he used to mother and the father, they were always out here and there. So I grew up under the care of my auntie, and she was a widow, but more than mother. So we used to call in Bengali ma, mother, chotoma, little mother, like that. So both of them, they used to love me, and I can remember, like any all other children, I grew up in a very good school.

I was admitted, and then afterwards, my father has a very broad mind that I noticed, that he used to help people, the poor people. Sometimes other brothers, they used to whisper, why you should give so much money to all the people? *laughs* But, uh, then sometimes the father said that money has been given by God, and I am just a keeper. So whoever comes before me. I am supposed to give them.

Maybe God is sending them to me. So that was his philosophy. He was a very religious minded person, and I can remember that he was a very devout person, Bhagavansi Ramakrishna. That is Bhagavansi Ramakrishna. So very, very famous in India and particularly in Bengal.

So he was also a devotee, and he has a book called Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. In Bengal, it is kathamritha. That is a nectar of words, so that kathamritha. It was a conversation of that great saint and with another teacher, so he recorded.

My father used to ask me to read one or two pages the moment I will come back from the school, have little snacks, and I was eager to go back to the field to play, and so my friends were waiting in the corner, but he won't allow, now first, you read two pages, and then you go. So that was a punishment at that time, but then I understood that that was a blessing in disguise. I never understood what actually I'm reading, the meaning of those, but as I grew up, I understood that this world with all its attractions is futile for a few days.

Why should I give all my life and energy for temporary thing? There is something which is permanent, and what is that? We call it in Sanskrit, ananda. Anandam means happiness. Then when I was studying in Calcutta University, I felt that is true.

Anandam, that the happiness, is the ultimate goal. Whether I become a doctor or engineer or profession, a successful person, if I am not happy, then it is worthless. So I have to search for that happiness. Then I came in the biography of life of lord Buddha, so he left everything for happiness, for the knowledge. Swami Vivekananda.

So I got very much inspired, so I thought that I should also become like that. Then I'm just disclosing before you, that was that helped me to take the final decision that I actually registered for to become a company secretary, so I, I was thinking to study that. So one day I was lying on my back on the terrace of our house. That was my first time I used to see the moving clouds, and I used to imagine that clouds has become like this, that cloud is this, they are talking, they are moving. Even when I was in university, I used to think in that way.

So one day I was lying like that all alone, and suddenly I saw myself on the sky. And for a, maybe for a second or so, one me with the tie and the coat in a European dress, and another me, with a shaven head and the guru clad as a Hindu monk. Both of them flashed before me, and someone said, choose one, and as if there was not much time. So I chose the monkhood. So I thought that will be better.

This, everyone have that, that this is a very special, not knowing actually what actually was going to happen. Then slowly, slowly, we were with my friends, we went to a hilly center in India, that is the northern part. It's a state called Meghalaya, and the particular city is called the Cherrapunji, the highest rainfall recorded over there. I went with my friend to visit, and I saw a Ramakrishna mission monk, that was the first time I saw them.

And I met him, and he inspired me, just he saw me, and he asked my friend to go around to see and offer me a cup of coffee. I, I love coffee, though the Bengalis, usually, they take tea because tea is growing all around, but I don't know why, but anyway so I left, and he offered me coffee. He said, I can give you a cup of coffee if you read these pages. I sat over there,

I started reading those pages, and that was inspiring that Swami Vivekananda's very inspiring words. Dedicate your everything for the service of the humanity. You were born so many times. You will be born again so many times. At least one life, you dedicate for the service of the humanity.

This word inspired me, then I told, how can I dedicate myself? Then he said, become a monk, and you should not have any desire, only to love the humanity, not that your religion, your language, your people, humanity as a wherever. And whenever you are there, wherever those people who are there before you, your people, so that is called Vedanta, seeing me in every being, and they are all same. Maybe language different, features are different, place may be different, but they are the same.

I told him, I'm ready. Can I become a monk? *laughs* Then he said, of course, you can. Then I told, I am staying back, I won't go back.

So of course, he said, no, no, your friend is there. You go back now, come after some time and take the permission of your mother. The father passed away when I was in class ten exam that they're giving, that time, almost fifteen, sixteen years young, but at that time father passed away, my mother was there.

She was also a very, very religious minded lady, most of the time worshiping and then one time only eating food, like that. Ah, then I told, if I ask my mother, I don't know what is going to happen. I won't tell her, *laughs*, so I will come and join. So I told my friend, and he was communist-minded, that friend, and he told, see, I told you, don't go to the monks, they, they have some miraculous power, they always capture young people and something like that. *laughs* It is all my desire, so nothing like that. You better go back and tell my mother that this has happened, I am here. Then the mother was naturally, she got upset, and I came to know from other friends that, then I wrote a letter, and the teacher, Swamiji, told, you must take the permission.

Then I wrote a letter to her, and this I remember, I told mother, if you want me to come back, marry and settle in there, I will come back, and whatever you ask, I will do, but I know I am not going to be happy by that way. But if you allow me to dedicate my life and lead a monastic life, I think I'll be happy. So mother wrote me back, as a mother, I only want to see my children happy. If you think that by serving the supreme god, you'll be happy, all my blessings with you. That ends there. As a Hindu monk, we are not supposed to go and meet families before twelve years, unless you are getting their sannyasa. In the Ramakrishna Mission system, the moment you join, they will allow you to leave for three years, and you also check that whether it is possible for you, and others will also check. Because the human emotion comes and you take the decision.

After six months, then the attraction for the world, first is young man of twenty three, twenty four years, attraction for the ladies, attraction for the name and fame, attraction for money. So all these are there. Seniors, they will observe, how you react in those situations, how you are

talking with the ladies, girls, how you are thinking about the money. So by that way, slowly, slowly, they will judge. After three years, when they think he is fit, they will send you to the headquarters for a monastic training.

And for two years, you have to be there and doing every sort of thing, like cleaning the bathroom, dressing the vegetables, worshiping God, and reading books, everything you have to do, including serving the old swamis also, and that was the difficult thing, serving the old swami. They wanted to test our patience with the swamis, so I am serving the food, one swami told a liquid thing that you should bring the, all the vegetables from below. So I brought the vegetables from the below and served him.

Next man told, no vegetable, only water. laughs* So he saw, noticed that, at like this, whether immediately if you react, that means you don't have the patience. The situation, you have to. So these things went up very well, and after the ten years, I got the sannyasa from my guru, and we get mantra diksha, anyone can have, but sannyasa, when you are really after the nine years, all the swamis who are observing, they give certificate, yes.

So finally, they give the sannyasa, that is the system in Ramakrishna Mission, not other Hindu. Other Hindus, they can simply go and get the sannyasa from outside, they can do, but Ramakrishna Mission, like that. You cannot marry, you should not have any loan, and your health should be perfect, at least ten to twelve, twenty years so that you can serve. And the swamis used to say, remember, you have come to serve, not to be served.

The day you enter, next day you are in a hospital. No. So you have to serve, and in difficult situations. I am really, really fortunate that not all the swamis get this opportunity. They send me to the distressed places where people are because of the flood, because of the earthquake, because, so I used to serve them, and that's very, very challenging.

And sometimes there will be the, the bad people, they came to snatch all those things which we took. We had to face them, protect those things, and you have to go and find out the real people and then give it to them. Like this, I did, and, and truly, that showed me God. And even though they are not having food, when I went over there, that lady was telling, first you please sit, then drink a little water, and I like to wash your feet because you have walked such a long place, long distance, and I like to wash your feet, then you say, I have come to serve you, you need not to serve me. So the mind of the people are so wonderful, wonderful people, and that is God. Love is God. By that way, I was serving over there, and most of the time, they put me to a place where I was the proofreader. There was a publication section, so I was the proofreader to find out faults was my main job, *laughs*, so that was for almost ten years I did, and then afterwards they sent me to a school, I was very successful because the school was in turmoil because of the political things, but somehow I could control that. Then they sent me to Andaman, and by that time I got the sannyasa, then they sent me to island, Andaman, and completely nothing was there. So I started from the scrap, and I was thinking what to do. People there, there have been a lot of money, not poor, but no culture. They drink a lot, as because island, you know, the morning till night, you see same faces. They're small, small islands. So they get, get so

naturally, a suicidal attitude is too much, and they think, what are we are going to have? So I developed two institutions. One, for I gave the name the Gyanamandira, the, the temple of knowledge, where those who were graduate or engineers or doctors, I used to teach them, train them, with through the professors, the nationwide competitive exam. I should prepare them for that so that they will go to the mainland, India, and they will be mixing with other people also. And those who are not that intelligent, so I used to teach them some vocational training so that they can earn for themselves, the cooking, driving, mechanic, and the handyman sort of. So that was very successful, and mainly I used to go and tell people that you have everything. First, you have money. Second, you have a human body. Only thing lacking, decision. You think only drinking will help you? No. You're actually hiding yourself. Yeah.

The pain is there, and maybe frustration is there, and you're trying to drink a lot and then forgetting that. Next day morning, it will start again. So there is another process. Think yourself divine, and the vastness of the ocean, vastness of the sky, and the wonderful nature, lavish green nature, beautiful birds, animals, that will help you. So I wanted to, I, I just used to go, and that Indian radio helped me a lot. They used to invite me to speak. You cannot go to all islands. Andaman is having more than five hundred islands, twenty six islands are inhabited, others are just jungle like that. So to reach to the twenty six is impossible and very risky also, and small, small boats to go over there, and there is no place to land, you know? Another small boat will come by the side of the big ship, and you have to be very, with the balance, you have to jump on that, that's because and from the, the young age, I'm, I used to feel that, that I should be like a boy, so my family, they had very good singers.

They actually wanted me also to like this training. I told the songs and all that for the girls. *laughs* Come boys should not sing like that, so I don't know why, and then I liked horse riding, then shooting, boxing, swimming, all those boys things, so naturally that I was, got trained in that. I joined the one type of army training in the college life, so there that also helped me.

So body was strong, and then I was not afraid of anything. And training was there, so I thought it's good. So god trained me to make his own soldier. So I liked it, and so this is okay for me. Then I used to go over there to talk to the people and tell them, so if you are meditating, you will get peace.

If you are helping others and praying for others, you will get peace. And not only that, you will get appreciation also. Go and help others. Somebody has lost his son. Go and just cry with him.

Hug him. You'll find that a solace is coming within you. Just feel for those people. Like to tell them, don't be selfish. Be always unselfish.

That was the way Swami Vivekananda said, my philosophy can be said in two sentences, to make people aware about their divine nature, to aware about their divine nature, and to help them to manifest it. And what is the divine nature? That he didn't say. Then afterwards, I came in different places, he mentioned unselfishness is God, Swami Vivekananda.

Unselfishness is God. The moment you become hundred percent unselfish, you are God yourself. A child is born with his closed fist, and when he die, he should be like the Buddha blessing others. So that is the goal of a human life, not like animals, getting up, eating food, fighting with others, and then one day die. Not like that.

So I was inspired by swamiji's words. I used to meditate, I used to read, and I used to serve. And after the success in Andaman, the then prime minister of India came and inaugurated, that was a great thing. So our general secretary, our system is spiritual leaders, president and vice president of the order, then administrative leaders, the general secretary, and his four assistants.

And whatever they say, then the heads of the centers, then the other swamis, brahmacharis, and the devotees, this, that is the pyramid, it goes in this way. Here in the west, you are the only swami, and then directly the devotees. In between, nothing.

So only trained people can handle this because the western life is completely new for us. And in India is a completely different type. You can talk freely. You can like this, but here, you are not supposed to. So, obviously, that way. So I was saying to another challenging position that is near the border of the Myanmar, Bangladesh, and that is called Arunachal Pradesh, and big China all over the north. They are full tribal people, very good people, very simple, very hardy, and good looking, but they were not that way educated. They never knew how to earn money. Going and shooting a deer or a boar, then seven days food is there. They won't bother to work like this.

So slowly, slowly, I was teaching them, then how to that is one thing. And secondly, we had a wonderful school, huge school and very modern with a computer, English, English medium with a computer, so that tribal boys and girls, when they come out, they won't feel that they are out of fish, out of water. So they will be, like the other people, same. So that I did for twelve long years inside the real, real, deep jungle, and the elephants used to pass through by the door, you know that jungle elephants.

Then by discussing with the forest department, they made a type of electric wire fencing so that the three hundred acre land that you are having, mostly jungle, the animals used to roam. So I told children are there, they are going to play, and it's very close to the deep jungle and the football ground. The edge is the jungle. We do not know whether a tiger is sitting over there or not. So I saw one or two tigers in the twelve long years.

Tigers were happy with their lot of boars and deer, so never came to the human being. That was good for us.*laughs* And but elephants were there, but never disturbed us. Elephants were very fond of eating rice and also drink the wine. At the labor labor camp,they are having the wine, the elephants will come to drink the wine, and that was a problem. And rice, if you are cooking rice, any time they may come because of the smell. So these are the two hazards, but slowly, slowly, our boys became very successful, and I can proudly say it is not me, previous swamis were also there. In nineteen seventy to till now, there are three schools that we run, and majority of

the educated population in Arunachal Pradesh are from our school. So that is a very good contribution.

And one day I received a phone call when I was in jungle, and there was a wonderful, my previous Swami, he constructed by the side of a river, there was a river flowing, by the side of it, a two story small room sort of thing, open. So I used to go and sit over there and meet people, and then and that was the the place you can see the sky, you can see the jungle, you can see the so I used to all alone, I used to sit over there, sometime meditating, reading, and meeting people also sometimes. So I loved that place very much. I really still like miss.

One day, I was sitting over there, suddenly a phone call came from the headquarters. What are you doing? I told, I didn't say that I am sitting and relaxing, I told I am working. *laughs* They're working, of course, mentally.

Then they said, but we like to send you to another place for a different type of work. What is that? You have to go to Chicago. So from the deep jungle, they asked us to come to Chicago, and that is the reason. And I told, okay, because we never said no, okay, I will come.

But I was not knowing, and they also didn't disclose at that moment that the Chicago, my predecessor, the Swami, he was an excellent Swami, he was an excellent monk, but not that way very practical about the money and all that. So you have to be also, because devotees are giving the donation, how to spend that, etcetera. Some people asked him to sell the buildings that he was having at the Chicago city itself, very close to our Chicago University, and two blocks away from the Obama's place, that's a very posh area. Now they told that you were to sell it and come to this place. So he told those, and they told you will get nearly nearly three million dollars at that time, and you can purchase this with a half a million, and a lot of money will be in the bank, you will have a nice life. So first thing he made the mistake that I, I feel that we are not for a nice life over here. We have as a mission, so we have to go and teach people. Lot of suffering in America, not for money or other things, but for their thought process. So that is the thing that we have to go and tell them. Again, the same thing. You are divine. A lot of things are there. And Jesus said, always we quote, the blessed are those who are pure in heart, but they shall see God. You are not at all sinner.

We made mistakes, but mistake is not the scene. Sometimes, I do not know I am frustrated, so I take a gun and shoot. But why unnecessarily you are shooting the innocent people? You will be jailed. Instead, why don't you go and serve them?

The all frustration will go away. People will talk to you. You will have so much connections. Naturally, don't feel yourself isolated. So these are the some things that is there in the American society.

Wherever I go, I talk to the Americans, I will say, from all over the world, every corner of the world, people, they dream to come to America. If they get the American visa, they think they are blessed. Now, friends, you are born in this country. You have everything. So you can make

yourself, you can mar yourself, you can destroy yourself. Make yourself. And main problem, I'm lonely, and the loneliness will go away if you have god your friend. God will never leave you. And the moment you are having the God in your mind as your friend, as your companion, all world will come to you because God is the attraction. You know, friends, I'm so happy that you're taking the interview, so I disclosed all this.

My, now I'm old, and naturally, I don't know how long. But anyway, as long as we are here, this only message we like to give to the people. We don't need to start a school here or a hospital here, sufficient. All those things are there. Only thing we have to tell, and particularly younger generation, it's a very good system in the society, the moment you are sixteen, go and find your own path so that they stand on their own, and that is not in the Asian countries. The parents go on dragging with them. *laughs* That is not good. This is one sense.

And secondly, but here the problem is, sixteen years is a very young mind and dangerous mind, and that is the time the body and mind is changing. As the body is changing, mind is changing, but he's immature, not having any idea of the world, and he'd listen to the friends. They are also fifteen, sixteen. How they can help them? *laughs* So it is like a blind leading another blind.

This is the time when the seniors, particularly the guardians and the teachers and the society should guide them, give them all positive thing. You want to marry, of course, you will marry, but after twenty one years. By that time, you should get the education, start earning, have your confidence that you can raise a family, then marry. Then that is it's not going away. And other things like smoking, drinking, and that is the bad thing because once you go into that, then you are finished. So we have to show them. So these are the young people who went out of curiosity to drink and to smoke. Now you see what has happened to them. Now they went to smoke, smoke. Now the smoke has captured them. They cannot leave that. The narcotics are terrible things. So be careful. Stand on your own feet. Sometimes you like to try, give a try. But that is a bad thing. Don't do that. What you should do, expand yourself.

Swami Vivekananda, again, he said, expansion is life, contraction is death. The moment you are alone, nobody cares about you. No one knows where you are. You are all dead.

Dead people, nobody remembers. But when you're living, people should feel, hey, here is he, where is she? Because your presence is a joy for them. They should remember it. The expansion is life. How you can expand yourself? Whatever you know, go and share with others. The good thing, help others. So this is our philosophy and our religion. We are religious people, and we are strong Hindu, but we worship Jesus. And but not church unity. We don't follow the church rules, but we love Jesus. Why you know? Because we believe if one can pray for those who are killing him, and in he was alive, and they were nailing him. In that excruciating pain, he was praying for those. He must be God, not less than God. So love is God, l o v e. A love for whom? For those the oppressed, the downtrodden, the illiterate. I said, for them. So Jesus is praying for them. He must be god. So we worship Jesus.

We worship Buddha, but we are not Buddhist. We appreciate Buddha because of his kind heart. He want to sacrifice himself for a, to save the life of an animal. If you like to slaughter and think that you are going to get the blessings of God, slaughter me than the goat. That is the love for a being.

And what is religion? Love. What is religion? Unselfishness. So unselfishness and love that we have to inculcate.

We are having already a father on the money all through, and then he is spending the money for the children, money for the society, also giving the donation to the poor. He is unselfish, but that unselfishness when break the whole boundary and embraces everything, everyone, that is called spirituality. I really like the way Jesus said, love thy neighbor as thyself, but that's the first step of religion. Same Jesus said, love thy oppressors, love thy critic, and that is called spirituality because nothing can touch you. You are the giver.

Again, Swami Vivekananda, I should quote, he said, in this world, take the position of a giver. Give love. Give service. Give whatever you can. Never want anything in return.

So this is what religion is, and we believe those who are not that everyone has to become a monastic, but they can be religious. And when they learn what is religion, then the world changes. And that is the reason we have started a center in the Chicago city itself, where we never do Hindu ceremonies. We never perform there. Here we do that.

The Hindus are coming. This is for you. There we invite different religious groups, religious faiths. They come and express their views, and others, they listen. Then they say it is almost like us, and that's why I have given the name, know and love. That is the series. If you know, then you will feel like loving. Oh, that is the same thing that we are doing. We have published a book also on that, many ways to God. Everybody is going to the God who is love, who is all powerful, who is the merciful, who is protecting us. All religion says that. Then how come your religion is different and my religion is different? No. You have a father, you love your father, because father is careful about you, protecting you, supporting you. My father is doing the same thing.

The parenthood, the fatherhood, the feelings of the father are same. Man may differ. Name may differ. Area may, place may differ. Religion may differ. Practices of really, but father is father. If the father is beating and not carrying the children, is he a father? Maybe he has given the birth, but he's not a father. Father, who is that who is protecting, giving the encouragement? That is same old religion is loving their god, then why we fight?

Because we don't know. Your god and my god are the same god. *laughs* You only call god in your, your way, sometimes Jehovah, sometimes Allah, sometimes god, and we call as Bhagavan or Ishwar. Only the language is different. Otherwise, it's the same love, same unselfishness, same protection.

So this is our philosophy we try to propagate among the people. People will be like this, but by doing that, I purify myself. World cannot be changed. Jesus tried. Buddha tried. Sri Krishna tried. World won't change. This is like this only. There will be bad people, there will be good people, there will be suffering, there will be what I am going to do in this, I should behave a godly way and make myself God, so we always say quoting Swamiji, Swami Vivekananda said, usually you wear like the animals. I should eat. If the dog is eating, another dog is going, they'll be fighting, I won't allow. So like that we wear animals, only having my position. Then we became human, considering others also. Okay, I have something I'm sharing with you. So considering, consideration, become God. That is love. If you cannot give things that matter, but love them, pray for them, and pray to your god. God, they are suffering. So please, whatever they have done, don't give them so much of punishment. Maybe whatever God will do, God will do, but by praying that way, you are becoming purified. That is the ultimate thing, and that is our life's motto, and this way we go. In America, we are having fifteen centers in different places, southern, in western the coast also there, eastern here, in center here at Chicago, and Saint Louis, it is there, like this centers are there.

One swami and the devotees, they come, they help us getting everything. They say what is going on. The lady who came, she has brought food for me today. (inaudible) So the different ladies, seven ladies for seven days. I don't cook, so they bring it. *laughs*

[PA]: So you've given us so much wonderful information, thank you for that. I think Sarah and I would like to go back and start asking a few questions.

[SI]: Yeah.

[PA]: Um, so maybe now Sarah is a good time to ask some questions about uh –

[SI]: Please do

[SL]: So I was thinking when you were talking about your family experience, you were talking about both your mother and your father as being, you know, religious people, religious types. And can I ask, when you were young, during childhood, what did religious life look like for you? What kinds of religious practices, um, surrounded you when you were little? Did you grow up going to pujas? Uh, did you celebrate pujas in your home? Did you have a community around you? What did that look like for you when you were little?

[SI]: So, of course, all the Hindu families, they have their family deity and regular worship. The ladies mainly they do, but the male, they also come. And I have seen that from the childhood days, and the communities also, like the Durga Puja, Kali Puja, big, big ones. So all the community will come in one place, all the neighbors, they will come in one place and celebrate. Of course, it was there. That was the main inspiration. But along with that, when you read the books, you get some idea, so by that way. So I was inspired by Swami Vivekananda, and he said, education, education, education is the panacea of all evils. You are getting education, but look around you. The people, those who are not getting education, if you don't help them to get

educated, you are making a blunder, and I, and think that being supported by those people, they're also paying taxes.

And those tax money, you are utilizing, whatever little maybe, but in exchange, you are not helping them, so help them. When I was in class eleven, twelve, that, that's the grade, I wrote this, and I got inspired, and I found out one or two children were playing. Hey, do you study? And they, when they I asked them, they fly to *laughs* so I chased them and found one little girl. She was trying to hide behind her mother. I told I like to teach her. Will you allow? The mother is a poor lady, and the regular, they go and clean the vessels and get some money like that. So she told, I'll be very happy, but I don't know whether she will study or not.

Then slowly, slowly, I started giving her some candies and fruits and this, that, and then started teaching a, b, like that, like that. Then I understood that by that way, I won't be able to help them. I have to grow up myself, educated, I have to earn money, then only I can come back with much more help. By this way, I'm wasting my time, and then I won't get good result in my exam. So no, this is not the way, I have to change in a different way. But inspiration that way.

[SL]: Can I ask, which neighborhood did you grow up in? What, what pada did you grow up in in Kolkata?

[SI]: Actually, when Swami Vivekananda's house, near to that.

[SL]: Really? Mhmm. Okay, that was—

[SI]: So Vivekananda was always our ideal and hero, Vivekananda.

Speaker 1: That's amazing, and, um, how long had your family lived in that particular neighborhood? Um, and had they come from anywhere else before then or Kolkata for a very long time?

[SI]: From my childhood, my birth, I saw that in Calcutta only, but I heard that they came from hm, Purulia, it's a district, Purulia, so in Purulia, I was there for two, three years in the school. But from the Purulia city, if you go, there is another township is there, small township, from there, my grandfather shifted to Calcutta, and father and his brother, my our uncle. I didn't see my uncle, uncle passed away very young, so only father was there.

I didn't see my grandparents also. They passed away at that time, but they shifted from Purulia to Calcutta, and there they started, Calcutta all facilities are there, so naturally, but they were rich people, the my parents were rich people. They were having a lot of gold that I've seen. *laughs* I saw that actually in those days, I do not know, the banks, the money and all that, maybe, so they used to purchase a lot of gold and keep in the houses.

Sometimes as a child I used to enter into, then the father may be opening or mother, I saw a lot of gold, sometimes I had to touch, but I never understood what actually those, then afterwards when you grew, I inquired, where are those things?

[PA]: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

[SI]: Yeah, I have a sister and a brother, so they also only one brother is now, uh, other, but we were a joint family. The uncle's family was also there, so they, we grew up together, but I do not know, almost all they have passed away, my mother and everything, everyone. Only one brother is there. Elder, my elder brother. He's a very nice person.

Speaker 1: Does he still live in Kolkata in north –

[SI]: He must be, he must be, right? Not much of connection. Must be.

[PA]: What, uh, you mentioned as a, a young man enjoying sports like boxing, swimming, uh, what, uh what was school like for you?

[SI]: Yeah, In the school, all these facilities were there–

[PA]: Uh huh

[SI]: The boxing facilities and the wrestling, and then there are some small, small clubs nearby that they used to teach, uh the horse riding. Of course, it's a little costly horse riding, but they allowed us, allowed me to. Then it was so easy, so I thought it was okay. *laughs*

Then I wanted, because I saw the Muslim boys, they used to play with the small, small, swords like this, the daggers actually, not swords, so they will be keeping like this. So I thought I will also learn that, but then they said it's not good. That is, anything that you do for your own protection and for the protection of others, so you are not going to, our teacher was a very good, boxing teacher. He used to tell, I am teaching you boxing not to hurt others, but to protect others. Sometimes you'll find some people are bullying on the poor and the weak people, you should go and stand there, and then protect that. Not that you should go and do some bad thing, no. So those qualities, they were really good people. And you know, human being is nothing but thoughts. If you give them good thoughts, positive thoughts, it changed like that.

[PA]: Did you, did you have a favorite subject in school before you–

[SI]: Yeah, I, I actually liked very much that the mostly history. History was my very favorite subject. And along with the history, sociology, economics, and of course and the Ravindranath Tagore is a very famous person. I read all, and there was other writers, beautiful writers, so they were there, Sharath Chandra, and also the Bankim Chandra, I wrote, read those.

When I joined in the Ramakrishna Mission, you know, Ramakrishna Mission very broad minded, they asked me to read the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. Though we are Hindu, but said, no, Saint Assisi's life is very inspiring life, so read that book. Then Philokalia in Cherrapunji library, I read those, that noontime, after the lunch I used to go and see. And this Philokalia, that is the record of the Russian Christian saints. Then there was the brother Lawrence, and ah, that is also mother Teresa of Avila, not mother Teresa of Calcutta, mother Teresa of Avila. So these are all very, very inspiring life, so we got inspiration from the spiritual life in that time.

[PA]: Did you enjoy being a proofreader in the publishing house?

[SI]: Of course. *laughs* Because when you are reading, so you get so many ideas. There's so many of course, all philosophy and they are giving the expression in different way, but different writers, different way they are expressing, so that I liked it very much. So we were reading and in a monastic life, there are only two, there are mind, is three level. One is physical level, the food and these and that, then intellectual level, then spiritual level. To keep the mind on spiritual level is very difficult. Constantly thinking of God, meditating on God is not possible, maybe hardly one hour, two hours, then the mind comes down. If you don't keep the mind on the intellectual level, reading different books and thinking on that, keeping the note or yourself writing, then the mind will come down to body level.

And you have noticed that even the Catholic fathers, they're doing wrong things. And mostly because of this, you are human being. All those things are there. If you are not keeping your mind, then mind will take you down, the physical level, and you make mistakes. You are married, you are householder, no problem, but when you have taken the oath that you will celibate, you must be celibate, you have to. But your mind will always provoke you. You have to fight back, and that is called sadhana. Sadhana means spiritual practice means what? Keeping the mind come bringing back and putting to God. (inaudible)

[PA]: You also mentioned reaching sannyasa, uh, for our listeners in the future who don't know what that is, could you define that for us?

[SI]: Say again please.

[SL]: Becoming a sannyasi, un, could you describe what that means if there are people who come to an exhibit later who don't know?

[SI]: Oh, sannyasa means, you know, samyak nyasa. In Sanskrit, if you break the word, samyak, totally, completely, nyasa, giving up. Completely giving up. What you are giving up? Food? No. Grace? No. Association? No. You're giving up ego. The moment you are free from the ego, whatever I am doing because of the blessings of God, this humbleness. I am successful speaker, I'm successful writer, I'm successful in many things, all because of the God. I don't have anything.

That humbleness, not me but thou, that is called sannyas. But if you have a system where you go and then offer things to the fire, and the Hindus did do that, and in front of your guru, you are taking the oath, promise that I am not going to marry, I am not going for money, I am not going for name and fame. I am a hundred percent dedicated to the ideology that I'm accepting, and I will never ever hurt anyone in my life through my words and through my action. So that is called sannyas. There's a promise that you have taken.

Now the president of America, he is keeping the hand on the bible, he's taking the oath. If he's breaking, that is not good for him. Human being means taking the oath even in the, the marriage, Hindu marriage and also Catholic marriage. You're promising from today, this lady I accept as my wife, until my death, I'll protect her.

And next day, you go for a separation, that is not good. *laughs* You have promised, and that keeping the promise is religion. Keeping the promise. Maybe there'll be once before taking the promise, think hundred percent.

And then once you have taken the oath, no breaking till death. So that is called religion. Once I have taken the oath, I am not going to break it. Nobody insisting me, forcing me, but I have taken the oath and that is called a human being.

[PA]: So, um, you're in the jungle and you receive a call to come to the United States. What was that transition like for you? You mentioned how different the West is from where you were living. What was the transition like for you personally?

[SI]: See, I was in Calcutta and then I was in Andaman, it's an island, and there eight years, Andaman island life, and very calm, composed, very peaceful, but so suddenly in the jungle, completely very challenging. Any moment, anything can happen, every time, and then suddenly to west. But, you know, I personally, I believe wherever I go, it is same God in different form present. I found over here in America the very first thing, freedom. Americans love freedom, and that also I like very much. And Swami Vivekananda said, freedom, freedom, freedom. Freedom is the first condition of growth. That is for the Indians, he said, because you won't get the growth unless you are free. Indian society can't grow, that is Swami Vivekananda said, because of the restrictions. You cannot eat this. You cannot wear dress like this. You cannot marry that lady. You cannot so much restrictions. So the society is not growing up.

We are stagnated. In America, we're completely free. You cannot dictate whom I am going to marry. That is my choice. You cannot dictate what I am going to eat. That is my choice. So that freedom, society has grown up, but the religion, you cannot do this, you cannot do that, the religion didn't grow. But in exactly opposite in India, for religion, whatever you like, you can do. So there are so many gods and goddesses, not that one god you have to worship. You like Shiva? No problem. You like this? You like that? So religion developed. The freedom is the first condition.

After coming over here in America, I saw, first is freedom. Secondly, everything big. They can't think of small thing. *laughs* That also, the expansion of the heart. The first time I came out from that immigration, the gentleman who received me gave, Swami, you like to have a coffee?

I said, of course. And he gave me this big mug. *laughs* I told, what is this? It's a jug full of whether this is America, and it, it goes like this. There'll be whole day, they'll be drinking the coffee like that and they will never inquire about your personal thing. They'll never look what you are reading even. Though you are sitting by you, by, in the flight, whatever you are doing, you'll never look at. Nothing. But if you want some help, immediately they are all these good qualities, Swami Vivekananda noticed.

And he said, these are the people ready for Vedanta. The Advaita Vedanta means you have to depend on yourself. There is no god. Forget about your guru or the master. No friends around.

You are responsible. You are the maker of your own destiny. These are the words he used. That's why I like the America. They think for the people.

This is the only country, you know, as because there is no king. Of course, the British king, they used to think that he's a ruling, but nobody liked it. And then the, the Boston Tea Party started in. *laughs* America is the only country in the whole world where this democracy, people think for themselves. It is not hierarchy. But anywhere in Europe you go, Asia you go, wherever the kings were there, everything for the king first. Then whatever is left over, the ministers and others. Finally, if something is there, okay, for the people. So always they think the people are the last, though they are paying, they are working, they are doing everything, these people, they consider themselves, but America, exactly opposite. They think for the people. You have paid the taxes. You have every right for a nice road. You have every right for the social security, every a right for these. You can go to the court for anything, but you'll no other country will find this. No other country. So America has so many good qualities, but only America should understand they're leading human society. They're animals. They're leading human society and at then they will be the leader of the whole human society.

And what is the human society? Also helping them to grow up, thinking for their betterment also. You need not to bring them to your own country and then a little group of people giving them education. No. You need not to.

Go out and reach over there. Tell friends, I like to start a very good hospital here, very good school here, college here. I like to teach you people. Ten years, you'll be like that. Swami Vivekananda observed. So this is the first time he came, the first Indian who came over here and he observed, and he was so happy. He wrote back to his friends. You know, the when the people are coming from the, the eastern countries and western the countries, they come, their heads are hanging on their chest, no confidence in them.

Within few days, the American weather, American air will whisper, Jack, you can do it. Tom, you can do it. And the way they get the self confidence, they go and shake hands with the president

of America without any, but they never say, oh, honorable sir. Hi, president. This is only America can do.

If you go to India and other places, anywhere in Asia, if the hierarchy you have to say these these, America, hey, Donald Trump and Dwight, Donald, how are you? You won't mind. This is only in America. I'm telling you, there's wonderful good qualities. Wonderful good qualities.

So, yeah, please.

[PA]: So go ahead Sarah—

Speaker 1: So you had mentioned that you've been back to Kolkata, you've been back to India, uh, several many times since moving here. What is the experience like for you when you go back to India and, you know, what do you think looking around? How do you experience India differently after having moved to the US?

[SI]: The one thing, India, it was under the subjugation of the foreign rules for a long, long, long period of time. So originality has been lost, but still through the religion and philosophy, things are still there. But as you know, they will never say no to the people. When no one was having. I mean, this the Muslims, these Bahai's, the Ayatollah, and this when they were tortured in Iran, they never went to the Europe. Their brother came to India, and India said, okay, you can stay with us, no problem. The first Christian, he went to the shore of Kerala, the southern shore of India, and said, I want a temple for my god. Hindu king never asked, is your god and my god are same, otherwise, why should I help? Or you get yourself converted. Never. Okay. Hindu money, Hindu land, Hindu people, they construct the first church there. This broadness, a Catholicity is there.

But you know money, the Britishers, they suck the whole money, and they injected in the minds of the Indians that you are nothing. You can't do anything. We, the Europeans, have come and helping you, that's why you are surviving. Slowly, slowly, slowly, they started thinking anything foreign is good. Now to afterwards, Swami Vivekananda gave the talk, and there he proudly said, I am from India. India is this, India is that. Only one lecture, five minutes lecture that electrified the millions and millions of Indians. And what actually he gave back? Self confidence, not ego.

The egoistic people say, I only can do it and nobody else, but the self confident people will say, I too can do it. That came back to Indian. They said, we also can do, why not? If the Britishers can do, we also can do.

So that self-confident then Swamiji indirectly said, freedom, freedom, freedom. Freedom is the first condition of growth. That generated the movement. Now when I go, it is only seventy two years, their freedom has come. You know that they're confused. The leaders are confused what to do and what not to do because lot of emotion is there. We have to help the poor. We have to do this, but practical way to thinking, that is also not there.

And India is a land of multilingual, multireligious, multiculture, so difficult to control them, to understand and handle them, very difficult. It's not like America. America is a huge country, very less population. India is actually very small country and three times more population than America.

America is three times bigger than India in land. India is small. All around us, the Britishers, they kept China without keeping proper border. British were ruling both, and suddenly one mister Mac McMohan, he sat in Delhi, and over a map, he make a red line and said that is China and this is India. You better go and see the place. *laughs*

Now China and India, till then, fighting each other. Then this is Pakistan. This is India. Now they're fighting. By that way, Bangladesh, many portion they were majority Hindu. Instead of keeping with the India, they gave it to Bangladesh, Pakistan. And the majority Muslim, they gave it to India so that we fight. So that challenges are also there. But even then, when there was nothing in India, when the Britishers left, from there, within the seventy two years, you see all over the world, the professors, mainly Indians. Not that the government is helping them, the people are very intelligent, and they have the confidence.

Doctors, engineers, scientists, researchers, thousands all over the world. Any university you go, you will find at least one or two professors. So that is there, but because of the population and resource, that is little difficult. But when I go now in Calcutta, very neat and clean.

And present the government, they're trying to make things really because they invite the foreigners to invest over there, so they are making things very nicely. But people are poor, what they will do? So the poor people, they will come and bathe in the tap, in the water tap over there naturally, so they are making, but still, comparing with America, we don't say, but when we were children, that way Calcutta is now much better. All facilities are there, everything.

[PA]: For people who don't know who listen to this recording in the future, could you tell us in general what the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago is?

[SI]: Yeah, see when Swami Vivekananda came over here, he came only to introduce India, the true India, ah, that discovered the self, and the India that gave the asylum to all the oppressed people from all over the world, including the Buddhist, the Dalai Lama, recently at our younger days. So that is wonderful India, but that people forgot about it. And very systematically, the Britishers, they gave the wrong picture. So Vivekananda could break that slowly, slowly. The great personalities like Max Muller, and he loved India.

He started translating, the, all the Upanishads like that, the Vedas. So slowly, slowly, it became all popular, and then Britishers left after the second world war. They understood, so they left all that way. Indian leaders are coming up slowly, so this is a transition period. We have to give them more time to settle down.

But Vivekananda's contribution is self confidence, and he said, you must have to have the self confidence first, secondly, very wonderful teaching, give women education and let them take their decision for their own problem. Give them education and take your hands off.

They will solve their own problem because the women were behind their cartons (inaudible), not like only Muslims. Hindus were, they never allowed, so the American, I, I'm really thinking if I get some money, I will help and start one museum for one lady from Detroit. She went all the way to Calcutta in those days and only to help the Indian women for education.

Christine Greenstidel, and we call her Sister Christine, and she was born in Detroit. People don't know, as an American lady dedicated her whole life, if I get some money, I will have something for her over there, that we should not forget her. So these are the the way that Vivekananda contributed.

The one lady asked Swamiji, I'd like to give some gift to you which will make you happy. Then he said, if you like to make me happy, love India. So obviously, the many American ladies, they went out to help Swamiji in that work. Our main, the Belur Board, the headquarters, that the land was purchased and the temple was constructed with the help of the American ladies, the disciples of Vivekananda, and Vivekananda, for the Indian, even today, is the ideal.

Even today, whether he's a Muslim or a, the sheik or a Buddhist or a Hindu, Vivekananda is separate. As an inspiration for younger generation, even today, arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached. You must get up and finish your job. That is Vivekananda. So, ah, and Vivekananda wanted here in America Vedanta society.

And what is the Vedanta society? When he found these people having everything but wasting time for many other things and not think, thinking about themselves. So Vivekananda asked us to go and tell them the yoga, union with God, you are God yourself. Only thing you have to close your eyes, sit and quietly calm down your mind, and you see what type of joy you come, you enjoy. So that's exactly what we do in America.

So as I was telling the younger generation, we must tell them, the friends, you should follow this type of things, then afterwards, you'll be the asset for your family, for your society, don't be a liability. Don't be a liability. Somehow earning some money and then you do, you do not know what is the goal.

And simply going and drinking and spending time and one day you just die, that is to the human life, the animal life, eating and then one day die. Human life means you should know what the resource is there inside, and what is that? Happiness. So be unselfish, and that is our goal. So we have fifteen centers, the Ramakrishna Mission Swamis are there.

Then we have American Swamis and nuns are also there. In the Hollywood and San Francisco, we have convents, nuns are also there, American ladies. And nearly one side is twenty one, another is seventeen, so these many nuns, they are there, so they are also working. We have

other Asthma centers run by the devotees, we visit there, monks, we visit there, and, but that that is managed by the devotees.

There is many, almost in every town here and I have started Vedanta study circle. I (inaudible) Vedanta study circle in Minnesota, in Colorado, and in Huntsville, and Detroit, and in, in Naperville, say, almost every places, the online, you should read books and you must ask question and then reply yourself. So slowly, slowly, the people that are coming, they are reading those books, and with many other things, if you read these books, that will help you to understand what a human being should do. Suffering will be there, challenges are there, but I am not that way connected. I'm a witness, so I won't suffer. I won't lose my brain. In America particularly, the main problem is psychological. We have to handle that in a proper way, otherwise it will be very difficult. *laughs* So our goal is to reach out to them, to help them so that they can help themselves and become happy in their own life, that's all.

[PA]: You mentioned earlier without naming it the home of harmony, could you, ah, tell us a little bit about the origins of buying the building and how that all came about?

[SI]: So the Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, he is the latest avatara. So he practiced all religions. He practiced all the ways of Hinduism and then Sufism, then he went to Christianity, and he saw the Christianity, and he claimed that Lord Jesus appeared before him and marched in his holy person. So that way, then he declared, as many faiths, so many paths, and all paths are leading to the same goal.

Now based on this organization, then when I came over here, I found that we should have to have some place where we should propagate this idea. So many churches are there, all are closed door. These are my members, these are my members, like that. But what we are doing, worshiping God. Same God, I'm also worshiping, you are also worshiping, why not come and sit together? You are also eating maybe the bread, I'm also eating bread, same taste. Maybe you are having some other type of ketchup and other things, but *laughs* that may change your taste, but we are actually doing the same thing, that our hunger satisfied with the food. So I thought we have to do something, but, you know, this place, when I came, two million dollar loan was there. So I was thinking, when I came to know, they, they started all the process. I applied for the visa. Then one day they called me and said, we go there, and you have to pay the loan that Swami, your predecessor, he has taken. I said, how much? Two million. I said, my god, I do not know. *laughs* I do not know how many zeros are necessary to make a million, so, ah, they told her (inaudible).

Will you believe I prayed to this mother, Ma Sharadhamani Devi, the, one of her direct disciple, and in her birthday, I mean, birthplace, Jayrambati, I was visiting that, and that Swamiji was there, very old Swami, direct disciple of mother, so I showed these two pictures, then he told that picture with the food grains and she's sitting, is a picture of the Lakshmi, the giver of wealth, and this picture is a picture of Saraswati, the giver of knowledge. So I believed it, then I worshiped those two. I prayed to the mother, mother, what to do?

I don't know anyone here and who will give two million? *laughs* So it is impossible, only billionaire can give and our devotee, they give five dollar, ten dollar.

To make that million means I will die again. That's it. After me, another swami has to come. *laughs* And I prayed to her, please do something, please do something. But suddenly, the then president of America, I, I mean, India, though he was known to me, that he told, as you have gone to America, organize a big program on Swami Vivekananda.

He was a very follower of Vivekananda. Pranab Mukherjee was his name. So then as because he's the president and he's asking then Belur Math also told, please do something. Then I planned a big way, and nearly fifty five Swamis and nuns, they came from all over the world, the fifty five, they, they have them. Seven hundred devotees, they came.

And the Hilton hotel, two days we booked that, every day the hall was for fifty thousand. So one hundred thousand, but one lady came and told, I like to give fifty thousand to you, for this work. One check. Another lady, just recently, she passed away, so she also gave fifty-five thousand. The third one gave thirty-five thousand, then I thought everything is solved. And after those whole thing, there again and again I used to tell them, please help me to pay back so much of money started coming in, and I could pay that within six months, two hundred two million and then I could save some money also.

With that money, I made some of the guest rooms, and the guest started coming. It came back to life. When people came to know that I want to start another center and this is the idea, they started donating me, Indian from all over, they started donate. A few Americans also donated.

I said, no, this is good idea? We do. And then we are searching for where to go, where to go, and you cannot just purchase any place because Joan is there. So you cannot simply go and purchase and start it.

No. You cannot do that. But this is a church. Already that facility was there, and they were also non not-for-profit. We are also, so that came, and they told, we can't run this church.

We, that, that was a dilapidated condition. I purchased that with one million, and then I renovated that another one million.*laughs* Still work is going on, from the air drop, water coming and then this thing, old thing.

But that helped me because the locality is very good. Neighborhood is very good. That they appreciated me, and they told we are always with you, and they never say anything. So this is slowly growing up. I want that people should know.

The one day, one of the meeting, all the religious leaders came, then I told, can I tell you one thing? I am organizing all the time. You are coming over here, and we are discussing that all should be together, why you people are not organizing. You also do that. Now the Muslims are also organizing, and the, and the Christians present, they're saying that they are also regularly,

they're also doing it, inviting other religious leaders. Recently, they have done. Now they are coming up. They're appreciating. I have a plan that we will go to the either the governor or at least the mayor.

Let me, they won't allow me to go and talk. But if these people, they go, maybe they will listen and give some time. We like to reach to the children with some stories, *sighs* stories from different religion, not one religion, different religion, and very interesting stories, but moral stories, by that way. These children will grow up, they will be in the helms of the affairs, they will become president and the senators, so if we can reach out, we'll start with Chicago, and if that clicks, then maybe in other states.

If the children will learn that all religions are the same, this animity will go, and the healthy competition will come. I have to be on the top of the ladder, that will come and we successful will be there. So by that way, this is my planning, so Home of Harmony is for that, but I need some money, you know, people they give money for temple.

But they don't understand spreading the message of unity is also a great job. So I could publish books, pamphlets if I had money. I could invite some of the great speakers from far away, like the San Francisco, like the, the other places but if I invite them, I have to pay them up and down fare, then I have to keep them in the hotel. Who will give that money?

So if people are listening, then if they come, *laughs*, then that is necessary. There are very good speakers. If they come and then that will help.

[PA]: Uh-huh, so that's Hope of Harmony, thank you. Could you talk a little bit about the retreat center, Ganges and –

[SI]: Ganges Retreat Center? That was purchased in nineteen seventy with the Swami, and you know who gave the money? The, he was the disciple of that Swami, Swami Bhashya Nandaji. He was the, the, actually, he discovered the Xerox machine. So obviously, he was having a lot of money. He gave that money to his guru, and he purchased a hundred and ten acres land in the Michigan because the place is called Ganges. So there are two different opinions of how, how the name came, but whatever. There is no river, there is nothing, *laughs*, but Ganges.

[SL]: What are the two different opinions and how the name came?

[SI]: The one, they say that the governor of that place, he went to India, he liked the Ganga, and so when he came back, and that place was much for that neighborhood, so he gave the name Ganges because he liked it. Another says that someone from India, a king came, the local small king, the landlords type, so he gave the name, but I don't know, I think the mayor may be. Anyway, the problem has become, it has become a white elephant for us, because it is a wonderful place, but far away.

[PA]: It is, yeah.

[SI]: And how many retreats you can do? Wintertime, it is impossible. In the snow time, it is impossible. Only summertime. Summertime means five or six. Only for the five or six retreats to maintain hundred and ten acres of land and so many buildings, electricity, heating, water, regular expenses. So that is a problem, but it's a beautiful place. Neighborhood also very good. Never ever disturb us. Never.

And we go and sit under the trees and we meditate, that gives us solace. You know that from the hustle and bustle of the city life, when you go over there, and then you are developing a community feeling also. I always say, husband and wife, you have come, and don't all the time sit together, all the time gossip to you, you are there in the home.

Now please separate and develop some friendship with others, so know others also. Exchange your phone number and address so that you become, the so many, many people will know you, and you also know them. So that is also one way it's helping, and slowly, slowly it will be wonderful, and let us see what to do. I am trying to sell the woodland, the wood part.

It's a huge place, like eighty-four acres. Very good trees are also there, but only those who can understand, they can utilize that and can develop in a many different way. If I can sell that, I can keep that money for the maintenance of the buildings that is necessary. And in Home of Harmony, I forgot to tell you, that apart from know and love, we have the online school, School of World Religions, and we teach seven religions over there, very popular. The last time I heard it is that is probably he's looking after, seven hundred students all over the world. Mmm.

And for every two months, we send the material, they read, and then they do the exam, give the exam. Again material goes, then after ten months we give them a certificate, you have completed this religion. And they also feel the confidence and some idea. There we have made a book, published a book, at the back of the book, a different religion. I have given in one chart who is the founder, when it was done, what is the main religion, and what are the practices.

You know why? Because if you go through the practices, same. The Jewish, they're also counting the beats, taking the name of god, going to the holy places, and the charity and fasting. Same thing, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, all are doing the same practices. And then I ask questions, if we are doing the same type of action, how come the result is different?

It cannot be. *laughs* That proves result will be the same. Suppose you are boiling a water and putting raw rice into that, wherever it is, in any part of the world, it will be the same cooked rice. So that should be, we are practicing the same fasting, same taking the name of god. That means god is the same, and god is unselfishness and love. Thank you. I think, any other questions?

[PA]: Ahh, actually, my last question and then Sarah, if, if you have anything, um, but yes, I was just curious, ah, because of the historical importance of the Parliament of World Religions.

[SI]: Yes

[PA]: Are you involved today in the Parliament of –

[SI]: Yes

[PA]: World Religions?

[SI]: Yes, I'm one of the trustees of the World Parliament, but I think, I, I don't like to talk, but thing is that, World Parliament of Religion, mainly then Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, they are very much associated with the social things. So why this thing? Why that thing? Immediately write a protest letter and send to, who read I don't know. But they will be writing. But religion has nothing to do with the social problems. Other institutions are there, other groups are there, peoples are there, the citizens are there to take care of that. Religion has another responsibility to make people aware about high moral values.

What is religion? Moral values. Don't tell lies, don't cheat, don't hurt, all moral values. We are not doing that. So I am disheartened to say, and really I am telling you. So very less meeting I'm attending, after all this, where we'll make a meeting, and how many people will go, what are the hotels, it's a management, a program management. Mhmm. That is not our job. Mhmm. Our job is to come and sit together, discuss, and go to different cities and discuss in that way.

Involve as maximum religious people and teach them that we are actually friends, not only the members and the, uh, trustees, anywhere, anyone, publish some magazine, write the, all these common things over there. These are the things the parliamentary religion should do. That is their job, not actually where they are bombed and then other people are there to look after. Our goal is to tell them religion is a completely different place like the Switzerland, where no law will go. Anyone from any place, if they come to my church, maybe he's from the, a completely different country, my enemy country, but if he comes to me and says, sir, I need some help, I should help.

I should go to the people, particularly to the decision makers. We go to the ordinary people. They listen and they are also the helpless, they cannot take the should go to the decision makers and then tell them, see, this way you are making the suffering. Why?

We should have to inspire them, and that way only we can serve the society. So I think someday some leader will come in the World Parliamentary Religion, that's very, very important.

[SL]: That's great.

[PA]: Did you have any, anything?

[SL]: I think that was really wonderful.

[PA]: Really nice, yes.

[SL]: Thank you for your time

[PA]: Thank you very much –

[SI]: Ah, ah

[PA]: We both really appreciate it and we learned a lot along the way.