

Artha Forum @ New Jersey

Date: 23rd November, 2013

Speaker: HH Radhanath Swami

Topic: Spirituality and Worldly Success, Shall the Twain Ever Meet?

It is my great honour and pleasure to be with you this evening. Thank you to all of you who have organized this event and to all of you who are participating, and being with us this evening. Time is so precious. Chanakya Pandit explained that one moment wasted cannot be regained with all the wealth on the world. *So the greatest wealth we have is each moment and the choices we make in that moment.*

Recently I was in Chicago and I was asked to speak at a very major International Corporation, to the leaders of that Company. The CEO came in a private jet, and there was the CEO, CFO, CMO and the COO and me (laughter). I haven't had a bank account or signed a check since 1969 and the CEO of this Corporation, he was asking me about earlier this year, my speech at the House of Lords at the British Parliament, and he asked me if I would speak from something I spoke at that time. I told him, I gave about a forty minute talk and one particular line, everyone clapped very enthusiastically and afterwards so many people were telling me how much they really appreciated this one particular line. There were Counts and Countesses, Princesses and Princes, Lords and Ladies, parliament Members and so many people – one sentence really touched them and it is such a common sense idea, it really fascinated me. Would you like to hear? I told this in Chicago – which *'You can find out how rich you are by counting how many things you have that money cannot buy.'* As soon as I said this the CEO became so enthusiastic, he said, 'The greatest and most important things in life, money cannot buy!' and then he went into the whole list. He said 'Money cannot buy happiness; money cannot buy love, health, satisfying family, friends.' He is a billionaire and he really works hard for money. I didn't say anything but I just looked at him and thought – why do you work so hard for money? He understood my question and said, 'Money cannot buy the most important things in life, but it is nice to have all the things money can buy' and I thought that was a good answer – his answer was very honest.

There is an apparent contradiction between spirituality and the pursuit of wealth. *The most fundamental need of every living being is to love and to be loved.* And without that, whatever else we may have, it's like a beautiful decorated case with very little inside, or like a little girl whose parents are so busy making money, they don't have time for her. She is dressed very prettily but inside the dress she is suffering. There is so much suffering in this world, because of a lack of substance, lack of purpose, a lack of spiritual connection in people's lives. Today's lecture is entitled "Spirituality and the Pursuit of Success – will the two ever meet?" It is an interesting question. In the Bible, Jesus said that it is easier to put a camel through the eye of the needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And then he said, for man it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.

He also said, don't make your treasures in this world; a place where it will be stolen by thieves, corroded by rust or eaten by moths. Bank your treasure in the Kingdom of God, which is within us.

Our real wealth is within us. There's an analogy of the musk deer, I learnt from a sadhu in the Himalayas. Musk deer has an organ that gives a fragrance that is so sweet, people pay up to forty thousand dollars for a kilo of this excretion. A musk deer wanders through the forest everywhere searching for this sweet fragrance, not knowing it is within oneself. That's very much the story of life within this world. The Brahma sutra says 'ananda mayo bhyasat' that every living being is seeking pleasure. But what is the pleasure we are really seeking? If we can't find it within ourselves, we cannot find it anywhere, no matter what we have, and if we find it within ourselves, then we will realize and see it everywhere. In the Srimad Bhagavatam@ (1.8.26), Kuntidevi in her prayers to Lord Krishna, she prayed - *janmaishvarya-sruta-sribhir edhamāna-madaḥ pumān naivārhaty abhidhātum vai tvām akiñcana-gocaram*' it means that the greatest disqualifications for spiritual enlightenment are beauty, fame, knowledge and wealth. The enlightenment that God is the property of *akincana* (meaning: of those who are in poverty). So this kind of sounds like trying to get that camel through the eye of the needle, what does it mean? (This is) what Jesus and Kunti and all of the great acharyas (saintly teachers) are teaching us, it's what our panel was discussing. *It's not success, or beauty or knowledge or wealth in itself that is a disqualification, but it's the tendency of greed, egoism and selfishness that so often comes with these things, that are the greatest disqualifications.* The 'Culture of Wealth' is a culture of gratitude and humility.

Recently we celebrated Diwali and New Year. The origin of this festival is from Ramayana+, where we learn the story and the lessons of Ravana and Hanuman. Sita is the Goddess of Fortune, in this sense from the Vedic perspective, wealth is sacred, and wealth is divine inherently because it is the grace of God. And the predominating origin, the personification of all good fortune is Lakshmi or Sita. Sita was the embodiment of goodness, compassion, forgiveness, of all the beautiful things of this world. Knowledge, richness, health, this is all good fortune. Ravana kidnapped her and tried to exploit her for his own selfish purposes. He separated God's Grace from God, Rama. Hanuman, he dedicated himself not to exploit Sita but to honour and restore Sita by bringing her back in connection with Rama. So these two forces through this analogy of this history are within each of us, there's a Ravana side and there's a Hanuman side. There's the part of us, our lower nature, like that bad dog, that's prone to arrogance, greed, selfish lust, envy, anger and there's our divine nature – goodness, love, compassion and generosity. Which aspect of our own inner nature we choose to feed through the choices we make is what is going to determine our life.

The Bhagavad Gita gives us a very practical way by which we can live within this world, but not be subjected to that lower tendency that so much predominates this world. In the fifth chapter (of Bhagavad Gita As It Is 5.29) there's a verse that my Guru Srila Prabhupada used to call the peace formula. *bhoktāram yajña-tapasām sarva-loka-maheśvaram* – in this verse it explains how we are not proprietors, but we are caretakers. We are not masters, but we are servants.

This is the natural understanding of one who has gratitude and humility. Whatever we have we are grateful to those who taught us, to our parents who gave us birth, to the great saints and sages who have given enlightened way to use it, to all of our customers, who factually we're depending on.

And to God, who's the source and origin of everything, who gives me the power. Krishna says in the Gita, I am the intelligence of the intelligent, I am the strength of the strong, and I am the ability in everyone. *When we have gratitude, we naturally become humble, because we understand it's not just about 'me'. It's about 'us.'* Then we realize more and more, that the property that I have, in the form of my intelligence, my abilities, my wealth, it's entrusted to me for a higher purpose and when we focus on that higher purpose we're actually liberated, from the sufferings and vices of this world. But in order to really focus on that higher purpose, and in that atmosphere, where there are so many other callings, satsang, or association that uplifts us is so very important.

And giving some quality time like Mr. Ford was explaining, that actually re-connects us with our own spiritual nature, through spiritual practice. It's very important to keep that connection. There's a wonderful story, about a thousand years ago, one saint in south India, his name was Ramanujacharya. He was going on a pilgrimage with several of his followers from Sri Rangam from Tirupati. And on the way they came to a town, and Ramanujacharya had a student there who was an extremely wealthy man, his name was Yajnes. So on the outskirts of the town, Ramanujacharya said to one of his disciples, 'Go to his house and tell him that I am coming with some of my followers, and ask him to prepare for me to spend the night with him.' So they went and this man got so excited, 'My guru is coming!' and then he started calling his servants, in making arrangements for an elaborate feast, and a wonderful reception and decorating the home. So the disciples went back to Ramanuja and reported to him. Ramanuja asked, 'What did he give you? Did he give you food, water? Did he give you reception?' They replied, 'He was so excited about you coming, that he forgot about us, he just started immediately going into action for making arrangements for you.' Ramanuja was silent. He said, 'There's a very simple man, who is also my disciple on the other side of the town. Tell him we're coming to his house.'

So they went and told him, they came back, and Ramanuja said, 'Tell me what his response was?' They said, 'All he had was a straw mat, he sat us down and gave us food and water, and he told us please tell Ramanuja how grateful I am.' So Ramanuja said, 'We will go to his house, because he has understood.'

Next morning, Yajnes, the wealthy man was completely bewildered. He had everything arranged, and he was waiting hour after hour, the whole day and the night passed and next morning he heard Ramanuja went to this simple man's house, so he thought, 'What have I done, to offend him in this way?'

So he came the next morning to the poor man's house and he was crying and said, 'Ramanuja, I made all the arrangements, why didn't you come? What have I done?' and Ramanuja explained to him, 'You don't know what real wealth is. It's my duty to teach you. *Real wealth is not about what you have, but who you are. Love is above wealth. To the degree you have love and compassion for God and other living beings in your heart that is*

true wealth. If you love me, you know how much I love all of my followers, why did you neglect them? Do you think serving me and neglecting them is going to make me happy?’

Srila Prabhupada would say, God whom we call Krishna, does not accept what we offer, he expects the purpose, the intent in which it is offered! When I was just a little child, I learnt this from my mother and later on when I met my Guru; I understood the incredible philosophical purport to it when it is connected to the spiritual dimension. On my mother’s birthday, you know how we men are, we always forget these things, and ladies it seems always remember these things. I remember my mother, would always judge our affection for her, by how we remember the special days and my father would always forget it.

So, it was her birthday, and I came home from school and I realized it was her birthday, because I saw she was kind of sad, because nobody remembered. So I ran in the backyard, where she had a rose garden. She planted the roses and grew them, and I just went there and ripped a rose from the garden. It only had about seven or eight roses, because we had just a small garden. And I gave her the rose, and she cried seeing the rose. She put it to her face, she put it to her heart and she said, ‘It’s not the thing that has value, it’s the love in which it’s given.’

It was like her mantra – It’s the thought that counts! Really, love is the only thing of true value; it’s the only thing that can give any satisfaction to the heart. To love and to be loved. Ramanuja explained this to his wealthy disciple. He said, ‘If you love me then you will love and be compassionate to those who are connected to me. That’s the meaning of love.’ And this is the important thing for all of us tonight. He told and Yajnesha began to cry, ‘I understand now, I deeply understand.’ And Ramanuja said, ‘When I’m coming back from Tirupati, I will stay at your house’, and when he came back from Tirupati, he truly did!

Wealth is not a disqualification, wealth is a tremendous blessing if it utilized with love. It is said, we should earn with integrity. Competition should be executed with high principles and our spending should be with compassion.

We have a couple of hospices and hospitals in India. In our hospice, they use morphine to actually help people to have a higher quality of life, as they are dying. In NY city, not too far from here, probably Princeton too, there are drug dealers who use that same morphine to destroy the lives of youth, by inducing them to become drug addicts. Is morphine good or bad? We have our Dr Mehta, he uses a knife to cure people from disease. Somebody else may use the same knife to cut someone’s throat. So everything in this world is potentially divine, if we have that consciousness of how to use it with compassion. In the Bible it is said, ‘What profiteth a man, if he gains the whole world but loses his eternal soul?’

The Bhagavad Gita echoes the same message. That real joy is within, real peace is within. True wealth is our consciousness, what we value and how we honour the sacredness of life within others. It is said that if you lose your wealth you lose nothing, if you lose your health you lose something, if you lose your values, you lose everything! The Gita teaches that the foundation in which we should build our lives is a foundation of understanding

the truth of who we really are? Otherwise, our values can easily be compromised when the storms of life come upon us. And storms will come.

If the house is built on strong foundation, it will sustain any storm. But if our life is built on the foundation of shifting sand, then it will collapse. Who am I? This is the basic message of all the great spiritual teachings of the world. The Gita explains that the conscious force within us, that is seeing through the eyes, that is touching through the skin, that is tasting through the tongue, that is thinking through the brain – that conscious force is the ‘atma’ or the soul. And the nature of our true self is satchitananda – we are eternal, full of knowledge and full of happiness.

And when we connect to our own true self, *mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ* (Bhagavad Gita 15.7) we realize that I am a part of the Supreme Being, I am a part of God, and we call Krishna. (Krishna) has many names and therefore I am divine, I am above and beyond birth and death, I am above and beyond anger, envy, arrogance and greed. My inherent potential is to be an instrument of God’s love, and to experience the infinite love of God within myself. And when we realize that, we understand the sacredness of everyone, *aham bija-pradaḥ pitā* (Bhagavad Gita 14.4) *on a spiritual level we are all brothers and sisters, whether one is black, white, red, yellow, female, male, rich or poor, from a spiritual perspective life is sacred, whether one is a human or a cow or an elephant, or a dog or a cat, there’s a part of God everywhere.* True compassion is based on this spiritual realization, beyond our moods and our sentiments of actually feeling for others. Last year I was on a train from NY to Washington D.C. and two men on the seat in front of me were talking, they had read a newspaper article, in an oriental country, there was a slaughter house for dogs, because they like to eat dogs. These people were so outraged by this, they considered it so totally uncivilized and terrible and barbaric, and I didn’t say anything because they didn’t ask me any questions, but I was thinking in my mind, ‘Hmm, yes, we should feel about the dogs, but they were eating cows as they were talking, what about the cows? Just because we don’t have them as pets in our homes, to lick us and everything, it doesn’t mean they feel any less pain, or they love their children any less than the dogs.’

Real compassion is not selective, real compassion is when we actually understand and appreciate the unity of life, and we have respect and honour for the life in others. Not because of the familiarity in them, it’s natural to be familiar. When I was a little boy I wasn’t getting good grades. Our next door neighbor was the same age as me, and was getting excellent grades, and I was pretty naughty, and our next door neighbor was a pretty well-behaved person, but it’s not that my father and mother loved him more than me; they naturally loved me, because I was theirs. So that’s natural, but as we actually develop our own inner consciousness, and we realize our own divinity, we start to see all of humanity as our family.

We start to see, as was explained in our panel, all our creation as an extended part of our family. That’s how true compassion can actually be discovered! We have a body, we have a mind and we also have an *atma*, or a soul. So the deepest compassion is compassion for the body, mind and soul. We have a hospital in Mumbai called Bhaktivedanta Hospital and we try to develop it according to this principle. People are suffering physically, our compassion should be to try and help them. But actually, mental anxiety causes more

suffering even than physical suffering. I have seen people who at the last stages dying of cancer, who were in spiritual ecstasy and gratitude, because they were connected to such a higher place. And I see all the time in my travel throughout the world, people in excellent physical health who are really, seriously suffering, because of the mind.

Compassion to the body, compassion to the mind, to one's emotions but also compassion to the soul (is needed). Our Dr. Mehta gave that beautiful example, of how when a person enters the crematorium and he's covered with a white sheet, there's no pockets, and the sheet and the body under are soon to be burnt! *kamala-dala-jala, jivana talamala*, that all the things in this world are like drops of water on the lotus leaf, at any moment they could be gone. So the deepest compassion is for the body, mind and also to give people that understanding of their true value, their true nature, of how to discover real happiness and real wealth within themselves.

In Bhuj, in Gujarat, India there was an earthquake some years ago, and our Bhaktivedanta Hospital went there and we had our Orthopaedic Surgeons doing all surgeries and there were so many other people volunteering and coming from all different directions to help the people, but what those people appreciated the most, whether they were Muslims, Christians, Jains, Parsis, Hindus or even atheists (chuckles..) we were giving them an understanding of God's presence within themselves. There was spiritual education, because even if we fixed their limbs, many of them, their children and husbands and wives were dead. Their houses were finished. Just healing a broken arm was not going to solve their suffering.

Yes, we were trying to help build their houses and all those things, but what they appreciated most is that they were given an understanding of what is within themselves, of how they can still make a difference for the eternal souls of their loved ones, who may have gone, and how they can actually be there for each other.

The more we try to help someone else, the more we transcend our own problems. In giving we do receive. Human evolution is not about how small we can make our chips; it's not about the development of our technology and sciences alone. Some of the great engineering universities I go to speak and the professors say that there are serious problems with depression, drug addiction, suicides in the University. Technology is wonderful; science is wonderful, providing it is built on the true foundation of human values. Real evolution is the evolution of consciousness – from the need to get more and more things to fill the void within my heart, to the joy of giving and sharing what we have found within ourselves, through our heart, through our wealth, through our ability, through our influence.

When I was in Silicon Valley I gave an example, and they seemed to liked it, so I am going to repeat it. I was recently in the Muir Woods, near San Francisco, and there was a group of Chinese tourists in a circle around a forest ranger. He was speaking about the underground secret of the Redwood trees. Now I am coming from the 1960s in America and so I am habitually attracted to 'underground kind of things' (...laughter). Would you like to hear this underground secret? Everyone is attracted to secrets. The redwood tree is the largest, tallest, widest tree on earth. And interestingly they grow in places where there

is very loose soil, where there are earthquakes, where there are massive storms. For most trees, their roots have to go very deep to sustain themselves year after year.

The roots of the Redwood tree do not grow deep. Now some of those trees are two thousand two hundred years old. That means they've been here before Jesus, before any white people came to America and in California they've lived through massive earthquakes and incredible blizzards and storms. How did they keep growing through countless forest fires? It's an underground secret. The roots of the Redwood trees grow underground outward. Each root reaches out for the roots of other trees and as soon as the roots come in contact with the roots of the other tree, they intertwine with each other. They create an inseparable bond with each other. The little tiny Redwoods have the giant Redwoods intertwining their roots with them. So every tree is supported by every other tree and practically nothing could disturb it. *Unity is strength!*

Humanity could learn a lot from trees. The strength of each of us, individually and collectively is how much we actually feel care and compassion for each other. The more we help our brothers and sisters, the stronger we become, and the more strength we give to others. This understanding is true wealth! When my Guru Srila Prabhupada was in London, I think it was 1969, he was asked by a reporter, 'Why have you come here?' and Srila Prabhupada replied, 'You British people, you ruled over India for about two hundred years, and during those two hundred years you took most all the treasures of India.' Much of the wealth of India is in the British museums. He said, 'But you forgot the most valuable treasure in all of India. You took our jewels, you took so much, but you forgot the greatest treasure - the spiritual culture of India. I have come to London to give you what you forgot to take' (...loud applause). And one of the beautiful things that really attracted me to bhakti, and to the tradition of spirituality of India is its inclusiveness. I write in this book that I wrote, 'The Journey Home.' I was actually born in Chicago, and when I was a teenager, I was really looking for a meaning and deep purpose to my life. And I saw so much hypocrisy even in religion. In the name of a loving God, people were becoming so judgmental and hateful, so I really felt either I have to reject this spirituality altogether, or I have to find a common essence.

And I had such deep faith that there was something wonderful and spiritual because I had read about the saints of all the great traditions and how they lived and what were their values and what were their contributions to the world! So I deeply went into Judaism and Christianity and hitch hiking from London to India, I went through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan; took six months, I was studying Islam. Recently I was in the London University, SOAS, and I was telling the story, and one girl came up to me afterward and she said, 'I loved your story, I am the President of the National Hitch Hikers Association' and she said, 'I am so inspired, I want to take my group on the same route that you took, hitch hiking from London to India.' She asked for my guidance. I said a little prayer; somebody asks you for guidance, you're responsible for what you say! So taking the conservative side (chuckles...), I said, you should hitch hike to Heathrow Airport, and then you fly. And when I was in India I was living with yogis and sadhus and Zen Buddhists and Tibetan Buddhists and so many other kinds of people. And when I found this path of bhakti, and I found the Bhagavad Gita, the Srimad Bhagavatam, one of the things that so profoundly affected me is how inclusive it was!

The fourth chapter of the Gita, *yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata* (Bhagavad Gita 4.7) Krishna says that I have descended in many forms with many names throughout the ages for the same purpose – to establish dharma. To enlighten us who we really are? What is our relationship with God? The essence to love with all your heart, mind and soul and to love your neighbour as yourself - this is the first and great commandment of the Old and New Testament. If you actually love God, you will naturally love your neighbour as yourself. If we don't love our neighbour as ourselves, that means we really don't have any true, real love of God. Like Ramanuja explained to that rich man. If you love me, then you'll love those who are connected to me.

sa vai puṁsām paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokṣaje (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.2.6) The Bhagavat Purana tells that true dharma is unmotivated, uninterrupted love for the Supreme Lord and compassion to all beings. We tune into that divinity within ourselves by chanting the Holy names of the Lord. That's the ultimate purpose of meditation and is the greatest potential we all have, to be instruments of love. That is a principle that is beyond sectarianism because we take ourselves out of the centre and we put God in the centre, and as soon as we do that, everyone becomes a part of the centre. *When you water the root of the tree, naturally the water goes to every single part of the tree, the leaves, the branches, the twigs and the flowers.* Srila Prabhupada explained that the spiritual culture of India is the essence of the spiritual culture of all great traditions. To understand our own eternal nature, to access God's love and to be an instrument of that love.

When he was coming to America in 1965, he had forty rupees. When I came to India in 1970, they were six and a half to a dollar, and you could get eight on the black market. Anyways forty rupees was not much, it was about seven dollars in those days. Thirty eight days on a cargo ship he had two heart attacks and sea sickness and when he came to New York, he didn't know anybody; he didn't even know where to go. But actually even though he was a seventy year old man, with no wealth physically he came to America to give the charity of the greatest wealth. He came to give God's love because he was truly tuned in. He wanted to teach us how to tune in, and discover our own true wealth.

When he was in London, one of his followers was George Harrison of the Beatles. At that time the Beatles were at the summit of their fame and success. George was born a simple poor boy in Liverpool and he joined the Beatles and suddenly, within a couple of years they were the most famous people in the world. They had huge sums of money, they were buying huge estates, they had the best cars and beautiful ladies, but George had some spiritual debt. He just saw that I really don't have anything, unless I have a deep spiritual connection. All the stuff is just distracting me from the loneliness which is within my heart. There's a saying that, in a civilized and enlightened society people use things and love people, but unfortunately the tendency is we use people and love things, and when you get to where he was at in success, you really see that all around. So he started chanting the Hare Krishna mantra and started feeling something so deep and beautiful that he told Srila Prabhupada that he wanted to join the ashram. Srila Prabhupada told him, 'You have such skills in music, such wealth and influence, it is a greater service to God and humanity to use those things,' and he did.

Our Alfred Ford, the great grandson of Henry Ford, who is one of my dearest friends and God brothers came to Prabhupada and was also just willing to become a monk.

Prabhupada explained to him, 'You have so much! Service to God is not just renouncing the things. It's renouncing the selfishness, the arrogance so that we could use what God gives us, for the joy that the heart is yearning for. The joy of being an instrument of love; an instrument of compassion. The legacy we leave our children is in the values that we live by.

I see everywhere in the world, parents work so hard for money and then the children become enemies fighting over it. I am a Swami, I don't have any children; but as far as I know, is that what parents like? My father, we just celebrated his ninetieth birthday in Chicago a couple of days ago, he has one son that is a businessman, one son who is a musician and one son who is a Swami (chuckles) but his joy in life is that we love each other. To be honest with you, we are so diversified, we have nothing absolutely to fight about (...laughter). But the reality is, our real legacy is the love, compassion and values, that we somehow or other inspire within our children and the generations to follow. And this is one of the principle teachings of the Gita. *yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janaḥ*, (Bhagavad Gita 3.21) that whatever people in leading positions do, common people follow their example. As parents, our greatest responsibility is the legacy of love and compassion that we inspire within our children. *Whether they are little Swamis with nothing materially, or whether they are multi-millionaires or billionaires, that's not so important, what's important is, the fulfillment that we find within ourselves that we can share with our children and that is legacy of compassion and love.*

Like the Redwood trees, as we help others we become strong. Our Ambarisa, Alfred Ford, we can see how he has taken that spirit of compassion and he his giving his whole heart. This temple he was showing us, it's not just a building, it's an educational centre, it's a hospital, it's a place where people can actually learn to value the real treasures that God has given us.

Thank you very much.