

SENSE  
ESSENCE  
AND  
NON-SENSE

VOLUME 4



Swami Venkatesananda



## Dedication

My Gurudev, Sri Swami Sivananda, used to treat all the conventional "valuables" with total indifference. Money, expensive articles, and such others that we value had none for Him.

But there was one exception: a piece, a scrap of paper on which He had recorded a passing thought. Everything He wrote had to be typed "three copies", properly checked - always by Him, and kept with different responsible persons - the first, Himself.

He once explained: "Money can be earned. Ashram can be built. But the thought, once lost, is lost forever."

Gurudev used to do this. He would record important thoughts after some lectures or talks.

His thoughts were from God. He regarded Himself and all of us as mere channels for their flow. They were sacred.

To assume authorship is one type of vanity. To treat them callously is another type of vanity.

Gurudev had no objection at all to other people plagiarizing His writings - so long as the knowledge was spread.

But He was "impatient" if they were allowed to be lost.

These flower petals are once again offered at the divine lotus Feet of my Gurudev Sivananda.

They belong to Him. They do not belong to me and often I have never had those ideas before.

I hear them first; they originate in the Feet of Gurudev.

At the Feet of my Gurudev in the reader's heart, I humbly dedicate this collection.

My grateful thanks to my Gurudev Swami Sivananda, who perpetually inspires us from within, whose Feet are the origin of all good thoughts.

May God bless you all.

Swami Venkatesananda

## Foreword

A new volume of 'Sense, Essence and Non-sense' of the sage Swami Venkatesananda makes its debut.

These are gems 'recollected at moments of tranquility' - moments when the mind is attuned with the Divine - for it is only with such divine Grace that the nectar of wisdom begins to flow, the divinity within also begins to glow, and radiate the light of knowledge.

The modern world is in haste. Its destination is unknown nor its course chartered.

Caught in this velocity, the mind too, speeds on this precarious path. It has little time for lengthy discourses on religion.

Some signposts are necessary to redirect the mind on the road to salvation. These short, pithy and at times witty, but down-to-earth truths, each a self-contained moral, serve as landmarks where man must turn off from his present course.

They should have appeal to the young and old, the scholar and the layman. They are simple, void of any proselytising or dogmas, yet thought provoking.

They express in simple language the truths of the scriptures of the East and the West.

Of what is said may be sense, some of it may be non-sense - you take out the essence.

It is 'non-sense' in so far as it is not related to the world of senses.

Some thoughts make sense. Others may be just non-sense, due to faulty medium of their expression, but even they may provoke a great thought in the reader.

True wisdom is above the sensory, because the latter is fleeting, transient, changing, impermanent and temporary.

Truth which is related to Reality is lasting.

These notes are not to be studied as a book, but used to stimulate your own ideas and thoughts.

They are not cogently arranged for that is considered unnecessary for the purpose we have in view.

They may even seem to contradict one another - that again is the purpose - to enable you to see the same truth from different angles, which should be done in regard to any fact or problem.

## Prayer

May God bless you all with health, long life, prosperity, and spiritual enlightenment.

May you all walk in the Light of God, with God with your hand in His, with the whole of you in His Palm.

Live in God. Love in God. Serve God in all beings.

May that Supreme Being dwell in your eyes, in your heart, seeing His Own Self in all; seeing God Himself in all.

May we thus swim in the Ocean of Bliss.

May that Peace that passeth all understanding dwell in your heart, radiate from every pore of your skin, bathing everyone who comes within the circle of your aura with that inexpressible peace.

May harmony radiate from you, dispelling the darkness of disharmony wherever it is found.

May bliss radiate from you, dispelling the gloom of suffering, misery, pain - physical, mental, moral and spiritual.

May God lead us from the Unreal to the Real, from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality.

Assert every moment of your life - I am not the body, I am not his finite, limited mind, I am the Immortal Self.

May you be established in that Self-Realisation right now.

Swami Venkatesananda

## Culture

Much knowledge is of no use.

It is only that knowledge that goes in to the inner culture of man that counts. An idol is made of clay - but we do not worship a mountain which has millions of times the quantity of clay used in the image.

An idol is made of stone - but we do not worship a crude rock or a mountain which has stone enough for a million idols.

Only when the clay is moulded does it become the idol fit for worship.

Only when the stone is chiselled into a proper shape does it become fit for worship.

Even so is much knowledge not to be praised, but that knowledge is useful and praiseworthy which has been utilized to culture the heart and mind.

## Religion

Not "my" religion or "your" religion, nor a third combatant called "universal religion" - but your religion for you and my religion for me.

## Why?

This simple question often asked and always abandoned prematurely can lead us to Truth.

He is dead. Why?

Because of cancer. Why?

Because the cells multiply too fast. Why?

Because the time has come for him to die or leave this body. Why?

Because his karma had come to an end. Why?

Because the soul had undergone the experiences to purify itself and learn further lessons. Why?

Because the imperfect, impure soul has to become perfect and pure. Why?

Because it has to realise its identity with God. Why?

Because in fact it is ever at one with God and duality is illusory!

## Desire and Motive

It is possible to be truthful only if one is desireless and motiveless.

Desire and motive make people lie.

## Idol

Ultimately even a simple stone should be realised as God manifest.

But in the beginning of our spiritual life we are as children, whatever our chronological age, and only certain specific symbols remind us of God.

## Pratyahara

We blame the outside world for our inability to concentrate, without realising that the world disturbs us because we are unable to concentrate the mind.

In sleep, our ears are open and yet we hear nothing!

## Visualisation and Realsation

It is exactly like sculpture.

The sculptor looks at a stone and visualises an image - not imagines.

You know the difference by the result.

In imagination, the image vanishes - in visualisation the image is realised as actuality.

The sculptor uses chisel and hammer.

The yoga student uses concentration and mantra.

## Intellect and Emotion

You should approach meditation with both intellect and emotion under control.

If there is only intellect it will lead to speculation.

If there is only emotion, you will be able to sing and dance, but not meditate.

## Asanas and Pranayama

Asanas and pranayama are aids, like spectacles are an aid for sight.

If you have no eyes, not even the most powerful spectacles will enable you to see.

If the heart is not pure, what will prapayama do?

## Obstacles

An obstacle is a step.

An obstacle does not allow you to go on smoothly, but it is actually a step to enable you to rise!

## Om Mani Padme Hum

Om - I invoke the path and experience of universality so that

Mani - the luminosity of my immortal mind

Padme - may be unfolded within the depths of the lotus center or awakened consciousness

Hum - and I may be wafted by the ecstasy of breaking through all bonds and horizons.

National Geographic Magazine : May, 1963.

## Prayer

Should we pray for material benefits? Yes!

Desires arise in our hearts, and when we pray to God for their fulfilment we actually hand them over to Him.

But if we still continue to entertain them, we shall be nagging Him" and, like a parent, He might snap back His refusal!

## Good

Good works without prayer may often lead you into confusion about what is good!

Prayer calms you, and His Grace will guide you to what is really - not conventionally, good.

## Old Age

To put off yoga to old age, is to offer God the leavings of the devil's dinner!'

## Chosen by God

In the Gita and the Kathopanishad we come across the phrase: I choose the devotee on whom Self-realisation is bestowed.

Is God then subject to eccentricities like the human being? No.

It is obvious that the ego cannot realise God.

It is only when the ego is surrendered that God-realisation is attained, and after this total surrender there is no egotistic personality with which to take the Final Step.

The 'I' is dead and the dead body falls at the Feet of God.

It cannot then embrace Him.

It has to be raised to a state of Union with Him.

That is what He does.

Self-realisation is therefore a natural corollary to self-surrender.

## I and You

I always expect to find all virtues in you.

I know why I erred last time and find an excuse to do it again.

Virtue is something we expect to find in others.

Vice is something we are ready to forgive to ourselves!

## Coma, Death, and Happiness

Coma, Death, and Happiness are God's Grace to save us from unbearable suffering, uselessness and unhappiness.

## Consciousness

We would not say that consciousness is in the body but rather that the body is in consciousness.

## Spirit

The Spirit of the universe cannot change.

Being 'All' there is nothing for It to change into.

The Soul of the universe must obey the will of the Spirit.

The Body of the universe cannot help changing!



### Banana Skin

The relation between soul and body is like the banana and its skin. The skin is in firm contact, but when it is peeled off, it leaves smoothly as though it had nothing to do with the fruit!

### Socrates

Socrates believed that nothing bad can come to a good man.

### Charity

Three planes in charity.

Egotistic - it is good for me to do it.

Duty - it must be done.

Surrender - I cannot help it - His Will.

### Creation

As the rain drops, water - pure in itself, coming into contact with various objects, is contaminated by them. The "fallen jiva" similarly is contaminated by satva, rajas, and tames - the three strands together forming the rudimentary matter of the universe.

These are not "outside" consciousness, but an integral part of it, just as the sun, the rain and the rain-bow are all in space, as part of it.

### Third Eye

Third Eye is within - it can only see within.

### Diversity, Unity and Humility

Standing on the ground you will perceive trees to be of different height.

Fly aloft and they will appear to be of the same height.

Lie down and they will appear sky-high!

### Satsanga

Satsanga is essential even after self-realisation.

Fire is latent in oil - even after the wick is lighted it needs oil to burn.

### Intelligence

Often we find intellectuals decrying some practices as superstitious - "we cannot understand them".

In that case they have no intelligence!

They are incapable of finding out why these customs came into being!

### Loss of Effort?

When sadhana is interrupted, is the effort or achievement lost? Perhaps no. But the momentum is lost, the zeal is lost - and zeal is every thing in spiritual life.

Even when the thread is taken up again, it will take considerable time to build up the momentum again.

This is the loss - and a very great loss.

### Just and Loving

God is both just and loving.

As a just God, He has given the law of karma.

As a loving God, He has kept the door to moksha open.

### Heart Failure

It is not heart failure when the heart stops - but when the heart shrinks, when the function of the heart, which is love and charity - stops.

It is then that there is heart failure.

The heartless miser has heart failure every hour of the day.

### Religion and Spirituality

What can we learn from the experiences of others, and what should we experience ourselves?

Ritualistic and ethical religious teachings can be learned from the lips and experiences of others, but spiritual truth have to be discovered for ourselves.

We can learn from others that fire will burn if we touch it with our fingers, but if we want to know what it is to be burnt, how it feels, how fire feels, then we will have to have the experience ourselves.

Ideas can be had second-hand, but God must be realised first hand.

Here even a guru can only guide.

### The Mirror

Man has been made in the image of God, we are told.

There is a wonderful meaning in this.

Look into the mirror - you see your image, and it looks at you.

That is what God wants us to do.

We should always look at Him.

### Kumbhakarna

We are told he could sleep so fast that elephants had to rollover him to awaken him.

That Kumbhakarna is our spiritual ignorance, which sleeps in spite of so many awakening influences.

### Jnana Yajna

Do not wait until you attain God-Realisation to give of your knowledge.  
Only if you give what you have will you get more.

### Learn and Teach

Only when you have cross ventilation do you get a good breeze in your room!  
It is no use keeping only one window open.  
In the same way - learn and teach at the same time.

### Help Another

Even if you feel you are spiritually small, teach, what you know.  
The tap in your kitchen does not say: "I am small compared to the underground pipe-line".  
You cannot drink water straight from the pipe-line.  
An aspirant can help another.

### Remember

We remember what we want to remember.  
Apart from a specific inability, like remembering names or numbers, we will not forget something that we want to remember.

### One-pointedness

We should have one-pointedness of mind, pouring all our energy into what is being done now.  
Our minds should not become diversified, trying to put our attention on half a dozen things at the same time and doing nothing properly.  
If you are really interested in what you are doing, your whole attention will be on the present moment, until that action has been completed.

### Follow

I doubt if anyone ever 'follows' anyone at all.  
Christ's disciples rejected, denied and ran away from Him.  
Arjuna, after all the teachings and Grace received from Krishna, later asked Him to repeat the teachings.  
We hear but do we learn or follow?  
Teachings are used when they suit us - for name, fame and prestige.  
When they no longer suit our purpose, we reject them.  
We follow nothing or no one - except our own nose.

### Fit In

Wherever you go, drop your behaviour pattern, leave it behind you and fit in with the customs of wherever you are.

### Alternatives

Problems are something to be dealt with calmly.

Think always of alternatives whilst the mind is considering the best solution.

With alternatives on hand, there is always some solution, something to fall back on.

Keep an open mind and look for all avenues of possibility.

### Double Morality

Double morality will be found everywhere.

What I consider good for myself I may not consider good for others.

### Insult

It is a pleasure to listen to insult.

It gives us an opportunity to see ourselves as other see us.

Thank you.

### Karma

All past karmas are blended and we are the product of that blended karma.

It is like this: take a glass of water; add to it a teaspoon sugar and pepper; stir it well and then taste it.

It is not possible to say 'this is the taste of sugar or pepper' - they are mixed up.

They are both there, no doubt, but not one apart from the other.

One of the corollaries of this theory is: can it be that our good actions can to a great extent mitigate the effect of evil actions, just as the pungency of pepper is mitigated by the addition of sugar.

### Man's Defence

The very physiological structure of Man points to the fact that his nature is non-violent. He does not have the sharp teeth and claws of a tiger or lion, nor even the horns or tusks' of the cow and elephant. He has brains and a heart.

He is expected to understand others and to love all. That is his only defence.

### Light and Power

Suffering is the name which the pleasure-seeking self gives to the "process of purification". It is like ashes accumulating over the fire - the wind blows them off. The wind is "suffering". But for the wind, the ashes

would smother the fire. From the Action of the wind as from "suffering", Light and Power are born.

## Obedience

Submission to the Will of God is a tricky business. It is possible for the seeker to deceive himself and others: "I Am doing only His Will". Even scriptures like the Gita, the Bible and the Quran can be misinterpreted by the ego. To deal with the ego, obey someone implicitly. Try it! This is the purpose of guru bhakti.

Life is beauty when you do your duty.

## Darkness in Light

Look at the flame of the candle - it has a secret message. It says: "There is no darkness - you have invented the word." "But" , you say, "It is dark in the next room". "Come" says the candle-flame , "Let us see". When you both enter the next room, you find you were wrong and the candle-flame was correct! There is no darkness in light.

## Disease and Death

It is necessary for the body to become broken down in order to justify its abandonment! This is called disease. Most of the diseases that Man fears are nothing more than natural conditions of the body's disintegration and not to be feared.

## Brain Graft

There is a lot of scientific talk that we may get a whole brain grafted from one to another! Do not forget the brain is just tissue. It will respond to stimulus - but will not think, nor feel, discriminate nor decide. The "I" has to do it. You see me with your eyes and hate me. Another looks through his eyes and loves me. Will changing eyes change your heart too?

## Self-culture

The point at which service and self-culture meet is yoga. I serve to rediscover my own Self in All.

## Attachment

Nothing attaches itself to us. We foolishly get attached to worldly objects and relationships.

## Guru

Guru is the ladder and the roof. If you ignore the ladder - you won't get to the roof. When you get to the roof, you will find Him there already!

## Law of Karma and Law of Grace

Any heavier-than-air object will fall down - Karma.

If it is pushed fast enough, and wings are provided, it will fly - Grace.

## Evil Qualities

It is often said that to get rid of evil qualities, the best way is to express them and get them out of oneself! Wish that it were so easy. Often this only acts as an electric sub-station where the current generated by a distant powerhouse gets a boost. Non-expression of the evil will lengthen the time process and weaken its power. Expression will boost the power of the evil. Even if it is there let it die a natural death in due course.

## Master and Slave

Mind wants to experience objects. The soul in ignorance identifies itself with mind and hence with desires and experiences. First you want to enjoy them as their master and then you are enslaved by them.

## His Will and Power

Do not desire anything, do not even desire "not to do". Let His Will and His Power take over. You will find that His Will keeps you ever active, but without selfishness, greed or desire.

## Lead Us

Guru, scripture and religion can lead us a certain distance and only as far as that.

But perhaps no other force can replace them for that purpose.

## Creation

The moment when Life became matter must for ever remain a mystery. It is too subtle, even for intelligence to grasp. An atom, or at least its component electron, is weightless - it casts no shadow because it has no dimension. When does the aggregate acquire the dimension to cast a shadow? It will be difficult, if not impossible to find out.

## Spiritual Experiences

It is possible to have spiritual experiences progressively. When the sky is very cloudy, we may not see the sky at all. When there is an opening, you see just a little. Through the window on a clear day, you see a little more. From the roof, you see much more. The cosmonaut sees a lot more. But no one can see the whole sky with the physical vision.

## Heart

I have my heart and you have yours. To me there is only one heart. To you there is only one. In structure and function and in their essential nature, "they" are all One. Your heart is not different from mine.

But my heart may love all and yours may shoot arrows at strangers.

## Love Your Enemies

God gives the power of understanding to us - but we are responsible for our own reactions. For instance, when someone regards himself as our enemy, and insults us, we understand his feelings, and even the fact that he insults us. But if we are spiritual aspirants, we will not react in a mimical way.

## Prayer

God wants us to think of Him.

If we think of Him only when we are unhappy, then naturally He has to give us that unhappiness.

If we think of Him even in prosperity, we can continue to enjoy prosperity.

If we think of Him in all conditions, then we shall not know any difference at all and shall always be blissful.

## Guest is God

The guest comes walking and the host politely and gracefully tell him to come in after washing his feet. At the same time they adopt the motto: Guest is God. They wave the lighted camphor which floats on coloured water and which has a message - 'You and I may be like fire and water, we may be otherwise opposed to each other and may have our differences, but let us dwell in unity when you are my guest!'

## Evolution

When the animal lifted its forelegs and looked up to the heavens, he became 'Man. Later he worshipped the Gods of heaven - rain, wind and sun etc. But Man found that even His Blessings could not give him permanent satisfaction. Then Saints and Scriptures reminded him that that satisfaction was neither on earth nor in heaven but "œwithin you is hidden God."

## One's Own Evil

To the disciple there is argument. Guru is God. Anyone who speaks ill of Him is to be avoided like poison. Any contrary idea arising in one's own mind should also be treated as the manifestation of one's own evil.

## Roots

A root going deep can break the foundations of nearby buildings. Similarly our spiritual roots must be strengthened and made to grow deeper so that the mansion of evil might be destroyed at the foundation.

## Two Kinds of Changes

We often hear "Times have changed; hence we should modify our attitude towards religion and give it up." This is obviously wrong. If a man is ill and suffering, it is a crime to say: "Yesterday you were well - times have changed, so we can't help."

But there is another type of change - natural change, e.g. old age. Here we do take change into account and do not expect the old man to do what he did fifty years ago.

There are certain unaging factors in religion and certain factors which are subject to change. We should discern between disease and old age in religion - and cure the disease!

## Sincerity

Beware of the man who demands that you should set an example - he does not mean to follow you! He wants to hide his own viciousness and keep your wisdom at a respectable distance by sealing your lips with the words "your life should be exemplary before you preach." Even if your conduct rises up to his expected exemplariness, do you think he will follow you? No.

He will applaud you, garland you - and go his own way, unaffected by your example! Truly, he is setting you an example. Go your own way all the time and if people are sincere they will follow you anyway!

## Ignorance

Nothing belongs to you. You belongs to Him. You are a part of Him.

Ignorance makes you imagine otherwise.

## If We Are Good

People often ask: "There is so much of unrighteousness now. Why does not the Lord come?"

We forget that He has promised to come - only to protect the good.

Unless we are good, we have no right to grumble. If we are good - we shall probably not grumble.

## Inner Motives

Of all things the most difficult is to scrutinise, the inner motives. Saints have said that if the motives are alright, the actions are also good. Gurudev

Sivananda emphasised that we should always scrutinise the inner motives.

Work and service assume a new significance when we do this. Suddenly, instead of working or serving, we are 'self-realising'. An inner awareness develops from scrutinising the inner motives.

## Ritual

Form is necessary. But when the spirit dies, there is only a dead body!



## Constitutions

I am ashamed to belong to a civilisation where hospitals are built only out of money wrested from man's hands, where it needs a big police force to keep brother from killing or plundering brother, and where even wandering on God's good Earth needs the sanction of a few people constituting themselves into Authority.

## Darkness Does not Argue

How long does it take to get rid of the impurity in our mind? All the wise men assure us that it may take no time at all if we are earnest. In fact, that is the meaning of Jesus' atonement for the sins of mankind. There He is on the cross, bleeding for our ignorance and folly.

“Turn towards Me in faith. Give up this worthless pursuit of the pleasures of the world. With a truly contrite heart which bleeds with deep, sincere repentance, turn to Me. We become one now. You are liberated. Go ye and sin no more.”

When you illumine a cave which has been dark over several millenia, the darkness does not argue, but flees in a second.

## Influences on Man

Man is influenced by heredity, upbringing, parents, company, and so on. The word influence is important. Man is already there - birth after birth. He is the evolving soul. The others only influence him. To what extent he can be influenced or what he will accept or reject, depends upon his own samskaras, brought forward from past births.

## Detachment

Without detachment no amount of sadhana will yield any result.

## Karma

Karma theory is purely a Law of physics. It affects only the physical and chemical parts of the being. Mind may associate itself with the body and be subject to karmic operation, or with the spirit - and be above it.

## Happiness

If you want to be happy for one hour, have a drink.

If you want to be happy for three days, get married.

If you want to be happy all your life, mind your own business.

## Grace

Grace is inherent in life itself. In recognisable forms, Grace comes as an awakening influence. Grace is cosmic, universal, eternal. It is never absent. We are not aware of it, and so at times in our spiritual growth it comes as pain, failure, misfortune and all sorts of things, rubbing the ego until we wake up! Once awakened, Grace brings about such circumstances that will lead us on to enlightenment.

One can, of course, be impervious to this Grace, disregard it and go back to where one started. Then Grace will come again as an awakening influence. We live in Grace.

## The Coming Era

We have had times where theory ruled - it was barren and impotent. There have been times where power has ruled ruthless and demoniacal. What we need today is control, not in theory but in practice, control to restrain.

Religion alone can give us this.

## Sincerity

Whether a habit is good or bad, that is an opinion. That is their opinion, not mine. Intelligence will tell you when it should be dropped, and if you are sincere you will simply do so. Sometimes we ask: "How do I drop it?"; You are not sincere and do not really want to drop it. When resistance is still there deep inside you, you still want it, otherwise there would be no need to ask, it would just fall away, just happen.

## Idea

The idea of an idea is a good idea, but when it is regarded as Truth it causes confusion.

## Turn Within

Watch the mind, watch thought arise in the mind. The rising of thought itself is the mind. Know what the mind is, and the linking of the mind to God is prayer. Motivation may be there but what reaches out from the mind is prayer. Instead of reaching out, can the mind be turned within to link with God?

## Glory

What do the lives of the Saints mean to us? Little, unless we inhale the fragrance of their messages. The message is something beautiful. When we listen to the life stories of the Great, we inhale that fragrance through the ears. Can we inspire this fragrance through our ears, and lose our hearts to its glory?

## Freedom

Real freedom is freedom from one's self - from selfishness. To be free from one's self - to be able to sacrifice one's self for others, one's country, the world or humanity - that is freedom.

## Intelligence

Intelligence is built into every cell, every fibre, every muscle of our body. I do not have to worry about the body - that intelligence is there. My only duty is to find God, or to find what it is in me that forgets God - that creates division between myself and God. Can this be abolished at its very source?

## Meditation

Through meditation I discover that it is some ego-sense that entertains hopes - and it is these hopes that suffer distress, it is these hopes that suffer frustration. When these connections are seen, I realise that "I" am not there at all, that "I" have nothing to do with these. That realisation is both peace and supreme happiness.

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