



Biography of
Swami Dayananda Saraswati



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1. Dayananda Saraswathi

This happened about 150 years ago. Saurashtra of the present Gujarat State consisted of several small states. Among them was Morvi. Tankara was a town in this state. There lived a wealthy Brahmin, Karshanji Lalji Tiwari by name; he was also the tahsildar of Tankara. The ruler of Morvi had granted him a small troop of horses (cavalry) both for protection and as a mark of honour.

Karshanji was a good and just man. He was generous in his dealings. He had faith in religious practices that had come down from times immemorial. His wife, Amrithbai, was a beautiful and virtuous woman. She was like a mother to all the villagers. In 1824, a son was born to the couple. They named him Moolashankar. According to the custom of the place, he was also called Dayaram. This child was to become famous as Maharshi Dayananda.

When he attained the age of five, Moolashankar's education started. At the age of eight, his Upanayana Samskara (being invested with the holy thread) was performed. The boy used to perform religious rites like 'Sandhyavandana' with devotion. He had a very good memory. By the time he was fourteen he had learnt by heart the Yajurveda, the scriptures and the upanishads.

Karshanji wished that his son should follow in his footsteps by becoming a devotee of Shiva. He, therefore, used to describe the greatness of Shiva every now and then. He would advise the boy to worship Lord Shiva and only then eat something on days of festivals.

Moolashankar had an uncle whom he loved very much. His uncle himself was a simple man of great learning with a religious bent of mind. He influenced the boy deeply. Moolashankar had a sharp intellect and an extraordinary memory and so his uncle thought some day his nephew would become a great man.



2. Not for Me This Life

It was Shivarathri. All the devotees gathered in the temple to keep awake all night and worship Lord Shiva. The boy Moola, too, went with his father. By midnight, one by one the worshippers fell asleep. But Moola was determined not to break the rule of the Shivarathri worship, so he sat gazing at the Shivalinga.

It was midnight. Near the Shivalinga a sacred lamp was burning dimly. Just then, some mice appeared from nowhere. They ate the preparations which had been placed before the Shivalinga as an offering, and danced fearlessly on the Shivalinga.

Moola gazed in amazement. The wheel of reflection began to rotate. What is this? The father used to tell him that Shiva was All Powerful and the very Source of Power; how was it that the Shivalinga kept quiet when the mice moved about on it? The boy's mind was confused. Without knowing what to do, he gently touched and awakened his father and said, "Father, was this the great God about whom you told me? Or is this linga some other substance?"

Irritated, his father cried, "What? If you talk like an atheist, you will lose your power of speech. Beyond doubt this Shivalinga is the great Shiva."

The boy again said softly, "Certainly not, father. The Shiva you speak of is the Life-Force itself. But this Shivalinga is motionless matter."

This answer increased the father's anger. But what his son said was logical. The conversation went on.

Father : Son, what you say is true. I his is an idol, and not Shiva.

Moolashankar: Then why should we worship this idol instead of Shiva?

Father: My son, in this age of man's history, in Kaliyuga, Lord Shiva cannot be seen by human beings in His real form. So, if we worship Him with the belief that Shiva resides in the idol, He will be pleased to give us Moksha (salvation).

Moolashankar: In that case, we can also assume we have worshipped Him. Why worship the idol?

Karshanji found no answer to this question. But the mind of the child was perplexed.

Once cholera broke out in Tankara. The fourteen-year-old sister of Moola fell a victim to



cholera. Parents, brothers and relatives wept in great grief. But Moolashankar alone did not weep. But he sat beside the dead body of his sister and gazed on it. This sudden death, however, set him thinking. Many visitors said, "What a heartless fellow he is!

In due course, all of them forgot about the death of the girl. But Moola, branded as heartless by all, could not forget it. Death remained a riddle to him.

Three years after this incident Moolashankar's beloved uncle died of cholera. This was a terrible blow to Moolashankar. It was as though he had lost everything in life. This time Moola wept bitterly. His Weeping would have melted even a stone.

The death of his sister had made him move away from worldly life. This aversion became stronger after the death of his uncle. The desire not to fall a prey to worldly pleasures but to attain what was enduring took a deep root in his mind.

3. Leaving Home

The desire to give up family ties grew in Moolashankar. What is life? What is death? He wanted to learn the answers to these questions from a perfect sage. With this end in view, Mopolashankar was determined to leave home in search of a worthy guru (a teacher) His parents noticed his growing detachment and were afraid that he might run away from home to become a monk. They decided he should soon be married. Even a bride was selected. The preparations for the marriage began in right earnest. Moolashankar did not show any opposition, That gave his parents the impression that their son was willing to marry and they were happy. But Moolashankar's mind was firmly set upon renunciation of family life.

One day, as it was getting dark, Moolashankar came out of his room. He stood in the spacious courtyard and gazed for a moment at his wealthy house. In his mind he bowed for the last time to his parents and other elders from where he stood. His heart grew heavy. The eyes were full of tears. 'I shall never again set foot in this house,' he told himself and walked away.

At this time, Moolashankar was only twenty-one years old.

All the efforts of Karshanji to bring his son back home were of no avail.



4. Wandering In Search Of A Guru

After leaving home Moolashankar travelled to places like Ahmedabad, Baroda, Hardwar, Kanpur and Kashi in search of a guru. He wandered among hills and in forests but nowhere could he find an able guru.

At this juncture, Moolashankar came across Swamy Poornananda, a profound scholar and sanyasi. The Swamiji initiated the young man into the holy orders. Moolashankar became Swamy Dayananda Saraswathi.

As Dayananda wandered from place to place in search of yogis. on the heights of the Himalayan regions, his life was in danger again and again. He had to wander day and night in forests where wild beasts roamed. And in the midst of his wanderings his devotion to his goal was tested, too.

While he was staying at Okhi Mutt, the Mahant, who was in charge of that mutt, was impressed by his radiance, and said, "Stay here as the future master of this mutt. All the wealth of this mutt will be yours." But Dayananda, who had given up all desire, very politely declined the offer and said, "Sir, if I had desired wealth I would never have left my wealthy father's house. What I want is not earthly wealth, but the treasure of spiritual knowledge." So saying- he walked away from the place.

Even though Dayananda wandered for ten years, he could not find an able guru. This filled him with despair. He climbed to the top of a mountain to kill himself. As he was about to jump down, a part of his mind said, 'Did you leave your house to die like a coward? You left to conquer death and again enlightenment This gave Dayananda fresh strength. He came down from the mountain, his mind firmly made up to find an able guru.

Then he came to know that perfect yogis lived in the dense forest near the source of the river Narmada. Dayananda walked hundreds of miles towards the south, without caring for the distance.

As he was approaching the river Narmada, Dayananda had the darshan of a monk, Poornashrama Swamy by name, in a garden. He was happy to hear the story of Dayananda's wanderings. After hearing his story he said, "Dayanandaji, there is only one man on this earth who can fulfil your desire, and that man is Virajananda Dandeasha. He lives in Mathura."



This was a ray of hope to Dayananda. Without any delay he set out for Mathura. He reached there on the 14th November 1860.

5. The Master and The Disciple Meet

Dayananda, a brilliant sanyasi of 36, knocked at the door of Swamy Virajananda's school which was on the way to Vishrant Ghat in Mathura. A grave voice spoke to him from within.

Virajananda : What is your name?

Dayananda: Gurudeva, I, your servant, am called Dayananda Saraswathi.

Virajananda: What do you want?

Dayananda: I have come in search of you to beg for spiritual enlightenment.

Virajananda: Do you know grammar?

Dayananda: I have studied 'Kaumudi' and 'Saraswatha' (two famous texts of Sanskrit grammar).

Virajananda: What? Kaumudi Saraswatha? Go away from here. Those useless books! Throw them into the river Yamuna and come back. Then only I will open the door.

As ordered by the guru, Dayananda went to the river Yamuna. Dayananda had journeyed hundreds of miles carrying those books on his head. But now, without any attachment to the books, he threw them into the river and went back and said, "Gurudeva, I have carried out your orders." The door was opened.

Dayananda entered. Before him was Virajananda sitting on the deer's skin, cross-legged. Although he was mere skin and bone, his face glowed with a matchless radiance. Dayananda fell at the feet of this embodiment of renunciation. Virajananda touched his head to bless Dayananda with affection.

Dayananda looked at his guru in amazement. The master had no eyes and could not read a single letter. But he was the living form of enlightenment and could clear all the doubts of his disciples, quoting passages from all the scriptures. Dayananda felt that this meeting with the great genius had fully rewarded all his hardships for fifteen years. He gladly surrendered himself at the feet of the great master.



6. Dayananda's Devotion to His Guru

By his extraordinary devotion and sense of service Dayananda soon became the most beloved disciple. Every morning, whether it was hot cold or raining, Dayananda fetched water for his teacher's bath and for other purposes from the river Yamuna. It was also his duty to sweep the floor and keep the premises clean and tidy. And Dayananda did every kind of work without the slightest hesitation. Several incidents show his extraordinary devotion to his master.

On one occasion, as Virajananda was teaching, something made angry with Dayananda. Then with Skinny hand he hit Dayananda on the back so hard that the teacher's he began to ache. After a while Dayananda slowly approached his guru and said in all humility, "Gurudeva, my body is hard like stone and beating like this cannot hurt it. Only your hands will ache. Hereafter, when you punish me kindly make use of a cane instead of your hand."

Dayananda's request was not in vain. At another time when Virajananda was displeased with Dayananda for some reason he struck him with a stick. Seeing this, Nayansukha, his schoolmate, said, "Gurudeva, it is not proper to treat such a great sanyasi in this way. He should be treated with respect." When the lessons were over, Dayananda took objection to his friend's disrespectful behaviour and said, "Do you think that our Gurudeva beat me out of hatred? Just as a potter shapes the lump of clay by pounding and beating it, the guru shapes the personality of his disciple by beating him and correcting him. You should not have spoken like that Later on, when Dayananda attained the status of a 'maharshi' and became the teacher of the people, he used show the marks on his shoulders made by Virajananda and say: 'These marks always remind me of all that I owe to my master.'

7. Triumph at Kashi

After his education, as ordained I his master, Swamy Dayananda undertook to travel to preach Vedic Knowledge among people. He went places like Agra, Ajmer, Jaipur, Gwalior Meerut, Hardwar and Kanpur. There he discussed the scriptures and the meaning with the pundits and scored resounding victory over their Wherever he went, he told the people "Idol worship is not mentioned in the Vedas. The rational mind cannot accept idol worship. God is everywhere God has no shape or form." Without Supporting or opposing any particular religion he pointed out the shortcomings of



every one of them. He bitterly criticized the harmful and wicked customs that have come down through the centuries. He explained the greatness of the religion preached in the Vedas and gave a clarion call to all People to unite under its banner.

So Dayananda sought to awaken people to their heritage. In the course " of his travels he came to Kashi (Benares) on 22nd October 1869. He took part in debates with the greatest scholars in Kashi. The meeting was attended by fifty to sixty thousand people. At the appointed hour, the president of the gathering, Maharaja Eshwari Prasad Narayan Singh of Kashi, took the chair. On one side was Swamy Dayananda all alone; on the other side were twentyseven distinguished scholars of Kashi.

The debate on the interpretation of the scriptures began. The question was whether the Vedas approved image worship. The scholars had to admit defeat in the face of Swamy Dayananda's arguments. Just then, a scholar Madhawacharya by name came up with two sheets of paper and asked a question. Dayananda picked up the sheets and began to read. A few minutes must have passed. Suddenly the Maharaja of Kashi declared, "Swamy Dayananda has not been able to answer the questions posed by the pundits." So saying he clapped his hands. The scholars of Kashi shouted, "Dayananda has no answer. Great victory to the Kashi pundits! Defeat to Dayananda!" Rowdies began to throw stones, slippers, cowdung and such things at Dayananda. Some of them hit Dayananda and he was wounded. Blood dropped from some of the wounds. Dayanandaji, who had attained a state of perfect serenity, endured everything and remained as if nothing had happened. But the chief pundits of Kashi Taracharan Tarkaratna, Bala Shastri and others said, "Really what Swamy Dayananda says is perfectly true. But we do not have the moral courage to go against the prevailing customs and traditions. So we have chosen to oppose him." So they said honestly in public.

The Maharaja of Kashi deeply regretted having taken sides in the debate on the scriptures. With great respect he invited Swamy Dayananda to his palace and begged him to excuse him (the Maharaja) for his improper behaviour.

So, from the point of view of both scholarship and morality, it was Swamy Dayananda who won a great victory in a true sense, in the debates about the correct explanation of scriptural texts.

It was Swamy Dayananda's keen desire to unite all people under the banner of a single religion. And he always worked hard for this end.



8. The Pioneer of the Cause of One National Language

Swamy Dayananda was convinced that a common language is a good means of unifying the members of a society. He, therefore, was of the opinion that Hindi should be given the place of the national language.

Swamy Dayananda was born in Gujarat and had a fine command over Gujarati language. Still, even in Gujarat, he chose to make speeches in Hindi instead of in Gujarati. He wrote all his books in Hindi.

9. The Patriot

Even though Maharshi Dayananda aimed at the welfare of all humanity, he had great love for his motherland, India. Once an English officer was greatly impressed with Dayananda's speech and said to him, "Swamiji, please go to England and teach the way of dharma (righteousness). I shall bear all the expenses." There-upon Swamiji said, "In the few years of life left to me I shall try to spread the knowledge of the vedas among my countrymen. Once the lamp of wisdom is lighted here, its light is bound to spread towards the west too."

He did not give a thought to the fame he could attain in foreign lands. He chose to stay in his own country and strive to improve the lot of his countrymen. This shows his boundless love for his country.

Once, addressing a huge gathering, Dayananda thundered: "Your ancestors were not uncivilized men living in forests. They were great men who enlightened this world. Your history is not a bundle of defeats. It is the eulogy of the conquerors of the world. Your Vedic Scriptures are not the songs of cowherds. They are the immortal truths which shaped mighty souls like Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. Awake! Arise! Be proud of your glorious history. Take inspiration from it to mould the present. Shame upon the modern education which fills you with contempt for your ancestors!"

10. The Messenger Of Armed Revolution

The patriotism of Swamy Dayananda was not merely an effusion of words. He was also a man of heroic action. The War of Independence in 1857 was a failure. The Indian National Congress was born in 1885. Swamy Dayananda was one of the heroes who, after the 1857 failure, kept the love of freedom alive in the hearts of Indians till the



Congress was founded. For this purpose he travelled throughout India. He tried to bring the princes of different states together and so he founded several branches of the Arya Samaj in places like Jodhpur, Udaipur and Shahpur, and many princes became his disciples. Swamy Dayananda was fully convinced that only an armed revolution could drive the British out of India. Therefore he sent a noted revolutionary, Shyamji Krishna Varma, to France, so that he might receive inspiration as well as training for his mission.

Arya Samaj and the gurukulas (homes of gurus where disciples stayed and received instruction) shaped patriots and gave them training and inspiration for armed revolution. Swamy Shradhananda, Bhai Paramananda, Lala Lajpat Ray and Lala Hardayal were Arya Samajists who openly fought to drive the British out of India. Famous young revolutionaries like Gendalal Dixit, Roshanlal and Ramprasad Bismil were proud to call themselves Arya Samajists.

From the very beginning the British were suspicious of Swamy Dayananda. Therefore, a team of spies followed the Swamiji everywhere. It has been found that the British had a hand in the poisoning of the Swamiji at Jodhpur.

11. A Man of Steel

Swamy Dayananda had a wonderful physique. When he was at Kasaganj an incident happened which showed his exceptional strength.

It so happened that two strong bulls were fighting in a street. Hundreds of people watched the fight from a distance, shivering with fear. The fight went on for quite some time but showed no signs of coming to an end. Swamy Dayananda pushed through the crowd and walked up to the bulls. The people watching him were terrified and shouted, "Swamiji, if you go near them, you won't return alive.

Come back!" But the Swamiji did not pay attention to them. He went towards the bulls. Suddenly he took both the huge bulls by their horns and pushed them away with a tremendous force. Without looking back the bulls went away in different directions. The people near by were amazed at the superhuman strength of the obstinate sanyasi.

It was because of this superhuman physical strength that Dayananda could live for a month even after drinking deadly poison.



12. Social Reformer

Although a sanyasi, Dayananda had a sensitive and compassionate heart that melted at the sufferings of the poor. 'To love the creation of God is to love God Himself' - so he taught people.

To awaken people from lethargy, the Swamiji travelled all over India. Wherever he went, he roundly condemned the caste system, idol worship, child marriage and other harmful customs and traditions. He preached that women should have equal rights with men and laid stress on pure conduct in life. This created a stir among the people. Over the centuries, with the passing of time some wicked customs had crept into Hinduism. These customs stood out prominently and therefore the real power and greatness of Hinduism were dimmed. With the teachings of Swamy Dayananda true Hinduism came to shine forth. Thousands of young people who had been influenced by Western Culture and were about to accept Christianity turned back and became the staunch followers of Vedic religion. Some time Hindus who had gone over to other religions wished to come back. But the Hindus would not permit this. Swamy Dayananda took the Christian and Muslim converts back into the Hindu fold by performing purification rites for them. So it may be said that Dayananda brought about a revolution in the social life of Indians.

He laid particular emphasis on the equality of women. He used to say that India had fallen to such a miserable condition precisely because women were not given education but were kept in ignorance. As long as women were prisoners of foolish customs like the purdah, progress was beyond reach like the reflection of a bundle of jewels in a mirror. They should throw away their purdahs. Seetha and Savithri are remembered not because they were behind the purdah, but because of their chastity and virtue. So he went on preaching.

Dayananda was bitterly opposed to Untouchability. "Untouchability is a dreadful curse of our society. Every living being has a soul which deserves affection; in every human being there is a soul worthy of respect. Any one who does not know this basic principle cannot understand the true meaning of the Vedic religion." So he preached.

Dayananda was fully convinced that the nation cannot prosper unless education spreads. But our education system should not be a mere carbon copy of the western type of education. There should be a law to compel the parents to send every boy or girl who is eight years old to school. Every boy and every girl should be sent to



Gurukulas where they stay with their gurus. There should be separate Gurukulas for boys and girls. The King's son and the farmer's son should be equals in a Gurukula. They should all be made to work alike. The Gurukula should be situated far from the town and the city, and should enjoy calm and serenity. Our culture and our great books like the Vedas should be introduced to our students. Side by side, mathematics, geology, astronomy and other sciences which are important in modern life should also be taught. Swamy Dayananda founded gurukulas at various places to fulfil these objects. Among them Kangadi is famous even to this day.

13. The Founder Of Arya Samaj

Dayananda wished that his work of social reform should continue even after his death. So he founded an institution called 'Arya Samaj' at Bombay on the 10th of April 1875. Gradually it grew into a huge institution and spread even beyond the shores of India. Millions of Hindus were influenced by the Arya Samaj. Arya Samaj has rendered boundless and unequalled service to society through its religious centers, its gurukulas, schools and colleges, educational institutions for women, orphanages and asylums for widows.

14. 'Satyarth Prakash' A Great Work

Another very important contribution of Swamy Dayananda is his work, 'Satyarth Prakash' (The Light of Truth). It contains fourteen chapters. It is a great book. It explains the true meaning of the Vedas and therefore is 'Satyarth Prakash'. And it is based solely on the Vedas.

All the teachings of Swamy Dayananda are clearly explained in this work. He has shown that his teachings have the support of the Vedas. He has clearly pointed, out the harmful customs and practices not only of the Hindus but also of the followers of other religions. He gave a hero's call to the people of India to shake off their slavery. He declared that it was no t sufficient for any religion to teach a man how to attain salvation after death; it must also show a man how to live usefully in this world. The Vedic religion has shown every man the right path, by placing before him the four-fold ideal of righteousness, wealth, enjoyment and salvation.

In those days the people were ignorant of the Vedas. Swamy Dayananda strove hard to dispel this ignorance among the masses. His teaching was this: man's main aim is



salvation; but if we do not live worthily on the earth we cannot attain salvation. This teaching he supported with passages from the Vedas. And he exhorted people to turn to the Vedas.

15. The Sanyasi Who Knew No Fear

Dayananda was a fearless sanyasi. Whatever he believed to be the truth he spoke out without fear. Once a priest Shulbred by name, threatened him saying, "If you criticize Christianity, you will have to go to jail." Dayananda, replied at once, "My friend, was not Jesus Christ crucified for speaking the truth? But I fear no one to speak the truth."

Dayananda used to point out flaws in other religions as he pointed out the flaws in Hinduism. Because of this, he had to incur the wrath of the followers of other religions several times. While he was giving a discourse at a Jodhpur meeting, the relative of a Diwan there placed his hand on the sword and said,

"Be careful, don't criticize our religion." The Diwan even said, "You should be cut to pieces."

Dayananda said, "I shall point out defects wherever I find them. I am not a rabbit to be frightened by the cries of jackals like you;" and he pin-pointed the flaws in his religion, too.

16. Mercy to the Man Who Poisoned Him

Dayananda argued that God has no shape, and therefore, idols should not be worshipped. This was not acceptable to the majority of Hindus. But none of them could answer his arguments. So, some of them began secretly to plan his murder. Thousands of Hindu converts were taken back into Hindu fold by purification rites conducted by Dayananda. This made the followers of these religions angry. So Dayananda was in danger both from the followers of his own religion and from the followers of other religions. And he had to walk along this path full of dangers.

An Anupashahar, a certain Hindu deceived the Swamiji and gave him pan-supari (betel leaf and nuts) containing poison. Afterwards Dayananda realized that he had been poisoned. He went to the river and with the help of Yoga, he removed the poison by vomiting all the food he had swallowed and saved himself. Even then he did not utter a single word to the man who poisoned him. But he felt sad that the Hindus could not



understand their true well-wisher. Syed Saheb was the tahsildar of the place and a devotee of Dayananda; he came to know what had happened and arrested the poisoner. When he learnt this, Dayananda was angry and said, "Sir, I have come here to free people from bondage and not to put them in bondage." On hearing this Syed Saheb was moved to tears. He felt that the Swamiji was in every way worthy of his name 'Dayananda' (one who delights in mercy).

At last the killers gained the upper hand. Once Swamy Dayananda went to Jodhpur. Maharaja Jaswant Singh, the prince of the state, was a man of bad character. He was in love with a girl called Nanhi Jan. Many a time the Maharaja had brought shame upon himself by his conduct. Dayananda told him clearly that his action was morally wrong and shameful. So Nanhi Jan came to hate the Swamiji bitterly.

It was the night of 20th September 1883. As usual the Swamiji drank some milk and went to bed. At about midnight he felt a severe pain in the stomach. When he woke up Dayananda realized that poison had entered his stomach. Immediately he vomited a couple of times, but it was of no avail. The poison had already entered the blood and spread throughout his body. It caused a burning sensation in his stomach and chest. On the next day, a doctor, Dr. Alimardan Khan, was called in. But his medicine only made Dayananda's condition worse. His body was full of sores. And blood was oozing out. This hellish torture lasted several days. The Maharaja, too, was very sad; but he could do nothing. However, he arranged to send Dayananda to a different place for treatment. And he himself was one of the bearers of the palanquin for a short distance.

One day, when there was no one near by, Swamy Dayananda called his cook Dhau Mishra. Seeing the blood oozing out of Dayananda's body, the cook could not control his grief. He said, "I listened to traitors and mixed powdered glass with your milk. My God, I have committed a heinous sin! Please forgive me." So saying he broke down. Dayananda consoled him with the words, "it was my fate. How are you to blame?" He then placed two hundred rupees in his hands and said, "If the Maharaja comes to know this, you will be in trouble. So go away to distant Nepal and hide yourself. Let this money be with you for your journey." So saying he sent away the Cook to a place of safety.

Afterwards Swamy Dayananda was removed to Mount Abu for further treatment, and from there to Ajmir. But no effort could save him. The 30th of October 1883 was Deepavali day. He had a shave and bath, and lay down on his bed in a white loin cloth.



Afterwards he called his disciples to his bedside and took a last look at them all with a benevolent smile. He then recited the Gayathri manthra and closed his eyes in Samadhi. It was six in the evening. The word 'Om' came from his mouth; and then his breathing stopped.

Dayananda was a great philosopher, a mighty logician, a magnificent speaker, a great man of letters, social reformer, patriot, philanthropist and sage, and a precursor of armed revolution; he was the embodiment of pure and noble conduct. He taught people to think independently and fearlessly.

Dayananda was a great Rishi (a sage). He sacrificed the great joy that would have been his by observing yoga practices. He chose a very difficult life for the well-being of mankind. But what did he get in return for all this? beatings, insults, abuses and poison. He accepted all this with a smile. And he always wished the well-being of all mankind.



Aryanlife.com

207, 2B GrantLane
Kolkata-12, India
e-mail:info@aryanlife.com

#513, 3208-8th Avenue NE
Calgary, AB Canada T2A 7V8
Telephone:403 680-2030
e-mail:info@aryanlife.com