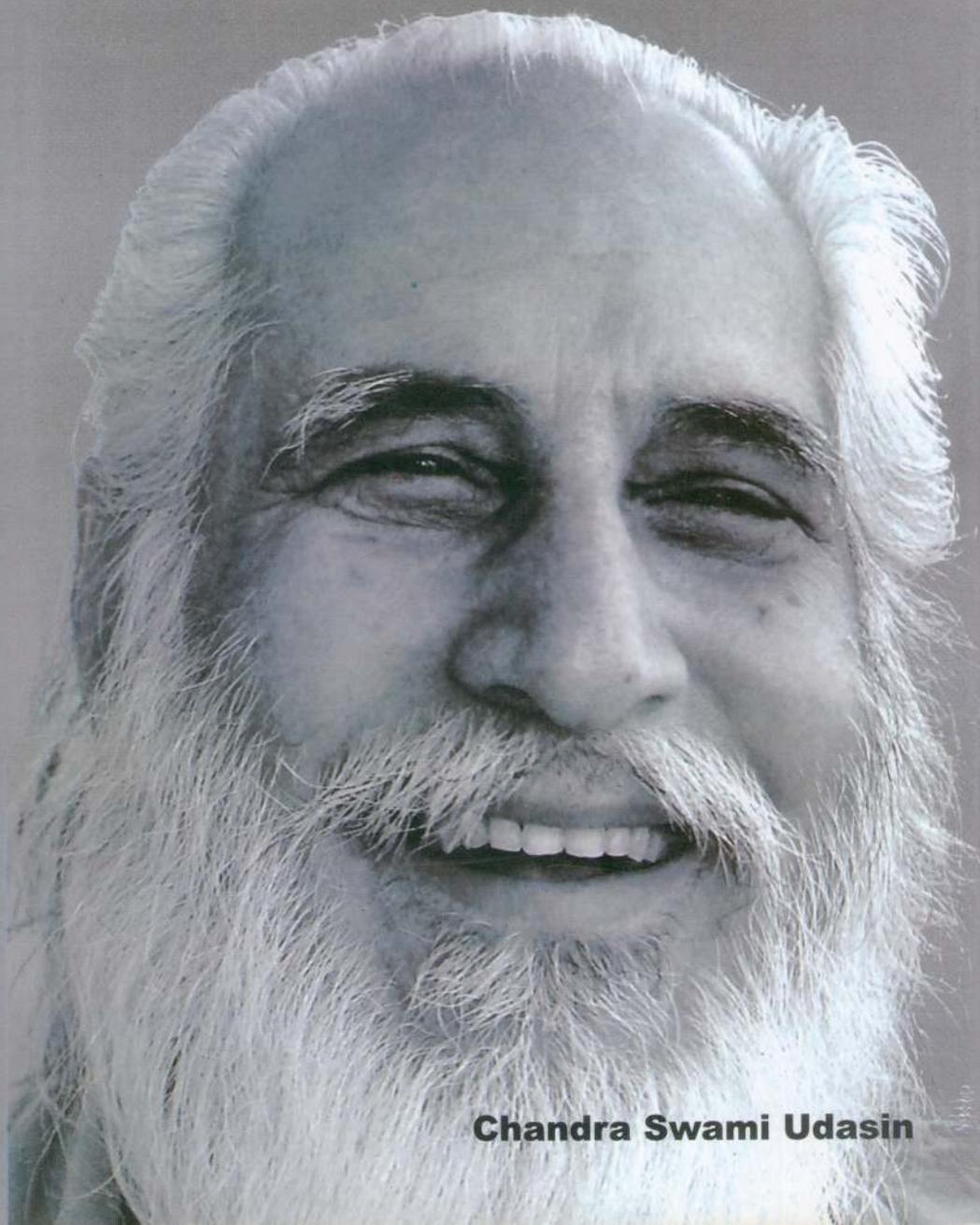


Song of Silence

Volume III



Chandra Swami Udasin

SONG OF SILENCE

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Chandra Swāmī Udāsīn

Seekers Trust
Sāadhanā Kendra Āshram
Domet, Dehradun - 248 125
Uttarakhand, India

Published by Seekers Trust
Sādhanā Kendra Āshram
Village Domet, P.O. Ashok Āshram
District Dehradun (Uttarakhand)
248 125 India
Tel: (01360) 22 22 04

First Edition: 1000 Copies

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ISBN: 978-81-89764-13-5

Printed at
Priyanka Graphic Printers
77, Govind Garh
Dehradun, India



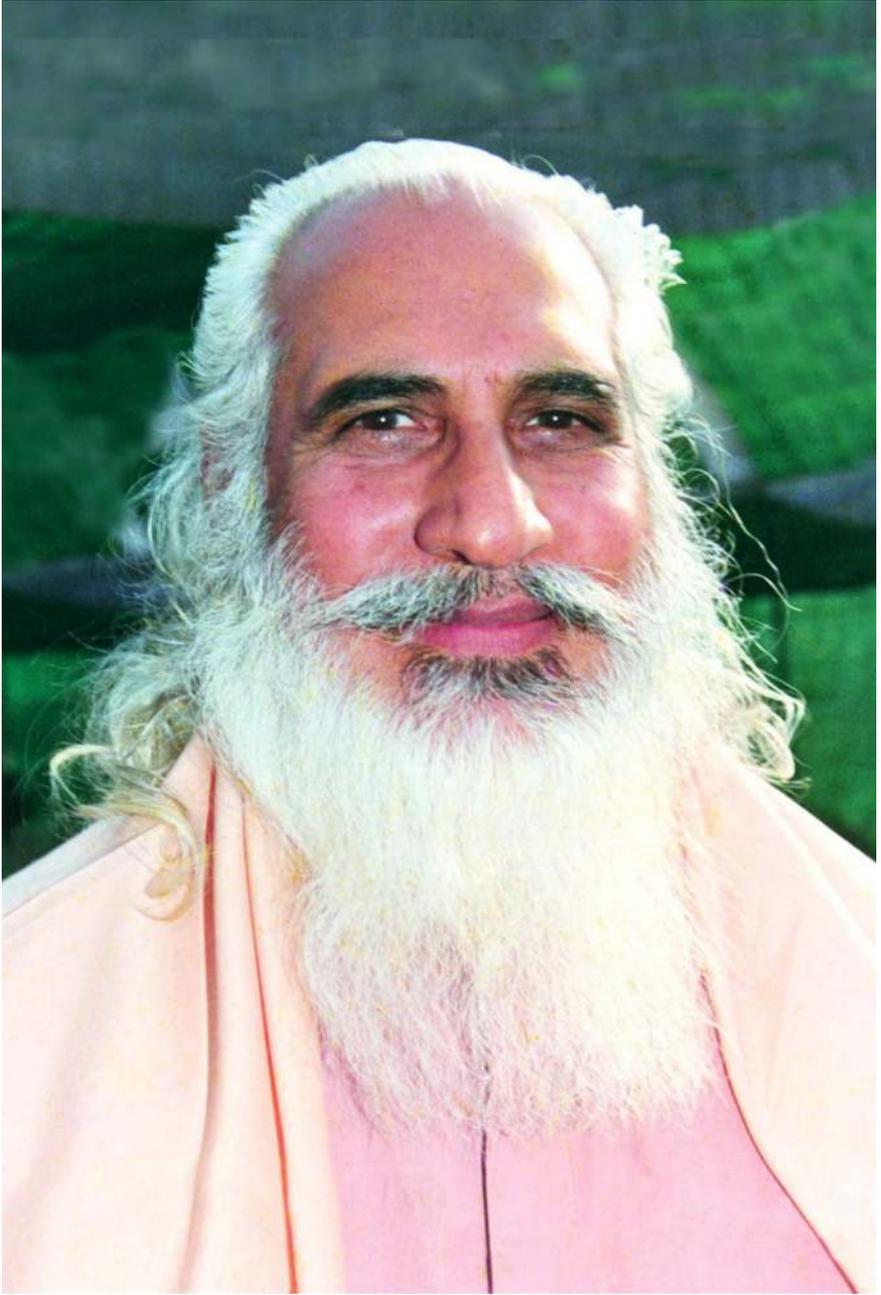
Dedicated to
the sweet and loving memory of
Udāsīnāchārya Bhagavān Shrīchandrajī
and Bālayati Bābā Bhūman Shāhjī Udāsīn



Udāsīnāchārya Bhagavān Shrīchandrajī
(1494 – 1643)



Bābā Bhūman Shāhjī Udāsīn
(1687 – 1747)



Shri Chandra Swami Udasin

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Introduction

It is indeed a great pleasure and privilege to present the third volume of *Song of Silence* to all the seekers of Truth. As with the first and second volumes, this book is the compilation of the written responses of our beloved Master, revered Shri Chandra Swāmijī Udāsīn, to the questions of his devotees and disciples. Most of the answers selected for this volume relate to the period between the 26th of November, 1995 to the 8th of January 1998¹. We have also included a few of his answers written in other years, as well as a few of his observations written informally outside of *satsaṅga*. As most of us know, our Master has been observing God-inspired, indefinite sweet silence for over twenty-five years. The majority of these answers are taken from the daily one-hour *satsaṅga* with Gurudeva from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., during which he gives answers to spiritual questions in writing. Most of the questions in this book are from foreign devotees, as is the case with Volumes I & II. God willing, we will translate these questions and answers into Hindi, and then publish them in book form in the future.

¹ Unfortunately no record was kept of the *satsaṅga* from the 27th of October 1996 to the 31st of March 1997. Therefore Swāmijī's answers given during this five month period are not included in this volume.

Unlike the previous two volumes, this compilation has been organized subject-wise and sequentially. We felt this new format would enable the reader to have a more comprehensive understanding of Swāmiji's teachings and would also be of great help to those who wish to refer to a specific topic. In the future we propose to publish further volumes of Song of Silence in a format similar to the present volume, that is to say, organized according to theme or topic. One great advantage of this is that over a period of time we will have a sizable collection of Gurudeva's priceless answers organized by topic and theme, which later on can easily be rearranged and published as separate books or booklets devoted exclusively to one topic.

Since Swāmiji's answers are integral and all-inclusive, there is some overlapping of topics, that is to say, one answer may relate to more than one topic. We have, therefore, arranged the answers according to their dominant theme.

In the process of categorizing the answers for this volume, we immediately were inspired by the book *The Practical Approach to Divinity*¹, the masterpiece written by Gurudeva. Those of us who have read this small book know that it is a complete treatise on spirituality. We humbly feel that Swāmiji's answers to spiritual questions are more or less a further exposition of the essentials already contained within this condensed book, and that this third volume of *Song of Silence*, when read with *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, will greatly help the reader to understand it. Thus in the present volume we have chosen to arrange Swāmiji's answers under different headings more or less according to the pattern of *The Practical Approach to Divinity*.

¹ A revised edition of *The Practical Approach to Divinity* has been published in March 2008.

In the first chapter, “God Exists: Different Aspects of the Divine,” Swāmījī develops the statement that the existence of God is evident and his answers to the questions about this topic further elucidate the different aspects of the supreme Reality such as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, God, Consciousness, *Ātmā*, *Brahman*, etc.

There are countless books in Hinduism on the vast topic of God and His different aspects. Trying to understand God or the Supreme Reality intellectually is not an indispensable and essential part of Swāmījī’s teaching, as he often says that the mind is not the right instrument to know God, the Infinite. Nevertheless, as he has answered many questions on this topic, some of them are included in this first chapter. Such knowledge may be useful for intellectually oriented seekers in their spiritual quest, as it helps dispel certain misgivings and brings about clarity with regard to the countless dimensions of God.

In the second chapter, “Goal of Life, God can and must be attained,” God-Realization is shown to be the ultimate and the most natural purpose of all human beings, and the practicality and urgency of God- Realization are discussed. The third chapter, “Basic Qualifications,” includes faith and trust, sincerity and aspiration, purity, humility, reflection and discrimination, dispassion and detachment, self-control, perseverance and patience. As Gurudeva says, these are the cardinal and common qualifications expected of all seekers irrespective of the nature of their path.

In his answers, Swāmījī very much emphasises the importance of a balanced and integral *sādhanā*, which has prompted us to dedicate the fourth chapter exclusively to the different limbs of *sādhanā*. This chapter, “Integral *Sādhanā*,” includes insights about *sādhanā* in general, as well as on the different spiritual paths: *bhakti yoga*, *jñāna yoga*, *karma yoga* and *rāja yoga*. Swāmījī’s answers in this section reveal the

integral and inclusive nature of his approach and teaching, i.e. *kriyā shakti* (power of action), *bhāva shakti* (power of feeling) and *jñāna shakti* (power of knowledge) should all be sublimated and directed towards God-Realization. For God-Realization to become uninterruptedly stabilized and permanent, all the parts of the personality of the seeker (body, senses, vital, mind and intellect) have to be purified and divinized.

The all-important fifth chapter on meditation and contemplation is organized according to the different methods of practice as laid out in *The Practical Approach to Divinity*. His guidance about the different types of meditation is rooted in the fact that he himself practiced all these methods and attained the direct experience of the Divine. Chapters six and seven speak about common obstacles and aids that a seeker has to face on the spiritual path. These chapters describe some specific obstacles and aids to meditation/contemplation, as well as general obstacles and aids, thus providing deep insight into the overall spiritual journey, which may take many, many lives with its tough terrains and with our minds playing subtle tricks to thwart our *sāadhanā*. In chapter eight, important terms like *karma*, *chakras*, body-mind, ego, soul, death, etc. have been discussed under the title “Metaphysical Matters.” Many seekers do want to understand these concepts and this chapter should help to clarify these topics. Swāmiji, however, has given only introductory and fundamental information about these matters without going into scriptural detail.

The final chapter compiles Swāmiji’s answers about the consummation of all *sāadhanās*, the highest achievement of human life, which once realized cannot be taken away, after knowing which nothing else remains to be known. This ninth chapter, “Spiritual Experiences, Enlightenment, Realization and Fulfilment,” starts with common experiences leading up to the highest experience

that transcends all experiences – the never waning integral Realization of the Divine – which he often refers to as Fulfilment or Experiencing, rather than experience.

In order to keep the focus primarily on Swāmījī’s answers, most of the questions have been shortened, and in some places omitted altogether. Swāmījī always addresses the ability, inclination and real need of the questioner rather than the question itself. In this regard he has said, “I may give a different reply to the same question put by a different person.” Most of the time we cannot grasp the deeper import of Swāmījī’s answers; we perceive only the tip of the iceberg. The essence of his answer can be appreciated only by the aspirant questioner in the unique Guru/disciple relationship. No matter what the question, Swāmījī’s answers and advice are always positive and consistent with the highest spiritual principles. His language is unambiguous and easy to understand. His whole approach is practical.

As the answers were written over a period of roughly one and a half years, there are naturally some repetitions. Some have been removed, others have been kept for the logical development of a particular discussion, or to highlight the heart of Swāmījī’s teaching.

Also, we should remember that this book contains only Swāmījī’s responses to the questions of devotees. Therefore, the amount of space or content dedicated to a specific topic is not proportional to the importance of that topic. Rather, it reflects the interest of seekers during the limited period of one and a half years which this book has covered. For instance, it is possible that only a few questions were asked relating to very important topics, as is the case with the negative method of meditation.

At some places we have also included relevant quotes from Swāmījī’s books: *The Practical Approach to Divinity*,

Spiritual Gems and *Mirror of Bliss*, to bring out the meaning of the discussion.

Regarding his teaching, Swāmījī himself says: “I am not a teacher because there is no course, no syllabus, no regular students, no classes, no particular teaching . . . I have no desire to teach, so I don’t call myself a teacher.”

Another important aspect of Swāmījī’s role as a spiritual Master is that he does not preach one particular method of practice. He says, “I have no special yoga of my own. I don’t claim to have discovered something new. All the methods I recommend have already been discovered by the ancient ṛishis and sages.” Thus Swāmījī guides each questioner spontaneously out of his own direct experience. He has the power to guide a *bhakta* as well as a *jñānī*, a beginner as well as an advanced seeker.

It also needs to be mentioned that this book is the fruit of the most humble and devotional *sevā* of Swāmījī’s beloved disciples, revered Mā Divya Jyoti and Karunāji, who have worked daily and tirelessly for more than two years to put Gurudeva’s holy words in its present format. They have had the privilege of sitting in Gurudeva’s *satsaṅga* daily and regularly for many, many years and are well conversant with the core of his teachings and therefore are most competent to do this work. Now, thanks to their efforts, we have the butter of Gurudeva’s words available by theme. May God bless them. In the words of Mā Divya Jyoti:

“Though this work is done with great respect and care, we must have made mistakes, for which we ask your forgiveness. Nevertheless, one thing eases our feeling of being unworthy of this work. It is our conviction that this book of questions and answers not only transmits Swāmījī’s teaching, but beyond the

words, it conveys his grace, the grace of God. The magic atmosphere of his daily *satsaṅgas* can be recreated in the open heart of any reader. But, beware, many of us could tell you, ‘He might steal your heart sooner than later, as the holy thief Kṛiṣṇa does with His flute.’”

Swāmījī’s answers are not mere words. They are, in fact, the vehicle of his infinite compassion and grace, which he ceaselessly pours on his devotees and which is so palpable in these pages; they are the device to help the open and willing heart with his “pushes and pulls” towards the Divine, as he likes to term it. Here, the light he sheds is the light of pure Spirit. It burns down whatever is negative and harmful, and strengthens, refines and illumines whatever is positive and salutary.

In the end, we trust that this book will turn the reader into a pilgrim of the path, and if one is already on the path, it will make one into a more confident, resolute pilgrim, equipped with better understanding and vision of his spiritual goal and a stronger will to achieve it. May the readers be blessed with the assurance that divine grace and the Guru’s grace are ever ready and waiting to raise the true seeker up to the heights of divine felicity.

Ever at his holy feet,

10.03.10

Swāmī Prem Vivekānanda
Sādhanā Kendra Āshram

Guru Darshana

It is 11 a.m. in the first week of February, 2009 at Sādhanā Kendra Āshram. It is quite cold, but pleasant because of the bright sunny day. The blue sky spreads above, clear and spotless. Like everyday, Gurudeva is sitting on a chair outside his room on the open terrace above the library hall of the āshram, surrounded by his devotees seated in a half circle, many of whom are from abroad. Some are sitting on the carpets spread on the ground and others in chairs. Just opposite flows the holy Yamunā River against the backdrop of the Shivalik Mountain range. Behind Swāmījī the mango and litchi trees are swaying in the gentle breeze. The chirping of birds fills the moment. The air is fragrant and pure. All of nature is reverentially present in Swāmījī's *satsaṅga* along with the devotees.

Swāmījī is wearing a warm orange robe which looks especially beautiful on him. His long white hair and beard sparkle in the winter sunlight and a mystical serenity and eternal freshness are dancing on his beaming face. Again and again we all are struck by his unearthly beauty descending down to the physical level even at the age of eighty. His whole being is exuding divinity, bathed in the effulgence of spiritual Fulfilment.

Swāmījī's infectious serenity and silent joy pervades the whole atmosphere like the fragrance of a flower, reaching

everyone around. There, he sits in his divine splendor with amazing unassumingness and utter humility, conversing through his mystical, sweet silence on a one-to-one basis. It is a rare spiritual feast not only for our physical eyes, but for our whole being. This is the *satsaṅga* of Shrī Chandra Swāmījī. It feels as if it has been going on here forever.

After exchanging some pleasantries with his devotees like intimate friends, he reads the first question, takes his notebook and pen, and lowering his head, starts to write his answer. In the meantime, a few devotees have arrived from Punjab. They make their way towards Swāmījī's seat, prostrate before him, place many offerings of fruit etc. near his holy feet, and then retrace their steps to take their seats in the back. But Gurudeva, the disinterested lover of all as he is, remains absorbed in writing his answer in the *satsaṅga* notebook as if in deep meditation. Some devotees sit with eyes open and some with eyes closed; for many of them too the intervals spent waiting for his answers are like small periods of meditation.

Nowadays a lot of repair work is going on right in front of the āshram because of the massive repair of the canal. All of a sudden, a concrete mixer starts working with a terrible noise, quickly enhanced by the coming and going of the tractors carrying the building material. In the midst of all this racket, unmoved by anything, firmly rooted in his true centre, Swāmījī's total attention is fixed on writing his answer. He does not even blink his eyes. All the distracting noise around is as if ashamed not to be able to disturb the *yogī* even a little bit. Swāmījī is completely his very own Self without displaying any sign of irritation or uneasiness. Rather, it feels as if he is sitting far, far away in the secluded forest absorbed in the profound peace of his *Ātmā*.

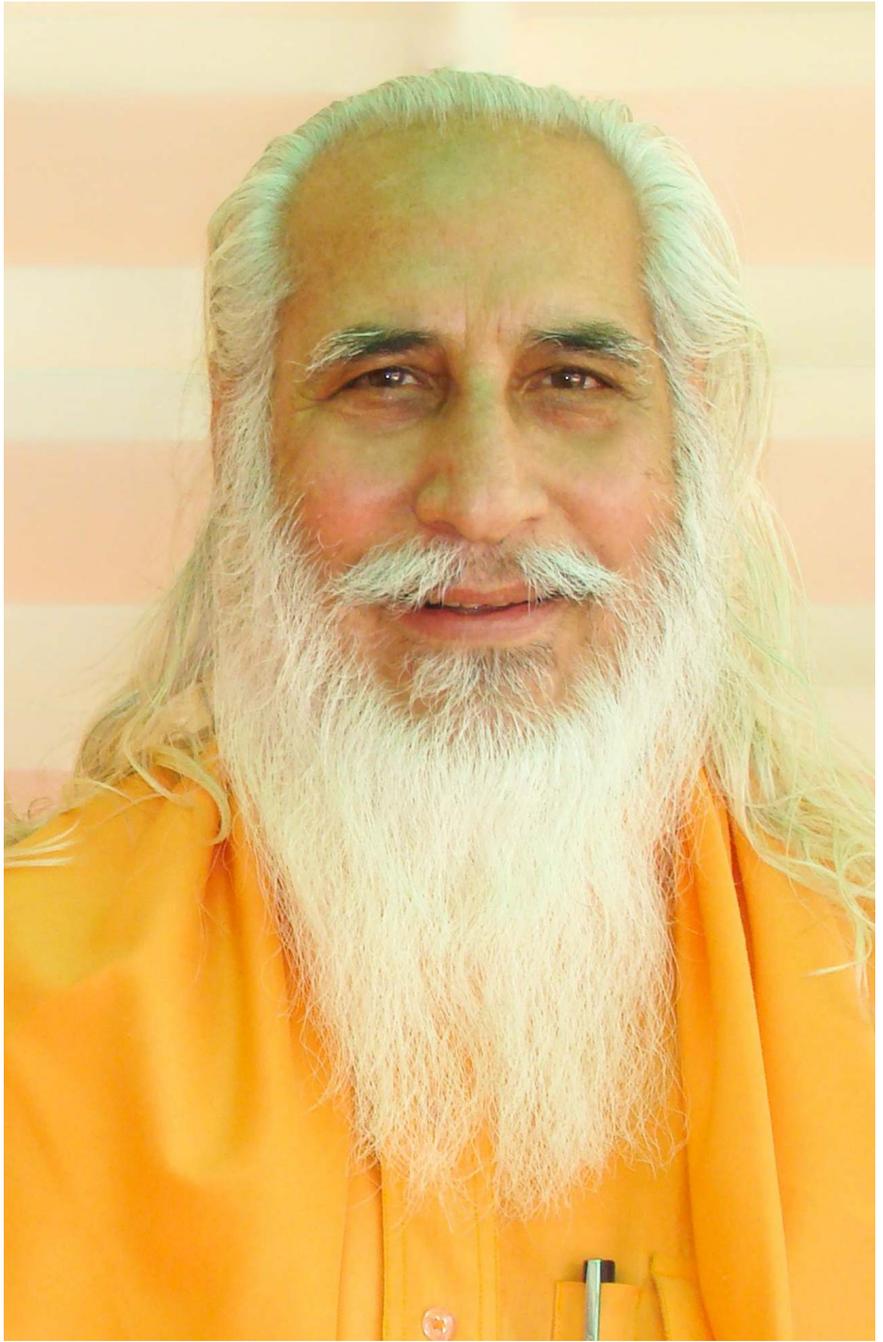




After writing the answer, he carefully rereads it and then gently hands the notebook to one of the translators seated by his side to read the answer aloud and translate it into Hindi or English and also French. Then he looks back to the devotees who had arrived from Punjab and enquires about their wellbeing with a love-filled gesture. While the answer is being read, he listens attentively to every word and at once corrects any inadvertent errors. More or less the same divine *līlā* enacts itself day after day.

With his characteristic Himalayan patience and unmistakable goodwill, he does not give merely his answer, but his own Self. His divinely inspired responses bear the stamp of spontaneity, simplicity and authority. Indeed they cannot be compared with anything less than a holy scripture. Yet, even more powerful than his words is the impact of his holy ambience. Those who are able to set aside the questioning mind and tune their hearts to his silent presence drink more from the power and sweetness of his Being than from his words. Words are merely the gross vehicle of his grace, as we are not yet ripe to receive through his sweet silence.

There is never a fixed agenda in the *satsaṅga* session and it flows spontaneously according to the need of the devotees. He often cuts jokes and the silence is broken by peels of laughter. What never changes is the feeling of his dynamic joy and profound peace, which is palpable. In such a milieu Gurudeva's *satsaṅga* is born, from which the words embodying his grace are scattered in these pages.



Life Profile of Shrī Chandra Swāmījī Udāsīn

The great sage, revered Shrī Chandra Swāmījī Udāsīn, was born on the 5th of March, 1930, in the village Bhūman Shāh, District Montgomery, now in Pakistan. The village is named after one of the greatest sages and mystics of the eighteenth century, revered Bābā Bhūman Shāhājī. This great sage is the master of our beloved Gurudeva, Shrī Chandra Swāmījī. Swāmījī, who has had the most sacred and mystical relationship with Bābājī, attributes all his herculean efforts and achievements to the latter's unreserved grace. Swāmījī had an irresistible inclination towards spirituality from his early childhood and is believed to be a very advanced *yogī* of many previous lives.

In the year 1947, Mahanta Girdhārī Dāsījī, the tenth master in the line of Bābā Bhūman Shāhājī, initiated him into the much-respected *Udāsīn* tradition of Hinduism. This took place through the direct and mystical intervention of Bābājī, who appeared to both Swāmījī's father and Mahantājī in their dreams and gave them explicit instructions regarding Swāmījī's spiritual future.

In his student days he was an extraordinarily gifted and accomplished sportsman and excelled in many events. While he was pursuing his postgraduate studies in science and maths, a very powerful longing for the Divine drove him to seek a first-hand and integral Realization of the Divine in this very life. Possessed by strong dispassion, he abandoned his postgraduate studies, severed all worldly ties, and took to a secluded monastic

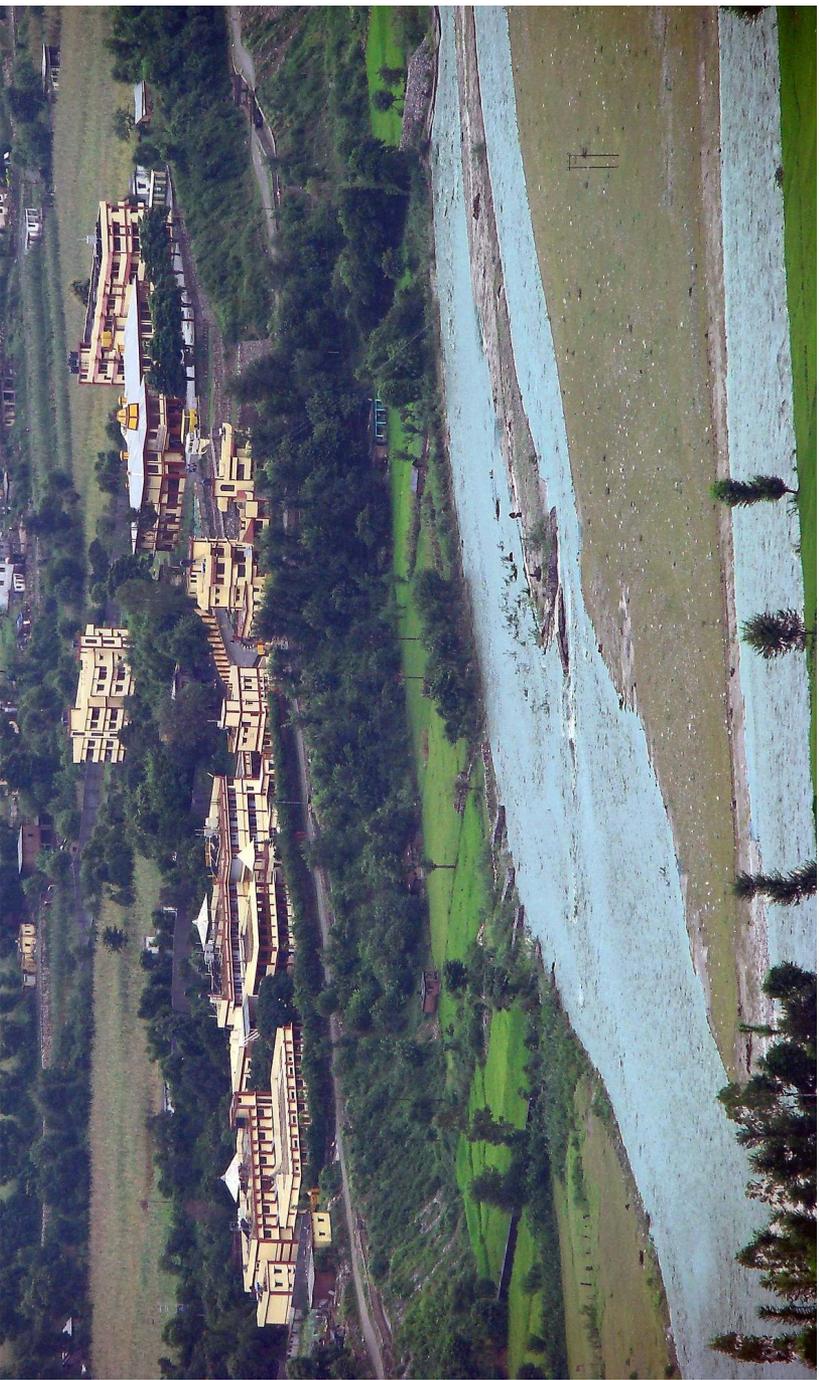
life. This was in the year 1952, when he was twenty-two years old.

A period of intense *sādhanā* followed. He went to Jammu & Kashmir and spent about eight years there in a cave and in the mountains. Then, from 1961 to 1970, he came to live on a secluded forest island near Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar, on the banks of the holy river Ganges. It is here that he attained the highest and never waning integral spiritual Realization. Many visitors going to his hut found that they had encountered a truly realized soul.

In 1970, at the earnest request of his devotees, he shifted to a small *āshram*, named Sevaka Nivāsa, in Sapta Sarovara, Haridwar. He lived there for twenty years. Then, with the passage of time, as the spot became crowded, noisy and commercial, he began to look for another more secluded place, and found one in the year 1989. The place was located in the quiet, remote and hilly village of Domet on the banks of the holy river Yamunā, some fifty kilometres away from Dehradun. Immediately, the construction of the building was started. In 1990, Swāmījī moved to the partly constructed Sādhanā Kendra Āshram.

The new *āshram* was built under his direct guidance. It has been developed as a place of *sādhanā*. The *āshram* is open to all seekers of Truth, irrespective of caste, creed or race. Four sessions of common meditation have been going on daily, in the presence of Swāmījī himself, for over twenty one years without a break. Sincere seekers from all over the country and abroad visit the *āshram* for *sādhanā* and to have *darshana* of this God-man. They come in large numbers, even though there is no advertisement or publicity made by the *āshram*. Word about Swāmījī spreads by the love that the devotees have for him.

The *āshram* also serves the poor and the needy in various ways, especially in the areas of education and medical care. Since



Sāadhanā Kendra Āshram, Domet, Dehradun

2001 the *āshram* has been running a free school by the name of Bābā Bhūman Shāh Vidyā Mandir, which provides high quality education – academic as well as moral – to the poorest children in the area. In 2005 the *āshram* also started a free dispensary, Udāsīnāchārya Shrīchandra Charitable Dispensary, within the *āshram* precincts. In addition, for the last several years the *āshram* has been offering free professional evening courses in tailoring and basic computer training for the unemployed youth of the area.

God inspired, Swāmījī has been in unbroken silence for the past twenty-five years. To date, the silence continues and its duration is unknown even to Swāmījī himself. His silence is more eloquent than words. To see him is to believe him. A free spirit, humble, simple, tender, non-dogmatic and unobtrusive, he is the very embodiment of Divinity.

Now 80 years of age, Swāmījī is an unbelievably charming person with Divinity descending down to the physical level. His pleasing countenance, which is at once peaceful and beaming, his penetrating and meditative eyes, his strong and regal figure, his gentle yet firm demeanour, his alertness and awareness in day-to-day activities, all bring an air of quiet and responsible freedom, making it a sheer delight to be with him. His presence envelops anyone who is a little receptive, in peace and holiness.

These few words about our beloved Master are simply an expression of gratitude to him in introducing the third volume of *Song of Silence*. A more detailed account of his life is to be found in *Song of Silence - Volume I*.

Ever in his sweet refuge,

20.02.2010

Swāmī Prem Vivekānanda
Sādhanā Kendra Āshram

Editor's Note

We feel it is necessary to clarify a few important features of this book, especially regarding the use of key words like God, meditation, Enlightenment and Realization, which are sometimes used differently depending on their context:

In Hindi different names are used for different aspects of the Divine or Supreme Reality, while in English only one word, i.e. "God," is used for all the aspects of the Divine. So, many times when writing in English, Swāmījī uses the same word "God" to express different aspects of the Divine. However, on some occasions he uses the word "God" according to its actual meaning in Hindi/Sanskrit. In the Indian context "God" means *Īshvara*, who is an aspect of Absolute Reality. *Īshvara* is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent and the creator, sustainer and destroyer of this universe. Thus *Īshvara*'s existence is relative to the existence of the universe.

In his book, *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, Swāmījī defines meditation (*vichāra-vimarsha*) as a sort of reflection involving a flow of correlated thoughts on a single subject, and contemplation (*dhyāna*) as the practice of either fixing the mind on a single name, form or idea, or completely rejecting all names, forms and ideas. However, in his daily answers to spiritual questions which comprise this book, Swāmījī

always answers according to the level and understanding of the questioner, and thus he often uses the word meditation more broadly to include all forms of spiritual concentration, as it is often used nowadays in common parlance.

Swāmījī makes a clear distinction between “Enlightenment” and “Realization,” and also between “Realization” and “Fulfilment.” Enlightenment comes like a flash – a sudden glimpse of the Divine. Realization denotes the stabilization and establishment of this experience in all the parts of one’s personality. Fulfilment refers to the highest Realization of all the various different aspects of the Divine. Despite this technical distinction in terminology, Swāmījī occasionally uses the terms Enlightenment and Realization interchangeably, as is often done in spiritual circles, depending on the nature, scope and depth of the questioner’s spiritual experience.

With regard to capitalization, all words designating the Supreme Reality, God, or any aspect of God, like *Ātmā*, Consciousness, *Nirguṇa*, *Saguṇa*, Spirit, *Puruṣha*, *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, *Īshvara*, etc. have been capitalized. Moreover, when a noun used for God or any aspect of God is qualified by an adjective, only the noun has been capitalized, as in the case of absolute Bliss. Often Swāmījī equates pure Consciousness with God/Supreme Reality. In this case the word Consciousness is capitalized, while for relative consciousness such as body or mind consciousness it is written in lower case. Similar is the case with the word Awareness. Also, when used to signify the supreme Being, the word God is capitalized, and when used to denote a deity or higher supernatural power, it is written in lower case.

In his answers to spiritual questions, Swāmījī almost always uses the gender neutral “his/her” construction when guiding

seekers on the spiritual path. However, for the sake of simplicity and clarity, in this volume we have retained only the masculine pronoun in many places, though of course the timeless wisdom contained within these pages applies to all alike, regardless of gender, caste or creed.

We have included a glossary of the Hindi and Sanskrit words appearing in this book in the light of Swāmījī's responses. The definitions of a few important scriptural terms like *Saguṇa Brahman*, *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Vedānta*, *pañcha koṣha*, etc. have been given in some detail because Swāmījī uses these words quite often in his *satsaṅga*. Many times Swāmījī's answers partially touch on these technical words without going into detail, depending on the scope of the question. So we think it is good to provide a more in depth explanation for those who are interested.

Finally, we have employed diacritical marks (*ā, ñ, ṣ* etc.) on all Hindi and Sanskrit words to facilitate more accurate pronunciation of these words. A pronunciation guide is provided at the back of the book.

Chapter One

God Exists

Different Aspects of the Divine

“You want proof of God’s existence? Cast a penetrating glance into the deepest depths of the heart of any living being (including yourself) and you shall invariably find there an innate, irresistible urge, conscious or unconscious, to realize the Life that is eternal, the Knowledge that denies all limitations, and the Bliss that knows no bounds of time, space and causality. Would this not be sufficient proof of God’s existence for you?”

– Spiritual Gems

God Exists

Different Aspects of the Divine

Sat-Chit-Ānanda

You can call the Divine *Sat* or *Chit* or *Ānanda* or Love

Does joy go with love and vice-versa?

Joy, Love and Consciousness are three names of infinite and timeless Existence. In the manifestation, they assume different forms while basically remaining the same. These are not three qualities of the Divine. These comprise the essential Being of the Divine. You can call the Divine *Sat* or *Chit* or *Ānanda* or Love. *Sat* means *Chit*, which means Love, which means *Ānanda*. *Sat* is *Chit*; *Chit* is *Ānanda*; *Ānanda* is Love. *Sat* means absolute Existence, *Chit* means absolute Consciousness and *Ānanda* means absolute Bliss. There cannot be many absolutes. There cannot be many infinities.

Bliss or *Ānanda* is here and now

How to be permanently in contact with Bliss?

You can realize lasting Bliss only when you realize your Self. You cannot find It in any object, situation or relationship, try as you might for aeons. You cannot know eternal Bliss as you know this table, as an object. You can only know It by being one with It, only by Self-Realization. Eternal Bliss means everlasting Bliss. It is not the bliss of the body. Infinite Consciousness is not limited by time and space. So, eternal Bliss is also not limited by time and space.

I know that I don't feel that Bliss.

How can you miss it? It is here in your missing also. You say that you know that you don't know it, when in fact it is most easily accessible. It is available to you, but you are not available to it. Bliss is here and now. The thoughts mean movement and you are moving with them, so you cannot grasp the Bliss.

The One manifests into many, and yet It remains One

The manifestation is so vast, how to see Brahman, the Reality, within it?

The difference is in the manifestation, not in *Brahman*. The One manifests into many, and yet It remains One. This is the mystery that cannot be known by the thinking mind. It can be illustrated by a few examples, such as the actor who plays the roles of many people in a film. Have you ever seen this kind of film?

Everything has five ingredients within it: name, form, Existence, Awareness and Bliss. The first two vary from one thing

to another. Existence-Awareness-Bliss, i.e. *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* is One and the same in everything. It is the Substance; names and forms are like shadows. To discover the Substance, the Reality, one has to go beyond name and form.

Hindus call the real Self, the real “I,” “*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*”

Thirteen years ago, while I was attending a weekend retreat based on the search for “the real Self,” the teacher, after a deep relaxation sequence, told us to write on a piece of paper our own definition of ourselves. I immediately wrote, “I am Love, since all eternity.” This formula transformed my life. Shall I use it as a mantra for japa?

Yes, you may use this as a *mantra*: “I am Love eternal, Joy unending, Peace everlasting.” Repeat this again and again in your heart and be relaxed. Don’t think anything else.

The real Self, the real “I” is indeed infinite Joy, the unabating light of Awareness, ever-glowing flame of Love, and absolute Existence. Hindus call it *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. Mixed with mind and, through mind, identifying Itself with the body, objects and situations, the real “I” imagines Itself to be full of limitations. In fact, It never becomes limited. The king becomes a beggar in a dream, but the dream is a dream; the king remains a king and does not really lose his kingdom.

God

God is self-evident

God is self-evident. Does He depend upon anyone to make Himself known? It is through God, by the light of God, that the whole existence comes to be known. God is infinite Consciousness. Does Consciousness need anyone to make Itself known?

What can we say about the qualities of God?

God is formless but He is not that type of formless God, as some people believe, who cannot assume any form. He is formless and yet He is the source of all names and forms. You can only say, “God Is.” You cannot say how or what God is. You can describe Him with contradictory terms as the *Upaniṣhads* have done. The *Upaniṣhads* say, “God is *nirguṇa*, and God is also *saguṇa*.” But these are not logical statements.

God is immanent and transcendent at the same time

I was taught that God is in every person and creature. No form can symbolize God for me.

God is absolute. He cannot be conceived by the mind. Mind can understand God bit by bit, thinking about different aspects of God. If you do not believe in God with form, it is not at all necessary for you to meditate on any form of God. God is within surely, but you have only heard this. Had you felt or seen God within yourself, you would not need to seek Him. Then, you would

feel fulfilled. Musk is in the navel of a mountain deer, but he is seeking it in the bushes here and there, as he always smells the scent of that musk within him. God is in every person and every thing, and yet He is transcendent. He is immanent and transcendent at the same time. You can concentrate on the qualities of God. You can concentrate on any name of God, in which you have faith. One can meditate on God through a *mantra* also.

The eternal Unchangeable and the temporal manifestation

Ultimately there is only oneness. Why concentrate on an Iṣṭā, on an external and personal God?

There is unity in diversity. Unity is the Real. Diversity is temporal, phenomenal. There is diversity only in the manifestation. The One does remain one even though appearing as many. It never loses its Oneness even when it is manifest in many names and forms. Manifestation does not mean that the One changes into many. As Aristotle used the term “unmoved mover,” similarly it can be said that the Unchangeable is assuming change, but really It does not change. Change is temporal, it is in time, and it is time. The Unchangeable is timeless and eternal. The manifestation is temporal. Divine Consciousness is eternal and infinite, unbound by time, space and causality. The unchangeable and eternal One is here and now. It is not only the final. It is the first and final, both at once.

God is like fire. Fire is there in the burning wood, fire is there even in a stone, and fire is there even in water, but fire in the stone does not burn your hand. It will burn your hand only

when and where it is manifest. God is everywhere and in every thing and person, but the degree of His manifestation is not the same in everyone. That is what makes a difference between different species, or even amongst different individuals of one species.

Nothing exists but God

In the West, I have been sad to hear and to read, sometimes by renowned authors, that Hinduism is polytheistic. What would you tell them?

According to Hindus, nothing exists but God. God is not only present in all things, but He is all things. If you say that an idol is not God, you are in a sense limiting God. God is not only energy. God is also matter. God is the atom and God is the space or ether too. Even science has proved that matter and energy are not two principles or *tattvas*. The whole universe of name, form and qualities is the manifestation of God according to Hindus. According to Hindus, you are also God.

In Hinduism God has many aspects and many names: God without attributes, God with attributes, God with form and God without form. And there are so many qualities, so God manifested with some particular qualities is given a particular name and so on.

The gods in Hinduism are to God what rays of the sun are to the sun. Swāmī Vivekānanda, in many of his discourses, explained that Hinduism was not polytheistic but monotheistic. God is infinite. Can there be many infinities?

Four concepts in Indian terminology

The whole existence has a common denominator, which is called *Brahman* or Godhead, the Divine, the One without a second, the Spirit. It is the timeless and eternal Consciousness. It manifests Itself into many and yet It remains one.

There is a universal and supreme Soul. It is called God (*Īshvara*). It has a universal mind. There is the individual soul with an individual mind, called *jīva*.

In Indian terminology, there are four concepts: *Brahman*, *Īshvara*, *jīva* and *Prakṛiti* (Nature). *Brahman* or Godhead is common in *Īshvara*, *jīva* and *Prakṛiti*. *Brahman* is absolute Existence, Bliss, Awareness and Love, whereas *Īshvara* is the energy of *Brahman*. God means *Īshvara*, the Master of the universe. He is personalized Consciousness.

Godhead is timeless. God is the highest manifestation of Godhead. *Jīva* or soul, God and Nature are the manifestations of Godhead.

Is the world a part of Brahman?

The world is not a part of *Brahman*. You may say that the world is like a shadow. *Brahman* is the substance. The world is the shadow. It is the appearance.

The “miracle”

How and why does the One manifest Itself into many?

A person is dancing. Can you ask the person, “Why are you dancing?” One can, however, ask a person who is weeping,

“Why are you weeping?” Dancing, if it is not professional, is a spontaneous expression of joy. The universe is the *līlā* of the Divine; you cannot question it! *Līlā* means a spontaneous action, which is unmotivated. You can only grasp it somewhat when you are yourself able to act without motivation. The One manifests Itself into many and still remains One. This is the miracle.

You seem to make a distinction between the feeling of dancing and weeping?

Singing or dancing is natural. Weeping is not natural. It has some cause behind it. No one wants suffering because it is not in the nature of human beings to suffer!

God has infinite qualities

God has infinite qualities. A particular individual has certain qualities that are manifest while the remaining ones are unmanifest. Those unmanifest qualities can be made manifest. Or certain qualities can be made manifest and certain unmanifest, thereby transforming one thing into another. A thief can be transformed into a saint and vice-versa. God is present in each and every being, but He is not completely manifest in every thing or being.

God is without attributes and with attributes

At the beginning of the satsaṅga, some verses of the Bhagavad Gītā are read. Swāmījī comments:

Without energy and Consciousness, no one can achieve any feat whether the feat is of the nature of *sattvaguṇa* or *tamoguṇa*. At one place in the *Gītā*, Lord Kṛiṣṇa is referring to his impersonal Consciousness/Energy, which is supporting all without being involved in anyone. You can take the example of light. It is only through light that you can read the *Gītā* or a detective novel. Without light you cannot read. Without light you cannot even gamble. It is not possible to describe the Absolute integrally. It can be described bit by bit, describing one aspect of the Divine, then another aspect, then a third, etc. Or the Absolute can be described by using opposites, like *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*. How can you say that God is without attributes and with attributes at the same time? It is illogical and paradoxical to say that, and yet all the scriptures say that God is *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*, both.

In the *Gītā*, at one place Kṛiṣṇa says, “I am the doer. Whatever is being done, it is being done by Me!” In another verse, he says, “I am not the doer. I do not do anything!” Now how will you reconcile these two statements? When he says, “I am the non-doer,” He is referring to His *nirguṇa* aspect, the impersonal aspect. When He says, “I am the doer, no one else is the doer,” He is referring to his *saguṇa* aspect, the personal aspect.

The Divine is personal and impersonal at the same time

Does “personal God” mean Kṛiṣṇa, Rāma, Jesus and all the sages and saints?

Kṛiṣṇa, Rāma and Jesus are not only personal, because they are always aware of their impersonal and absolute Divinity.

Personal is related to what is in time. The Divine is personal and impersonal at the same time.

When we say, “Tat Tvam Asi” (You are That), does it mean what you just wrote?

In “Tat Tvam Asi” it is the impersonal aspect which is indicated.

Can you elaborate on the supreme universal personal God?

It is written that He sees without eyes, He hears without ears, He walks without feet, He catches without hands, He tastes without a tongue; He touches without skin, He smells without a nose, etc. You want to see Him as an object, as you see a table or chair? It is impossible. You can realize Him as yourself. How do you see yourself?

“To fight over the point, ‘God is personal and with a form or He is impersonal and formless,’ betrays sheer ignorance! In truth there is no difference at all between the personal God and the impersonal and formless Godhead. When you perceive Him through the mind and senses, He is known to be personal and with form; when you perceive Him by transcending your mind and senses, He is impersonal and formless.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Where is God?

God once called all the angels and his ministers and said, “I am very much tired of man. Everybody wants to come to me.

Someone wants good health and calls me. Someone is fighting a case in the court and wants to win the case and calls me. Someone's business is going down and he calls me for blessings. Someone has a spiritual problem and wants to solve that problem, so he calls me. Someone has a family dispute, etc. Everyone has his or her own problems and comes after me. I want to go somewhere where man cannot find me."

The ministers gave different opinions and suggestions. One said, "You should go to the highest peak of that mountain where no man will be able to reach." The second said, "You should go and live underwater." The third said, "You should go to the top of the North Pole." But God said, "I know man very well. He will reach everywhere." Then a very wise minister said: "You should hide yourself inside man. He will search for you everywhere outside, and thus allow you to have rest." God liked the suggestion and hid Himself in the heart of man.

The greatest sacrifice of the Divine

I don't feel very devotional and I am more attracted to the impersonal aspect of God. What should be my practice?

Are you a person or not? How can a person see the impersonal God? To see the impersonal, you have to be the impersonal. Can you do that? Can you give up your mind? Can you be totally impersonal? There is no difference between the Impersonal and the Personal. If they were two, both would be finite, and mortal. The Impersonal becomes the Personal, without losing its Impersonality so that the persons can communicate with Him, and be related with Him. It is the greatest sacrifice the Divine makes for people. It is said that God made man in His image. I

say that a man sees God as he himself is. Man sees God in his own image.

What do you mean by, “Man sees God in his own image?”

So long as man’s mind is conditioned and he has pre-conceived ideas and ready-made beliefs, he conceives of God accordingly. It is actually not seeing God. It is the conceptual knowledge of God. In this sense I have written that man knows God in his own image.

Three aspects of God: *Brahmā-Vishṇu-Shiva*

Could you give some explanation about: “Brahmā-Vishṇu-Shiva?”

Brahmā is one aspect of *Īshvara*, or God, the highest manifestation of *Brahman*. There are three powers of *Īshvara*:

1. The creating power
2. The sustaining power
3. The destroying power

Brahmā is the creating conscious power of God. *Vishṇu* is the sustaining conscious power of God. *Shaṅkara* (or *Shiva*) is the destroying conscious power of God. They are one in God. These are three aspects of the same God, as when a man washes the clothes he is called a washer-man, when he stitches the clothes he is called a tailor, and when he drives a car he is called a driver. But he can be the same person. God is not doing this at different times. Creation, sustenance and destruction are going on at the same time.

What is the difference between those who worship Vishṇu and those who worship Shiva?

The *Shivaists* address God by the name *Shiva*. The *Vaiṣṇavas* address God by the name *Vishṇu*. That is the only difference. *Vishṇu* is pleased when you worship *Shiva* and *Shiva* is pleased when you worship *Vishṇu*. As a matter of fact, *Vishṇu* and *Shiva* are not two.

In Hinduism you can choose any form or any name of God you like to worship. You can even deny God. In Hinduism you can deny all forms of God. You can even deny that He has any qualities or attributes. Hinduism is a very, very liberal religion. In one Hindu family, one member worships *Vishṇu*, one worships *Shiva*, one worships the goddess, and the fourth does not worship any of them. He is an *Ārya Samājist*. But they all live harmoniously.

Brahmā, *Vishṇu* and *Shaṅkara* are not three different beings. These are the three names of one supreme Being in reference to the three main attributes of God, the creator, the preserver and the destroyer. These are, as it were, the three faces of one God, the three aspects.

Ātmā or Spirit

“What is God? What is Ātmā? What is the true relation between them? We are answered only when we realize ourselves! Whatever we conceive of God or Ātmā prior to God-Realization or Self-Realization is only our mental construction, faith, presumption, or mere scriptural testimony.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

The *Ātmā* cannot be conceived of by the mind

There is a dialogue between two *ṛiṣhis* in an *Upaniṣhad*. One asks, “What is the fastest thing in the world?” The other *ṛiṣhi* says, “It is the mind.” But the first *ṛiṣhi* corrects him and says, “The *Ātmā* is the fastest in the sense that when the mind reaches a certain place, it finds the *Ātmā* already there!” “The *Ātmā* moves and moves not. It is the smallest of the small, and the biggest of the big. It is the near-most and the dear-most,” says the *Ishāvāsyā Upaniṣhad*. Can you conceive of it through the mind?

*Who has seen the immortal *Ātmā*, and what is the proof that It exists?*

The immortal *Ātmā* does not need any proof of Its existence. The universal urge to live of even a worm is sufficient rational proof of it. Moreover, the *Ātmā*'s true nature is Awareness, which cannot be denied. How can you deny the existence of Awareness without Awareness? Awareness is self-evident. To say that there is no *Ātmā* is like saying aloud, “I have no tongue.” You should read and reflect upon the first chapter of *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, the chapter titled “Does God Exist?”

***Ātmā* is the wonder of all wonders**

Please, Swāmījī, could you talk about the Spirit?

The word for “Spirit” in Hindu terminology is *Ātmā*. In the *Upaniṣhads*, as also in the *Gītā*, there are many *shlokas* that

describe the nature of the *Ātmā*. Some *shlokas* about the *Ātmā* are the same, word for word, in the *Gītā* and *Upaniṣhads*. The words “spiritual” and “spirituality,” which you hear or read everywhere, are derived from the word “Spirit.”

Spirit is the principle of Consciousness/Awareness that is not bound by time, space and the law of cause and effect. It is the immutable and immovable ground of all existence. As in a cinema, you see images and shadows in different forms with different names, stationary or moving on a screen, similarly the entire world of names and forms is based on the Spirit or the *Ātmā*. The *Ātmā* or Spirit cannot be destroyed; fire cannot burn It, air cannot sweep It away, and no weapon can pierce It. It is immanent in time and space and is also beyond them. It is the infinite source of Joy, Peace and Sweetness. In a word, It is Existence absolute, Awareness absolute and Bliss absolute. It cannot be perceived through the senses and the mind. It cannot be known by the intellect. It cannot be described by any words and yet It can be realized. It is the Mind of all minds, the Eye of all eyes, the Ear of all ears. It is the Light of all lights. It is the non-doer and non-enjoyer, *akartā* and *abhoktā*. The one who realizes the *Ātmā* is wonderstruck; one who speaks of *Ātmā* is also wonderstruck. One who hears about the *Ātmā* is wonderstruck. *Ātmā* is the wonder of all wonders.

What kind of light is, “Jyotiṣhañ jyoti,” as it is written in the Vedas?

There are so many kinds of lights. There is the light of the sun. Then there is the light of the senses, as also the light of the mind. There is the light of *Ātmā*. It is called, “The Light of all lights” –

“*Jyotiṣhañ jyoti*” in the *Vedas*. The light of Awareness is the only light that is eternal. Awareness is the substratum of all that exists. Awareness is the source of all lights.

“The Ātmā is not somewhere within you; you are yourself Ātmā. Cast not aspersions on Ātmā by identifying it with the trifle of your physical body.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Only the Ātmā is real

Is not the Ātmā inside and outside the mind?

Yes, the Ātmā is everywhere, but it is reflected only in rarefied matter, like the mind, as the sunlight is reflected only in water or in a mirror. The Ātmā is even in a stone, even in an atom, but it is not reflected there. When Ātmā is said to be all pervading, it is said only in relation to time and space. But, transcendently speaking, nothing exists but the Ātmā. It is One without a second. It is absolute Existence. If you take time and space as a mirage, you may say that Ātmā is not all pervading. The Ātmā is said to be all pervading in relation to time and space, which are taken to be real. Is the physical body real? When you say that the Ātmā is in the body, you are first taking the physical body to be real. Isn't it so? If the physical body were real, why should it die or disintegrate and cease to be? Does the Real cease to be? The Real is defined as that which was, which is, and which will be forever.

In that sense, the mind also is not real.

The mind is relatively more lasting than the body. It dies only after Realization. It may last billions and billions of years. It is only the *Ātmā* that is real. Everything else, the body, the mind, time, space, even God are dependent for their existence on the *Ātmā*. God is the highest manifestation of the *Ātmā*. The *Ātmā* is neither high nor low. It is spaceless. It is timeless. Please, don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that the individual soul is timeless and spaceless. I am not saying that you, as a soul, should not worship God. *Ātmā* is the common denominator of God and soul. In God, the Power and Awareness of the *Ātmā* is fully manifest. In the soul, it is not so.

God is the *Ātmā* reflected in the universal mind, plus the universal mind. The soul is the *Ātmā* reflected in the individual mind, plus the individual mind. Therefore God is omniscient, but the soul is not. Godhead is the *Ātmā* or *Brahman*.

“Ātmā speaks when the mind and vital being become silent.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

The Spirit is never born, nor does It ever die

I have the feeling that I will die at the age of eighty. Is my intuition correct? Shall I realize my true Being before?

It would be better for you to realize that you never die before you shed your body. It is the body that is born and that dies. The Spirit is never born, nor does It ever die. Strive to know this Truth first hand before your body dies. Realization is not

predestined. You may get Realization this very moment, or you may not get It even after many lives.

Consciousness

“Believe it or not, a Consciousness continuous and perfect permeates minerals, vegetables, animals, human beings and gods. They are distinguished from one another not by their essential Consciousness but by the degree of manifestation in them of the perfect Consciousness.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Divine Consciousness cannot be defined

Could you explain what is meant by divine Consciousness? And what about the different planes of Consciousness?

Consciousness is the fundamental spiritual Principle that enables you to be aware. Some people confuse It with mind. Mind, in fact, is a material thing. It is rarefied matter. It does not know anything by itself; it is an instrument of Consciousness. Divine Consciousness means Consciousness in its pure and absolute form. It is synonymous with *Ātmā*. Consciousness in Its essential Nature is absolute, infinite, and eternal, but when It becomes identified with mind and matter, It seems to be finite and relative. The relative perception, which involves the triangle of the knower, the knowledge and the known, is the result of the finite and relative consciousness.

Absolute Consciousness is the ground of all existence. It is involved in all the planes of existence. Different planes of

existence are, so to say, the different planes of Consciousness. No plane of existence can be independent of Consciousness. Nothing is independent of Consciousness. Even this world, the earth, the planets, the moon and the sun are not independent of Consciousness. If there were no Consciousness, how could the existence of the earth be proved? To ask what is divine Consciousness is to ask what is *Brahman* or Godhead. It cannot be defined. It can only be hinted at. It can be experienced when the mind is completely purified and free from thoughts. It cannot be perceived as you perceive a chair. It cannot be made an object of perception. You can come to know It only by being one with It.

The layers of existence

In the earthly life, it is the form and body that dominate the mind. In the mental and higher worlds, it is the mind and Spirit that dominate the form and body. The individual mind does not create a thing. It only interprets things.

There are two layers or rather three layers of existence. One is created by the individual mind. It is very superficial. The other is the creation of the universal mind. This layer is very deep and it lasts as long as the universal mind lasts. The third one is pure Existence, not created, not createable. It is the substratum, the ground. It is the Reality. As a matter of fact, it should not be called a layer. It is Existence Itself, as It is. It is absolute Consciousness-Bliss.

Behind all the *koshas* is pure Consciousness

How can I see the koshas?

Kosha means “cover,” like a cover on a pillow. What will you gain by seeing the covers? You should aspire to see what is covered or hidden! What is covered is the timeless, immortal Spirit, which is your true Being.

The outermost *kosha* is called the *annamaya kosha*. It is represented by the physical body. You can see the physical body with your naked eyes, though its very minute tissues and atoms cannot be seen without some sophisticated scientific instruments. Through a cat scan and other screening instruments you can see the physical body. The second cover, inside the physical body, is called the *prāṇamaya kosha*. *Prāṇamaya kosha* is represented by vital energy that moves the different parts of the physical body. *Prāṇamaya kosha* is immanent in the physical body, i.e., *annamaya kosha*, but it is also transcendent. It supports the physical body, but is independent of the latter. It is vital energy. You cannot see the energy with the eyes but you can feel it and perceive its movements. *Prāṇamaya kosha* is subtler than *annamaya kosha*. Behind *prāṇamaya kosha* is the *manomaya kosha*, behind *manomaya kosha* is the *vijñānamaya kosha*, and behind *vijñānamaya kosha* is the *ānandamaya kosha*, which is called Bliss-Consciousness. By going inward, you can feel and perceive all these *koshas* with the inner eye, that is, by the *jīva* or the individualized soul.

Hidden behind all these *koshas* is the pure, timeless, immortal Consciousness, which supports and lends existence to all that is, or can be. That timeless, immortal Consciousness cannot be seen as an object, as you see a chair. It can be realised only

by being one with it, as your true Being. The way is to go within, more and more within, till you reach the limit of depth. It is like a fish merging into the sea to discover the depth of the ocean.

Pure Consciousness is always the same

There are infinite, innumerable dimensions of Existence. All are, as a matter of fact, different states of Consciousness. Every dimension, whether it is outer or inner, has its own flavour, quality and taste.

Man is the only being who can taste the flavour of different dimensions, evaluate, assess, choose and make relatively independent decisions. He can shift from one state of consciousness to another, though most men remain on a particular wavelength and perceive the world accordingly. The perception changes with the change in the level of consciousness.

In reality there are no levels of Consciousness. There are levels of mind. Consciousness reflected in a higher level of mind is usually called higher consciousness. Consciousness reflected in a lower level of mind is called lower consciousness. Thus from the viewpoint of the world manifestation, pure Consciousness acquires different names such as physical consciousness, mental consciousness or vital consciousness accordingly.

Pure Consciousness always remains pure Consciousness whether it is in a physical body or not. The only difference between you and a sage is that the sage is aware of his pristine Nature and you are not aware of it. Pure Consciousness, the Spirit, is always the same. It does not evolve or devolve. It is the *jīva* or the soul which evolves. It is the *jīva* which is bound and it is the *jīva* which becomes free. The *jīva* means the Spirit plus the mind.

Puruṣha and Prakṛiti

The world is created by two principles: Spirit and matter, called *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti*

According to the *Sāṅkhya* school of thought, which is the third school of the Indian philosophical system, there are two fundamental principles: Spirit and matter. Spirit is the Reality, matter is what covers the Spirit. Energy and matter are interchangeable. Energy is the subtle state of matter; matter is the gross form of energy, but they are insentient. Spirit is a conscious or sentient principle. The world is created by the joining of these two principles: Spirit and matter. *Sāṅkhya* calls them *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti*. *Puruṣha* is the Seer. *Prakṛiti* is the seen. *Puruṣha* is immovable, and dimensionless, and there are many *Puruṣhas*. *Prakṛiti* is movement and has many modes, twenty-four modes.

The last school of thought, called *Vedānta*, modifies the *Sāṅkhya* system and says that the fundamental principle is one, and not two. *Puruṣha* is immovable and without attributes, but it is one and not many. *Prakṛiti* is made of three *guṇas* and can be divided into twenty-four modes. *Prakṛiti* and *Puruṣha* are resolved into one principle that is the supreme *Puruṣha*. *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* are like two poles, positive and negative poles of electrons and protons.

The coming together of *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* is phenomenal, temporal

*Can you explain what you mean by the identification of *Puruṣha* with *Prakṛiti*?*

Puruṣha is pure Consciousness; It does not do anything; It is *akartā* and *abhoktā*; it is the witness, it is without qualities. *Prakṛiti* is energy, the composite of the *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamogūṇa*. *Prakṛiti* is insentient. It is the doer. It moves but it does not see. *Puruṣha* sees but does not move.

With the union of *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* another principle or *tattva* is born, which is called the *jīva*, the soul. *Jīva* is the conscious doer, but this union of *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* is only phenomenal. It is not eternal.

Īshvara is the supreme, universal *jīva*. He is the supreme Doer. *Jīva* is only a part of *Īshvara*. The existence of *Īshvara* is phenomenal, as is the existence of the world and *jīva*. *Parabrahman* is the eternal Principle, the Absolute, the One without a second.

The coming together of *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* is phenomenal, temporal. It cannot be permanent; otherwise there can never be Liberation of *Puruṣha* from *Prakṛiti*. You may say the world is unreal, but not everyone can digest this. So, it is better to say it has a relative existence; it has no absolute existence. Or you may say it is a phenomenon. Or you may say it is only an appearance. You may say it is a dream. So, you like to say it has a relative existence, all right, it is changing. Do you want happiness from that which is changing? How can a changing thing give you permanent happiness?

If a person is always changing his statements – in one moment he says one thing, in the next moment he says the opposite – you say he is a liar. Why don't you apply this logic to the world, which is always changing? It cannot be known, because when you try to know it, it changes. The scientific method is not to know "why." It can only know "how." "Why" is the method of philosophy. Science says when hydrogen and

oxygen unite water is created, but it does not tell you why the union of hydrogen and oxygen creates water.

The three *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*

What are these qualities called “guṇas?”

Guṇas are qualities and they are categorized into three kinds: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. All things have *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva* but in different proportions. The quality of *tamas* is the quality of inertia and inactivity. The quality of *rajas* is the quality of desire and activity and *sattva* is the quality in which Consciousness is reflected more or less in Its true form.



The five elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether are made of the three *guṇas*. Mind is made from the aggregate of the *sattvagūṇa* parts of the five elements. *Prāṇa* is made from the aggregate of the *rajogūṇa* parts of the five elements. The physical body is made from the aggregate of the *tamogūṇa* parts of the five elements. The difference between mind, intellect, ego and *chitta* is only a difference of degree of the vibrations of *sattvagūṇa*.

The body is made from the *tamogūṇa* part of earth, plus the *tamogūṇa* part of water, plus the *tamogūṇa* part of fire, plus the *tamogūṇa* part of air and the *tamogūṇa* part of ether.

When mind is overpowered by the vital consciousness, it is called the *rajoguṇī* mind. When the mind is obsessed with body-consciousness, it is called the *tamoguṇī* mind. Otherwise the mind is neither *rajoguṇī* nor *tamoguṇī*.

Mind/intellect/ego is essentially *sattvaguṇī*. It reflects Consciousness. *Sattvaguṇa* is like a thin transparent cloth. If anything is covered with a thin transparent cloth, you can see the thing as it is, although there is still a veil. If that thing is covered with a coloured cloth, you will see the thing as coloured. If it is covered with a black cloth, you cannot see that thing. *Tamoguṇa* is like a black cloth. *Rajoguṇa* is like a coloured cloth. *Sattvaguṇa* is like a thin transparent cloth.



Sattva practically represents all the cardinal virtues. But there may be an ego of becoming virtuous. Then *sattva* becomes an obstacle. The subtle sense of being a doer persists in *sattva*. *Sattva* is like a golden chain. It is not common. The common chain is made of *rajas* and *tamas*. Do you think that the majority of people in the world are virtuous? It is not so. The virtuous people are a slim minority.

Aum or Om (ॐ)

Through the worship of *Aum*, you can achieve whatever you want

The word *Aum* represents all that is: the soul, the world, God and the *Ātmā*. According to the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣhad* the letters of *Aum* represent the following:

A represents the material world and the *Ātmā* identified with it.

U represents the subtle world and the *Ātmā* identified with it.

M represents the causal world and the *Ātmā* identified with it.

Om has a fourth nature or aspect which transcends these distinctions of A, U and M. It is called “*amātra*,” which literally means immeasurable. It is the soundless form of *Om*. It is not audible to the ears. It is the pure unqualified Self, called *Ātmā*, absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, *Turīya*, or *Brahman*.

Some scholars say that the half arc in *Om* represents *māyā* and the point represents pure Awareness, the dimensionless, timeless, spaceless and eternal Existence. How does mathematics define a point? Something that has no width, no length, no height, no dimension. What we call *nirguṇa* or impersonal Consciousness, which is eternal, is represented by the point in the *Aum*.

By the practice of *Om* (or *Aum*), you can achieve any worldly state. You can get all the worldly pleasures, the pleasures of the celestial world. You can even be one with God through the worship of *Om* and, above all, you can go beyond the manifestation. Through the worship of *Om*, you can achieve whatever you want. *Om* is the source of all *mantras*. Maybe “amin” (Muslim) and “amen” (Christian) originated from *Om*.

***Aum* is representative of all the aspects of the Divine**

Aum is representative of all the aspects of the Divine. *Aum* is the source of all spoken words. When you speak *Aum*, it starts from the throat and ends with closed lips. It covers the whole speaking system. The meaning of *Aum* is described in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣhad*. The three vowels of *Aum* represent all the trinities, the three states, the three *guṇas*, the three worlds, the three modes of time. And the soundless aspect of *Aum* represents pure Consciousness. Thus *Aum* represents both *Saṅguṇa Brahman* and *Nirguṇa Brahman*.

Chapter Two

Goal of Life God Can and Must be Attained

“Yes, God can be known at first hand. He can surely be sought and found. Not only this, it is He alone who can be attained for certain. The things of the world are transitory. How can you get a hold of them or find them? Their attainment may seem to be an attainment today, but it will inevitably be changed into non-attainment tomorrow. Real attainment is that which does not change. The Lord is immutable and immovable. When He is found, He is found forever. It is said, therefore, that it is God alone who can be found in the real sense of the term.”

– *The Practical Approach to Divinity*

Goal of Life *God Can and Must be Attained*

How to feel fulfilled?

I feel empty inside and long for love. What can I do?

If you feel empty, it means you are missing something. What are you missing? Reflect upon it again and again. It may awaken you.

I have seen many rich people saying, “I feel something is missing. I have everything. I have money, I have a very beautiful house, I have a very beautiful and friendly wife, I have beautiful children, I have a very high position in society and command respect, I have perfect health, but I feel emptiness. What does it mean? It means that your soul is infinite and cannot be filled with these things. Something infinite and timeless alone can fulfil the soul. You have to discover that Infinite and Eternal for yourself. Only then can you feel you are fulfilled.

The true goal of human life

The goal of human life is to realize one’s true Nature, which is absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge, absolute Bliss, and

absolute Love: *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. Everyone is in one way or another seeking the Infinite, the Eternal, seeking one's true and essential Being, as the fish in the ocean is seeking water. Some seek it in outer conditions and situations. Some seek it in one's own Being.



I am fully aware and convinced that the true goal of life is Self-Realization. I am also convinced that very few reach this state. Sometimes I feel desperate in my sādhanā. Why should I make effort if it is unattainable?

The true goal of life implies the goal which is true, which once realized cannot be taken away, which once found can never be lost. It is the eternal Life/Bliss/Love/Light/Self. Every human being is consciously or unconsciously searching for It and trying to realize It. But, due to ignorance, people seek It in the wrong places, in wrong things and relationships, and therefore do not find It. How can the infinite and unlimited Bliss be found in limited and finite things, objects and relationships? What am I seeking? This is the most fundamental question that everyone should ask himself or herself. It is God/Self, and Self alone, the absolute Bliss/Consciousness which is attainable and which once realized is never lost. All else is like a mirage, which can never quench the thirst of any person.

Whatever we achieve or mistakenly think we have achieved – wealth, respect, name and fame or any pleasing object – is snatched away from us by death. When such right understanding dawns on a person, it is called awakening and one stops running after that which is transitory and impermanent and starts to work for Self-Realization, to realize that which is permanent and

imperishable. And one has to work for Self-Realization with the spirit of do or die. One can never find permanent Peace, Bliss and Life in something that is not permanent, yet still, most people are trying to do that and are living for that; this is what is called the influence of *māyā*, the power which deludes people. Nothing except God or Self can be attained because nothing except God is true and real. The soul is reincarnating again and again because it is trying to find the eternal Bliss/God/Peace in the impermanent. This cycle of birth and death never ends for the soul unless and until it discovers its essential Being, which is God/Absolute Bliss/Consciousness. Out of a million people, only one is truly seeking God. This actually means that although everybody is looking for what is permanent and true, only one in a million is actually looking for what is permanent and true in the eternal Lord. The rest are trying to find eternal Bliss in impermanent things and situations.



“The sages, to whom everyone bows in love and reverence out of regard for their greatness, were once ordinary persons, like most of you are today. They baked themselves in the fire of self-control and discipline; they sang the Lord’s praise without a break — and lo, behold, they attained their great state! Take to their footprints and surely you shall achieve the greatness they have attained.”

— *Spiritual Gems*



We are told to get ourselves free from the cycle of birth and death. Why? One does not know about one’s previous births.

One does not know about one's future births. So we are happy and comfortable in our present birth. Hence, what is the necessity to get free from the cycle of birth and death? What will be the advantage?

No one dies who is not born. And no one wants to die. So birth and death are so deeply connected that they cannot be separated. Fear of death is considered to be the greatest fear, as the desire to live is the deepest desire. People usually say that they are not afraid of death. It is not right. It shows they are forgetting that they can die, and die at any moment. In *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras*, there is a *sūtra* which says that, of all the fears, the fear of death is the greatest. Only a person who has the direct experience of the immortal *Ātmā* and is established in it is not afraid of death. The law of cause and effect, the law of *karma*, is the greatest law working in this phenomenal world. The previous births can be known by diving deep into the subconscious mind, which contains the memories of the past lives.

Does anyone like pain? Not even an animal wants to suffer. Your question is like asking, "What is the advantage of pleasure or joy? What is the advantage of life?" Pleasure, when it ends (and it cannot be permanent) brings frustration and pain. Birth, death, disease and old age cause pain, as Lord Kṛiṣṇa observes in a *shloka* of the *Gītā*. No one wants pain. No one wants to die. It proves that the real goal of human life is to realize directly the *Ātmā* which is *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. The real life never dies and that life is the immortal *Ātmā* or the Self.

Truth is your birthright and you must aspire for it

Some teachings say that to desire Realization is an obstacle because we are all already realized, while some other

teachings say one must desire Realization like one who has his head under water and wants to have oxygen. What is the attitude we must follow?

You say Truth is already realized. Have you realized the Truth? All desires cease when you have realized the Truth. Have you no desire at all? Certainly it is far better to desire the Realization of God, the Infinite, than to desire the impermanent things. Realization brings Freedom and Fulfilment. Are you free and fulfilled? Moreover, the desire for Realization is a misnomer. Realization means owning what already belongs to you. Realization means being aware of what you are in your true and essential Nature. The word desire is used when you want to have something that is different from you. So to use the expression, "Desire for Realization," is not proper. Truth is your birthright. If you are not aware of and established in Truth, you must aspire for It and devote yourself whole-heartedly to Self-Realization. If you run after the petty and transient things and comforts of life, how can you say that to desire the Infinite is absurd? If you were satisfied with what you are, you would not have asked any question. If you still have doubts and need to ask questions, it is obvious that you have not realized the Truth, even if It is always with you.

Be established in what is eternal and unchangeable

The world exists only because the forces are not balanced. Is trying to bring harmony not working against the nature of these forces?

Do you mean to say that those who are working for global, universal understanding and harmony are working for the extinction of this universe? The universe is no doubt a disturbed equilibrium of forces. The universe is a movement, and movement implies that the forces working in it are not totally balanced. According to Hindu philosophy, these forces are the principles of *sattvaguṇa*, *rajoguṇa* and *tamoguṇa*, and the universe is the play of these three *guṇas*. Moreover, this play is universally eternal, it is beginningless and endless. But beyond these *guṇas* there is something that is ever the same, eternal and lasting, unaffected by these *guṇas*, unchanging and unchangeable. It is called *Ātmā* or Spirit. When this Spirit is discovered and realized by the soul, the latter is established in the peace/harmony/happiness which is lasting.

You cannot live without a purpose

Is there motion in this world, or is motion also illusory?

If life is a movement, does it not imply that it has purpose and meaning? If you are moving, is it not logical to ask you, “Where are you going?” Should you be established in what is not moving, which is timeless, then there is no goal or purpose for you. All your desires will be stilled, and you will feel fulfilled. How many people are there who feel self-fulfilled? Have you no desire? Have you no goal? If so, I bow before you, accept my *praṇāma*!

An animal has no purpose, or goal of life. A liberated one too has no purpose or goal of life, but a man who is living on the level of mental consciousness cannot be without a goal and cannot live without a purpose. The liberated ones may work out of

compassion. They may be the instruments of the Divine. They may be prompted by *sattvaguṇa*.

The first and foremost question

For what have we come into this world?

The answer to this question will depend upon who we take ourselves to be. How can you know the purpose of your life unless you know who you are. The first and foremost question is, “Who am I?” Actually you were asking what the real purpose of life is for a human being. All the saints and sages and the holy scriptures tell us that the real purpose of human life is to realize God. We have read about God in the holy books or heard about God from the saints, but we have not seen Him or known Him directly.

What is our role on earth?

What should we do? What is our foremost duty? How can you know your role unless you know yourself first? The source of all life is eternal Consciousness, the Divine. You owe your existence to It. You have been living and wandering, assuming different forms, in different worlds because you did not know your essential Nature, your *svarūpa*. When you come to realize your *svarūpa*, your wandering will cease.

As a person has already had many lives, does he belong to a specific lineage?

The lineage of all of us is the same, because we all come from God. We come from God and we go back to Him. The true aim and purpose of our life is to know our root, to know the source of all existence. What is the use of knowing the roles or duties that go on changing with the change of the level of one's consciousness? Are you not tired of assuming so many roles in different lives? What other role do you want to play? There comes a time when the child is fed up with playing with toys and wants to go back to its mother. Maybe you still want to go on playing? It is your choice!

Can communication take place between the Almighty and a living man?

Certainly, yes. A living man has that potentiality of communicating with the Divine. What he has to do is to withdraw his interest and attention from what is finite and direct them to the Divine. The more he is able to do it, the more easily he can communicate with the Divine.

“Would you like to know the last word of all the saints and scriptures? It is this: ‘The supreme goal of life is to live in God and the secret of its achievement lies in living for Him and Him alone.’”

– *Spiritual Gems*

What is a successful life?

Once Swāmijī asked the following question to all the devotees sitting around him: “How do you define a successful life?”

From the worldly standpoint, your life is successful if you have built up a big bank balance, if you own a palatial house, if you have earned a name in society, if you have gained a high status, if you have power over others, if you have high political connections, etc.

For a seeker of Truth, all these achievements have no importance. He or she has already become convinced about the futility of this so-called success. From the spiritual standpoint, a successful life is defined in terms of the spiritual progress you have made in your life. You may be a rich person or a poor person; that is not important. Poverty is not a blessing, nor is affluence a blessing. Usually, it is easier for a middle class person to make progress in spirituality and realize the Truth. The more you have inner peace and joy, the more you can control your thoughts and emotions, the more you can remain undisturbed in adverse and unfavourable situations, the more advanced you are in spiritual life. The most successful life is that in which one has realized one's essential and eternal Consciousness and become completely free.

How to turn to spirituality

What is spirituality? What is to be achieved through it, and how? How to deepen our aspiration?

Spirituality is the art and science of life through which man can find lasting peace and happiness by the direct experience of the Spirit, which is absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge and absolute Happiness. All the methods and modes of living that help us to discover the eternal Spirit are included in spirituality. Interest in spirituality can be developed by the association with spiritual persons, by right thinking and reflection. To reflect on the

transitory and impermanent nature of all temporal things, situations, and relationships helps a person to turn to spirituality.

The urge for immortality is innate in every person. When one comes to understand that this urge can only be fulfilled by the discovery of the eternal and infinite Spirit, one turns to spirituality. Only two types of persons don't aspire for God-Realization: those who are deeply submerged in sense pleasures like animals, or those very few who have realized God. One who has no desire for God-Realization can observe and judge the category one belongs to. The Indian system of thought classifies man into four types:

1. *Pāmara* is one who cannot think about what life is, about what is the purpose and aim of life. He lives on the level of animal-consciousness.
2. *Vishāyī* is one who understands the true aim and purpose of life, but he is so much attached with the ephemeral that he finds he is unable to devote himself to realize the true aim of life.
3. *Jijñāsu* is the person who is an aspirant of Truth and works whole-heartedly to realize the Truth.
4. *Jñānī* is the one who has realized the Truth and has no question or doubt left in him.

“If, for the attainment of limited knowledge of a single ordinary subject so much sacrifice of time and money is required and so much absorbing hard work is needed, how great a sacrifice would be needed to know God, the Infinite, after knowing Whom nothing else remains to be known.”

– *The Practical Approach to Divinity*

Man is potentially divine

Swāmījī received a booklet about the story of “Mukti the Lion.”¹ Someone asked about the meaning of the story.

It is a very popular story, often told by *Vedāntins* to prove that the real and essential Nature of man is divine. But man, as if under the influence of mass-hypnotism, takes himself to be weak, ignorant and thus becomes subservient to his lower nature. When he comes to know of his true identity, he becomes free and fearless.

By mass-hypnotism do you mean māyā? Māyā governs this world and even the devatās are under her control. So what can we do?

Māyā may govern the gods, but she serves the saints like a mother.

Māyā is a mother for everyone; how to go beyond māyā?

“Yo miyeta iti māyā”— “That which limits, that which makes the Infinite look as finite is māyā.” There are two words used in the scriptures: māyā and Mahāmāyā. Māyā binds. Mahāmāyā liberates.

¹ In this Vedic parable a lion cub is raised by sheep and comes to identify himself as a lamb. It is only when an adult lion reveals to him a reflection of his true self on the clear surface of a lake that he realizes his true nature.

Now we are in the kaliyuga, which is full of kāma (desires) and artha (materialism). Even so, is it possible to attain liberation?

Man is potentially divine. He has the potentiality to realize his divine Nature in every *yuga*. All such saints as Kabīr, Tulasidās, Guru Nānak Dev, Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, and in modern times Vivekānanda, Rām Tirth, Rāmakṛṣṇa, Ramaṇa Maharṣhi and Aurobindo, have lived in *kaliyuga*.

“Rise up friend; be up and doing. God-attainment is practicable and also urgent. Take to the sādhanā of spiritual perfection. In this lies your real good; in this lies the good of your society, of your nation, of your country. What’s more, in this alone lies the good of the entire world.”

– *The Practical Approach to Divinity*

Chapter Three

Basic Qualifications

“Is your mind tired of the world? Has your intellect seen through the vanity of the world? Has your individual soul felt for certain the irresistible need for God? Has the passion for meeting the Divine awakened in your heart? If all this has happened, then verily you deserve to seek the Lord.”

– Spiritual Gems

Basic Qualifications

There are four types of devotees

For me, love of the Eternal does not compensate for all of my earthly pains and desires.

It is actually the other way around. The attachment to worldly things, situations and persons is a substitute for divine Love. When you are unaware of the Real, you become attached to what is unreal. When one has divine Love, one feels Self-Fulfilled and does not need anything else. In a sense you are right.

In the *Gītā* it is said there are four types of devotees:

1. Those who are devoted to God because they believe God will remove their sufferings and solve their problems. They are called *ārtta*.
2. Those who want some worldly comforts and conveniences, and call on God for that. They perform some rituals, religious rites or practise a *mantra* with the motive of fulfilling their worldly desires through God. They are called *arthārthī* (traders).
3. Those devotees who are seekers of Truth, who, finding that they cannot realize the Truth with their self-effort alone,

become devoted to God so that they can get the help of God on the path of Realization. They are called *jijñāsu*, or seekers of Truth.

4. Those who are wise and who have realized the Truth. They love the Divine as their own Self. They love the Divine as they love themselves. They are called *jñānīs*, knowers. Their love is spontaneous and motiveless. It is based on the Realization of their oneness with the Divine.

Why do you love yourself? Everyone's love for oneself is without any motive or reason. It is spontaneous. In the same way, the love for the Divine of the one who has realized the Divine as one's own Self is spontaneous and without any reason or motive.

“A devotee is one who lives for God; a worldly person is one who lives for the world.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Faith & Trust

“First of all, there must be belief; then one should start the search.”

– *The Practical Approach to Divinity*

Faith is not mental belief

I do not feel faith; I cannot surrender completely to God's hands. What is faith? How to feel it?

Faith has many dimensions: faith in the existence of God, the Creator of this world, the omnipotent Power-Consciousness, faith that God is most compassionate and loving, and He is my real Father/Mother who loves me and is my well-wisher, like a mother is to her child. If one has such faith in God, it is not difficult to surrender to God. But such total faith is very, very rare.

Faith is not mental belief. It is much deeper and belongs to the soul who is nearer to God owing to certain personal experiences, attained mainly through God-remembrance, which strengthen one's faith in God and also purify the personality. It may take years and years of sincere *sāadhanā* to attain such total faith in God that enables one to completely surrender oneself into the hands of God.

The child has faith in its mother. Even when the mother slaps her baby, the baby starts weeping, but does not go away from the mother; it catches hold of the mother more strongly. It seems you have forgotten the faith you had in your mother when you were one year old. Do you understand what faith is? Faith can only be felt. It cannot be understood by the rational intellect.

You have to believe in God, and then try to realize Him

Some days ago, you spoke about becoming free of attachment and belief. Should we keep only the belief in God?

Attachment to temporal things, situations and relationships is a hindrance to one's spiritual growth. But one can accept these situations, things and relationships without attachment and use them on the path of God-Realization.

You cannot live without belief. Even in day-to-day life you have to believe. You go to a market and purchase cloth. You first give the money with the belief that the shopkeeper will give you the cloth afterwards. If you tell the shopkeeper, “First give me the cloth and then I will give you the money, because I cannot believe you,” the shopkeeper may argue in the same way, he may say, “I don’t believe you, please first give me the money. Who knows if you will take the cloth and not pay the money afterwards?”

Belief in God is necessary, but it is not enough. You have to believe in God, and then try to realize Him. If you do not believe in God, you won’t do any *sāadhanā* to realize Him.

“I felt very nervous on seeing slips at every step in this world, but when I realized that He had held my hand, all my worries disappeared.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

“O Lord, I will have faith in you even if you kill me!”

Swāmījī, as to your question whether I believe in God: Yes, I believe in God in the way that I recognize Him as the author of all creation. But to feel faith, confidence in God, as love, as goodness, I don’t know. What is faith?

A Sufi saint has said: “O Lord, I will have faith in you even if you kill me!” Why do you wish to be faithful? Why do you dislike a person who is not faithful, who is not worthy of trust? Reflect upon the transitory nature of the world. Try to see the unreal as unreal. It will purify your heart. When the heart is purified, divine

Love becomes manifest in the heart. Weeping will help you. Weeping is very good. (Smilingly) It not only unburdens your heart, it is good for the eyes too!

Should we have faith in what God is doing?

Do you know God? If not, how would you know what God does? First try to know God. Don't bother about what He is doing or not doing.

“Are you a sincere believer in Him? If you say ‘Yes,’ then rest assured worry and fear can never come near you; these will fly like shy birds at your approach.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Padma Nabh

There is a story about Shaṅkarāchārya regarding *shraddhā* (faith). Shaṅkarāchārya was standing on the bank of a very deep lake. On the opposite bank was standing one of his disciples. Shaṅkarāchārya called to the disciple to come. The disciple did not know how to swim and the lake was very, very deep, but he had a very deep faith in his Master. He went into the water to go to Shaṅkarāchārya. It is said that wherever he put his feet into the lake, by the grace and power of Shaṅkarāchārya, a lotus plant appeared under his feet to support him, and he crossed the whole lake as if he were walking on the ground. Then Shaṅkarāchārya embraced him, blessed him and gave him the name Padma Nabh (*padma* means lotus).

Sincerity & Aspiration

“Sincerity unto God is the greatest secret of spiritual sādhanā. Be sure, if you become even ninety percent sincere, then one half of your journey is accomplished.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

How to be sincere

For many years, I have tried to do some kind of sādhanā but I feel that the results are so little and so slow that I often feel discouraged and want to give it all up.

Success in *sādhanā* depends upon so many factors. Maybe you have not put your whole heart into your *sādhanā*. Be more and more devoted and dedicated to your path of spiritual upliftment. Burn the bridges behind if you don't want to go back to your former way of life.

Unfortunately, I live in a professional environment that is no help at all. People want only to be successful in their careers.

You should mind your own business, in the environment where you live. Don't mix with the people around who are not interested in higher values of life. Don't care a bit for what they say. Follow your path with determination and sincerity.

I feel I am split into two parts and it makes my life difficult.

Do not identify yourself with any part of your mind. Only then you will be able to integrate it. The mind can be disciplined.

Reflect upon your essential Being and you will get the strength to keep your mind under control. Also pray to the Lord daily and regularly and you will receive strength and light. I wish you to be more and more sincere to your spiritual edification. May the Divine help you!

“When will you find God? Yea, you will find Him when you shall not suffer His separation even for a moment. So long as you can afford to live without Him, you cannot find Him. Know thee for certain that the hour of meeting Him is drawing nigh when the grief of His separation is an insufferable anguish for you.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

You have only to turn your face to Him

Can you help me to start my relationship with God and to make my faith in Him alive?

God is readily available. You have not to spend a single French franc to meet Him. He is the source of all life, light, energy, peace, knowledge and bliss. You have only to turn your face to Him. You have simply to welcome Him in your heart. He is waiting for you in your heart, waiting to communicate with you. When will you be able to spare some time to go within and meet Him?

The need of God

A time comes when one feels the need for God. You cannot be satisfied with playing with toys forever. God is calling you, but

you do not hear the call. You are too busy playing. Stop running for a while, sit down quietly for some time daily, and you will hear the call. One first has to be aware of one's separation before one can be united. If you don't first come to know that you are in exile, you will never yearn or try to go back home. Let your need be God and God alone. By association with saints and sages, you can become aware of this need more and more. "The devotee of God pants for God as a fish pants for water," says Guru Nānak.

The urge for Truth

How can one make the urge for Truth more and more important? Sometimes I am unable to sleep because an essential question turns over in my mind. Is it because it is so urgent for me?

The urge for Truth can be made strong by reflecting regularly on the futility and vagaries of what is not true. Reading the lives of realized sages also helps to intensify the urge for Truth. Periodic association with those who have realized the Truth or those who are practically doing something to discover the Truth is also very useful.

Some questions about Truth may disturb one's sleep. It indicates the sincerity of the seeker. I used to have many sleepless nights during the initial stage of my *sāḍhanā*. If you go to sleep with a question in your mind, your subconscious mind keeps on working on that question and when you get up sometimes the answer to that question comes like a flash. The question has been solved by the subconscious mind. The subconscious mind is stronger and wiser and more knowledgeable than the conscious

mind. When the urge for Truth in you is taken up by the subconscious mind, you become devoted to *sādhana* without any conscious effort. Some saints and sages who are devoted to God or who discovered the Truth had the urge for Truth rooted in their subconscious mind from their childhood. Always try to remember your death as well.

“Easy it is to understand that the task which you consider most important you do first of all. Had you given the highest importance to God and God-attainment then prayer and spiritual endeavour would have been of the utmost significance to your life. Then you would not offer excuses and deceive yourself, postponing prayer and spiritual pursuit to the future.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Aspiration is the call of the Divine

*I experience a deep anxiety because I feel that I should hurry to practise my *sādhana* according to my aspiration. Is it the ego? Is it useful for *sādhana* or is it an obstacle?*

It is the beginning; it is not enough. One must be anxious to make best use of one’s life in regard to the Realization of Truth. This anxiety should be transformed into the deep and sincere aspiration to realize the timeless Reality. It is not the ego. The ego always opposes such aspiration by playing many tricks, by rationalising what is against spiritual experience and the revelations of sages. How can the deep aspiration for discovering the Truth be an obstacle? On the other hand, it signifies the awakening of the soul. It is the call of the Divine, not desire.

Desire means to want to achieve something that is temporal and separate from you. The Divine or Truth is neither temporal nor essentially separate from you. Therefore, the aspiration to realize the Divine means to discover your essential Nature and Being. To call it a desire is a misnomer. Desires are obstacles to Realization. Deep and sincere aspiration to discover the Truth is an essential prerequisite and qualification of a seeker of Truth. Hurrying does not do any good. It disturbs your balance and reduces your efficiency. Work steadily and in a balanced way, quietly and remaining composed.

“Know thee for certain that the Divine is calling thee unto Himself if thou find awakened in thy heart disinterestedness towards the world, a longing to meet saints, a love of solitude and an eagerness for God-meditation.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

You are a seeker of Life

In the book, *Spiritual Gems*, it is written that death signifies forgetting the Divine. Life implies the feeling of the presence of the Divine. How many of us are really alive? Are you alive or dead?

If we are not alive, then what makes us come to this place again and again?

You are not dead, nor alive. You are a seeker of Life. Seeker means the one who is seeking the eternal Life, the Life which death cannot kill.

To “just sit and just be” is the last step. What is the first step?

The first step to “just be” is to have the sincere aspiration to “just be.”

The wants other than the want for Truth cover the Truth

When you don't want anything but Truth and Truth alone, Truth/God is revealed to you. All *sāadhanā* is to eliminate all wants other than the want of God. The wants, other than the want for Truth, cover the Truth. If you want anything of the world, you need to do something to get that want fulfilled. To find God, only total love/zeal for God is needed.

“You have not only to love God, but to love only God.”

Purity

“Purity signifies complete absence of ill will, evil motives, untamed emotions and disorderly passions in an individual. On the positive side, purity entails the inculcation of all the cardinal virtues, such as frugality, non-violence, humility, selfless service, contentment, forgiveness and simplicity.”

— The Practical Approach to Divinity

Purity leads to silence of mind

Can the mind be purified but not yet silent, or are purity and silence two qualities that go together?

Only the purified mind can be made silent. The impure mind cannot be made silent. It has first to be purified. If you stop your impure mind with some special method, you may get some extraordinary powers, but you cannot realize your true and essential Nature. To see your face clearly, as it is, in the mirror, the mirror must not be moving and it must also be clean. By concentration you get powers. By purity you also get powers, but it also becomes easier for you to realize the Truth.

Humility

Humility is the fruit of wisdom

There is a couplet in Hindi from saint Tulasidās that says, “Do you know what is the first sign of a devotee of *Hari* (God)? It is truthfulness, humility and taking all women other than one’s wife as one’s mother.” The stronger you are, the more humble you become. Humility is the fruit of wisdom.

The right perspective makes you humble

How to reconcile oneself with humility when we are in the state of non-seeing?

In the state of simple seeing, you are neither arrogant nor humble, neither high nor low, neither wise nor stupid; you transcend all the dualities. Simple seeing is a very high state which means awareness without any duality. But the right understanding in which the mind is still there, yet is clear and transparent, makes

you humble. This is neither a state of simple seeing, nor is it not seeing. It is seeing with the right perspective. You become humble with the right perspective.

As a matter of fact, there cannot be a state of non-seeing, because seeing is beyond time and space, and is always present. But seeing may become blurred, as it were, and you become arrogant. It is the wrong perspective that makes you arrogant. It is the right perspective that makes you humble. It is not necessary that a humble person should be free, though one who is free must also be humble. The simple seeing makes you free. It is not necessary that a moral, pure person should be free. But one who is free cannot be immoral and impure. I am not talking of policeman morality. The morality you adopt due to fear, or simply as a custom is not real morality, though even that morality is helpful. The true morality comes from within. The seekers always try to be good and pure in their words, actions and thoughts.

Narrow vision creates pride

I understand that pride is the foundation of the sense of "my."

What are you proud of? When a superiority complex is felt, one should look towards one's superiors. There are so many people superior to you in all respects, isn't it so? So, there should be no place for pride in you if you don't confine yourself to a small, narrow group. It is narrow vision which creates pride. Observe your mind and see its limitations. It will make you humble.

Have you not heard the story of Socrates? A Greek man used to come to Socrates. He was a big landlord, who owned

hundreds of hectares of land. And he was very proud of being a big landlord. One day when he came to meet Socrates, he was in a receptive mood, and Socrates wanted to teach him that he should not be proud of owning a big piece of land. Socrates brought a world map and spread it before the man and asked, "Where is Greece on this map?" Now, you know, Greece is a very small country in comparison with so many other countries in the world. If you see Greece on the world-map, you will find it very, very small. The man had to search out his country on that map. After locating it, he said, "Sir, this is Greece." Then Socrates said, "On this map where is the town in which we are sitting?" The man could not find the town on that map. Again Socrates asked, "Where is the village in which you own your land?" Now how can you find a small village on the map of the world? The man said, "Sir on this map of the world, I cannot locate my village or my land." Socrates laughed and said, "How stupid you are then! You are proud of your land, which is so small in comparison with the land of the world, that you cannot even locate it on the map. Is it not sheer stupidity to be proud of having such a small piece of land?" The man understood the point and after that never boasted of being a big landlord. Humility came into his heart.

The more your vision expands, the more humble you become

How not to be arrogant when acting?

Do you mean to say it is impossible to act without being arrogant? The action that comes out of selfless love is the highest action.

Arrogance is the consequence of short sightedness. You impose yourself on others when you think you are right and others are wrong. When your vision is narrow, you become arrogant. The more your vision expands, the more humble you become.

Most often, I feel proud, but I am sorry to have this feeling.

What can you be proud of? Are you proud of your friends? Should you die, they will bury your body as soon as they can. They may even become afraid of your ghost. Reflect on the transience of this life and you will be awakened. What are you proud of? Your body? It cannot live without food and air.

There was a Persian poet. He was very poor, so much so that he could not afford a pair of shoes. One day, he wrote a couplet, complaining to God, “O God, you are so great, but in your world, I have not even a shoe to wear.” Then he came out of his home and saw a man who had only one foot. He went back and wrote a new couplet, thanking God that He was so merciful that He had given him two feet. You should thank God that He has not made you a donkey. If you live like a donkey, you are going to be a donkey in your next birth. What are you proud of? There is another type of arrogance in which you may feel, “O, I am so humble. No one is more humble than me.”

The essential prerequisite of Self-Realization

Please, Swāmījī can you tell me more about humility?

What is your problem? Don't you know what humility is? Humility means to be completely unassuming, to be as if you are

not, to be like a zero. Humility makes you receptive and open. That is why it is the essential prerequisite of Self-Realization. When you are completely humble, you have no ego of being humble or feeling that you are very humble. The humility will radiate from you as the fragrance of a flower.

Observe and look to your physical and mental limitations. It will weaken your ego and make way for humility. A Sufi saint was passing through a street. Some woman on the first floor of a building threw ashes from the window without looking if someone was passing there. The ashes fell on the head of the Sufi saint. He looked to the sky and said: "O Lord! I am such a sinner that the fire should have been thrown on my head, but you are so merciful that only ashes have been thrown on my head."

Forgiveness

I would like to know what you think about the act of forgiving. Can an ordinary person forgive everything? If yes, is there an easy way of doing it and do you think there is a link between the act of forgiving and the act of forgetting?

Forgiveness is one of the cardinal virtues. Everyone has the potentiality of cultivating this virtue or developing it. No person is perfect in this world. Anyone can make mistakes. When we make mistakes we want to be forgiven. What we expect from others, we should be willing to do the same for others. Forgiving releases the mental tension of the one who forgives. It also appeases the one who is forgiven and makes the relationship harmonious.

Forgiving is more difficult than forgetting. Forgetting is the substitute for forgiving. If one cannot forgive, one should try to ignore and forget. Forgetting gives temporary peace to the one who forgets; it does not help much in improving relationships. Forgiving is like the permanent cure of a disease. Forgetting is like taking a painkiller, taking a medicine that gives temporary relief.

Have you read the story of Jesus? People caught a woman of bad character and brought her to Jesus. In Judaism, as well as in Islam, it was the rule that if a woman was caught committing adultery, she was stoned to death by the public as punishment. The people brought the woman to Jesus Christ and wanted to throw stones at her in the presence of Jesus. Jesus said, "All right you can do it, but let that man be the first to throw the stone who has never committed a wrong in his life." It had such force (the words of an enlightened Master are very forceful) that it compelled the people to look within themselves. No one dared to throw a single stone at that woman. One by one, all went away leaving the woman alone in the presence of Jesus. The woman's heart was certainly transformed. She made a resolve not to sin again in the future. Jesus blessed her.

Good Habits

How to be able to practise with regularity?

At what time do you get up in the morning when you are at home? If you develop the habit of getting up quite early in the morning, it will be easier for you to meditate.

If I get up early, I am tired.

It will be difficult for you to get up at 4 a.m. if you go to sleep at 12 midnight. Go to sleep at 10 p.m. at night and you will be able to get up early in the morning. You have to change your habits. You feel tired in the morning when you don't have adequate sleep during the night. If your body and mind are tired, you have a sound sleep. The stress and strain and worries also don't let you have a sound sleep.

That is my difficulty because even if my body is tired, my mind doesn't stop thinking.

There was a king. He could not have a sound sleep at night. He undertook many treatments but to no avail. Then he went to a sage and requested his help. The sage advised him to dig the earth daily in the evening for one hour with a spade. He followed the advice and started getting a good sleep at night.

Simplicity

In the West things are becoming more and more sophisticated: machines, public relations and procedures. What would be the correct attitude of a sādḥaka towards this technical evolution in everyday life?

There is a mad race, a rat race going on in every field these days. The more desires you have, the more sophisticated means you need to fulfil them. A seeker of Truth should try to make his or

her life as simple as possible. The machines have created more problems than they have solved. Man's life is becoming more and more complex with the use of sophisticated gadgets. In the near future, man will have to invent machines to help him have a good sleep at night. In the big hospitals, they already have rooms equipped with very sophisticated machines, which help you go to sleep. A man full of stress cannot have a sound sleep.

Reflection & Discrimination

A man who is a slave of his desires cannot say, "There is no good or bad."

Could you please explain more about the saying: "There is nothing wrong or right but thinking makes it so."

It is very clear in itself. When you go beyond thinking, when you transcend the mind completely, there is nothing right or wrong for you. But how many people go beyond or transcend their mind? It is not easy to control the mind, what to say of going beyond it? Most people are slaves of their mind and desires. So if an ordinary person says, "There is nothing good or bad," it shows he has not yet reached even the evolutionary stage of reflection and thinking. There is no good or bad for animals either, because they don't have the thinking faculty. Guru Arjun Dev says, "Good or bad, virtue or sin, become meaningless for a realized one." If a realized person like Guru Arjun Dev says this, it is justified, but if a man of likes and dislikes, a man who is a slave of his mind and desires says so, he is simply trying to justify his wrong doings by interpreting the saying wrongly.

Is it the mind that creates problems?

There is no good and bad where there is no-mind. It is the mind that is the cause of relative perception, the perception of the pairs of opposites. Mind is a valuable tool for knowing the world, but for realizing the Truth, the Absolute, no-mind is the instrument. Mind is a transitory step in evolution; it is not the end, nor the final step.

Reflect on the vanity of what is finite

Can we take pleasure as a stepping-stone?

Do you wish for pleasures in order to make them stepping-stones? Why not wish for pains in order to make them stepping-stones? The seeker must be very clear about the goal that he or she wants to achieve. The definition of *vairāgya*, which is the prerequisite for the Realization of the Truth, is that the seeker should not wish for anything that is not everlasting, whether it pertains to this world, or to heaven, or to any higher world. Not only that, it is said that even the attachment to any inner experience that is enchanting but not lasting is an obstacle on the path of Realization.

Reflect again and again on the vanity and limitations of all that is finite and temporal. Reflect again and again on the beauty and importance of what is absolute, eternal, and infinite. There is no real happiness in the finite. Go within and you will find an innate urge for God, for infinity, for wholeness. Sit quietly and reflect on what is your real need. Sift through the experiences of your life and you will discover that you are looking for wholeness, for God but in the wrong places and in the wrong way.

Man can change for the better

You can change a person who wants to be changed. As a matter of fact, everyone in this world is trying to change/make others like himself or herself, consciously or unconsciously. The mind of man is flexible; that is why it is unsteady and changeable. In a sense it goes to the credit of man. Animals have a very fixed mind. Man can change for the better through right education, right company and association, right guidance, and disinterested love.

In Haridwar there was a very old lady, around the age of eighty years. She was very much attached to me spiritually. She had a habit of chewing tobacco since her early years. Her husband, a *paṇḍitajī*, tried his best to make her give up chewing tobacco, but did not succeed. They fought with each other on this issue many times. She always said to her husband, “It is beyond my power to give up this habit.” One day during *satsaṅga* the topic of addiction was being discussed. That *paṇḍitānījī* was also present. I told her to give up chewing tobacco. She humbly told me that it was beyond her power to do so. I said, “All right, you do one thing: Either you give up chewing tobacco, or you stop coming to me.” She started weeping and reflecting on what to do. All the people present were curious to know what decision she would make. After three or four minutes she wiped her tears, took out the packet of tobacco from her pocket and threw it away, saying, “From now on I will stop chewing tobacco.” She lived six or seven years after that, but did not touch tobacco at all.

Reflect and know what makes you disturbed

When you meet a person, can you easily see how thick that person's veils are and the best way to remove them?

I do not try to see the veils of those who come to me. They themselves reveal their veils; they cannot hide them from me even if they so wish. What is a veil? Is it something behind which you have hidden yourself, or is it something you have devised to fool others? Do you know about your veils? You should try to know them yourself. Reflect and know what makes you disturbed and uneasy.

What is in you that has not changed?

All the awakened people seem to have their own personality and individuality even though they are impersonal and free of past experiences. Then, what is a free individual personality?

What is free and what can be free is not the individual personality. One who is free is either the universal Person, whom religious people call God, or the impersonal timeless Consciousness that is named Godhead or *Brahman*. The individual being is a phenomenon. It is not real in the transcendental sense. How would you define an individual? Does an individual change or not? If you say it does not change, then it must be infinite, because what is finite is in time and does change. If you say that the individual does change, then the individuality has no sense, it has no real identity, it is changing; it cannot be differentiated from others.

What is in you that has not changed? Can you tell me about it? Try to know directly that which has not changed in you. What has changed and what is changing in you is not your essential Being. How would you realize that which is not changing in you? One way is not to identify yourself with that which is changing in you. What can change and what has changed is not your real

Self. Do not identify yourself with it. If you go on doing this continuously, for a long time, then your real Self, which is timeless and immortal, will gradually be revealed to you. What is changing is only phenomenal. It comes and goes. It is not permanent. It does not last. It is like a shadow. Do not be too serious about it. It is like a dream. If you can do that, the Real will be revealed to you.

If I try to perceive directly what doesn't change in myself, I cannot.

If the individuality changes, then it ceases to be individuality. If it does not change, then it must be infinite because all that is finite is changeable, which means that the individual is universal, which is illogical and absurd. Buddhism and *Vedānta* say that the individual and universal souls are not timeless. They are parts of the phenomena. Only *Brahman* is real and timeless. Does phenomenal mean that it is not real? If you hesitate to use the word “unreal,” you may say it is not what it appears to be. Maybe you are confounding the “personal” with the “individual.” What does not change is the real “I,” but it cannot be individual. It is the unceasing, timeless Consciousness. Your personality is changing. It is the sum total of your past experiences, but your present experiences are continuously modifying it.

Can we say yes to everything?

What does it mean exactly to say “yes” to everything?

To say “yes” to everything is virtually impossible so long as you have likes and dislikes and you choose. From your heart you

dislike a thing and don't want it, but if you say yes to that thing it will be hypocrisy. How can you say yes to everything? A man asks you to give him one hundred euros because he wants to drink whisky, will you say yes? And what if the man who asks for the money already owes you two thousand euros and does not want to give it back? And what if you don't have one hundred euros with you, how will you say yes?

To say "yes" means to surrender oneself to the Divine. Complete self-surrender does not come instantly and immediately. It may take lives and lives of sincere work, *sādhana*, prayer, effort, discipline and meditation before one becomes able to surrender. If a man comes and tries to snatch your money and clothes, what will you do? Will you say, "Yes, take all that I have?" Or would you resist? Would you call this resistance, repression? Repression is one thing. Refusal is another thing. Even an animal does not say yes to every situation. It faces the challenges, fights for self-preservation, and refuses what it dislikes instinctively. Man has been given the gift of reflection and discrimination. He should discriminate and reflect upon what is good for him and what is not good for him. Do you not think, assess, evaluate a situation and then act or react? Are you a robot?

How to be free of desire

A butterfly can never reach the moon. It is not possible for it. How can it give up its desire, which cannot be fulfilled, without suffering and repression? Is there a way?

If you cannot fulfil a desire, you suffer mentally. When you fulfil a desire, it gives you temporary relief, like scratching an itch, but

it again comes back. In fact the desire is not fulfilled. In trying to fulfil one desire, many other desires are created. The desires are not to be suppressed. One has to see through the futility of desiring and then the desire drops, then the question of suppression does not arise.

The *avadhūta* and the businessman

The aim of movement is rest. You should reflect on it. I will tell you a story. There was an *avadhūta* resting under the shade of a tree on the outskirts of a town. Some people came to see him. One of them asked, “Why don’t you do something? You are a very healthy man, you should do some work.” The *avadhūta* asked him, “Who are you? What are you doing?” The man replied, “I am a big businessman. I am running a big factory in this town, then I will open factories in other towns.” The *avadhūta* asked, “And then what will you do?” The man, “I will open factories in other countries.” The *avadhūta* said, “After that, what?” The businessman replied, “After doing all that, I will take rest.” The *avadhūta* smiled and said, “That is what I am doing.”

Right thinking involves discriminating between what is temporal and what is lasting

Yesterday you spoke about the search for the “I” and the “backward flowing of attention.” What is the role of analysis in this context?

Analysing involves thinking. To realize one's true and essential Nature, or to realize "I am," the thinking process must stop. It is the state of complete alert passivity in which the revelation of "I" happens. "I" cannot be made an object of thought. Analytical thinking is useful only for knowing something pertaining to the world.

Can I stop thinking?

In the deep sleep state you do not think at all. Do you? And all that is essential to live goes on without your thinking. The breathing process, the digestive process, the functioning of your nervous system and all the biological processes go on without your thinking. If the thinking process can stop in sleep, why can't it stop in some other state? Sleep is the substitute of what is called *samādhi*. You can be without thinking even in the waking state. If you cannot stop thinking completely, you must practise right thinking. Right thinking is a step towards the non-thinking state even when you are wide awake.

Well, can you give me some more details about what "right thinking" is?

Right thinking is the first part of the discipline of *Vedānta*. It also comprises the twelve-fold path of Buddhism. In *Vedānta* right thinking is called *viveka*. Right thinking is what is called reflection. You have to discriminate between what is real and what is unreal, between what is transient and what is permanent, between what is temporal and what is eternal. Right thinking will reveal to you the temporal nature of the manifestation. The seeker is

intellectually convinced that by running after temporal things, situations and relationships, one cannot reach anywhere, but is bound to be dissatisfied and frustrated in the end. It will also reveal to you that what you really need is something that is everlasting and infinite. The seeker becomes more and more interested in the Eternal, the Infinite, the Timeless, that is the supreme Consciousness.

Until what point does the reflection go on? Right thinking will lead you to dispassion and detachment. When dispassion comes, you stop running after temporary pleasures, or at least you try to stop running after them. From this point starts your effort to control your senses and your mind, to tame your unbridled desires and longings, and you are practically engaged in *sādhana*.

You have to reflect upon what an experience has given you

How can we learn from our experiences?

Learning from experience requires alertness and reflection. An animal has all types of experiences but it cannot learn from them, because it cannot reflect. Man has been experiencing for many, many lives. He repeats the same experiences again and again in every life. You can learn from your past. The past is useful for the present only in the sense that you can reflect upon the past in order to learn and grow. To learn from your experiences you have to be very alert during the period of experience, and after the experience you have to reflect upon what the experience has given you. But only few grow, because only few reflect upon their experiences.

Names and forms are not real

I always had difficulties with my surname. Maybe you can tell me something in that regard?

All names and forms are *māyā*. They do not last. They are changing. They are the objects of the senses. They hide the Truth. It is your body that is recognized by the name “Fernande.” Any other name could be given to your body for the purpose of recognizing it and dealing with it. We see something lying here that we call a “mat.” The word mat hides from us the cotton that is the real stuff of this mat. When we say or hear the word mat, it evokes in our mind something that has a special form and is used for sitting. It does not evoke the presence of cotton (of which it is made) in our mind. The word mat hides from us the substance that is the essence of the mat. In *Vedānta* it is said that everything has five elements in it:

1. *Asti*: Is-ness
2. *Bhāti*: Awareness
3. *Priya*: Love
4. *nāma*: name
5. *rūpa*: form

Asti, *Bhāti* and *Priya* are one and the same thing. They are the Reality, the light of Consciousness/Awareness that is absolute. It is present in each and every person and thing, and is the same.

Nāma and *rūpa* (name and form) vary from one thing to another, from one person to another. They are not real. They have their utility in dealing with the world, but they are unreal. They cannot be separated from each other. Every form is known

through a name. Name and form are not important. Is-ness/Awareness/Love, which is the ground of all existence, is important. It has to be realized. In its realization lies the secret of Freedom and absolute Bliss. The seeker should not be serious about names and forms.

Don't confound the standpoint of a realized sage with the standpoint of a seeker

The cause, the source of this illusion of subject and object is a mystery beyond space, time and causality. So why persist with questions that have no answer like, "What am I" or "Where am I?" Would it not be wiser to simply accept the mystery of existence? I have, for some time, been following the path of Ramaṇa Maharṣhi who recommended that one continually enquire into the source of the "I".

I have read your question again. It seems you have taken many things for granted without having experienced them. For example, you talk of the illusion of object and subject. Have you yourself ever felt the objective world as an illusion? If you feel, really feel, the world as an illusion, most problems of your life and mind are solved. Could you ever run after water when you know it is a mirage? The greatest problem and obstacle in solving a problem often comes when you have already heard about the answer of the problem without working on the problem yourself.

If there is no form, no name, no idea and nothing to aim for, how is it possible to become one-pointed? Where is the path?

There is no path and there is no aim for you when you are established in the Truth/Absolute. But when you are in the world of duality, rather diversity, the world of name and form, feeling and suffering, pains and pleasures, what do you do? Do you sit idly, quietly and relaxed, without any desire, any longing, any thought? Or are you seeking something? When you are seeking, you are following a path; you want to reach somewhere. Then the path is there, the aim is there, the following of the path is there, the name and the form are there, the idea is there, and there are means and methods to go beyond all of these.

What you have written is the standpoint of a realized and fulfilled sage. It is not correct from the standpoint of a *sādhaka* or seeker. There is one man who is doubtful whether all the thoughts and ideas can be stopped. And here is a blessed man who says there is no idea, no path, no aim.

There was a “mad” saint, Sheshadri Swāmī, who was quite old. He roamed about in Arunachala, Tiruvannamallai, in ragged clothes, without caring a bit about his physical body and its comforts. People would call him a mad saint. He had many extraordinary powers. He could at once know what you were thinking if you met him. One day he went to see Ramaṇa Maharṣhi. He sat there in front of Ramaṇa Maharṣhi for one hour or so and then said, “This is the first man I have encountered during the period of the last forty years (since he had attained the power of mind-reading) who is thinking nothing.” He became devoted to Ramaṇa Maharṣhi and would come to sit in his presence often. Ramaṇa Maharṣhi never said, “There is no name, no form, no idea, no path, no aim.”

Is it possible to be taught by nature, as well as by human beings?

The tree does not teach you, but you can learn certain qualities from a tree. This learning comes from your subjective reflection on the good qualities of a tree. The tree does not communicate or teach you anything. A human being can teach you, can guide you on the basis of his or her experience. If he or she has himself or herself trodden the path of Truth, he or she can guide you and teach you. Has a tree trodden the path of Truth, in order to be able to guide you? The tree does not know the Truth. The tree does not know what you want to learn. The tree does not know itself. How can it teach you? In the sense you are speaking of, you can learn even from a donkey. But a donkey cannot be your teacher. Can it be?

Shakespeare has said, “Books in running brooks and sermons in stones¹.” So if you could learn from the Jordan River in Israel and from the stones of Jerusalem, what need did you feel to come here?

Don't give your heart to the shadows

Whenever I'm alone, I am always, expecting bad messages about one thing or another. How can I overcome this?

Why should you expect bad messages? It is negative thinking that should be stopped. Entertain only positive thoughts. Have

¹ “And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything.” (Shakespeare)

faith and trust in the Divine. If and when any negative thought comes, reject it at once.

Sometimes, it is impossible not to have negative thoughts.

What makes you weak? It is the attachment to what is changing. Isn't it? Reflect upon the changing nature of this world phenomenon, again and again. Don't expect the mortal to become immortal. Stop trying to make the impermanent permanent. If you take a situation or thing to be real, it becomes stronger and stronger for you. If you take anything to be momentary, temporal, passing and unreal, it becomes weaker and weaker and eventually ceases to move you or influence you.

How can you be peaceful if you give your heart to the shadows? One who becomes attached to shadows cannot but feel disappointed and dejected sooner or later. The seeking must involve mind and ego. Purified mind/ego seeks happiness at the right place; a stupid person seeks it in the wrong places. Some run after shadows and their seeking never comes to an end.

How to identify the voice of God

How can we identify the voice of God within? How can we know if the voice we hear within really comes from the Divine or from some other source?

It is not difficult to identify the divine voice when you hear it within you. The divine voice never contradicts the teachings of the holy scriptures, sages and revealed wisdom. It is in conformity with

the revelation of sages as mentioned in the holy books. The voice will not suggest that you be selfish and harm any other life. It will never instigate you to be dishonest, insincere, violent, arrogant, wrathful, revengeful, greedy or attached. It will exhort you to be honest, relaxed, alert, peaceful, loving, compassionate, and free from all attachments that make you suffer.

The body is only my vehicle

How to abandon this feeling that we are the body?

Think again and again, “I am not this physical body. It is only a vehicle that I am using. This body has been given to me by God according to my *karmas* so that I may make best use of this vehicle to reach the ultimate goal of human life, which is Self-Realization.” One should reflect upon this again and again and act in the light of this truism.

The real cause of pain and suffering

When I was a child or teenager, I was looking at my face in the mirror and there was someone who suffered and someone looking at this suffering. I think that now when you say not to be identified with our thoughts or feelings, I use the same kind of process. But I am not sure that it is a good approach because it makes me feel “split up.” What does it mean exactly “not to be identified with our thoughts, our feelings” and how to do it?

When you are totally identified with the physical body, which is only a superficial part of your existence, or with your thoughts and feelings, which are like waves in an ocean, you cannot be at peace; you feel limited and dependent. The waves can cause no harm to the ocean. But are you aware of the ocean of your pure Consciousness? Should you be aware of your inner Being that is not limited by time and space, neither your thoughts nor your physical body can disturb your peace and joy. You have to be centred in your absolute Existence, you have not to be centred only in the superficial part of yourself.

If you feel that by disidentifying yourself with the physical body or mind you become split and fragmented, then instead of saying “I am not this body, I am not the mind,” you should say “I am not only this physical body, I am not only the mind. I am surely beyond them, if not separate from them.” You have to be conscious of the absolute Existence, that is what is needed. For that you have to stop thinking that you are only the physical body or the mind. All your relative experiences are the result of Consciousness becoming split into the knower, the known and the knowing. You are already split. Do you feel and experience your oneness with each and every object and person? How can you say that you do not become split when you identify yourself with your physical body? By remaining aware only of the physical body and mind, you cannot claim that you are not split! Then you are aware of only an infinitely small and superficial part of your absolute Existence. As a matter of fact, it is not the body consciousness that is the cause of pain and suffering. The real cause of pain and suffering is becoming unaware and forgetful of your timeless and eternal Nature.

If you put a burning piece of wood in the ocean, can it make the water of the ocean hot? Hundreds of rivers flow into

the ocean, but the ocean remains the same. Should you be centered in the eternal Bliss of your eternal Consciousness, the suffering of the body cannot disturb that Bliss.

The seeker has to make the right decision at every step

How can I be sure about God's will? It is not easy to understand one's life clearly, especially if we are at a crossroads with different paths.

At every step of life there are crossroads and one has to choose, and choose correctly so that one does not take the wrong path. In *Spiritual Gems* it is written that with every step the road is split in three directions: one going to heaven, another going to hell and the third going to God. The seeker has to be vigilant and make the right decision at every step. The holy books and the wise men have put the sign boards on every road to tell you where you are going. In spite of that, very few people take the road going to God.

Those who seek Eternity do find it sooner or later

In my daily life, I sometimes feel some doubts about what I am doing. Is it spiritual or not?

Doubts create obstacles in *sādhanā*. Faith and trust help the seeker on the path of Realization. Reflect on the ultimate and true purpose of life again and again. Whatever one gets or achieves in life pertaining to the world is taken away by death. Do not

confound the means with the end. Use all your energies, all that you have, to realize that which can never be taken away, to realize that which is timeless and eternal. Everyone is seeking something that is infinite. Some seek it in the wrong places and in the wrong way with the result that they never reach anywhere. Those who seek Eternity in the right way do find it sooner or later and become fulfilled.

“Do not be orthodox. Gone are the days of following traditions blindly. Assess life’s problems in the light of place, time and present conditions and accomplish every action in the right way.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Dispassion & Detachment

“Call him blind though possessed of sight and call him stupid though possessed of cleverness, who does not have vairāgya (dispassion) towards the world even when seeing its perishable nature and transience.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Detachment is the consummation of dispassion

Is stability of mind beyond good and bad, likes and dislikes?

To go beyond all the pairs of opposites like good and bad, likes and dislikes means to go beyond the mental consciousness. The

seeker should purify his or her mind first and cultivate reflection and dispassion in the beginning. Moreover, the practice of regular inward concentration is a very important part of *sādhana*. Stability of mind means that the seeker is able to fix his or her mind inward without any distraction. The seeker has to start discriminating between right and wrong and follow the right path with firm determination. Discrimination and dispassion help stability of mind; they are not hindrances. When Arjuna asked Kṛiṣṇa how to make his mind stable, the Lord said: “It is only through dispassion and the regular practice of concentration that one can make the mind stable.”

Is dispassion the same as detachment?

There are two words in Hindi, *vairāgya* and *vītārāga*. They can be translated as dispassion and detachment. Dispassion is the first stage, while detachment is the consummation of dispassion. Dispassion means feeling the futility of giving one’s life to the pursuit of what is not lasting, to what is temporal. Right thinking is the effort to generate dispassion. In the *Vedāntic* discipline of seven parts, it is *viveka* that generates the real *vairāgya*. Dispassion is based on right thinking. Detachment is the spontaneous state in which the seeker is not disturbed by any happening, because he or she is not attached to any person, situation or thing.

How can detachment happen?

Complete detachment happens only by the Realization of the Self. It is by Self-Realization that the seed of all attachments is destroyed.

Can we be detached from little things at the beginning before we reach complete detachment?

If you have dispassion, detachment will come by itself. If you have dispassion, you will not run after temporalities. If you don't get food some day, you will not be disturbed. You will not fight for food, house, clothing, chair, power, status and recognition.

The aspiration for Self-Realization and the spirit of dispassion

My desire to attain Realization is not stable. How to make it steady?

The aspiration for Self-Realization should not only be intellectual. One should feel the need for Self-Realization very deeply; all the parts of one's personality should aspire for Self-Realization. Moreover, the spirit of dispassion from what is temporal is a must. Otherwise interest in the world of phenomena weakens the aspiration for Self-Realization. Regular reflection on the transitory nature of things, situations and relationships in the world is helpful in cultivating dispassion.

The energy which becomes desires is the same energy which becomes the deep aspiration and longing for the Divine. Dispassion towards the temporalities of the world, therefore, is a must. It helps to transform desire into the deep and intense longing for the Divine. It is not possible to conduct spiritual *sāadhanā* seriously and sincerely without a deep and intense longing and aspiration for the Divine.

“Dispassion is not indicated by absence of things, nor is the presence of things any sign of attachment. Remember, dispassion and attachment are only states of mind — the former leading to Liberation and the latter to bondage.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Holy indifference is an essential prerequisite

What does it mean to “die while living?”

To die while living means to deny oneself, to shun one’s ego, to disclaim “me” and “mine.” It is virtual self-denial, which follows elimination of most of the worldly desires, longings, ambitions in order to conserve one’s energies and use them for discovering eternal Life, lasting happiness, divine Light and Love. What is called “holy indifference” is an essential prerequisite for the Realization of Truth. It is a biblical phrase, meaning dispassion, that is to say giving up craving for earthly pleasures as well as for heaven. What is temporal can never satisfy the soul of man. All the temporal pleasures are the will-o’-the-wisp, they promise but never fulfil.

Man is in deep slumber

Doctorjī, your profession is such that you must meet many people daily who are suffering very much. Does it create a feeling of dispassion in you? There is so much suffering in this life. Lord Buddha saw only one man suffering and he became awakened. And you see so many people suffering everyday!

Yes, then why is it so? Why don't we become dispassionate?

Why? It is because man is, as it were, in deep slumber. While seeing, he does not see. While hearing, he does not hear. Lord Buddha saw a dead man only once and he was shocked. He felt that he would also die one day. He asked himself, "Then what is the meaning of life? If death takes away from you all that you have achieved or earned in life, then what is the use of being busy all the time?" Such questions disturbed him and he began the search for the truth about life and death.

Reflection, introspection and discrimination are the first steps of *sādhanā*. They beget dispassion. They also generate aspiration to know the truth of life, and then, you follow the path of Realization.

Be completely involved with God

Can family be an obstacle on our path?

Whether you live in a family or away from family your mind must be focused on the Divine.

To be focused only on the Divine should we cultivate vairāgya first?

Vairāgya means detachment. It is necessary to be completely involved with God. How you can be one-pointed on God, if you are not detached from what is not God?

Your life interest must change

As vairāgya is a step to Self-Realization, is it better to aim at only the supreme goal?

Vairāgya is a means. Divine Love is the means as well as the end. Should you have divine Love, you could not be attached to anything or any person but God. *Vairāgya* is the means to fix your mind on the Divine. If the mind is attached to the mundane, how will you fix it on God? Your life interest must be changed. The direction of the arrow of your attention must be reversed and changed from going outside to coming inside.

One has to be totally unattached?

Yes, not attached to any thing or any person.

Not even to the Guru who is God?

Who is the Guru? Is the Guru the physical body that you see with your eyes? Attachment to the Guru is possible only if you know the Guru. Isn't it?

Burn the bridges behind

Are there any criteria to know if one is advancing in his or her spiritual efforts?

No one can remain at the same point always in this world. Where you can remain forever is in your timeless Being. The criteria to

see if you are progressing in your *sāadhanā* are: growing peace, detachment, control over your thoughts and emotions, growing interest in Realization, love and the ability to remain more and more composed in all situations. If you do not want to go back, run fast. If you do not want to go back, burn the bridges behind, so that you cannot go back.

Once a seeker told me, “I have left my home, my family, my flourishing business, but I am not progressing in my *sāadhanā*. It would have been better if I had not given up all these.” I said to him, “One of the reasons why you are not progressing is that you still feel the importance of the things you said you have left behind. You have not yet given them up in the real sense because you still feel their importance in your heart.”

“Listen! No one has ever climbed the mountain of spiritual perfection with the burden of worldly worries bundled on one’s head.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Self-Control

Self-control is a part of self-discipline in all the paths of God-Realization

Self-control is an important part of spiritual *sāadhanā*. Without control over one’s senses and mind one cannot go deep into meditation, nor can one have any substantial spiritual experience. Self-control is a part of self-discipline in all paths of God-Realization or Self-Realization, whether it is *bhakti yoga*, *jñāna yoga* or *rāja yoga*. Self-control can be achieved by regular

practice, by right thinking and it also requires very firm and strong determination.

Perseverance and Patience

“Who can be called a man of patience and perseverance? The one who does not lose balance of mind in favourable or adverse circumstances; the one whose mind is not disturbed by the blows of nature; the one who moves forward to the spiritual goal with ease but with vigilance.”

— *Spiritual Gems*

The feeling of loneliness goes away with perseverance and patience

Why do I feel lonely?

The vital being wants excitement and entertainment and when it does not get it in *sāadhanā*, it feels lonely and sometimes frustrated. Do not identify yourself with the feelings of the vital. From the *sāadhanā* point of view, one should not feel excited and elated. When slowly and gradually your vital consciousness becomes aware that you don't care for or depend upon its influence on you, it will follow you and share the joy which *sāadhanā* will bring or brings to you, and the loneliness will go away. The feeling of loneliness is a common experience for seekers, but it goes away in due course of time if the seeker is not discouraged and maintains perseverance and patience. You may call it suffering, but it is the vital that suffers because it does not get what it wants.

Sticking to the practice

Achieving total concentration takes a long, long time. Controlling one's mind and thoughts is the most difficult task. One should not expect to have full concentration within a few days or months. The seeker must practise with commitment and consistency of purpose and also perseverance. Even very great saints, who devoted themselves exclusively to controlling their thoughts and making their minds totally silent, had to undertake very long and arduous practice and discipline for years and years. Regular practice, alertness and perseverance are the essential prerequisites for a successful meditation.

The more one advances on the spiritual path, the more problems one has to face. Why is it so?

It is quite natural. After attaining spiritual Realization, nothing else remains to be found. So naturally, one has to strive more to reach the state of Realization. It is easier to become the president of a country than to be spiritually perfect. It is natural that the spiritual search and Fulfilment are more arduous. You stumble only when and where there is darkness or when you are unmindful. When you feel the presence of God, there is no possibility of going astray, of taking the wrong path.

Ups and downs in *sādhana*

*What to do when sometimes we feel less aspiration or devotion, or even lose interest in *sādhana*?*

There are ups and downs in the intensity of aspiration and *sādhana*. These are natural. The seeker should not be discouraged when his or her *sādhana* slows down. The spiritual journey is like walking on a mountain path: at one time you go up, then come down, then go higher and again come down. One can reach the highest peak only in such a way. One cannot climb the highest peak in one climb. Perseverance is a must. During *sādhana* a very dry period comes. The *sādhaka* has lost all interest in the temporal but cannot find anything to hold on to. It is very sickening. The Christian mystics call it “the dark night of the soul.”

You cannot stay at one place for a long period. Either you move ahead, or you move back to gain more strength to move ahead fast. When an athlete takes a long jump, he goes back some distance and runs to gain enough momentum so that he can take a better long jump.

Chapter Four

Integral Sādhanā

“The seeker must sit regularly in meditation, read spiritual books that lend him encouragement to follow the path of Realization, reflect regularly, tame his senses and mind, conduct periodic satsaṅga and associate with realized ones or those who are quite advanced on the path, lead the life of purity and honesty, render service to the needy according to his means, and be loving to one and all irrespective of their caste, creed or religion etc.”

Integral Sādhanā

General Concepts

Disciplines are needed to purify and stabilize the mind

What conditions and practices are necessary to enable the emergence of the true Self?

The true Self is reflected in its pristine purity in a purified and completely silent mind. As the mind is connected with the physical body and they influence each other, the physical body also has to undergo certain disciplines that are conducive to making the mind silent. Moreover, man lives in a society and interacts with it, so a social discipline is also needed. In the eight-fold path of Patañjali's *yoga*, all this has been systematically discussed.

I am a seeker of wisdom and spiritual growth. How does one know the Truth?

The seeker of Truth has to do research, which is called *sādhanā*. One has to listen to the sages who have realized the Truth and then follow their instructions as to how to purify one's mind and attain stability of mind. One has to perform experiments and know for oneself what is true and what is not. If you so wish, you can

read the book, *The Practical Approach to Divinity*. There are practical suggestions in it.

The negative and positive aspects of *sādhana*

What is sādhana?

One has to break the false identifications. That is what *sādhana* is. There can be no freedom unless the false identifications are broken. A man's house is burnt to ashes and he cries, "I am finished," as if he is the house.

Is sādhana done to purify one's Self?

The purpose and aim of *sādhana* is not to transform the Self, but to realize its true and essential Nature, which is divine. What needs to be purified and transformed is the body-mind so that it can reflect the true Nature of the Self. Mind is like a mirror. To see one's face in the mirror there are two conditions:

1. The mirror should be clean.
2. The mirror should not be moving.

In *Vedāntic* parlance, it is said that *mala* (impurity) and *vikṣhepa* (distraction) are to be removed. The purpose of *sādhana* is to purify the mind and make it steady and still.

How to clean all these negativities such as anger, greed, jealousy, etc?

You ask how to get rid of attachment, desire, anger and other negative emotions, which practically means purification of mind.

There are two aspects of effort: negative and positive. The negative aspect means that the seeker has to continuously reflect on the transient nature of the world phenomenon, on the impermanence of things, situations and relationships of the world. It will generate dispassion. Then, one stops being too serious about worldly matters. The seeker has to contemplate upon his or her death. As soon as one becomes aware of one's death, desire subsides and with it all the other negative emotions. The positive side of *sādhana* is to contemplate upon the Divine, the eternal Principle. If you think of God, and remember Him constantly through *japa* or contemplation, you slowly and gradually fall in love with God. Love of God transforms passion into dispassion and attachment into selfless love.

There are so many other parts of *sādhana*, such as selfless service, association with saints and sages, breathing exercises, reading of spiritual books and holy scriptures and so on.

“Mind becomes impure with desire, anger, greed, infatuation, arrogance, violence, etc. which make it tense and turbulent with the result that it does not and cannot reflect the divine Light, Knowledge and eternal Bliss of one's true spiritual Being. Cleanse thou, therefore, the mirror of thy mind, with total commitment. This is what is called puruṣhārtha, or spiritual effort, or sādhana.”

— *Mirror of Bliss*

***Sādhana* means right effort for self-unfoldment**

During my sādhana I often have moments of depression. Is it normal?

It is not normal, but it happens to many persons.

Is it possible while doing sādhanā to always be happy?

In *sādhanā* you are not really happy, but if you are sincere, you enjoy your *sādhanā*.

Should I be able to accept everything that comes to me?

How can you accept everything as long as you have likes and dislikes and your mind is conditioned? It is easier said than done. The state of complete self-surrender is the fruit of successful *sādhanā*. *Sādhanā*, which means right effort for self-unfoldment, is taken up by the divine power when self-surrender comes. Self-Realization happens when the sincerest right effort and God's grace meet.

***Sādhanā* always uplifts you and prepares you to realize the Truth**

When physical troubles arise during the course of sādhanā, how can you recognize whether it is due to wrong practice or weakness of mind? What should be the right attitude?

Sādhanā itself means the right attitude and the right way of living to be happy and peaceful, and ultimately to realize the Truth. *Sādhanā* always uplifts you and prepares you, both physically and mentally, to realize the Truth. If any *sādhanā* makes your body sick or your mind weak and unbalanced, it is not *sādhanā* at all. Then you are doing something wrong in the name of *sādhanā*.

The seeker may become sick physically and mentally from adverse effects on the body and mind, due to practising certain types of *sāadhanās*, like *prāṇayāma* or some *tāntric* types that are not followed exactly according to prescribed rules, and that don't involve the regular guidance or even physical presence of an adept master. How would you recognize if your sickness or weakness is due to the wrong practice of *sāadhanā*? It is very simple. Leave your *sāadhanā* for some days and if you get relief from your physical ailment, or mental weakness or tension, then take it for granted that your problem is related to the wrong practice of your *sāadhanā*. *Sāadhanā* means to conserve and channel all your energies in the right direction. How can it make you sick or weak? It is impossible. Normally one becomes sick only when one's energy is not evenly distributed in the body or when one does not live one's life according to the right and positive principles of living. *Sāadhanā* should, on the other hand, normally make the body strong and the mind more pure, peaceful and open.

***Sāadhanā* and level of consciousness**

I feel that sāadhanā is a fight between two kinds of forces. One pulls me in the direction of the spiritual quest and the other back towards the world. How can I be unified?

Sāadhanā does not have a fixed pattern. It goes on changing with the change in the level of consciousness of the seeker. *Sāadhanā* may be a fight; it may also be a play, a joy. It depends upon the state of the *sādhaka*.

Sometimes I have the vision of Swāmījī inside my forehead. Should I concentrate on it?

I never impose my views on anyone, what to say of imposing my form and face! As the level of your consciousness changes, your form of *sāadhanā* also changes. *Sāadhanā* is not the same for your whole life. It cannot remain the same. The outer aspect of *sāadhanā* changes even with the change in your age.

Does it take a long time?

If it takes a long time, will you not practise? Moreover, the time it takes is proportional to the speed of your travelling, the sincerity and intensity of your effort, and also depends on so many other factors.

Can it happen that sāadhanā goes backwards?

It does not go backwards, it may go downwards in order to take a swing upwards to greater heights. All movements are in a waveform. There is no motion in a straight line, no energy moves in a straight line.

With each new birth, do we have to start again from the beginning?

You start again in your next life where you left off, if you are not fed up with your *sāadhanā*. You may stop for many lives and then restart where you had left. The point is that what you have gained in the spiritual field is not lost.

Is it possible to fall down and lose all the spiritual gains?

Falling down is possible, but it does not destroy the impact of your spiritual experience or your spiritual being. It is like forgetting or going astray for some period, but you can come back home again.

“You ask for an easy path to Divinity? Should the path be difficult, will you not take to it? Make a thorough search of your heart and choose — between convenience and God.”

— *Spiritual Gems*

If you want to realize God, dive deep within

You wrote that we should dive deep within ourselves. How can we do it?

I have written somewhere, “If you want to know the definition of God, Truth or *Nirvāṇa*, read books on religion, philosophy and *yoga*, but if you want to realize God or the Truth, then dive deep within yourself.” To dive deep within yourself, it is necessary to be able to detach yourself from the external world of objects and situations, which means a good deal of dispassion. The second prerequisite is the regular and constant practice of some technique to go within. There are other qualifications for a seeker of Truth, which you can read in the book, *The Practical Approach to Divinity*. Prayer is also very necessary because it is almost impossible to realize the Timeless with self-effort alone.

You should follow any way that is easiest for you

I was looking for a spiritual Master and feel that now I have found him. From now on, should I practise my sādhanā according to your yoga?

I have no special *yoga* of my own. I don't claim to have discovered something new. All those methods have already been discovered by the ancient *ṛishis* and sages. As a matter of fact, when I happen to read a book on spirituality that is more ancient, I find more depth and simplicity expressed in that book, even though it may not be very intellectual and full of discursive thoughts. You should follow any way that is easiest and most suitable for you. Should you find anything, any method, way of meditation, concentration and relaxation here, with me, in which you feel interested, and ask for my help, I will try to help you. Deep interest, faith, commitment and sincerity are the essentials to be successful in any practice.

One cannot change the world, one can change oneself

Five thousand years ago, the world was going on as it is going on now. How can we quickly get out of this vicious sansāra?

The awakening may come in a moment, but the transformation of consciousness and life takes time according to the constitution and *sanskāras* of a particular person. Habits, sometimes called the second nature of a person, die hard. It is not so easy to change them. It needs extraordinary commitment and effort, discipline,

strong will, and understanding to change them. One cannot change the world. One can change oneself. If you change within, your perspective changes, and with it the world changes for you.

***Sādhanā* is like walking on a razor's edge**

Sādhanā is like walking on a razor's edge. To strengthen your faith, regularly read books on the lives of sages who made great sacrifices for the sake of discovering the Truth. And reflect again and again on the fragility of the body. You cannot save your body howsoever you try. It may die at any time, without giving you any notice. What could be better than to lose your life in search of Truth? The body is very useful, but it is also the most untrustworthy thing in the world.

I do not like to read the lives of saints because often they have gone through so many difficulties that I prefer not to know about them.

Should you fall in love with God, nothing will be difficult for you.

All the paths lead to the same God

I am following the teaching of Lord Buddha. Is it a must to have a living Master? If so, should I look only for a Buddhist Master? If I have a Buddhist Master, can I still ask for advice from Gurus of other religions?

From whom did you receive the teaching of Buddha, from books or from a living Master? Are you satisfied with what you have

been taught? If so, there is no need for you to seek any living Master. You should follow the teachings sincerely and practise what you have been told to practise. Should you face some difficulty or have some doubt, you have to approach a living Master. The practical teaching of all the Masters is almost the same except some who want to propagate their own sect or cult. Otherwise the ethical norms and the social discipline is almost the same in all teachings. There are differences in the metaphysical or philosophical teaching only, which are not so important as far as practice is concerned. Should the seeker practise sincerely and with commitment, he or she can have growing clarity of vision and can decide which metaphysical concept suits his or her temperament. The ultimate aim is the supramental Realization of the Truth, which is beyond all words and all concepts. The seeker should not become attached to any cult or sect.

Rāmakṛiṣṇa Paramahansa was a very unique personality in whom love for God was embedded from his past lives. Though in India many saints were full of God's Love from their early age, Rāmakṛiṣṇa's life is unique in the sense that he practised the *sāadhanā* of many religions and found that all the *sāadhanās* lead to the same God in the end. Many sages, both in the East and West have experienced the truth that God is One and all paths lead to God. But mostly they followed only one path and became realized. They did not bother to practise the other *sāadhanās* to see if all led to the same end. When you are climbing a hill you see only one path going up to the top, the path that you are treading. But when you reach the top and look down on all sides, you may see many persons coming up on different paths, from different directions.

There is one thing more. If you have purified and stabilized your mind through one *sāadhanā*, it is very easy to be absorbed

in God or the Divine through another method as well. If you are open and not a fanatic, if you have not been conditioned and trained to follow and teach only one religion or *sāadhanā*, you can have the same experience of the Divine through another *sāadhanā* in a very short time. It is true that you cannot follow or walk on two paths at the same time. Jesus said, “I am the only path.” Mohammed also said that, and so did Kṛiṣṇa. But some people interpreted it and understood the meaning in the wrong way. They started to believe that only their path was the right path and people of other religions were going on the wrong path. So they started fighting with others to put them on their own path, and started converting the people of other faiths to their own. The import of that teaching is that you should follow one path at one time. If I tell you that there are one thousand paths you may become confused or you may not take to even one path. The prophets said this to people only to convey that one should follow one path at one time without thinking that the others who are following other paths are wrong.

“Great, indeed, is the importance of contemplation in spiritual endeavour. Should contemplation bore you, recite the Lord’s name; should recitation tire you, reflect on the meaning of the holy scriptures. If you cannot do that either, attend holy discourses, and if the holy discourse too does not make you peaceful, serve people in God’s name. Somehow, in some way, you must always remain connected to the Divine.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

The key to live a spiritual life

I am a beginner on the path of spiritual life. I want to become stronger and more open to God. What should I do in my everyday life?

First of all, you have to keep up your aspiration to realize God within you. It is very, very important. It is the key to living a spiritual life, a life in which you make a continuous and conscious effort to realize the Truth. Read books regularly which inspire you to live a spiritual life. Periodically meet saints and sages or holy men who encourage you to sit in meditation, prayer and other spiritual practices. Sit regularly in meditation, at least two sittings each and everyday, that is, in the morning and in the evening. Pray daily. Practise some breathing exercises. Serve the poor and the needy in the name of God. Whatever you do, do it to please God.

How can we develop the ability to listen to the divine voice?

Don't keep your mind preoccupied with worldly thoughts; be passive and alert. Don't cherish opinions. Be empty. Be vigilant. Do not be averse to what sages say. Follow the injunctions laid down in the holy books. Meditate daily. Pray regularly. Practise breathing exercises to calm down your mind. Be relaxed in body and mind. Keep your heart open.

“The ultimate goal of life is to live in God. The ultimate way to achieve it is to live for God.”

Stability of mind

To achieve stability of mind many things are needed, such as regular practice of meditation, reflection, periodic association with enlightened persons, purification of mind, dispassion, right action, right belief. The believers in God chant/repeat His holy name and reflect on the divine qualities of God to purify and stabilize their minds.

The easiest method of concentration is to remember the Divine by repeating His holy name with faith and love. This may be supplemented with some breathing exercises that make the breathing process conscious, slow and regular. These exercises are very helpful in slowing down the movements of the mind.

Limbs of spiritual *sādhana*

Discrimination, dispassion, self control or self-culture, aspiration to discover the Truth, observing some disciplines and practice of reflection, meditation, prayer etc. are the limbs of spiritual effort or what is called *sādhana*. All these limbs grow at the same time, as all the parts of the physical body grow simultaneously. They are deeply correlated and their growth is also correlated.

The root cause of worries

*I realize that there are a lot of worries in me. Sometimes, I wake up in the night, emotionally worried. I feel it is reduced through *sādhana*, but it is still there. What should I do?*

Attachment to what is temporal and passing is the root cause of worries. You have to get rid of this attachment. Reflect on the passing nature of objects and situations again and again. Do not forget death. Do not forget the Divine. Cultivate love for the Divine in your heart. Attachment breeds anxiety. Love breeds joy and freedom. Meditate more and more. Recite God's name. Practise breathing exercises. Be more and more sincere in your *sādhana*. Slowly and gradually, it will destroy the seeds of attachment.

You have the potentiality of being at peace

In this place, I am a little more able to live with my heart open and simple. But the reality of my day-to-day life is different. I don't know how to deal with this difficulty.

You have the potentiality of being at peace everywhere and at all times and in all situations. The more you become centred in your true Self, the easier it is for you to be able to remain open and peaceful in your day-to-day life and activities. Sit in meditation daily. Be more and more sincere about your spiritual upliftment. Work earnestly to purify your heart. Serve the poor and needy in the name of God.

Make your *sādhana* more and more integral

*How can we know what kind of *sādhana* we should emphasize? Is it based on the predominance of *kriyā*, *bhāva* or *jñāna shakti*? I try to have a regular practice of *hatha**

yoga, breathing exercises, discrimination, reading of spiritual books, etc. as you suggest, but what should I emphasize?

An integral approach to *sāadhanā* in which *karma*, *bhāva* and *jñāna* are purified and channelled for the Realization of the Divine is the best. In fact, to have a balanced personality is very rare. Therefore, emphasis in *sāadhanā* is laid on one of these according to the soma-psychic make-up of the seeker. The *sāadhanā* should not be lopsided. Make your *sāadhanā* more and more integral.

I see some people practising only karma yoga and others only meditation.

There is no contradiction between *bhakti yoga*, *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga*. They are not incompatible. Meditation helps *karma yoga* and vice-versa. Sincerity, commitment, *bhāva* and aspiration are also needed for *karma yoga*, *dhyāna yoga* and *jñāna yoga*.

Give your intellect, your heart and your hands to God

Shaṅkarāchārya, the greatest exponent of *Vedānta*, was a devotee of Lord Kṛiṣṇa. Whenever he started to write a book, he first saluted Lord Kṛiṣṇa and asked for His grace. How could he reconcile devotion with the highest concept of Oneness in *Vedānta*?

Give your intellect, your heart and your hands to God. This is the path that Aurobindo calls “Integral *Yoga*.” Develop all the powers that you have been given and direct them to treading the

path of Realization of Truth. You may follow the, “Integral Yoga” in which one’s will and self-effort are directed and used on the path of Realization and at the same time pray and invoke the Divine to lead you on the path and help you.

“Be awake and alert. Be lovable and loving. Be cheerful. Be unassuming and humble. Make best use of all your energies for your spiritual unfoldment and for that of others. And pray daily. Sit in meditation regularly. Read holy books which give you inspiration. Practise breathing exercises. Go periodically to inspired saints and sages and listen to them with faith and simple attention. Serve the poor and the needy in the name of God.”

The integral approach is the best

When Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary, Martha complained that her sister Mary was merely sitting at the feet of Lord Jesus rather than helping with all the preparations. But Jesus replied that Mary had chosen the better way.¹ According to his answer, it seems to me that Jesus gave preference to the way of devotion rather than to the way of service.

Jesus did not say that what Martha was doing was wrong. Martha had complained to Jesus about Mary, so, Jesus said that what Mary was doing was right. Martha had complained that Mary was not helping her.

¹Gospel of Lord Jesus, Luke 10 – 38/42

Sevā (service) is good in its own part. Devotion also is good on its own. Inquiry is good on its own, but it is best if there is an integral approach. Both of these aspects of devotion can and should be blended together.

Contemplation and right action

Is the doer different or opposite from the one who contemplates?

Contemplation is not against right action. The path that leads to Self-Realization and in turn to Freedom is manifold. It is comprised of right action, right belief, right thinking, right contemplation, right means of livelihood, right conduct and so on. These are not paradoxical. They are complementary and help one another.

How to make a green fruit ripe? I want Self-Realization. I would like some help.

Be more and more sincere in your *sāadhanā*. Pray daily. Meditate daily and regularly. Reflect upon your shortcomings and try to remove them. Practise breathing exercises. Read books which inspire you to be regular in *sāadhanā*. Go and stay with holy persons periodically. Avoid the company of those who don't cherish the higher values of life.

Different Paths

There are as many paths as the number of individuals

I have often heard that all traditional spiritual paths lead to the ultimate Reality. Presently I follow the path of Arnaud Desjardins and it helps me. However, I feel that I am missing the expression of the Divine in the transmission of that teaching.

Yes, all the paths ultimately lead to the Truth. There are as many paths as the number of individuals. Every individual is unique in his or her body and mind. The master teaches the student according to the competence of the student. The competence of a student depends upon the interest of the student in a certain path as well as her or his capability to follow that path. All the paths can be classified into three categories, the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*), the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*), and the path of action (*karma yoga*). There are some common qualifications that are required to follow any of these paths, such as:

1. A very deep interest and burning aspiration
2. Commitment
3. Sincerity and consistency of purpose
4. Purity
5. Ability to concentrate
6. Openness
7. Control upon one's senses and mind

Every path has its own discipline. As concentration and one-pointedness are essential prerequisites to follow any of these paths, a special science called *yoga* was developed in India by which one could fix one's mind on anything.

Shabda Surat Yoga, a branch of yogic discipline

In the school of yoga called Shabda Surat Yoga, when the Guru gives initiation, he gives to the person the light and the sound that will magnetize and turn the senses within. What do you think about this path?

There is nothing new in it. It is a branch of *yogic* discipline. *Nāda*, the soundless sound, has been mentioned in many ancient scriptures with the method to hear it. There is a tendency for some people to take out a particular technique or method from the ancient inspired scriptures and start their own separate sect. *Anāhata* sound is that sound which is not produced by friction. It is going on everywhere within and without. One can hear it if one goes very deep within oneself or even if one concentrates deeply on any object. It is very magnetic and when you hear it, it absorbs your attention with the result that your mind becomes totally detached from the outside world.

Difference between *bhakti* and *jñāna yoga*

The goal of a *bhakta* and a *jñānī* is the Realization of the Divine, who is at once within and without, immanent as well as transcendent. The difference is only in their approach. In the path

of *bhakti yoga*, the heart, love and emotion play the most prominent roles and *buddhi* (intellect) plays the role of an assistant, while in *jñāna yoga* it is just the opposite. In *jñāna yoga*, *buddhi*, the analysing and reflecting faculty, plays the prominent role and the heart the role of an assistant.

Haṭha yoga can be practised as a part of sādhanā

I started practising haṭha yoga and I found it very helpful.

Haṭha yoga can be practised as one part of sādhanā. I have seen that most people who practise haṭha yoga do not even know the real aim of what they are doing. It just becomes like a circus. Haṭha literally means persistence. Some people stand in chilly water, some sit under the scorching sun, some stand up for years and years without sitting or sleeping. It is haṭha yoga. Practising many types of āsanās is also a part of haṭha yoga. It is better than doing no sādhanā at all.

The ways of ascent and descent in the different yogas

In the West there are many people who are strongly involved in haṭha yoga with lots of tapas, while their ego is still quite strong. I can't imagine that all of that energy has been a waste. You emphasize the fact that for sādhanā one must have strong willpower, which many times is associated with a strong ego. What is the way for those people?

The purpose and aim of a seeker determines his or her way of *sādhana*. The aim of *haṭha yoga* is also Self-Realization. Practice of postures and *prāṇāyāma* and subsequent control over one's body and *prāṇa* are prominent in *haṭha yoga*.

Ego is there in everyone. Some use their ego for constructive purposes while others are used by their ego. A fit body and a purified and stable mind are great assets for the seeker of Truth. You know how the body of Sri Rāmakṛṣṇa and J.Kṛṣṇamurti suffered during the period of their *sādhana*. There are certain states of mind, connected with intense devotion or intense dispassion, in which the divine energy becomes extraordinarily active, and then it needs a very strong and fit body to bear them. *Haṭha yoga* helps to prepare the body to contain the impact of certain spiritual experiences. But if the spiritual aim and purpose is not clear to one who is practising *haṭha yoga*, it is nothing more than gymnastics. Every light bulb has a wire of particular resistance. If a current of five hundred volts passes through a bulb that is made to bear the current of two hundred and twenty volts, the bulb fuses; it does not give light any more.

Sādhana prepares you to bear the impact of the divine energy when it manifests in you. Therefore, do not be in a hurry. Prepare yourself so that you can bear the impact of the divine energy when it descends upon you, or when it is aroused in you. Do you know how many seekers trying to awaken their *kuṇḍalini* become mental cases?

Is there some difference between the energy that descends upon us and the one that arises in us?

It is the same thing told in two different ways. The divine energy is manifest in the universal supreme Being. It is not manifest in

the individual, the *jīva*, but it is there hidden in the soul. The Divine may come to you, or you may go to the Divine, the result is the same: communion.

There are two ways of *sāadhanā*. The way of ascent is called *ārohaṇa* and the way of descent is called *avarohaṇa*. In the way of *avarohaṇa*, calling the Divine incessantly from the core of one's heart is the basic factor. In the way of *ārohaṇa*, the seeker tries to arouse the divine Power hidden in him or in her by will and self-effort. The experiences in these different ways are different. In the path of ascent you feel your body becoming light and your vital energy rising from the *mūlādhāra* to the higher centres in the body. In the path of descent (*avarohaṇa*) you may feel the pressure on the *sahasrāra* centre in the head and sometimes feel your body becoming heavier.

You can read Aurobindo for the *avarohaṇa* path (descent). He has discussed this path in detail. *Japa* is used in both paths, as is meditation. But the *mantras* are different and the method of meditation is also different.

There is no doubt that the ultimate Experience and Realization are the same; *bhakti* is the way of *avarohaṇa*. *Haṭha yoga*, *rāja yoga* and *jñāna yoga* are the parts of *ārohaṇa* (ascent). There is also a synthesis of these two paths. They are not paradoxical in essence. The path of ascent is the path of *saṅkalpa*, the path of will and effort. The path of descent is the path of *samarpaṇa*, the path of self-surrender and devotion.

In jñāna, is there also the experience of ascent? I thought it was the opposite.

Jñāna yoga is the path of self-effort. However, making effort for God-Realization is not forbidden in the path of *bhakti*. What

is most important in the path of *bhakti* is to have faith and trust in God. In the path of *jñāna yoga* you may have faith in God or you may not have it, still you can follow the path.

Many sages say that in kaliyuga the way of kuṇḍalini is not suitable.

Yes, the *kuṇḍalini yoga* is arduous. You don't find the teachers of *kuṇḍalini yoga* who are expert, who have themselves successfully practised this *yoga*. There is very strict discipline in it, which the modern man seeking comforts and conveniences cannot follow. The environment is also not conducive. If you don't practise this *yoga* strictly and in a proper way, you invite disease, both physical and mental.

The “doer” according to different *yogas*

If we have no mission and if everybody is suffering according to his or her karma, what is the use of sevā or karma yoga?

Karma yoga means working without a mission. *Sevā* means service performed out of love, and not with a mission. The cause of suffering is not *karma* directly, but “being a doer.”

Lord Kṛiṣṇa says, “One whose soul is deluded with ego takes himself or herself to be a doer, saying, ‘I am the doer.’” A *bhakta* says, “God is the doer, I don't do anything.” A *jñānī* says, “It is *Prakṛiti*, the composite of three qualities (*rajas*, *sattva* and *tamas*) that is the doer. I am the non-doer, the non-enjoyer, the Seer, the unmoved and immovable Spirit.” The *karma yogī* acts without the sense of being a doer. He or she can only do *karma yoga* either on the basis of *bhakti* or on the

basis of *jñāna*. Without the support of consummation of *bhakti* or the consummation of *jñāna*, true *karma yoga* is not possible.

What do you mean by consummation?

Consummation means the ultimate height.

How is it possible to act without the sense of doership?

To be the non-doer of an action there are two attitudes, of which either one has to be continuously practised by the seeker according to his or her path:

First, God is the doer. I am only His instrument. Howsoever He moves me, I move. Not only that, you have also to think again and again that God is not moving only you, He is moving everyone and everything. He moves everything, while Himself remaining unmoved. Aristotle used the phrase “the Unmoved Mover” for God.

Second, all the actions and activities are being conducted by the three qualities of *Prakṛiti* (Nature): *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamoguna*. It is *Prakṛiti* that does everything. I am the *Puruṣha*, the Seer. *Prakṛiti* is the doer, *Puruṣha* is the Seer. This is the *Sāṅkhya* School of thought. One has to reflect upon this principle again and again and take oneself to be the non-doer.

Different paths, one destination

Is it a must to follow a tradition?

If you do not follow a tradition, you are like a person who is making his or her own path to come out of a dense forest. There

are so many footpaths in the forest on which many people have walked and come out of the forest. You can follow any path or you may endeavour to cut the bushes, etc., to make a new path. After you have gone out of the forest, the tradition ceases. You have left the path of the forest behind and are now in the open, seeing your goal with your open eyes. Even when you are in the open, the paths may differ because all individuals are not standing at the same place. When you reach the destination the path ceases, all the paths merge there.

1. Bhakti Yoga **The Path of Love and Devotion**

Love cannot suffer separation

Why do butterflies fly into the flame?

Very simple: because the butterfly loves the flame and love cannot suffer separation. It is natural for a butterfly to fly into the flame and merge with it.

But that is self-destruction.

It is not self-destruction. It is self-sacrifice to be united with one's beloved. Jesus said: "Die and come to life." To find the Beloved virtually means to lose oneself.

What type of lover of God are you?

If you prefer convenience and ease to the search for Truth, how can you find Truth? Even in an ordinary love relationship, the lover makes so many sacrifices for the beloved. The lover may even risk his life for the sake of the beloved. What type of lover of God are you?

It reminds me of a story of a fake lover. A lover wrote a long love-letter to his or her beloved: “Enough is enough. I cannot live without you now even for a single moment. Whatever I see, your face comes in front of my eyes. I cannot read, I cannot talk to anyone, I can do nothing. I am virtually dying every moment to meet you . . .” A very long and emotional love letter. Lastly the lover wrote, “I will meet you tomorrow at such and such place at 6 p.m., provided the weather is clear and there is no rain.”

Deep love for God

How can my mind be constantly absorbed in God? Kindly do help me in this respect.

Your mind can remain constantly absorbed in God when you are in deep love with God. You constantly remember someone or something you are in utter need of. Until and unless one has such deep love for God, one should try to remember Him through the practice of *japa* and contemplation.

Love is more powerful than sacrifice

What does sacrifice mean? What do I have to sacrifice for Self-Realization?

The lover sacrifices his or her self-interest for the beloved. A mother can jump in a river to save her child, at the risk of her own life. She can suffer wilfully to make her child happy and comfortable. The seeker of Truth/God can make any sacrifice for the sake of God. The seeker can enjoy suffering for God. What makes you suffer? If you lose your watch, you suffer. If someone snatches your watch, you suffer more, but if you give your watch wilfully to someone, it does not hurt you at all; it may give you joy to do so. Sacrifice is not the proper word. In regard to what you give to your Beloved/God, the proper word is "consecration." The word "sacrifice" implies that you are giving up something that is dearer to you than the person to whom you are giving that thing. The word "sacrifice" makes it sound as if you are doing a very good action; it may swell your ego. You may say, "Oh, I have sacrificed this and this thing for A, B or C." It means the thing was more important to you than A, B or C. The householders should first learn to make a sacrifice for their brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, husband and children. Slowly and gradually they can widen their field of sacrifice to include other people.

Does sacrifice accompany love?

Sacrifice is natural in love. You don't feel any difficulty in sacrificing anything for your beloved. The same is the case with God. When you fall in love with God, you can make the biggest sacrifice for the sake of God. You can even give up your life for Him. But such love for God is very, very rare. A Jesus or a Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, or a Ramaṇa Maharṣhi is a very rare phenomenon.

Love is in you

Beloved Gurudeva, tell us how to love God.

Love is in you. It is directed to the temporal world, its things, situations and relationships. When your mind stops flowing in the direction of the world, it starts flowing to the Divine. The same energy that becomes worldly love is transformed into divine Love. The energy to accomplish *sādhanā* comes to a seeker from the love he or she has for the Divine. Love is a great power. Even the ordinary love of a lover for his or her beloved in this world gives so much strength to the lover that he or she can joyfully make any sacrifice for the sake of the beloved. The lover can give up anything for the beloved.

In Sufism they say that there is *Ishqa Hakīkī* and *Ishqa Mijāzī*. *Ishqa Mijāzī* is the love of one human being for another human being. *Ishqa Hakīkī* is the love of a human being for the Divine, the infinite and eternal Consciousness, which people call by different names.

Divine Love transforms one's whole personality

What is the role of emotions on the spiritual path?

Emotions, like desires, should not be suppressed, nor should they be indulged in blindly. They have to be purified, sublimated and directed to Self-Realization. Emotions consume a lot of energy; they can destabilise the personality when they are violent. They have to be divinised before they can be transcended completely. Pleasure caused by an emotion brings frustration when it ends.

One has to remain balanced and unaffected in the situations that bring up emotions. What is the aim and purpose of your life?

The purpose of my life is to experience divine Love.

When divine Love is the purpose of life and one sincerely lives for it, it transforms one's whole personality, including desires, emotions, thinking, intentions, actions, beliefs and concepts. Then the emotions and desires don't create problems and obstacles; on the contrary, they become instruments for a happy, independent and blissful life.

Mahābhāva

What does mahābhāva mean?

Mahābhāva is the state of divine ecstasy. When one is in the state of *mahābhāva*, one is possessed by divine emotion so much so that one forgets one's body. The body becomes charged with divine emotion, so much so that if someone touches that body he or she also becomes possessed by that divine emotion. It is one type of *samādhi*. Usually those saints go into *mahābhāva* who follow the path of devotion.

Chaitanya Mahāprabhu once went to the beach to take his bath when he was staying in Jagannātha Purī. When he was in the water, seeing the blue water of the sea, he went into the state of *mahābhāva* (the complexion of Kṛṣṇa, his *Iṣṭa*, is also blue) and lost control over his body. A wave came and carried his body out to sea. Then his body was swept away and taken many kilometres away on the bank where a fisherman had spread

a fishing net in the water to catch fish. Mahāprabhus’s body was caught in this fishing net. The fisherman felt that something very heavy had come into the net. So he took the net out and found a human body trapped in it. He pulled out the net and started to take the body out from the net. As soon as he touched the body, he started chanting “Kṛiṣṇa, Kṛiṣṇa,” and he also became mad in the love of Kṛiṣṇa. The other fishermen rushed to him and said, “What has happened to you?” He said, “I have simply touched this body and the love of Kṛiṣṇa has seized me.”

To love others in the name of God

What does it mean to love a person in the name of God?

To love a person in the name of God means that you believe all beings come out of God – as two brothers love each other because they are sons of the same father and mother. Similarly, you accept the relationship of love with others because you come from the same source from which others come. And that ultimate source is your Beloved. You love all others who come from your Beloved. For example, you fall in love with me. So, naturally, you will give respect and love to anyone who is related to me, which means you love them in my name or through me.

Have you heard the love-story of Laila and Majnu – an Arabic story? They were lovers to the extent that they remembered each other all the time. Once Majnu was seen kissing the face of a dog. The people said, “Are you mad? The dog is not your pet dog. It seems very strange that you kiss the face of this dog.” Majnu replied, “This dog sometimes visits the home of my beloved Laila, so he is very dear to me. I enjoy kissing him because he is often going to the home of my

beloved.” Have you ever felt as much love for God as Majnu felt for Laila? Laila was not a beautiful girl. People asked Majnu, “Why have you fallen in love with such an ugly girl?” Majnu would reply, “Please, see Laila with my eyes.” Laila was not beautiful but Majnu could fall in love with her. God is most beautiful and sweet and yet you don’t fall in love with Him. It is really very strange. You fall in love with the shadows and when they go away, you repent and curse your destiny and God.

Difference between love and compassion

What is true compassion? Is there a difference between love and compassion?

True compassion comes from within. It is like the fragrance of a flower. It does not depend upon suffering. It is present even if no one is there to receive it. It is like grace. Love is more intimate than compassion. I cannot express it.

Distinction between love and attachment

What does “to love” mean and how to transcend love?

Love is not an act. It is a state of mind in which the lover feels oneness with his or her beloved and vice versa. The stronger this feeling is in the lover and the beloved, the deeper the love is between them. In its consummation love unites the lover and the beloved. Love is the panacea of all maladies. Love has not to be transcended. It has to be realized. It is attachment that has to

be gotten rid of. You must distinguish between love and attachment. Selfishness is at the core of attachment. It brings dependence and suffering in the long run. Selflessness and self-giving is the basis of love. Love is selfless while attachment is always based on selfishness. Attachment seeks pleasure. Love expresses joy and turns into love for God in the long run.

Then, the love for one person is a selfish love?

If you love a person in the name of God and have no self-interest in it, it cannot be attachment. That person only makes you remember the Divine. With what motive you become related with a person will determine whether you grow in love or attachment. If your relationship with a person is based on material considerations, it cannot be called love. If it is only to have sensual pleasures, it may not result in real closeness and unity between the two persons. Both would be exploiting or blackmailing each other for their selfish desires. The word love is the most misused word in the world.

Why can't I always be in the state of love?

Love manifests when attachment subsides. Attachment and hatred are the two sides of the same coin. More often than not, the attachment changes into hatred when the selfishness of the one who is attached is not realized or fulfilled.

Though selfish in the beginning, doesn't the love for a person grow into selfless love with time?

Even the love of a devotee for God is not selfless in the beginning, but slowly and gradually the relationship becomes more and more

refined and with the inner growth of the devotee the love becomes more and more selfless.

Divine Love is the longing of the finite for the Infinite

Does attachment to God happen through the five senses?

That is the difference between love and attachment, between *prem* and *rāga*. *Prem* is selfless, *rāga* is based on selfishness. Divine Love is called *anurāga*. It is not based on the senses or mind. It comes from the depth of the *Ātmā*. It indicates the total unity of the devotee and the Divine. It transcends human love. Divine Love is the longing of the finite for the Infinite, the longing of the part to merge in the whole. Love for the Divine is not confined to human love. It spreads to all the animate and inanimate beings and things in the name of the Divine. You become whatever you love. If you love your Guru, you will ultimately reach and realize the level of consciousness in which your Guru is established.

Love for a realized saint leads to love for God

How can one fall in love with God?

People ask, “How can you fall in love with someone whom you have not seen or whom you do not know?” It is true that it cannot be explained logically. But the fact remains that many saints fell in love with God and spent their whole lives in search of God. Some could realize Him, some could not do so in one life. Usually

you fall in love with a God-man before you fall in love with God. In my own case, when I fell in love with Bābājī (Bābā Bhūman Shāhjī) I did not know anything about God nor did I want to see or realize God in the beginning. My love for God was born of my love for Bābājī. We see some persons become very much interested in religion and God in their early years even though their parents may not be so inclined. It is obvious that they have inherited this aspiration, or love for God, from their past lives.

Love for God is inherent in all persons

Does the ability to love God depend upon prārabdha?

Love for God does not depend upon *prārabdha*. *Prārabdha* is a *karma*, a past *karma* and every *karma* is in time and space, and is therefore limited. If God or love for God were the fruit of any action, it would not be infinite and all consuming. Love for God is inherent in all persons but it manifests only in pure hearts.

God is in everyone, but is it possible that I have been forgotten by Him? In my head, I believe deeply that He exists, but I am not able to meet Him.

You have not been forgotten by God, even though you may have forgotten Him. Keep God in your head as well as in your heart. Let Him be the, “Be All and End All” of your life. Live for Him and Him alone and you will be able to meet Him. To believe in the existence of God is not enough. You have to fall in love with Him. He is very sweet and loving. He loves you more than anyone else can love you.

True love does not wax and wane

How does one get over the fear of opening the heart?

What do you mean by opening the heart? Do you mean the opening of the physical heart by an operation? Well, why should you be afraid of opening the heart? The opening of the heart brings joy and peace. If the heart is closed, one cannot feel the warmth of love. People want their hearts to be open. They pray, they meditate, they practise breathing exercises, they try many methods to get their hearts opened, and you are afraid of it. It is strange! If your heart is opened, what do you think will happen to you? Perhaps, you are misinformed about the opening of the heart. You seem to have some misunderstanding about it. Are you afraid of love?

No, but when love comes and then leaves, it is painful.

It means you are not afraid of love, but you are afraid of losing love. To be afraid of love and to be afraid of losing love are not the same thing. The true Love does not wax and wane. It is divine in nature. It is of the quality of timeless Consciousness.

How to enjoy your practice

How can I attain the state where the mind is lost in contemplation? When I sit in meditation my mind is only wandering here and there.

If one only practises a technique or method to progress in one's *sādhana*, one becomes a technician. One should add love to the

technique while using it. Then the quality of *sādhanā* is changed. The seeker of the Divine is more like an artist and less like a technician. Dive deep within yourself with the aspiration to see your Beloved, which is God/Truth for the seeker.

Guru Nānak was not a technician. He was a lover. He was a God-intoxicated man. He was always in communion with the Divine. He attained this constant state of communion with the Divine through the unceasing repetition of God's name. Should you add love and devotion to your *sādhanā*, then your *sādhanā* will become sweet and enchanting for you. Cultivate the love of the Divine in your heart. Have a deep and sincere aspiration to realize the Divine, and then you will enjoy your *sādhanā* more. If you have a good appetite you enjoy your food more.

When you associate the Divine with your action it is transformed into *bhakti*

What does it mean to dedicate the fruit of action to God?

To act without worrying about the result is one thing. It is the first step, but to dedicate the result to the Divine adds a new dimension to the action. By doing so you not only stop worrying about the result, but through that action you also start remembering the Divine. When you associate the Divine with your action, the action is transformed into the worship of God, into *bhakti*.

In the path of devotion common sense has no place

How to deal with such situations where common sense is not to be used?

In the path of devotion, common sense has no place. Devotees come, wash the feet of the saints and drink that water. What is the common sense in doing that? It is hygienically not good. It may give you some serious infection and you may even die!

There is a holy place (Lourdes) in France, where there is a spring. It has been found that the hopeless patients, who have been sent back by competent doctors as fatal cases, go there and, in some cases, they have been cured after taking a bath. Science has not been able to explain it. There have been many cases such as when a plane crashed, three hundred people died but one was saved. It cannot be explained how one was saved. The plane falls down not from fifteen meters but from two thousand meters. There is a saying in Islam. When you enter a mosque, the place of God, “Keep your wisdom behind in your shoes which you leave outside.” Not only common sense but also wisdom!

God loves, but people don't respond

If God loves us, why didn't He create us as loving devotees?

God loves, but people don't respond positively. They turn their backs on God. How many people in the world live for God? Rāmakṛṣṇa used to say, “I see many people who weep for the world, but no one weeps in the love of God.” Have you ever noticed that when a mother cannot see her child, she feels agonized and weeps? Or when a mother meets her child after being separated from him for many years, tears of joy come from her eyes? There are few, very rare persons, who weep for God. Have you ever wept in His love?

Is it possible to love when we are experiencing great suffering?

Suffering loses its bite when you are in the state of love. The lover can even enjoy suffering for the sake of his or her beloved and vice versa. Love is not an emotion, though it can express itself as an emotion. It is very, very deep and pertains to the proximity of the soul. It is emotion that rises and subsides. Love is ever fresh.

The secret of enthusiasm in *sādhana*

Love is the salt of *sādhana*. It makes the *sādhana* tasty.

What do you mean by this?

Love for God generates the love for *sādhana* to realize God. One's sincerity in and commitment to *sādhana* is the measure of one's love for God. Whatever you love, you want to have it, you want to realize it, you want to be always with it and for that you devise methods, you do whatever you can to meet your beloved. The love for God and the love for *sādhana* to realize God are very deeply related.

*What do you mean by "commitment to *sādhana*"?*

Commitment to Self-Realization or commitment to realize God.

Isn't the Self of the seeker the same as God?

It is the same for one who has realized the oneness of the seeker and the Sought, the lover and the Beloved/God. For others it is

only a statement of Truth. If a man sitting in the dark says that the sun is the source of light or that light dispels darkness, he is making a true statement and yet he is not enjoying the light of the sun. If you feel joy in believing it, how much joy you will have when you realize it!

To love human beings you have to give up your ego

I have the displeasing feeling sometimes that I love animals and nature more than human beings. How to love all and everything equally?

It is far easier to love animals and nature. In dealing with animals and nature, you don't need to mortify your ego. They don't resist you and your ego, so you find yourself easily compatible with them, and you call it love. To love human beings, you have to give up your ego. That is the problem for the ego, the ego-problem.

“You alone can say whether or not you love God, but certain it is that He does love you. Though you need Him, yet you do not remember Him; though He needs you not, in anyway, in any manner, He never forgets you. This shows His supreme sweetness as also your great misfortune, for thus, you surely miss that bliss which is found in His remembrance.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Prayer

To seek the help of the supreme Power

What is surrender and to what extent is it useful for Realization?

Man has many limitations. He is not perfect. He cannot be perfect. His body and mind are governed by many laws that man cannot transgress. He may reach the moon, he may invent very sophisticated instruments, and he may make incredible discoveries, yet his knowledge and power always remain limited. As a handicapped person seeks the help of other people, similarly those who believe in the existence of a supreme conscious Power seek the help of that Power to achieve their aim and purpose. The seekers of Truth also seek the help of the supreme divine Power in their efforts to realize the Truth. It is only through the most sincere effort, aided and supplemented by divine grace that a seeker can realize the Truth. So the devotees take refuge in the Divine and pray regularly for His grace.

The Divine is your real need

Often I forget to pray. Is it due to arrogance or pride?

Do you also forget to have your lunch sometimes? You cannot forget a thing that you are constantly in need of. You forget prayer because you still do not know what your real need is. The real need of each and every person is lasting happiness. Real happiness comes from the Realization of the Divine. There is no

other alternative. The Divine is your real need. Prayer means invoking the Divine and divine grace. If you forget prayer it means you have forgotten your real need. Can a thirsty man forget water? Can a hungry man forget food?

Prayer changes with the level of consciousness

Prayer is of many kinds. It changes with the level of consciousness of the seeker. Devotion also is of many kinds. It is the by-product of love. Some people are devoted to their parents, some to their wives or girlfriends and some others to the Divine. Commitment accompanies devotion. Those who are committed to Self-Realization are also devoted persons. Shaṅkarāchārya defined devotion as the deep aspiration to realize one's divinity. The realized one does not need to pray. Those who feel that they cannot realize the Truth by their self-effort alone, and those who also have faith in the personal God, need to pray.

It is difficult for me to pray because I see duality in prayer. What shall I do?

If you have realized the non-dual and feel no difference at all between you and the Divine, the question of prayer does not arise for you. The question of prayer arises when you feel or become aware of limitations or obstacles that you cannot remove with your self-effort. You then pray for help from the supreme Power, if you believe in the existence of a supreme Power. When you pray, you feel a sort of duality; do you feel duality in your other dealings (when you are not praying) and actions? For example, when you ask a question or when you become angry with someone or attached to something, do you feel duality or not?

Prayer is a part of *sādhana*

I am standing at the door and requesting Bhagavāna to please come in. How is it possible for God to enter if we do not leave the door? Is it not necessary for a sādhanika to stop requesting, praying or any sort of thoughts while trying to concentrate?

When you pray to God for His *darshan*, it does not mean that you are standing in the middle of the doorway through which God has to come in. It is the ego that is the obstacle. Prayer only attracts the grace of God because prayer humbles the ego. The more a prayer is passive, the more effective it becomes. Prayer is a part of *sādhana*. It has its own place. Silent meditation has its own place in *sādhana*. What does *sādhika* mean? *Sādhika* means one who aspires for the Realization of Truth and undertakes some sort of *sādhana* to realize what he aspires for. According to your theory, the aspiration should stop; otherwise it would be “like standing in the middle of the doorway from which God has to come in.” Prayer is like fire. As fire subsides by itself after burning the wood, similarly prayer ceases by itself after the ego is destroyed. Ego cannot be destroyed at once. It has to first be purified and sublimated and directed to the Divine. Once it comes in contact with the Divine, it vanishes.

While we are sitting in meditation, should we not ask for His darshan but only be involved in meditation?

Neither is prayer a doing, nor is meditation a doing. Both are states of a purified mind. Both have their own place in *sādhana*. When you request *darshan* from God, you are simply expressing

the state of your mind, your aspiration in words. You cannot force God or any sage to give His vision. You can only pray and wait. If you do not feel the need for prayer and you can stop the thinking process by self-effort alone, without invoking the grace of God, there is no need for you to pray. Self-effort is in time, how can you realize by self-effort “That” which is beyond time and space? Some power-consciousness from above is required to intervene in one’s *sāadhanā* to take the *sādhaka* beyond. Self-effort is the beginning; surrender is the end. Prayer in its consummation turns into self-surrender.

What is passive prayer?

A prayer is most passive when there is no sense of “I” in the prayer. It involves complete self-denial and embodies the complete assertion of God.

There are four kinds of devotees according to their different kinds of relationship with God

Devotional practice brings dissolution into the Divine, while petitional prayer is made to get something. Is there a contradiction if we pray to Hanumān for the power to dissolve?

Hanumān is the heart of Lord Rāma. Devotees worship and pray to Hanumān to bless them with unconditional devotion for Rāma and His *darshan*. The invocation of Hanumān’s grace removes obstacles on the path of God-Realization. Petition, intercession and expressing gratitude to the Divine are the three grades of prayer.

I have had experiences of peace and love that I would call God. In those moments, it is clear that God is in me as well as in all other persons or things. Why should I call on an external God for help?

For the sake of argument, even if there is no God, prayer is useful. Someone has said that even if there is no God, He should be created so that man can aspire for something that is infinite and lasting. Do you want nothing? If you don't want anything, there is no need for you to believe in God or make any prayer.

In the *Gītā* Lord Kṛiṣṇa says that there are four kinds of devotees:

1. *Ārtta* is one who asks like a beggar. It is those who pray to God and remember Him to get rid of their pain or suffering.
2. *Arthārthī* is one who bargains, who does something and asks in return. It is those who remember God in the hour of distress.
3. *Jijñāsu* is one who aspires only for God and prays, and practises. It is those who invoke the grace of God for Self-Realization; they are the sincere seekers.
4. *Jñānī* is one who has realized God and remembers Him, and loves Him in the experience of being one with Him. It is those who love God without any reason. Their love is unconditional. They have realized God as their true Being. Why do you love yourself? You love yourself without any reason. The *jñānī* loves God because he has realized that God is his own Self.

The prayer we say here before meditation contains the qualities of the first three. In the next *śloka*, Kṛiṣṇa says that all these devotees are dear to Him, but the *jñānī* is His own *Ātmā*.

Difference between flattery and adoration

There is a difference between flattery and adoration. Adoration is a sort of admiration. When you feel God's presence, you cannot but admire Him. When you say your beloved is very beautiful, are you flattering your beloved? Flattery involves selfishness on the part of the one who is flattering. Adoration is spontaneous and selfless. Flattering God is not bad. It is better than flattering your wife or something which is not lasting. If you want something by saying so, it is flattery. If you say it out of love and knowledge, but without any asking, it is adoration. Prayer has many stages. At a certain stage, it turns from asking into gratitude. At its highest stage, there is even no gratitude in it: it becomes the experience of Oneness.

God enjoys the prayers of his innocent devotees

Can we hear the voice of God?

It is not so easy to hear the voice of God. It takes years and years even for the advanced *yogīs* to hear the voice of God. You hear the voice of God when all the voices of your mind and ego have stopped during the wakeful state, when your mind is completely purified, silent and open.

Moses heard the voice of God only a few times during his life. Here is a story. Moses was travelling on a mountain. He saw a shepherd praying: "O God, if you come to me, I will give you a very good bath. I will take the lice out of your hair. I will give you the milk of my best goat to drink." When Moses heard the boy praying in such a way, he rebuked him and said, "What are

you saying? You are insulting God by praying like this. First, God has no form, no physical body to come to you. Second, He cannot be so dirty as to have lice in His hair like you. Moreover, He is providing food to all the beings in the universe. He does not need the milk of your goat.” The boy was frightened and stopped praying. Then Moses heard the voice of God saying, “I have sent you to persuade people to pray to Me, but you are stopping a boy who has been praying to Me with deep faith and love. What are you doing? The boy is innocent, he is praying from his heart. I am very pleased to hear his prayer and I am not so much pleased to hear My praises from scholars, because their calling is mostly intellectual.” Then Moses apologized to the boy and told him to continue to pray as he was doing.

It does not matter how you pray to God. What matters is that the prayer should come out from the depth of your heart. It should not be confined only to words. You cannot tell what God is. Whatever you pray to God is just like the prattling of a small child who has not yet learnt to speak, but who tries to convey his feelings through incomplete words. Only the child’s mother, with whom the child is trying to communicate, can feel the love of that child. God enjoys the prayers of his innocent devotees. The relationship of a person with God that is based in the heart is much deeper than the relationship that is based on the intellect.

Most people’s prayers are not sincere

Why doesn’t God remove our suffering? Has He no power or does He refuse to do it?

God is always available to help you. He has all the power. But who cares for Him? Who invokes His help and grace? Most

people turn their backs on God. They have more faith in and rapport with their egos, which cause pleasure and pain. Suffering is the result of not being in rapport with God, the Divine. God is not aggressive. He is like the sunlight. If you shut yourself up in a room and close all the windows, the light is not going to break open your windows to reach you. If you open the windows of your room, it is readily available. Even when we pray, our prayers are not sincere. When we are praying, our mind should be inwardly seeking the help of God. But the tongue is repeating the words of prayer and the mind is wandering somewhere else.

A man went to a temple to pray. In the East, when you go in a temple or mosque, you have to leave your shoes outside; you cannot take them in. That man had a new and very expensive pair of shoes. He left his shoes outside and went into the temple, but in his mind fear was lurking that his expensive shoes might be stolen. He started reciting a verse from the scriptures, “O Lord, Thou art my father,” and then looked back to his shoes. His mind was on his shoes though his body was inside the temple. Then he proceeded, “Thou art my mother,” and again looked back to see his shoes, “Thou art my friend, my treasure, my knowledge, my all in all, the God of all gods.” You can understand how he was praying! Most people pray like that man. When your soul is glued to your shoes, how will you invoke the grace of God?

“Whatever is your prayer unto the Lord, offer it with your heart full of love and devotion. Let it be not half-hearted; let it be more and more absorbing. A sincere prayer, though short, is ever so more fruitful.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Self-Surrender

Surrender happens when you have exhausted all your efforts

How to surrender? In “Īshvara praṇidhāna,” does praṇidhāna mean surrender, adoration or devotion?

Īshvara praṇidhāna means surrender to God. It does not mean devotion. Devotion to God and adoration gradually lead to surrender to God. Surrender happens when you have exhausted all your efforts and there is no satisfactory success. Effort involves the ego directly or indirectly because it is the doer who makes effort and the doer is born as a result of the identification of the *Puruṣha* with *Prakṛiti*. The ego has first to be purified before it can be totally eliminated. Remembrance of the Divine, prayer, *japa*, meditation and breathing exercises are the means to purify the ego. Impure ego is the block, the obstacle. Pure ego is the means.

I find it difficult to surrender. What should I do?

Do you think surrender is easier than practice? True self-surrender happens only when you have worked very hard, staking your whole life for a purpose and exhausted all your efforts. If you want to surrender to escape the hardships and difficulties of practice, surrender will not happen at all. *Tamas* and lethargy will overtake you, and you may confound that lethargy with surrender.

There is no contradiction between self-effort and self-surrender

Whatever happens and whatever does not happen is supposed to be determined by God's will or sañkalpa. If it is so, are we only puppets in God's puppet-show? Is there a fine line to distinguish self-effort from divine will?

There is no contradiction between self-effort and self-surrender. Self-surrender is the consummation of self-effort. Resigning to the will of God and inertia are totally different. Resigning to the will of God is purely a *sāttvic* attitude, while inertia and laziness are the working of *tamoguna* in man. It is only self-effort supplemented with prayer and the invoking of God's grace that can lead to Realization. To be a puppet in the hand of God is the most difficult thing for a man because it involves the complete surrender of the ego. The puppet has no will.

Surrender to the Divine is the fruit of unconditional love

Please Swāmījī, can you make me feel deeply what surrender to the Divine is?

Surrender to the Divine is born of the whole-hearted trust in and love for the Divine. Love and trust go together. Where there is love, there is also trust. The highest and deepest love is unconditional. It does not put forth conditions. It is completely selfless. Surrender unto the Divine is the fruit of such unconditional love for the Divine.

There is no other alternative except to submit to God!

Submission to God or to the will of God should be voluntary and full of love. When there is no other alternative and you are forced to submit to God's will, you may even feel pain and uneasiness. When the submission is full of love, it brings joy and transformation. When it is forced, it does not change you. The submission that comes through love has a different quality.

Dynamic surrender means performing actions without self-will, without ego

Sometimes in life we have to act and sometimes we have to surrender. How can I find the balance between the two?

Surrender is a state of mind. It is not inaction or inertia. It is the giving up of self-will. What is required for spiritual progress is dynamic surrender, performing actions without self-will, without ego. It is not so easy. Surrender is the consummation of right self-effort. In the beginning, you should act rightly. That is possible only if you have developed or cultivated right thinking; right thinking is the thinking which is not biased, which is positive, which is in conformity with the teaching of the inspired scriptures and in conformity with the teaching of the enlightened ones.

Surrender means the death of the ego. Surrender is the end of *sādhana*

What does it mean to surrender to a Master? What does one surrender? How does one surrender? How do I know if I succeed in surrendering or not?

Surrender to a Master is a very comprehensive thing. Surrender to someone, in fact, is the consummation of your faith and trust in that person. If your faith and trust in your Master is not total, surrender is not possible, or it can never be lasting. But trust and faith cannot be complete without experience. Surrender means to surrender everything, your mind, your body, your money, your ego, your life, your will, your everything, your whole being — what you are, who you are and what you possess. The one who has really surrendered has no question at all. If you have surrendered your mind, all the questions cease; can you have any question without a mind? In the light of what is written above, you can know if you have succeeded in surrendering or not. It is very easy to speak about the word surrender, but it is the most difficult thing to achieve. Surrender means total love, unconditional love.

Sometimes I am at the point of surrender, but I feel at the same time that I am dying.

Yes, because you are nothing more than an ego at present, therefore you may experience the feeling of death at the time of surrender. Surrender means death of the ego. Your body, your will, your desires, your questions, your problems, your pleasures and pains — all these are the extensions of your ego. The English word surrender is not a good word. Literally it means defeat, but surrender is not defeat. It represents victory over your ego. You can defeat someone, but you cannot make anyone surrender to you because you cannot force anyone to have total faith and trust in you. Surrender, like love, is deliberate. It can never be imposed.

It seems to me easier to believe in a principle rather than a person.

Which principle? That principle may be the creation of your ego also. So, how can it be called surrender? It is an extension of your ego. Surrender is the end of *sādhana*.

Grace

“Who does the Lord bless? How are they blessed, and what are the conditions under which grace descends? This is a secret one cannot know. There are those known to be virtuous, but they are not blessed, and lo, there have been sinners who have received His grace. But I tell you, for me there is not a greater truism than this, that God’s grace is a reality, and that it is undoubtedly shown to individuals.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Grace is always there

What is grace?

The grace of God can be defined as the selfless compassion bestowed by the Almighty on an individual. And it is already there whether the individual can perceive it or not. Grace cannot be defined. Yes, grace is grace. There is no difference between God and God’s grace. They cannot be separated. Can heat be separated from fire? God is everywhere and so is grace. You may or may not feel God or God’s grace, but it is always there. It is not only immanent in time and space, but is also timeless at

the same time. How to receive grace virtually means how to become aware of grace. How do you become aware? Cultivate positivity, alertness, openness, and emptiness. Make room. Don't be like a wall. If you feel your effort is not sufficient, pray, invoke the Divine. Call on Him. Weep for Him. Have you ever wept in separation from Him? Is your separation from Him disturbing your sleep?

"The divine grace accomplishes in the twinkling of an eye that task which human effort cannot in a hundred years. How surprising that even then, man brags about his strength and shirks to pray for divine grace!"

– *Spiritual Gems*

Grace is not aggressive; it comes but finds your doors closed

Grace is readily available to you, but you are not available to grace. God is not aggressive and violent. He will not forcibly convert us. Are we making the best use of what God has given to us by His grace? If not, how are we justified to ask for more of His grace? Grace comes and finds your doors closed. It calls and waits. The door is not opened, and it goes back. Grace will never force open your door. It is you who have to open your door to let grace come in and bless you.

How can I open my door?

You are not willing to open your door. You have many vested interests in keeping your door closed. If you keenly observe, you will be able to see those vested interests of yours.

Can we know the price of God's love or of God's grace?

God's love or grace is freely available but we are not available to it. We are closed. We prefer attachment and pleasure. That is why we cannot receive God's grace and love. God does not impose Himself on you. If and when you are open, you come to discover that He is always with you and in you.

“Mysterious and surprising, indeed, is the way in which God's grace unfolds itself! Its true purpose is to lead man to his “real home” and not to fulfil each and every wish of his in this world. God's grace works even by causing sorrow, bereavement, failure, difficulties and death. For the spiritual edification of an individual, it does not shirk from utilizing these means (i.e., sorrow, bereavement, failure, difficulties and death).”

– *Spiritual Gems*

There are four types of grace

I have learnt that by sitting in the presence of the Master, meditation becomes easier. When the Master blesses the aspirant, his efforts become quick and successful. If it is so, why are we not receiving His grace?

There are four types of grace: the grace of God, the grace of the Guru, the grace of the holy scriptures and the grace of the self of the seeker. When all these graces meet, only then the seeker succeeds in his or her *sādhana*. The grace of the self of the seeker means that the seeker should be very sincere and

totally committed to do *sādhana*. His or her *sādhana* must be according to the instructions of the Guru and in harmony with the teachings of the holy and revealed scriptures. Once, someone said that a disciple should be a practical person and that he or she should not be like an armchair scientist. The Guru who has initiated him or her should be perfect, not only a person of Realization, but one who is a living example for other seekers as well. He should not be only a teacher or a preacher. And, there should be the special grace of God intervening in the *sādhana*.

Should we look for the grace of God?

The grace of God or the grace of the Guru is not to be found. It has to be received. The giving of grace depends upon God, but the receiving of grace depends upon the disciple.

“The grace of the Divine is of paramount importance in all the spiritual efforts for God-Realization. Without divine grace, it is impossible to realize the Truth first hand. Blessed indeed are the seekers who conduct their sādhana with the spirit of self-surrender unto the Divine.”

– *Mirror of Bliss*

Grace is received in an empty and receptive mind

Could you please talk to us about the import of prasāda?

Prasāda literally means *kripā*. What is *kripā*? *Kripā* or *prasāda* means grace given without any selfish motive and in the state of bliss and selfless love. When we offer something to someone who

is of a higher status than us, it is not *prasāda* as usually mistakenly called. It is *naivedya*. To express our good will and happiness to someone, when we give even one toffee to someone, it is *prasāda*. It may be one toffee or one billion rupees, it does not matter. Or it may be spiritual blessings. For a child, a toffee is a great blessing. If you offer Īshā (a two-year-old child) one hundred dollars or a toffee, she would prefer the toffee.

Does one have to do something or be in a certain state in order to deserve prasāda?

What one receives as a result of doing an action is in accordance with the law of justice, but grace is not the result of any action. Grace is received in a state of no thoughts, in an empty and receptive mind. It cannot be achieved by force. *Kripā* can only be felt; it cannot be described.

2. Jñāna Yoga The Path of Knowledge

What is *jñāna yoga*?

Analytical thinking is a part of *jñāna yoga*. Shaṅkarāchārya is regarded as the greatest exponent of *Advaita Vedānta*. He has systematised the *jñāna yoga*, the path of knowledge, in his book, “*Viveka Chūḍāmaṇi*,” which represents the essence of his teachings. In the terminology of *Advaita Vedānta*, there are two terms used for the highest and ultimate goal of human life. These terms are, “*Nitya prapta kī prāpti*,” and, “*Nitya nivṛitta kī*

nivṛitti.” The first can be translated in English as, “The attainment of That which is already attained,” that is, our true Nature, the *Ātmā*.” The second means, “The abandonment of that which is already abandoned,” that is, the abandonment of that which never existed — the world.

There was a Saint, Nishchala Dāsa, who was a contemporary of Tulasīdāsa, the author of Tulasīdāsa’s Rāmāyaṇa. He wrote a book on *Advaita Vedānta*, “*Vichāra Sāgara*,” in Hindi and proved logically in it that the true Self is already *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. He has referred to these two Hindi terms, which are now very popular in *Vedānta*. In the olden times, all the saints, when they started to write a book, they would, first of all, salute (make *prāṇama*) to their personal God. Even Shaṅkarāchārya would do it. But Nishchal Dāsa, when starting to write this book on *advaita* said in the beginning, “To whom should I do *prāṇama*? Because, no one except my Self exists?” This book is totally based on logic and reasoning. In it, he has given very deep and intricate logical arguments to prove *advaita* and disprove all the other systems of *dvaita*. It is not easy to understand his book unless you have first studied the scriptures of higher logic, “*tarka shāstra*.”

God is the ground of all existence; names and forms change

A few years ago, after doing the sādhanā of trying to see everything as an illusion, I felt as if I was taken by a very, very strong energy and I could see that everything was this energy; only the forms were different. At that moment I realized that I too was His energy, as the flower, the colour, etc. I became scared that I would disappear. Now I try to see God everywhere, but it is very difficult for me.

To think again and again that everything is an illusion and not real generates detachment, *vairāgya*. All the names and forms are unreal. They appear and disappear. But what assumes the names and forms is the energy, the primordial force, the *ādi-shakti*. So, your experience of feeling that energy was quite consistent with your *sādhanā* of thinking again and again that the world of names of forms was an illusion.

Why did you become scared of this experience? It shows you are identified with your present form so much so that when the form disappears, you feel as if you are dying. This experience comes also when the mind is disappearing or thoughts are completely subsiding, it is because of one's identification with the mind. To try to see God everywhere and in everyone is very good, but it is easier said than done. It is the result of the Realization of the immanent aspect of the Divine. Unless that Realization happens, it is not possible to see God everywhere and in everyone. There is no contradiction in thinking that all names and forms are unreal and thinking that God is everywhere. God is the ground of all existence. The names and forms change, but the substance, the substratum that supports all names and forms is the same "Is-ness." You can reconcile both of these ways in your *sādhanā*.

Knowledge and knowledge

All senses are the instruments of knowledge (relative knowledge). These senses have their own limitations and so also the knowledge gained by them. The senses deceive a man so often. The eyes show you that the sun is moving, which is wrong. When travelling in a train, you see the trees moving. If you immerse a stick in a glass of water, it looks as if it is bent. It is an optical

illusion. Intellectual knowledge is superior to the knowledge gained through the senses. The intellect has its own utility in *sādhana*. It is not totally useless. As a matter of fact, nothing is useless. Everything or every faculty is to be properly used. The intellect, what we call *buddhi*, is more refined than the senses and the mind. The intellect can help you overcome many superstitions, but there are higher levels of consciousness than what is called intellect. The Knowledge gained through intuition or *samādhi* is superior to the knowledge gained by the intellect. If your attention is fixed on any inner feeling and you forget the outer world, it is a good sign.

Aparā vidyā and parā vidyā

Nowadays, in the West, the main ways of knowledge are science and technology, philosophy and psycho-analysis. Our society discredits all that concerns spirituality.

Science, technology, philosophy and psychoanalysis are useful for raising the material standard of life, as you would call it in the West, but these do not lead to lasting happiness and peace. In *Vedic* terminology they are called *aparā vidyā*.

There is a story in the *Upaniṣhads*. A very advanced seeker goes to the Kumara Brothers and says, “I have studied science, mathematics, psychology, sociology, and all the other sciences thoroughly, but have not found peace. Will you please tell me how I can attain lasting peace?” Then the Kumara brothers teach him spirituality, the Knowledge of *Parabrahman*, the eternal Principle that is the ground of all existence. This Knowledge is called *parā vidyā*, the supreme Knowledge.

Reading Holy Scriptures

Scriptures of Indian Philosophy

Which texts should I read?

Read the six schools of Indian philosophy separately. Then, studying one by one, finally read the *Vedāntic* school. Then you will be able to understand. The first school is *Nyāya*, second is *Vaisheshika*, third is *Sāṅkhya*, fourth is *Yoga*, fifth is *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* and the sixth and final is *Vedānta*.

They are not absolutely different. One is the modification of the other. The final is *Vedānta*. The fifth school, *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*, is mostly *karma kāṇḍa* and ritualistic. You need not read it. It is for the priests who perform rituals.

Is reading such books essential for sādhanā? I feel we already have so many concepts.

If you have metaphysical questions, you need an answer that is metaphysical. So you have to read metaphysics as well. Every seeker does not need to read metaphysics, but some need it.

Isn't it better to experience first, and then read about it?

If you have an experience and cannot interpret it properly and cannot explain it scientifically, you may become superstitious. That is why in religion you find so many superstitions. You have some symbolic experiences of Truth and you may take them to be literally true. In meditation, you may see a horse with four ears,

talking to you on spiritual matters, and declare that God is like a horse with four ears.

“Some count the mangoes, some eat them”

I am reading some books on spirituality and it helps me. Should I dedicate more time to it?

Reading inspiring books is also a part of *sādhanā*, but one should not read too much. Books are like maps; if you are always looking at the maps, you may become knowledgeable, but will not be able to see any of the places. Books may also be compared with a menu. Its purpose is to let you know what delicious preparations are available. But if you start eating the menu, it will not give you any nourishment. There are hundreds and thousands of books on spirituality. If you read all those books, you will have no time to sit in meditation or prayer, or practise any other spiritual exercise. And then you may become confused having read so many theories; your mind will become unstable. You may become lost as it were, in a big forest and will not know which way to move. Read only such books that infuse spiritual interest in you and help you to practise in order to transform your life. Otherwise you will end up becoming a philosopher, or at best, a teacher who has not himself realized anything.

In Hinduism it is said that if you read or hear anything concerning spirituality once, you should reflect upon it ten times, and meditate on it and practise it one hundred times. Only then it helps you on the path of Realization. “Some count the mangoes, some eat them,” Rāmakṛiṣṇa used to say. How many books did Jesus read? How many books did Ramaṇa Maharṣi read?

How many books did Mohammed read? Many of the prophets and great mystics and saints were not scholars nor had they read many books.

Spiritual teachings should be ingrained in our life

I have the wish, within myself, to write such stories which can help others, especially the youth who are in distress. Can you advise me about this desire?

There was an Indian scholar saint, Swāmī Dayānanda, about one hundred years ago. He was a contemporary of Rāmakṛiṣṇa Paramahansa. He was given poison by a *Brahmin* and died. You may call him the Martin Luther of Hinduism. He founded a religious institution called *Ārya Samāj*, which does not believe in idol worship. He wrote commentaries on the four *Vedas*. He is considered as a great reformist in India. Many books have been written on him. He had a devotee, Gurudatta by name. Gurudatta lived with Swāmī Dayānanda for many years.

After Swāmījī died, some other devotees requested Gurudatta to write a biography of Swāmī Dayānanda. They said, “You have been living with the Swāmī for so many years. You have seen him very closely. The biography of Swāmī Dayānandajī written by you would be most authentic.” Gurudatta would just smile and say, “All right, I will do it.” After six-seven years, the devotees again requested him to write the biography. He smiled and said, “If I tell you the truth, I have been continuously writing the biography of Swāmī Dayānanda, my Master on my heart and during my life. I have been trying to ingrain his teachings in my life to my best. I am still doing it. I think this is the best way of writing the biography of my Master.”

3. Karma Yoga

The Path of Selfless Work and Service

“Selfless service is the service rendered quite spontaneously to one and all regardless of caste, creed or color, and without any motive behind it; or it is that type of service that is done in the name of the Lord with the motive of pleasing Him for His sake alone. An action may be as insignificant as, say, that of dusting or sweeping, or as high as freely feeding or teaching the poor; it makes no difference from the spiritual point of view. Selfless service enriches the life of the Spirit as much as meditation and spiritual concentration or worship of God.”

– *Practical Approach to Divinity*

Karma yoga is not an independent path

Karma yoga is not an independent path. It is either based on *bhakti yoga* or *jñāna yoga*.

To give out of love

The highest charity is one that you give out of love and joy without any obligation or sense of duty, and without any expectation of return in any form. The quality of charity is more important than the quantity. When you are being persuaded to give charity, it proves that it is not coming from within you. You give that much which gives you inner joy and delight. If the *shāstras* do not say it, does it mean you should not give in charity? When you eat

butter, you enjoy it. Have you learnt it from the *shāstras*? Jesus said, “When you give with your right hand, your left hand should not know it.”

The real spirit of service

Could you please tell us how to obtain the real spirit of service?

To be a good server, you have to love the person whom you serve as your beloved one. In serving God there is the spirit of love as well as respect for God. But in serving the Beloved, respect and love for the Beloved merge and become one. Let God be your Beloved. The real spirit of service is attained when you love with your whole heart the person you serve. *Karma yoga*, as explained in the *Gītā*, is the way to be absorbed in the love of God while working.

Sevā purifies your heart

How does karma yoga, or sevā, purify one’s mind?

Karma binds. All *karmas*, or actions, prompted by desire bind the soul. Even the virtuous *karmas* prompted by *sāttvic* desire bind the soul, even if they yield pleasurable results. As fire is associated with smoke, similarly all the *karmas* that are prompted by desire are associated with ignorance and bind the soul (says the *Gītā*). To avoid all *karmas* in life is almost as impossible as

to give up all desires. *Karma yoga* is the spiritual field by which the *karmas* do not bind the soul. Instead, the *karmas* performed with spiritual skill help the soul on the path of its spiritual unfoldment.

There are three progressive stages of *karma yoga*. The first stage is that you do the *karma*, as sanctioned by the holy and revered scriptures, with a total mind and alertness and surrender the fruits to the Divine, in all humility, as an offering. In this way the *karma* becomes associated with God and its quality is changed. Do you know, most perfumes are made from the aldehydes and waste of coal-products? *Karma yoga* is the skill of converting the coal of *karmas* into the perfume of divine Awareness.

The second progressive stage is that you perform the *karmas* to please the Divine and get His grace. You are still the doer, but the motive/interest of your *karmas* is completely and radically transformed. Whatever you do, you do it to please your Beloved, who is God, absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss personified.

The third stage is that you lose your ego of doing in the Divine and become the instrument of God. There is no doer left in you. You are like a conscious kite whose string is held by God. Finally, you become God Himself.

Sevā literally means service. If you serve the needy and suffering people out of compassion to alleviate their suffering, it purifies your heart. If you serve someone in the name of God, the service is transformed into devotion to God. Through that service you remember the Divine. The Divine is Purity absolute, Love absolute and Awareness absolute. Should you remember the Divine, your whole personality begins to be purified. Not only

that, an unprecedented stability, strength, peace, awareness and love comes into your life. Service performed in the name of God is worship of God.

Selfless service and the integral approach

Some saints say that sevā (selfless service) is the best way to go to God and purify ourselves. I suppose, Swāmījī, you would say the same thing?

Service performed in the name of God is a means of remembering God, as *japa* is a means of remembering God. Any activity through which God is remembered becomes worship of God. But service in the name of God serves two purposes:

1. It helps the one whom you serve.
2. It enables you to remember the Divine.

In the practice of *japa*, you only remember the Divine. But you can remember the Divine through *japa* with more one-pointedness than you can through service. Meditation also serves the same purpose, but through meditation one can be the most one-pointed in remembering the Divine. The integral approach to spiritual progress involves *sevā*, *japa*, meditation, reflection, reading of inspiring books, etc. One should practise all these in their own right, and at their own time. *Sevā*, selfless service in the name of God, is one part of integral *sādhana* for God-Realization. Through *sevā* the seeker makes the best use of his vital energy on the path of God-Realization.

4. Rāja Yoga of Maharṣhi Patañjali

Aṣṭāṅga yoga

What is rāja yoga?

Rāja yoga is the *yoga* of Patañjali. A very strict discipline of body-mind is a must to stop the thinking process completely. This discipline is mentioned in the *yoga* of Patañjali. It has eight parts, five outer parts and three inner parts: *yama*, *niyama*, *pratyāhāra*, *āsana*, *prāṇayāma*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, *samādhi*. This is called *aṣṭāṅga yoga*, which means eight-limbed *yoga*. For details you should read the book, “*Rāja Yoga*” by Swāmī Vivekānanda. The *rāja yoga* of Patañjali is a very scientific discipline to stop the thinking process and realize the pure Consciousness, which is the Seer, the witnessing Consciousness unlimited by time and space. In *Vedic* terminology it is called the Realization of *Nirguṇa Brahman*.

The practice of rāja yoga associated with bhakti

I have been studying and practising rāja yoga for some time. My life has been transformed by it. But, my heart is and has been for a long time longing for a more devotional approach. Do you have any specific suggestions for developing a devotional bhakti practice from a scientific rāja practice?

True, *rāja yoga* is not very emphatic about devotion to the Lord. In one of the five *niyāmas* of *rāja yoga*, there is one called

Īshvara praṇidhāna meaning surrender to the Divine. But it is taken up only to make the mind calm and quiet. The goal of *rāja yoga* is to attain Liberation. The goal of the path of devotion is to be united with the Divine. In this path, the Divine is the focus of all the *sādhanā* of a devotee. Liberation is not the goal, even though Liberation automatically follows union with the Divine. I always say or suggest to the seeker that he or she must supplement devotion to the Lord with the practice of any technique to tame, subjugate and purify the mind through meditation. Many obstacles on the path of Self-Realization, which cannot be removed by self-effort, are easily removed by invoking the grace of the Divine and devotion to Him.

***Rāja yoga* is a soma psychological discipline**

Is rāja yoga helpful to improve our concentration?

In all *yogas*, all paths, concentration is needed. *Rāja yoga* is a discipline through which you can learn the art of concentration. When you have learned to concentrate through *rāja yoga*, you can follow all the other *yogas* very easily and successfully. *Rāja yoga* is the soma psychological discipline to control the modifications of mind. In the first *sūtra* of *rāja yoga*, this description of *yoga* is clearly given, “*yogaḥ chitta vṛitti nirodhaḥ.*”

Chapter Five

Meditation & Contemplation

“The purpose of spiritual contemplation is to take us beyond the mind to the direct supramental vision of the Divine. The process of perfect contemplation leads us to a strainless and stressless relaxation in the divine Spirit or to an effortless absorption in the Seer which shines in Its pure light in the deep silence, where the mental activities of thinking, willing, knowing and feeling do not exist at all.”

– The Practical Approach to Divinity

Meditation & Contemplation

General Concepts

Meditation means to change the working of one's mind

What is meditation and how to practise it?

It is not difficult to understand what meditation is and how to practise it. We all know and feel that our mind is like a monkey who is always moving from place to place, jumping from one branch of a tree to another. It is at rest only when it is tired and goes to sleep. The mind of man, in the same way, is always moving and thinking of things, situations and persons. It is looking into one's past situations and experiences, or is planning to make one's future more comfortable and convenient. It does not stop even for a moment until sleep overpowers it and it goes into slumber, either dreaming or going into the deep sleep state.

Meditation means to change this mode of working of one's mind. During meditation, this negative thinking has to be completely stopped and the mind has to be pivoted on one thing, i.e. one idea, one feeling or one activity, like breathing. The thing, idea or feeling that one focuses on should, however, be connected with the Divine in one way or the other. It serves two main

purposes. The way mind dissipates its energy is by making undue movement. Also, it gains strength when it is concentrated and becomes aware of the Divine through that thing or idea, or person, thus increasing the awareness. The question is of developing deep interest in meditation and practising regularly.

It is like swimming

In meditation I think more than I repeat the mantra; so, if I meditate regularly in a bad way, will it strengthen my futile desires and thoughts?

What you are doing now is not meditation. You are actually preparing for meditation. In the beginning, you have to refuse the inordinate thoughts and desires, should they come during your practice of meditation. Even the legitimate thoughts and desires have not to be entertained when you are sitting for meditation. It is like swimming. You can learn swimming only when you go into the water and move your arms and legs and struggle to keep yourself on the surface of the water. To learn meditation, you must sit and work to subdue your thoughts and emotions, and struggle to make your mind calm and quiet. You cannot be friendly with anyone whom you take to be your enemy. Can you?

Meditation means to withdraw one's attention from all outer objects, situations, relationships and look within

In our day-to-day activities should we also be in a kind of meditative state?

Withdraw your attention from all the objects, situations, relationships and look within yourself. This is meditation. How can you do it all the time when you cannot do it for one hour? By the practice of regular meditation, your mind turns inward. It stops wandering. Slowly and gradually, you can control your thoughts. Your mind is like a mirror in which you see your face. When the mirror is dirty, you cannot see your face. Similarly, when your mind is moving and not pure, you cannot know who you really are. The purpose of meditation is to purify your mind and stop it from moving.

The personality of one who practises more and more regular and sincere meditation goes on changing with the result that his or her perception of the world also changes accordingly. His reactions to different situations also change. The seeker becomes more and more enlightened, peaceful, relaxed, open, and capable of reaching the Reality in the end. The Reality is always there, unperceived, by those who are always preoccupied with mundane affairs and do not practise any method of meditation, prayer, or make a sincere effort to realize what is real and lasting.

The purpose of meditation is not to think something, but to stop the process of thinking

Situations that I thought I had overcome are again creating strong emotions within me since I am at the āshram. When will all these emotions vanish?

Emotions, when purified, refined, and directed to the Divine are not an obstacle to Realization. They are, on the other hand, an aid. Without emotions, what is the difference between a man and

a stone? The seeker has not to become emotionless, but free from the domination of emotions. This also applies to thinking. Thinking is a great power. But you cannot think a particular thought for more than a few seconds. You have to repeat that thought again and again for years and years continuously. Only then, it starts to transform your life. You have not to be subservient to your emotions and thoughts, but to be the master of them and use them properly, in the right way, at the right place and in the right direction.

The purpose of meditation is not to think something, but to stop the process of thinking. Do you want to go into the thought-free state or do you want to think something? You must somehow enter the state of no-mind if you want to directly realize the Truth as it is in Itself. What you want to have through *sādhanā* determines the way of your *sādhanā*.

Polar and non-polar meditation

There are many stages of meditation. In non-polar meditation, the subject and the object, the observer and the observed become one. Or it may be said that in non-polar meditation only Awareness without any content remains. Awareness without content — this cannot be understood by the mind. The mind can only understand the awareness that is in relation to something.

Kindly elaborate on the different stages of meditation, as you just mentioned.

Meditation can be classified mainly into two kinds: polar meditation and non-polar meditation. All the working and activity

stops in the final stage of meditation. There is neither activity of the mind nor any activity of the soul. Polar meditation is one in which the triangle of the knower, the knowledge (relative) and the known exists. Polar meditation has many stages, depending upon the purification of the knower and the known. Non-polar meditation is one in which the knower and the known become one. It is in non-polar meditation alone that the Self is realized in its pristine purity.

Please, guide me to know what the “purification of the knower” is.

Purification of the knower involves the purification of the mind of the knower. There is what is called *savikalpa samādhi*, in which the mind is still working, but the experience in that state depends upon the extent of the purification of the mind. There are so many worlds that are invisible to the physical mind and senses of man. The more the mind becomes pure and rarefied, the more it can have the experience of these subtle and psychic worlds. Moreover, the knower can have the experiences of the different aspects of the Divine. These experiences also depend upon where the knower is standing in relation to the purification of mind.

Concentration gives power; relaxation gives peace

It seems difficult to practise relaxation and concentration together. How to combine them?

Meditation does not only imply concentration, it may imply relaxation also. If you enjoy concentration, it does not create any

physical problem. It is only the forced concentration that creates a problem. Concentration gives power. Relaxation gives peace. The highest state of concentration turns into relaxation.

Is it the same as in the state of awareness?

Awareness focussed at one point is concentration.

What is the best way to concentrate?

The best way to concentrate is to fix your mind on some point. Should the mind become absorbed in this point, there will be no distraction on the part of the eyes and other organs. It is the intense love of something that makes the mind absorbed in it completely. Love has a greater power than thought. It can change you within a moment.

Pleasure comes from concentration, not from objects

Why do we experience pleasure when we look at or think of certain things?

What you call pleasure comes not through the object, but through the concentration of your mind on that object. When you enjoy delicious food, it is because your mind is concentrated on that food. If your mind were dispersed or distracted you wouldn't enjoy that food. But there is a difference in the quality of pleasure you get from concentration on a perishable object and concentration on the Divine. Try to concentrate on water and see. Then concentrate on fire and see. There will be a difference in what you experience.

Everyone can meditate

It is said that an impure seeker should not practise meditation. It will be like touching a live wire or dynamite.

It depends upon the kind of meditation. The practice of right meditation not only helps the seeker in stabilizing his or her mind, but also in the purification of the mind. If you keep on waiting, thinking that you will start meditating when your mind has been completely purified, then you may not be able to start meditating for many lives. Meditation is the dynamite that blasts your ego.

Alertness and watchfulness is the common factor in all the techniques

After a week in the āshram, with the practice of japa, I went into rather deep meditation. But the following days the mind interfered more and more because thoughts arose, like memories, fears, images. Please, tell me what can I do to get out of the mind's trap?

It is natural that thoughts arise; fears, memories and images come up when one tries to meditate. The seeker has to get rid of them. A very long and persistent practice is needed to stop all the modifications of the mind. It is not the work of two weeks, two months or even two years. There are many techniques for making the mind silent, and *japa* is one of them. Alertness and watchfulness is the common factor in all the techniques of meditation. Be more and more sincere. Carry on with your practice daily and regularly when you go back to France. Be more

and more committed and have patience. The mind will gradually become purified and stable in due course of time.

Meditation enables one to distinguish between *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti*

I was taught to divide my attention into two parts, one part upon myself and the second on the object. I find it very difficult.

To know yourself, the direction of the attention has to be turned one hundred and eighty degrees. From the seen, the attention has to turn to the Seer; that is what Jung calls, “The backward flowing of Consciousness.” The theory behind all methods of meditation is first to separate the Seer from what is seen. It is done by dividing your mind, the conscious part of your mind from the energy part of your mind. It can be said, the material part of the mind and the spiritual element in the mind. You know, in the *Sāṅkhya* School of Indian thought, *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* are the two fundamental principles. *Puruṣha* does not do anything; it only sees. *Prakṛiti* does not see; it does everything. These two are mixed up in every phenomenon so much that it is not easy to distinguish between them. The practice of meditation first separates them, as it were.

It is easier to concentrate on a *mantra* than on an image

My sādhanā consists of prayer, japa and meditation. But I feel that I am not progressing. During meditation, I can sit

only for thirty to forty minutes without changing my āsana. Swāmījī, please pray and bless me, so that I will make progress and will have the darshan of Baby Kṛiṣṇa soon.

The way of your *sāadhanā* is perfectly correct. I also appreciate your aspiration to progress in your *sāadhanā*. The period of sitting in meditation in a particular posture can be increased by regular practice. There is no harm in changing the posture when one starts feeling pain in one's legs.

One can easily concentrate on the image of anything or any person for whom one has deep love in one's heart. Let the love of Baby Kṛiṣṇa grow more and more in your heart. Read His *līlā* again and again. Pray to Him daily and request Him to stay in your heart. Recite His name more and more, with love and faith. It is easier to concentrate on a *mantra* or name than on an image or form. You should devote yourself more to the practice of *japa* of the *mantra*, “*Om Klīm Kṛiṣṇāya Namaḥ Om.*” Recite this *mantra* mentally, keeping your attention at the heart-centre, in the middle of your chest. Recite the *mantra* mentally and hear it at the same time. Before you start reciting the *mantra*, do *praṇām* to Lord Kṛiṣṇa and also to your *Gurudeva*. The *japa* of the *mantra* of one's *Iṣṭa* ultimately leads to the *darshan* of one's *Iṣṭa*. If and when you concentrate on the divine form of your *Iṣṭa*, keep the attention on the *ājñā chakra*, in the middle of the eyebrows. All the images are made at that centre.

I wish you speedy progress in your *sāadhanā*. Be more and more sincere. Sit daily and regularly and practise *japa*. Pray to your *Iṣṭa* again and again with simple love, as that of a small baby who calls its mother.

Different kinds of meditation and the proper time to practise them

During the day is there a better or special time to concentrate on the sound and on the form?

The concentration or meditation on a divine form involves forming the mental image of the form at the *ājñā chakra* and at the same time seeing that image mentally. That is to say, with the eyes closed. The concentration on the divine name involves reciting mentally that divine name at the heart-centre and at the same time hearing that recitation mentally. Since these practices need concentration at two different places, both cannot be done at the same time. Moreover, if you see the form and hear the word at the same time, your mind becomes divided in hearing and seeing with the result that you can neither hear the divine word with your total mind, nor can you see the form with your total mind. You must have noted that when you are seeing anything with total attention and someone is talking near you, you do not hear him. Similarly, if you are hearing someone with total attention and another man passes near by, you do not see him. Concentrating on a form with eyes closed during meditation is more difficult than concentrating on a word, or name, or a *mantra*.

Morning is better for concentrating on the form. Daytime and evening is better for concentration on the name or *mantra*.

If we hear a sound in one or both ears, shall we use it as a support for concentration or shall we take no notice of it?

During *japa*, the word or *mantra* is heard mentally through the right ear. When you are practising *japa*, you have to concentrate

on the name or the *mantra*, and draw back your attention if you come to hear any other sound at that time.

Meditation shows how free you are

After twenty minutes of meditation, I feel pain in my knees and my thoughts continue to disturb me. What to do?

Take meditation as a challenge. Meditation actually is the test to know for yourself how independent and free you are. If you cannot sit quietly for an hour or so, what sort of freedom do you have? If you cannot sit quiet, without thinking, it means you are the slave of your thoughts. How can you call yourself free? I have heard many mad caps saying, “I am Divine. I am *Brahman*,” but they cannot remain quiet, free of thoughts, even for a few minutes. Such knowledge is practically useless. It is only second-hand information that they confound with wisdom, and claim to be free. It is like a man sitting in darkness and saying, “I am Light absolute.”

Good attracts good, evil attracts evil

A good or bad meditation may also be due to external influences, because the mind is also subject to outer influences. When your mind becomes very strong, it becomes less and less influenced by outer conditions. Moreover, the inner state of mind does not remain the same at all times. When it is dominated by *sattva*, the meditation is fine. When the mind is dominated by *rajas*, it is difficult to stop the thinking process because the desires make the mind think and move. When the mind is dominated by *tamas*,

there is a tendency to be lethargic and go to sleep during meditation. Inertia can be overcome by *rajas* (by desire), and *rajas* by *sattva*, the principle that reflects Consciousness. There comes a time when *sattva* also becomes an obstacle. It can be overcome by the spirit of self-surrender or by the practice of witnessing-consciousness.

Can outer forces enter our bodies during meditation?

In active meditation, if the meditation is proper and deep, no outer force can enter the body of the *sādhaka*, because there is no empty space in the body-mind of a *sādhaka* who is busy in active meditation. During passive meditation, some outer force may enter the body-mind of a *sādhaka*, but it cannot remain there, because the *sādhaka* does not become identified with that force. During meditation some external forces may enter the body when the *sādhaka* is overpowered by inertia.

Sometimes, I feel these forces are good forces and at other moments they seem like bad forces.

Good attracts good and evil attracts evil. It depends upon the personality of the *sādhaka* and what he or she invokes. Both, good and evil forces can be invoked.

If you do not enjoy your *sādhanā*, do it as a duty

*My *sādhanā* makes my worldly life difficult.*

Who makes it difficult?

I feel now that it is more difficult for me to use my intellect.

I am not asking you to lose your intellect, I am asking you to be open and receptive, to realize and be what you are in reality. Should your intellect create a problem to realize your true Being, shun it! Losing something is one thing and giving up or surrendering is quite another. What are you interested in? Are you interested in something that is not love, which is not joy, which is not awareness? Are you interested in dreaming?

I am interested in love and peace, but I realize that my sincerity is poor.

Stop concentrating on what is limited. Concentration follows deep interest.

When I arrived here, I did my sādhanā for two days, then I got sick, and since that time I cannot meditate. Why?

The mind finds many excuses to escape from sādhanā. A child does not want to sit and read. He wants to play. You have to educate the child and create interest in him so that he can devote himself to his studies. Maybe you got sick after two days because you did not want to meditate anymore. Your deep interest plays a great part in what you do. If you don't enjoy your sādhanā, do it as a duty. If your sādhanā does not taste sweet to you, take it as a medicine. How will the disease be cured if you do not take medicine, especially when the disease is caused by a virus?

Periodic retreat and silent meditation are essential

Do you sit in meditation daily? It is very important. Meditation is to the soul what food is to the body. Meditation brings clarity to the mind and gives strength to cope with day-to-day situations in which we are involved in dealing with others. In active life, one spends one's physical and mental energies that must be regained daily during sleep as well as during meditation. Sleep is the substitute of meditation. The expenditure must balance one's income. If you go on spending without earning, it invites crisis. So periodic retreat and silent meditation is essential. If you could sit in meditation four times in a day, even for twenty minutes in each sitting, it would be more beneficial than sitting for one or two hours in one sitting. If one sincerely so wishes, one can adjust oneself in one's daily life in such a way.

The more you are involved in the world, the more meditation you need

I try to meditate sincerely everyday at home but I see how many obstacles I encounter to keep time available.

For Westerners, there should be ten hours of meditation everyday! Householders need to do more meditation than monks. Westerners need to do more meditation than Orientals. People think the opposite: that prayer and meditation are only for monks. The more you are involved in the world, the more meditation and prayer you need. In activity, you spend more energy. To recover that energy you need to sit in meditation again and again.

To be continuously aware of the Divine

You have breakfast and it gives you some energy. Then you work and spend your energy. Again you have lunch. Then you have evening tea and dinner. You have to eat again and again to compensate for the loss of energy you spend in working. Similarly, the seeker has to sit three times, four times or five times in contemplation so that he can remain continuously aware of the Divine throughout the day. The Hindus call it “*trikāla sandhyā*,” sitting at least three times in contemplation of God. The Muslims offer five times *namāz* (prayer) in a day. This is for those who have to fulfil social obligations. The seekers who have devoted their lives exclusively to God-Realization practise remembering God all the time.

To feel a relationship with the Divine

How can I relate myself with the Divine in my daily life when I feel tired and unable to face the situations that come to me?

Can you feel your relationship with the Divine when you sit quietly for some time? Sit down and try it, just now! If you cannot, how will you be able to feel that divine relationship when you are active, busy, preoccupied with so many activities in this world, where everyone wishes to be on the top? It would be better if you start sitting quietly in meditation, receive some inspiration, light, inner strength through relating yourself with the Divine, who is the source of all love, light, strength, peace and then practise to retain these in your daily life in various situations.

“If you go on increasing the time span of your meditation and spiritual practice even by half a minute everyday, rest assured that within a year you can attain samādhi. Nothing is unattainable! What you need is real zeal, the right technique and a regular practice.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Methods of Meditation or Spiritual Concentration

Meditation is of many kinds

In Hindi, meditation is called *vichāra vimarsha* and contemplation is called *dhyāna*. Meditation is of many kinds. The purpose of meditation is to stop the thinking process. One can learn meditation through practice only. You can learn swimming only when you jump into water and try to keep your body on the surface of the water. Similarly you sit down and watch your mind and try to stop thinking. The methods of meditation can be classified into these three categories:

1. **Positive:** The positive method of meditation comprises those in which the mind is fixed on some outer or inner object to the exclusion of all other objects.
2. **Negative:** In the negative method of meditation all images and thoughts that arise in the mind are rejected and negated.

3. Neutral: The neutral method is one in which one simply watches one's mind without identifying oneself with any thought or image. One has simply to be a disinterested witness of all that is happening in the mind and all the thoughts gradually subside.

Three ways to get rid of desires and thoughts

How can I blow on my little inner flame so that it becomes a raging fire that burns up all the impurities in my heart?

The inner flame is always burning, but it is covered by the mind full of desires and thoughts. First, tame your desires and thoughts and then get rid of them completely. There are three ways: one is the way of doing, the other is the way of undoing, and the third is the path of love, I mean of divine Love. Doing means practising dynamic meditation. Undoing is the path of watching. The word should be non-doing instead of undoing. It is passive meditation.

Think with your brain, feel with your heart

I want to concentrate on the heart centre.

The heart is the instrument of feeling. The instrument of thinking is not the heart but the brain. If I ask you to hear with your eyes and see with your ears, will it not be absurd? Every instrument has its own use. It has been made for some special function. For example, scissors are made to cut cloth and needles are made

to stitch clothes. But if you start cutting with the needle and stitching with the scissors, what will happen? Think with your brain. Feel with your heart.

The brain is connected with the centre between the eyebrows. The heart is connected with the centre called *anāhata chakra* which is located in the middle of the chest. It is the brain which makes/creates images, not the heart. But it is true that the brain and heart are very deeply connected with each other. The transformation of one also affects the transformation of the other.

Turn your attention to your essential Being

In the West now, people try more and more to communicate with angels, spiritual guides, etc. What do you think about such practices?

One who is an aspirant of Self-Realization must stop communicating, or minimize one's communication with others, be they animals, ghosts, human beings or angels, and turn one's attention to one's essential Being and communicate with oneself. What if you know all the beings in the world but you don't know yourself? Socrates said, "Know thyself." You can know thyself only if you communicate with thyself! And it is easier for you to communicate with yourself if you withdraw your attention from other objects, situations, persons, angels, ghosts, demons etc. This is called, *pratyaḥāra* in *yoga*. For the practice of *dhāraṇā*, that is fixing your attention on the Truth, it is necessary that you first withdraw your attention from what is not the Truth.

Meditation and contemplation

Can we consider contemplation as a form of meditation?

Contemplation implies fixing the mind on one word, one form or one idea/thought, while meditation means thinking of one subject through correlated thoughts associated with the Divine. Meditation may be called *Bhagavat Chintan*. The thoughts are correlated and sequential. They are not irrelevant to one another. They are related to a subject that is connected with the Divine or Truth. Meditation is the first step; it is a sort of reflection in which the mind is moving in a fixed direction. Contemplation is riveting the mind to a single thought or object in which the mind does not move.

Meditation, concentration and *japa* are methods to stop the thinking process

I am practising meditation since some years, and still I have no real control over my mind.

To control one's mind (thoughts, feelings and emotions) is a very difficult task, but it is possible. It needs a long, sustained practice of meditation aided by *vairāgya* (dispassion). Mind is like a child. It has to be educated, disciplined. It is deeply related with the physical body. Therefore the disciplining of the body is also necessary.

Meditation, contemplation and *japa* are the techniques devised by the *ṛishis* to stop the thinking process. Some breathing exercises are also very useful for successful meditation, because

they make the movement of breath regular and slow. The movement of breath and mind are also very deeply correlated.

On what should we contemplate? Should we have different subjects for each session? Should we try to imagine an idol between the eyebrows?

One may contemplate on any divine name, form or idea to which one is most attracted. The word *Om* is a mystical word and is very powerful. It can be contemplated upon between the eyebrows, at the *ājñā chakra*. The *japa* of *Om* can also be practised but, during the practice of *japa* of *Om*, the word *Om* has to be repeated at the heart-centre and at the same time its sound has to be listened to mentally at the heart-centre.

What about the concentration at the navel-centre?

To concentrate at the navel-centre is dangerous unless the higher *chakras* are sufficiently purified and developed. It can abruptly arouse the *prāṇa shakti* and aggravate the sexual desire or the tendency towards anger and violence. When one is advanced enough in spirituality and has achieved control over one's mind and senses, then there is no harm in concentrating on the navel-centre.

To practise the *mantra* at the heart-centre and visualise some divine form at the *ājñā chakra* is very scientific

*Did Shrī Ramaṇa Maharṣhi not distinguish, as you do, between concentration on the *ājñā chakra* for meditation*

and on the heart-chakra for japa? He also recommended japa.

Ramaṇa Maharṣhi's approach was that of Self-inquiry. Many people interpret his teaching as an analytical approach, that is, analysing and separating the real "I" from the ego and objective world, a sort of analytical thinking. To me, it seems that he recommended to reverse the direction of attention and look for the real "I" at the heart-centre. He did not put emphasis on *japa*, nor did he stop anyone from practising *japa*. He was not an *advaitist* like the modern *Vedāntins*. He spoke like an *Upaniṣhadic ṛiṣhi*. He even composed hymns praising Lord *Shiva*.

To practise the *mantra* at the heart-centre and visualise some divine form at the *ājñā chakra* is very scientific. It is hinted at in the *Yoga Sūtras of Pātañjali*, but not clearly explained. It is my observation based on my own experience. That is why I tell it emphatically to all those who want to concentrate on a word or on some divine form.

1. The Negative Method: The Practice of Stopping and Rejecting

"The negative method of spiritual concentration is quite simple to understand. All kinds of emotions, moods and ideas that arise from within, or the impacts of thoughts and suggestions that come from without or from the universal mind, are to be rejected

or discarded as soon as they arise or come. Simultaneously, it is to be keenly observed that this “stopping” or “rejecting” is going on uninterruptedly and that the active part has not become engaged in thinking, willing or feeling something other than mere “stopping” or “rejecting.”...In the final step... only Awareness shines in its pristine purity...This is a state of peace and only peace.”

– *The Practical Approach to Divinity*

Don't identify with the thoughts and reject them at once

How to stop the thoughts and their contradictions?

There are many methods of stopping the thoughts. One is that when a thought comes, don't identify yourself with it and reject it. It is the negative method of making the mind silent, free of thoughts. One has to sit down, watch one's mind, and reject any thought that comes into the mind. The mind becomes silent when it is free of all thoughts, feelings and emotions. Which thoughts come to you and why? They come because of your attachments. So you have to reduce your attachments and slowly and gradually eradicate them.

What are attachments?

When you sit in meditation, do the thoughts of people living in Sri Lanka come to you? They don't because you are not attached to them in any way.

2. The Positive Method: The Practice of Concentrating on a Divine Form, a Divine Name, or a Divine Idea

The practical necessity of concentrating on a single form, idea or name

Is it advisable to meditate on blankness, rather than on an image, which itself is a creation of the mind, whereas the goal is to attain stillness of mind?

It is very difficult to concentrate on emptiness. The mind is dealing with names, forms and ideas all the time. It is easier for the mind to concentrate on one form, one name or one idea. Do you think that the names, forms and ideas are the creation of your individual mind? If you think so, you are mistaken. It is true that the goal is to make the mind free from all names, forms and ideas. If you can do it straightway, well and good. You do not need to meditate on any name, form or idea. Then you can go into *samādhi* directly. But, it is easier said than done. When you sit down and close your eyes, many names, forms, and ideas come to your mind.

If you like to meditate on what you call blankness or emptiness, you can do that. No one should object to it. Remain in that emptiness more and more. It will lead you to the Realization of the Self. The problem is how to get rid of the images. When you are sitting with eyes closed, your mind is like a supermarket. It is full of so many images, names, forms and ideas. Is it not? To concentrate on one image, one form, one idea or one name is only a means to ultimately get rid of all the images. If you do not need the support of one name, one idea or one

form for concentration that is very good. It is said that an empty mind is the devil's workshop. But it can also be the workshop of God.

What is the devil? How to recognize who is working inside us, God or the devil?

I have not seen the devil. They say the devil is the evil spirit, the embodiment of all evil tendencies. There is a saying that an empty mind is the devil's workshop. It means that when the mind has nothing to think at all, it usually thinks bad and destructive thoughts. On the path of God-Realization, the mind has to be emptied of all thoughts; only then, it becomes the instrument of God. It is easy to discern who is working inside. If the thoughts are destructive, if you think badly of others and if you are planning to hurt others, it means the devil is using you. If you think good of one and all, it means your mind is the workshop of God.

Concentrating on a Divine Form

During meditation only one image should be entertained

Yesterday, you told me that I should not be interested in the visions I have. The main problem is that I sometimes see my beloved Kṛiṣṇa. Kindly tell me, how can I push my Lord out of my vision? I also had visions of Bhagavān Shrī Chandrajī three or four times. Such visions remain for not more than a few minutes. Please let me know what I should do.

Visions of saints and sages and of one's *Iṣṭa* come to very sincere and advanced seekers. They come to change something in the *sādhaka*. The impact of such visions is very deep on the subconscious and they are very transporting. Ordinary seekers do not have such visions even if they so wish or try to get them.

During meditation, the attention should be focused only on one divine form or image. If the forms go on changing every few seconds or minutes during meditation, it splits the consciousness and concentration does not happen. During meditation only one divine form, divine idea or divine name should be entertained. First of all, the divine image of one's *Iṣṭa* must become stabilized for a long period in one's mind, at the *ājñā chakra*. After one reaches a stage where the divine image remains in one's mind for over two hours continuously, then there is a technique to transcend that stage and enter into *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Normally, when the seeker is fit to enter *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the *Iṣṭa* itself withdraws its form and leads the devotee into *nirvikalpa samādhi*. In that case, the technique to transcend the divine form is not required to be used. In some special cases, there arises the need to use that technique. You should continue to concentrate on the divine form of your *Iṣṭa*. During meditation only one image should be entertained. It is necessary for concentration.

Concentrating on a Divine Name (*Japa*)

"This world with all its enchantments and temptations is a mere nothing to one who but once tastes of the sweetness of the Lord's name."

– *Spiritual Gems*

***Japa* is a dynamic meditation**

Does sincere practice of japa (chanting of the Guru-mantra) lead to meditation? Is meditation necessary to get peace?

Japa itself is a sort of meditation. It is a dynamic meditation. It leads to the ultimate spiritual Experience. There is the day-to-day peace. It can be gained by adjustment and reflection, but the peace that lasts forever is the fruit of Realization. The chanting of the *Guru-mantra* with total faith and commitment does lead to the highest meditation and Realization of the Divine. The purpose of *mantra japa* is to remember the Divine through the *mantra* with a heart full of love. Through the practice of *mantra japa*, it is easier to fix one's mind on the Divine. *Mantra japa* also purifies the subconscious mind of the seeker.

***Japa* is a powerful means to cleanse the subconscious**

Peace or absence of tension in the conscious mind is only the beginning. More work is needed to cleanse one's subconscious mind, in which the roots of one's personality lay. *Japa* is one of the most efficient techniques to cleanse one's subconscious. Love for the Infinite, for Immortality, and eternal Life is inherent in all beings. Even an insect does not want to die. The eternal Life can only be realized through the realization of one's essential and eternal Nature. The work on one's subconscious is even more important than simply making one's mind peaceful through a certain technique.

Repetition is involved in every event and movement of this world. *Japa* is a technique to reach the subconscious through the repetition of a word or an idea.

Do you mean that japa is the most efficient method to work on our subconscious mind?

It is the repetition of a suggestion through a word or *mantra*. By repetition, the suggestion goes deep into the subconscious. The process of repetition is the secret of the world. The wakeful state, the dream state and the deep sleep state are being repeated in your life again and again. Day and night, seasons, circulation of your blood, movement of breath and movements of thoughts all involve repetition. There is a tree; it gives fruits, then seeds, then from the seeds again a tree. The water of the sea evaporates, goes to the sky, becomes clouds, and comes back on earth and into the sea. This process is repeated again and again. You cannot conceive of any system in which there is no repetition. Tell me what is there in the world that is not being repeated. Every movement in your body is being repeated. So it is in the whole universe. Your life is transformed only when your subconscious is changed. To reach the subconscious, repetition of a word or an idea is the easiest method. Repetition is involved in every event or movement in this world, or in your body. It is obligatory for any system whatsoever. The *rishis* have done great research and discovered the technique of *japa* or repetition as a means for stopping the thinking process, which is the sine qua non of going into *samādhi*.

The practice of japa: the different stages

Can you guide me about how to say the mantra?

In the first stage of practice, the *mantra* has to be chanted mentally by keeping one's attention in the middle of the chest and

at the same time you have to listen mentally to that chanting. That is to say that in the first stage you have to do two things at a time. Chanting the *mantra* as well as listening to it. The attention should be at the heart-centre, as if you are chanting the *mantra* and listening to it in the middle of the chest.

After a long and consistent practice as mentioned above, the chanting will become more and more automatic and effortless. It is taken up by the subconscious mind. It requires a very long period of doing *japa* consciously to make it go into the depths of the subconscious mind. When the chanting becomes completely effortless, then you have to simply listen to the *mantra* being chanted by the subconscious mind. This is the second stage when the *japa* is going on effortlessly and you are simply listening to the *mantra* at the heart-centre. It is called “*ajapā japa*.” *Ajapā* is effortless but not mechanical. It is the effortless but conscious repeating of a divine name. There is deep psychology and science behind the practice of *japa*. It is practised in all the religions of the world, without exception.

In the next stage the *mantra* disappears and only the meaning of the *mantra* is felt by your whole personality, as the vibrations of the *mantra* have permeated all the cells of your body-mind. Anyone who is open and can totally concentrate one’s mind can listen to and feel the vibration of the *mantra* if he or she touches your body when you are in this state. Your body-mind becomes charged with the vibrations of the *mantra*. It is a very blissful state. You are totally absorbed within, enjoying the Bliss. In some cases, the practitioner loses control of his body in this state and cannot work, or if he or she had been walking, he can fall down. It is called the “*māhābhāva*” state. Rāmakṛṣṇa once lost control over his body in this state, fell down and broke his arm. When you reach this state, you lose body-consciousness completely; hence someone must be there

to take care of your body. If someone is not there with you to take care of your body, the body may even die after a certain period, because you cannot even eat by yourself. There are further higher stages, but they need not be described. If you could reach this state, it would be a very big achievement for you.

Recite the *mantra* and at the same time listen to it

When I try to meditate the way you told me by concentrating on the heart, without thinking (which is not easy), the mantra begins. Then what should I do? Should I say the mantra concentrated always on the heart-centre or should I stop the mantra and try to stay without thinking?

If the *mantra* comes during meditation, just listen to it mentally without thinking. Do not stop it. If it stops itself then all right. Then only keep your attention at the heart-centre and watch without thinking. But when you are reciting/practising a *mantra*, do not stop it, recite the *mantra* and at the same time listen to it. If you do so it will help you to be thoughtless. Your whole mind will be engaged in reciting the *mantra* and listening to it. As a matter of fact the practice of the *mantra*, in the method described above, is very helpful in stopping the thinking process. You have to recite the *mantra* and at the same time listen to it, this is the method.

Conscious repetition of the *mantra* is difficult

Repeating the *mantra* is not difficult, what is difficult is to repeat it consciously and sweetly. This needs alertness and faith in the

mantra and God. Do you enjoy hearing the name of X and thinking of him or not? You enjoy it because you love him. Similarly, when you have love for God, you enjoy repeating or hearing His name, you feel joy in hearing about Him and in talking about Him. What you think to be futile you cannot like, nor enjoy thinking of. You think of what is of great importance to you or what you love. You may also think of something or someone of whom you are afraid. Some people remember God because of fear. That is better than not remembering God at all.

The use of a *mālā*

*Why does the *mālā* have one hundred and eight beads?*

There are one hundred and eight beads in a *mālā*, but when you count the number of recitations of a *mantra* with the help of a *mālā*, you count only one hundred for one *mālā*. Thus, if you have to recite a *mantra* one thousand times, you have to do ten *mālās* of japa, taking into account that eight times your mind had gone away for a fraction of a second when you were doing japa with the *mālā*. When I was counting the number of *mālās* during the fifties I used to have a *mālā* of one thousand and eighty beads. That means one big *mālā* consisting of ten *mālās*. Some number of beads has to be there in a *mālā*. If there are two hundred, you will ask, why two hundred?

Advice for different practices of *japa*

Is it necessary to practise only one mantra or can many mantras be practised?

It is necessary to practise only one *mantra* or one name of God for concentration. However, in singing the praises of God, one can recite many names. One should give equal respect and adore all the names of God. But for concentration, only one name or *mantra* should be practised.

Why should we not repeat the mantra with the breath?

One should not practise the *mantra* with the breath while keeping one's attention at the navel. The centre for practising breathing is the navel. The navel is the source of *prāṇa*. If you practise *japa* with the breathing and keeping the attention on the navel it can stimulate your vital energy to such an extent that it can prove disastrous to your *sādhana*.

At different times of the day, is it possible to practise different methods and to concentrate at their appropriate centre?

Japa has to be practised at the heart-centre, whether you do it in the morning, at noon, or in the evening. The practice of thoughtlessness should also be done at the heart-centre. Concentration on the heart can lead you to the hearing of the *anāhata* sound (the soundless sound) or to thoughtlessness.

Is it advisable to recite the mantra loudly?

If you are sitting alone you can recite the *mantra* vocally. But don't do it when you are sitting for practice among many people. The *mantra* recited mentally needs more attention and alertness. It is easier to concentrate on the *mantra* if it is recited verbally,

but socially it is not advisable. For the novices it is better to recite the *mantra* vocally, while sitting alone and in a solitary place.

When the thinking process stops, does the japa also stop? Is it not a thought?

Japa does not need any thinking. On the other hand, one of its purposes is to stop the thinking process. In the practice of *japa* you have only to recite the *mantra* mentally, remaining alert or one may recite it in the language of feeling, but thinking is not required at all.

In the “language of feeling” should japa be practised by feeling it continuously?

No *bhāva* remains for more than a fraction of a minute. To remain in the state of feeling, you have to go on repeating it. Similar is the case with the thinking process. No thought can last for more than a fraction of a minute. To sustain a certain thought, you have to repeat it again and again. No thought can sustain itself unless you identify yourself with it by cherishing it or by hating it.

In hearing the *mantra*, the *japa* will not become mechanical

When I do japa, suddenly my mind goes off. I start thinking of something else. What can I do so that my japa does not get disturbed?

When you are doing *japa* one part of your mind goes off and starts thinking of something. In order to overcome this I had told you to do the *japa* and at the same time, mentally hear the *japa* being chanted or recited. If you do the *japa* with this method, the part of the mind that goes off will be engaged in hearing the *mantra*, and you will be able to concentrate. Also, the *japa* will not become mechanical.

Can one do japa with eyes open and with the light on? When I do japa I keep looking at Lord Kṛiṣṇa's photo.

Japa can also be done with the eyes open. But in that case when you see things with your open eyes, your mind may start thinking about those things. So it is better to keep the eyes closed during *japa* or meditation. Should one feel sleepy during *japa* or meditation one may open one's eyes. With closed eyes, the tendency to go to sleep increases. If your eyes are closed it does not make much difference if the lights are on or off. It is better not to count the number of repetitions when you are doing *japa*, unless you are performing a specific *anuṣṭhāna* in which the counting is done.

I don't understand very well the use of a mālā. Why should we count for God?

If you don't feel the need of using a *mālā*, you should not use a *mālā*. Some people find it easier to remember the Divine through a *mālā*. Some Tibetan Buddhists use a revolving wheel instead of a *mālā*. You may use anything that helps you to remember the Divine, but if you count, God is not angry.

Even mechanical *japa* is not completely useless

Is it of any use to repeat the mantra mechanically?

The repetition of a *mantra* may become mechanical, but in the depth of consciousness there remains the faith in the *mantra*, so even mechanical *japa* is not useless. Only the conscious mind has stopped working or becomes distracted, but the subconscious mind is still working. How do you breathe? You do not breathe consciously or wilfully. It is the subconscious that is controlling and regulating the process of your breathing. In the same way, the repetition of the *mantra* is done by the subconscious mind. It works and affects your personality in spite of your not being aware of it. But should you remain alert and conscious during the practice of *japa*, you can enjoy it, if you have faith in it. That is the difference. Otherwise the *japa* does its own work on the subconscious level even if the *mantra* is repeated mechanically.

Proper time to practise meditation, *japa* and *sañkīrtan*

Is meditation and japa presumably done in that order? What is the importance of doing meditation first?

Before starting *japa* one has to be very submissive, open and receptive. *Japa* brings down (or brings up) the divine Energy which one must be able to appreciate and contain. It is also correct that in the early morning the mind is quieter and fresher, hence it is more appropriate to practice meditation rather than to do *japa*. *Japa* should be normally practised in the mid-day,

and *sañkīrtan* in the evening. It depends upon one's state of spiritual development, as also on one's day-to-day occupation. *Japa* is a sort of dynamic meditation. Both meditation and *japa* lead to silence, if practised rightly and consistently.

When every cell of your body is permeated with the vibration of the *mantra*, it is not possible to think

Obviously, japa is best when done with concentration and devotion, but it is recommended that one do japa continuously. Is there much benefit in doing japa "semi-consciously," for example, when walking or doing other things?

A part of your mind remains engaged in *japa* when you practise *japa* while doing some other activity. You know, the conscious mind is a very superficial layer of the mind. The power of the subconscious mind is ten times the power of the conscious mind. If the *japa* is taken up by the subconscious mind, you do not have to make any effort to practise it. It is called *ajapā-japa*. The *mantra* has its own power. When you repeat the *mantra* consciously or semi-consciously, the vibrations of the *mantra* influence your personality.

When meditating on an idea, the japa sometimes continues effortlessly. How to separate these two practices?

Concentrate on one, either on *japa* or on meditation. Moreover, one of the purposes of *japa* is to stop the thinking process. If you go on thinking while doing *japa*, this purpose is defeated. When every cell of your body is permeated with the vibration of

the *mantra*, it is not possible to think. Your whole attention is absorbed in the vibration of the *mantra*.

The *mantra* brings up to the surface what is buried in the subconscious

Sometimes after a long practice of japa, the bad thoughts come up. Why is it so?

The power of the *mantra* first brings up what is buried in the subconscious. So if negative thoughts come up during *japa*, one should not be frightened. For example, if you start sweeping a room, the dust which has settled in the room will start flying. You should not be frightened by it and should not stop sweeping. The power of the *mantra* will destroy those negative thoughts after bringing them up.

What is wrong with me? I feel bored if I use only one mantra.

When you hear the name of a person, it reminds you of that person. If you hear the word chair, at once the image of a chair comes to your mind. If you hear the word Osho, the image of Rajneesh flashes in your mind. Should I call you with different names? But addressing you with one name doesn't bore me. A mother enjoys it when she calls her child with its name or even when she hears that name. The association of that name with your beloved is created in your mind. So how can you get bored? If you love the one whose name you are repeating you will never be bored. On the contrary, you will enjoy it when you call that name. You get bored only when you recite the *mantra* without love.

Enjoying the recitation of the divine name

My recitation of the divine name is mechanical and devoid of deep feeling.

You have to be related with the Divine, only then can you enjoy the recitation of the divine name. Not only that, you will enjoy it even if someone else is chanting the divine name. When a mother hears the name of her child or when a lover hears or speaks the name of his or her beloved, a peculiar thrill is felt in the heart of the mother or the lover. When a mother hears the name of her child, her face changes.

I read somewhere that once some students were asked to write an essay on the miracle by which Jesus turned water into wine. Almost all the students wrote very long essays on the miracle, giving details, history, and the import of that miracle. One student was sitting motionless, not doing anything, not writing, absorbed within himself. When the time allotted for the paper was just to be finished, he took his pen and wrote one sentence on that miracle as follows, “The water saw its Master and blushed.” This student got first prize.

It is better to recite the name of God with love

How to make the habit of doing japa meaningful and fruitful all of the time?

Japa becomes effortless when it is taken up by the subconscious mind. Any activity, which is repeated again and again for a long period of time, is taken up by the subconscious mind and

becomes a habit. It is better to recite the name of God or a *mantra* with love. It is possible only if you are in love with the deity whose name you are reciting. If you are not deeply attached with the deity whose name you recite for long periods daily, it will gradually generate love for that deity in you.

Mantra japa is a means to fall in love with God

I don't know much about mantras. So to experience japa in meditation, I contemplate on the concept of love. Is this good enough?

It would be better if you add the word divine with the word love and make it, divine Love, because love in the West is a very misused word. More often than not, in the West, love is used for lust. If you add divine, it will also make you remember the Divine.

Is it the same to use a mantra or to contemplate on divine Love?

Mantra japa is also a means to fall in love with God. If you are constantly remembering God through a name, you are bound to fall in love with God eventually. Whatever you are thinking or remembering continuously, you become attached with that thing, person or situation. *Japa* means repetition. Constant repetition of any idea (every word or *mantra* is associated with an idea) transforms your mind, your outlook, your life and your values of life. It is a psychological fact.

Is it of any use to repeat one's mantra all day, but mechanically?

The practice of *japa* is based on very deep psychology. Yes, even if the *mantra* is practised mechanically, it is useful. It is better than not doing any spiritual practice. But *japa* done attentively or with feeling is a very effective technique of not only going into *samādhi*, but also of transforming one's life. In the practice of hypnotism, you sit down and simply repeat the words, "I am going to sleep, I am going to sleep, etc." By this repetition, you go into an induced sleep. *Samādhi* is also an induced sleep, but of a different category.

What is important is to recite His name with love and trust

When I start my japa, I always hesitate about the right pronunciation of the name of Jesus or Yeshoua? Can I add also the name of Mother Mary?

Recite Jesus or Yeshoua. It does not matter. Recite His name with love and trust. That is what is important. There is no harm in adding the name of Mother Mary. You may add this name while practising the *japa*. Make it, "Jesus, the son of Mother Mary."

When there is a transformation in the subconscious

Are there particular signs that we can observe when the mantra overpowers the subconscious in order to clean and purify it?

Your conscious mind is the instrument of your subconscious. When there is a transformation in the subconscious, the conscious mind starts working in a different way and your behaviour also changes. Not only you, but also others near you will be able to see the transformation in your life.

How do we know that we have realized the power of the mantra?

When the power of the *mantra* is awakened, you feel its power in many ways. It can give you extraordinary powers. It can give you peace that cannot be shaken in unfavourable conditions. It broadens your vision. It enables you to have control over your thoughts and emotions. And finally, it enables you to realize your eternal Nature.

Why different mantras? Do they reveal different aspects of God?

The practice of different *mantras* works in different ways to reach the same place. Some people also use the power of *mantras* for temporal gains.

Practice of *japa*: different results according to different motives

*It seems that for some persons *ajapa* comes to them easily and for some others, after years and years of practice *japa* is still not spontaneous. Is there some explanation for that?*

All people do not practise *japa* with the same motive. Some practise it as a ritual. Some practise it for the fulfilment of some worldly desire. Some practise it for self-purification. Some practise it with some other motive. And the result is according to the motive.

About forty years ago, a rich Sikh gentleman came to me. I was staying with a devotee in Delhi for a few days. He told me, “My mother is always doing *japa* and repeating *Vāheguru, Vāheguru*, all day long for years and years together, but she has not changed at all. She becomes disturbed over petty things. She is easily provoked to anger. She is very much attached to little things, much more than us who do not remember God regularly. If a child breaks a cup, she becomes upset.” He asked, “Why has the practice of the holy name for so many years not changed her? She should have reached a very high state. She should have even realized God, for she has been practising *japa* of the holy name regularly and continuously for over the last sixty years. But she seems to be the same person as she was sixty years ago. It makes us doubtful about the efficacy of doing *japa* and remembering God. She tells us to remember God, but seeing that she has not attained peace by remembering God for over sixty years, we don’t have faith in *japa*. Sometimes, we even challenge the existence of God. Will you please explain to us the practice of *japa* and its efficiency?” I smiled and told him, “Please go back home. Ask your mother why she practises *japa*, what she wants to achieve through the practice of *japa* and remembering God, why has she been repeating God’s name for over sixty years. Then come to me and I will reply to your question.”

The man had many big dry-cleaning shops in different parts of Delhi and was running a very flourishing and successful business. Naturally, he was a very busy man. So he came back

to me after a week or so. I asked him, “Did you ask your mother why she was repeating God’s name and remembering Him for over sixty years? With what purpose and aim in her mind was she repeating God’s name?” The gentleman told me, “My mother said, ‘My husband, your father, died when I was only twenty-five years old. I had two sons, you and your brother, who were only one and three years old at that time. I had no money, no house of my own. I was not educated to get a job. So I took refuge in God and worked as a domestic servant. I started doing *japa* and calling on God to help me. I wanted my sons to be very, very educated and rich people. For that purpose I started doing *japa* and calling on God regularly. God is very kind. He fulfilled my ambition. You both are highly educated and very rich people. I thank God. Now I do *japa* and call on and pray for your protection and the welfare of my grandchildren.”

I said to that gentleman, “You see, you are rich, you are educated, your children are well-settled. It is the result of the prayers of your mother and the result of the *japa* she has been doing for over sixty years. It has not been useless. Had she practised *japa* for her purification and God-Realization, she would have attained that also. You get only what you ask. If you pray for worldly success, God grants you that; if you pray for Self-Realization, God grants you Self-Realization.”

Different *mantras* have their specific powers

We can utilize a sound or mantra in a particular tune, directing it on some part of the body to help or heal someone. Are we working on the psychic body?

Words and thoughts are deeply correlated. Particular words evoke particular thoughts and feelings in a person. If someone is addressed as a scoundrel, it evokes particular feelings in the addressee. If someone is addressed as a gentleman or gentle lady, it evokes a different feeling in the addressee. Different *mantras* have their specific powers and energies. There are many types of *mantras*. There is a *mantra* that can heal a person bitten by a snake. There are *mantras* that can cure the disease of desire and ignorance. As a thought has its own vibrations, similarly a *mantra* has its own vibrations.

Concentration on the heart *chakra* is not harmful for the physical body

We are advised to do japa by concentrating on the heart chakra. I have undergone by-pass surgery. Can the practice of japa affect my heart?

The physical heart in the body, which is on the left side, has nothing to do with the heart *chakra*. The heart *chakra* is located right in the middle of the chest. Concentration on the heart *chakra* is not at all harmful for heart patients, provided the concentration does not produce tension. When you perform *japa* by focusing your attention on the heart *chakra* with the spirit of self-surrender it makes you relaxed, removing the worries that create tension. It is good for heart patients to remain relaxed. The practice of concentrating on the heart *chakra* will not have any adverse effect.

Mantras repeated in the love of God never do any harm

While practising japa I feel pain in my body. What can it be?

Japa, which is one of the methods of remaining aware of the Divine, has nothing to do with any trouble in the body. The awareness of the Divine relaxes the mind, and in turn can even remove certain maladies of the physical body. There are certain mystical *mantras* that are practised by some people to gain extraordinary powers. These *mantras* are to be chanted with certain specific rituals on some special days. If the methods of chanting these *mantras* are not followed correctly, they can harm the practitioner mentally or even physically. Such *mantras* are not revealed to all people. But the *mantras* that are repeated in the love of God and for remembering the Divine never do any harm to any person.

The practice of japa never goes to waste

Due to some doubts in my relationship with the Guru and in my inability to be a true disciple, I feel a lot of obstacles in the practice of the mantra.

It is true that if you have faith in the *mantra*, it is easier to awaken its power through practice. The practice of the *mantra* conducted in any manner, with faith or without faith, with concentration or without concentration never goes to waste. It does help the practitioner, but very slowly. As a matter of fact, if you practise the *mantra*, there is some faith in you, otherwise you would not practise at all. If you carry on with the practice of your *mantra*, it will eventually remove your doubts and restore total faith.

Concentrating on a Divine Idea

Self-Inquiry or Self-Searching

Self-Inquiry implies concentration on a single thought

“Self-Inquiry as taught by the sage Ramaṇa Maharṣhi seems to be an independent method of contemplation, or can it be classified amongst the three methods given in “The Practical Approach to Divinity?”

The self-inquiry taught by Ramaṇa Maharṣhi is not an independent method from the three methods of contemplation given in the book, “The Practical Approach to Divinity.” It implies the concentration on a single thought, “Who am I,” to the exclusion of all other thoughts.”

Reflection or Self-Searching in *Vedānta*

Is self-searching a type of meditation?

Yes, self-searching is also a type of meditation. In fact, in the beginning it is a reflection involving the thinking process, but it culminates into meditation which finally leads to the experience of Seer or Self. In the *Vedāntic* discipline, as systematised by Shaṅkarāchārya, there are seven parts, four outer parts and three inner parts. The first four parts involve social and moral discipline, which are helpful in the practice of the inner parts called *shravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. The second of the three inner parts, that is *manana* or reflection, is called self-searching.

The modern *Vedāntins*, especially in Europe, do not follow the first four parts. Most of them only read the books on *Vedānta* or listen to the discourses on *Vedānta* given by the *Vedānta* Gurus. Some may practise *manana* or reflection as well. Very, very few practise *nididhyāsana*.

It appears that the sādhanā advocated by Ramaṇa Maharṣhi – “Who am I?” is a reflection (manana) because it involves logic, which in turn, when it ripens, turns into an experience of the Seer or Self, which is the fruit of the negative method and witnessing method. And also it appears to belong to the jñāna path. Is it a negative approach, or is it a positive approach of focusing the attention on an idea?

“Who am I?” is the most basic question which comes to the mind of a thinking person. But the question itself is not *manana* or reflection. It may come to the mind for only a few seconds and then the mind starts thinking of other things. Reflection or *manana* implies the repetition of one idea/thought or one feeling or *bhāva* again and again exclusively.

To reflect on the inquiry “Who am I?” certainly comes on the path of *jñāna* or *jñāna yoga*. But this question, “Who am I?” is not the process of reflection or *manana*. The process of reflection finally ripens into what is called *nididhyāsana* in *Vedāntic* terminology, and contemplation or *dhyāna* in yogic terminology.

The direct experience of “Who am I?” comes in the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, when all the feelings as well as the thinking process stops completely during meditation or *dhyāna*. This is a positive approach in the sense that it starts with concentrating on an idea or thought.

Try to know what you are not

Who am I?

First try to know who you are not. Then give up your false identification. It will enable you to know who you are. Whatsoever is, or can be, separated from you at any time cannot be your Self. Use this line of argument and try to know what you are not! In this way you can go on detaching yourself from all the states that can be separated from you. Finally you reach something that cannot be separated from you at any place or at any time, and that is yourself. This method is called the method of disagreement or *vyatireka* in the parlance of *Vedānta*. To know, “Who am I” is only possible when you can detach yourself completely from what is seen. You cannot know yourself as you know a chair, an object of perception. To know the knower you have to go into a state in which the perception of all objects, outer or inner, is stopped.

You have to bring back your attention; you have to turn it one hundred and eighty degrees and direct it on yourself. That is what is called meditation.

To know directly “Who am I?” reverse the attention from outside to within

Why persist with questions that have no answer like, “Who am I”? Would it not be wiser to simply accept the mystery of existence? I have for some time been following the path of Ramaṇa Maharṣhi who recommended that one should continually enquire into the source of the “I.”

Few people have understood Ramaṇa Maharṣhi's approach of inquiring, "Who am I?" People only make it an intellectual exercise entertaining discursive thinking about the question "Who am I?" They should reflect more on the life of Ramaṇa Maharṣhi in order to understand him correctly. The central idea of his method of self-inquiry is to reverse the direction of the attention from outside to within, what Jung called the "backward flowing of attention." That is the way to directly know, "Who am I." It is not the way of discursive thinking. "I" is the centre of all existence. If you know this "I", nothing remains to be known. "I" is not a mystery; it is the most ultimate reality of your own Being. You are not aware of the "I" because of your false identifications, and the unbroken flowing of your attention outward. If you could reverse the current of your attention from outward to your inmost Being, it would be the easiest thing to know and realize who you really are. I don't know what you have been doing or not doing to go within yourself. It took Ramaṇa Maharṣhi more than thirty years to realize and be established in his true Being. He worked exclusively and devoted his heart and soul to realize his true Being.

Spiritual desire is the nature of your true Being

How can I know if I have spiritual desire?

Spiritual desire means the inner urge to discover one's true and essential Nature, to know directly, "Who am I?" I ask you, "Who are you?" and you reply, "This is my name and I am a disciple of X." What are you telling me? You are not telling me who you are, but only telling me your relationship with a word, and your relationship with a person. Are you simply the sum total of all

your relationships? I did not ask about your relationships. I asked, “Who are you?” and you started telling me your relationships.

I am a package made of thoughts, emotions, sufferings and all that. I don't know who I am.

When you are in the deep sleep state, you do not think, you have no emotion and you have no thought. Do you exist in the deep sleep state or not? If yes, who are you? If you say, “I do not know,” you are accepting your existence and being. The urge to know directly, not from books or from others, the true Nature of your existence and being is what can be called spiritual desire. This is the fundamental urge. To try to know everything without knowing oneself is childish, if not stupid.

People are very strange. If you tell them to give up desire, they will give up the spiritual desire but will carry on with all of the other desires which are concerned with the temporal pleasures, comforts, conveniences, name and fame, money, power, status and all that stupefies a person and makes him dependent and a slave in the real sense of the word.

Beyond the pairs of opposites, you are “That”

If I try to go deeply into the contradiction or paradox of my individuality, fear arises.

The whole world is made of pairs of opposites, co-existing together, like life and death, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, ups and downs, good and bad, peace and war, hot and cold, and so on and so forth. They are like the two faces of a coin

that cannot be separated. Can you separate them? Why don't you take the universal and individual in the same sense? Either both are real or both are unreal. You cannot say that one is real and the other is unreal. They can of course be resolved on a higher level of consciousness that includes both, and yet is beyond and above all the pairs of opposites. "Thou are That." Realize that "Thou are That."

What are you? Who are you? What do you want to be? What are you doing in order to be what you want to be? What should you be? Can you define anything in absolute terms? When you say, "I am an individual," you are indirectly believing and saying that there is something universal also. When you say, "I do not know everything," you are indirectly accepting the existence of something that knows everything. In the field of relativity, which includes speech, thought, emotions, feeling etc., you can speak of anything only in relation to others. That is why you cannot say anything about the "One without a second." You cannot describe "That" with any quality or attribute. What you can talk of is only qualities and nothing more.

You do according to what you think you are

What should I do to get your help?

It is far better to think, "Who am I?" than to think, "What should I do or not do?" It is so because the action comes out of you according to what you think yourself to be. You do according to what you think you are. If you take yourself to be a tailor, you will stitch clothes. If you take yourself to be a palmist, you will read other's hands, and so on and so forth. You are the originator

of your action. You are there even if you do not do anything. You are not the sum total of your actions.

3. The Neutral Method: The Practice of Witnessing

“Would you like to have stillness of mind? Stillness is directly proportional to awareness. Mind becomes restless when you are not a witness of it. As the witness-state rises in you, the vacillation of mind ceases. Everyday, therefore, morning and evening, sit in a comfortable posture, at least for half an hour, and watch your mind as a detached seer. That is all. Within only a few days, you will find stillness and peace dawning in your mind. But you, and no one else, have to make the experiment for yourself.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Watch your thoughts as a witness

Last week, when I was meditating, it was extremely difficult to get focused. A lot of unpleasant pictures were coming incessantly in my mind. How can I cope with these pictures?

What you are seeing or experiencing in meditation is not abnormal at all for a lay-seeker. The mind is, as it were, a thought-manufacturing and image-manufacturing machine. This machine starts working as soon as you identify yourself with it. If you want it to stop working, watch it as a witness, without identifying

yourself with it. If you can do that, your mind will become thought-free and without any image. Watch your thoughts as a witness, watch your emotions as a witness and they will subside. When watching is there, the mind subsides. Watching leads to the experience of non-duality in the end. Watching first leads to the experience of emptiness and finally to the experience of the One without a second.

By the practice of watching, one can separate oneself from one's mind

Sometimes I try to be the witness of my thoughts, but I don't succeed. How can we separate the mind from ourselves?

Persistent and regular practice is needed to be able to watch one's thoughts, remaining a disinterested witness. By this practice, one can separate oneself from one's mind. Whenever you are watching anything, by remaining a disinterested witness, your identification with that thing is being broken. Should one feel difficulty in watching one's thoughts, one should start with watching one's breath. If one cannot watch one's breath successfully, one should watch any part of one's body or any outer object with one's eyes open but without thinking anything.

If I succeed in watching my thoughts, will the fear of death disappear?

Should you realize your separateness from your physical body and your mind, not only the fear of death dies, but death itself ceases to exist for you.

The Truth is revealed in the non-doing state

Can you tell me about the non-doing state?

Non-doing is the highest state. It is in this state that the Truth is revealed. But doing nothing is much more difficult than doing something. If you cannot do anything or you don't want to do any other spiritual practice, you should sit down, be relaxed and simply watch your breath without thinking anything. Just relax and remain unoccupied and wait. This is what is called the passive meditation. One can lie down in a comfortable posture instead of sitting. This is the best posture, provided one does not go to sleep.

During active meditation you are doing something. You are concentrating on some divine image, some divine thought or divine feeling. This type of practice also leads to a state of passive alertness in which you receive the Truth.

The thought cannot by itself become a thinking process unless you entertain it

I try to meditate the way you told me, and try not to think, but thoughts come anyway. Is it because I am not sincere enough? Or is it because I do not have enough will-power?

If the thoughts come, just watch them. Don't become identified with them. If you do so, the thoughts will subside. The thinking process starts only when a thought comes and you become identified with it and start working on it. Then it creates a chain of correlated thoughts in which you are involved, cooperate with

them and take pleasure in the process. Isn't it so? The thought cannot by itself become a thinking process unless you entertain it. If you take pleasure in thinking, how will the thoughts stop? You have to be on your guard and refuse a thought when it comes. The first step is to watch the coming of a thought. If you are alert, it is most likely that it will not come. To simply see means not to react. It is true that if you see any emotion, the emotion loses its intensity. You should guard your mind. The mind is like a thief. A thief steals only when the guard is sleeping. If the guard and the thief become one, then the thief is at liberty to steal anything at anytime. Please don't be friendly with the thief.

Watching without thinking

Does the sādhanā of witnessing mean watching the mind?

To be a witness and to think that I am the witness is not the same thing. To be a witness you have to stop thinking, you have to stop interpreting what you are seeing. You have simply to watch. You have not to let yourself be identified with what you are seeing. You have not to give any meaning to what you are looking at. You can watch a thing, an activity, and a person without thinking. You can see a bird flying in the sky disinterestedly. You can watch the flowing of water of the Yamunā without thinking. You may see your breathing process without thinking. If you are an advanced *sādhaka* you can see your thinking process without becoming identified or involved with it. If you can do that the thinking process should slowly and gradually cease, and all the thoughts will subside.

Who is the witness?

The witness is the soul, the *Ātmā* reflected in a pure mind. In the process of witnessing, the witness becomes uninterested in the object being witnessed. Therefore, the first object becomes weak and finally disappears. If you witness an emotion it will subside; it cannot overcome you. If you are a witness of your anger, your anger subsides. That which you witness will not influence you because you do not become identified with it. In the process of witnessing one does not feel non-duality at once. It happens when the “Seer” becomes established in Itself and when all the modifications of the mind are finally stopped, that is, when the mind becomes totally pure and stable.

Pure Awareness

(To a devotee) What do you see when you close your eyes?

I see nothing when I close my eyes, only darkness.

When you say that you see darkness, then how can you say you don't see anything? Seeing never ceases. It is always there, regardless of an object being there or not.

It seems to be enormously difficult to separate the light of Consciousness from what it illuminates. Whenever I try to see beyond thoughts to That which illumines thoughts I find only more thoughts. I don't know how to proceed past this point.

Seeing is not doing. Doing is confined to time and space. Seeing is spaceless and timeless. The objects and states and situations are changing, but seeing is always there. What you identify yourself with becomes real to you, and starts influencing you. You become deeply involved with what you are identified with. Do not do anything with the thoughts. Do not try to look beyond the thoughts. Simply watch the thoughts without identifying yourself with them and the thoughts will subside.

I am using self-inquiry as recommended by Ramaṇa Maharṣhi, trying to trace the origin of the “I”, but it seems that inquiry is an effort involving thought.

Making inquiry is not seeing. You have simply to observe; you don't have to analyse. In analysing, the mind is working; it is thinking. All sorts of thinking must stop.

What you have said about seeing applies to hearing as well?

Hearing without thinking, seeing without thinking, smelling without thinking – all of these involve pure Awareness. The object of seeing, the object of hearing, the object of smelling does not in any way influence the pure seeing, hearing or smelling. It is like light illuminating an object without getting involved with the object.

Seeing is there in all states but it is covered by thinking

You told me, “See the thinking process and it will disappear.” Mr. Arnaud told me, “Everything can be seen.” Seeing my

emotions, my refusals, it seems to me that I am losing my personality and, even if the mind is becoming quieter, it seems to be endless. Am I doing something wrong?

Yes, if you see your thoughts or emotions, they do disappear. You have not to think that you are seeing. You have to simply see without thinking. Please, note this difference.

Mr. Arnaud told you the right thing. You can see all the activities of the mind and they will stop. You are not doing something wrong. To make the mind completely silent, patience and perseverance are needed. One must practise daily and regularly, with dedication and commitment and wait! If you lose your personality, you will gain the impersonal Self which is everywhere and eternal. I wish for you to lose your personality sooner than later. Your wife should not be worried about it. When you lose your personality, you become more humble and docile. Usually, it so happens that, if the husband becomes more absorbed in meditation, the wife becomes worried, and vice versa. But in your case, as both of you are sincere seekers, no problem will arise.

Seeing the mind is very difficult and very easy also. One does not need any energy or strength to see. Even a man lying on his deathbed can see. Seeing is there in all states, but it is covered by thinking. The covering is voluntary; it is not forced by any other person. Seeing does not need any energy but thinking does. If you spend a lot of energy, it means you must be thinking. Thinking has its own utility, as doing has its own as well. In life, you have to think and also act. You must think rightly and act rightly. Lead your life purposefully. The true purpose of human life is Self-Realization.

For a devotee to lose his personality, does it mean a total surrender of himself to the Divine?

The devotee can most easily achieve losing one's personality, one's whole person, by surrendering himself unto the Divine. But there are other methods of losing one's personality. One of them, which is what we were just speaking of, is by seeing. Personality includes mind, ego, intellect, *chitta* and all the instruments of the soul. In fact, ego is the result of non-seeing.

Why try to see the mind?

Purification of the mind leads to right perception and right understanding. Seeing of the mind leads to the end of the mind and the end of all relative knowledge. Which do you prefer? You cannot see the Spirit as you see a chair. You can BE the Spirit!

Turn your attention to the Seer

Feelings of silence, peace and other states of mind are still observed by something that is still the ego. Should we give up this witness that belongs to the ego, so that we can merge into the silence that is boundless?

A time comes when the Seer and the seen, the experiencer and the experienced become one. Withdraw your attention from what is being experienced and turn it to the Seer. That is the secret. Turn your attention to the One who is experiencing.

4. Different Methods should be Practised at Different Times

***Bhakti* and *jñāna* are different paths**

I would like to give up my heart and my intellect. Is it possible to practise bhakti and jñāna in one method?

Bhakti, in its proper sense, means love for God. The devotee wants to have direct experience of God through the path of love and worship. The path of self-inquiry is different. An Indian can follow these two paths at the same time, because faith in God is inborn in an Indian, who can follow the path of self-inquiry and also pray to the Lord to help him on the path. For a Westerner it may not be easy to follow both paths at the same time.

The word *bhakti* is translated into English as devotion. If the seeker is whole-heartedly devoted to the path of self-enquiry, it may be said that he is putting both his heart and intellect to realize the Self. In this sense only it can be said that he is practising *bhakti* and *jñāna* together. Otherwise *bhakti* and *jñāna* are different paths. The path of self-inquiry, “Who am I?” has nothing to do with *bhakti*.

It is only in Hinduism that so many paths to find the Truth are available. Christianity and Islam basically follow the path of *bhakti*.

Concentration on the *anāhata chakra* or *ājñā chakra*

I understood that japa should be practised at the heart-centre

and dhyāna at the ājñā chakra, but should I practise them together, or alternately or at different times?

How will you focus your attention on the heart-centre and ājñā chakra simultaneously? It will not be possible. If you try to practise *japa* and *dhyāna* at the same time, your mind will be divided, and you will not be able to do even one of them with total concentration. So *japa* and *dhyāna* should be practised at different times. It is most scientific to practise *japa* at the heart-centre and practise contemplation on any form or idea on the ājñā chakra. Ājñā chakra is the centre of vision. All the forms are conceived at the ājñā chakra. The heart-centre is called the *anāhata chakra*. It is connected with sound.

I myself have experienced that all visions take place at the ājñā chakra. If you are practising *japa* at the heart-centre and a vision comes, your attention at once rushes to the ājñā chakra. On the other hand if you are concentrating on any form or image at the ājñā chakra, and some inner sound is heard, your attention at once comes down to the heart-centre and you hear that sound at the heart-centre. I have experienced this many times during the period of my *sādhanā*.

Between light and sound what is the shortcut to practise right meditation?

Light and sound are not different in kind. Light changes into sound and sound changes into light. The difference between them is only in the degree of their vibrations. Basically both are the same energy. In the scriptures, at some places it is written that the universe came out of light; at other places it is written that it came out of sound. Light and sound, as objects, are only the

manifestations of Consciousness. Consciousness is the fundamental principle. It is the light of Consciousness, which enlightens the whole “becoming.” Who sees the light or who hears the sound? It is the subject. Light and sound are objects. Subject is individualised Consciousness. To be in Consciousness itself, you have to draw back your attention from all objects, inner or outer. It is called “the backward flowing of attention.” You have to reverse the direction of the arrow of your attention.

Don't let your mind be divided

Meditation and the practice of *mantra japa* both lead eventually to absorption in the Divine, but meditation and *mantra japa* should not be practised at the same time. When you are practising *japa*, concentrate on listening to the *mantra* at your heart-centre. Do not think anything at that time. One of the purposes of the practice of *mantra japa* is to stop the thinking process. One should pray to and adore the Divine before starting meditation or before the practice of the *mantra*. If you practise meditation and *mantra japa* at the same time, your mind will be divided and you won't be able to meditate with your whole mind, nor will you be able to practise the *mantra* with total concentration.

What ways are there to communicate with God?

There are many ways. If one cannot directly communicate with God one has to use some divine symbol. The symbol may be of a divine name, a divine form, or a quality/idea associated with the Divine.

***Japa* and contemplation on an image are different practices**

*Many times during my practice of *japa*, the form of God comes to my mind. What should I do?*

Japa and contemplation on any divine form are two separate practices and they should not be practised at the same time. In *japa*, the chanting of the name, or *mantra*, is done and at the same time mentally listened to, while in the practice of contemplation on a divine form, the divine image has to be formed and seen simultaneously. If you mix both, your mind will be divided and you will not be able to concentrate on any one of them. Moreover, the centres where the attention has to be fixed during these two practices are different. So it is not scientific to practise *japa* and contemplation on the divine form at the same time. During *japa*, concentrate on the *mantra* and listen to it. During contemplation, imagine the form and concentrate on seeing it without thinking.

This fact happens so easily without my will.

If you can concentrate on both at the same time, it is excellent. Why should you be confused? I have written what is the easier method to concentrate. One person cannot even think one thing at a time and another person can think of three things at the same time. All forms of the image are made at the *ājñā chakra*. For hearing the name or sound, it is in the heart-centre, called *anāhata chakra*. At what centre will you concentrate if you practise *japa* and contemplation on the form at the same time? How will your mind become stable? It will be moving between two centres! Fix your attention at only one centre at a time if you want your mind to be concentrated.

I start my meditation like that, but a few minutes later the form arises.

If you enjoy that, go on doing it, but the concentration will not be achieved. What is meant by concentration? Is it not a voluntary effort? When you are making a voluntary effort to do something, you have to refuse all other thoughts or images that come to your mind involuntarily.

It is said that name and form are one, when there is name, form is there also.

The *Ārya Samāijists* do not believe in the form of God. They concentrate on any divine quality and no form comes in their mind, because there is no association of that divine quality with any form in their mind. What form comes in the mind of Muslims when they repeat Allah? For them, it is blasphemy to associate any form with the Divine.

It seems impossible for me not to have both together...

I am not saying that you should not associate a form with the name of God. I am saying it is not impossible. It depends upon your *sanskāras* and association.

Why did you tell me that it is excellent if I can concentrate on both at the same time, and yet you say not to do it?

For concentration, it is not proper. But if you can do both things at one time, then it is extraordinary; you are a special case!

The goal is to see no difference between name and form, is it not?

If you are in that state, you should be worshipped!

Difference between the methods of witnessing and rejecting thoughts

Can we practise thoughtlessness by rejecting the thoughts that arise?

How will you reject the thoughts? You have to use a negative thought to reject thoughts.

Then how to practise thoughtlessness?

Do not deliberately think anything. If a thought arises, don't identify yourself with it. Simply watch it, and it subsides. That is one method of practice that leads to thoughtlessness. The attention in this method has to be kept at the heart-centre.

To mix *japa* and *dhyāna* is not proper

To practise japa I sit in siddhāsana. Then I concentrate upon all the seven chakras one by one. Kindly tell me if this is the right way. Should I concentrate upon the anāhata chakra only during japa? The problem is that when I concentrate on the heart-centre, I forget the counting of my mālās.

Siddhāsana is very appropriate for practising *dhyāna* or contemplation. To mix *japa* and *dhyāna* is not proper. It splits the consciousness with the result that the seeker can neither concentrate completely on *japa*, nor he or she can concentrate in *dhyāna*. I have already said, and I always recommend that seekers practise *mantra japa* at the heart-centre and practise contemplation at the *ājñā chakra*. If you want to count the beads of the *mālā* while reciting a *mantra* and at the same time you concentrate at a particular centre and try to hear the vibrations of the *mantra* at that centre, it means you are doing many things at the same time. I do not know if you can fully concentrate on all these at the same time. I advise the seekers to practise one thing at one time.

According to my own experience, the proper place for practising *japa* is the heart-centre, but if you forget the counting of the beads, which you do not want to stop when you concentrate upon the *anāhata chakra*, then you should not concentrate on the heart. I do not know what is your purpose of counting the number of *japa* on the *mālā*. If your *Gurudeva* has asked you to do it, then you should continue it with faith and trust.

What is the exact location of the anāhata chakra? Is it the biological heart? And what is the exact technique of reciting a mantra?

The *anāhata chakra* corresponds to the heart centre. It is in the middle of the chest. It is not the physical heart. You may recite the *mantra* mentally and hear it mentally also. A stage comes when the reciting becomes effortless. It goes on by itself, and you simply hear the *mantra*. It is called *ajapā jāpa*.

Don't mix thinking and watching

When I try to meditate and watch without thinking, should I have an attitude of intense personal effort or of complete surrender to the Guru's power or to the Divine?

Watching is not doing something. How can it be associated with effort? Thinking is associated with effort. While thinking you have to correlate your thoughts and be relevant. Right thinking may involve effort; wrong thinking may involve more effort because in wrong thinking you have to associate thoughts that appear to be right but in fact are wrong. And what about watching? You are watching all the time; even when you are sleeping, you are watching the sleep. Watching and thinking have been mixed up together. Meditation means to simply watch. It is not doing something. You may call it non-doing. Surrendering to the Guru or God is a different method to stop thinking. It has nothing to do with watching. Don't mix the two methods.

Chapter Six

Obstacles on the Spiritual Journey

“There are three obstacles that prevent man from realizing God: impurity of mind, instability of mind, and the veil of ignorance. Impurity is removed by selfless and good actions. Instability is removed by love and devotion to God. The veil of ignorance is removed by knowledge and awareness. The integral sādhanā of realizing God includes all the three — karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jñāna yoga.”

Obstacles on the Spiritual Journey

Obstacles to Meditation & Contemplation

The Wandering Mind

Your mind is like a supermarket

The sage has no mind, no desire. He becomes the instrument of the Divine. The divine will works through the sage freely. If the sage has a mind, he is not the slave of his mind. He uses his mind, but is not used by his mind. That is the difference. First, you should integrate your mind. It is divided at present. It has so many desires that are opposite to each other. Integrate it and direct it to the Divine.

Take a paper and a pen! Write down honestly all the thoughts that come into your mind. Take it as if you have not to show this paper to anyone, so that you can write everything. If you read that paper afterwards, you will come to know that you are a mad person. Do you know who a mad person is? A mad person is one who has no coherence in his thoughts and actions. Your mind is like a supermarket, where each and everything is available.

The senses and the mind must be transcended

Is the objective world real?

When you take the objective world as real, you have in some way to identify it as the manifestation of the Divine because the Divine is one without a second. How do you define the Real? What is real? The materialists say that what you can see, touch and taste is real. So your senses are the proof of reality. The spiritualists say that what is real is out of reach of all senses including the mind. You have to subdue your senses and drop your mind. The senses and mind are the obstacles; they must be transcended. Where do you stand?

When do the senses and the thoughts dissolve?

At present you cannot totally stop your thoughts. What you have to do is to purify your thoughts, intentions, feelings, emotions, actions and speech. During meditation you should try to stop the thinking process or concentrate on some divine symbol in order to stabilize your mind. When the mind becomes pure, it is far easier to concentrate and control one's thoughts. Purification of mind involves sublimation of one's emotions, desires and thoughts. A purified mind becomes very strong and can bear the impact of favourable and adverse situations and remains undisturbed in all conditions.

Your thoughts follow your desires and interests

When I reflect on the control of thoughts, I see that my will is not able to control them.

How are your thoughts independent of your will? Every thought that comes to you is directly or indirectly connected with your desires and your interests. Your thoughts follow your deep interest. If you are very much interested in ice cream, the thought of ice cream will come. How to get it? From where to get it? You will think of its taste. You may even think of the shop where the best ice cream is available. You may think of how ice cream is made. A chain of thoughts related with the ice cream will obsess your mind. If you are deeply interested in money, the corresponding thoughts will follow. If you are interested in God, thoughts about God will come. At present there is not one centre of your interest. There are countless centres of interest. Your mind is like a broken mirror, and the broken parts of that mirror are scattered at so many places.

To live in the present

How to live in the present and not think about the past and future?

To live in the present moment is easier said than done. A moving mind cannot even grasp what the present is. How can it live in the present? Your mind is the result of your past. First, it has to be made free of its conditioning. It has to be made transparent. It is an arduous task. It is *sādhana*. Only a totally passive but alert mind can taste the beauty of the present moment. What is time? You conceive of the present in relation to past and future, in relation to the movement of your mind. Can you conceive of time without the mind? The present is the experience of no-mind. When the mind stops, time stops.

Then, how to stop the thinking process?

Gaze at some point or sit in the presence of someone whom you love deeply, and your thinking will stop. When you see something very beautiful, your thinking stops for a few seconds. When a mother meets her child after a separation of so many years, her mind stops for a few seconds. Doesn't it?

The mind is made up of the memories of the past and imagination of the future. There is another supramental level of consciousness. When you reach that level of consciousness, only then, can you realize the present. The mind is not the final experience in evolution. As soon as the mind thinks of the present, the latter slips into past. The mind cannot even conceive of the present. When it is exhorted or advised that one should live in the present, it practically means that the seeker should not make big plans for the distant future. One should discharge one's day-to-day duties in the name of the Divine and spend most of one's time in *sādhana*, i.e., meditation, prayer, reflection, *japa* and breathing exercises.

The mind has tremendous power of imagination

Do all emotions come from the past?

All emotions are not connected with the past, but most of them are. They can also be connected with a situation you have imagined to take place in the future. The mind is mostly made up of the past, but it has the capacity to imagine about the future; it can make images of things and beings it has never experienced before. It can imagine a being with the head of a man and the body of a cat. It can make a hell of heaven and a heaven of hell.

It has tremendous power. It can become a demon. It can also become an angel.

The policy of stick and carrot

We always speak about taming the mind, but wouldn't it be much better to make it our friend?

Deal with your mind as if it is a child. You can teach a child with love as well. But you have to use the policy of stick and carrot. A tamed, seasoned, pure mind is a friend and is helpful; an untamed, impure mind is the enemy which creates obstacles in the path of God-Realization. Man can tame a wild elephant, a wild lion, but he cannot tame his own mind. Mind is a very flexible thing. It is easier to change your mind than to change your body.

If you cannot go beyond thought, pray for divine grace

I never go beyond thought. Why is thought so powerful?

If the thinking process slows down, it can also come to a standstill. It is the identification of Consciousness with a thought or a thing that starts the thinking process. Who creates thoughts in you? Is it something other than you?

The attachment to the thoughts is so deep, is it due to māyā?

Well, if you say it is māyā, it does not solve any problem. There is something in you that is more powerful than māyā. If you cannot go beyond thought with your efforts, pray and invoke

divine grace. In the *Gītā* Kṛiṣṇa says, “Only those can overcome the influence of *māyā* who take refuge in Me and always remember Me.”

Control of mind

Through some technique, can we know the root cause of our emotions?

Mere intellectual understanding does not help much in overcoming the emotions. Who does not know that anger is not good? Who does not know that attachment brings suffering? Who does not know that greed is bad? But how many people are free of anger, attachment, greed etc.? It is divine Love that brings radical transformation in the seeker. Freud was a great psychologist. He knew so much about the mind and its mechanism. But the poor guy had no control over his own mind.

Don't be a slave of your mind

I am very often disturbed by my feelings and I don't know what to do about it.

You should not entertain a feeling that disturbs you. Don't be a slave of your mind. How can you remain undisturbed when you have no control over your thoughts, emotions and feelings? Work to tame your mind. An untamed mind will never let you be at peace.

Are thoughts independent of the observer?

If the thoughts were independent how would you stop them? The mind owes its existence to you, to your being. Don't you say, "My mind," "My hand," "My feet," "My eyes" etc. They belong to you.

Don't identify with your mind, only then will you SEE

How to deal with this part of myself that is rebellious and lazy and doesn't want to do sādhanā?

Ego/mind is afraid of doing *sādhanā*. It is so because one of the purposes of *sādhanā* is to control the mind. Mind cherishes being a master. It will put forth all sorts of obstacles if you want to end its control over you. It may even suggest to you that to do *sādhanā* is to be egoistic. Be strong. Assert yourself. Be more and more alert. The mind does not confront you. It plays tricks upon you. It is like a thief. If you are alert and awake, it cannot deceive you. Always keep watch on your mind. It works only when you are slumbering or when you are absent. Be present as a witness.

How to remember to be present in so many different situations that occur?

Mind does not see. It only interprets. It judges. Don't identify with your mind, only then will you be able to SEE. First apply it during meditation. After that, slowly and gradually, you will be able to apply it in dealing with others. If you cannot remain alert

and a witness during one hour of meditation, how will you remain alert during ten hours of activity?

Already I need grace to keep myself alert and be a witness during meditation.

Grace comes in the state of no-mind, in the state of no-ego. Your ego and mind do not let the grace happen to you. Whatever you do, do it totally. When you do *japa*, be absorbed in *japa* totally. When you practise witness consciousness, remain a witness totally.

When you see the knot as a knot it starts opening

In my mind, the same thoughts, the same inner discussions are coming again and again.

You know about the gramophone record? Before the tape cassette was invented, there were only gramophone records. If there was a crack or a scratch in the gramophone record, when the needle reached that crack, it could not move ahead and it would get stuck in one groove, repeating again and again the same words. You had to pick up the needle and take it out of the groove to move it forward. Then, it could move ahead and play the rest of the record.

Similarly, there are some “knots” or “complexes” in the mind. When your thinking comes to that knot, the same thoughts go on repeating again and again. That is how the thinking process goes on. This process is almost mechanical. Only a few persons are able to think creatively by what is called “creative thinking.” There is something in you that is beyond mind. When you have

an approach to this something, which is not mechanical, the mechanical process of thinking stops. The approach may be temporary, a glimpse. If it is temporary, there are only temporary moments of creative thinking. When you see the knot as a knot, it starts opening. Mental bondage is not something concrete like a prison-house. It is born of ignorance. It is like darkness. It disappears in a moment with the coming of the light. You have a vested interest in ignorance and darkness, that is why it is difficult to get out of it.

Observation is disinterested watching

Should a part of my sādhanā be to watch, here and now?

Observation, right! But not analysis. Observation is disinterested watching. Analysis is reasoning and trying to come to a conclusion. Analysis is the substitute for observation. The reasoning mind works like a computer. The computer is first fed with memories and then it can reproduce what it has been fed. Mind is only rarefied matter. It has no intelligence of its own.

The Tendency to Sleep during Meditation

Difference between sleep and deep meditation

How to differentiate between sleep and meditation?

If you go to sleep during meditation, your head cannot remain in the same posture; it bends down. Some people start snoring when

they go to sleep during meditation. Sleep and deep meditation are similar in the respect that the mind stops thinking in both states. Therefore, one can confuse deep meditation with sleep. The radical difference you can feel is when you come out of that state. If you had been sleeping, you will feel lethargic and would like to lie down and sleep again. If you had been in deep meditation, you will feel very refreshed and light and peaceful when you come out of it.

How to overcome sleep during meditation

One goes to sleep during meditation for so many reasons. Some of them are:

1. You don't have enough sleep at night to meet the body's requirement.
2. You have overeaten and it tends to make you sleep.
3. You are physically and mentally very tired.
4. You get bored by meditation and don't enjoy it.

The persons who practise meditation have to avoid all the factors cited above. There are also some measures to avoid sleep during meditation:

1. Take light food; your stomach should not be full when you sit in meditation. It is better to take a bath or refresh yourself before sitting in meditation.
2. There is a *yogic kriyā* called *bhastrikā*. It consists of inhaling your breath very fast and immediately exhaling it fast. Do it for about five minutes. It makes the *pranic* energy in the body very active and you cannot go to sleep.
3. Create deep and sincere interest in meditation by reflecting upon the merits and necessity of meditation.

4. If all methods fail, you should get up, go out, take a stroll in the fresh air for some minutes and again sit in meditation.
5. Some people say that taking tea is good before sitting in meditation. It tends to keep one awake. But I don't recommend it.
6. You can also stand up and meditate. Don't sit. There was a time I used to practise *japa* in the standing position for over five hours. It is not easy to sleep in the standing position.

Can you go to sleep when you are sitting near your beloved?

In meditation, when I experience more silence I always become a little dizzy or sleepy. How can I overcome it?

It is true that when the mind becomes slow during meditation there is a tendency to go to sleep. This tendency can be overcome by a keen interest in meditation, by alertness, by sitting in such a posture in which the spine remains straight. If you have deep love for God in your heart, you would never go to sleep during meditation. Can you go to sleep when you are sitting near your beloved and enjoying his or her presence?

The Tendency to Change One's Practice

Some people go on changing their *mantra* like they change their clothes

*Among all the forms of meditation, I feel more inclined to practise *japa yoga*. I had practised it for two years and then*

inertia started. I want to fill my mind with the name of God again. Shall I go back to that mantra or is it more efficient to use a mantra given by a Guru through initiation? Is it still possible to receive a mantra from you?

Does that *mantra* not appeal to you now? If your mind is attracted to that *mantra*, it will not only be easier for you to concentrate on it but you will enjoy it too. It is true that a *mantra* that has been practised and perfected by someone and then imparted, is more efficient and can be easily perfected by the one to whom it is imparted. The other advantage is that when you have been given a *mantra*, you are usually not tempted to change it again and again. Otherwise, it so happens that one reads about the glory of a *mantra* and starts to practise it. After sometime, one reads somewhere that another *mantra* is more powerful and efficient and one gives up the practice of the first *mantra* and takes to the other. Thus, one may go on changing one's *mantra* like one changes ones clothes, and may not be able to enjoy any of them. For taking a *mantra* from me you have to fulfil certain conditions.

When the Absolute has been realized, then no *mantra* needs to be practised

You said that it is important to keep the same mantra. Should one practise the same mantra all his life?

I would have said that you should not change your *mantra* unless its meaning has been absorbed by your subconscious mind completely. It happens so after a very long practice of *japa* of that *mantra*; it may take years and years. After you have

absorbed the meaning of that *mantra* and your personality is changed, you may (or may not) need a new *mantra* that evolves your personality higher and higher. There are many aspects of the Divine and the practice of different *mantras* helps the seeker to realize the different aspects of God.

When the Absolute has been realized, then no *mantra* needs to be practised, all spiritual effort comes to an end; the seeker himself stops to be; the Divine destination is reached, there is nothing more to be achieved. Some people read the glories of different *mantras* and they go on changing their *mantra* and its practice, it is like changing a path before it has led you where it had to take you.

Temptation and Danger from Subtle Planes

When the *sādhaka* enters the astral plane during meditation

I sometimes find some forces entering my body and giving me strange suggestions.

Do not trust such messages or suggestions whether they come from living persons or unseen forces. Only those messages and suggestions should be followed which are reasonable and which conform to the teachings of the holy scriptures. Many voices giving messages may be heard if the *sādhaka* enters the astral plane during meditation. Usually such voices that are heard and the forms that are seen during meditation split the consciousness of the *sādhaka* and are detrimental to his or her progress in meditation.

General Obstacles

“Obstacles will be there, without doubt, as long as there is imperfection. If they upset you, you cannot succeed in your aim. Worry not about these and march on towards perfection with confidence and perseverance. Remember, God is on your side.”

– Spiritual Gems

Turning the stumbling stones into stepping stones

It happens that our old bad karmas become an obstacle in our sādhanā. How to reduce the effect of those so that our sādhanā proceeds according to our plan?

The stumbling stones can be made into stepping stones, provided you know how to do that, and provided you have a very intense and strong desire to do *sādhanā*. Obstacles come to make you aware of where you stand and how deep and sincere you are in your aspiration. The seeker should adjust himself in his situation properly with regard to how much time he should devote to prayer, meditation, selfless service and other limbs of spiritual *sādhanā*.

For the last few days I am not able to concentrate in meditation. I feel some obstruction coming in.

What is preventing you from sitting in *sādhanā*? Is the obstacle coming from outside or is your mind resisting? Unless you know your obstacle, how can you remove it? Look within. Introspect and try to know what is preventing you from sitting in *sādhanā*.

What is it that is keeping me away from God?

Once I asked your help to build my relationship with God, and you answered, “When will you be able to spare some time to go within and meet Him?” What makes me unable to welcome Him into my heart?

There are so many obstacles that come in the way of God-Realization. The main and foremost obstacles are the lack of interest in God, lack of trust in Him, undue attachment with temporal things, situations and relationships, negative emotions, worldly desires, instability of mind, wrong beliefs, wrong understanding, wrong actions and the lack of openness in the life of the seeker. To overcome such obstacles as mentioned above, total commitment, determination, right effort, right guidance, prayer, introspection, reflection and periodic association with the enlightened ones are the essential prerequisites. God helps those who help themselves with trust in Him.

Ask yourself, “What is it that keeps me away from God? What is it that keeps me always moving and wandering? What is it that makes me suffer?” Ask yourself these questions everyday. Sit down quietly and introspect. You will get the answers, surely. You know your mind and your life better than any other person.

How to get rid of the impact of a past incident

During meditation and japa, a past incident appeared and hindered the process of my meditation. In spite of my efforts, it persisted. Please guide me, what should I do to remove such a hindrance?

It seems that past incident had a very deep impact on your mind. You have to counter the impact of that incident through reflection. If you cannot do it, then pray to God to make you free from the memory of that incident. Tell that incident to a very close friend. Do not keep it hidden in your heart. Your friend may help you overcome the impact of the incident. It will be easier for you to get rid of the influence of the incident if you disclose it to some of your intimate friends.

How to overcome psychological and mental problems?

My son was hospitalised twice for psychiatric treatment and, as a result of this painful situation, he has become more mature and it also has made me go deeper in my spiritual path. At times my anxiety makes him weak. What to do?

Your anxiety for your son will not in any way help him. It may create psychological problems for you as well. Help him in whatever way you can. Give him positive suggestions. Help him to lead a balanced life. What is the cause of his psychological problem? Try to know it and then remove it. In the West, as I have seen, many more people are suffering from psychological problems than those in the East. One of the reasons is their way of life and instability of family life. Pray for him, for his welfare. Don't let him be alone. He should be persuaded to keep himself always busy in some work.

I also have to face psychological problems in my family. Then I feel a lot of suffering in my body. How to purify it?

The body suffers due to some disease. Get your body thoroughly checked-up and treat it properly according to the medical advice. The body can also be sick due to some acute mental problem. To remove the sickness in the body caused by some mental problem, one has to overcome that mental problem. More often than not mental problems are created by wrong thinking, by acute negative emotions and worries. Try to keep your mind composed and peaceful through trust in God, reflection, prayer, breathing exercises, meditation, etc.

Two ways to overcome negative emotions

During meditation we should try to be completely relaxed, but if we have some emotions, then tension may arise. How to deal with this?

There are two ways of overcoming an emotion. One is that you use the method given in *Pātañjali's Yoga Sūtras*. One *sūtra* says, “*Vitarkabādhane pratipakshabhāvanam*” — “Counter one emotion, the negative emotion, with its opposite.” If there is anger, counter it with love. If there is attachment, counter it with dispassion. If there is infatuation, counter it with detachment, and so on. How will you do it? If you have a feeling of attachment, you should remember or think of some incident that evokes dispassion in you. For example, you can remember the death of some of your close friends. You may remember or think of some other incident in which a close friend deserted his or her friend, etc. Such thinking will make the feeling of attachment subside or reduce. Also, one should reflect on the harmful consequences of giving in to negative emotions.

The second method is to watch an emotion as a witness without identifying yourself with it, and the emotion at once subsides. Your mind cannot function at all without your identification with it. So if you can watch your mind as a witness, the thinking process or the feeling process slows down and eventually stops. So, when an emotion appears the key is: “Don’t suppress it, don’t give in, see it.” If you are not sitting in meditation, you should start jogging or running and the tension will stop. The energy that makes the mind think or feel is used in running or jogging.

Shall I tell you a story? There was a clerk working in an office. His boss was very, very rude to him. He would often scold the clerk over petty matters. The clerk would not dare say anything to his boss or express his anger. Slowly and gradually, it started having a bad effect on his body and mind, so much so that he became sick both in his body and mind and could not go to the office. He took leave and stayed home. But the memory of his boss scolding him did not leave him. Even in his home he was very restless. He could not sleep in the night. His wife took him to a psychiatrist who listened to the clerk very attentively and said, “You can be cured within a week.” He told the clerk to keep a photo of his boss in his room and beat it regularly with a shoe four times a day, (Swāmīji laughs) as you attend the meditation sessions. The clerk followed the instructions and was cured of his illness within a week. He went back to his office to work. The boss asked him how he was cured. He replied, “Because of you, Sir.” Positive emotions also create tension, but it is pleasing. Every kind of excitement works against peace.

“For a seeker it is most important to be unimportant”

Superiority and inferiority complex

How to overcome pride? Should I diminish myself?

I would like to quote from the book *Spiritual Gems*, “Are you proud of the beauty and health of your body? A few days of acute illness can deform it and turn it into a detestable skeleton of bones. Are you proud of your intellect and reflecting power? A blow on your head may damage your brain and all your thinking capacity may be nullified. Are you proud of your life? A few minutes stopping of your breath and your life is lost.” What can you boast of? If you boast of being a rich person, there are thousands in the world who are richer than you. If you boast of being a wise person, you are in fact showing your ignorance, because there are hundreds of persons in the world wiser than you. If you boast of being a great saint or sage, it shows your short-sightedness, because there are many greater sages than you in the world.

Can you tell me what is in you that you can feel proud of? Both an inferiority complex and the feeling of being superior are the working of the ego. Why should you feel inferior? If you are sick, there are hundreds of persons who are sicker than you. If you are poor, there are thousands in the world who have not enough to eat. If you feel ignorant, there are so many in the world who are more ignorant than you. Why should you feel inferior? Don't compare yourself with anyone. Try to go deep within and discover your true and essential Nature. When the feeling of being inferior comes to you, look to those who are lower than you. When the feeling of being superior comes to you, look to those who are higher than you. It will keep you in a balanced state of mind.

When you feel a headache, stop concentrating and relax

I am feeling pain between my eyes while meditating. What can I do to release this? I heard that sometimes we have to open the forehead to get relief from pain.

If the concentration is forced, it can give you a headache. When you feel a headache, stop concentrating and relax. If the pain persists, you should stop concentrating, otherwise, it may harm the braincells. If you are concentrating on an image on the forehead for many years, it can happen that you may not be able to remove that image, though it is very, very rare and holy. Rāmakṛiṣṇa had to face that obstacle. Totapuri (Rāmakṛiṣṇa's Guru) pricked that spot to the extent that some blood came out, and the image of *Devī* disappeared.

Rāmakṛiṣṇa would not make any effort while concentrating on *Devī*. It had become effortless for him, and he would totally forget everything, except *Devī*, at that time. It is called *savikalpa samādhi*. Very few reach that stage.

So, sādhanā should not make us tense?

If *sādhanā* makes you tense, it is no *sādhanā* at all. Can drinking water make you thirsty? Can fire make you feel cold? Try to find out the cause of your tension. It cannot be due to *sādhanā*. Forced meditation can create tension, cause headache or some other malady. Cultivate deep aspiration for *sādhanā*. Then you will enjoy your *sādhanā*. Meditation means sitting close to your Beloved/God. How can you be tense when you are sitting near your Beloved?

Anger

Where is your anger?

When one has a wave of anger or irritation, should one express it, even if it might hurt the person it is directed to? Or should one try to restrain it?

One should not be swayed by anger. Anger can be overcome by love. When anger comes, remember someone whom you love deeply and the anger will subside.

Anger is sometimes so strong!

If you could see your anger when you are angry, the anger would lose its intensity and even stop.

Are the emotions coming from the navel-centre?

All emotions are connected with the heart. The *maṇipura* or navel-centre is the seat of *prāṇa shakti*, the force of activity.

Is there one way to avoid anger?

Doctors say if your adrenals are taken out, you won't be able to become angry at all. Can you show me your anger? A man went to a Zen monk and said, "How can I overcome my anger?" The monk replied, "Show me your anger and I will tell you how to overcome it. Where is your anger?" The man looked within and tried his best but could not find anger within him. When you are present (aware), the anger is absent. When anger is present, you are absent.

Man has the power to discriminate and to overcome his negative tendencies

I feel it is suppression to try to overcome my anger. Isn't it better to let it go?

Suppression means when you are forced to do something under pressure from the outside, but if you do something wilfully and joyfully, with a constructive and positive purpose, how can it be called suppression? For example, you know and accept that anger is not good. It is bad for your physical health, it raises your blood pressure, it produces poison in your body, it adversely affects your digestion, etc. It is bad for your mind also, because it creates tension in your mind and makes you very disturbed and upset. Moreover, it is also bad socially, because it creates conflicts in society. In a fit of anger one can even murder another person. It can break up your family life. Above all, it is bad spiritually because during a fit of anger you lose your power of discrimination, you lose alertness and become totally identified with the object of your anger; you lose self-awareness and become centred on what is phenomenal and not lasting. It is the same thing with all the negative tendencies and emotions.

If you understand all this, should you not try to refuse and reject the anger when it comes, or should you be subservient to it and obey your angry mind? An animal, when angry, cannot stop its anger, but a man has the power and ability to overcome anger and all his negative tendencies. He has the power to discriminate, he can overcome anger by love, he can refuse and reject the tendency to get angry, he can forgive the mistakes of others and he can bear the weaknesses of others. If, through any method, he overcomes his or her anger, would you call it suppression?

If you don't reflect upon your experiences and learn from them, then what is the difference between an animal and a man? The mind and senses cheat you. Many times you follow the dictates of your senses and mind and when the result is very disturbing or harmful, you repent. Don't you? Should you not then try to avoid making that mistake again and again? Or should you go on committing the same mistakes again and again, thinking that it is suppression to refuse and reject the negative suggestions of your mind? Should you "let go" and kill a person if your angry mind tells you to do so? "Let go" are the words, the phrase you hear from teachers of the West everywhere. What is this "let go," what exactly does it mean? Should you surrender to anger and the negative tendencies of your mind?

If you see your anger, it tends to subside

How to accept my anger?

Anger harms the person who entertains anger more than the one to whom the anger is expressed. If you see your anger when it is there, it tends to subside. But usually you don't see it. You remember it after the storm has passed. The one who sees and the one who remembers it later are not the same being. The person who remembers/recognizes the anger and is determined to accept it is not the same as the one who sees the anger. How would you accept your anger? You are absent when the anger is there. Only the intellectual understanding does not enable you to say "yes" or "no" to the situation that you encounter. You know that anger is harmful for the mind and body and still you become angry. You know very well that you should not be jealous and yet you become jealous.

Lust

Sexual desire is a big obstacle

After the death of my son, something died in me too. I don't feel sexual desire any more. Is it due to some transformation of the energy? What is your advice about it?

It is very good that you don't have sexual desire after the death of your son. You should now direct all your energies on the path of God-Realization. For many seekers, sexual desire is a big obstacle on the path. Desire is like itching. You itch and scratch and get a sort of temporary relief that you confuse with happiness. So you scratch again and again. It does not solve the problem. *Sāadhanā* means to sublimate all your energies and direct them on the path of Realization.

Overcoming sexual desire

I was married for many years, but my wife passed away; I am now a widower. I still have sexual desire. How can I overcome it?

There are only two ways of overcoming sexual desire. One is the intense and deep love for God. When that zeal for God-Realization emerges, the energy of sexual desire starts transforming and passions turn into more and more love for God. The second way is the way of *pravṛitti*, the householder's life. One can overcome this desire through *gṛihastha* life (householder's life) provided one has the sexual experience with one's wife according to the norms laid down in the *sat-shāstra*

(holy scripture) for a married person. If you have not been able to overcome this desire even after spending so many years of your life as a married person, it means you did not live the married life attempting to overcome the sexual desire, but you took to married life only to enjoy the sexual pleasures. That attempt has to be made while one's wife is alive, but it seems you never made this attempt to overcome your sexual desires when your wife was alive. You took up that life only to enjoy the pleasures of sexual experiences. Now the memory of those pleasures is simmering in your mind and disturbing you because you have no means to enjoy those pleasures. At this stage, you can overcome this desire through *vairāgya*, for which you have to reflect constantly upon the transitory nature of the pleasure of sexual experience for a long, long time. Along with this, you should also pray to the Lord to give you clarity of vision and intense and true love for Him. You should also keep control upon your diet. Don't eat things that stimulate the sexual energy.

The other way, I would now suggest to you, is to get married again and have a life-partner who herself is an ardent seeker of Truth and also wants to overcome her sexual desire. The purpose of married life is not to enjoy sexual pleasure, but to overcome the sexual desire. One who lives a married life for that purpose has to live differently than the ordinary *grihasthas*. It is not only the sexual experience that enables you to overcome sexual desire. If it were so, you or all the other married persons would be able to overcome sexual desire. The first and most important factor is the motive, whether it is to enjoy sexual pleasure or to overcome sexual desire. The second is the particular way of going through the sexual act, for which the married person should read the relevant books. There is no taboo on sex in animals. They are freer with regards to sex than even

the people of the West, but have the Western people overcome their sexual desire? It has created many more problems in their society than it has solved. No one gets rid of sexual desire by adopting free sex. They only lose sexual energy, not the sexual desire.

The greatness of human beings is to enjoy more subtle pleasures and joy

All the great spiritual teachings tell us to avoid physical relationships between men and women, because it is dirty. Why is it so?

The sensory pleasures are available to all, including animals. Animals enjoy sensual pleasures more deeply and to a greater extent than a human being. Their senses are more powerful than those of a human being. For example, you cannot see a thing when it is far away, but an eagle flying in the sky can see a needle lying on the ground from a distance of many kilometres. A dog can smell an object from a very long distance, and so on.

There is nothing dirty, as you have read from some people, in enjoying sexual pleasures, but the greatness of a human being is to be able to enjoy more subtle and higher types of pleasures, such as the joy felt in compassion, religion, music, poetry, art, painting, research, selfless service, and so on. The highest and greatest privilege, which a human being is given, is that he or she can discover the Truth and thereby find lasting Peace and Bliss. If a human being spends his or her life in merely enjoying the sensual pleasures, he is not progressing or evolving at all, but simply repeating the same experiences in human life that he has undergone in so many previous animal lives. It is childish.

Sexual energy can be transformed and used for one's spiritual unfoldment

What is the sexual energy and what to do with it? What do you say about sexuality?

There is a difference between sexual energy and sexuality. Sexuality means to use the sexual energy for getting sexual pleasures. It may not be a sin to seek sexual pleasures in conformity with the social norms, but it is surely not the best use of the sexual energy. Sexual energy can be transformed into spiritual energy and used for one's spiritual unfoldment. Sexual and sensual pleasure is freely and readily available in animal life. There is nothing commendable if a human being seeks the same pleasure that he has been enjoying freely in the animal life. The true aim and purpose of human life cannot be the pursuit of sensual pleasures. It is surely degradation. The true purpose and aim of human life is to realize the infinite and eternal Peace, Happiness, which is the fruit of Self-Realization. Sexual energy can be transformed into *ojas* and *tejas* and utilized on the path of Self-Realization. *Ojas* is the rarefied form of sexual energy. It is virtually not possible to control one's mind without *ojas*. *Ojas* further manifests itself into *tejas*, which is the divine light cum magnetism that can be felt when you go near a saintly person.

How can we discover and experience this process?

Aspire for the Timeless more and more. Cultivate dispassion for what is temporal and transient. Practise breathing exercises and *prāṇāyāma*. Meditate regularly. If you persistently follow these guidelines, you will be able to transform your sexual energy.

How can we recognize if the transformation of sexual energy has started?

You will have less and less sexual excitement and more and more an inner feeling of transportation when your sexual energy is being transformed.

If you can't overcome your sexual urges, get married

I have the feeling that the teachers who are monks sometimes start imitating the life of a monk although they are not born-celibates and thereby ruin their lives or they become false priests, as I observed in Catholicism. Would you please comment?

They should not live like donkeys! They should use their free will and thinking power to subjugate their animal instincts. They should get married and follow the rules of married life. Even in Christianity, no one is forced to become a monk. If one cannot observe the vows of a monk, he is allowed to leave the Church and live the life of an ordinary citizen.

You say, "In the end, sexuality has to be overcome."

There is also the institution of marriage. One should get married and live like a responsible member of society. I am suggesting the right path for you! If you cannot control and overcome your sexual urges, you should get married. There is no coercion in it. It is your choice. You can choose if you want to become a monk or not.

So, what is your suggestion? Please, make it clear.

The way of a donkey is the easiest. Will you follow that? Why are you afraid of challenges? (Laughing) If you cannot face a wife, how will you face God?

Attachment

Attachment is the obstacle, not the world

Is sādhanā done to live correctly in the world?

When you are in the body, you are in the world. How can you be out of the world so long as you are in the body? It is not the world that is the obstacle, it is the attachment, the craving for the world that is the obstacle to *sādhanā*. When your ego is hurt, you become very disturbed and restless. How can you bear the death of your ego, being at the stage where you are? If you lose your money, you weep. If you lose your house, you weep. If there is danger to your body, you cry. How can you face the death of your mind?

To remain unmoved in unfavourable situations is easier

What do you mean when you say, “It is more difficult to bear the favourable conditions than unfavourable situations”?

You don't become attached to the unfavourable situations. You try to overcome them, but if you are not alert, the favourable conditions may entangle your mind. You don't resist the favourable

situations. On the other hand, you wish and try to make the situations favourable to you. So it is much easier to get attached to them. To remain unmoved in favourable situations is more difficult than to remain unmoved in adverse situations. To remain unmoved and aware in unfavourable situations is easier. With the favourable conditions you at once become identified, as you feel pleasure in them. It was in this sense that I wrote that to bear the favourable conditions is more difficult.

Attachments disturb the mind

The weaker the desires and attachments become, the easier and better is the meditation. It is desire that moves the mind. It is attachment that disturbs the mind.

Can I become generous if I am born selfish?

Certainly, you can become generous from being selfish. Love makes you generous. Attachment makes you selfish. You have to give up attachment, and cherish and entertain love in your heart.

How to get rid of any attachment

Can we get rid of attachment to food only by discipline, or is it related to some other desire?

When you eat food that you like, again and again, and for a long time, you may get attached to it. To get rid of any attachment, both discipline and right understanding are needed.

Overeating may be due to some compensation also?

If there is a lack of salt in your body, you may feel the desire to eat the food that contains salt. For example, when you perspire, so much water goes out of your body that you feel thirsty and want to drink water. The same law applies to the mental plane.

You wrote once that we can eat sweets, but we should give up the desire for sweets.

If you can do so, it will be eating without eating, seeing without seeing, hearing without hearing and so on. Everyone cannot do that. This is a common saying (in spirituality). The same words have been said by many mystics about doing when the doing is motiveless and without the sense of doership.

Do not be serious about anything but God

I am recognized by various groups of people as a man able to lead them into action, which is my problem.

You cannot stop people from recognizing what they want. Should you not accept their recognition, there can be no problem for you. You are what you are. They are what they are. Keep yourself inwardly detached. Do not be serious about anything but God and Truth.

The child and the broken broom

A very rich family once came to see me when I was staying in a cave in Jammu. They had a child with them. There was a broken

broom lying in the corner of the cave. The child fell in love with that broom. When the family was ready to leave, he would not leave that broom. He insisted on taking it to his home. His family told him, “We will buy you many such brooms, please leave this broom here.” But the child was so adamant that he refused to listen to anyone and took that broken broom with him to his home. I told the family, “We all are, in a sense, like this child.” We fall in love with worldly things that, from a higher standpoint, are only like this broom. When you become spiritually mature you realize this. When I used to speak, I told this story many times during my talks.

“Lo! There, God awaits you. Alas, here, you are absorbed in playing with toys!”

— *Spiritual Gems*

Fear

It is attachment that creates fear

Why does the Truth create fear, so much fear?

It is untruth that creates fear lest it be exposed. Untruth has no legs to stand on. It creates a facade to appear as Truth. No one likes untruth. If anyone tells lies, would you like him or her? You cannot trust a person who is a liar. It is a liar who is afraid of Truth. How can a truthful person be afraid? If a truthful person is afraid, it means the person is very, very weak. All the holy books say it is Truth that wins in the long run. If an untruthful man succeeds in life, he does not succeed because he is untruthful. He succeeds because people think he is truthful and trust him.

As soon as his untruth is exposed, the people cease to trust him and he is in trouble.

It is not the giving up of your crutch that creates fear in you. Your security is false. How can a thing or person who is not itself secure make you secure? The security you feel in temporal things or relationships is based on ignorance. You depend upon someone or something which is itself dependent. So, though outwardly you seem to be secure, within yourself you can never feel secure. You are only dreaming of being secure. That dream may break any moment. It is the attachment with things and situations which are not lasting that creates fear. You feel secure because you cannot see the precariousness of that thing; you take it to be permanent and therefore deceive yourself with the sense of security. Real security comes only when you discover That which can never be taken away from you. And that thing is your essential and true Being. You say you know, but your fear indicates that you do not know. Had you really known the Real, and had you really known what is unreal, your attachment with the unreal would have ceased along with the fear. When you see and know that the snake you are seeing is not a snake but only a piece of rope appearing to be a snake, will you ever be afraid of that rope?

To fear the fears

Swāmījī, you advised us to fear the fears. How is it possible?

If you doubt your doubts, your doubts lose their strength and gradually vanish. If you fear the fear, your fear will gradually lose its strength. Fear is the result of attachment. Attachment produces fear. Love eradicates fear. Do you know, a loving mother can face and fight a lion to save her child?

Fear is overcome by faith and trust, or by giving up body-consciousness

What is the cause of fear? How to overcome it?

Fear, of course, is a great hindrance. Fear can be overcome by faith and trust in God. Moreover, the seeker of Truth should be ready to make any sacrifice and face boldly whatever comes in the way. True love for God and regular prayer give strength to face any eventuality. The cause of fear is attachment. As long as attachment is there, one cannot be completely free of fear. However, if you have simple faith and trust in God, as that of a child in its mother, you can overcome the fear, because you feel that God, who is always with you, protects you. You have to practise to feel the presence of God, who is most loving and compassionate and who is ever present. Read the books that generate or enhance faith in God. Read again and again books on the lives of saints who loved God and had deep faith in God.

The other way is to practise giving up body-consciousness. All attachment is born of body-consciousness. You have to reflect again and again that you are not this body-mind, you are the witnessing Consciousness. This practice of disidentifying yourself with the mind-body should become like breathing. You have to practise it day and night.

The fear of suffering makes you inefficient

I have read about a saint who asks his devotees to walk on a plank kept at a particular height from the ground. At one level, the devotees are afraid of the height and do not dare

to walk on the plank. I do not understand the meaning of this practice.

You are not afraid of the height but you are afraid of falling from the height! It indicates the psychological fact that when you have fear in your mind, you cannot even do a simple task. Walking on a one foot wide plank is so easy but when it is raised to fifteen or twenty feet, you cannot walk over it because of the fear of falling and hurting yourself. The fear of suffering, the fear of death makes you inefficient.

Only the realized one is free from the fear of death

While in meditation, I feel I am going deep, but then I resist the desire to go deep.

The mind is divided. It is not integrated. One part of the mind wants something; the other part wants just the opposite. At one time, you want to be a king. At another time, you may want to renounce everything and become a *sannyāsī*. It is due to the fact that your mind is not total and integrated. Meditate on the One who is integrated. Meditate more and more on God.

I have the feeling that I will die during meditation.

Everyone is afraid of death. Only the realized one is free from the fear of death. Even very advanced *yogīs* are afraid of death. The desire to live is very deeply rooted in the subconscious mind. The subconscious has to be purified. Divine Love can eradicate fear. Even ordinary love can sometimes do that. Mothers have been seen sacrificing their lives for their children. Lovers feel happy to die for their beloved. Divine Knowledge also eradicates

fear of death. The Realization of the immortal Self dispels fear of death completely.

Greed

Spirituality cannot be sold

In the West, there is a tendency to commercialise everything, be it science, arts, psychology, religion or even spirituality. Even the sports events and games, like athletics, tennis, football, basketball, cricket etc., are taken up for earning money. So there is nothing strange if some methods of developing and using one's strong willpower are sold by clever people in the West. But spirituality cannot be sold or purchased, nor can God.

The fact is that many people in the West have so much money. Affluence brings with it many mental problems and diseases of the body as well. Because people can afford to spend, many of them are manipulated to spend on very strange shortcuts to gain extraordinary powers and become healers and spiritual guides, mediums and messengers of divine Knowledge.

Ignorance

Ignorance means self-forgetfulness

In Tibetan teaching, they say the mind falls into three areas from which darkness comes: anger, desire and ignorance. Can you tell me about ignorance?

This darkness means self-forgetfulness, lack of self-awareness. Have you ever noted that when you are angry, you are not aware of anger, nor you are aware of yourself? While in the state of anger you see only the person with whom you are angry, and the shortcomings of that person. The same is the case with desire. Ignorance and darkness are one and the same thing.

Does something exist that could be called choice?

Choose the lesser evil. Darkness or ignorance has no positive existence. Man is ignorant because he has a vested interest in ignorance. In practice, he prefers darkness to light and ignorance to knowledge. He does not want to change. He has become addicted to ignorance, as a drunkard becomes addicted to alcohol and a chain smoker to smoking.

Test of a wise or an ignorant person

Who is a wise person?

Why is one called a wise man and another called an ignorant man? The wise man uses his senses and mind. The ignorant person is the slave of his senses and mind. He even sees what should not be seen because of his attachment to the form; he hears what should not be heard because of his attachment to the word. He speaks what should not be spoken, for example he speaks foolish words when he is angry. One person may serve others with his hands; the other may beat others with his hands. That is the difference. The wise person uses his mind and his senses as they should be used. The ignorant person is swayed by emotions, has no control over his thoughts. This you can see

when you sit in meditation. Then you will know if you are wise or ignorant, whether you are free or not.

***Māyā* is the power of ignorance**

“*Yo miyete iti māyā*” — “That which makes the infinite appear as finite is *māyā*.” The soul is under the spell of *māyā*. Due to the spell, the soul sees the One as many, the Infinite as finite. It is the power of ignorance, but *māyā* has no positive existence. It is like a shadow. It disappears in the light of Awareness. *Māyā* is not obligatory. The soul prefers ignorance to Knowledge, as man prefers temporary pleasures to real happiness.

Why is it so?

Because you have vested interests in ignorance. You cannot run after the pleasures of the senses if you are awakened. Man prefers to be blind because he has a vested interest in remaining blind. It is his choice. Life does not start from this birth. You have chosen to be blind for so many past lives. You can get your eyesight restored if and when you so wish.

When the blind lead the blind

What about those seekers who acquired powers and used them to give physical illness to others?

Spirituality has nothing to do with the body. Its central purpose and aim is to enable one to realize that one’s essential and true Nature is timeless and infinite Consciousness. Spiritual powers should be used to realize the Spirit, to realize the Divine and to

exhort others to realize their Divinity. It is Self-Realization alone that can make a person free and independent in the real sense.

Sometimes I would like to have powers to be able to help heal the patients who are disabled and have a miserable life.

First realize yourself and then do whatever you want to do. Then you may even become a Guru if you so like. First, work for yourself. Are you free and impervious to pain and suffering? “Charity begins at home,” it is said. Service to others may be a part of one’s *sāadhanā* for Self-Realization. There is nothing wrong in it. But the foremost purpose is to know yourself, “Who are you?” Do you know it?

But Swāmījī, I am a psychiatrist, so my occupation is to help others.

That is true. There are more psychiatrists in the West because there are more psychiatric patients. One of the symptoms of a psychiatric patient is that he or she wants to help others without knowing who he or she is, the blind leading the blind. Those who need dire help are trying to help others. Please, don’t make your profession “To help others.” If you do so, you will be more successful in your profession if there are more helpless people in the world. What will you do if no one is there to take your help?

It is already my job. If I stop that work I will have no means to eat or to come to India.

What you are saying is that you help others only to earn money. What type of help is this? To earn money by helping others — is it the advice of your head or of your heart?

In the past I worked in a suicide centre to earn a living.

So you are becoming more and more experienced in earning money! Dead people exhorting others not to commit suicide!

I have observed during my work that many people have experienced some spiritual opening that they do not understand. Then they are not able to bear this life and tend to commit suicide.

Do you mean to say that the closer you come to knowing your real Nature, the more you are inclined to commit suicide? Or do you want to say that the closer you are to death, the more you become interested in knowing your true, real Nature? Then, what do you want to say?

The Real never dies. It is timeless. It cannot be lost. If a person who is unaware of his true Being is alive, then who is dead? If there is nothing immortal, then why is there the universal innate urge in man to live eternally? This urge does not come by any training or education. It is universal and natural.

Our ignorance is voluntary; we don't want Enlightenment

Why am I afraid of Enlightenment and Self-Realization?

It must be because of your vested interest in remaining unenlightened. It reminds me of a story. In India a father named X had a daughter who was very, very ugly. No man wanted to marry that girl. The father tried his best, but no boy was prepared to get married to that very ugly girl. Finally the girl was married to a blind boy. After a few years, a friend of X came back from England after becoming an expert eye surgeon. He was told by

his friend all about why his daughter had to be married to a blind boy. The doctor checked the eyes of the blind boy and said, “This blind boy can be given eyesight by an eye operation. I will happily do it.” The father then pondered over this and refused, saying, “If the boy gets his eyesight, he might divorce my daughter because she is very ugly.”

Do you understand the import of this story? Our ignorance is voluntary. We have a vested interest in our ignorance. Maybe, if you become enlightened, you may not be able to keep a girlfriend (if you have one), and that is why you are afraid of Enlightenment. This transient world, at one stage, looks like a very ugly girl or boy to a seeker of Enlightenment. We want only pleasure. We don't want pain, but this is impossible. Pain and pleasure are the two sides of the same coin. They cannot be separated. If we have pleasure, the pain is hiding itself to come out. If we have pain, pleasure is waiting to replace the pain; but we can transcend both pain and pleasure by Enlightenment. Enlightenment may deprive us of pleasure too. So we don't want Enlightenment. Accept pain and pleasure both and try to learn from them. Both can help in the evolution of the soul, provided one is aware and reflects on all the experiences in order to learn and grow, and not simply for enjoying pleasures.

We are again and again sent to this world, because we are not yet enlightened. We want to be in this world! Take this world as a school, and not as a place for enjoying pleasures. Unless we are competent to go to the higher class we cannot be promoted like in some schools where the teachers promote the students to the higher class by taking bribes. In *Spiritual Gems* there is one saying, “This world is like a school for the seeker of Truth, a worldly person takes this world as a place for enjoying pleasures and comforts. For an enlightened person it is a playground.”

“The universe in truth is not as it appeareth to us through the sense organs, dyed in hate and love. To the pessimist, it looks dark and defective; to the sādhaḱas, it appeareth as a school and unique field of advancement; and the sages see it as the playground of the Infinite.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Anxiety & Depression

“Whenever you are in the clutches of a calamity which refuses to leave its hold on you, do not sink in the sea of despair. Think that it has happened at God’s bidding for your good and try to learn a lesson from such a situation.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Discover your true Being

Sometimes I get up feeling really alive and joyful and sometimes without specific reason I wake up depressed and sad.

When you feel depressed and uneasy, you should pray to God for strength. When you feel joy, you should thank God. There is spring, and there is also autumn. There is sunrise and there is sunset. There is winter and there is summer. Everything and every state is changing. Everything and every situation has its own purpose. Can there be spring without autumn or vice versa? When you have the right understanding, you are able to appreciate all the situations. There is only one thing, if you call it a thing, which

is beyond change and flux. It is your true Being. Go deep within yourself and you can discover It.

How to generate interest for the higher values of life

Often, I have no desire or courage, as if there was some obstacle in my life. What to do in such a depressed state of mind?

Practise deep breathing daily, early in the morning for half an hour in the open and fresh air. Pray to the Lord to give you strength and courage. During meditation, watch your thoughts as a witness, without involving or identifying yourself with them. If it seems to you difficult to do, sit down calmly and simply watch your incoming and outgoing breath, without thinking anything. Cultivate interest in the higher values of life. Read books on spirituality and the biographies of saints and holy men regularly. It will help you to generate interest for the higher values of life.

Mental suffering is deeper than physical suffering

It is natural for a person to be afraid of suffering. It proves that there is something in the person for which suffering is alien and a stranger. It proves the essential Being of a person to be blissful.

What to think about those who commit suicide due to unbearable suffering?

It would be a very rare case if some suffering person commits suicide or asks anyone to bring poison for him or her. How many

people commit suicide daily in the world, even though millions are suffering from cancer and other very painful diseases? To say so is not difficult, but to face death is the most difficult thing. Mental suffering is deeper than physical suffering. With the power of mental peace, one can bear physical suffering.

The old lady who could not bear life anymore

Even a person who is suffering with great pain does not want to die. I have heard a story in this respect. There was a very poor old woman. She had to go to the forest daily, collect the wood, bring it to the market to sell it, and from that income, she could survive by eating simple bread once a day. No sweets, no fruits, nothing delicious could she afford to eat. One day, she had gone to the forest to collect wood and she made a big bundle. She tried again and again to lift it up and put it on her head, but she could not. She felt very depressed and cried, “It would be better that death comes and takes me rather than living such a miserable life,” and she started weeping. Then, at once, a very furious looking woman appeared before her. Seeing her, the old woman became frightened and said, “Who are you?” The furious looking woman said, “I am death. You have called me; I have come to take you.” The old woman said, “Madam, I have called you so that you may please help me put this bundle of wood on my head.”

In *Pātañjali’s Yoga Sūtras* there is a *sūtra* in which it is said that the fear of death is the greatest fear a person feels, greater than losing his or her money, relatives or anything else. Only an Enlightened person is not afraid of death. Your essential Nature is eternal happiness. You cannot accept unhappiness or

death wilfully. Death and suffering are essentially unnatural to you. That is why you don't want death and suffering. There is something in man that does not die at all. So the presence of that in man does not allow him to accept death. The presence of that eternal Element is expressing itself in the mind of man. He therefore feels that he will never die. But man superimposes the quality of the Spirit on the body. He is afraid of death because he superimposes the nature of the body on the Spirit. In practice, man superimposes the attribute of immortality of the Spirit on the body and feels and behaves as if his body will never die; on the other hand, he superimposes the attribute of his mortal body on the immortal Spirit and somehow feels the fear of death. He lives in paradox.

Can you tell me of a single person who wants to die? One may commit suicide in a moment of depression, but no one really wants to die. In fact the unnatural and impulsive tendency for suicide also proves the innate urge in man for eternal and infinite happiness. One commits suicide in a depressed state to escape the unbearable misery and suffering in the present life; because one failed to find satisfaction and happiness according to one's expectation in this life.

Adverse Situations

"The adverse situations come to test our integrity and the inner state of our being. They are like a mirror in which we can see our faces. The world of relationships cannot be made perfect. It can be used to see ourselves as to where we are and what we have achieved on the path of Self-Realization."

How to cope with adverse situations

When I am in Europe, I receive bullets from everywhere and it is difficult to bear them!

I had been observing that you were feeling uneasy. Life is not a bed of roses. It is a struggle. You have to face many forces from outside as also from within. What you need is strength and courage. Regular prayer and meditation give you that strength. Divine Love gives you the strength and enables you to cope with any adverse situation calmly. You have to trust God even at the risk of your life, and you get His protection. Do not give undue importance to what is temporal. You know what a drama is. Take this world as a drama. The actor plays the given role, but remains detached and aloof within. You have to cultivate that art of an actor.

To accept any problem as a challenge

Within a month, I shall resume working in my school and be obliged to face a colleague who is a highly negative and scornful woman. How to face such a person without hurting her?

What has your colleague done to you? Why are you afraid of her? What is your problem with her? If you do not like her, do not keep any connection with her. Are you obliged to deal with her and her negativity? Be bold and courageous. Do not despise her. Give her positive suggestions, full of love and sympathy. Do not let her frighten you, but do not frighten her. Love wins where

hatred fails. Win her by your good will to her. Do not be a coward. Life is full of problems. Accept a problem as a challenge. Do not try to run away from the problem. Do not be an escapist. Try to learn from the situation that you are put into. This is for everyone!

Adverse situations and *sāadhanā*

I have a difficult relationship with my daughter-in-law. How can I see and understand better the situation in which I am involved?

It is difficult to realize the Truth, but it is more difficult to live the Realization of the Truth in practical day-to-day life. The Realization comes to one whose mind is peaceful, passive, pure, and alert. The seeker should avoid the conditions that disturb his or her mind as far as possible. But it does not mean that one should run away from the world. If the world is in our mind, it follows us wherever we go. Through *sāadhanā* one can get the strength to face the inevitable with a quiet and balanced mind.

A man comes and spits in the face of the Buddha. Buddha just smiles. If the Buddha can remain undisturbed in such a situation, we all can do that, provided we achieve the same Realization that the Buddha had.

Either have disinterested love for all or be indifferent (detached) within

An old relationship with a friend and student turned out to be very difficult because the other person misused the love

and affection given. A lot of bitter feelings are coming back. Why can't I overcome them?

Such things sometimes do happen in relationships. One should be prepared to face them. Don't have any ill-will towards that lady. Ignore her if you cannot forget her. It is very difficult to change others. And then, how many people will you change in the world? Change your attitude. Either have a disinterested love for all or be indifferent within, though dealing and behaving with all those you come in contact with very properly and judiciously. People say that love brings sorrow. It is not correct. It is the expectation of return of love that brings sorrow and disenchantment.

A human life is considered to be the most privileged life on earth, but when a human being becomes degraded, he can surpass animals and become more dangerous. This reminds me of a meeting with an old European *sannyāsini* lady. I was staying in the forest at that time. One day, I came to Sapta Sarovar in the *āshram* of a *swāmī*. The lady was staying in the *āshram* of that *swāmījī*. *Swāmījī* introduced me to that lady, saying, "He is living in the forest which is full of wild animals." She smiled and remarked, "We too are living in the forest of this world, which is full of human animals who are more dangerous than the animals living in the forest." The animals cannot pretend. It is not so difficult to deal with them, but most human beings are many-faced. You cannot know or understand their intentions easily. Inner detachment is the prerequisite of spiritual growth.

Situations are not meant only to exhaust one's *karmas* but also to learn and grow

I believe that the situations are created to help us to overcome our vāsanās. In that case, what do we have to understand in the relationship of a couple?

All relationships, like situations, are temporal. If these are accepted in the name of God, these become a means to remember the Divine and are a help on the path of Self-Realization. Should you become very much involved in the relationships, so much so that you forget the true aim and purpose of life, these relationships are a hindrance on the path. Whether situations and relationships are due to past *karmas* or are newly created cannot be known by the thinking mind, which cannot look into the past and future. Situations are not meant only to exhaust one's *karmas*, but also to learn and grow. This is only possible if one lives very diligently and by reflecting on and sifting one's experiences of life.

Harmony in relationships

Sometimes I feel obliged to say "no" to the members of my company and this makes me feel hurt and sad.

Such problems exist in a family too. Everyone has his or her own temperament. Everyone wants things done in one's own way. What is right and what is wrong is also different for different people. The root of the problem is self-importance, and of course the ego. The ego is hurt when something goes against its will.

No one in this world is perfect. Everyone has one's own weaknesses and infirmities. We expect others to be perfect, though we cannot make ourselves perfect in spite of all our efforts. This is not right. We have to learn to tolerate the weaknesses of others.

Love can overcome all differences of opinion. A mother is not hurt by the weaknesses of her child. She tries to teach the child with love. Love wins where force fails. You have to generate confidence in your colleagues through love and good will. Once they are convinced that you can never do something intentionally which goes against them, they will stop resisting you.

What do you mean by good-will?

To create good-will means that you deal with people in such a way that they start trusting you.

We all have confidence in each other, but still conflicts arise.

How can there be a fight between two persons if one of them withdraws? It requires two hands to clap.

The seeker has to adjust himself in his present situation

I feel our bad actions become obstacles to our sādhanā and the intensity of these is more than that of other obstacles like sickness, etc.

Yes.

How to overcome these?

Sādhana has to be done amidst all sorts of limitations. The mode of *sādhana* changes according to conditions that differ from time to time. No situation is perfect. The seeker has to adjust himself in his present situation and continue his *sādhana*. At the same time, he should pray daily and regularly. Prayer gives strength. Prayer is to the soul what food is to the body. God's grace or the Guru's grace is secretly working for the evolution of the soul or the evolution of the disciple. It becomes tangible to the seeker when the seeker reaches a particular stage of his spiritual growth. A child cannot comprehend the love and grace of its mother. It may even give more importance to playing with toys, and disobey its mother. But when the child grows up and becomes mature, it can feel and comprehend how its mother had always been working for its welfare and growth.

“Away, far, far away be the comforts and pleasures that stand between you and your Maker. Welcome be that sorrow, that pain, which cultivates the love for His holy feet — this surely is the attitude (the conviction) of His true devotees.”

— *Spiritual Gems*

One can remain cheerful in a state of physical suffering

Even after so many requests from his devotees, Shri Rāmakṛiṣṇa did not try to cure his disease. What could be the reason?

Everything that happens in this world has a purpose. The illness of the body of a saint must also have a purpose. He may not have to learn anything from the illness of his body. Others may learn from seeing a saint or sage maintaining his balance of mind and peace even in great suffering. Yvan Amar's health was very bad, he could not even breathe easily and yet he looked to be very cheerful and alive. Mr. Arnaud once wrote to me the same thing about Yvan, praising him for keeping his cheerfulness in such a state of physical suffering. Only a sage can remain calm and quiet in suffering. Maybe God makes the saints suffer in order to show people how man should behave in the most unfavourable conditions?

A person once asked me, "A child of four or five years dies of illness after suffering for two years. What is the purpose of the life of such a child? It cannot learn anything from life at such a tender age." I said, "Why are you isolating the life of that child from the lives of its parents and the society around it? The child may not have learnt anything from its sickness, but its parents and the doctors and the society could have learnt much from the life and sickness of that child."

If we have the possibility to cure illness through drugs or prāṇa, do we have to use only one or is it correct to use both?

Medicines are made to cure diseases. There is nothing wrong in using medicine to cure diseases. One may also get diseases cured through *prāṇa*. One may even pray to God for good health. Everyone cannot be a Rāmakṛṣṇa. A drowning man even tries to take the support of a floating blade of grass!

Acceptance and detachment are ways to overcome pain

How can I transcend the power of the physical body? In meditation yesterday, I was in a state of lightness, not feeling the body nor time until a cough started which brought me back again to body-consciousness.

Accept what is inevitable. If you do this, your mind will not be disturbed by the limitations of the body. Take old age for example. No one can stop it. When the body becomes old, it becomes weak and its power of resistance diminishes with the result that it is more prone to disease and illness. Many things in life cannot be changed; you have to mortify your will, and you should accept these things cheerfully. Only by doing so can you transcend them.

There are also other ways through which you don't feel pain. You can take some pain-killing medicine. You can also detach your senses and mind from the part of the body that is in pain. Pains and pleasures are created by the association of the senses and mind with the objects. When your eye meets a form, you feel a pleasant or unpleasant sensation according to the *sanskāras* or past impressions of your mind. If the sensation is pleasant, it is interpreted as pleasure by the mind; if the sensation is unpleasant, the mind interprets it as pain. Similar is the case with the senses of touch, smell, taste, sound, etc. The mind is the eleventh sense of perception.

There are five senses of action and five senses of relative perception or knowledge. For action the sense organs are: the hands, feet, two organs of reproduction and excretion, and the voice. For perception/knowledge the sense organs are: the eyes, ears, tongue, nose and skin. They are dependent on the mind. If you disassociate your mind from your eyes, the eyes cannot see.

If you disassociate your mind from the ears, the ears cannot hear and so on.

Do we have to train our mind not to be drawn easily to the level of senses and mind?

You cannot remain out of the body all the time. If you do so, the body will die. You have to come back to the body. You must accept the limitations of the body, but one may have the experience of going out of the body. Then, you can say with authenticity that you are separate from the body.

Why is it that we don't retain this fine state when we come back to the body?

It is so because the experience is not Realization.

Judging Others/Criticism

“You call yourself a sādhaṅga and even then you feel pleasure in backbiting. Do you not feel ashamed of it? Prayer, God-meditation, service and devotion should absorb a sādhaṅga completely.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

It is the work of God to pass judgement

It seems to me that my Guru is not behaving in accordance with his teachings, which are very moral. This makes it very

difficult for me to have complete faith in him. How to solve the problem?

I have read in the Bible, “Do not judge.” It is the work of God to pass judgement about who is right and who is wrong. How can a person who is seeking judge? The seeker is in search of Truth, how can he or she judge? However, the seeker may say, “To me this seems to be right and this seems to be wrong.”

The cause of your happiness or misery is within you

What is judgement? I wish to have a deeper understanding of what it is in order to overcome it.

Judgement means seeing the good qualities and shortcomings of others to determine their ethical or spiritual status. All sages say that it is not good for a seeker of Truth to judge others. You know what Lord Jesus has said in this regard, “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”¹

As long as you have your likes and dislikes, it is not possible for you to judge others. What you like is good according to you and what you dislike is bad. But it should be the other way round. You should like what is bad and you should dislike what is good. The energy you spend in judging others could be better spent in self-introspection in order to know your own shortcomings and remove them. That is what the seeker of Truth does. If you are not able to concentrate or meditate, there is something wrong with you. You should introspect and try to know what hinders you from going within, what makes you disturbed

¹ Gospel of Lord Jesus: Mat 7, 3-5, Luke 6, 41-42

or depressed. Do not look for the cause of your disturbance outside. The cause of your happiness or your misery is within you. Look within.

Through discrimination can I see what is good and bad?

You discriminate with your mind, which is full of preconceived ideas, beliefs, and self-interest. How can your discrimination be right? First try to purify your mind.

“Remember, it is not good to criticise or interpret adversely the spiritual approaches and convictions of others. The path of all seekers has never been, and will never be, the same. But know for certain that the destination of all spiritual seekers is one and the same.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

The Pārsi Saint

There was a Pārsi saint. It was his principle that he would eat his meal only after he had first served food to some hungry person. So, many persons, beggars, would come to him and eat a meal in his home. One day, no one came. So the saint went out in search of a man who could eat food in his home. He found such a man and brought him to his home. He washed his feet, gave him a seat and put a dish full of food before him. The man started eating without thanking God. The saint became very furious, stopped him from eating and pushed him out of his home, saying, “You are so wretched. You got the food without making any effort on your part, but you did not thank God.” The man said, “I don’t believe in God.” The saint said, “Then you don’t

deserve to eat this food.” The story goes that a voice came from the sky and God said to the saint, “I have been giving food to this man for the last forty years and you could not give him some even for one day?”

Imitating Others

Change does not come to you by imitating others

You said that we can bring a horse to the river; after that, it depends on the horse to drink the water or not.

You are right. All horses are not alike. Change does not come to you by imitating others. Imitation is one thing and the urge to change is another.

Can we at least imitate the saints?

Saints should not be imitated. Their advice and instructions should be followed sincerely. There is a story of Shaṅkarāchārya. Once he was travelling with some of his disciples. On the way, they came across a place where people were making wine. They offered wine to Shaṅkarāchārya who drank it. Imitating him, his disciples also drank some wine. They continued on and found a furnace where iron was being melted. Shaṅkarāchārya was a *Sidhha Puruṣha*. He took a cup of hot melted iron and drank it. Another disciple came forward and, imitating Shaṅkarāchārya, took a cup of melted hot iron and tried to drink it. He burnt his mouth completely. Shaṅkarāchārya asked the other disciples to imitate him as they did while drinking wine, but all of them ran away. Then Shaṅkarāchārya made a code of conduct for

sannyāsīs. The *sannyāsīs* who follow that code are called *daṇḍī sannyāsīs*. They keep with them a stick covered with saffron cloth that is the symbol of that code. The first clause of that code is never to drink alcohol.

Bad habits

Can we attain Realization with the habits of smoking and drinking, as we observed a realized one who has such habits?

Well, such bad habits as smoking and drinking may not diminish the Realization of a realized one, but these don't set a good example or ideal for a seeker to follow. These habits are very bad from the point of view of health; also excessive use of drugs and narcotics can result in totally destroying the spiritual endeavour of a seeker. The seeker of Truth must abstain from such things. It is stupid on the part of a seeker to imitate such bad habits with the excuse that such and such realized person used to smoke, drink or eat non-vegetarian food.

Illusion and Delusion

The difference between illusion and delusion

The true "I" realizes its essential and true Nature when the false "I", that is the ego-self, dies. Otherwise, the "I" is identified with the ego-self, but this identification is not real. A king becomes a beggar in a dream, but his becoming a beggar is not real. He is

a beggar as long as he is dreaming. As a matter of fact, he does not cease to be a king, even when he takes himself as a beggar in his dream.

Who is sleeping or dreaming?

Neither the dreamer is real nor is the dream real. They have only a phenomenal existence. The *Ātmā*, the true “I” has a noumenal, eternal Existence. The dream is not an illusion. It is a delusion, a mistake of perception. Illusion is totally imaginative. There is no substance at all, but you imagine something. There is no thief in your room, but you imagine that there is one and you are afraid. It is an illusion. Delusion means that there is something, but it is not being seen in its true form. There is something, but it is not being recognized.

Negative Habits & Vices

A lesson about how to drink alcohol

Mullah Nasruddin was sitting in a club with his son, giving him his first lesson about drinking alcohol. Mullah said, “You keep on drinking. And you see, on the table in the corner, there are three persons sitting and drinking. When those three persons look to you to be four persons, then you should stop and drink no more. The son looked to that table and said, “But father, there are only two persons sitting there.” When you are drunk with *māyā*, you see many, instead of one.

Worldly people are like the fisher woman addicted to the smell of stinking fish

Have you heard the story of a woman who used to sell fish? She would come from a village on the coast with baskets full of fish, sell them in the town and go back to her village in the evening. Once it so happened that she came very late to the town and could not go back to her village. She knocked at a door. An old woman came out. The fisher woman requested her, "It is very late, I cannot go back to my village alone at night. Kindly let me stay in your home for one night." The old woman said, "All right, keep your baskets of fish outside in the compound and come and sleep in this room." In the night, the fisher woman felt very uneasy and could not sleep in that clean room with fresh air. She got up, went out and slept there along with the baskets full of dead fish. She was so used to the bad smell of stinking fish that she could not sleep in the room with fresh fragrant air. She preferred to go out and sleep near the baskets full of fish emitting a repugnant smell.

This is how worldly people are. When they go out of a crowded noisy place to a calm and quiet place they cannot bear the calm atmosphere; they become uneasy and rush back to the crowded and noisy towns. The mind of man can become conditioned to any situation, healthy or even an unhealthy one. People become addicted to smoking even while knowing that smoking can cause cancer, but they feel helpless and cannot give up smoking. How can a man boast of being free when he is unable to use his mind, emotions and energy in the right direction? It is easy to claim "I am enlightened," but what sort of Enlightenment is it if it does not make you free?

Chapter Seven

Aids on the Spiritual Journey

“Moderation in eating, sleeping, walking and in other activities ensures progress in yoga. It is not through violent effort but through proper technique, wisdom and unsleeping awareness that spiritual concentration can be realized. In the proper balancing of activity and inactivity, love and detachment, service and devotion and knowledge lies the secret of spiritual success.”

– The Practical Approach to Divinity

Aids on the Spiritual Journey

Aids to Meditation & Contemplation

Proper Diet

Non-vegetarian food is unnatural for man

I am not yet a vegetarian and I know that you advise not to eat meat. Can you tell me more about why I should change my diet?

Every food has its own effect on the mind. Non-vegetarian food is certainly not conducive for a *sādhaka* as far as *sādhanā* is concerned. It is *rājasic* food and it stimulates desire. Moreover, to digest non-vegetarian food, you may be inclined to drink and if you start drinking, you may become an alcoholic. It has been proved by the votaries of vegetarianism that non-vegetarian food is unnatural for man. There are some animals that are vegetarian and the teeth of men are similar to such animals that do not eat meat. Eating non-vegetarian food encourages violence also, which the seeker of Truth must shun.

If you cannot give life, you have no right to take the life of any being. Would you like to be an instrument of destruction or

of creation? What would you prefer? When you become *Shiva*, only then you are eligible to kill! He drank poison and nothing happened to him. Can you do so? Your own life is not in your hands. You don't know when you will die. And you are justifying killing others. Do to others what you would like to be done to you. Treat others as you want to be treated by others. If someone comes to kill you, will you say, "Welcome, you have come to kill me! Creation and destruction is the law of life." I am not in favour of seekers taking non-vegetarian food.

Vegetarian food and right means of livelihood

Those who want to receive a mantra from you have to become vegetarian. Is it only to observe the principle of ahimsā or are there other effects? Also, what about someone who is vegetarian but works in a slaughterhouse or in the armament industry? Are one's actions and way of living not far more important and influential than one's food?

Certainly, yes. The right means of livelihood is a very important part of the discipline to be followed by the seeker of Truth. Right means of livelihood constitutes a part of the eight-fold path of Buddha. No seeker of Truth will work in an armament factory or in a slaughterhouse. Apart from violence, the non-vegetarian food has a *rājasic* effect on the mind. It excites desire. For a person employed in the military, who has to fight with others, non-vegetarian food may be useful. But I have even met people in military uniform who are vegetarians.

Advice about food

If you don't eat eggs, will you die? Others don't force you to eat fish and eggs. Take fruit juice, eat salad, eat nuts, eat bread, eat vegetables, eat butter, eat cheese, eat yoghurt. There are so many other things to eat. Cheese is very good for the stomach. Yoghurt is even better.

Should the stomach be empty at the time of meditation?

Meditation does not need necessarily to be practised when the stomach is empty. It can be practised even after breakfast. But the stomach should not be completely full. One should practise breathing exercises, like *prāṇayāma*, only when the stomach is empty. The seeker may adjust oneself in the given situation and practise accordingly.

What about diet and climate?

Man has the potentiality of adapting himself to any diet and any climate. The animals cannot do that. One should, of course, not suddenly give up a thing to which one is addicted. One should reduce the quantity and give it up slowly and gradually.

Is one glass of red wine allowed during meals, since it is good for health? Even Christ drank wine and created communion with bread and wine!

Man has come a long way in the last two thousands years. If Christ was to come today, he would perhaps introduce vegetarianism and forbid alcohol, in spite of the protests of the Church! For Europeans, it is a great penance to give up alcohol!

Deep Conscious Breathing & Prāṇayāma

Conscious breathing cultivates awareness

Conscious breathing makes the breathing process rhythmic and slow, with the result that the mind's thinking and tensions are reduced. Have you ever noticed that when you are worried or tense, your breathing becomes fast and irregular? Conversely, if you make your breathing slow and rhythmic, it reduces tension. Ordinarily, the breathing is going on mechanically. Its pace changes with the change of your mental states. Moreover, conscious breathing is a very effective practice for cultivating awareness. Not only breathing but also all of your activities should be done with awareness. In deep meditation the breathing becomes very slow, so much so that sometimes it seems as if it has stopped.

Breathing may become slow or fast due to many reasons. It may even stop with a mental shock. The pace of breathing is connected with the mental states. It is more difficult to watch your thoughts than to watch your breathing, but the result is the same. It helps in slowing down the thinking process and ultimately in stopping it. The practice of watching the breath enables you to watch your thoughts more efficiently afterwards. In Buddhism they first advise you to watch your breath. After a reasonable period of this regular practice, they advise you to watch your mind.

Breathing exercises or *prāṇayāma*

What kind of breathing exercises can we practise?

Inhale deeply and then exhale deeply in about twice the time of inhaling. That means if you inhale for ten seconds, exhale for

twenty seconds. Do it consciously. Concentrate on the breath coming in and the breath going out, without thinking. Do it for five to seven minutes before starting meditation. This is one type of *prāṇayāma*. It is harmless and can be practised by anyone. There are other types of *prāṇayāma* that must be practised with right technique, very regularly, taking a proper diet that is very nutritious, and one has to sit four times a day regularly and daily. If one does not follow the proper technique and rules and regulations of *prāṇayāma*, it is harmful for the nervous system in particular, and stomach system in general, making one ill.

Breathing exercises generate willpower

How can I control my ego to make myself more respectful and receptive to saints and Gurus such as yourself and other authoritative figures?

I have not noticed that you have shown or given me any disrespect. I, however, found you very reserved and also somewhat nervous. It is surely due to the lack of self-confidence in you and your lack of trust in others. The best way for you to overcome these weaknesses is to practise breathing exercises. Rhythmic and conscious breathing is very helpful in generating willpower and self-confidence. You should devote at least half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening to rhythmic and conscious breathing, but daily and regularly. It will surely help you.

Should I practise these breathing exercises during the recitation of the mantra, or during meditation?

In the beginning of meditation or the practice of *japa*, one can, or rather one should, practise conscious and rhythmic breathing

for about ten minutes. It calms down the tensions of both the body and the mind.

The law of motion and rest

Between expiration and inhalation there is a blank space. Are there any means to make this blank space longer?

Between the incoming and the outgoing of the breath there is a pause when the breath stops. It is the natural *kumbhaka*. The period of this *kumbhaka* can be prolonged by the practice of *prāṇayāma*. On the level of thought also, between one thought and the second thought, there is a moment of thoughtlessness. It is so small that it is very difficult for the mind to grasp this thoughtless moment. This period of thoughtlessness can be prolonged by the practice of meditation.

Should we hold kumbhaka in between two breaths?

There is a natural stopping of breath between inhaling and exhaling. The same is the case with the beating of the heart and the movement of the thoughts. Between two thoughts, that is to say when one thought subsides and another arises, there is a thoughtless moment. Between every two beats of the heart, there is a moment when the heart stops. All of these work under the law of motion and rest. After every movement there is rest and after rest, there is movement again. With deep concentration and alertness of mind, this can be perceived.

What do you want to do with this moment of rest? If you could perceive it, it may give you a glimpse of your true Nature.

The slowing of the breathing and thinking process is directly proportional to attention. When the thought or breath completely stops, the attention is at its highest. The practice of *prāṇayāma* is based upon this fact. During meditation, when the thinking and breathing process become very, very slow, your alertness and attention become so acute that you are able to have a glimpse of the Truth. You must have noted that if someone is talking at a distance or at a very low tone and you want to listen to it; you deliberately stop your breath. It enables you to be more attentive.

“With the setting of one thought and before the rise of yet another thought there is an empty moment which is beyond imagination. If you could seize this empty moment through some spiritual practice, you would doubtless realize your true Self.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

***Prāṇayāma* practice**

I observed that my meditation was deeper when I practised prāṇayāma before. What is your advice for practising prāṇayāma?

Breathing and mind are deeply correlated. When the breathing is slow, deep and rhythmic, the mind also becomes slow and the thoughts start subsiding.

In the *sādhana* of *prāṇayāma*, special care should be taken in one’s diet. Butter and milk should be sufficiently taken, otherwise the nerves become dry and it creates problems with the nervous system. The *sādhaka* who practises *prāṇayāma* as the main part of one’s *sādhana* must observe celibacy as well.

It should be practised only with an empty stomach. Moreover, one should sit in a pure and fresh atmosphere when one practises *prāṇayāma*. If you practise it at a place that is polluted, you are filling your lungs with carbon dioxide and inviting asthmatic problems.

The standard ratio of inhaling, retaining and exhaling the breath in one *prāṇayāma* is ten, forty and twenty seconds. Should a beginner feel that ten seconds for inhaling is more than his or her capacity, he or she can start with five seconds. You can safely practise for fifteen minutes in one sitting. Should all the instructions be followed carefully, the practice of *prāṇayāma* is not dangerous at all. In the beginning one should practise only inhaling and exhaling for six months. After six months, the retaining of breath outside can also be done. After another six months, inhaling, exhaling, retaining the breath outside, inhaling, retaining the breath inside and exhaling should be practised in the given order.

Prāṇayāma should be practised with *mūlabandha* during inhaling, retaining and exhaling. If you inhale the breath while maintaining *mūlabandha*, the belly does not come out while inhaling, the lungs should be filled and not the belly. One should sit for *prāṇayāma* regularly, at least twice a day, starting with fifteen minutes. Then, slowly and gradually, one can increase the period up to forty-five minutes in one sitting. The period should be increased gradually. To reach the period of forty-five minutes of *prāṇayāma* in one sitting, at least one year of continuous and regular practice is a must.

Complete success in *dhyāna* or contemplation is achieved by following all the parts of the discipline as mentioned by Pātañjali. *Yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇayāma* and *pratyāhāra* are the five outer limbs of *yoga*. The inner three are *dhāraṇā*,

dhyāna and *samādhi*. The seeker should practise *yoga* with its complete discipline; only then, can one achieve the desired result as mentioned in Pātañjali's *yoga*.

Proper Posture

The most appropriate posture for meditation

For sitting in contemplation, the basic thing (in all of the methods) is to keep the spine, neck and head in a straight line, because it enhances alertness. Sitting cross-legged locks the body and prevents the energy from dissipating. It is better if the body is not on the ground. Therefore, if one sits on the ground, sitting on a wooden seat or on a cushion covered with a woollen cloth (to make it a non-conductor), is very conducive. Well, these are the precautions. If a seeker can observe them, well and good. If the seeker is at a very advanced stage it may not affect him or her. Kabir says in one couplet, “What if you have perfected a posture? If the ambitions, desires of your mind are not dead, you cannot reach anywhere. Then you are like a bull working in an oil-grinding mill. He walks all day in circles, maybe eighty kilometres a day, but remains at the same place.” *Pātañjali's Yoga Sūtras* is the highest authority on *yoga*. In that book not many postures are mentioned. The most appropriate posture for meditation is defined as one that is stable and comfortable.

The central purpose of meditation is to tame the mind

After some time, during meditation the back bends. Do we have to make an effort to keep it straight?

It is better if the back remains straight during meditation. It helps in alertness. But these are the external rules that everyone cannot follow. For example, for an old person, it is difficult to sit cross-legged and with a straight spine and neck for a long time. But for those who can observe such rules, it is better. The central purpose is to tame and discipline your mind so that it is fully under your control.

By regular practice, you can prolong the period of sitting in one posture during meditation. Westerners are used to sitting on a chair since their childhood, so it is difficult for them to sit crosslegged. For old persons also, it is difficult to sit crosslegged. The bones lose their flexibility and become stiff in old age. Those who cannot sit on the ground with legs crossed may sit in a chair for meditation. God does not mind if you are sitting on the ground or in a chair. He is concerned only with what your mind is doing during meditation.

If the body is tired, change your posture

I am very, very nervous. All the time I need to move. It's difficult to stay in the same position during one hour of meditation, and in my life, I never feel peace. What can I do?

It is impossible to be always moving, but it is possible to be always at rest. To move is to become. To be at rest is to be. During meditation, if the body is tired or there is pain in the body, change your posture. You may, however, increase the period of sitting in one posture during meditation slowly and gradually through practice. If you have never felt peace in your life, it is sure that you have been looking for peace in the wrong places.

Stabalize your crossed-legged posture gradually

If you can sit cross-legged in meditation for thirty minutes without feeling any pain in your legs, sit only for thirty minutes in that posture, but you have to practise regularly and daily. This is very important. After six months, you should increase the period of sitting in that posture by only five minutes. Then practise sitting in that posture for thirty-five minutes daily and regularly for six months. After another six months, you can again increase the period by five minutes. In this way, slowly and gradually, within a few years you will be able to sit in that posture for one hour and a half, without feeling pain in the legs. What is needed is regular practice with patience and perseverance.

The quality of the meditation is more important than the quantity

After thirty minutes of meditation, my knees ache so much that I want to move and get rid of that pain. My ego always wants not to suffer. Is there any value in trying not to move and staying with the pain as a training to reach my prayer's goal?

I won't advise you to invite more suffering. Is suffering not enough already in man's life? One can learn both from pain and pleasure, if one is alert, if one is a sincere seeker. The ego is a very complex phenomenon. It can suffer pain happily in order to get more pleasures on this earth or in heaven. Ego is Satan. It is very difficult to know its tricks. If you feel pain in your knees after sitting for thirty minutes in meditation, you should change your posture.

Otherwise, your mind will be more concentrated on the pain than in meditation. Your ego (Satan) may tell you, “Go on suffering this pain but don’t change your posture!” Moreover, the quality of the meditation is more important than the quantity. If you can sit in meditation for twenty minutes, it is much better than sitting in meditation for two hours without concentration.

Proper Place, Time & Direction

The best place for *sādhanā*

The best place for *sādhanā* is the one that has a moderate climate, not very hot, not very cold, that is not very far (difficult to reach), not very near (easy to reach), not polluted, and it should have sufficient water. It should have beautiful landscape that soothes the mind. The environment should be natural. It should not be situated in a very dense forest where you have to protect your-self from wild animals. It should not be situated on a highway. It should be situated at a spot where people would not come casually but especially for a purpose, to meet the sage, to conduct *sādhanā* or to practise to discover the Truth. It must not be at a pilgrimage place, where people come only to perform certain rituals and see the temples.

(With a laugh) There should be no monkeys at the place. I selected this place on the basis of my experience. There should be no mosquitoes. It is very important. If there are even two mosquitoes in your room, it may spoil your meditation. They are more dangerous for a seeker of Truth than a lion! I considered all these things before selecting this place.

Right direction for meditation

Should we keep our āsana facing any particular direction?

In the initial stages it is better to sit in meditation facing East or North. Facing the South during meditation should be avoided.

General Aids

“Any activity, physical or mental, which makes one forget the Divine is an obstacle on the path of Self-Realization or God-Realization. Any activity, physical or mental, which enables one to remember the Divine is helpful in spiritual sādhanā.”

The Guru or the Spiritual Guide

Meaning of the word Guru

The word Guru has so many meanings:

1. Teacher (academic or spiritual)
2. Guru means the priest who teaches the religion to which he belongs.
3. Guru means the one who is a realized one and who radiates peace and love.
4. The word Guru literally means the one who is very heavy, implying the one who is unshakable by the favourable and

unfavourable situations and all pairs of opposites like praise and blame, loss and gain, pleasure and pain and so on.

If you teach one thing and do just the opposite, no one is going to be impressed. An example of practical life is much stronger than words. The words go only into your intellect, but the sincerity of the teacher impresses your heart. The concept is better than information, but experience is the essence of religion.

Description of a Guru

Should we expect from a true Master irreproachable ethics concerning money, power and sexuality? As we are ignorant, should we stop judging the supposed Guru?

Yes, the Master or Guru is not only a teacher, but also a living example and embodiment of a perfect life, which is not subservient to money, power and sexuality. It is true that you cannot judge the depth of the Realization of the Master, but a Master does not act against the social and ethical norms as laid down in the holy scriptures. The Master may be asocial and amoral, but he or she cannot be antisocial and immoral. Master literally means one who has control over his desires, emotions and thoughts and is not swayed by them.

The two qualities of a Guru, as mentioned in the scriptures, are that the Guru should be *shrotriya* and *Brahma niṣṭha*. *Shrotriya* means, “One who is well versed in the *Vedas*, i.e. one who understands the real intent of the revealed scriptures.” *Brahma niṣṭha* means, “One who is established in *Brahman*, one who has completely assimilated the Real in one’s whole

Being.” He is completely free from attachment, anger and all other emotions and has complete control over his thoughts as well. He is one with God.

What is the difference between the Seer and the guard? Is not the Seer a guard?

The Seer is not a guard, though he or she can be a guard. The Guru, the Master, is the guard. The Seer is impersonal; the Guru is impersonal as well as personal. The Guru is established in the Truth, but also connected with the disciple. He is like a ladder of which one end is connected with the ground and the other end to the top. To be a Guru is more difficult than to be the Seer.

The influence of the Guru becomes deeper after leaving the physical body

When the Master leaves his body and the seeker needs more help what to do?

Is the body of the Master, the Master? It is the spiritual influence and teachings of the Master that lead the disciples for their whole life. And if you know better, you will see that the influence of a Master who has left his body becomes deeper and vibrating. Jesus had only a few disciples when he was crucified, but now, when he is not present in a physical body, he has hundreds of millions of followers. The same happens with all prophets and even with great sages. The physical body is like a cage. You cannot work freely through your body. The body has its own limitations. If you can have contact with the Master living in the body then you

can gain very much. It is true that all people cannot communicate with the sage when he has shed his physical body.

You told us that we can have only one Guru and have blessings of other enlightened souls. How can I get your blessings? What should I do?

To receive the blessings of sages one has to do nothing but keep oneself open and docile.

Whose feet should I touch first?

There is a story. Once God and Kabir's Guru appeared before Kabir.¹ Kabir was puzzled, thinking, "Whose feet should I touch first?" In a flash, a couplet was revealed to him that says, "Guru and Govind (God) are both standing in front of me. Whose feet should I touch first? O, Kabir, the Guru is indeed the greater because it is the Guru who enabled you to meet God." This is a very famous couplet from Kabir and it is very often quoted by the disciples in India in praise of their Gurus.

A Sikh devotee was once going to Hardwar for a pilgrimage. On the way, he halted in someone's home. In those days there were no trains or vehicles in India and devotees used to go for pilgrimages on foot, walking hundreds of miles through forests. He was warmly greeted by the host. In the evening, when the host served food to him, the devotee asked the host, "Who is your Guru?" The host said, "I have no Guru." The devotee refused to eat food served by the host and left his house, saying,

¹ Kabir (1398 - 1518) was a mystic poet and saint whose literature has greatly influenced the *bhakti* movement in India .

“I am sorry. I did not know that you were without a Guru.” This reflects the old culture of Indians.

Why are Gurus mostly males?

Are there any differences between male and female Gurus?

Normally there is a difference between the temperaments of men and women, as there is a difference between their physical bodies. This difference is natural and not created by society. Women are by nature more passive, receptive, patient and heart dominated. Men are by nature more aggressive, physically stronger, brain dominated and less patient. Women have more depth; men have more intensity in their lives. It is easier for a woman to realize God than for a man. But it is not necessary that one who is realized must be a Guru, though a Guru must be one who is realized. It is easier for a man to be a Guru than for a woman, if he is able to realize God.

To be a Guru, the realized one needs some special qualities. The first of them is that the realized one must be able to communicate what He or She has realized. Communication on the part of the Guru means a sort of transmission that is against the nature of a woman. It smells of assertion and aggressiveness. A woman normally receives and does not transmit, but by training, education and practice, she can also acquire this quality. So a realized woman can also be a Guru, but those are exceptional cases. It is more natural, and easier, for a realized man to be a Guru. That is why you find more male Gurus in every country than female Gurus. But because the Spirit, which is the common denominator of men and women, has infinite potentialities, a woman can surely become a Guru.

Sometimes Gurus take on the suffering of their devotees

So many great sages died from cancer, why is it so?

Birth, disease, old age and death belong to the body. The saints and sages who have realized the Truth rise above body consciousness. Usually, it is the devotees who cause such diseases as cancer to the body of their Gurus. Their body is taxed by the devotees beyond proper limit. All types of devotees come to saints: the sick people who want to be blessed to get rid of their diseases, the disturbed people who want blessing for peace; some even want to be blessed to overcome their financial problems. If a saint blesses all those who come to him, he has sometimes to take upon himself the suffering of his devotees. Christians say that Jesus was hanged because He took the sins of people on Himself. Vivekānanda was only thirty-nine years of age when he died. Jesus was thirty-three when He was crucified. Ramaṇa Maharṣhi was in His fifties. There is no rule that a realized person must live over a hundred years. Moreover, time has no absolute existence. What is millions and millions of years to a man is only one day for *Brahmā*, the Creator of this universe. Time changes with the change of the level of consciousness.

Guru and disciple

How would you define the relationship of the disciple with his Guru?

It is a relationless relationship. It is like love, which you cannot define. The word love provokes different meanings in different persons in the same way as the phrase “relationship with the

Guru” does. You cannot show your love. You say I have love for him in my heart, but if your body is cut and your heart is surgically opened, no one will find there anything called love.



What is the relationship between a disciple and his Guru? How does it differ from the relationship between a seeker and his beloved teacher?

A teacher is a teacher. He or she may teach what he or she has not experienced or what he or she has never practised himself or herself. The Guru is one who has realized the Truth first hand, and who teaches what he has realized. There is complete harmony in his teachings and his actions. He is the living example of his teachings. He is beyond pleasure and pain and remains unmoved in all situations. He has conquered his mind and senses; he is not a slave of desires and emotions. He is self-satisfied and fulfilled.

The disciple has complete faith and trust in his Guru. He tries to follow the teachings of his Guru and learns from the living example of his Master. The relationship between them is spiritual. It is based on love, faith and trust. This relationship is much deeper than all those relationships that are based on body-consciousness. It reminds me of a dialogue between Lord Rāma and his great devotee Hanumān. Lord Rāma once asked Hanumān, “What is your relationship with me?” Hanumān replied, “From the standpoint of the body, you are the Master and I am your servant. From the standpoint of the soul, You are the Whole/God and I am a part of You. From the standpoint of the pure Spirit, there is no difference between You and me.” This is the relationship that an enlightened disciple feels between himself and his Guru.

There are about five types of love relationships between two persons as we see in the world, such as:

1. Between a father/mother and child.
2. Between two friends.
3. Between a master and a servant.
4. Between a husband and wife.
5. Between a teacher and his student, and so on.

The relationship between Guru and disciple includes the love of relationships 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and yet it is something more. But how will you understand it? The Guru is not only a teacher. He is a father, mother and friend at the same time. The only relationship that makes one free is the relationship between the Guru and disciple because it alone leads the disciple to the Realization of oneness with Godhead.



What do you mean by, “To give one’s mind to the Master?”

Giving one’s mind to the Master means to have simple faith and trust in Him like that of a child in its beloved mother.



Tell me about, “How to serve the Guru.” What does it mean and how to serve Him while I am not in the āshram?

To serve the Guru means to sincerely follow His teachings, assimilate them and then radiate them. Offer Him your pure love; serve Him by all the means you have.



Is it possible to have two Gurus?

Guru is one. But the seeker is allowed to receive blessings from all saints and sages. All the Gurus come from the same country, so their language is the same. The Guru does not make a slave of his disciple. But the loyalty of the disciple towards the Guru is a must.

All seekers cannot be attracted to one teacher or one Master, but every seeker is connected to one Master or another deeply. And then there is much difference between the seekers of the West and the Indian seekers. In India, when a seeker has chosen one Master, it is the first and last spiritual relationship between them; the search of the Indian seeker, after he has chosen a Guru, stops forever (a very few exceptions apart), but in the West it is not like that.

I have a relationship of fifteen years with my Guru who died. Do you mean that I cannot go anymore now to other āshrams or meditate with other Gurus?

Some are not satisfied with their Guru. They go to seek satisfaction from one sage to another sage. The Master is not like a dress that you can change anytime you like. A true Master will never shake your faith in your own Master but will strengthen your trust in Him. There is no harm in going to other saints for spiritual seekers. You may pay respect to them, feeling the presence of your own Guru in them, but you should not become disloyal to your Master.



Please, tell us the importance of “sharaṇam” (to take refuge) in the Master.

The relationship of Guru and disciple comes to happen only when the disciple surrenders himself or herself to the Master. Unless you have surrendered to your Master, you are not open to Him, and the relationship has not, indeed, come to happen. So, it is not that you have to surrender yourself to your Master at a certain stage. That surrender must take place at the very beginning. If the surrender is not there, the relationship is only an advertised thing; it has not happened yet.

How can we judge a Guru unless we know his real qualifications?

Most people ask about the real qualifications of the Guru. No one asks the real qualifications of a disciple.



Before starting the spiritual path, the difficulty is to find the true Guru.

In France someone asked me, “Why are there so many false Gurus?” I said, “It is so because there are so many false seekers.” The law of demand and supply applies in every field. When people ask me how to find a true Guru, I tell them to cultivate the qualities of a true disciple in themselves. It is only a true disciple who can find a true Guru. Discrimination is not the highest or the infallible means of judging anyone, much less a Guru.



To me it seems difficult to surrender to a Guru and easier to surrender to Existence or God.

God is the Guru. He is residing in your heart. Time and space cannot separate Him from you. If you could communicate directly with God, the inner Guru, there would be no need of an outer Guru for you. But it is very rare that one can communicate with the inner Guru without the help and assistance of a living Master and guide. When you are asking a question, it shows that you do need a living Master. To surrender to a living Master/Guru is difficult as well as easy. It is difficult because the Guru is in a physical body and you may see many limitations in him and thus may not retain absolute faith in him; and it is easy because he is in the physical body and so tangible and easily approachable. To surrender to Existence/God is also very difficult. When you cannot directly communicate with God, the question of surrender unto God does not arise. It will be like groping in the dark.



I am a simple person; I find it difficult to choose a Guru.

When you feel from the depth of your heart the need of a Guru, you are ready for the guidance of a Guru. You have to give up your ready-made beliefs, acquire the quality of listening and the determination to follow the path that the Guru may advise. It is not easy to choose a Guru. It would be much better if a Guru chooses you. To be chosen by a Guru you have to cultivate some qualities in you, such as humility, simplicity, deep aspiration to know the Truth, dispassion from what is impermanent, etc. Everyone has the potentiality of treading the path of Truth and

God-Realization. The ego usually exhorts you not to follow the path of Realization because Realization means the death of the ego.



Is the Guru different from God?

The Guru is like a ladder. On one end, He is connected with God, on the other end, He is connected with the world.

I don't need a God whom I don't know, but I surely need you whom I can see.

To see the Guru is as difficult, or as easy to see God. There is a deep conspiracy between God and Gurus.

There is a Sufi story: Once God appeared as a beggar before a Sufi sage. The sage had a very beautiful cap on his head. The beggar said, "Kindly give me your cap. I like it very much." The Sufi recognized that it was God who had come to him in the guise of a beggar. The Sufi smiled and said, "Go away. I cannot give you my cap." God saw that the Sufi had recognized Him. So God said, "Do you know I am God? I will stop your *rozī* and *rotī*." "*Rozī* and *rotī*" means what you get to eat and the essential things needed for living. The Sufi said: "If you do so, I will finish your *khudāī*." *Khudāī* means your authority of being God. God said, "Very strange. How can you do that?" The sage said, "I can do that. I will go and tell people that there is no God and people will stop worshipping you." So God became frightened. Do you understand the conspiracy between God and Gurus?



Is it not a hindrance to be attached to the form of the Guru?

The presence of a Guru, even his physical presence, is very magnetic for the disciple. Something very deep and substantial is percolating from the physical body of the Guru. His body is like radioactive matter. When the Guru is in the state of *mahābhāva*, his body becomes divinised. If anyone touches his body at that time, he becomes awakened. Even the seat on which Rāmakṛṣṇa used to sit during meditation, when he was in the state of *mahābhāva*, would become so much charged that any ordinary man would feel his body burning if he touched the seat. Once Hriday, the nephew of Rāmakṛṣṇa, sat on that seat but could not bear the touch and immediately got up.

What is the nature of help that a teacher or Guru can give to a seeker like myself? I come here, without knowing you, hoping that the consciousness of your attainments can help me to deepen my sādhanā.

The Master or Guru can help the seeker or the devotee in so many ways. He can remove the doubts of the seeker, he can remove the obstacles that the seeker may be facing in the progress of his or her *sādhanā*. When the seeker is face to face with a Master, there is a communication between them that goes beyond words and if the seeker is receptive and open, he can see himself in the light in which the Guru is established.

A Sufi Master asked one of his disciples to go to another Master and stay with him for four days. The disciple said, “What is the use? The other Master will talk to me about God. He will tell me to practise meditation and breathing exercises and exhort me to do *sādhanā*. I am already doing *sādhanā*. I have reflected and meditated on God so much. How will the other Master help

me?” The Sufi said, “Now you are seeing God according to your own understanding and doing *sādhanā* according to your own liking and understanding. When you are in the presence of that Master, you will start seeing God in His light. Sit near Him with an open mind. Listen to what He says without interpreting it with your own mind.” The Guru can help the seeker to solve the problems and overcome the difficulties that he is facing in his or her *sādhanā*. What help does a seeker want from the Guru?

To really dedicate oneself to sādhanā requires a total turnaround within the psyche. Such a thing is not possible without grace. The seeker wants any and every help towards full Realization.

Grace is not aggressive. It comes to you, but if your door is closed, it does not break open your door. You have to make yourself available to grace.

What entitles one to receive the Guru’s grace?

Obedience, surrender, openness. It is true that the seeker has his own limitations, but within those limitations he must do his best, must make best use of what he has to tread the path of Truth. He must look within and find out what is hindering him on the path of Self-Realization. Then he should sincerely work to remove those obstacles.



In the Christian tradition, Jesus says that after His death on the cross, His disciples will be guided by the Holy Spirit. In Indian holy scriptures is there something similar?

Yes, it is what the Gurus in India say to their disciples. The Guru guides you even if he has shed his physical body. Those who have faith and are open to the Guru can feel it. Those who are not open do not get the guidance even when the Guru is living. They hear the words of the Guru with one ear and let them go out the opposite ear. Very few live according to the guidance of the Guru. Some even try to teach their Gurus after they have lived with their Guru for some time. They tell their Guru, “Do this, do that, why are you doing this? Why do you not do that?”



During your absence, I had more difficulties during meditation. Does your presence help us?

Surely, but the receiver of the seeker must be of good quality and intact. The transmitter should also be of good quality and intact. Many seekers come in contact with the same sage but all of them are not benefited to the same extent. Many came in contact with Rāmakṛṣṇa, but Vivekānanda was the one who attained Enlightenment.



How to understand that some sages give initiation and have disciples and some others do not?

You cannot ask, “Why?” It is the sweet will of a sage if he accepts a disciple or not. You cannot force a Master to accept a disciple or not to accept a disciple. Nothing is obligatory for a Master. Every flower has its own fragrance. It is not proper to compare two flowers. It is not proper even to compare two seekers, what to say of comparing two Masters. There are Gurus who teach a

specific teaching. They are the heads of some sect or cult. There are Gurus who don't teach a specific line of *sādhana*, but they teach the disciple according to the competence of the disciple.

Can it be a burden for a Master to give mantra dīkṣhā?

There is no question of a disciple being a burden on the Master or not being a burden. It is the sweet will of the Master to accept a disciple or not. He is not bound by any rule.

Do we need initiation to progress in spirituality?

Well, spiritual progress can be made even without a Master, though it is very rare.

Does mantra initiation create a spiritual link between the Master and the devotee? Is it mainly the power of the realized Master that is conveyed in the mantra, giving it more power?

Yes, *mantra dīkṣhā* does create a spiritual bond between the Master and the disciple. It is easier for the disciple to awaken the power of the *mantra* if the *mantra* is received from a realized Master and practised in the proper way.

Alertness and Awareness

“Let things be scattered here and there, topsy-turvy, in a room, but if you are wide-awake, you can walk across without stumbling. On the other hand, if your eyes are shut, you do

stumble even if all things are in order in the room. Similarly, an aware and alert seeker can march ahead on the divine path, be the surroundings as hostile as they may; but a seeker who is not aware, who is not alert is bound to stumble, be the surroundings as conducive as these ever can be."

– *Spiritual Gems*

Alertness is only one dimension of awareness

Since I started to meditate, fifty years ago, I have tension in my thumb. Do you think I can do something to overcome it?

Was it there before you started the practice of relaxation/meditation or did this tension in the right thumb start with the practice?

I didn't observe it before.

It is normal. When you become relaxed, the awareness increases. Awareness is directly proportional to relaxation. First you become aware of your body, then you become aware of your mind and finally, you become aware of your Self that is beyond body-mind-ego. Be more and more relaxed in your meditation. Alertness is only one dimension of awareness.

What is alertness?

Alertness means watchfulness. When you are doing anything, do not do it mechanically, do it consciously. When you are walking,

are you aware? Maybe you are walking and your mind is thinking of your beloved and expecting her to reach here on such and such date and the walking is going on mechanically.

The non-doing and alert state

How to intensify my presence here and now?

You can feel to be here and now when you are alert yet not doing any physical or mental action, but it is most difficult for a person, who is a thinking animal. Non-doing is more difficult than doing. So the sages have devised some particular types of doings which ultimately lead you to the non-doing and alert state in which you have the glimpse of being here and now.

Awareness and alertness are the key to reach one's subconscious

How can I be free from the inscriptions of the past still alive in my subconscious, like attachment to certain people or experiences?

The roots of the personality of a person are in his or her subconscious. To change oneself, the seeker must be able to see and communicate with one's subconscious. How would you do it? There are many techniques for it. One thing that is common in all techniques is awareness and alertness. Do not do anything mechanically. Be aware in all your day-to-day activities. Sit daily in the morning and evening and practise silent meditation. When your conscious mind becomes silent, you are able to communicate

with your subconscious and change it. Desire and attachment are the causes of all suffering. The roots of attachment are in the subconscious. When you reach a state in which you remain aware all the time during the wakeful state, the awareness expands its range to the dreaming state also. If you could remain aware in your dreams, you would be able to have control over your dreams as well.

Long ago I discovered walking meditation by myself. It helps a lot to be aware in every situation. Should I carry on with this practice?

Well, you can learn through experience. That is true learning. You should try to experience the inner joy, which is not dependent on the objects and situations. If you can do that, you will easily be able to overcome the attachments with persons and situations. The aim and purpose of all movement is rest. Is it not?

To practise or do walking meditation for me is just to be there where I am.

That is fine. If you realize rest in movement and immobility in walking, that is a unique experience. Some people cannot feel restful even when they are sitting.

The light of awareness weakens what is negative and strengthens what is positive

Attention is a sort of light. It lights up and enlivens whatever it falls upon. If you become attentive to your breathing, it becomes regular and orderly. The principle is that if you become aware of

what is negative in you, it subsides or is eliminated, but if you become aware of what is positive, it is strengthened.

The practice of alertness

To develop the pure seeing/witnessing Consciousness, you advised us to see our own activities and thoughts with indifference. But that again involves a part of the mind.

That is the practice of alertness. You have to practise so that you don't do any activity mechanically. This also includes thinking and breathing. In fact, it includes all your day-to-day activities, such as eating. Don't eat mechanically, like a cat.

What is the difference between alertness and pure seeing?

Alertness purifies the mind. Seeing through a purified mind is alertness. Meditation is the special practice to remain alert. Seeing through the thinking mind also requires that you do not identify yourself with your thoughts. The Seer is always there. If there are no thoughts, the Seer sees the state of no thoughts. If you start seeing your thoughts without identifying yourself with them, the thoughts start subsiding. Therefore:

1. Don't do anything mechanically.
2. Do all your activities with good intention.
3. Do them to please the Divine, i.e., in the name of the Divine. That is the way in which a seeker performs his or her activities.

There is pure and contentless Consciousness. There is another consciousness, which is in conformity with the divine will. Consciousness implies alertness, but the alertness manifests on

many levels. When a thief is stealing, he is also alert. When you are doing something in the name of God, you are also alert. The mind or anything else has no existence without Consciousness; it is the mind that is impure or pure. Awareness/Consciousness is like the light. When the light illumines a gutter, it does not become impure. When the light illumines the water of the holy river Ganga, it does not become purified.

Can alertness be practised only when the mind is pure or does its practice in turn purify the mind as well?

I told you that even a thief is alert. However, alertness can purify the mind. Pure Awareness does not do anything. Alertness is what is called *dviguṇa* in the *Vedas*. It looks as if it is more aware than pure Awareness. You can understand it by an example. There is the simple sunlight, but when it is reflected in a mirror, it becomes brighter. Alertness means Awareness reflected in the mind.

“Awareness is neither the creation of the “knower,” nor the transmutation of what is “known,” nor is it any relation of the “knower” with the “known.” It is that principle, eternal, supreme, and beyond time, which illumines the “known,” the “knower,” and the presence or the absence of their mutual relationship.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Be more and more vigilant

Opportunities come and go. Those who are vigilant and alert avail the opportunities to their best. Some, slumbering and full of sloth,

let them pass. Those, doubting and lacking trust, are deprived of making good use of them. Be more and more vigilant, and make yourself free and spiritually wise before life passes into death.

Peace

“Peace is there neither in a magnificent palace nor is it there in a thatched hut. But what a trickery of māyā! Those who dwell in palaces think that peace is nowhere but in huts, and those who dwell in huts think that peace is to be found only in palaces. The fact is that, once true understanding comes, you are sure that peace can be found nowhere but in God-communion or in Self-Realization.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Be at peace whether in a group or in seclusion

I feel weak to do my housework when I am alone.

A composed mind has more capacity than a mind full of tension. Therefore, the seeker should try to keep his mind composed and free of tension. If it is easier and more practical for you to be at peace when you are alone, live alone. If it is easier with a companion, or in a group, live accordingly. It depends upon the temperament of the seeker. The born contemplatives find it easier to evolve themselves in seclusion. But if you keep an extrovert in seclusion, it will become a solitary prison confinement for him or her, and will create tension.

“Never give up contentment, and thou shall see that peace never deserts thee.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Silence

“Why are you silent?”

When someone asks, “Why are you silent?” the answer should be given as, “Silence is a state of being in which why, when, where, if, and how completely disappear.”

Everything comes from silence and goes back to silence

When I see the tremendous inner peace in which I feel you are, I wonder if keeping silence is not the best way to attain that peace.

Speech is one of the means to communicate with others. Silence, from the standpoint of *sādhana*, is the only means of communicating with one’s true Self that is the source of all peace and true happiness. Everything comes out of silence and goes back into silence.

How to become silent

How to be silent enough to hear?

The first step to be silent is not to speak. The second step is not to think. So long as you have any mission, you cannot stop

thinking. Your thinking is always in accordance with your mission. Is it not so? Let your mission be to be free of all missions.

Can we say that silence of mind is the goal? Do all the yogas lead to that end, since God is silence?

Yes, the purpose of all the *yogas* is to purify the mind and make it stable, unmoving. It is in the completely silent and alert mind that revelation happens. Love of God also purifies the mind and stops it; ultimately, it unites the lover with the Beloved, the Divine.

Many obstacles in *sādhana* are removed by observing silence

The practice of observing periodic silence is a part of spiritual *sādhana*. It is very useful from the viewpoint of *sādhana* because many unnecessary activities and contacts are easily avoided. The seeker can devote oneself more to meditation.

How can your speaking be helpful for your meditation? If you want to go within, you do not need to speak. You need to speak only when you want to express yourself. Many obstacles in *sādhana* are removed by observing silence. Controlling one's speech is the first step to the control of one's thoughts. The practice of observing silence increases your willpower to control yourself. We are talking of silence that is motivated by the goal to improve oneself spiritually. Otherwise silence is not a practice at all.

Once three seekers decided to observe silence together

Do you know the story of the three seekers? They were staying together in a hermitage. Once, they decided to observe silence for a week. They were silent for the whole first day. In the late evening, the oil in the lamp became less and less with the result that the light became very dim by and by. One of them forgot that he was observing silence and told the others to bring oil and put it in the lamp. The second seeker could not restrain himself and said, "Why have you spoken? We are not supposed to speak because we are observing silence." Hearing this, the third one said bragging, "I am the only one who has not spoken."

Silence is a more powerful means of communication than speech

Don't you feel that if you break your silence and come in direct contact with the seekers, it will be easier for them to have communication with you?

Silence is a more powerful means of communication than speech. If one is speaking and the other, who is listening, is not silent, there is no communication. If both are silent, the communication is direct and complete, without the interference of thoughts and words.

I was speaking for over forty years and have now been observing silence for over thirteen years and I have found that more people have been benefited through my association in these thirteen years of silence than in the forty years when I was speaking. In every town and city, there are so many preachers

and teachers preaching religion and spirituality. Has it changed anything in the towns and cities? There is more corruption and more play of wickedness in the towns and cities than in the isolated villages. By the spread of the media and modern means of communication, even the villagers are on the way to degradation.

Silence and spiritual experience

Does silence inhibit the progress of spiritual experience?

How can silence inhibit the progress of spiritual experience? It is only in silence that the spiritual experience takes place. When your senses and mind stand still, when your intellect stops chattering, only then the spiritual experience happens. This is what the *Upanishads* say.

Balanced Living

You have to strike a balance between patience and impatience

How to work with impatience?

You should learn to work with patience. Why should you want to know how to work with impatience? Do you want to be impatient? You have to be impatient in certain respects and patient in some other respects. You have to maintain a balance. It is like starting a hundred-metre sprint (race). To win the hundred-metre

race depends upon how you take the start. The difference between the speeds of the hundred-metre racerunners is so small that the one who can remain composed and take the better start wins the race. You have not to be impatient to start first because it creates tension in you. Some of your energy is lost in that tension and you cannot run to your full ability. But if you are too patient, you become complacent, you will take a slow start and lose the race. So you have to be balanced, you have to strike a balance between patience and impatience to make the best start. I know it because I used to take part in sprints in sports.¹ I applied the same technique in my *sāadhanā* and it helped me a lot.

What is the result of this balance?

It is like walking on a tightrope. You learn with regular practice. In the *Upaniṣhads*, it is said that *sāadhanā* (following the path of Truth) is like walking on a razor's edge. You can imagine how much skill and art is needed to do that. It is like climbing the date tree, which is high and straight. If you can climb and reach the top, you eat the sweet, delicious dates. If you slip and fall, you break your bones.

A balanced life is the most conducive for awakening

Normally, the stronger and more forceful the disturbing emotions are, the less is the potential to recognize one's true Nature. It is very simple to understand. The emotions are more disturbing or pleasurable when you are more identified with them. The more the false identification is, the less the chance of becoming

¹ Swamiji was an extraordinarily gifted racer and athlete in his college days.

awakened. The extreme identification, whether it is positive or negative, reduces the potential of awakening. A balanced life is the most conducive for awakening. That is why Buddha preached balanced living.

Slow and steady wins the race

How is it possible to feel lost and full of pain while making a lot of effort and living near a Master?

Take care of your health. If your body is healthy and your mind peaceful, it is easier for you to meditate or do any spiritual exercise for your upliftment. Do not work beyond your capacity. Do not exhaust yourself with overwork. Slow and steady wins the race.

First discover your real centre

I feel in conflict between my dharma to the world and my own dharma. I have engaged myself fully to give to others. I feel I have neglected myself.

If you are in conflict, you cannot give anything positive to the world. First discover your real centre. Then and only then will you be able to give peace, clarity, love, light and true happiness to others. Serving others is, however, a part of spiritual *sādhana*. There is no contradiction between serving others and working for one's spiritual upliftment. Keep your life balanced.

Right Livelihood

Earning money as a part of *sādhana*

*How to do my *sādhana* and work at the same time?*

If you earn money to sustain yourself and do *sādhana*, then the earning of money (of course by fair means) becomes a part of *sādhana*. But it does not mean that first you have to remain preoccupied with earning money and afterwards, when you have enough money, then you devote yourself to *sādhana*. Even when you are doing a job or working to earn money, you have to continue with your *sādhana*.

I want to spend all my holidays at the āshram.

You are most welcome. Holy-day is the day that you spend in meditation and remembrance of the Divine. It is the day of rest. But you are at rest and peace only when your mind is in the Divine. Am I right?

Let your hands work, but let your heart be with the Divine

My family and friends advise me to be more serious about my work and finances. Are seekers of Truth bound to end up being poor and jobless?

You have to strike a balance. Unless you take *sannyāsa*, you have to earn your living without losing sight of your spiritual goal. Don't be very ambitious about your financial status, but do not make yourself dependent upon others. Let your hands work, but

let your heart be with the Divine. Do not care about what others say. Are all rich people happy? I have never known of a poor man committing suicide, but I have learned of many billionaires committing suicide. Making money is not bad, forgetting the Divine is bad. Money has its own utility in life, but it cannot fulfil you. What if you gain money and lose the Divine? It will be the greatest tragedy.

Bhajans and Chanting

Remembrance of God through singing

Can we use the personal inner intuition as a guide on our path?

Every person has one's own inherent tendencies. One can surely know one's latent idiosyncrasies and chart one's way of life in which one can use one's energies in the right direction and gradually evolve spiritually. You can use only what you have. You have a potential worth, but you also have an element of freedom in you. If you follow the path that suits your temperament, it is easier for you to follow it. You can do singing and agricultural activities and still follow the path of Self-Realization.

What is the place of music in the search for Realization?

You should sing for God. Sing divine songs to please God. Sing His glories. It will enable you to remember God through singing. What do you like to sing? Rock music, pop music, or what? Sing the praises of God. In *kīrtan* many names of God can be

chanted. There were many saints in India, like Guru Nānak, who were singing in the love of God. Their songs are full of deep love for God. If you sing to make money, you will get money. If you sing to see God, you will see God. If you have God, you have everything. If you have the tree, you have its shade also. But if you are running after shadows, you may not find the Real.

Saint Haridās, the master musician, who sang to please God

There is a story. Saint Haridās was a master musician (vocalist). King Akbar heard about his fame and asked Tānsena, his court musician, to bring Haridās because he wanted to hear songs from him. Tānsena went and requested Saint Haridās to come to the king, but he refused. Then Tānsena asked Akbar to go to Haridās's *āshram*, not as a king but as an ordinary man, and then Tānsena would somehow persuade Haridās to sing. So they went there, touched Haridās's feet and sat before him. Tānsena started singing but not in a correct tune. So Haridās started to sing to correct Tānsena. His singing was so sweet that king Akbar became wonderstruck. When they came back, the king said, "Tānsena, you are a very good musician, known all over the country but, Haridās is far superior to you in singing. How is it possible?" Tānsena replied to the king, "Sir, I sing to please you, but Haridās sings to please only God. That is the difference."

Rituals

If you worship the Divine, you attain the Divine

What is the significance of rituals performed in marriages, death, etc?

Rituals in one way or the other remind you of the Divine. If and when one can remember the Divine without the help of rituals, one need not practise any ritual.

Can rituals really help the dead?

There is a science of helping the departed soul. The departed soul can be helped through invisible powers by invoking those powers through their corresponding *mantras*. They can also be helped through prayer and through intercessions.

Does it matter which deity one worships?

In the *Gītā*, there is a *shloka* in which Lord Kṛiṣṇa says, “Those who worship ghosts, they go to the world of ghosts. Those who worship the *devatās* go to the world of *devatās*, but those who worship Me, come to Me.” If you worship anyone taking him to be the Divine, you attain the Divine. If you worship anyone to have a particular power (different from the Divine), you attain that power or become one with that power in the end.

Has the worship of different deities a special impact, or is it the nature of the worship that is important?

Yes, the effect and the result of worshipping different deities are different. A deity means a particular aspect of the Divine. If you worship one aspect, you realize only that aspect of the Divine. And Fulfilment comes by the integral Realization of all the aspects of the Divine.

Pilgrimage

The benefits of pilgrimages

Can you give us some details about the positive and negative forces which are outside and also in us?

This world is a battlefield of negative and positive forces. But in the *āshrams* and temples and places of worship, it is the positive forces that prevail and the negative or evil forces do not dare to enter those places. The evil forces have their sway in the places and people where promiscuity, falsehood, greed, violence, cheating, drinking, etc., dominate. The dark forces can never dare to enter the places where people worship God and meditate and practise divine awareness.

Please, could you explain the importance and benefits of going on pilgrimages to holy places for spiritual progress?

Going on pilgrimages to holy places is useful. Devotees are reminded of the real purpose of life by going on pilgrimages. They are reminded of God through the holy places. It also prepares them to make sacrifices for God. They can meet saints at holy places too. Some saints, who have realized God, go to the holy places in search of a competent devotee to whom they can impart their wisdom. So you may encounter some realized saint when you go on a pilgrimage.

I think doing japa in the presence of a saint will be more beneficial. Is this correct?

Naturally, the presence of a saint helps the seeker to keep his mind calm and quiet. The vibrations of the saint help the seeker. The transmitter may be very strong and sophisticated, but the receiver must also be in working condition, if not very strong.

While you are living here, the vibrations are good and strong, but what will happen after one hundred or two hundred years; will the vibrations still be here?

It depends upon what goes on at this place after me. If this place remains free of commercial or wordly activity, the influence may last hundreds of years.

Does the effect of vibrations of a pilgrimage place wear off after a long time? And do the visits of saints recharge the place?

The more a pilgrimage place becomes commercialized, the more it loses its sanctity. Pilgrimage places are holy because of many saints or a powerful saint who lived there in the past or because of a high saint still living there.

God is more manifest at certain places

As the world can be so distracting, is it not better to stay in seclusion until one is fully realized?

God is present everywhere. He is there in a saint as well as in a thief. By living in a thief, He does not become vicious, and by living in a saint, He does not become saintly. Similarly, the realized one remains untainted and unaffected even while living in the world, as the lotus leaf does not get wet even in water.

Some holy places can give inspiration like the river Ganga, though in other holy places I feel nothing.

The fire is everywhere. It is there in the stone, it is there in your body, and it is there even in water. But the fire in the stone does not burn your hand, because it is not manifest in it. Similarly, God is everywhere but He is not manifest in everyone nor at every place. He is more manifest in a saint than in an ordinary person. He is more manifest at certain places than at other places. The place where a saint established in God lives becomes charged with holy vibrations. All the places that are associated with saints and sages who are/were God-men become holy.

How can one make oneself sensitive to the blessings of holy places?

A place that is worshipped by thousands of people with devotion as a place of God becomes charged with godly vibrations. It is relatively easier for an individual to feel the presence of God at that place. The holy atmosphere at that place is not the creation of the individual who feels peace at that place. It is what is called “second hand objectivity” in psychology. But, as people’s devotion and faith in such a place becomes less and less, the manifestation of the divine Power at that place also becomes less and less. All of the pilgrimage places that become more and more commercialized become less and less holy.

Thousands of people are benefited in the *kumbha*

The kumbha melā will be held next April in Hardwar. I heard it is an opportunity to be liberated from rebirth after bathing

in the holy Ganges at a certain time. What do you think about Westerners participating in such an event?

About six million people come to the *kumbha melā* in Hardwar and take a bath in the Ganges at a particular time. Should the six million people become liberated by taking a dip, liberation would be the simplest affair. Then, what is the use of following the discipline of some *yoga*, meditation, breathing exercises and all of that? Moreover, why do the same people go again and again to the *kumbha* if they become liberated by participating in it only once? You will be here in India at the time of the *kumbha*, you may go there and try, and see for yourself. If you get Liberation, nothing better than that. I am not saying that it is useless to participate in the *kumbha melā*. Thousands and thousands of people are benefited in the *kumbha*, in one way or another.

God-Oriented Married Life

Married life and Self-Realization

How to match physical attraction and the life of a couple with sādhanā?

Two seekers of Truth living together are like two pilgrims going together on a pilgrimage; they can help each other to make their pilgrimage easier and more comfortable, provided:

1. They are loyal to each other and remain loyal to each other until they reach their destination.
2. They should not use each other for their selfish satisfaction, but each one should try to make the other satisfied by making sacrifices for each other.

If they feel physical attraction for each other, they should get married and lead a responsible householder's life but, at the same time, devote themselves to the path of Self-Realization. It is a life-long commitment, and they must make sacrifices for each other, work sincerely as honest life-partners full of truthful love and trust and loyalty to fulfil that commitment. They should be aware of each other's weaknesses and try to remove those weaknesses through mutual understanding and help. If there is some difference of opinion, they should compromise out of love and not let their difference of opinion reduce their love. Being life partners, they are to share their pleasures and pains and feel joy in doing that. Both of them are to remain ever aware of the true aim and purpose of life and work together diligently to realize that aim. Mutual cooperation, trust, love, loyalty, sincerity and the spirit of sacrifice for each other makes the relationship sweet, joyful and enduring. Occasional difference of opinion is normal. But it should not make you discouraged. Once you have decided to live for each other and have committed to be life-partners, then you have to bear up and overcome these temporary differences of opinions through the intensity of mutual love and trust.

A couple should live together as co-travellers on the path of God-Realization

I have read a book called "Aghora." It says: "In the vedic tradition, women were supposed to take care of the house and the custodian aspect of existence, whereas men had to celebrate rituals and care about the spiritual evolution of the family. The man never had to worry about the material needs, to be free to spiritualise himself as much as possible.

The wife did not have to worry about difficult sādhanās and other spiritual practices, because for every sādhanā practised by her husband, in a certain way, she had the fruits of it.” Are men and women equal to face sādhanā? Do you think that I will receive the fruits of my husband’s spiritual work?

In the Indian tradition, marriage implies a sort of spiritual relationship between husband and wife. They live together as co-travellers on the path of God-Realization. There are certain religious ceremonies in Hinduism which both wife and husband have to perform together. If a husband performs such a ceremony alone, he does not get the desired fruit. It is true that the role of a woman is predominantly to run the house and take care of the children. And the role of a husband is to run the business or do some other job in order to financially support the whole family, but, as far as spiritual *sādhanā* is concerned, both the husband and wife have to do it, adjusting themselves in their personal work. In India, the wife is addressed as “*gharavālī*” by the husband, which means the owner of the home, and the husband is addressed as “*gharavāla*” by the wife, which means that he is the owner of the home. It means both of them absolve themselves from the possessiveness of ownership and feel themselves free. It is very beautiful.

You should also pray and meditate in the morning before the children get up. After sending them to school, you can again find some time to pray and read some books on spirituality. Your husband must also sit in meditation and prayer. Live together like co-travellers on the path of Self-Realization. Fulfil your familial and social obligations in the name of God and at the same time devote time to prayer and meditation. *Sādhanā* is not at all difficult for those who have deep aspiration to discover the Truth.

They enjoy *sāadhanā* as any other work they are attracted to do. You should help your husband in his *sāadhanā* and your husband should help you in your *sāadhanā*.

Women are nearer to God than men. The love of a woman is more enduring than that of a man. I am talking of marriage with God. I am talking of love for God through the simile of human love, as the Sufis did. Please, don't interpret me in your own way. When you get married to God, there is no need for you to go for another marriage.

Married life as a spiritual path

Should we stop sexual relations in our married life to get Realization?

No. A married person can realize the Truth. Nevertheless, marriage in Indian society has never been considered only as a means of sexual gratification. Many *vedic ṛishis* were married persons, but they lived a life of self-restraint devoted to God-Realization along with their wives, helping each other in every way. If there is no harmony between a wife and a husband, their life becomes a hell.

But some sages say we should not have sexual relations.

If one has chosen the life of a *sannyāsī*, then one has to completely abstain from sexual relationships. It is completely forbidden for a *sannyāsī* to have sexual relationships. But the society does not force you to become a *sannyāsī*. It is your own sweet choice to live as a *sannyāsī* and devote all your energies to God-Realization.

Live in harmony

How can I involve my wife in my sādhanā?

Sādhanā is like love. It cannot be forced on anyone. One must feel the importance of God-Realization before the urge for *sādhanā* enters one's mind. You should give some books on spirituality and on saints and sages to your wife. By reading such books, an interest for *sādhanā* may be generated in her. She will turn to God if and when she is impressed with some sage. Do not try to impose your ideas on her. It is very difficult for a wife to accept her husband as a spiritual teacher. Do not try to teach her. Live in harmony with her, otherwise she will create problems in your *sādhanā*. Discharge cheerfully your duties to your children and wife and to your parents. Win their confidence. They should be convinced that you are their well-wisher and you love all of them deeply. Love wins where argumentation fails.

Marriage and divorce

What do you think about marriage and divorce?

Christians believe that marriages are made in heaven. To stretch this concept, it may be said that divorces are made in hell. In the Indian tradition, there was no place for divorce. It is the same in Christianity, but now it has become only a means of seeking sensual pleasure. So it does not last long. The values of life have changed, in the West as well as in the East. Man is becoming more and more selfish. In olden times, marriage connoted sacrifice, the wife making a sacrifice for her husband and vice-versa. Marriage was the symbol of love. Marriages in the West

are in most of the cases not born out of love, but out of lust. That is the reason why there are many divorces. Marriage is a bond between two persons who love each other or who want to love each other. It is a commitment to love and not to lust. When a marriage is prompted only by carnal love, it cannot last long.

Practice of restraint in married life

Should the sexual impulses be controlled even in married life?

A married person asked Socrates how many times a married man should sleep with his wife. Socrates replied, "Once a year." The man said, "If it is too difficult?" Socrates replied, "Once in six months." The man said, "If it is still too difficult?" Socrates replied, "Once a month." Again the man said, "If even that cannot be done?" Then Socrates replied, "That man has no right to be called a man; he is worse than an animal." Socrates said that, and he was a married man.

Parents and children

The mother is the first Guru of the child

I have a son (sixteen years old) who started smoking, drinking and taking drugs. He lives with his father and when he comes to see me, often he doesn't respect me or the rules in the house. What can I do and, at the same time, how to let go? Would you write something in a letter to him? I think he is interested in spirituality, but he is afraid that his father

and sister will tell him that he is “crazy,” like they feel I am. I often wonder what God wants me to do!

You cannot plan “to let go” or force it to happen. It happens to one who has utilised all one’s energies in the right direction in the discovery of Truth. It comes with the end of the ego, which is the trap one has created for oneself in the hope of trapping others. A spider spins a net to catch its prey, but ultimately is itself caught up in that trap. “Let go” means complete self surrender. It is the consummation of a most sincere, committed, right effort that leads to Realization and complete revelation. “Let go,” as regards the conditioning of your son, would mean running away from your obligation; as a matter of fact, the present problem is due to your attitude of “let go” towards him when he was a child. You did not take care of him as a loving and wise mother should have done for her child. The mother is the first Guru of her children.

Now what can you do? Being a mother, you cannot forget or ignore your son, even if you try. You should think how the others could decondition him. There are so many organisations, voluntary as well as governmental, which conduct camps and courses for such children who become drug addicts. You and your husband should persuade your son (with love) to join such camps or courses. Give him love and more love to win him. Love wins where other methods fail. You did not give him the requisite love of a mother – that is why he went in the wrong direction. He must have felt some sort of emptiness and took the wrong path to fill it. You are responsible for it. Had you given your motherly love in abundance to him in his childhood, he would not have gone astray.

He does not know me. My writing to him may not have any effect on him, but if you so wish, you may give me his address and I will write to him a few words.

Worship your mother and father as God

Are our parents responsible for our problems?

I have found that most of the Western seekers accuse their parents for their own faults and problems. It is true that parents play the greatest role in making the personality of their sons and daughters, but why should they be held responsible only for your weaknesses? If they are responsible for your weaknesses, they are also responsible for what is good in you. In India it is taught that the mother is God. You should not only love her, but worship her too. Whatever you learn in your childhood becomes a part of your personality. In the *Vedas*, there are *mantras* that mean, “Worship your mother as God. Worship your father as God.” And the *Vedas* were taught to all in childhood.

Selfless love

Many of my friends tell me that I devote too much time to serving my mother. What is your advice?

Even if you devote your entire time to serving her, you cannot match the services that she rendered to you when you were a child. Mother is your first Guru. She is the first God who brought you up when you were unable to take care of yourself. If you serve your parents taking them to be the manifestation of God,

it becomes a part of *sāadhanā*. Why does a mother love her child? A mother's love for her child is the most selfless; there can be no other better example of selfless love in the world.

To reform the children, first reform the parents

As a therapist, I work with children. During your visit to France, what did you think about the children there?

There is a saying, "Show me a child and I can tell you everything about its parents." Children are like a clean slate when they are born. Up to the age of seven years they learn unconsciously from their parents. Their minds are very sensitive and open. They are not prejudiced against any person, situation, or social, political or religious system. They do not know how to tell a lie. But as a child grows, it takes up the habits of its parents; it starts speaking the language of its parents. If you want to reform the children of a country or society, you must first reform the parents in that country or society. If the parents are reformed, the need to reform the children will gradually cease.

You are what you have been taught in your childhood

I can feel now some love for my parents, which was not there when I was a teenager.

It is only intellectual. It is not very deep in your heart. You understand intellectually that anger is not good and greed is not good, but still you become angry and still you are overpowered

by greed or anger. Why? Now it is your intellectual understanding, but what you learn in your childhood is engrained on your heart. It is so because you were not taught and educated in that direction in your childhood. You are what you have been taught in your childhood. The impressions you receive in your childhood are the deepest because your heart is very delicate, like a clean slate at that time.

You understand intellectually that attachment is the cause of suffering, but still you become attached. Why? It means that intellectual understanding is not enough. It does not change your life. Lord Buddha said, “From the head come to your heart.” You are confusing attachment with love!

Advice to a mother

My son, of fourteen years, is facing some psychological problems. How can I help him?

Children learn mostly from the lives of their parents. A small child is very sensitive and open with a clean state of mind. What he sees his parents doing, how they behave and live, the child grasps. What the parents teach him through words is not as important as what they do and how they live. Now your son is fourteen years old. What can you teach him? Now you can only give him suggestions, but you cannot teach him. You must win his heart by love and then you can make him do what you want. You cannot teach him now. It is too late. The parents should also take care that their children do not fall into bad company. They should be very careful that the child does not start taking drugs.

Advice to a teenager

For a few years I will not be able to come to the āshram. Please give me some advice for my behaviour.

You should concentrate on your studies. Play basketball as a hobby. Listen to the advice of your parents. They are your greatest well-wishers. They want you to grow into a mature and a very intelligent man. Have full trust in them. Do not fight with your sisters, or with your classmates. Keep the company of intelligent boys who are devoted to their studies. Be obedient and respectful to your parents and teachers. Always keep away from those spoiled children who take drugs and who are not interested in their studies. Pray for ten minutes daily in the morning.

Factors that influence character

Why do some bad tendencies come and submerge my mind?

Most of the bad tendencies come to you from outside, from bad association, wrong suggestions, and if you follow them again and again they turn into bad habits, like smoking and drinking. Then you cannot leave them even if you wish to leave them. You become an addict.

I thought the negative tendencies come from the deep roots of mind or ego, or from childhood, or even from past lives, but not from outside. What do you mean by outside?

Many bad tendencies in a man are caused by his association with wrong persons and groups. For example, you acquire smoking

and drinking habits only when you associate with people who smoke and drink. You don't acquire such tendencies from your childhood. Association plays a great role in moulding one's life. There is no doubt that there are seeds of good and bad tendencies in children, but they sprout and grow only when and if they find fertile land. A most innocent child may become a robber if he falls into bad company. It is the parent's duty to protect their children from bad company until the child becomes mature enough to think what is right and what is wrong.

Education also plays a great part. How you are educated, what you are taught, what kind of values you are taught to acquire in life, all takes place in the schools and colleges. The type of system of education is very important. A child is like a delicate green branch; you can bend it in any direction, but when it becomes very thick, hard and dry wood, you cannot bend it. Children have very sensitive and open minds. They learn more from your example than from what you teach them orally. These days, children are wiser than their parents, more clever, if not wiser.

Friendship

Friendship can lead to the evolution of friends

I would like to know, "What is friendship?"

Friendship is between two equals. It is a relationship of complete trust and loyalty between two persons. Friendship can lead to the evolution of friends when both help each other on the path of evolution. Attachment leads to fear and suffering. But one can learn through suffering also if one is alert and reflects. Friendship

is always harmonious. If there is no mutual understanding and harmony between two friends the friendship does not last. A friend in need is a friend indeed. A friend of yours is tested when you are in trouble. When you are prosperous and doing well, you have many friends. When you are in trouble, most of your so-called friends leave you.

Old Age – An Opportunity

Devote yourself totally to your spiritual upliftment

I am leaving the āshram today. What should I do now?

Your age is the age of living on pension. It is strange that at this age you are still required to do something. It is an indication that you did not perform well when you were young and had enough energy to do so.

My heart feels young but my body doesn't follow it.

Lord Jesus said, “The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” All the sages come from the same place. So they speak the same language.

Can you express more clearly what you just said about my future?

Now is the time for you to devote yourself totally to your spiritual upliftment. This age is not the time for you to take up some profession and earn your livelihood.

“What use to lock up the stable after the horses are stolen? You wake up only after you have been robbed! What use is this waking now? You have enjoyed the world; you have become old and infirm, and your body is wrinkled all over; and now you say, ‘The world is unreal’ and now you say you would find God. What use of all this afterthought?”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Sannyāsa

When a person is ready for sannyāsa the urge is irresistible

Should I get married or remain celibate and become a sannyāsī?

In 1962, when this body was staying in Sapta Sarovar *jhāḍī* at the bank of the Ganges, a gentleman from Amritsar came to see me. He was a family man with a wife and one son. His son had taken over his father’s business and was running a big sweet shop. The man said to me, “I want to take *sannyāsa*. I have had enough of family life. I am tired of it and now I want to devote myself exclusively to *sādhanā*.” I asked him if he had consulted his wife and his son about this. He replied in the negative. He continued to come to me for over ten days and then sent a telegram to his wife in Amritsar and called her to come to Hardwar.

After a few days they came together to see me, he and his wife. I said to his wife, “Govardhandass (it was the name of that man), your husband, wants to take *sannyāsa*. Have you any

objection?” She replied, “Not at all! He can take *sannyāsa* even today. I have no objection at all, but first ask him why he wants to take *sannyāsa*. Have I ever created any obstacle in his *sāadhanā*? We have only one son. He is settled. Govardhandass goes to the shop only for one hour in the evening. All day long, he is free. He can spend his whole day and night in *sāadhanā* if he so wishes. We have no small children who make noise at home. I will serve him in his *sāadhanā*. I will cook food for him, wash his clothes and help him in every way in his *sāadhanā*. If he wants to observe *brahmacharya*, both of us can take a vow in your presence on the bank of Ganges that from today we will live like mother and son. Ask him what it is that is creating a problem in his *sāadhanā* at home.” The man was sitting quietly and nodding as if he was confirming that there was no problem for him in doing *sāadhanā* at home. Finally they stayed in Hardwar for a month. They were coming daily to me for *satsaṅga*. Then they went to Amritsar and lived there peacefully devoting themselves to *sāadhanā*.

When and if anyone asks my advice for taking *sannyāsa*, I always tell the person not to do it. Do you know why? When a person is truly ready for *sannyāsa*, he does not ask anyone’s advice. He simply runs away from home and never goes back. If someone exhorts the person not to take *sannyāsa*, he or she does not listen. He cannot live without becoming a *sannyāsī*. The urge is irresistible. It is too strong for you to seek any advice. Buddha ran away from his palace. Swāmī Rām Tīrth ran away from his home. They were married men with families. If they could do it, what can stop an unmarried person who is burning with dispassion?

Qualities of a *sannyāsī*

I have learnt that in the Indian tradition there are four different stages in man's life: the learning stage, the creation of a family and working, the transmission of wealth and knowledge (pre-retirement period), and sannyāsa (retirement). Is it possible to go from the first stage to the fourth without going through the second and the third?

Certainly, yes. These four stages were observed by the society as a general social rule, but one could go from the first stage to the fourth, directly. Shaṅkarāchārya went to the fourth stage directly from the first stage, and so many other saints and sages also did the same. If one has burning dispassion at an early age, one is not obliged to go through the second and the third stage. But this rule of *āshram dharma* is not followed these days by all Hindus.

In olden times, the rules were very strict. No *sannyāsī* was allowed to marry or have conjugal relationships. If any *sannyāsī* would marry, he would be ostracized by the society. These days anyone can take *sannyāsa* and any *sannyāsī* can give up his vow and get married. It is not a legal offence but even now, if a *sannyāsī* gets married, he is despised by the society. There is another type of *sannyāsa* that is called “periodic *sannyāsa*.” This is prevalent in the *Hinayāna* Buddhist school in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

What about Yvan Amar, who got married at the time when his sannyāsa clothes were given to him?

Yvan Amar took my permission before getting married. I allowed him to get married. If the Guru allows the disciple to get married,

it is not an offence. The Guru of Nivṛittinātha asked the latter to go back to his home and live with his wife, even though he had taken *sannyāsa*. Jñāneshvara, the great saint who has written a commentary on the *Gītā* was born to Nivṛittinātha after the latter had gone back home and given up *sannyāsa* at the behest of his Guru.

What are the inner aspects of a sannyāsī, the aspects that last forever?

Dispassion, desirelessness, burning aspiration to discover the Truth, one-pointed commitment to find the Truth, self-control and self-mastery are the basic qualities of a *sannyāsī*. A *sannyāsī* has no attachment, no hatred and no attraction. He or she has equanimity, peace, compassion and all the cardinal virtues. A *sannyāsī* is generally called *swāmī*. *Swāmī* literally means master, master of one's mind and senses.

Inner states of a real *sannyāsī*

There are two inner states of a real *sannyāsī*:

1. The *sannyāsī* feels the pangs of separation from God.
2. The *sannyāsī* feels the union with God.

The sign of a monk

Abraham, a sage monk, asked a seeker, “What are the qualifications of a monk? The seeker said, “The monk should be so content that if he gets food without asking, he should accept it and eat it. If he does not get food, he should not make a fuss

and should remain content.” Abraham laughed and said, “This is what a dog does.” The seeker was surprised. He said, “Then, Father, you please tell me the sign of a monk.” Abraham said, “A monk is one who, when he gets the food unasked, does not eat it alone but shares it with those who are hungry, too.”

Chapter Eight

Metaphysical Matters

“The purpose of metaphysical thinking is to investigate intellectually the fundamental nature of the world and God. It must be more hypothetical and less practical, because it has to deal with that which lies behind the apparent forms and is super-sensory.

What is the nature of this world and what are its laws? What are matter, life and mind and how are they mutually related? Can there be anything like soul or Spirit? What is God? What is the relation between man and God, and between God and the world? What is the whence and whither of this life? Does this world go on mechanically, moved by the blind laws of insentient nature? Do things happen in this world by chance, or is there a secret Intelligence working behind the veil of forms? The investigation of all these problems falls within the field of metaphysical thinking.”

– The Practical Approach to Divinity

Metaphysical Matters

The Theory of Karma and Destiny

The cause of suffering

How to learn from suffering, do we have to understand the meaning of our suffering?

Suffering is there in the world, but everyone suffers in one's own way; the quality as well as the quantity of suffering is different for everyone. If we take suffering to be an effect, then it must have some cause, because effect is the fruit of cause. The sufferer has to reflect upon and try to find out the cause of his or her suffering. If the cause is not traceable in this life, then we are forced to accept by reasoning that the cause must be hidden in the past lives of the one who is suffering. That is why the word used by Hindus for fate is called *prārabdha*, which literally means that which comes from the past.

Now, how can you learn a lesson from suffering? If you come to know directly that some action has caused you that suffering, you should be vigilant and try your best not to commit the mistake of doing the same thing again. If you cannot directly see the cause, you should take it for granted that this suffering is

the result of your past *karma* which you cannot see. No other person is responsible for it. No one other than you is responsible for your suffering, so you should not have a grudge against anyone. It will make your mind light. Moreover, no one wants to suffer. If you suffer, you may develop the sense of compassion for others who are also suffering. You have to reflect continuously upon your actions, experiences and the conditions and challenges you face in your life, only then you can learn.

The law of cause and effect

I would like to know how you feel about the suffering and pain that people inflict voluntarily on others (like torture or ethnic purification) and what do you think about society's silence in witnessing such atrocities? I thank you for your answer on a subject that is very important to me.

No one wants to suffer and yet all suffer more or less. All want to be happy, but very few are happy in this world. It shows that there is a law working in the world and a person who does not follow that law cannot escape suffering or be happy in spite of wanting it.

That law is the law of cause and effect, the law of *karma* as it is called in Hinduism. The law is that if one sows the seeds of wheat, one is bound to reap the grains of wheat and if one sows the seed of paddy (rice still in the husk), one is bound to reap the fruit accordingly. There cannot be an exception to it. It is not possible that one sows the seeds of wheat and gets rice from the crop. Those who inflict suffering on others get back suffering manifold and those who give happiness to others get

back happiness many times more. The shouting of crowds or the silence of crowds cannot change this law.

It is possible that we may confuse the seeds of wheat with the seeds of paddy and sow those seeds hoping to get the fruit of wheat. When we do not get wheat, we say, "It is injustice, it is wrong. I had sown the seeds of wheat, why am I getting rice?" Nature cannot make a mistake. It is I who sowed the seeds of paddy taking it to be the seeds of wheat and that is why I am getting rice. One seed makes a plant and from that you get many many seeds of the same kind and quality.

The law of *karma* is a divine law enforced by God

Karma is working in our life. I agree when you say that it has been established by God, every cause bringing its effect, but I cannot understand how karma is enforced by God.

Is *karma* sentient or insentient? If *karma* is insentient, it does not know what is good or what is bad; it cannot judge. So how can *karma* deliver justice? It is God who gives you the fruit according to your *karma*. The *karma* itself does not do any justice. Nor does the doer enforce the law of *karma*. A thief would never want to punish himself because of his stealing nor does the act of stealing give him punishment. It is the judge who gives punishment to the thief.

But we cannot speak about God as we speak about a judge.

Why not? God enforces the law. The law is like a constitution. There must be someone who makes the constitution and there

must be some supreme authority to enforce the law. Otherwise who will follow the law?

The law should already bring respect of the law by itself.

If everyone were to respect the law there would be peace in the world. The law of *karma* is the divine law, but the Divine is above the law. If a thief is allowed to make the judgment, do you think he will make the right judgment?

Usually, we live in full ignorance of what this law is.

The ignorance of the law is no excuse. If a thief says, “I stole your property because I did not know that stealing is punishable,” the judge will not pardon him. The judge gives judgment according to the law.

Karma means activity done by a doer wilfully. *Karma* is good or bad according to the intention of the doer. *Karma* is classified into many kinds: *karma*, *vikarma*, *akarma* and *sahaj karma* are the four kinds of *karmas*. The doer has nothing to do with the judgment. He is obliged to reap the fruit of his *karma* as ordained by the divine dispensation. Is reaction wilful or not? Suppose someone rebukes you. You become angry and in reaction you slap the person who rebuked you. Did you slap that person wilfully or not? Did you move your hand to slap that person or some one other than you moved your hand?

Who am I to say if I move or not?

In the present state, you are the mind. Or it would be better to say that you are the slave of your mind. Don't you play any part in your growth? Don't you play any part in your regeneration or

degeneration? You kill a man. You are caught and taken to a court according to the law. You argue that you have done nothing, that you only reacted and killed the person. The judge is not going to absolve you from the charge of murder. You are driving a scooter and cause an accident, injuring a passer-by. Are you not responsible for it? Is it God who makes you angry and kill a person? If you do something against the law, why should you not feel guilty? There are social laws, moral and ethical laws and above all there is the divine law. Even your society does not allow you to act against the social law.

There is a hidden law working in the universe

If we are born in a certain place, is it only by chance?

Nothing happens by chance in the world of God. Man may not be able to understand the cause of many things and happenings, but nothing happens by chance. There is a hidden law working in the universe and everything is happening under that law.

Man's life is composed of and run by both self-effort as well as destiny, and the third basic power is God's will, which works in a hidden way.

Individual and collective *karma*

How does collective karma work?

There is the *karma* of an individual and there is the *karma* of a society and community also. When you are part of a community, the *karma* of the community also affects you. If you become a

minister, your family members will also be benefited. If you turn into a thief, will not your family members also be affected? The *karma* of the parents affects their children and vice versa. A society or community is only the extension of a family.

A devotee was travelling with Guru Nānak. The devotee put the same question to Guru Nānak, asking, “Why does a man suffer because of the *karma* of others?” Guru Nānak said, “Tomorrow you will get the reply.” When the devotee was sleeping, Guru Nānak took a few grains of sugar and put them on the body of the devotee. Many ants crawled up on the devotee’s body to take that sugar. One ant bit the devotee. The devotee hit the place on his body where he had been bitten with the result that many ants were killed. The next day Guru Nānak asked the devotee, “Only one ant had bitten you. Why did you kill so many ants? What harm had the other ants done to you?”

You cannot defy the law but you can outgrow it. If you could outgrow body-consciousness and realize the Spirit, which is beyond all limitations and laws, you can outgrow the law of *karma*. When you realize your essential Nature, no favourable or unfavourable situation can affect you. You outgrow all pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure, hot and cold, low and high, sin and virtue, loss and gain. So there is a solution.

The different kinds of *karma*

Please explain the different kinds of karma and how they work.

Prārabdha karma is like an arrow that has been released from the bow. You have no control over it at all. You cannot bring the arrow back.

Sañchita karma is like the arrow that is still on the bow but the bow is stretched. There is a force already projected into it by you, but it has not yet been released. You can take that force back.

Vartamān karma is like the arrow that is still held in your hand; it has not yet been fixed on the bow, nor has it been released. You are sowing the seed; it is your present *karma*. As it does not give the result or fruit immediately it takes time to bear its fruit, so it is also called *āgāmī karma*, meaning the *karma* whose fruit is reaped in the future.

Prārabdhā karma and puruṣhārtha

Can you give us the real meaning of these two words, prārabhdha and puruṣhārtha?

Prārabhdha is the name of *karmas* that have started yielding fruits. *Puruṣhārtha* is making a new *karma*. It is like sowing a seed. The seed takes time to become a plant and then bear fruit, but with different methods of sowing the seed and nourishing it, the time of fructification can be reduced. It is not easy to correlate the *prārabhdha* with its *karma* done in the past, because the thinking mind cannot see into the past lives. The thinking mind is a very superficial mind and it is not powerful. But if someone could go deep into his subconscious, he could find out the cause of his present situation and correlate the fruit with the seed, and the effect with the cause. Nevertheless, the law of cause and effect is working, whether we can correlate the effect with the cause or not.

Should we give up puruṣhārtha?

Why should one give up *puruṣhārtha*? Moreover, giving it up is not so easy. Can you stop making an effort? No fatalist behaves in practice as if he is an absolute fatalist. You may believe in *prārabhdha* as a concept, but in practice you always deal as if you believe in *puruṣhārtha*. Why did not you stop making an effort, if you believe in *prārabhdha* absolutely? There is something in man, the freedom of which is ever percolating in the mind, and it never allows a man to become an absolute determinist or fatalist. Therefore you cannot put absolutely in practice the theory of *prārabhdha*. The fact is that *prārabhdha* and *puruṣhārtha* always co-exist, like the two sides of a coin. On the level of mental consciousness, you cannot conceive of determinism without freedom and vice versa. When the self-effort reaches its highest consummation, it turns into self-surrender.

I feel that I should practise both meditation and self-effort.

Self-effort can be supplemented with prayer. Through prayer one can tap the divine power and can make self-effort more effective and powerful. The Divine is not aggressive. He is not violent. If you allow the Divine to work in you, He is ever ready to take you to the source, to Himself. Meditation only helps you to be open and receive the divine grace. *Darshana* is possible only when the mind is silent, but alert.

How to differentiate prārabhdha from puruṣhārtha?

Prārabhdha does not fall from the sky. It is made by self-effort (*puruṣhārtha*). There are certain present *karmas* that are so

strong that they bear fruit in this very life, meaning they turn into *prārabhdha*.

How to become free from *karma*

How can one be free from karma? Is the doer different or opposite from the contemplative?

Freedom from *karma* is not achieved suddenly. One has to work it out slowly. There are certain steps:

1. Act rightly, exercising your discrimination and in the light of the parameters laid down in the holy scriptures or recommended by the sages, without caring for the result of the action.
2. Act rightly, using your whole energy and with awareness and consecrate its results to the Divine.

If you follow these two steps sincerely and consistently, slowly and gradually, an understanding (not only intellectual but a very deep understanding involving all the parts of your personality) will emerge in you that you are the non-doer. Once you reach this state of consciousness in which you realize yourself as being a non-doer, your actions become totally selfless, spontaneous and motiveless. Such actions do not bind you. Then it is the Divine who acts through you. You are completely free from action.

I need money to create my next dance programme. If I don't earn some money with this new programme, I cannot

continue my activity. How is it possible not to think of the result of my actions in such a situation?

If you are always thinking of the result, you will not be able to put your whole energy into the action. If you act, the result is sure to come. To act without thinking of the result does not mean that you do not plan. It means to put your whole energy and attention into the action. So, to keep on thinking of the result is not only useless, but it diminishes the capacity of your doing an action.

What you have achieved in this life is not lost

Do we retain the credit of our good karmas?

What you have achieved in this life is never destroyed. A man can temporarily assume some lower birth to exhaust his lower *karmas*, but what he has achieved is not lost. When he again assumes a human birth, he starts to evolve from where he left off in his past human birth. It is not necessary that after death every man has to go through eight million, four hundred thousand births in different species to come again into human form!

The theory of reincarnation

Can we know our past lives?

Past life or rebirth is not a concept. You can see your past lives if you so wish. There are methods and techniques through which you can look into the past and see your past lives. The theory of reincarnation is also most logical and even scientific. It can be

proved by logic also. You can explain the diversity in this world only through the law of *karma*, which is the law of cause and effect in a limited sense.

A child does not do any good or bad *karma*. The child does not even know what is good and what is bad. Why should a child suffer if it has not done anything in this life which could cause its suffering? There cannot be an effect without a cause. If you don't find the cause of an effect during the present life, you are obliged to accept the existence of past lives.

Are there any proofs of the theory of reincarnation?

Annie Besant¹ had a daughter who suffered very much in her childhood. Annie Besant studied Hinduism and Buddhism thoroughly and became convinced of the theory of rebirth. All the religions that originated in India believe in the theory of rebirth. There have been instances when some children remembered their past lives, the parents and their home of their past lives. They were taken to that place and they recognized everyone. Many such cases have happened and are still happening. There are books published which describe such events. People all over the world have been coming to see those children who are talking about their past lives. The children of the same parents, brought up in the same environment, eating the same food, given the same education have different and diverse tendencies and propensities. How will you explain these differences unless you believe that

¹ Annie Besant (1847-1933) was a prominent British theosophist, women's rights activist, writer and supporter of Irish and Indian self rule. For many years she lived in India and became the president of the Theosophical Society and the first woman president of Indian National Congress.

each of them has brought with him in his mind from the past life something special?

A person can be born in a family for so many reasons

How can it happen that I am born into a family which I feel I don't belong to?

A person can be born in a family for many reasons. The two main reasons are, to exhaust some past *karmas* and to learn. It is not necessary that one should take birth in a family to live a harmonious life with other members of the family. There are many such stories that a man was born in a family to take revenge on his present parents and as soon as he finished that task, he died.

From the standpoint of timeless Consciousness, *karma* and rebirth do not exist

In Christianity, there is no belief about karma, about having many lives. How can this difference be explained without concluding that one of them is wrong?

What can I say if the Christians don't believe in *karma* theory and rebirth of the soul? I can only say that it is reasonable to believe in *karma* and rebirth. Moreover, the goal of spiritual *sādhanā* is to go out of the vicious circle of *karma* and rebirth and not to prove it. From the standpoint of the timeless Consciousness, *karma* and rebirth do not exist. They exist in relation to the world phenomena. So both are right!

Karma theory is the theory of cause and effect. How do you explain going to hell and heaven, if you don't believe in the

karma theory? You cannot say that it is the will of God that ‘X’ goes to hell and ‘Y’ goes to heaven.

When one experiences bad karma, should he not surrender to it, taking it to be the will of God?

Never! You may surrender to God and ask pardon from God for your past bad *karmas*, but you cannot go on doing the bad *karma* and saying that you are doing it because you have surrendered to God. Can you steal in daylight, or can you steal or deceive others when you have an awakened conscience or when you have surrendered to God?

What I mean is that we should not complain about our unfortunate destiny.

If you kill a person and say, “It was my destiny or God’s will to do it,” and the court sends you to prison and sentences you to be hanged and says, “Please take this punishment as your destiny and as the will of God,” can you accept it cheerfully? If you can accept going to the gallows cheerfully, you are allowed to kill others cheerfully! Please don’t be selective in accepting God’s will to suit your interests.

How to come in contact with past lives

You said to me concerning my question about rebirth, “Why don’t you go deep into yourself and discover it for yourself?” Is it really possible to see clearly our past lives?

Keep the desire in your mind that you want to see your past lives and then meditate. When your conscious mind stops thinking, the

subconscious will open up and come up to the surface. The subconscious has many, many layers. The more you go deep into your subconscious, the more experiences of more remote past lives will come to you. The way is to keep the desire of knowing your past lives and to stop the working of your conscious mind.

Man is relatively free

How far is man bound by fate and to what extent he is free?

Both determinism and freedom are there in every man's life. The ratio of determinism and freedom varies from one person to another. It is this variation that differentiates one person from another. With the progressive evolution of the soul, the factor of determinism goes on decreasing while the element of freedom goes on increasing. When one is totally free, one realizes that the element of determinism becomes zero and the element of freedom reaches infinity.

The element of freedom can never be zero. Even in an atom of matter, there is some freedom. Scientists have come to this conclusion. They have found that the behaviour of an atom is not completely predetermined. Man is relatively free. He has more freedom than animals, vegetables and minerals. When you ask, "Am I free or not?" What do you refer to as "I"? Do you take your physical body as "I"? Do you take your mind as "I"? What do you take as your "I"? If you take yourself to be the physical body, you can never be free. The body can never be free. It is governed by physical laws. If you take yourself to be the mind, you are relatively free, because the mind is more flexible

than the body. In your mind you can go to France within a fraction of a second, though not with your body. Nevertheless, the mind has its own limitations. You cannot realize Freedom so long as you are identified with your mind. True Freedom comes to you through the Realization of the Spirit that is free.

I would like to understand better about the doer, freedom and fate.

Are you free to smoke or not? Or is it already predetermined?

That is part of my reflection. Are we free to decide to smoke or not to smoke?

Are you a robot? Man's freedom is relative. He is not absolutely free, but it does not mean that his life is absolutely predetermined. His freedom is limited, but with the right effort aided by the Divine, as he evolves, the scope of his freedom goes on increasing.

Why does God allow His manifestation to sin, to forget Him?

God has given you the freedom to choose. If you choose wrong things and do not use your discrimination properly, you suffer. God has not created suffering in the world. He makes you suffer when you do not cooperate with the divine law. As a mother slaps her child out of love, or as a doctor makes a surgical operation upon you to remove some malignant part of your body, similarly God sometimes makes you suffer, so that you may be purified and live a long and happy life. You think in terms of short-term pleasures; He prepares you to have lasting happiness.

Chakras

To go out of the *chakra*, you have to go to its centre

Can you give me more details concerning the chakras and how they work?

Chakra means “wheel,” or “circle.” If you are moving in a circle, you do not reach anywhere. You feel as if you are moving ahead, but in the end you reach the same place from where you had started. So you are moving and moving but reaching nowhere. To go out of the *chakra*, you have to go to its centre. If you are caught in a whirlpool in a river, you have to come to its centre, then it takes you down to the bottom and throws you away from its magnetic field.

Once while crossing the Ganges, I was caught in a whirlpool. As I had heard and knew how to get out of a whirlpool, I used the same method, came out and was saved. You cannot swim out of it. It forcibly moves you round and round and does not allow you to go out. The only way is not to try to go out, but to go to its centre and down.

The energy takes the form of *chakras* at certain places in the body

I would like to know about chakras and centres.

You know, the literal meaning of *chakra* is “trap.” The energy is trapped there. Have you ever seen a whirlpool in a river? You can see it where the running water falls down with great speed.

A force field is created around that whirlpool. Similarly, around every *chakra* there is a force field. The individual soul is also a centre, a *chakra*. The Spirit trapped in the mind is called the soul.

The energy takes the form of a *chakra* at certain places in the body. Instead of moving straight, it assumes the form of a wheel, going round and round. Only some part of the energy is moving round and round, just as you see in the river that the whole water does not turn into a whirlpool; only a part of the flowing water turns into a whirlpool. The energy, when it assumes the form of a *chakra*, becomes specific, with a specific force field. The energy at the navel becomes the vital force; at the heart, it becomes the force of feeling; at the *ājñā chakra*, it becomes the energy of understanding. This *chakra* is connected with the brain. In man, it is the brain that gives all directions, so it can be called the master *chakra*.

One has to open the *chakras* through practice

It is said that there are three granthīs (knots), at the level of the mūlādhāra, anāhata and ājñā chakra. I also read a similar assertion in Taoism. What about these knots in the way of descent? I heard something about the existence of cycles of seven years, each cycle corresponding to the purification of a specific chakra. Is it so?

The *chakras* in the body are more or less active in everyone, but they are not purified and active to their full capacity. In common parlance it is said that these *chakras* are closed and one has to open them through practice. In that sense it can be said that there are knots at the level of these *chakras*. The fact

is that the *chakras* are only partially opened and partially working in an ordinary person.

In the way of descent, it is the divine Power that opens the *chakras*. But because that Power comes from above, it first opens the higher *chakras*. The *mūlādhāra* is the last *chakra* on which the divine Power works. In the path of raising the *kuṇḍalini*, *mūlādhāra* is the first *chakra* that is worked upon, purified and developed. The raising of *kuṇḍalini* is the way of ascent.

I don't know about the cycles of seven years in connection with the purification of *chakras*. It is, however said that after every seven years in every one's life there is a change in the level of consciousness. The life of a human being is divided into five cycles, each cycle consisting of fourteen years. In Hindi, *chakra* means a circle. To move in a circle is like falling into a trap. You may move in a circle for thousands of years, but will not reach anywhere. We call this world a *chakra*.

When one *chakra* is purified it starts purifying the others

What is the sequence of purification, i.e. opening of the chakras?

There is no sequence of purifying and opening the *chakras*. One can start from any *chakra*. But it is best to start from the heart-centre, which is in the middle of the chest. One can move up or come down from the heart to purify the other *chakras* easily if the heart-centre is purified and developed. When one *chakra* is sufficiently purified and developed, its vibrations reach the other *chakras* located above and below it and start purifying them. At that time, one can concentrate on the other *chakras* as well. It

is safest to concentrate on the heart-centre and other centres above the heart-centre first of all. It is not safe to activate the lower *chakras* located at the navel and below before the heart-centre and the centres above the heart are adequately developed.

The realization of different aspects of the Divine occurs in different centres

Sri Ramaṇa used to say, “Fullness of Consciousness is the heart.”

The word “heart” is used for many things. There is the physical heart in the body located on the left side that pumps the blood to all parts of the body. The word heart is also used for love as an emotion. In *yoga*, the *anāhata chakra* or the heart-centre is not the physical heart, it is the energy centre located in the middle of the chest. The heart is the centre where the infinite Consciousness is revealed. Ramaṇa always recommended to the seekers to concentrate on the heart-centre. In the *Upaniṣhads* it is written that the Divine dwells in the space of the heart. The Divine dwells everywhere, but He is realized in the heart-centre.

In Shaivism, it is said that the union of Shiva-Shakti in the sahasrāra is the final step, but the jñānīs say that it is not the final step, the “I” thought must come back into the heart-centre. How to reconcile both?

There are many aspects of Realization, as there are many aspects of the Divine. The Realization of different aspects of the Divine occurs in different centres. The *sahasrāra* is the final/highest centre. It is true that the Realization of the union of *Shiva* and

Shakti happens in the *sahasrāra* centre. But the Realization that liberates the soul comes when all the centres are transcended.

What does a centre or *chakra* mean? *Chakra* is like a whirlpool, a vortex where the energy gets centralised and assumes a specific form, with its specified field of force. All the *chakras* are, as it were, converters of energy into a specific form. The navel-centre converts the energy into the vital force, *prāṇa shakti*, the heart-centre converts the energy into *bhāvanā shakti*, the power of feeling; and the *ājñā chakra* converts the energy into the thinking power, *jñāna shakti*. These are the three main centres, and these three powers are the main powers in a human being: *kriyā shakti*, *bhāvanā shakti*, and *jñāna shakti*. *Kriyā shakti* is the manifestation of *prāṇa shakti*. Activity is the quality of *prāṇa*. The three *yogas*: *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga* and *jñāna yoga* are based on the predominance of *kriyā shakti*, *bhāvanā shakti* and *jñāna shakti* respectively. Every human being has got these three *shaktis*. But there is a predominance of one *shakti* in one person and the predominance of another *shakti* in another person. Very rarely are they balanced in one person.

All the *chakras* are connected

How to know if our higher chakras are purified?

When the higher *chakras* are purified and developed, one gains mastery over one's mind and senses.

Should I concentrate on the maṇipura chakra or revert to the heart chakra?

All the *chakras* are connected with one another. When one *chakra* is sufficiently developed, the wavelength of its vibrations

increases and it starts to influence the other *chakra* located near it. It is better to concentrate on the heart-center and *ājñā chakra*.

Beyond the *ājñā chakra*

One remains aware of the manifestation up to the *ājñā chakra*. The triangle of the knower, the known and the knowledge is present only up to the *ājñā chakra*. After going beyond the *ājñā chakra* and reaching the *sahasrāra* centre, one goes beyond the manifestation and the experience of *nirguṇa*, the contentless awareness, happens. One goes up to the *ājñā chakra* through the concentration of one's mind, but after that the intervention of divine grace is indispensable. The effort is there only so long as there is mind. Only the Consciousness that is beyond the *guṇas* can take the seeker to what is beyond mind.

Opening of *chakras*

Many times these days, I felt the kuṇḍalini growing. Last night, the fifth and sixth chakras opened, I believe, and they were full of light for twelve hours. Is not the kuṇḍalini developing way too fast?

There are two paths, the path of ascent and the path of descent. In the first path, the divine Power that is lying dormant at the *mūlādhāra*, the lowest centre in the body is awakened and moves upward into the higher *chakras* one by one and goes up to the sixth *chakra*. The seventh *chakra* is above the head and when the *kuṇḍalini* reaches that centre, one goes out of the manifestation. It is very difficult for it to come down if and when the seventh centre is reached. That is why it is said that normally

the body dies twenty-one days after the seventh centre is reached. One achieves *nirvāṇa* and the body dies.

You have felt the opening of the fifth and sixth *chakras*. It may not be complete opening, but these *chakras* may have become activated which gave you the feeling that you have hinted at. You may concentrate on the transporting experience more and more. It will help in purifying the *chakras*. The divine Energy goes up and then comes down. It does not stay up because it has to purify the lower centres and open them as well. So it comes down. Unless all the centres are purified and opened, the experience of joy and peace does not become permanent. The purifying and opening of all the centres is a very slow and long process. It may take many years of regular and intense *sādhana*.

In the path of descent, the divine Power that is manifest in the universe and is working, descends from above and comes from the sixth centre down to the lowest centre called *mūlādhāra*, in order to purify and open the *chakras*. The path is the path of prayer, invoking the Divine and surrender. The first path is the path of *sañkalpa*, the path of exercising one's will power and concentrating on the *chakras* to purify and open them.

Practice of concentration on different *chakras* at different times of the day

I read in your book that there are three types of shakti: kriyā, bhāva and jñāna. As far as the practice is concerned, is it necessary to concentrate alternatively on the navel, heart and ājñā in order to balance these shaktis?

Concentrate on the heart-centre. When concentration on one centre is achieved, it is easier to concentrate on other *chakras*

too. The heart-centre is in the middle. When it becomes more and more purified and active, its vibrations also start influencing the upper and lower *chakras*.

I understand what you wrote, but is it necessary to have a regular schedule of concentration on the different centres?

In the evening, you may also concentrate on the navel-centre. For half an hour in the morning, concentrate on the *ājñā chakra*, but spend more and more time in concentrating on the heart-centre.

Why do you advise to concentrate on the navel-centre in the evening?

In the evening, there is a tendency of inertia because the body and mind have exhausted some of their energy during the activities of the day. Moreover the sun, which is the source of *prāṇa*, is setting and it reduces the flow of energy in the body. The navel is the centre of *prāṇa* in the body. By concentrating on that centre in the evening, it is easier to overcome the tendency to sleep during meditation.

Body – Mind

Don't confuse the means with the end

What about all the techniques that work on the body?

What do you want to do with your body? Do you want to make it eternal? As body and mind are very deeply correlated, therefore

to tame your mind, you have to discipline your body also to a certain extent. If your body is fit and healthy, it is easier to meditate. If your body is sick, it is not easy to follow any *sādhana*. But one should not confuse the means with the end.

I like it when you say that the body is the temple of God. To maintain health, should we do some physical exercises/efforts?

Some people only take care of the temple of God for their whole lives and in the process forget God altogether. Can physical effort be escaped? Even when you breathe you consume some energy. The food you consume should be proportional to the physical and mental effort you are making. It is the excess of food, the food which is not consumed by the metabolic process of the body, which causes disease. The labourers don't need a walk. This advice is for those who work all day sitting in a chair with machines and computers. Ancient *brāhmaṇas* did not need such long walks. They ate very little. They fasted so often.

Body consciousness

What do you mean by body consciousness? Is it identification with the body only?

Body consciousness means that you think and feel that you are the body. To think and feel and know that I am the body is what body consciousness is. All the other identifications are the products of body consciousness. First you are identified with your body, and then, through the body you are related with different situations, things and persons and consequently become identified

with them. It is surely through the identification with the body that you become identified with any other thing or person.

I feel my attachments are physical. Is it so?

You have attachment with your thoughts, your opinions and your desires too. These are not physical. Are thoughts and opinions physical or mental? But it is true that it is through body-consciousness that thoughts and desires arise. First of all, you have to give up attachment and identification with your physical body.

“Thinking starts with body-consciousness.” Can you please explain this?

It is usually through the physical body that a person becomes related to others, objects, persons or situations. All thoughts and desires arise because of the relationships, which are born of body-consciousness. Therefore, to get rid of body-consciousness is most important.

There are five *puruṣhas*:

1. *Annamaya Puruṣha* – body-consciousness
2. *Prāṇamaya Puruṣha* – vital-consciousness
3. *Manomaya Puruṣha* – mental-consciousness
4. *Vijñānamaya Puruṣha* – gnostic or supramental consciousness
5. *Ānandamaya Puruṣha* – Bliss-Consciousness

There are also five bodies. When body-consciousness overpowers the other *puruṣhas*, you become subservient to *tamas*. When vital consciousness overpowers you, you become subservient to *rajas*, that is desire and activity. When mental

consciousness is more powerful, it is the *sattva* that dominates your life. Supramental is a higher dimension of Consciousness that takes over when the body, *prāṇa* and mind are purified and transcended.

You can overcome body-consciousness either through divine Love or through divine Knowledge. Be more and more sincere, more and more dedicated to what you are doing. Trust in God and have patience. To control one's mind completely is more difficult than to become the president of your country.

Corpse means the body without a soul

What does disintegration of the body mean exactly? Are the body and a corpse the same thing?

The disintegration of the body means that the body is broken into its ingredients. The soul, the unifying intelligent force, which keeps those ingredients together in the shape of the body and which initiates the metabolic process, leaves the body at the time of death. The body becomes a corpse after the soul has left it. Corpse means a dead body, the body without a soul.

Control of *prāṇa* can keep the body alive for thousands of years

It is said that even realized persons are subject to the rules of nature. They feel pain and the body dies. What about the yogīs who can live in the Himalayas, for thousands of years, in the snow, and who don't feel any suffering?

The *yogīs* you talk about, living in the Himalayas for thousands of years, don't do so with their physical bodies. There is another body, the subtle body, which some *yogīs* retain wilfully for thousands of years for some specific purpose and have the power to materialize into physical form when they so wish. The normal life of a human physical body is one hundred years, as mentioned in the *Upaniṣhads*. The physical body can be kept alive for thousands of years through the control of *prāṇa*, but that body will be motionless, not doing anything. It can remain in *samādhi*, motionless for thousands of years. When the *prāṇa* is completely controlled the metabolic process stops, the body becomes very, very slim, only a skeleton of bones; but the *prāṇa* does not leave the body. To some extent, it is similar to the phenomenon of hibernation.

“That which is māyā on the universal plane is called mind on the individual plane. It is the mind alone that makes Consciousness seem limited, though in reality it is without limit; it is the mind and the mind alone that makes Consciousness appear divisible, though essentially it is indivisible; and it is this very thing known as mind which makes Consciousness seem as if bound by the law of opposites (of good and bad, right and wrong), though in reality it is not so bound. Therefore, all forms of spiritual practices are, in reality, the various methods and techniques meant to make the sādhaṅga go beyond mind.”

— *Spiritual Gems*

Body and mind are deeply correlated

What is the relationship between body and mind?

There is no basic or radical difference between body and mind. Both are made of matter. There is no difference in kind between them; the difference between them is only of degree. Therefore, in Indian spiritual phraseology we call the mind the subtle body. The body and mind are deeply correlated. The change in one causes a change in the other. If your body is sick, your mind too becomes disturbed, or worried; it may feel frustrated or depressed. On the other hand, if your mind is worried and very much tense, you may have high blood pressure, diabetes or even a heart problem.

So in spiritual *sādhana*, both body and mind have to be disciplined and kept fit. The same is the case with breathing. The pattern of your breathing affects the state of your mind and vice versa. When you are relaxed and peaceful, your breathing becomes light and slow. If your mind is tense, if it is full of fear or anger, the breathing becomes faster and irregular. That is why *prāṇayāma*, making the breathing regular and slow, helps you in meditation.

Have you ever noticed that when a person is very angry, his or her face becomes red? His body may start trembling. When a person is very much depressed, his or her blood pressure dips, his or her pulse becomes very slow. Not only that, the perception of a sick person changes. An unsuccessful person in life tends to become pessimistic. A successful person often becomes optimistic. The state of your mind is very much related with the state of your body (with the exception of those who have broken

their false identification with the body-mind). When your mind is tense, the body assumes a different look. Even different postures of the physical body affect your state of mind. That is why in *hatha yoga* certain postures of the body are practised; they have a positive effect on the mind.

Identification with body-mind

How can I become free of my mind and stop being a slave to it? I am always missing something. I suffer because I don't have children. Help me Swāmī in my path!

Who makes you the slave of your mind? It is your weakness. When the master is weak, the servants do not obey him. You have to realize your true Nature. Think again and again that you are not the body, you are not the mind. Body and mind are only your instruments. Reflect upon this truth again and again, and you will gain strength. There is no freedom for you as long as your mind is not under your control. What are you missing? You miss something when you feel yourself to be incomplete. You desire when you identify yourself with your body or with your mind. This false identification has to be broken. You cannot feel yourself complete as long as you are identified with the body/mind.

Siddhartha (Buddha) left his young son and wife, renounced his whole family and went away in order to seek the ultimate Truth. And there are people who want a wife, a husband, children and families. 'X' has a son and she is always worried about her son. You have no children and you are worried, and you want to have children...

The universal mind

What is the psychic medium?

The psychic medium is the universal mind. It is not made of your individual mind. If your mind stops, does the whole world cease to exist? The world is not the creation of your mind; it is the creation of the mind of God. So when you go to sleep and your mind becomes inactive, the world goes on; it does not cease to exist. Actually, your mind has no independent existence. It is a part of the universal mind, but the universal mind is not only the mathematical sum total of all minds; it also transcends the sum total of all minds.

The thinking process

Could you suggest a method to stop the thinking process?

Thinking can be mechanical. Most people think mechanically. Their thinking is conditioned by their *sanskāras*, it is not free or creative thinking. Thinking is the activity of the mind, as a physical action is associated with the body. The mind is more flexible; it is not as rigid and solid as the physical body, but it is material. The mind is rarefied matter. It is made of the *sāttvic* portions of the five elements that are earth, water, fire, air and space or ether. So it reflects Awareness, but in itself it is material. You can see your thoughts objectively, just as you see a chair. Most people confound Awareness with mind. So when the mind is not working, they get the impression that they are unconscious or unaware.

The actual fact is that the more your mind is stable, not moving, the more aware you are.

The source of thoughts is *chitta*, the subconscious mind

It seems that all our actions are preceded by a thought. Some are bad and we discard them. Some are good and we act upon them. So we classify thoughts according to our personal discrimination. Since all thoughts originate from pure Consciousness (Source), how and from where do they accumulate their qualities when they come to the surface of our consciousness? How can we purify our thoughts?

The thoughts do not originate from pure Consciousness. They originate from the *chitta*, which is like a storehouse. There are two principles: One is *chitta* and the other is *Chit*. *Chitta* is a part of *antaḥkaraṇa*, which is the combination of *mana*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahaṅkāra*. *Chit* is pure Consciousness and comes in the word *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*.

Pure Consciousness is the *adhiṣṭhāna*, the ground of all thoughts, but it is not the originator of the thoughts. The source of thoughts is *chitta*, the subconscious mind. *Prakṛiti* is the source of all that is moving, i.e. *ahaṅkāra*, intellect, mind and *chitta*, senses, physical body and all objects. Pure Consciousness is *Puruṣa*; thoughts and mind are the manifestations of *Prakṛiti*.

Now, what is the relationship between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛiti*? Shaṅkarāchārya would say that *Prakṛiti* has no noumenal existence. It is like a shadow. *Puruṣa* is real. *Prakṛiti* has only a phenomenal existence.

Mind in itself is *sāttvic*

Is the mind a very bad fellow?

Mind is an instrument. It depends upon how you use your mind. Mind in itself is neither a good nor a bad fellow. To be very precise, mind in itself is always *sāttvic*. It becomes *rājasic* or *tāmasic* with the association of *prāṇa* and matter.

Every element — earth, water, fire, air, ether or space — has three parts: *sāttvic*, *rājasic* and *tāmasic*. According to the *Vedāntic* system, mind is made of the *sāttvic* parts, *prāṇa* is made of the *rājasic* parts and the physical body is made of the *tāmasic* parts of these elements. So mind in itself is *sāttvic*. It reflects and reveals Consciousness. It becomes *rājasic* because of its association with *prāṇa*. It becomes *tāmasic* because of its association with the body.

Mind is not the proper instrument to discover the Truth

In my daily life, I have difficulty making decisions. I can spend one hour trying to decide something and become very stressed without making the right decision. What to do?

What decision? When you are on the level of mental consciousness, you weigh the pros and cons of a situation before making a decision. The immediate decision can be made only when you stop thinking and see. Thinking is like a stick used by a blind man. When you have eyes, you don't need a stick, do you? Clarity of mind will show the mind that it is not the right and proper instrument to discover the Truth. A pure mind is able

to see its limitations. Confusion never convinces the mind of its inability.

Part of me feels disturbed, not at ease and I don't know why.

Your own feeling or opinion should be clear to you. If your mind is not divided or confused, there should be certainty in what you feel or think. If you see anything through a broken glass or a coloured glass, the quality of your perception is changed. The perception of a thing depends upon the instruments with which we perceive. The thing perceived is independent of the mode of perception. Different people perceive a given situation in different ways. Perceiving through the mind has its own limitations; it is not a clear and right perception. The mind is like a computer; its calculations/workings are according to the data fed into it. A computer may write novels or even poetry, but it can never be creative. The feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness, likes and dislikes are dependent on the structure of one's mind. As long as the mind is active, the direct and true perception of Existence is not possible.

It is the mind that divides Existence. It divides Existence into matter, mind, soul, Spirit, God and so on. When the mind is transcended, there is no diversity at all. *Saguṇa Brahman* is the qualified or personal God. *Nirguṇa Brahman* is the attributeless or impersonal God. But the difference between them is created by the mind.

"All distinctions of Self and non-self last only as long as the mind lasts. As the mind disappears, or is transcended, all these distinctions vanish altogether!"

– *Spiritual Gems*

A pure and tamed mind is the means of Liberation

How can I make decisions without vacillating in my mind?

Man's mind is like the steering wheel of a car. If the steering wheel of a car is fixed in one place, you cannot travel by that car. Man's mind is moving; it is a privilege. Only animals have fixed minds. But man must be able to move his mind in the direction he wants. This ability comes by a long and sustained practice, including discipline and continuous reflection. The mind has to be trained and tamed. A pure and tamed mind, which is under your control, is the means of Liberation. An impure and untamed mind is the cause of bondage and suffering. Mind is like a child. It has to be nourished properly with positive thoughts and good *sanskāras*. It all depends upon you. It depends upon so many factors: your purpose of life, your company, your education, your aspirations, your way of life and above all your deeds, intentions and thoughts.

Mind can have control over matter

Can you explain what you mean by, "Some people retain their subtle body?"

Some sages can shed all their bodies and completely merge in the Divine, but they retain their subtle bodies with some specific purpose to help seekers. They can materialise their bodies, appear and come to any seeker. What is the concept of Bodhisattva in Buddhism? The Buddhists believe that when Buddha reached a state in which he could enter *Nirvāṇa*, he

refused to accept *Nirvāṇa* willfully and vowed to reincarnate in this world to help the ignorant people. So Buddha comes again and again. He can materialise His body even though He has no physical body. It is the concept of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Similar is the case with many other sages. In Hinduism we call them *Kāraṇa Ātmā*. They are liberated, but they retain their subtle bodies and can materialise their bodies whenever they want. Even Jesus said that he would come again. When they reincarnate, they come through the normal process and take birth, but they can also materialise their physical bodies at will for a few minutes or hours if they so want and appear before any devotee to help him or her.

The mind has full control over matter; this has been proved by psychology. A man in Israel demonstrated it. He can break anything merely by looking at it, by will, without touching that thing. He is not a sage, but he has got this power through concentration of his will.

When the mind is total, its quality changes

I realize that some part of my mind likes to compromise by indulging in bad feelings, but where do they come from?

You accept the feeling and you ask where does it come from? What is the use of knowing where it comes from? If you don't like the feeling, refuse it. That is enough. Don't let your mind be divided into parts; if it is divided, it is like a broken mirror. Have you ever seen your face in a broken mirror? When the mind is total, its quality changes. Even if you feel anger with a total mind,

the anger will turn into love. It is like closing your fist with total energy. If you do it, the closed fist starts opening.

Creativity is possible only when the mind is transcended

One can become so immersed in some form of creativity that a sense of being lost in time and space appears. Is this a divine state, and is expressing creativity a form of service?

Mind is normally formed of the past *sanskāras* and it thinks and works according to these past *sanskāras*. But it can also work, though very rarely, without the impact of past *sanskāras*. This superstate of the working of mind is called the state of creativity and this state of creativity is achieved by being in touch with the Divine, who is absolutely free and therefore infinitely creative.

In my opinion creativity is not possible by anyone who has not transcended the mind, whose decisions and workings are determined by past *sanskāras*. The divine state does not imply being lost in time and space. On the other hand, it involves an awareness that is free from the limitations of past and future thinking. The expressing of creativity is not a form of service. It is a sort of play that involves the spontaneous expression of inner joy.

Mind can make a heaven, and mind can also make a hell

Please tell us about the advantages and disadvantages of using the mind for exploring the inner and outer world.

It is the mind that distinguishes a human being from an animal. It is owing to the mind that man has more freedom than animals.

Some animals are much stronger physically than man, but man can control them because man is equipped with the mind. The mind can make a heaven, and mind can also make a hell. Mind can be trained to do whatever you want it to do. The mind can be a means of bondage and it can also be a means of freedom. Mind can explore both the outer world and the inner world, but it is unable to know the timeless Reality. An ordinary man uses a very small part of his mind. The mind is the most sophisticated computer. You can use a computer to cheat others or to help others. I have heard that very talented students had been cheating a big bank through their proficiency in the knowledge of computers.

The role of mind in the triangle of the knower, the knowledge and the known

Could you please explain what is “relative perception?”

In relative perception the knower, the knowledge and the known are present. For example, you are seeing a chair. It is a relative perception. There is the knower, who in this case is your soul; there is the knowledge of the chair, and the chair is the known object. The subject, object and their relationship are involved in the relative perception. Pure Consciousness is identified with the mind, and through the mind, with the object.

The Conscious, Subconscious and Unconscious Mind

To know the subconscious, you need to stop all the activity of the conscious mind

What is the difference between the unconscious and the subconscious?

Unconscious is universal. Subconscious is individual. When you are dreaming, you are in the subconscious state. When you are in the deep-sleep state, you are in the unconscious. The dreams of two persons are not the same. The deep-sleep state of all persons is similar.

The subconscious does not belong only to the dreaming state. Isn't it working even when we are in the wakeful state?

In the waking state the subconscious mind is working through the wakeful mind. In the dreaming state the subconscious mind works independently of the conscious mind and physical body.

Is it through sādhanā that we can know our subconscious mind?

The subconscious can be brought to the conscious level. What is your subconscious today, was your conscious mind in the past. The impression is first conscious then slowly, slowly, it goes into the subconscious. You forget it, but it is there in your subconscious, influencing your conscious behaviour and thinking

without your knowledge. To know the subconscious, you need to stop all the activity of the conscious mind and remain alert. To communicate with the subconscious, the conscious mind must be silent. When your conscious mind is silent, you don't at once come in contact with the *Ātmā* or the Self, you come in contact with your subconscious first. When you go inside, you become aware of the inner world. When you also go beyond the inner world, you find the Self.

What is the inner world?

The inner world is the world within you that you cannot perceive because your attention is flowing outward, you are too much preoccupied with the outer world. The inner world consists of so many diverse forces working secretly. As a matter of fact, the outer visible world is only a part of the working of the inner, invisible forces.

From where does this voice come that tells me when I am wrong?

It is the voice of the pure mind. It is always guiding you, but you don't listen to its voice. When the storm in your mind has passed, then you listen to that voice.

The subconscious mind influences your body without your knowing

The conscious mind, as well as the subconscious mind, both influence the physical body. You are not in communication with your subconscious mind, so it is influencing your body even without

you knowing it. Such activities as breathing, digesting the food, involuntary movement of the muscles etc. are all done by the subconscious mind.

Purification of the subconscious mind

What is most helpful among all the methods of purification of the subconscious?

On the conscious level, the most efficient method of purifying one's subconscious is the unceasing remembrance of the Divine and His divine qualities. Disinterested love and compassion and good-will towards one and all also purify one's mind, both conscious and unconscious.

The other methods are meditation, *japa* and breathing exercises. Whatever you do again and again for a long time, the impact of those actions slowly goes down to your subconscious. Therefore good deeds, like serving others, also contribute in purifying the mind.

Passive concentration is what is needed to communicate with the subconscious

Can we communicate with our subconscious?

It is not necessary that the mind should be pure in order to communicate with the subconscious. The communication with the subconscious can be gained even by an impure mind. Passive concentration is what is needed to communicate with the subconscious. Passive concentration is achieved by gazing on

something inside or outside the body, but without thinking. Passive concentration is usually practised by those who want to become hypnotists. It strengthens the power of concentration. The hypnotist first takes you to the subconscious state and then gives you a suggestion, which your conscious mind does not know. He can give any suggestion to your subconscious that you will follow like a robot.

Dreams and Sleep

Sādhakas should not bother about dreams

What should a spiritual sādḥaka do with his dreams? Should he accept or disregard them? Should he contemplate on them?

It is more difficult to have control over one's dreams than to control one's thoughts during the wakeful state. The dreaming person cannot handle the dreams as long as he or she is dreaming. Most of the dreams come from the subconscious mind. Some of them are symbolic. A few can also be prophetic. Seeing saints and sages in dreams may be due to the strong desire to see them or it may be due to the will of the saints who want to communicate with you. While dreaming, the mind is disassociated from the physical body. Therefore its capacity to create or reflect is enhanced. Frightening as well as transporting dreams are mostly symbolic. During the dream state, when one's mind becomes connected with some other world, it may see the things and beings of that world but it interprets them with the images of this world.

Sādhakas should not bother themselves about dreams. They should devote themselves more and more to spiritual *sādhanā* in the wakeful state. One must try to remain aware all the time in one's wakeful state. When the awareness is extended to the dream state, the dreams cease. When one comes to know that one is dreaming, the dream does not last long, it ceases. People cannot properly handle their wakeful state. For them, to handle the dream state is not possible.

From the standpoint of Enlightenment, there is no difference between the so-called wakeful state and the dream state. Who is dreaming? Who is wakeful? Try to know this "Who." The dreamer is a part of the dream. When the dream ceases, the dreamer also ceases. The dreamer and the dream are born together and die together.

Is it important to remember my dreams?

Dreams are dreams, good or bad. There is no need to remember them or give importance to them. The sooner you forget them, the better it is. When you are wide awake, the dreams cease. Don't let the dreams engage you when they are over.

A promising dream

Someone explains a dream in which a spiritual Master was with him.

Your dream is very encouraging and promising. Moreover, it gave you joy. If a dream can give you joy, how happy will you be if the dream turns out to be real? Pray that your dream becomes true.

Which is more important: the dream or the wakeful world?

Is it possible to see or experience things in the dream state, excluding the sensory organs? If so, how best can it be done?

How do you see in your dream? Your eyes are closed, but you see everything in your dream. When you are in a dream, it is as real for you as the world you see in your wakeful state. In a sense, the dream world is more real. When you enter a dream, the world of the wakeful state is forgotten, but when you are in the wakeful state, the dream world is not forgotten. So, which is stronger?

In a dream, is it not due to the subconscious that we can see?

When you are looking at a thing with total concentration, you don't hear anything. You are awake, but you don't hear because all of your attention is concentrated in seeing. So, even in the wakeful state, you don't hear, and your hearing organ becomes inactive. Similar is the case with all the sensory organs. You can be fully aware in the deep sleep state, and you can be fully unaware in the wakeful state. Awareness is not dependent on the sensory organs. The sensory organs are dependent on awareness.

Sleep is the substitute of *samādhi*

No question.

When you are very young, you have many dreams. Old people dream of the past. Young people are full of ambitions. They have dreams connected with the future. Old people are like a spent

force. Young people are full of energy and desires that take form when aroused. Most dreams come from one's subconscious mind. A dream, when very strong, can influence your mind as well as your body. It becomes a tangible experience. What you are seeing is also an illusion. What you are seeing is your perception based on your past dreams and desires.

If you cannot sleep, you will become mad. People who don't get sleep take sleeping pills. Sleep is the substitute of *samādhi*. Because everyone cannot go into *samādhi*, nature has provided sleep to man, so that he can forget his relationships with the world that create tension. Nature provides him a sort of relaxation in dreamless sleep in which he regenerates the energy that he spends in thinking and working. Don't think about what a dream is. Think of who is dreaming!

You cannot say how and when a dream started so long as you are in the dream. But when you wake up, you say there is no dream. Dream means what is temporary and not lasting. It is only an appearance. It is not substantial. If you are feeling thirsty during your dream, you have to try to find the dream-water to quench your thirst or you wake up and both the thirst and the quest for water cease. Either your sleep is complete and you wake up, or someone who is awake wakes you up by shaking you. Some people prefer to sleep. They have some vested interest in sleeping. They are attached to certain things that can be enjoyed only during sleep. So they don't want to be awakened.

Most dreams are the bubbling of the subconscious

What are dreams?

Most dreams are the bubbling of your subconscious mind. What you cannot do in your waking state, you do in the dreaming state. Dream is like a safety valve of a pressure-cooker. If there is too much pressure in your mind, it releases during the dream. Very few dreams indicate some happenings that are due to happen in the future.

The dream of an enlightened person is more or less a vision. It is now believed that for an ordinary person, dreams are more necessary than deep sleep. Your deeper interests and deeper personality can be known only from your dreams. You cannot pretend when you are dreaming. In your wakeful state, you can have many masks. A saint can pretend to be mad, and a thief can pretend to be a saint, but you cannot do that in a dream. Your true personality is hidden behind your appearance.

Ego

“The first and the last barrier between God and man is only one. It is man’s ego. Sādhanā is verily the name of those means which weaken the ego and ultimately destroy it.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

What is ego?

Ego is the substitute of the real Self. Ego has no positive existence. It is like darkness. When the light appears, the darkness vanishes. As a matter of fact, it never existed. Ego has a phenomenal existence. It is not real.

What is the difference between the mind and ego?

There is a technical difference between the mind and the ego, but basically they are both material and are parts of *Prakṛiti*, which is composed of the three *guṇas* or principles called *rajoguṇa*, *tamoguṇa* and *sattvagūṇa*. The function of the ego is to identify the soul with objects, situations and persons. The function of the mind is to desire, think, feel, react etc.

When we are working on the ego are we also working on the mind?

Working through the ego and working on the ego are different things. When you are overpowered with emotions, desires, reactions or thinking, then you are helplessly involved in the ego. When you are using your emotions, desires, thinking etc., in the right direction and sublimating them in order to get rid of them, then you are working on your ego. To use your ego is one thing and to be used by your ego is quite different.

How can I avoid the ego's demands in order to grow spiritually?

Ego is there in everyone, as mind is there in everyone. As a matter of fact, mind and ego are not different in kind. They are the same energy functioning in various ways. If you are the slave of your ego, you cannot but obey it and fulfil its due or undue demands. Spirituality, if followed and practised rightly, releases you from being the slave of your ego. Not only that, you are then able to use your ego.

You can use your ego/mind only if you have control over it

You have written, "Use your ego, do not be used by your ego." Please, can you clarify?

You can use your ego/mind only if you have control over it. You can use it for constructive purposes. You can use it for helping others. You can use it for right thinking and making right decisions. You can use it in many creative ways. If you have no control over your mind/ego, it can lead you to hell.

There is a simile in the *Upanishads* in which the body is compared to a chariot. The senses are the horses of the chariot. The mind is the reins of the horse. The intellect is the driver and the soul is the owner of the chariot, sitting on it and travelling. If the horses are not tamed, if they are not under the control of the driver, there is surely going to be an accident.

Ego is the product of non-seeing

I keep feeling that the main hindrance on my path is my ego. How can I shed it and be a neutral and natural person?

Can you show me your ego? When you see, the ego disappears. Ego is the product of non-seeing. It is the ego that is creating the problem. It is the ego that creates all problems. It first creates problems and then it is preoccupied in solving these problems.

Is the ability to see given through grace or can we cultivate it by some practice?

It is always with you. You have disowned it. Seeing is your essential Nature. Practice is needed to remove the cover or veil that has hidden your “seeing.”

Shed your identifications

According to many spiritual Masters, Self-Realization is synonymous with the destruction of the ego. It has been reported by some that this experience can invoke fear. Why is the destruction of the ego frightening?

No one wants to die. You become frightened when your ego is dying because you are identified with the ego. You may even become frightened when your thoughts/mind stop totally, because at this stage you cannot even conceive that there is something in you that outlives the mind. The only way is to shed the identification and attachments that you have with all the objects, situations, and persons, including your mind, body and ego. There is no other way to get rid of fear completely.

Ego can assume any form

Can we say that a part of our ego or mind helps us in our sādhanā?

A purified and stable mind is a help in sādhanā. An impure and unsteady mind is an obstacle. It is the soul that is trapped by the ego and it is the soul that becomes free of ego. The ego covers up pure Consciousness. When the ego is gone, Consciousness

shines in its pristine purity. The ego can assume any form whatsoever. It can even assume the form of humility.

There was a saint lying on his deathbed. His eyes were closed and it looked as if he was absorbed in meditation. Some devotees sitting beside him were talking to one another and praising him. One said, “This saint is a very high saint. He never lost his temper in his life.” The other said, “He never cared for money and riches.” The third said, “He was very gentle and compassionate, he could not stand to see anyone in distress.” And so on. The saint opened his eyes and said, “How is it that none of you are talking about my humility?”

“Understand well the distinction between the real ‘I’ and the ego. The real ‘I’ (Ātmā) is the substance, whereas the ego is the shadow. The real ‘I’ is Brahman, whereas the ego is jīva. The ego emerges when the real ‘I’, reflected in time, gets apparently identified with any of its projections in time and space.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Soul

Identifications of the soul

To identify yourself with what you are not or to identify yourself with what you really are, which is easier? The soul is identified either with its instruments or, through its instruments, with the world, or with its essential source that is timeless Consciousness.

The soul assumes different names

Man is a composite of three bodies: physical, astral (or subtle cum mental body) and causal, as also of soul and Spirit. The soul is the Spirit identified with or reflected in these three bodies. It assumes different names. The soul in the physical body is called *jīva* (or *jīvātmā*.) The soul in the subtle body is called *tejas*. The soul in the causal body is called *prāñña*. On the universal level, the soul in the physical world is called *Virāt*. The soul in the subtle world is called *Hiraṇyagarbha* and the soul of the causal world is called *Avyākṛita* in the *Vedas*.

The essential nature of the *jīvā* is to be discovered and realized

Is the dharma of the jīvātmā or soul fixed and established from birth? Can it be changed with spiritual practices?

The individual soul or *jīvātmā* is potentially divine. The aim and purpose of human life is to manifest the divinity. It is not only possible, but it must be done, and in this very life. *Dharma* means essential Nature. The essential Nature of the *jīvātmā* is not to be changed; it is to be discovered and realized. What is to be tamed is the body/mind so that it can reflect the true and essential Nature of the *Ātmā*.

The soul is the reflection of the Spirit in the mind

Is it not said that the soul is unmovable?

The soul is not immovable. It is the Spirit that is immovable. The Spirit is one. Souls are many. Actually, it is the *prāṇa* and mind

that move. As the soul is the reflection of the Spirit in the mind, it looks as if it is moving when the mind is moving. There is a simile to explain this. There is a pot full of water and the moon is being reflected in the water. If you move the pot, the reflection of the moon in the pot also moves. If there are one hundred pots, there will be one hundred reflections of the moon but the moon is one and the reflections of the moon are as many as the pots full of water in which the moon is being reflected.

Soul is called *jīva*. Spirit is called *Ātmā*. *Ātmā* is one. *Jīvas* are many. Spirit is eternal, immortal. Soul lasts as long as the mind lasts. Liberation of the soul comes when the mind dies. So long as the mind (desire) is there, there is no Liberation for the soul. It is desire that brings the soul back again and again in new bodies.

May you tell us about the relationship between the soul and the Spirit?

The soul is the reflection of the Spirit in the mirror of the mind. If the mind is clean, pure and stable, the reflection is exactly like the Spirit. If not, the reflection becomes distorted. Have you ever seen your face in a laughing mirror? Soul is a spark of the Divine, but when the soul becomes subservient to *māyā*/mind and senses, it appears to lose its divine qualities and to become trapped.

Watching or seeing is the essential trait of the soul

I would like more explanation about feelings and emotions. I can watch them, but who is feeling them? Who is saying

lovely words to the Divine? Is it possible to love without feeling or emotion?

It is the soul that feels. It feels through the mind. Feelings, emotions, thinking, desiring, selecting or choosing are the functions of the mind. It is the soul that addresses God with words full of love. Love is supramental. The mind goes on changing, but not love. Love is regarded as the very nature of *Ātmā* or God. It is expressed through the mind. The pure and evolved mind is an instrument for the expression of Love. Thus love does not depend on feeling or emotion. If you are not identified with a divine emotion, that emotion will subside, but the subsiding of the divine emotion does not imply the weakening of your love for the Divine. It can, however, express itself in feeling or emotion. Feeling is deeper than emotion. Emotion does not last long. The feeling can continue for days and days.

Does the soul feel and watch at the same time?

Watching or seeing is the essential trait of the soul. Feeling or desiring or choosing etc., is accomplished by the soul when it is associated with the mind. When the mind is completely purified, the soul discovers its true Nature. When the soul discovers its essential Nature, it cannot remain subservient to the mind. Then, the purified mind does not become an obstacle; on the other hand, it becomes, as it were, a stepping-stone.

The soul of a living being is considered to be a reflection of the real Self. Then what is the reflector?

The mind is the mirror. The Spirit is being reflected in the mirror of the mind. You may call the mind the reflector if you so wish and the reflection is called the soul or *jīva*. This is only a simile to make the mind understand a little about the *jīva* and the *Ātmā*.

The *jīva* is called *dviguṇa* in the *Vedas*. It seems to be more alive than its prototype. You can understand it if you reflect the sun in a mirror. The reflection looks to be brighter than the light of the sun. The earth does not reflect the sun, whereas water does. You cannot see the sun reflected in the earth because it is gross. Water is relatively more rarefied so you see the reflection in the water. If you make the surface of the earth glazed, you can see the reflection from the surface also. Mind is rarefied matter, that is why the reflection of the Spirit in the mind can be seen. Wherever there is mind, there is also soul. When the mind disintegrates, the soul ceases to be. There are as many souls as there are minds. The Spirit is one.

Should I understand that the soul is not immortal?

When the mind dies, the phenomenon of the soul ceases, the soul stops existing as an individual. Either it merges into the universal Being called God, or it goes out of the manifestation of the relative and phenomenal existence and realizes its spiritual Nature remaining in its non-polar, spiritual, divine “Suchness,” called *Brahman* or Godhead. It is called Liberation.

Death and the Journey after Death

“Think awhile: if your body were to die (say this very moment) would your self and property, worldly status and power be of any avail to you? When you are gone from this world, even your dearest relations will weep for you only for a while and then forget you altogether. You shall be all alone, without any worldly thing or being to help you, in your voyage ahead.”

– Spiritual Gems

Death is only a myth

Death is only a myth. What appears to be death is only the separation of the soul from the physical body as you change your clothes. The soul does not die with the death of the physical body. The soul disappears into the Spirit when the mind dies. So long as the mind does not die, the soul has to take birth again to work out the desires of the mind. The physical body dies, but the mind may take billions of years to die.

Forgetting death is no solution

How to dispel the fear of death?

Guru Nānak has said at one place, “The death that the people of this world are so much scared of brings joy to me.” Most people become unconscious at the time of death, they are so

shocked and scared. Forgetting death is no solution. It aggravates the inner problems of man. It is so because there is something in man that never dies and it can never accept death. Even an ant is afraid of death. An insect living in the garbage is afraid of death. Reasoning alone does not solve any problem. Reasoning belongs to the superficial layers of mind. The roots of all mental problems are deep in the subconscious layers of the mind.

One has to accept what is inevitable

My mind is restless! Since the death of my son, I am deeply disturbed; I feel no peace. Swāmījī, teach me please how to get peace.

What makes you disturbed? Your son will not come back if you go on weeping for him. Instead of weeping, pray for his departed soul. Pray also that the Lord gives you strength to bear the shock. No one can stop death. Kings die, beggars die. The prophets who saved other's lives also died. There is no family in the world in which no one has ever died. You should reflect on these facts. One has to accept what is inevitable. If your son is now in a better place and situation than when he was with you, will you still weep? Death only means a change. Can there be evolution without change? Death is not so bad as people think.

“I leave this body before the body leaves me.”

Is it right to commit suicide, as in the case of great suffering etc.? What is the impact of such a decision on one's spiritual progress?

When your body and mind are of no use to you or to the society, then what is the use of keeping it? Vinobhājī, the great saint and spiritual disciple of Mahātmā Gāndhī, left his body wilfully, saying, “I leave this body, before the body leaves me.”

In Jainism, many *Jain Munis*, when they become very old, stop eating and give up their bodies. In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, it is a religious custom that when a man becomes very old and becomes unfit to do any *sādhanā*, he goes to the jungle at the bank of Ganges. There, he stops eating, lives only by drinking the water of Ganges so long as he can move and take water from the river, and finally sheds his body. You cannot call it suicide. Such cases are very rare. Otherwise no man wants to die. Even a cancer patient does not want to die. He wants to undergo treatment so that he can live. From another standpoint, if a person becomes an invalid, the other relatives associated with that person undergo many experiences because of his or her illness. So the life of that invalid person is not totally useless. It may have some purpose. Nothing in this world happens without a purpose.

In the case of an irreversible illness, do relatives of the patient have authority to decide whether the patient can be taken off all life support systems?

The children should never make such a decision for their parents who are on the deathbed. It would be an act of ungratefulness. They should serve the parents with all love and devotion till the parents breathe their last.

If the state laws demand that terminally ill patients should not be taken care of after a certain period, what should be the role of the relatives?

No country can force you in such case. It would be an encroachment of one's fundamental rights. If the relatives agree, only then can the state implement such a law. The desire to live is the strongest desire in a person. When a person commits suicide, it is only an emotional outburst. It is not one's deep and natural desire.

Alexander the Great and a hermit sage

Alexander the Great heard of a great hermit sage living in a forest. He went to see him with many security men and his ministers. It was winter. When Alexander reached the thatched hut, he saw the sage, who was wearing only a loincloth, lying and relaxing in the sun outside his hut. He was absorbed in meditation. Alexander went and stood near him but the saint did not even look towards him. Alexander was the king of India at that time. He felt that, being a king, he did not receive the due respect and reception and felt enraged. After a few minutes, the sage looked up to him.

Alexander said, "Do you know, I am Alexander the Great, the present king of India?"

The sage replied, "What if you are king? I don't need anything from you. Why have you come here?"

Alexander felt insulted, became even more enraged and said, "Are you not afraid of me?"

The sage looked at him and asked, "Are you a good man or a bad man?"

Alexander: "I am a good and noble person."

The sage: "Then, why should I be afraid of a person who is noble and gentle?"

On hearing this, Alexander was pleased and said, "You know, I am the king. You can ask anything from me and I will

give it to you: treasure, pearls, gems, palatial houses, servants, land. Anything you may ask, I can give you. I am pleased you have given a very wise answer.”

The sage smiled and said, “I don’t want anything. Please go away, stand aside, your shadow is obstructing the sun from coming to me.”

Alexander again felt annoyed and said, “Don’t you know I am the king? Your life and death are in my hands. If I wish, I can have you killed just now.”

The sage again smiled and said, “Your own life and death are not in your hands. It seems you have not many more years to live. You will not reach your country when you go back.”

“Be ever prepared for death and then you have the real taste of life.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Your last thought will determine the quality of your next birth

Swāmījī asked this question to the devotees:

What will you do if you come to know that you will die this evening? We should live thinking that we may die any moment. We should always be prepared for death. It is very difficult to think that you will die today unless you have a serious heart attack. It means you will try your best to save yourself from death. How do you know you will be alive by next year? Life is like a bubble. It can burst any moment. It cannot be guaranteed, secured or ensured. Death can come irrespective

of the age, health, power, status, or position of a person. Don't think that you will die only when you are old enough. Even children die!

What will you do if you come to know that you will die this evening? You cannot say what you will do. When you come to know that you are dying, you are not free to do or to think. Your last thought will determine the quality of your next life, but at that time, your doing or thinking is determined by what you have been thinking and doing your whole life. If you cannot remain conscious during meditation in your normal state, how can you remain conscious at the time of death, which is a very critical moment?

I am old and I have no desire, can I hope to be concentrated on God while dying?

If change in life-interest is forced on you by sickness or old age, it is not the real change in interest. When you say you have no desire, it is not true. The desires have gone into the subconscious because you cannot fulfil them. It is only hibernation; the snake of desire has gone underground. If you become healthy and young, you will have the same interests that you had in good health and young age. If, in old age, a person of ninety-five years feels an interest in observing celibacy, would it be a real interest? It is not real celibacy. It is impotency. Can there be a craving without liking? Craving is developed. Habits are developed. They are not formed in one day. The body can be satisfied easily, but not the mind. The mind has a separate existence from the body. If the mind were not different from the body, then you would not be born again after the body dies.

What is considered to be the last moment

What happens if death arrives in the deep sleep state?

Then it is not your last moment. The last moment is considered to be your last conscious moment. That is why it is recommended that you should remember the Divine each moment, because you do not know when the last moment is going to come.

A dying person has no control over his thoughts

How can one give psychological and spiritual assistance to a person who is dying or who is going to die very soon?

It is very difficult for a dying person to follow the advice of a psychologist or a monk at the time of death, unless the dying person has lived a life devoted to the search for Truth.

There is a story. There was a shopkeeper who used to sell cloth. He spent his whole life in purchasing and selling cloth. He never thought of what would happen to him in the next life. He had forgotten his death and had been totally absorbed in the business of cloth during his life. At the time of his death, he became semiconscious. His sons brought a *paṇḍitajī* to recite holy scriptures near him and guide him. The *paṇḍitajī* exhorted him to remember the name of God, to say, “Rām, Rām” at that moment. But the man could only utter, in a semi-conscious state, “Take this cloth at the rate of ten rupees per meter if you don’t want to pay twelve rupees per meter.” He would only repeat that! So how would you guide him at that moment? He does not listen to you. He is absorbed in his subconscious mind and remembering how he has lived his life.

The last moment of your death is determined by the way you spent your life

How to meditate on death?

Have you seen anyone dying – lying on the bed, unable to move, taking medicine, feeling pain somewhere, afraid of being separated from those to whom he is attached, fearful of the unknown future, uncertain of what is going to happen next, etc? Visualize yourself in the same state. If you can do that you are bound to get a mental shock. You will feel your present life has no meaning; it is going to end in death. It will change your thoughts about life. This practice is very popular in Buddhism. What is the use of your seeing so many people dying if it does not generate dispassion in your mind? Don't you think you will also die and may end up in the same situation? Do you remember it always? Suppose you come to know for certain that you will die at 4 p.m. today? What will you think? What will you do?

I will do nothing.

Just reflect and tell me. If you cannot do “nothing” in your normal state, now, how will you be able to do nothing if you come to know of your death? You can do only what you are able to do. You sit in meditation and resolve that you will not do anything. And still you will be thinking and thinking. If you have no control over your thoughts while you are alive, how will you be able to control your thoughts when you are dying? Do you think non-doing is so easy? You said at once, “I will do nothing.” Now, while alive, you have the capacity to choose what you should think or what you should not think. At the time of death, you lose this capacity to choose. At that time, only those thoughts of

actions overpower your mind that have left a very deep impression on your mind during your life. You have played all your cards during life, except for only one which is left with you at the time of death. You have no choice but to play that last card at the time of death. You have no other choice. The last moment of your death is completely determined by the way you spent your life.

At the time of death the deepest impression of your life comes to your mind

If you take death as your enemy, be prepared to face it and overcome it. If you take death as your friend, be prepared to welcome it. But never forget death. You cannot stop death. It must come sooner or later. It can come at any time. If you are not prepared to meet death, you will be in great trouble.

You didn't tell me yet how to be prepared to die.

There is a state of mind in which you want to be at the time of your death. You must be able to go into that state wilfully at any time. Only then can you be sure that at the time of death you will be able to go into that state. Can you go into that state of mind now? If not, you must practise again and again to go into that state at your sweet will.

Your thinking and your will are not free at the time of death. At the time of your death, they are determined by how you have lived your life. The deepest impression that your mind has caught during your life comes to the surface of your mind (and engages your mind) at the time of death. You can understand it by the

following example: in the day you meet many persons, engage in many activities, and receive many impressions on your mind. Suppose you quarrel with someone in the day and you have been very deeply hurt by that person. When you are about to go to sleep at night, it is the impression of that quarrel (which was the deepest impression on your mind during the day) which will come to the fore. You will be remembering that incident in spite of yourself when you are going to sleep.

How can we avoid letting old impressions come to the surface?

The result of all the impressions gained during your life comes to the fore at the time of death, your mind becomes mechanically engaged in thinking according to that result, and you breathe your last. That is why it is advised that one should practise the remembrance and presence of God regularly during one's life, with deep interest.

But some die in the state of coma. What happens to them?

Coma means that your surface mind or conscious mind, the outer mind stops working. Suppose you go into a coma at the time of death, then how will you do your best at that time? Now is the time to do your best. When you sit in meditation, can you control your mind? If not, how will you control it at the time of death?

“Human life is a test in spirituality. Only those who remain ever vigilant, steadfast and engaged in introspection, pass this test successfully.”

– Spiritual Gems

Gāndhijī's last words

When Gāndhījī was shot dead, Bernard Shaw had commented, “In this world it is too dangerous to be good like Gāndhijī.” Gāndhī never allowed the government to keep security guards for him even during public conferences. Many people had political differences with him. The last words that he uttered while falling down after being shot in the chest were, “Hey Rām.” He remembered God in his last moments. The state of mind of a person in the last moment before death is the result of what the person has been doing during his whole life.

Prayer to be absorbed in God at the time of death

This prayer has been made by a *ṛiṣhi* in one of the scriptures, the name of which I don't remember. He says:

“O Lord, I do not know, at the time of death, what will be the state of my body and mind. It may be that at that time, I will not be able to say anything or pray to You, due to my body being indisposed. I therefore pray to You, here and now, and again and again, that at the time of death, my mind be absorbed in You and You alone; it should not go anywhere else.” The words may not be the same, but the import of that prayer is exactly this.

How to help the soul of a dying person?

For the one who has a spiritually oriented life, can someone be of some help in regards to one's psychological and spiritual needs when dying?

Ramaṇa Maharṣhi's mother came to live in his *āshram*. She took the duty of washing the utensils of the devotees and visitors who would come and take meals in the *āshram*. She served them with devotion and love. She died in the *āshram*. When she was dying, Ramaṇa Maharṣhi put his hand on her heart. Someone asked, "Why did you do that?" He said, "She served the devotees in the *āshram* for many years with love and humility. Her heart was purified. She had no worldly desire left in her conscious mind. At the time of her death, by putting my hand on her heart, I made it certain, through my spiritual power, that no desire or thought of the world would come up from the depth of her subconscious mind. Her soul has been liberated. She will never come in this world again."

Some positive suggestions can be imparted to the soul of the dying persons. It can be done through some specific *mantras* or by a monk who has the power to communicate with the soul of a dying person. Even prayer by a devotee can help the soul of a dying person, or even after the death of that person.



My grandmother is ninety-one years old and comes closer and closer to death. I follow my heart to try to prepare her for death and she listens to me. What do you advise me to do before her death, when she dies and after her death?

Tell your grandmother to remember the Divine. If she has faith in Jesus, keep a photo of Jesus near her bed so that she can see him all the time. Tell her to pray. You can give her a written prayer that she can read and say. Read some holy scriptures near her, any holy scripture in which she has faith. You may also tell her

that death means only a change of form and place, but the Spirit does not die.

At the time of her death, when she goes into a coma, you can address her soul and give her positive suggestions, such as written in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. After her death, you should pray to the Lord that He gives peace to the departed soul of your grandmother, and takes care of her during her journey in the next worlds. I pray that the Lord gives her peace.

When the soul leaves the body

I read that there are many different planes when we leave the body. Is it true?

Yes, there are many planes, but all these planes belong to the manifestation. A plane corresponds to a particular level of mental state. When the soul leaves the body, it goes to the world that corresponds to its mental state at the time of death. You know that the system of the universe exactly corresponds to your own system. The individual is the microcosm. Man is made in the image of God. If you could know the microcosm, you could also know the macrocosm.

Are you the body?

Are life and death really different? Are they not two words for the same concept: transformation?

Life cannot be defined. Death can be defined. Life and death are not the same. Birth and death are interdependent. They are

like the two sides of a coin. Birth follows death and vice versa. Yes, the soul undergoes evolution. When the mind and *prāṇa* go out of the body along with the soul, the physical body disintegrates. The cells of the body also die. The soul has a phenomenal existence. It also ceases to be when the mind dies. When the body dies, the mind does not die, and the soul does not die. The soul goes out of the body when death happens.

After death, does the soul have any sense of who it was?

Who is speaking in you? Who is questioning? Who is seeing? Who is reacting? Are you the body? When death occurs, why can't you hear or speak or see? I think it does not need much intelligence to understand that what you call "I" is different from the body.

After death link

After our death, are there some links, maybe in the subtle body, with those whom we loved?

Death means the separation of the subtle body from the physical body. When the soul goes out of the physical body taking the subtle body with it, the physical body disintegrates. Death is as important as life. Can you imagine a situation in the world if no one ever died? The conscious links are there as long as the soul does not take another physical body. What link do you have with your great grandparents who died long ago? You do not remember your past lives. So how could there be a link? Even if there is a link you are not aware of it, so it is meaningless. You

make new links after taking a new body and forget your past. It is necessary for your evolution. Change is necessary for evolution of the soul.

Is it possible to communicate with a dead person?

If you can go into the inner state that corresponds to the world in which the departed soul is present, you can contact that soul. You can have “give and take” with the beings of other worlds provided you can communicate with them.

Have you had such experiences and can you describe them to us?

It is best to communicate with your real Self. It is the realization of your true Being that satisfies you and fulfils you. Any other desire may prove a distraction on the path of Truth.

Travel of the soul after death

What happens to the soul after death?

The travel of the soul after death depends upon the *karmas* (actions) as well as the mental state of the person at the time of death. It varies from individual to individual. There is no fixed rule about where every soul goes after death. There are three paths on which the soul travels. One path leads to *chandra loka*, the other leads to *sūrya loka*. The third path leads the soul into the dust (earth). From the earth it develops into the shape of vegetation that is eaten by animals with the result that the soul

enters the animal world. The soul of those persons who have realized their true Nature does not go anywhere. It merges with the Divine as soon as the body is shed. Even during life, it enjoys communion with the Divine ceaselessly.

Generally, the departed soul, that is the soul freed from the body, is present in an invisible form near the body for thirteen days because of the attachment of the soul with the body. That is why the Indians destroy the body as soon as possible so that the soul can go on its onward journey. If you bury the body, the body is not destroyed soon in the grave. Therefore, in the graveyard, there are many ghosts. Some *tāntrics* do certain types of practices in the graveyards or even in the cremation grounds in order to control the departed souls. The relatives and friends of the departed should pray and chant the holy name of God, so that the soul, present around the body, can hear that and also remember the Divine. It makes the soul feel peace.

Where do saints go after leaving their bodies?

Every great saint who has gone from the world has his own *loka*. Every *loka* represents a particular state of consciousness.

After death it is not your concept but your attachment that takes you somewhere

Your *Iṣṭa* means the personal deity whom you worship. *Iṣṭa* literally means that which you aspire to achieve or become one with. Those who worship a personal God or an *Avatāra* go to the world of that God if they have reached a very advanced stage and have no desire left in them but to see their *Iṣṭa*.

Those who have no personal deity and don't worship, but have reached a very advanced stage, shedding all attachment to the world, and yet have not achieved the direct Realization of the Divine or the Absolute go to *sūrya loka*. From *sūrya loka*, they are taken to the world of *Brahmā*, the Creator, and finally when *Brahmā* merges in Godhead or *Parabrahman*, they also merge in *Parabrahman*, that is timeless, eternal, conscious Existence, and attain *mokṣha*. Every personal deity or *avatāra* has his or her own world. These are not visible with physical organs. They are in the psychic medium.

If you are my Iṣṭa, where will I go when I die?

It is very simple. If I am your *Iṣṭa* and I am still in this body, when you die and if you have no other desire left in you except to be with me, then you will come to me wherever I am, maybe in *Sādhanā Kendra*, if I am still there. It is not your concept that takes you somewhere. It is your attachment that takes you somewhere. This applies to all planes.

Generally human beings are not reborn in lower forms of life

There are 8.4 million species in this universe out of which the human form is also one. Now my question is, if the human form is to come again, does it come again only after passing through all 8.4 million species?

Do not worry! Once you have reached the state of mental consciousness and assumed a human form, you need not go to lower forms of life unless you are dominated by an animal tendency that can be worked out only in an animal body. *Karmas*

produce *sanskāras* and it is according to its *sanskāras* that the soul takes birth in a particular body to exhaust those *sanskāras*. If the soul of a human being lives like an animal and is full of animal tendencies, it can take birth in an animal body again. The soul of a human being does not have to pass through all 8.4 million forms of life again and again. It may go to a particular animal body, if it is full of the instincts of that animal.

Communicating with departed souls

After death, for how long can we contact the departed soul?

There is no rule about how much time it takes for a departed soul to assume a new physical body. It differs from person to person. Moreover, time is relative. What may be a thousand years for you may be ten days for a departed soul.

Do you confirm that we can contact a departed soul?

If you can contact God, why not a departed soul? It is possible for a person to talk to and communicate with the souls of dead people. The communication is psychic and the voice that one hears is also psychic, usually it is the voice of those people whom you are talking or listening to. I think it should be easier to contact a departed soul than to contact God.

It is said that we should avoid disturbing the departed soul.

They are disturbed if you weep for them. Why should they be disturbed if you offer sweets to them?

Are the entities present around us fed by our emotions?

They are disembodied souls, but they have all the mental desires, emotions, likes and dislikes as those of men. As different men have different states and mental dispositions, similarly the disembodied souls are of many types.

How do these entities get nourished?

They eat astral food for their astral body. As they have no physical body, they do not need physical food.

Ghost means, “The soul which is afraid of light”

In today’s morning news on BBC, it was said that there is a ghost living in one of the colleges of Oxford. There was an interview with two persons on the BBC who encountered the ghost in the month of November 1997. Both these men are very educated, perhaps professors teaching in that college. They told their experiences and said, “We cannot help but believe what we experienced. We cannot say, after this experience, that ghosts do not exist.”

Have you ever seen a ghost? People living in the cities are more mischievous than ghosts! So ghosts are afraid of those people. They feel more comfortable in the villages. Man is more afraid of ghosts in a dark room than in a room in which there is light. Why is it so? Ghost means, “The soul which is afraid of light.” These souls who prefer to live in darkness become ghosts after death. There are some *mantras* for the purpose of helping them. Prayer for the departed souls also helps them.

“Friends! Do you always remember that a time has to come when you will be separated from your dearest relatives and objects? Do you always remember that this separation can come at any time, any moment? If this is so, then rest assured, the ghost of worldly attachment cannot overwhelm you; nor can there be any mental torture for you when you are about to depart from this world.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

God's Will

God's will and self-will

How to know God's will?

What is God's will? How will you know God's will unless you know God? Do you know God? God's will can only be known when one's mind is full of God's Love, as also when one's own will is inactive. God's will can be known when the self-will is absent, and when the mind is not preoccupied, but is alert. The seeker should give up the self-will.

To give up self-will is the most difficult

My feeling is that I am one cell of God's body and that everything happens according to the plan made by God. Swāmijī, can you comment on my reflection?

Do you believe it only for yourself, or do you believe the others to be in the same position? If you are not the doer, then X is also not the doer. Y is also not the doer, and so on. Do you feel

offended if someone slaps you? How would you react if your passport was thrown in the canal by X? If she is not the doer, why should you feel offended by her? Well, if you can be established in this state and always remain unmoved in every situation, then no one should challenge your belief or conviction. But generally it is seen that people justify their actions by this belief yet become disturbed if someone acts against their will or when something happens against their will. To give up self-will is the most difficult thing. When you say “God’s will,” you indirectly accept that there is also self-will. Is your will the will of God or is it separate? The will that is not satisfied, where does it come from and whose will is it? If your will is not realized or fulfilled, you cannot say it is the will of God. And when you say it is not the will of God, what then? If your understanding is wrong, is it the will of God? And if you adopt a double standard, you would say that it is the will of God. If someone tries to steal your purse and you don’t let him or her do that, what does it mean? How do you know God’s will? Is it God’s will that you should be confused? If someone hurts you then you should also take it as the will of God. God has made you unenlightened. Then why should you wish to be enlightened? He first makes you ignorant and then he gives you aspiration to remove this ignorance. What kind of God is He? I have no objection if you believe that everything happens by the will of God. Believe it, but don’t use a double standard.

God won’t impose freedom upon you because imposed freedom becomes bondage

How can we be sure that we are following God’s will and not our desires?

When your mind is silent and free from desires, only then God's will works freely in you. Finally, self-will has to be given up completely. In the beginning self-will has to be directed to the Divine. You have to reconcile all the parts of your personality. There is no other way for harmony. If a cart is pulled on many sides in many directions, do you know what happens? The difficulty of making a choice is a common problem. It is this problem that makes the mind restive and wandering. If you justify your weaknesses or if you are proud of them, no one can make you free of those weaknesses, not even God. If you don't want to be free, God won't impose freedom upon you. The imposed freedom turns into bondage.

Justice is the grace of God limited by the actions of persons

God's will is working on two planes. It works in the life of people who are doers, giving justice to them according to their *karmas*; and it works as pure grace in the life of those who have shed their ego of being the doer. You may say that justice is the grace of God limited by the actions of persons. Justice and grace are not opposed to each other.

Freedom

God is absolute Freedom and Freedom is the essential nature of man

You wrote, "The element of freedom can never be zero; even in an atom of matter there is some freedom." Is this the manifestation of the Divine within us?

That freedom is the proof of the presence of the Divine in every thing and every person. The degree of that freedom is proportional to the manifestation of the Divine in a particular thing or person. In the liberated one or in God, that freedom is completely manifest. In other persons, it is in a potential form.

What is this freedom?

Freedom is the essential nature of man. But how many people feel or realize that they are free? Every person feels his or her own limitations in every field: familial, social, and political. You wanted to come here and you came here. Another man may be wishing to come here, but is not able to come here. You may also want something, or want to do something, or want to know something, but are not able to do so.

You ask how are we human beings not free? I would ask how is a human being free? Everyone wants to be happy, but how many people are really happy? Everyone has one desire or another: the desire to be healthy, the desire to be wealthy, the desire to be a respected person and so on. Does it not prove that they are missing something or that they are seeking something? How can you say that everyone is free?

Generally, I am happy. Can I say that I am free?

If one's freedom or happiness depends upon favourable situations and circumstances, it can never be lasting. If a person does not feel bound at a particular time or place, or in a particular situation, it is not necessarily true that he or she is free. To be free, one first has to know what bondage is and why there is bondage, then to know how to remove that bondage. Very few people

even know what bondage is. The chances of their being really free are very slim.

The element of freedom in man represents the Divine in him; it determines evolution

I am confused about self-effort and divine will. Are we not born with some vāsanās (tendencies) and is not the body given to us to experience and exhaust our prārabdha karma? We are like a cow grazing in the meadow with a tiny rope tied around its neck.

The divine will works in the direction of making a soul free. Is the Divine a dictator who wants to keep the soul bound? It is true that we are born with some vāsanās that can be exhausted through the physical bodies given to us. But it is also true that there is an element of freedom in man that cannot be totally eliminated. This element of freedom in man represents the Divine in him. In man's life, the factor of freedom and the factor of determinism coexist. The ratio of freedom and predetermination varies from person to person. The level of evolution of a person is directly proportional to his freedom and inversely proportional to predetermination in the life of that person. This ratio is not constant. It is changing. The more a person evolves, the greater is the element of freedom in him or her. The element of freedom can never become zero.

Self-effort is not against the divine will; it is in conformity with the divine will. Every cow has its own rope. It is free to graze within that limit. And that rope is changing. If you use the freedom given to you properly, you are given more and more freedom. If you misuse the freedom given to you, that freedom is taken away

from you. The human life is an opportunity to make effort. In the animal form, the soul is not free to make effort. That is why human life is considered more important than the life of even a god. If a god wants to be completely liberated, he must come down in a human form. This is what the scriptures say. Gods have more power than man, but they are not free. They are more evolved souls, but not perfectly evolved. To be perfectly evolved and free, they have to become human beings again.

God is absolute Freedom

Is God interested in our freedom?

God's essential Nature is absolute Love, absolute Freedom, absolute Consciousness, absolute Bliss. God does not want or wish anyone to be bound. It is the self-will or desire of the individual that binds him or her. God is absolute Freedom; the more the individual approaches God, the more he or she feels free. Or it can be said that the more God is manifested in the individual, the more he or she feels real Freedom.

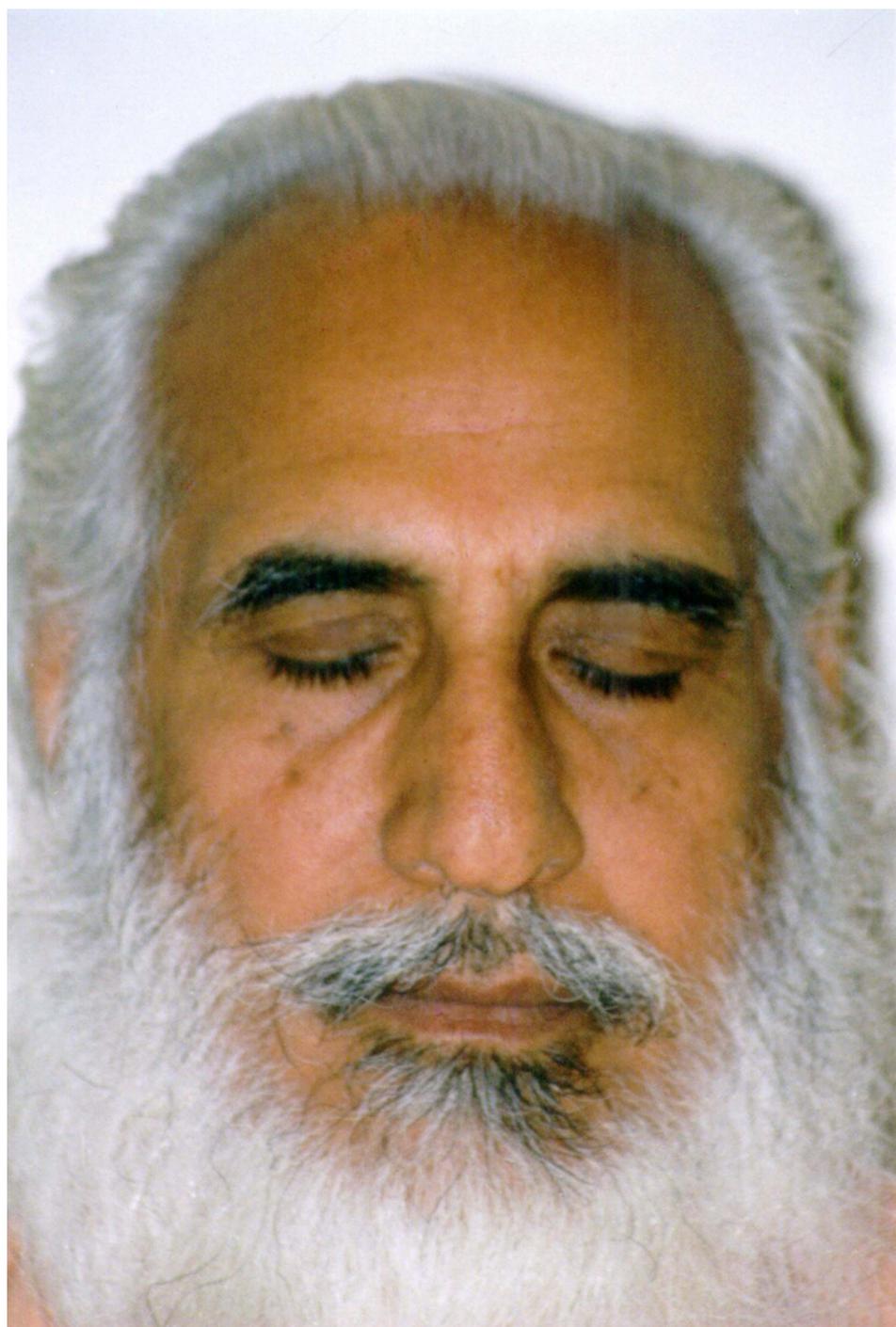
Chapter Nine

Spiritual Experiences, Enlightenment, Realization & Fulfilment

“Generally speaking, when a seeker attains sufficient passivity, concentration, purity and detachment, he begins to have the experiences of higher spiritual planes.” – *Spiritual Gems*



“Awakening, experience, Enlightenment or Illumination, Realization or Fulfilment – this is the chronological order. Through awakening you come to know what is unreal and become inspired to follow the path of Truth. When all the senses, the mind and the intellect come to a standstill in the wakeful state, the spiritual experience happens. The experience is like a flash. When you have the experience again and again you get Enlightenment. When the experience is stabilized, it is Realization.”



Spiritual Experiences
Enlightenment
Realization & Fulfilment

Experiences on the body level

Sometimes during meditation (or even at other moments of the day), I feel vibrations or a kind of shaking in my body. Should I not pay attention to it, should I try to stop it, or should I encourage it?

If your body is trembling during meditation, it is due to the movement of *prāṇic* energy in the body. If you become afraid of it and resist it, it gives a bad feeling, but if you accept it, it gives a good feeling and you can enjoy it. Don't stop it. Don't resist it or encourage it. Whatever happens in the body during meditation, see it as a witness without interfering with it. There are certain physiological changes in the body during deep meditation. There is movement of *prāṇic* force also. Many kinds of experiences on the body level can happen during meditation.

I thought that it was bad energy.

Even good energy can make the body tremble but, because it is a new experience, one may become afraid of it.

Hearing sounds during meditation

When I sit in meditation, I start hearing whistling sounds in both ears. I would like to know if it is because of some ear problem. If not, then is it the nāda sound?

When one's mind turns inward, one may have many types of experiences. Hearing sounds of different kinds, such as that of humming bees, water flowing in a river, some musical sounds, seeing different shades of lights, having visions of saints and sages, are some of these experiences. The sound you are hearing in meditation is not due to any ear problem. Had it been due to some problem in your ear, it would not come to you when you go deep in meditation. Have you any painful sensation in the ear? Is your hearing power going down? Or do you feel any other abnormal symptom that makes you uneasy? If not, then why should you interpret this experience as an ear problem? Hearing such sounds in meditation helps the seeker to withdraw his mind from the outer world and its objects. The inner sound is transporting and magnetic. It draws the attention and helps the seeker to go inward. When the sound appears during your meditation, you should concentrate on it. It will help in your concentration.

When sitting in meditation the *sādhaka* has to withdraw the mind from the outer objects and concentrate on the object of meditation. If one is practising *japa* and the sound of the *mantra* is transformed into some joyful sound in its subtle form, then, concentrating on it helps in achieving inwardness. But the *sādhaka* should not take such experiences for his/her ultimate goal. Concentration on such sound may be a step on the way to achieve inwardness, but if it is taken as a final goal, then it will become an obstacle in the way of higher spiritual experiences.

Concentrating on such inner sounds helps the seeker to evolve. When such inner experiences stop, the *sādhaka* should again resume the *japa* according to his/her level of consciousness. For example, one may shift to oral *japa*, mental *japa* or supramental *japa* (spontaneous *japa* termed as *ājapa japa*).

The sound you are hearing is not the *nāda*, which is the source of all sounds. When one comes to hear the *nāda*, one totally forgets one's body and feels a peculiar joy.

Do not give any importance to such experiences

Last year, during meditation, I was feeling my finger becoming bigger and bigger. I was afraid and I prayed to the Lord. Another time, a big eye approached me, looking at and watching me. Once also, when I was walking on the street, I suddenly became very high, very light and joyful.

Many types of experiences come during meditation. Some are pleasing and others are displeasing. Some are very absurd and defy all logic. The seeker has to keep himself or herself quite indifferent and should not try to interpret them. Such experiences split your consciousness and prevent you from concentrating on the Divine or on the divine symbols. Therefore, do not give any importance to such experiences. There is no need to be frightened if you see during meditation any frightening scene related to you in one way or another. Most of the scenes that you see during meditation are the working of your subconscious mind. Do not take them seriously. Be indifferent to them; let the subconscious bubble. Be a simple witness, and do not involve yourself with them. Try to concentrate on some divine symbol more and more. The progress in your meditation depends on how much you can

remain aloof from the mechanical arising of images in your mind and carry on with concentrating on the Divine.

A promising inner experience

This morning I felt joy for two hours. I just tried to follow the joy for as long as possible. There was a fire happily burning me, and there was my awareness seeing that. Please can you explain this and advise me?

It is a very promising inner experience. Keep on looking at that light when it appears, without thinking. Don't bother with thoughts that come involuntarily. Just see that light and concentrate on the transporting joy it provides. Be more and more aware of watching that flame without trying to interpret what it is. One should not be curious to know the meaning of what one experiences or sees during meditation because the mind cannot interpret experiences rightly unless it reaches a very advanced stage of meditation and can comprehend the meaning of the symbolic experiences that come during meditation. Such experiences leave an influence on the personality of the seeker, even without the knowledge of his or her conscious mind.

Two inner experiences

I have two different types of experiences. Sometimes, it is the body, chakras and joy. Sometimes, it is just abrupt stillness.

Both are inner experiences; the experience of joy and that of silence or emptiness are high spiritual experiences. One can

concentrate on the memory of either of these two experiences. You should concentrate on the experience of silence. It will help you break the false identifications, which is essential to have the experience of the passive Self. Without the direct experience of the passive Self, it is not possible to completely detach oneself from the working of the ego and *Prakṛiti* or the three *guṇas*. The experience of the passive Self is not the end, but it is essential before one can have the experience of absolute Truth.

Any experience that gives peace should be entertained

Is it helpful to remember a deep experience of peace and happiness?

Yes, it is a sort of meditation. If you remember again and again some transporting experience that has come to you, it helps you in concentration.

While remembering, do I keep thinking?

To remember is not memory. It is not thinking either. It is to feel the presence of what you have experienced.

Yesterday evening, during meditation, I suddenly felt as if I was discovering the people, the walls and the windows for the first time. I felt the reality as a fact, and not through my thoughts. This experience carried a strong feeling of peace.

Any inner experience that gives peace should be entertained. It integrates the consciousness and is helpful in one's spiritual

upliftment. The experience you had during meditation last evening is not directly connected with your spiritual *sādhana*. It is, however, better to have some inner experience during meditation than sitting and only daydreaming. When you sit again in meditation, concentrate on the memory of the peace you have experienced. It will help you to be more and more peaceful. Different people have different experiences in meditation. When the conscious mind becomes inactive, the subconscious takes over. The subconscious is like an ocean in which all types of impressions of your past experiences are stored. The subconscious may bring forth any image that the conscious mind cannot interpret or understand.

In this experience, can we say that the mind became silent and so the eyes and ears could really see and hear?

Can an eye see without the mind being connected with the eye? Can an ear hear anything if the mind is not attached to it? There is another type of seeing, another type of hearing and another type of smelling. Jesus has hinted about such seeing and hearing that transforms one's life instantly.

A vision leaves a deep impression

Is it true that you have seen Jesus Christ?

What makes you doubt it? I have had the vision of Jesus a few times. You can also see Him. You must sit in meditation regularly and pray. The features of Jesus I saw in the vision looked like those of Gerald, except that I saw Him wearing a long robe with

a special type of stitching at the place of the throat. When I see Gerald, I always come to remember that vision. It is not necessary that everyone should have the same vision of Jesus or Buddha or Kṛiṣṇa.

There is a difference between a vision and imagination or dream. The vision may come even when you don't meditate on the image of the person whom you see in the vision. During my *sādhanā*, I saw visions of some sages I had not even heard of before and could recognise only after reading books on them. A vision leaves a very deep impression on your personality, much more than any book or teaching can do. Any sage who has lived thousands of years ago can appear in your vision. You may not even recognise who he is.

“The uninterrupted remembrance of and contemplation on the Divine is the means as well as the end. The remembrance of God unifies/integrates the consciousness, removes all the infirmities and impurities of mind and makes the seeker fit for God-Realization.”

– *Mirror of Bliss*

Spiritual experiences purify “the doors of perception”

I feel good during meditation, but when I am in touch with the outer world, I don't feel so good. Why this difference?

Yes, certainly the inner world one experiences during meditation and the outer world one experiences through the sense organs are different, unless one reaches the highest spiritual Realization in which *Nirvāṇa* (Liberation) and *sansāra* become one and the

same. There is total reconciliation and absolute unity experienced among all the aspects of existence in the highest spiritual Realization. The differences are there on the phenomenal level in the manifestation.

It is good if you feel good during meditation. Let this state be deeper and deeper and more stable. It will then slowly and gradually extend and spread to the outer perceptions. The impact of inner spiritual experiences gradually purifies and transforms what are called, “The doors of perception.” These doors of perception include the mind and the senses. We now perceive the world through the tainted glasses of our mind and senses. The mind is conditioned with so many wrong beliefs, negativity, doubts, delusions, and above all, instability. Can you see your true face in a moving, dirty or broken mirror? You cannot see the Existence in its divine form with an impure, unstable and divided mind. During meditation, when the senses are withdrawn inwards, when the mind is comparatively stable, when there is love in your heart, when the desires have temporarily subsided, it is natural to feel good, peaceful and transported.

Sometimes I feel sensations at the heart-centre during meditation. What should I think about them?

Are the feelings pleasant or unpleasant? There is nothing abnormal. When the heart-centre is becoming purified and developed and its vibrations are becoming longer and subtler, one feels a pleasant sensation in the middle of the chest during meditation.

The mind does not want its death

I had the experience that I was not the individual and also that thoughts come from this identification with it. Since this experience, my mind is disturbed.

The experience should have made you more open and peaceful, but it may happen sometimes that even the breaking of identification is disturbing in the beginning. When a moth is taken out of the mud (cocoon), it feels disturbed in the beginning. A door that has remained shut for a long time makes creaking and disturbing noises when it is opened. The advantage must come, if you really have had the experience of not being an individual. The mind does not want its death. It plays all the tricks to remain alive. It is the mind that sustains individuality.

Experience is not Realization

I read that Ramaṇa Maharṣhi got Realization at the age of seventeen.

Ramaṇa had the first experience at the age of sixteen, but the experience is not Realization. Experience comes, more often than not, suddenly and unexpectedly. The experience turns into Realization only when your whole personality is purified and stabilized. It may take years and years, if not many lives. It took Buddha over twenty-four lives to get complete Enlightenment. You must know what he did and how he worked for it.

***Shaktipāt*: a shortcut to Realization?**

Is shaktipāt a shortcut to Realization, as some claim it to be?

You should go to those people and experience yourself what they claim to transmit. It would be the shortest-cut to receive Realization without doing anything on your part.

Through shaktipāt it can be easier. When I touch your feet, do I already get shaktipāt?

A very competent *ādhāra* (receptacle) like Swāmī Vivekānanda could not bear the *shaktipāt* when Rāmakṛṣṇa wanted to give it to him and touched his head. Vivekānanda started to cry. The whole world began to disappear before his eyes and his mind faced a total death. He felt as if he was dying. Rāmakṛṣṇa stopped the *shaktipāt*. How can an ordinary person bear the impact of *shaktipāt* if Vivekānanda could not do it?

Difference between experiences and philosophy

Should we give up all concepts?

The concept should turn into experience. That is what *sādhanā* is needed for. In India, if you ask a small child, he will tell you that it is only the body that dies, the *Ātmā* does not die. He has inherited this information from his parents and society, but in practice, it does not influence his life. The concept is better than information, but experience is the essence of religion. All major religions are based on experience. That is what makes the difference between religion and philosophy.

Realize God before helping others

I feel my duty is to work towards Realization and then to help my brothers and sisters in the West. Can you give me some direction?

I appreciate your concern to help others on the path of God-Realization. It can really be done only if and when you yourself have realized God. Otherwise, you will become like a professor. You can gather much information about God and God-Realization and, along the way, impart that information to others. Then you will simply become like the people “who only count the mangoes, but do not eat them,” as Rāmakriṣṇa Paramahansa used to say.

“As the sight of the one engaged in eating a meal does not appease the hunger of another starving person, so also the spiritual experiences of others do not satisfy the one seeking the Lord. The rishis of yore no doubt perceived the Truth, yet you will have to discover that Truth for yourself.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

When the thinking mind subsides, the intuition takes charge

What is intuition?

There is the intuition of the senses, as well as the intuition of the mind and the intuition of the super-mind. The intuition of the senses is active or working in wild animals and, to a certain extent, in pet animals too. The intuition of the mind works only in the

purified and quiet mind. For the super-mind, the intuition is spontaneous. Intuition is a higher means of knowledge.

On the spiritual path, does intuition come from the mind or from the supermind?

We can categorize knowledge into four groups:

1. Knowledge gained through instinct.
2. Knowledge gained through the five senses with the help of the mind.
3. Knowledge gained through the reasoning mind.
4. Knowledge gained directly and immediately, without depending on instinct, senses and mind. This knowledge is called intuition. It is a sort of revelation that flashes when the mind is completely silent and pure, when it is not a slave of one's senses.

The animals know through instinct. Their instincts are pure (especially those of wild animals who live in the forests, away from men) and are ninety-nine per cent correct. Man's instincts are not pure, because his mind interferes and his conditioning and prejudices influence his instincts. If you encounter a lion in the forest, and it does not attack you, it is because it is not hungry. It will attack you only if it is hungry or if you provoke him. It is instinctively violent. If it does not attack you, it does not do it with a feeling of non-violence. Instinct looks like intuition because in both the mind is not working, but there is a qualitative difference between them. Intuition comes from a supramental state of consciousness, while instinct comes from a subliminal state of consciousness. "Subliminal" means subconscious.

Is honest intuition a good guide for devising a spiritual practice?

Intuition is of many grades. When you have the highest intuition, you don't need any guide. As a matter of fact, you have to follow some method to reach the state of intuition. The more pure, calm, quiet and silent your mind is, the higher your intuition is.

How can one improve and develop his intuition?

Real intuition means immediate response to situations, without the interference of your conditioned mind. When the thinking mind subsides, the intuition takes charge. Make your mind silent more and more. Thinking/discriminating is the substitute of intuition. Right belief, right thinking and right meditation gradually lead to intuition. There is no shortcut. The mind has to be purified and made silent. Inner peace, desirelessness, detachment, humility and spontaneity are the main characteristics one develops in the advanced stage of intuition.

Revelation is the direct Knowledge

Whatever knowledge we gain through books or through holy scriptures, eventually has to be transcended. Is it not enough to read or recite the Guru mantra?

The real Knowledge comes through revelation. The knowledge we gain through books is only information. Revelation happens when the mind is pure and completely silent. The *japa* of a *mantra* purifies the mind. It is also a method to stop the thinking process and make the mind silent. The holy scriptures are

revelations. The Knowledge contained in holy scriptures is not based on reading books or on reflection and thinking. Revelation is the direct, first-hand Knowledge. Knowledge gained through books is borrowed, second hand knowledge.

After revelation do we need to read books and holy scriptures?

Revelation not only convinces you, but also fulfills you. After Fulfilment, you don't need to know anything. All doubts disappear and, knowing the details or laws of how this world goes on, becomes irrelevant. In the *Upanishads* it is said, "After knowing That, nothing else remains to be known." "That" is *Brahman*.

"If you are eager to know how God is defined, read books and books on philosophy; but be it your burning desire to experience Him directly, then plunge deep within yourself."

– *Spiritual Gems*

You are here to know how to realize God

God is supposed to be omnipresent. Then, how does the feeling of the absence of God occur?

When you don't feel God's presence, He is absent for you.

How can we recognize what we don't know?

That is why you are here, to know how to realize God. Realization of Truth comes to those whose hearts are pure, who are as

humble as grass, whose senses and minds are under their control, and those who are at peace and full of divine Love.

God is always with you, but you are not with Him

You told us that we could realize God here and now. I feel the possibility and also the impossibility of this proposition. The possibility because I (the observer) am in the present, which is timeless. The impossibility because there is something like a dream between me and the Reality. Even if I know that I am dreaming, the dream doesn't stop. How is it possible to realize God here and now?

God is always realized here and now. He cannot be realized in the past or in the future. It is not a proposition but a fact. You say you know you are dreaming. This is not your experience. When you are dreaming you do not know you are dreaming. When you are in the dreaming state and become aware that you are dreaming, the dream is broken; you wake up. At this time you know that you were dreaming. You can realize God here and now because God is here and now. He is always with you, He is everywhere with you, but you are not with Him. You are preoccupied with so many things and activities that you do not see Him.

I am sitting with you, before you, but if your mind is occupied with thinking of something or someone in France or anywhere else, you may not see me sitting here or feel my presence. Or, if I am here before you and you do not know me, then I am not before you. Sometimes new visitors come in the *āshram* and ask me, “Where is Chandra Swāmī?” The same is the case with you in regard to God!

The perception of Oneness

When we have seen our true Nature, how does the process of integration take place?

How is the process of integration working now? There is always unity behind the apparent diversity. There is always the presence of the Unchangeable behind the changing names and forms. Now, you are only aware of the change. You see that everything is changing. No proof is needed for that. In the moment, if you call it a moment, of what you call the vision of the true Being, you simply become aware of the Unchangeable in all the movements, and Oneness in the diversity. This perception of Oneness integrates your personality automatically. Your ambitions and desires for diverse things and situations tend to disintegrate your personality; the aspiration for Oneness tends to integrate your personality. It is very simple to understand. If you want one thing or love one person, you become united inwardly. If you desire many things or love many persons, you become divided within.

Go within yourself and realize your true Being

Especially when I am here, I feel a lot of energy, but often I don't know what to do with it.

You are the source of all energy, as the sea is the source of all water. The sea is not at all disturbed when the waves arise in it. Go within yourself and realize your true Being.

Swāmījī, you know well that for me it is not easy.

To realize one's true Being is the most difficult as well as the easiest thing. You make it difficult or easy. If you feel it is difficult, it is because you are difficult and very complex.

Do we need many lives to realize God?

There is no fixed rule for it. You can realize God even here and now. But, usually, it takes many lives to tame and transform one's mind to be able to realize God. It differs from person to person and depends upon so many factors: how much effort you put in, how sincere you are, your potential worth, the help of some realized and powerful Master, the grace of God, the intensity and depth of your commitment to God-Realization and so many other inscrutable factors.

“Realization is most difficult and the easiest at the same time. It is most difficult because it happens to a person whose mind is completely purified and completely silent or full of divine Love. And it is most easy because you don't have to get anything that is separate from you, or far away from you. You have to be aware of your own essential Being and be established in It.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

When you are realized, all questions and problems stop

If God moves everything, then who makes the decision?

You are saying, “If God moves everything...” Now this “if” is creating the whole problem. By affixing “if,” you are turning the experience of a surrendered soul into a proposition, and this

creates your problem and question. When you have realized (and not only say) that God moves everything, then all the questions and problems cease to disturb you; they vanish.

Is it possible to solve all our problems only through meditation?

Meditation is a means of Realization. It is Realization that brings an end to all doubts and problems. Over ninety percent of the problems of life lose their urgency and meaning for you if your life-interest is radically changed, if you become interested in God alone. Most of the problems of your life are created because of your interest in the world.

“The absolute divine Consciousness/Bliss is revealed only in the heart which is completely pure, still and silent, alert and passive and totally free of all impurities like attachment, hatred, jealousy, self-importance etc., and which is ever so full of love and compassion.”

– *Mirror of Bliss*

The five-year old sage

A sage with a white beard was asked, “What is your age?” He said, “Five years.” The devotee was amazed and again said, “Sir, don’t be kidding. How can you be five years old when you have white hair on your whole body?” The sage said, “It was five years ago that I realized the Truth. Life before that, I don’t consider it now as life. It was a flow of death.” Jesus calls spiritual awakening, “A new birth.”

The state of no-mind

What is the state of no mind?

The state of no-mind is the state of alert passivity. When the mind is totally free of all thoughts, emotions and desires during the wakeful state, it is called no-mind. It is during the state of no-mind that the direct experience of one's true, timeless Being happens. When this experience becomes established in all parts of one's personality, one becomes totally liberated and self-fulfilled. No-mind is undifferentiated, non-dual, and homo-geneous Consciousness. It is contentless and pure Awareness.

There are many states of mind: unconscious state (deep sleep), subconscious state (dreaming state), conscious state (wakeful state) and superconscious state. The conscious mind has many further stages: overmind, supermind (gnosis) and Bliss/Consciousness. These have been mentioned in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣhad*. Aurobindo has explained them in detail. The spiritual philosophy of Aurobindo is mainly based on these revelations of the *Upaniṣhads*.

The highest state of meditation is the state of no-mind

Do we have to become the Ātmā to understand what it is?

Not to become, but to be the *Ātmā*. The *Ātmā* is being; the mind is becoming. Mind and ego are different, as water and steam are different. The highest state of meditation is the state of no-mind. Mind is the instrument of knowing the world. The *Ātmā* is realized through no-mind.

When the mind stops, the Spirit shines in its pristine purity

Thinking is a function of the mind. It is said that meditation is a function of the Spirit. Who will assess (mind or Spirit), whether one is in a state of meditation or engaged in the activity of the mind?

Thinking is no doubt the functioning of the mind, but meditation is not the functioning of the Spirit. Meditation is of many types. Meditation means thinking of the Divine, in one way or the other, through some symbol or stopping the thinking process completely. When the mind stops, it is called no-mind. In no-mind, the Spirit shines in its pristine purity. There is no assessment or judgment in the state of no-mind. There is no need of assessment when one is absorbed in the Spirit. Spirit never moves. It is omnipresent, how can it move? For moving, some empty space is needed. First, try to stop the modifications of your mind. It reminds me of a saying of a saint, “If a baby is resting in the lap of its mother and enjoying the sucking of the milk, does it need any proof as to whether it is the mother’s lap or not?”

The state of experiencing the present moment is the state of no-mind

When all the elements of the personality, ego, mind and so on have disappeared, one’s true Nature remains. How can I recognize that true Nature as I do not know it?

You mean to say that when there is no-mind, how shall you recognize it? During meditation, when the mind/ego disappears, the essential Nature that is *Sat Chit Ānanda* remains. Now, you

ask how you would recognize Awareness and Bliss? You do not need to recognize Awareness and Bliss as something different from you. You are simple Awareness and Bliss in that state. You will know what it is when the mind disappears. The state of experiencing the present moment is the state of no-mind. You practise meditation to know it. What it is cannot be said. It can only be experienced. When you experience it yourself, you will be satisfied and fulfilled and the question of its recognition will not arise.

No-mind is the third eye

Can you help me to see the Divine?

To see the Divine, you need a different kind of eye. That eye is the eye of Enlightenment. When you have that eye, you can see the Divine even in a blade of grass.

I read that the whole world is the body of the Guru.

You read with your mind. When you are able to read with no-mind, then you become aware of the Truth. No-mind is the third eye, the divine eye. The Knowledge gained through no-mind is the highest Knowledge and is always the same. It may come to A, B or C, a man or woman of any religion or any country.

What do we see through the third eye?

Through the divine third eye, you see Existence as it is in Itself. Through your mind, you see Existence as you want to see it.

Here and now

What does “here and now” mean?

“Here and now” means not to think of the past, not to think of the future, not to think of your girlfriend or boyfriend, not to think of any person or situation, anything that is in time and space. It is the state of no-mind. Can you, at this stage of your development, be in a state of no-mind? If you can, very good. If not, then think positive and constructive thoughts and act in a positive and creative way, or try to do that. At the same time, sit in the morning and evening and try to be silent, quiet, through any method for some time. If you practise sincerely, daily, regularly, with deep interest and undivided commitment, then, slowly and gradually, you may one day have the taste of no-mind in due course of time.

Before reaching the state of no-mind there is good and bad

*It is said, “Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.”
Is it true?*

It is true, but can you give up thinking? You cannot stop the thinking process even when you sit in meditation. When you reach the state of no-mind, then nothing remains good or bad for you. Before that, there is good and bad for you. Ask yourself, “Am I above the feeling of good and bad?” You will get the correct reply if you are not dishonest with yourself! If you don’t feel good or bad at all, then either you are living at the level of animal-consciousness, or you have transcended the mental consciousness and have realized the supramental Consciousness. Nothing is good or bad for that person (or better to say that non-person) alone

who has reached the state of choiceless Awareness. Do you choose or not? If you choose, it means there is good and bad for you.

The chronological order of spiritual attainment

Respected Swāmījī, can you give us your definition of Enlightenment? How does it differ from Realization?

To believe in God is very good, but it is not enough. Superior to belief in God is the intellectual understanding of God. Superior to intellectual understanding of God is faith in God. Superior to faith in God is the direct experience of God and the highest is the Realization of God. It is Realization that brings an end to all the doubts and fulfills the soul. Belief in God is the first step. It is the beginning. When you consistently remember God and reflect on Him, the belief changes into intellectual understanding. To change intellectual understanding into experience, you are required to do *sādhana* with faith, for the purification and stabilization of your mind. In the end, you have Realization.

Awakening, experience, Enlightenment or Illumination, Realization and Fulfilment — this is the chronological order. Through awakening, you come to know what is unreal and become inspired to follow the path of Truth. In rare cases, the experience may come before awakening but it does not last, it comes like a flash and goes. It comes again and again and goes again and again, transforming your personality. Slowly and gradually, it starts stabilizing. When all the senses, the mind, the intellect come to a standstill in the wakeful state, this experience happens. The experience is like a flash. When you have the experience again and again, you get the Enlightenment. When the

experience is stabilized, it is Realization. There is no need to quote any other mystic or Master or scripture when you have realized the Truth. You don't need any one's authority to confirm the veracity of your experience. You don't even care if others are convinced by what you say.

For the person who has realized the Self, is there any reason to forget the Self again? Sometimes, we feel extreme peace but the next moment, it has disappeared. What is that kind of peace?

The Self/God, once found is never lost. Once discovered, the Self never becomes covered for the realized one. The forgetfulness is not real. The question should be asked to those who take the forgetfulness as real.

X became a mouse in a dream and a cat followed X. From the standpoint of the wakeful state, the mouse, the cat and the following of the mouse by the cat are not real. Anything that does not last is not real. It may be a feeling of temporary peace or a feeling of a temporary disturbance. Whatever is temporary should not be wished or entertained and cherished by the seeker of Truth. It may be the pleasures of this world or the pleasures of heaven.

What is meant by "the experience?"

The experience of the timeless Reality.

Are all of us present in front of you awakened?

You are aspirants. Some are true aspirants and some are not very sincere.

I assume that even one minute, or even one second, of experiencing the timeless Reality will give one immense vairāgya. Is it true?

It has a very great impact on your personality. It is like this: you are eating bitter things, taking them to be sweet, but once you happen to eat sugar for a second it gives you an experience of the difference between a bitter taste and a sweet taste.

What is Self-Realization?

Could you please explain Self-Realization? Is it when the Self realizes that It becomes part of God or becomes God?

When a soul becomes aware of its essential Nature through first-hand and direct experience and becomes permanently established in that experience, it is called Self-Realization. This experience is the non-polar experience of one's timeless and eternal Self which is not bound by time, space and causality. Causality means the law of cause and effect. The experience usually comes like a flash, but it may not last. When it comes again and again, it starts purifying all the parts of the personality and its duration becomes longer and longer. Finally, it becomes permanent and never leaves. That is Self-Realization.

“First-hand” I can understand, but does “permanent experience” imply that the person never stoops to something the Divine would never do? Does it imply permanently “so perfect that he or she can never fail,” in a mere human way?

Real means that which exists forever. This experience or Self-Realization has nothing to do with any doing or action, divine or undivine. Actions are always in time and space. The Self is timeless and spaceless. Actions can be an indirect means of purification of the personality, and thus useful in *sādhana*, but once Self-Realization is achieved, they become irrelevant.

Does a self-realized person never feel or think anything imperfect, e.g. laziness, lack of patience, being easily distracted during dhyāna, etc.? (Not necessarily doing something externally). Is his love for God or God's love for him never shaken?

A self-realized person does not act through a conditioned mind. You may say that he or she does not act at all, or he becomes an instrument in the hands of God. The realized one acts as God wills him to act. Can you know how God acts?

Can the realized one control all his deeds and thoughts?

You are asking if a realized one is free or not! If Realization does not make you free, what is the use of that Realization? Freedom is the fruit of the Realization of the Truth.

Difference between experience and “Experiencing”

Could you tell us the difference between experience and “Experiencing?”

There are two types of experiences: there is experience and there is Experiencing. Experience implies the triangle of the experiencer,

the object of experience and the relationship between them. The second experience is the one in which the triangle merges into one. As a matter of fact, it should not be called an experience. It should be called absolute Experiencing or absolute Awareness. The Experiencing is simple, pure, contentless and constant. The Experiencing is never lost. Experiencing is Consciousness. Experience is relative. Experiencing is absolute. Experiencing is absolute Consciousness. No experience is lasting. It is the Experiencing that is lasting. Realize the Experiencing, it will solve all your problems and enquiries.

Stop thinking, call Him and wait

Fulfilment looks like a fish I am trying to catch. During meditation, do I have to make it an aim, and try and try to be in this Fulfilment? The thoughts I am identified with prevent me from being with God. What should I do with them?

Fulfilment is brought about by the awareness of being complete. Awareness of one's true Being gives Fulfilment. When you are identified with the physical body or mind, you cannot feel complete, you cannot feel freedom! To realize God is surely like catching a fish in one sense, which you have very correctly observed. In order to catch a fish, you cannot do anything but throw a fishing hook in the water, sit and wait patiently, fixing your attention, hoping the fish will be caught anytime. The fish may come in a minute or it may not for the whole day. You cannot do anything but wait patiently. It may be very simple, or it may be very difficult. It is not in your hands. What is in your hands is to throw the fishing hook in the water and wait, and wait.

Exactly similar is the case with finding God. You sit down quietly, call Him from the depth of your heart and wait for Him. What you can do and what you have to do is to sit quietly, stop thinking, call Him with simple love and total trust – as that of a child for its mother – and wait, and wait. You cannot in any way tempt God to come to you for He cannot be tempted, being complete in Himself. You cannot force Him to come, because He cannot be forced, being omnipotent. You cannot do anything to God. You can only do something to yourself and that is what is needed. You have to fall in love with Him. You have to make your heart pure and full of love for God. You have to be receptive, unoccupied, and open. You have to keep your eyes open always, not slumbering and napping, so that He may not go back, finding you asleep.

God is Fulfilment. God is infinite, unlimited by space. God is Eternity, unconfined by time. God is absolute Happiness untainted by pain and pleasure. God has not to be made an aim. God has to be experienced as Love without which you cannot live a single moment. During meditation what do you have to do? You have to do nothing but call Him and wait diligently with full attention, as you do while catching a fish.

Integral Realization of the Divine

What is Realization of the Self?

Realization of the Self means the Realization of the passive and inactive Consciousness, the Seer, the attributeless *Ātmā*. This Realization is not complete in itself. It is the Realization of only one aspect of the Divine. There are many aspects of the Divine

– *Avatāra*, *Virāt*, *Hiraṇyagarbha* or *Īshvara*, *Avyākṛita*, the pure and simple Consciousness.

These aspects have to be considered as different facets of the same Divine. As one cannot see a whole mansion with the eye by standing at one place, similarly the intellect cannot conceive of the Divine in its wholeness. As one has to move all around the building, see all its facets one by one, then go inside and see it from within, similarly the intellect can conceive of Him bit by bit, understanding one aspect at a time. But there is an integral experience of the Divine that includes all the aspects of the Divine at the same time and yet transcends all of them. The Divine is not only the mathematical sum total of all His aspects mentioned above. He is more than this sum total.

Does the method of witnessing lead to Self-Realization?

Witnessing is a method, it is not the final achievement. Its final culmination is the establishment of the Seer in Itself, which is the highest goal of Patañjali's system of *yoga*. It does not enable you to realize the *saguṇa* aspect of Reality. It leads to the experience of the *nirguṇa* aspect of absolute Reality.

How is it different from the path of devotion?

In contrast to the path of devotion, the practice of witnessing takes a seeker gradually to the experience of *nirguṇa*, which is devoid of all attributes whatsoever, a state of direct Realization of the pure, passive, silent Self, which is of the nature of contentless Awareness. Witnessing is a step lower than *nirvikalpa samādhi*, in which the trinity of the witness, the witnessed and the process of witnessing is abolished and only pure Awareness remains.

As opposed to *nirguṇa* experience, in the experience of *saguṇa* there is the high and the low; there is the omnipotence of God and the limited power of the soul. In the experience of *Saguṇa Brahman* the devotee experiences the presence of God, but God's attributes like omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience are not acquired by the devotee. It is so because the physical body and the mind of the soul have their own limitations. Therefore, a devotee may have a very strong body, but he can never be omnipotent.

Self-Realization happens when self-effort and divine grace meet

In The Practical Approach to Divinity, you have written, "One has to travel most of the way, though not the whole of it, with the help of the body, mind, senses and intellect." What do you mean by, "Not the whole of it?"

Body, mind and intellect are means for spiritual self-effort if these are used rightly with the purpose of Self-Realization, but they have their own limitations. After a certain stage of spiritual growth, some higher principles than body-mind have to intervene to take the seeker to the ultimate goal of Self-Realization. One of them is the supermind, and above all, it is the teleological pull of the Divine or divine grace. Think of a small baby who wants to meet its mother. It can crawl to the feet of its mother, but has not enough power to rise up and embrace her. Seeing the intense longing of the baby who has reached her feet, the mother picks it up.

Self-Realization happens only when self-effort on the part of the seeker and special grace on the part of the Divine meet

together. All self-effort is in time and the means used for Realization of God are also in time. How can one reach the Timeless? These means, if used rightly, only take the seeker to a certain stage of spiritual growth.

“When the hardest effort on the part of the seeker, and unreserved grace on the part of the Divine meet, the miracle of Realization happens.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

“To be” is to be liberated here and now

In some difficult moments, I ask myself, “Why did I come to India?” And a spontaneous answer arises, “I am not here to do, but ‘to be,’ to live consciously in the present.”

Just “to be,” you don’t need to go anywhere. “To be” means to be free of any wants. “To be” means to be satisfied with what you are. “To be” means to cease to become or to try to become. “To be” is the conscious state of being Fulfilled. “To be” is to be free of any difficult moment. “To be” is to be liberated here and now. The seeker is not in that state. The seeker aspires “to be.” The seeker therefore works for that Liberation, to just be. When the seeker is in the state of simple being, he or she ceases to be a seeker.

In that state, is one still a disciple?

In your true Being you are neither a disciple nor a Master.

When you stop becoming, you realize your true Being

Can we go for a picnic someday to the peak of the mountain we can see from here?

It would be better for you to go into the deepest recesses of your heart. When you reach that peak you will see another higher peak from there. If you reach the second peak, you will see a still higher one ahead. It would be better for you to stop moving. When you stop moving, when you stop becoming, you realize your true Being.

The direct experience of the personal and the impersonal God

The saints urge us to remember God, but they cannot tell us exactly what God is. Instead, they say, "God's nature is inexpressible." So, what is it we should remember when practising the remembrance of God?

The saints and holy books say that there are two aspects of God: personal God and impersonal God. The personal God is related with this world as its creator, sustainer and destroyer and is also compassionate. The impersonal God is pure infinite Consciousness, without any attributes. The direct experience of the attributeless comes only in the state of no-mind, when all the modifications of the mind stop. The personal God is experienced in the supramental state. Remembrance of God implies feeling the presence of God. Meditation and *japa* are the techniques to have the first hand, direct experience of God.

Kindly explain what is the difference between the supramental and no-mind states.

In the state of no-mind, all the modifications of the mind stop. In the supramental state, the mind is transcended and the supermind becomes manifest. Supermind is a much more evolved form of the mind in which the divine attributes of God are expressed.

So, in the supramental state the mind is not completely absent, but it is a more evolved form of mind.

The mind has been completely transformed, or sublimated. For example, water becomes steam. When anything becomes transformed up to a critical limit, then its name and qualities change.



What is the meaning of sākṣhatkāra? At what level does a devotee realize sākṣhatkāra?

Sakṣhatkāra literally means the direct experience. During *sakṣhatkāra*, the senses come to a standstill, the mind stops and the intellect does not move. The Spirit, disidentified with the mind, remains established in Itself. That is the *sakṣhatkāra* of the *Ātmā*. In Realization, the *sakṣhatkāra* becomes stabilized and is never lost.

The *sakṣhatkāra* of one's *Iṣṭā* is different. In the *sakṣhatkāra* of one's *Iṣṭā*, the senses and the mind of the devotee are totally absorbed in one's *Iṣṭā*. The *sakṣhatkāra* of one's *Iṣṭā* is only one step lower than that in which the

devotee and his *Iṣṭā* become one and the duality is abolished. In non-dual experience, the triangle of the subject, the object and the relationship between them is transcended. In the *sakṣhatkāra* of one's *Iṣṭā*, the polarity of the subject and the object is still there. Some people do not want to become sugar. They want to remain separate from the sugar, so that they can always taste the sweetness of the sugar.

In the Catholic religion it seems that Jesus remains always separate from His devotees.

Jesus said, "I and my Father are One."

"As spiritual insight sharpens, the difference between within and without begins to appear unreal. The highest stage of Self-Realization suffers no distinction between 'Is' and 'Am'."

– *Spiritual Gems*

The state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*

Nirvikalpa samādhi is the state in which the mind is totally silent, when all the relative experiences, all the modifications of the mind stop – including thoughts, emotions, feelings and supramental experiences. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* the subject, the object and the relative knowledge disappear, and only pure Awareness shines in its pristine purity.

In the non-polar *samādhi* you become one with God

You advise us to develop a particular relationship with God,

such as the relationship of a child with its mother, or a lover with his or her beloved, so that we may be able to remember God through this relationship. When we realize God as “the One without a second,” does this relationship continue to exist?

How can there be a relationship in One? A relationship needs two. The realized one, when he opens his eyes, sees the Divine with form. When he goes within, he realizes the Divine as formless but with attributes. When in the non-polar meditation, he is one with the absolute Divinity. The realized one is always with the Divine in all the states, whether in the waking state, dream, deep sleep or in *samādhi*. In the non-polar *samādhi*, the realized one is in absolute rest. In the other states, the realized one is playing with himself. You are alone only in the non-polar *samādhi*. In the non-polar *samādhi*, the relative perception stops altogether. Then, you become one with God. No questions, no answers!

Union with the Divine brings Fulfilment

Can you tell me what are the small spots of white light that we see moving in the air?

When do you see them, during the night?

I see them in the day.

It may be the reflection of something. When the sunlight is reflected from any glazed surface, like a mirror, it becomes doubly bright and distinct from the sunlight. Similar is the case with simple awareness and the awareness reflected through the mind. The

awareness reflected through the mind becomes brighter. It is called *jīva*, the soul. You can more easily recognise a *jīva* than the simple awareness. In the *Vedas*, *jīva* is also called *dviguṇa*, which means doubly bright. If you bring a mirror I can show you. Communication with the Divine is not enough. It is the sunlight reflected in the mirror. It looks brighter than the sunlight. It is union that brings Fulfilment.

You will become God

If you live for God, you will realize God. Then you will live like God. You will work like God works. You will become God. Your life will become full of love, light and happiness. What are you working for if not to have these things?

“Self-Realization cannot be bartered; it is not a thing that can be given or received. It verily is the opening and flowering of the innermost Consciousness! It is the awakening of the Self (Being) into its pure pristine Nature. It is a Fulfilment that happens to the Self, from the Self, in the Self.”

– *Spiritual Gems*

Glossary

abhoktā: non-enjoyer of the fruits of actions; *Puruṣha* or pure Consciousness which is only witness is called *akartā* (non-doer) and *abhoktā*.

ādhāra: basis; foundation; ground.

adhiṣṭhāna: the substratum, the ground on which some other thing rests or owes its existence to. According to *Vedānta*, *Brahman* is the *adhiṣṭhāna* of all that exists, i.e. the gross, subtle and causal worlds.

ādishakti: the primordial Power or the divine conscious Power of God by which this world of names and forms is created, sustained and destroyed.

advaita: lit. “non-dual”; often refers to the *Advaita Vedānta* of Śhaṅkarāchārya, according to which Reality is One without a second, and none exists save *Brahman*.

advaitist: one who believes in the doctrine of *advaita*.

āgāmī karma: see **karma**.

ahaṅkāra: lit. “ego”; the power of identification with the non-Self; that power of *māyā* which makes absolute and infinite Consciousness appear as a relative and finite centre of individuality. (Also see **antaḥkaraṇa**). In common parlance the word *ahaṅkāra* is also used for pride.

ahinsā: non-violence.

ajapā japa: see **japa**.

ājñā chakra: the sixth of the seven *chakras*; it is situated between the two eyebrows, in the forehead, and is considered the centre of vision, ideas and knowledge. The meditation on a divine form or a divine thought is done at this *chakra* or centre.

akarma: see **karma**.

akartā: the non-doer; *Puruṣha* or pure Consciousness is *akartā* and *abhoktā*; it is the witness.

anāhata cakra: the fourth of the seven centres; it is situated in the middle of the chest, though not in the physical heart, and is regarded as the centre of emotion, feeling and sound.

anāhata nāda: the soundless sound; a sound which is not produced by friction; the source of all sounds. It is present everywhere within and without. One can hear it if one goes very deep within oneself or even if one concentrates very deeply on any one object. It is very magnetic.

Ānanda: lit. “bliss”; absolute Bliss is one of the three essential aspects of *Brahman*, others being *Sat* and *Chit*. Also commonly used for joy.

ānandamaya koṣha: see **pañcha koṣha**.

ānandamaya puruṣha: see **pañcha koṣha**.

annamaya koṣha: see **pañcha koṣha**.

annamaya puruṣha: see **pañcha koṣha**.

antaḥkaraṇa: lit. “inner instrument”; inner instrument of cognition/relative knowledge of the *jīva*, the composite of *mana* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *chitta* (memory) and *ahaṅkāra* (ego):

1. **mana** (mind): responsible for general thinking, willing, feeling and doubting.
2. **buddhi** (intellect): discriminates, deliberates, evaluates and decides or chooses.
3. **chitta** (memory): also called the subconscious mind and is like a huge storehouse of all *sanskāras*, i.e. impressions formed of latent desires, tendencies and the impact of all the experiences of past lives. It is far bigger and much more powerful than the conscious mind. Therefore it is *chitta* which needs to be completely purified through *japa*, meditation, etc. for having any substantial spiritual experience.
4. **ahaṅkāra** (ego): the sense of limited individuality or “I-ness.” It is a false “I” and a superficial self, which is practically superimposed on the *Ātmā* or real Self.

The *jīva* or individual soul is the reflection of the *Ātmā* or *Brahman* (pure Consciousness) in the *antaḥkaraṇa*. Relatively it is the inner personality of a person. *Antaḥkaraṇa* is the instrument of all empirical knowledge and also the reservoir of all desires, emotions

and propensities of a person. It does not die with the death of the physical body and causes the transmigration or rebirth of the soul again and again to work out its desires. When the mind and *chitta* become completely desireless and the Self is realized, the *antaḥkaraṇa* is completely under the control of the Self, and this is called Liberation or *jīvanamukta*.

In common parlance *antaḥkaraṇa* is also used for mind, *buddhi*, *chitta* or *ahaṅkāra*. Mind, *buddhi* and *chitta* represent the same energy, but function differently.

anurāga: deep love.

anuṣṭhāna: religious practices associated with certain vows for attaining and fulfilling some worldly desires or for one's spiritual growth as a part of *sādhanā*.

aparā vidyā: see **vidyā**.

ārohaṇa: lit. "ascent"; the spiritual path of ascent in which the seeker tries to arouse the divine power hidden in him or in her by self-will and self-effort.

ārtta: the devotees who are devoted to God because they have faith that God will remove their sufferings and solve their problems.

arthārthī: those devotees who want some worldly comforts and conveniences and call on God for that. They perform certain rituals, religious rites or practise a *mantra* with the motive of fulfilling their worldly desires through God; they are like traders.

Ārya Samāja: a social and religious reform movement within Hinduism, founded by Swāmī Dāyānanda Sarasvati in 1875. It believes in the trinity of three fundamental principles: *Īshvara* (God), *jīva* (soul) and *Prakṛiti* (Nature).

āsana: see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

āshram: 1. abode of sages, ascetics and spiritual seekers meant for *sādhanā*; 2. *āshrams*: the four stages of life according to ancient Hindu tradition – *brahmachārya*, *gṛihastha*, *vānaprastha*, *sannyāsa*. Taking an average human life span as 100 years, *brahmachārya āshram* is a period of 25 years meant for acquiring academic, moral, spiritual and

religious education and livelihood skills while observing celibacy. *Gṛihastha āshram* refers to the period from 26-50 years of married life of a householder in which one earns one's livelihood through right means and lives a balanced and well-oriented life. *Vānprastha āshram* refers to the period from 51 to 75 years in which one withdraws from the familial ties and leads a life dedicated to the study of holy scriptures and selfless service as a preparation for *sannyāsa*. *Sannyāsa āshram* refers to the last stage from 76 to 100 years in which one completely severs all worldly ties and lives exclusively for God-Realization.

aṣṭāṅga yoga: one of the six classical systems of Indian philosophy propounded by Maharṣhi Patañjali, also commonly called *Pātañjali Yoga*, *rāja yoga*, or *yoga*. It is not merely a systematic philosophy, but also a very scientific psycho-physical yogic discipline comprised of eight limbs. The first five, described below, are called the outer limbs:

1. **yama:** lit. “restraint”; there are five *yamas*: *ahinsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truthful conduct), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmachārya* (celibacy) and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness).
2. **niyama:** they are also five: *shoucha* (outer and inner purity), *santoṣha* (contentment), *tapa* (austerity), *svādhyāya* (reading and reflecting on revealed scriptures), and *Īshvara praṇidhāna* (taking refuge in God).
3. **āsana:** the practice of a posture in which one can sit comfortably and with stability for a long period for meditation; nowadays also refers to the practice of different postures called *yogāsanas*.
4. **prāṇāyāma:** breathing exercises for attaining control over *prāṇa*, i.e. the vital energy, through regulation of the incoming and outgoing breath. It weakens the veil of ignorance on the *Ātmā* and helps in fixing the mind on the desired object.
5. **pratyāhāra:** the withdrawal into the mind of all the senses, which are by nature extroverted, from their corresponding objects of perception.

The following three are called the inner limbs, being the direct means of Self-Realization:

6. **dhāraṇa:** dwelling or holding the mind on some internal or external object.

7. **dhyāna**: unbroken concentration of the mind on the chosen object to the exclusion of all other thoughts.
8. **samādhi**: the state of total absorption of the mind in the object of meditation. There are many types of *samādhi*. In the highest *samādhi*, called *nirbīja* or *nirvikalpa samādhi*, all the modifications of the mind are stopped. The trinity of the Seer, seen, and seeing is dissolved and the Seer is established in Its own pristine purity.
- aṣṭa chakras**: eight *chakras* or energy centres in the body.
- asti**: Is-ness.
- Ātmā**: the real Self; innermost divine Reality of everyone and everything.
- avadhūta**: an ascetic who has renounced everything of the world and moves about without any possessions.
- avarohaṇa**: lit. descent; spiritual path of descent in which the devotee calls the Divine incessantly from the core of his heart.
- avatāra**: lit. “descent”; the absolute Reality/Infinite/God assuming a physical body and becoming apparently limited, as in the case of Lord Kṛiṣṇa, Lord Rāma, Lord Jesus, Lord Buddha etc. to push up the process of evolution.
- Avyākṛita**: see **Īshvara**.
- bhagavat chintan**: sequential thinking on a subject related with the Divine or Truth; another name for meditation.
- bhajan**: 1. general term for prayer, meditation or *sādhana*; 2. devotional and religious songs/chants.
- bhakta**: devotee of God.
- bhakti yoga**: the *yoga* or path of loving devotion and surrender to God, through which a devotee finally realizes God.
- bhastrikā**: a *yogic kriyā* consisting of inhaling the breath very fast and immediately exhaling it fast. It makes the *prāṇic* energy in the body very active.
- bhāti**: Awareness or Consciousness.

bhāva: feeling or emotion (also see *mahābhāva*).

bhāvanā shakti: the energy of feeling.

bindu: lit. “a point”; since a point is dimensionless, it symbolizes the universe in its unmanifested form, or the *nirguṇa* aspect of Reality.

bodhisattva: in Mahāyāna Buddhism it is believed that there are some sages who have reached a stage wherefrom they can enter *Nirvāṇa*, but they refuse to accept *Nirvāṇa* and vow to reincarnate in this world to help the ignorant people until all become liberated.

Brahmā: the Creator of this universe; also called *Prajāpati*, *Apar Brahman* and *Hiraṇyagarbha*. According to Hindu scriptures, at the time of the great destruction of the universe, called *mahāpralaya*, *Brahmā* merges into the primordial source and substratum, *Brahman*, which is absolute Consciousness. Since creation and destruction of the universe ever goes on cyclically, *Brahmā* is again created from *Brahman* in the beginning of the next phase of creation of the universe.

brahmachārya: lit. “abiding in *Brahman*”; celibacy; see *āshram*.

Brahman: the Absolute, the Divine or Godhead; the absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss; the Truth or ultimate Reality which is at once immanent and transcendent. *Brahman* is different from *Brahmā*, the Creator aspect of God, who is variously called *Apar Brahman* and *Saguṇa Brahman*. Correctly written it would be spelt ‘*Brahma*,’ but *Brahman* is now commonly accepted and therefore retained in this book.

Brahma niṣṭha: one who is established in *Brahman*, who has completely assimilated the Real in one’s whole being.

Brāhmaṇa: 1. the first of the four castes in the orthodox Hindu social hierarchy whose main duty as prescribed in the scriptures is to study holy scriptures, teach, perform *yajñas*, and subsist on alms; 2. the theological portion of the *Vedas* dealing with *yajñas* and moral code of conduct etc.

buddhi: commonly used for the discriminating and deciding faculty of man; see *antaḥkaraṇa*.

chakra: lit. “trap”; energy centre situated inside the spinal cord. The energy gets trapped there and its type/quality is changed.

chandra loka: lunar world.

Chit: absolute Consciousness; one of the three essential aspects of *Brahman*, the others being *Sat* and *Ānanda*.

chitta: see **antaḥkaraṇa**.

daṇḍī sannyāsī: see **sannyāsī**.

darshana: lit. “looking at” or “seeing” (pronounced as *darshan*); 1. vision of God; sight of a sage, a saint, a sacred image, etc. 2. also used as a technical term to signify the respective views of the six classical Hindu philosophical Schools because in this context it enables one to directly perceive the essence of Reality.

devatā: a god; celestial power.

Devī: the goddess.

dhāraṇā: see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

dharma: 1. universal cosmic order. 2. moral duty of an individual. 3. that which sustains the world. 4. right action.

dhyāna: 1. meditation; 2. in Hindi *dhyāna* means contemplation; the seventh discipline of Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga yoga* (see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**).

dikṣhā: see **mantra dikṣhā**.

dvaita: dualism.

dviguṇa: 1. a term used in the *Vedas* denoting alertness or awareness reflected in the mind. 2. another name for *jīva*, the individual soul.

gharavālā: lit. “the owner of the home”; the husband is addressed as *gharavālā* by his wife.

gharavālī: lit. “the owner of the home”; the wife is addressed as *gharavālī* by her husband.

Gītā: lit. “song”; usually designates the *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the most revered Hindu sacred scriptures, believed to be the essence of the

Upaniṣhads and considered a *Vedāntic* scripture. It contains the spiritual teachings given by Lord Kṛiṣṇa to his disciple Arjuna on the battlefield.

granthī: knot.

grihastha: see **āshram**.

guṇa: 1. the three fundamental modes of *Prakṛiti*, or primordial Nature: *i. sattva* or *sattvaguṇa* represents light, intelligence, purity, selflessness and inclination towards spirituality (adj. *sāttvic*), *ii. rajas* or *rajoguṇa* represents the vital energy, activity and desire (adj. *rājasic*), *iii. tamas* or *tamoguṇa* represents inertia, ignorance and darkness (adj. *tāmasic*); the interplay of these three *guṇas* is the material cause of the whole universe in its gross, subtle and causal form. (Also see **Sāṅkhya**) 2. In common usage *guṇa* means a quality or attribute like the hardness of stone, sweetness of sugar, truthfulness, anger, etc.

Guru: teacher; spiritual Master.

Gurudeva: an epithet used for the Guru in Hinduism showing deep reverence for the Guru as the embodiment of God.

haṭha yoga: a particular *yoga*; practice of postures (*āsanas*), *prāṇāyama* and subsequent control over one's body and *prāṇa* are prominent in *haṭha yoga*. But the highest aim of *haṭha yoga* is Self-Realization.

Hinayāna: a Buddhist School which is widespread in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Hiraṇyagarbha: lit. "golden womb"; see **Saguṇa Brahman**.

Iṣṭa: lit. "chosen"; personal God; the chosen deity of an individual worshipper (also called *Iṣṭa devatā*).

Ishqa Hakikī: love of a human being for the Divine; a term used in Sufism.

Ishqa Mijāzī: love of a human being for another human being; a term used in Sufism.

Īshvara: omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God who is the controller of all the subtle and gross worlds; see **Saguṇa Brahman**.

Īshvara praṇidhāna: surrender to God; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

Jain: a follower of Jainism, one of the main religions of India, initiated by Lord Mahāvīra, a contemporary of Lord Buddha.

japa: the repetition of a *mantra* or a name of God; **ajapā japa:** when the *japa* is taken up by the subconscious mind and goes on spontaneously without effort, like breathing.

jīñāsu: an aspirant of Truth who works wholeheartedly to realize the Truth.

jīva: the individual soul; syn. with *jīvātmā*. According to *Vedānta*, *jīva* is the reflection of the Spirit (*Ātmā*) in the individual mind, plus the mind; the doer and enjoyer of the fruits of action.

jñāna yoga: the path of knowledge.

jñānī: 1. lit. “one who knows”; one who has realized the Self/Truth and has no question or doubt left in him. 2. also used to refer to a seeker following the path of *jñāna*.

jyotiṣhaḥ jyoti: lit. “the Light of all lights”; an expression used in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanṣhad* for *Ātmā* or *Brahman*.

Kālī: 1. when the Divine Mother or the conscious Energy of God (*Shakti*) destroys, it is called *Kālī*; 2. one of the ten names of the Divine Mother.

kaliyuga: according to Hinduism, the last of the four *yugas* (ages), in which the world is at present. It is characterized by increasing disorder, distress, lack of morality and spirituality.

kāma: desire; sexual desire.

Kāraka Ātmā: 1. a sage who is liberated but retains his/her subtle body and can materialise it at will and appear before a devotee to help that particular devotee. 2. a liberated soul who voluntarily takes birth as a human being to accomplish a specific task to push up the process of evolution.

karma: lit. “an action”; 1. *karma* is comprised of the doer of an action with an ego or sense of doership, the motivation/desire behind the action, the wilful act, and the instrument of action, i.e. senses and mind. Some scholars describe *karma* as being of two types:

- a. ordinary *karma* in which the doer has the ego of being the doer, but the motive behind the action is of a common nature, such as the desire to live, to be happy, healthy, peaceful etc. For example, actions like waking, resting, eating, bathing etc.
- b. special *karma*, which is prompted by a specific motive, whether good or bad. For example, to abuse or praise someone, to work hard for success, to harm someone out of enmity etc. This is sometimes called *vikarma*.

2. *karma* also means the universal law of cause and effect implemented by God according to which performing an action is like sowing a seed, and therefore, “as you sow, so shall you reap.” The law of *karma* is associated with the theory of reincarnation/rebirth of the soul because all the *karmas* don’t bear their fruits within the present lifetime of the doer. It does not mean fatalism. It implies relative freedom of performing present *karmas*, but being bound by the result/fruits thereof. The law of *karma* applies to all, irrespective of one’s faith or belief. *Karma* may bear fruit immediately or later, depending upon so many factors.

There are mainly three types of *karmas*:

- a. **prārabdha karma**: past *karma* or an action which has started bearing fruit. Its impact cannot be escaped by self-effort and must be borne. But God can overrule this phenomenon/law and can change it, though very rarely.
- b. **sañchita karma**: those past *karmas* which are stored as *sanskāras* and impressions in the subconscious mind, but which have yet not become ripe or started bearing fruit; they can be changed. *Sañchita karma* is like an unreleased arrow stretched on a bow. There is a force projected into it, but it has not yet been released.
- c. **vartamāna karma or āgāmī karma**: an action which is being done now and which will bear fruit in the future. The soul has relative freedom to perform *vartamāna karmas*.

There are five more terms related with *karma*:

- i. **akarma**: lit. “no *karma*”; a *karma* performed without the sense of doership by the one who has realized his or her real Self as *akartā-abhoktā*, but with awareness. *Akarma* does not bear any fruit, good or bad, nor does it bind because there is no sense of doership behind it.

- ii. **sahaja karma**: lit. “spontaneous action”; according to Shri Chandra Swāmījī, *sahaja karma* is the highest form of *karma*. It has no motive behind it. It is different from *akarma* because in it both the sense of doership and the sense of non-doership co-exist, in the same way as they exist together in God at the same time. It cannot be understood logically. *Sahaja karma* is a free *karma*. It is the *karma* of the one established in the integral Realization of absolute Reality (i.e. all the aspects of absolute Reality), the *karma* of the one who is free of dualities, free of likes and dislikes.
- iii. **vikarma or niṣhiddha karma**: such wrong actions as are not sanctioned by the higher conscience or holy scriptures. Some scholars have also interpreted *vikarma* to mean a special *karma*, as previously mentioned in 1b.
- iv. **niṣhkāma karma**: *karma* performed in the spirit of selflessness without desire of receiving the fruits of the action. It is an action done with a selfless attitude and the person doing it may have the sense of doership.
- v. **kāmya karma**: action performed for fulfilling a specific desire.
- vi. **prāyashchitta karma**: religious acts to atone for some sin or wrongful act.

karma kāṇḍa: the portion of any religious scripture which deals with rituals and religious practices. It is not the essential part of the religion and changes with time and situation. Every religion has its own *karma kāṇḍa*.

karma yoga: the yogic path of selfless service and performing action in the name of or for the sake of God without any desire of receiving the fruit thereof.

khudāi: the Godliness of God (Urdu word).

kīrtan: devotional singing in chorus.

koṣha: see **pañcha koṣha**.

kripā: grace

kriyā: 1. activity; 2. a particular practice of *haṭha yoga*.

kriyā shakti: energy of action.

kumbhaka: a pause in which the breath stops between the incoming and outgoing of the breath, and vice versa.

kumbha melā: an important religious festival in India during which millions and millions of *sādhus*, *sannyāsīs* and devotees gather together to bathe in a holy river. It is held by turn in Haridwar, Nasik, Ujjain and Allahbad. At each of these pilgrimage places a half *kumbha*, called *ardha kumbha*, is held after every six years, and the full *kumbha melā* is held after every twelve years.

kuṇḍalini: divine energy (*shakti*) which remains latent in the *mulādhāra chakra* like a coiled snake and becomes active when roused by specific yogic exercises or *sādhana*.

līlā: the divine play; an action which comes out of joy. In Hinduism, the whole manifestation is considered as the divine play or *līlā* of God.

loka: a world; a part of the universe.

mahābhāva: the state of ecstasy of God's love; a very blissful state in which the devotee is totally immersed in divine Bliss. In some cases he/she may even lose body consciousness.

Mahāmāyā: see *māyā*.

Mahāyāna: lit. "Great Vehicle"; a name for the Buddhist School which developed later advocating the *Bodhisattva* ideal.

mala: impurity.

mālā: a rosary for doing *japa*; a garland.

mana: mind; an instrument of thinking; part of *antaḥkaraṇa* (inner organ of relative perception).

manana: spiritual reflection; the sixth part of the seven-fold *Vedāntic* discipline (see **Vedānta**).

maṇipura chakra: the third of the seven *chakras*, located in the navel region. It is considered the centre of *prāṇa*, the vital force.

manomaya puruṣha: pure Consciousness identified with the mind or mental consciousness; see **pañcha koṣha**.

mantra: a formula comprising words or sounds believed to be of divine nature, and used in a ritual or meditation practice.

mantra dīkṣhā: initiation by which the *mantra* is transmitted to the disciple by his Guru.

mantra japa: see **japa**.

māyā: the delusive power which makes the Infinite appear as finite; the power of ignorance which binds the soul. **Mahāmāyā:** the divine power which liberates the soul.

mokṣha: Liberation; release from the cycle of birth and death (*sansāra*).

mūlabandha: a *yogic* posture in which the sphincters of the anus are kept contracted.

mūlādhāra: the first of the seven *chakras* (energy centres); it is situated in the lowest extremity of the spinal cord, where the *kuṇḍalini* lies coiled.

muni: sage, ascetic.

nāda: lit. “sound”; see **anāhata nāda**.

nāma: name; in a spiritual context it means a *mantra* or a holy name of God which is used for *japa*.

naivedya: a reverential offering to someone who is of a higher status than the one who offers.

namāz: prayer which the Muslims offer five times in a day.

nididhyāsana: concentrating or contemplating on a single non-dual *Vedāntic* idea; seventh part of the *Vedāntic* discipline (see **Vedānta**).

Nirguṇa Brahman: pure Consciousness, passive, immutable, free of all attributes or adjuncts or *guṇas*.

Nirvāṇa: in Hinduism and in Buddhism synonymous of Liberation; “extinction” of all worldly desires and attachments; liberation from the vicious cycle of birth and death.

nirvikalpa samādhi: see **samādhi**.

niyama: see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

Nyāya: lit. “logic”; the first school of Indian philosophy propounded by the great sage Gautama. It is concerned with the matter of right and logical thinking, and acquiring the means to attain true/valid knowledge of reality. Like the other philosophies, its aim is Liberation, though through the application of principles of right and rational thinking, which are sixteen in number:

1. **pramāṇa:** a very important term which means the proof of valid knowledge. It is of four types: i) *pratyakṣha* – direct perception of a sense-object, or mental cognition, or intuitive direct experience of the *Ātmā*. It is the highest source of knowledge whether worldly or spiritual. ii) *anumāna* – knowledge acquired through the process of reasoning or logical inference. iii) *upamāna* – knowledge of an object acquired by comparing it with a known example. iv) *śabda* – lit. verbal knowledge; knowledge acquired through the words of an authoritative and trustworthy person or the words of the *Vedas* or revealed scriptures.
2. **prameya:** the twelve objects of knowledge: Self (*Ātmā*), body, senses, sense-objects like smell, taste, etc., cognition i.e. knowledge, mind, activity, mental infirmities like attachment and hatred etc., rebirth, pain-pleasure, suffering and Liberation (*apavarga*).

Nyāya also accepts the seven *padārthas* of *Vaiśeṣika* philosophy and its theory of the physical world and Liberation. For Liberation the seeker should have the right knowledge of the nature of all types of realities. Only then can one, through the removal of ignorance, know the *Ātmā*.

The remaining fourteen terms are: 3. **sanshaya** – doubt. 4. **prayojana** – final goal of reasoning. 5. **ḍṛiṣṭānta** – an undisputed fact illustrating a rule. 6. **siddhānta** – doctrine taught and accepted as true in a system. 7. **avayava** – inference. 8. **tarka** – hypothetical argument to justify one’s conclusion by exposing the absurdity of the opponent. 9. **nirṇaya** – a definite and valid knowledge. 10. **vāda** – a discussion conducted according to the rules of *Nyāya* to arrive at truth. 11. **jalpa** – a discussion aimed to win over another rather than know the truth. 12. **vitāṇḍa** – debate only to refute the opponent and not to establish one’s own stand. 13. **hetvābhāsa** – an apparent reason; not the real reason. 14. **ḥhala** – a mischievous reply by distorting the intent of a statement. 15. **jati** – an unfair

reply based on false analogy. **16. nigrasthāna** – the point where one is declared defeated in a debate.

Nyāya and *Vaiśeṣika* philosophies are much the same and are collectively called *paramāṇuvāda* or atomic theory, which are realistic and pluralistic in nature. Many portions of their theories have been adopted by other philosophies.

ojas: the rarefied and sublimated form of sexual energy.

Om/Aum: a symbol which represents all the aspects of the Divine; *Om* is the most sacred syllable in all the religions born in India.

pāmara: one who cannot think about what is the purpose and aim of life. He lives on the level of animal-consciousness.

padma: lotus. **Padma Nabh:** a name for Viṣṇu.

pañcha koṣha: lit. “five coverings or sheaths”; these *koṣhas* are as if five sheaths on the *Ātmā*; they are of different colours, thickness and characteristics and are contained within each other. The *Ātmā* is immanent in all these *koṣhas*. The light of pure Consciousness or relationless *Ātmā* is variously distorted by these sheaths, though it is also transcendent. The nearer or the more transparent a sheath is, the more exactly it reflects the light of pure Consciousness relative to the other sheaths. Thus, relatively, *ānandamaya koṣha* reflects the light and Bliss of the *Ātmā* most clearly and the *annamaya koṣha* least clearly.

1. **ānandamaya koṣha:** the bliss-body; it is the first covering on the *Ātmā*. It is the veil of ignorance and is the *kāraṇa sharīra* or causal body of the soul. The pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* identified with *ānandamaya koṣha* in the state of deep sleep or *suṣṭupti* is called *ānandamaya puruṣha* or *prājñā*. For a *yogi*, this *koṣha* means the highest form of *savikalpa samādhi* in which the light and Bliss of the *Ātmā* are experienced, but the sense of limited “*I-ness*” also persists.
2. **vijñānamaya koṣha:** the second covering on the *Ātmā*, that of ego and intellect, which encases the *ānandamaya koṣha*. It makes the pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* appear as the knower, chooser, doer of action and the enjoyer of the fruits thereof. The *ānandamaya*

koṣha is unmanifest in it. The pure Consciousness identified with *viññānmayā koṣha* is called *viññānamaya puruṣha*. In the highest state of *viññānmayā koṣha*, attained by a *yogī*, the supramental mind manifests and all paradoxes/pairs of opposites are harmoniously reconciled.

3. **manomaya koṣha:** the third covering/sheath, that of the mind and five senses of perception (*jñānendriyañ*), which encases the *viññānmayā koṣha*. The above two *koṣhas* are unmanifest in it. It clouds the real nature of the *Ātmā* and makes It appear as thinking energy characterized by desire, doubt, infatuation, and pain and pleasure. It is endowed with willpower and is of the nature of the energy of relative perception. Pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* identified with *manomaya koṣha* is called *manomaya puruṣha*. In the highest state of this *koṣha*, the *yogī* has the first-hand intimate knowledge of the subtle objects of meditation.
4. **prāṇamaya koṣha:** the fourth covering, which encases the *manomaya koṣha*, is made of 5 *prāṇas* (five types of vital energy, namely *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*) and five senses/means of action (*karmendriyañ*). It makes the relationless, non-doer *Ātmā* appear as if the doer, speaker, giver, mover and as if associated with hunger, thirst etc. This sheath is of the nature of the energy of action. The previous three *koṣhas* are unmanifest in it. The pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* identified with *prāṇamaya koṣha* is called *prāṇamaya puruṣha*. In the highest state of this *koṣha* the *yogī* has the first-hand intimate knowledge of the *prāṇic* objects of meditation.

Viññānmayā koṣha together with *manomaya koṣha* and *prāṇamaya koṣha* are called the subtle body. Pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* identified with this *sūkṣhma sharīra* or subtle body in the dream state is called *tejasa* in *Vedānta*.

5. **annamaya koṣha:** the *sthūla sharīra* or gross physical body; the fifth and last covering/sheath on the *Ātmā*, which encases the *prāṇamaya koṣha*. It is made up of five primal elements (i.e. ether, air, fire, water and earth). Since it is made of and sustained by *anna* (food), it is called *annamaya koṣha*. Because of this *koṣha* the infinite, immaterial pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* appears as limited, physical and subject to disease, birth and death. All the previous four *koṣhas* are unmanifest in it. Pure Consciousness or

Ātmā identified with *annamaya koṣha* in the wakeful state is called **annamaya puruṣha** or **vishva** in *Vedānta*. In the highest state of this *koṣha* the *yogi* has the right, intimate and first-hand knowledge of the gross objects of meditation.

The seeker of Truth, through meditation and spiritual practices, gradually and progressively penetrates and transcends each *koṣha*, starting from the *annamaya koṣha*. In the course of spiritual *sāadhanā* the seeker has various spiritual experiences specific to the *koṣhas* ranging from the gross world, to the subtle world, to the causal world. Finally, transcending all the *koṣhas*, the seeker realizes the *Ātmā* in Its pure and pristine nature. This is Self-Realization.

paṇḍita: a scholar versed in the holy scriptures; a priest.

Parabrahman: lit. “the Supreme *Brahman*”; the Absolute, the Supreme Being, Godhead, absolute Consciousness; the eternal Principle that is the ground of all existence.

parā vidyā: see **vidyā**.

Pārasī: a follower of the Zoroastrian religion, which was born in Iran.

Patañjali: sage and author of the *Yoga Sūtras*, *yoga* aphorisms which comprise the philosophy of **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

prājña: the individual soul identified with the causal body in the state of deep sleep or *sūshupti*; also see **pañcha koṣhas**.

Prakṛiti: primordial, insentient, material Nature composed of the three *guṇas*; in *Sāṅkhya* philosophy it is considered the ultimate material Reality and the material cause of all matter and energy; in *Vedānta*, syn. with the cosmic divine manifestation or *māyā*.

prāṇa: breath; vital energy; adj. *prāṇic*.

praṇāma: bowing down before someone out of reverence; salutation; prostration.

prāṇayāma: control of *prāṇa* through regulation of breath; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

prārabdha: fate; see **karma**.

prasāda: lit. “grace”; grace bestowed without any selfish motive, and in the state of Bliss and selfless love. It may be in the form of a single toffee or one billion rupees, or it may be spiritual blessings.

pratyāhāra: see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

pravṛitti: involvement in activity; autonym of *nivṛitti*, which means non-involvement.

prem: lit. “love”; selfless love.

priya: dear, beloved; lovable, pleasing.

Pūrva Mimāṃsā: the fifth school of Indian philosophy which describes the processes of creation and dissolution of the universe and different worlds, God, different cosmic powers, the law of *karma* (as you sow, so shall you reap), the soul and its mutual relationship with all the above, etc. It also lays down elaborate rules relating to righteous *karmas* (actions) and the performance of *Vedic* rites and rituals like *yajñas* etc. through which man attains enjoyments in this life and rises to higher worlds/heaven after death. Since it deals with *karmas*, this philosophy is also called **karma kāṇḍa**.

Puruṣha: 1. in *Sāṅkhya*, one of the two fundamental principles (*tattvas*) which is pure Consciousness and is the non-doer, non-experiencer and the Seer of all the movements of *Prakṛiti*, the second fundamental principle. **2.** in the Upaniṣhads and the Bhagavad *Gītā* it is used to mean the immortal Self. **3.** in common parlance *puruṣha* means a male person.

puruṣhārtha: self-effort.

rāga: attachment based on selfishness.

Ramāyaṇa: a holy scripture authored by sage Vālmīki which narrates the *līlā* (divine sport) of Lord Rāma; a great epic containing profound moral and spiritual teachings.

rajas: see **guṇas**.

ṛiṣhi: lit. “seer”; the *ṛiṣhis* are the realized *Vedic* sages to whom the *Vedas* were revealed.

rūpa: form.

rozī and rotī: a popular phrase meaning livelihood; the essential things needed for living.

sādhaka: the practitioner of a spiritual path; spiritual aspirant.

sādhanā: a general term for spiritual effort.

sādhu: an ascetic who has controlled his senses, renounced the world and who is dedicated to the search for God.

sādhu puruṣha: a noble person of higher values like humanity, morality, spirituality.

Saguṇa Brahman: lit. “*Brahman* with attributes or adjuncts”; According to *Vedānta*, when *Brahman*, i.e. absolute, timeless, pure Consciousness, associates with *māyā* or *Prakṛiti* on the universal level, it is called *Saguṇa Brahman*, *Apara Brahman* or *Kārya Brahman*. It is the Supreme Soul. But *Saguṇa Brahman* has an individual aspect as well, called the individual soul or *jīva*. The Supreme Soul, called *Īshvara*, is Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and is the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of this world, and is also compassionate. It has three aspects:

1. **Virāṭ or Vaishvānara:** When the universal Soul (*Īshvara* or God) identifies Itself with the gross universal body, it is called *Virāṭ*, i.e. gross universal Being. It is the totality of all the gross individual souls of the universe. *Hiraṇyagarbha* and *Avyākṛita* are immanent in it.
2. **Hiraṇyagarbha or Brahmā:** When the universal Soul (*Īshvara*) identifies Itself with the universal *antaḥkarṇa* or mind, It is called *Hiraṇyagarbha* or golden womb because It is the womb of all creation. It is the subtle universal Being and is also called *Brahmā*, the Creator. It is the totality of all the individual minds and the subtle world, which also includes the *prāṇic* world. It is the Creator of all the gross and subtle worlds and is omnipotent. The universal causal Being or *Avyākṛita* is immanent in It.
3. **Avyākṛita or Īshvara:** When the universal Soul is identified with the causal universal body, i.e. the totality of individual causal bodies, It is called *Īshvara* or *Avyākṛita* (the unmanifest). It is the universal causal Being. *Brahman* or pure Consciousness is immanent in It. Essentially it is pure *sattva guṇa* with minimal

traces of *rajoguṇa* and *tamoguṇa*. Therefore it is Omniscient, Omnipresent and Omnipotent and is the highest aspect of *Saguṇa Brahman*. It is the starting point of all creation because even the Creator, i.e. *Hiraṇyagarbha* or *Brahmā* is created by It. It is the seed or ultimate cause of all creation. The scriptures call it *Īshvara*, meaning It is endowed with all glory and power. It is called *Avyākṛita* (unmanifest) because the subtle and gross worlds are latent in It like a seed and are not yet manifested. In fact, all these three aspects belong to one and the same *Īshvara* or God.

The *jīva* or individual aspect of *Saguṇa Brahman* also has three aspects:

1. **vishva**: individual soul identified with the physical body in the waking state.
2. **tejasa**: individual soul identified with the subtle body in the dream state.
3. **prājña**: individual soul identified with the causal body in the deep sleep state.

sahaja karma: a spontaneous action; see **karma**.

sahasrāra: lit. “the thousand petaled lotus”; the seventh *chakra*, the highest centre to which *kuṇḍalini shakti* (spiritual energy) rises.

sākṣhatkāra: lit. “direct experience”; 1. *sākṣhatkāra* of the *Ātmā*: the Spirit, disidentified with the mind, remains established in itself. 2. *sākṣhatkāra* of one’s *Iṣṭa*: the senses and the mind of the devotee are totally absorbed in one’s *Iṣṭa*. The polarity of the subject and object still remains.

samādhi: complete absorption of the mind in the object of contemplation; the eighth discipline of Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga yoga*. *Samādhi* comprises a variety of higher mental states: 1. **savikalpa samādhi**: the *samādhi* in which a sense of difference between the knower and his or her object of knowledge survives. 2. **nirvikalpa samādhi**: the *samādhi* in which the distinction between the knower, the knowledge and the known vanishes absolutely; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

samarpaṇa: lit. “surrender”; self-surrender.

Sāṅkhya: the third school of Indian philosophy, propounded by sage Kapil Muni. It believes in two fundamental principles/realities: *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti*. *Puruṣha* is pure Consciousness, the Seer, passive, immovable, immutable, dimensionless, eternal and free. *Prakṛiti* is undifferentiated primordial matter. It is inert, insentient, unintelligent and phenomenal. It is composed of the three *guṇas*: *sattva*, characterized by light and joy, *rajas*, characterized by activity, and *tamas*, characterized by inertia or resistance to action (see **guṇas**).

There are 24 principles which successively evolve on the cosmic level when *Puruṣha* interacts with *Prakṛiti*. The three *guṇas* are present in all the modifications of *Prakṛiti*:

1. **Prakṛiti:** the primordial matter in its subtlest state of potentiality of manifesting all the physical universe including matter and energy. In *Prakṛiti* there is complete equilibrium among the three *guṇas*. It is unmanifest; also called *pradhāna*.
2. **mahattattva:** cosmic intelligence; the first product of the evolution of *Prakṛiti*. It is pure *sattva guṇa* with minimal traces of *rajas* and *tamas*. In the later modifications, *rajas* and *tamas* increase in varying degrees.
3. **ahaṅkāra:** cosmic ego; it gives living beings the sense of being an individual or limited self.
4. **mind:** evolves from the *sāttvic* part of *ahaṅkāra*.
5. **five jñānendriyāḥ:** five senses of relative cognition, i.e. hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell. These also evolve from the *sāttvic* aspect of *ahaṅkāra*.
6. **five karmendriyāḥ:** five senses of activity evolve from the *rajasic* aspect of *ahaṅkāra*. They are: doing, walking, speaking, reproduction and excretion.
7. **tanmātrās:** the 5 fundamental physical elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth) in their purest and subtlest form. These evolve from the *tāmasic* aspect of *ahaṅkāra*.
8. **pañcha mahābhūtas:** five fundamental gross elements; ether, air, fire, water and earth in their gross form. They evolve from the corresponding five *tanmātrās* as a result of the process of grossification or *pañchīkaraṇa* (mutual intermixing) of the *tanmātrās*.

However, at the level of the individual soul, the mind-intellect is made from the *sāttvic* aspect of the *tanmātrās*, ego from the *rājasic* aspect of the *tanmātrās*, and the physical body from the *tāmasic* aspect of the *tanmātrās*.

All physical events are the manifestation of the evolution of *Prakṛiti*. The manifestation is further categorized into animate and inanimate realms. In the animate realm, *Puruṣha* separates into countless sentient beings or individual units of consciousness through association with the individual mind-body. Thus *Sāṅkhya* believes in the plurality of *Puruṣha* and multiplicity of evolved *Prakṛiti*.

According to *Sāṅkhya*, in the process of evolution the primal *Prakṛiti* is transformed with the intermingling of *Puruṣha* and becomes differentiated into the myriad forms of manifestation at the individual and universal level. *Sāṅkhya* holds that all evolution is in fact the unfoldment of *Prakṛiti*, i.e. the effect is already hidden in the cause. Thus nothing new is created and nothing is destroyed. It is called *satkāryavāda* or *pariṇamavāda* in technical parlance. Dissolution follows evolution. At the time of dissolution all the modifications of *Prakṛiti* sequentially dissolve back into their primal cause, i.e. *Prakṛiti*.

In the individual soul *Puruṣha* is identified with the body-mind, which is the product of *Prakṛiti*. Liberation means the breaking of this identification and realization of the *Puruṣha*, the conscious and free principle as the true Being of the soul.

sansāra: lit. “wandering”; the cycle and bondage of life, death and rebirth, the worldly existence.

sanskāra: subliminal impression; potential propensity.

sañchita karma: see **karma**.

sañkalpa: volition or will.

sankīrtan: see **kīrtan**.

sannyāsa: renunciation; the fourth and last stage (**āshram**) in life according to orthodox Hinduism; the monastic life of contemplation and *sādhana* in which all the worldly ties are severed and which is exclusively dedicated to the goal of God-Realization.

sannyāsī: [fem. *sannyāsinī*] a renunciate; one who has received *sannyāsa dīkṣhā*, initiation into *sannyāsa*. **Daṇḍī sannyāsī**: those *sannyāsīs* who follow the code of conduct laid down by Shaṅkarāchārya. They keep with them a stick (*daṇḍa*) as a sign of their tradition.

Sat: absolute Existence.

Sat-Chit-Ānanda: lit. “Existence-Consciousness-Bliss”; represents *Brahman*, the absolute Consciousness.

satsaṅga: lit. “to be in the presence of Truth/Reality”; to be in the company of holy men or Enlightened Ones.

sattva: see *guṇa*.

savikalpa samādhi: see **samādhi**.

sevā: lit. “service”; selfless service performed in the name of God.

Shabda Surat Yoga: *japa* of God’s name.

Shaivism: a doctrine in Hinduism in which the different aspects of Lord Shiva are mentioned. Shiva is a name of God or Supreme Consciousness in Hinduism.

shakti: lit. “energy”; divine power or energy conceived as the feminine and creative aspect of the Divine. There are mainly three types of *shakti* or energies:

1. **kriyā shakti**: energy of action; the manifestation of *prāṇa shakti* (vital energy). Activity is the quality of *prāṇa*.
2. **bhāva shakti**: the energy of emotion and feeling.
3. **jñāna shakti**: the energy of understanding or knowing.

shaktipāt: transmission of spiritual energy from the Guru to the disciple.

Shaṅkara: another name of *Shiva*.

Shaṅkarāchārya: the great philosopher saint of the 7th century who propounded the theory of *Advaita Vedānta*, also called *māyāvāda* or *vīvartavāda*, according to which the world is a mere illusion and not real.

sharaṇam: refuge.

shāstra: lit. “scripture”; holy scriptures in which the fundamental principles of the six classical Schools of Hindu philosophy are expounded.

Shiva: **1.** the destroyer aspect of God; one of the divine trio in Hinduism, the others being *Brahmā* and *Viṣṇu*. **2.** also used for Godhead. **3.** wellbeing; auspicious; good.

shloka: a verse.

shraddhā: deep faith.

shravaṇa: a part of the *Vedāntic* discipline which consists of right listening to spiritual teachings; see **Vedānta**.

shrotriya: One who is well versed in the *Vedas*, i.e. who understands the real intent of the revealed scriptures.

siddhāsana: a particular sitting *yogic* posture for meditation.

Spiritual Gems: name of a small booklet containing profound spiritual revelations in the form of aphorisms authored by revered Shri Chandra Swāmiji Udāsīn.

sūrya loka: solar world.

sūtra: an aphorism.

svarūpa: one’s essential Nature.

swāmī: [fem. *swāminī*] lit. “master” (master of one’s body, senses and mind); title of respect for a Hindu monk.

Taittirīya Upaniṣhad: see **Upaniṣhads**.

tamas or **tamoguṇa:** see **guṇas**.

Tāntric: a person who practises *tāntrism*, a philosophy whose doctrinal texts are called *Tantras*. *Tāntrism* emphasizes the feminine energy (*shakti*) of a bipolar reality and seeks to unite these polarities to attain *mokṣha*.

tapas: asceticism; the practice of austerity which is part of *niyama* in Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga yoga*.

tattva: lit. “fundamental reality”; principle of anything; according to *Sāṅkhya* there are twenty-four principles of *Prakṛiti*, i.e. primordial cosmic Nature.

tejas: the divine lustre cum magnetism that can be felt when one goes near a saintly person.

trikāla sandhyā: the Hindu practice of sitting in prayer and contemplation on God three times a day.

Udāsīn: denomination of Indian monks which started from *ṛiṣhi* Sanātan Kumar, one of the four *Vedic ṛiṣhis* known as the Kumara Brothers. One of the greatest exponents of the Udāsīn tradition was Achārya Shri Chandrajī, son of Shri Guru Nānak Devjī. Like Shaṅkarāchārya of the *sannyāsī* tradition, he established *mathas* and *āshrams* throughout India.

Upaniṣhads: lit. “sitting near the Guru to receive spiritual instructions”; the concluding sections of the *Vedas* containing the *Vedānta* philosophy; adj. *upaniṣhadic*. The eleven main *Upaniṣhads* are: Brihadāraṇyaka, Chāṇdogya, Īshāvāsya, Kena, Kaṭha, Māṇḍukya, Muṇḍak, Prashna, Taittirīya, Aitareya, Shvetāshvatara.

vairāgya: detachment/dispassion.

Vaisheshika: one of the six systems of Indian philosophy, founded by sage Kaṇāda. Its aim, like the other systems, is complete cessation of suffering and liberation of the individual soul through right knowledge of reality. According to it, there are seven fundamental and eternal *padārthas*. *Padārtha* literally means that which is implied by a word and therefore refers to all objects of knowledge or reality. The first six are positive realities:

1. **dravya** (substance): these are of nine types: earth, water, fire, air, ether, space, time, mind and Spirit or *Ātmā*. While the first four are composed of the smallest indestructible particles of matter, called atoms, the *akāsha* (ether), space and time are imperceptible substances, each of which is one and all-pervading. Mind is an internal sense of the soul and is an eternal substance which is atomic and not all-pervading. *Ātmā* is an eternal and all-pervading substance, which is the substratum of the phenomenon of Consciousness. There are two types of *Ātmās*:

jīvātmā and *Paramātmā* (*Īshvara*). The individual self is not one, but many, while *Īshvara* is one who is omnipotent, omniscient and is the creator of this world.

2. **guṇa** (quality): that which exists in a substance. They are broadly 24 in number.
3. **karma** (action): a movement which belongs to substance.
4. **sāmānya** (generality): the eternal essence common to all the individuals of a class, like the cowness in all cows.
5. **viśeṣha** (particularity): the element of unique individuality in the atoms of the fundamental substances. It is because of this particularity that one atom of earth is different from another atom of earth and one mind is different from another mind.
6. **samavāya** (inherence): an eternal relation between two entities, of which one inheres in the other. As the whole is in the part, a quality or an action is in a substance and particularity is in an atom.
7. **abhāva** (non-existence): the mystical seventh category of reality. God creates and destroys the world out of the combination of eternal atoms in eternal time and space with reference to the spiritual evolution of individual soul in coherence with their *karmas*. The world is governed by Him according to the law of *karma*. It believes in the endless cycle of creation and dissolution of the world. This system is tied to *Nyāya* philosophy. It also emphasises the practice of physical, moral and spiritual discipline to achieve liberation.

vaiṣṇava: one who worships God in the form of *Vishṇu*.

vānaprastha: the third “*āshram*” in life according to orthodox Hinduism during which the *grihashtas* (householders) would retire from the worldly life to devote themselves to selfless service/spirituality.

vartamān karma: see **karma**.

vāsanā: deep desire; strong longing.

Vedas: lit. “knowledge”; most ancient scriptures in the world, considered to be an encyclopaedia of knowledge, both worldly and spiritual; the revealed word of God. The Vedas are taken as the highest authority in all Hindu philosophies. They are four in number: Ṛigveda, Atharaveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda.

Vedānta or Uttara Mīmāṃsā: lit. end or essence of the *Vedas*; the last of the six *darshanas* or philosophies. It means the set of texts comprising of the *Upaniṣhads*, which contain the quintessence of the *Vedas*, the *Brahmasūtras* of sage Veda Vyāsa, the *Bhagavadgīta* which are collectively termed *prasthānatrayī*. It also includes other such scriptures which believe in the *Vedāntic* principles. It modifies the Sāṅkhya system and affirms that the fundamental Reality is absolute, eternal, pure Consciousness and is One without a second, not two; adj. *Vedāntic*.

Advaita Vedānta: the most influential school of *Vedānta*, propounded mainly by Shaṅkarāchārya. It affirms that there is total identity among *Brahman* (ultimate reality), *jīvātmā* (individual soul) and *Prakṛiti* and its countless manifestations, and that the apparent multiplicity is only phenomenal and illusive. It is called *māyāvāda* or *vivarttvāda*.

The *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy describes not only the nature of *Brahman*, but, like *aṣṭāṅga yoga*, gives a practical path/discipline to achieve this goal of Liberation or firsthand Realization of *Brahman*. It has seven limbs of which four are called *sādhanā chatusṣṭaya* or four-fold spiritual practice. They are:

1. **viveka:** discrimination between the Real and unreal.
2. **vairāgya:** the spirit of dispassion or disinterestedness towards all that is transient and phenomenal whether belonging to this world or other worlds.
3. **shamādi-ṣhaṭka:** six essential spiritual virtues i.e. *shama* (peace of mind), *dama* (self-control), *uparati* (withdrawal of mind from sense objects), *titikṣhā* (forebearance or endurance), *samādhāna* (concentration of mind) and *shraddhā* (faith).
4. **mumukṣhatva:** deep aspiration for Liberation.
5. **shravaṇa:** right listening to the Guru's teaching.
6. **manana:** deep and repeated reflection on the teaching thus received.
7. **nididhyāsana:** contemplation on that inferential *Vedāntic* idea/ thought which emerges in the mind as a result of deep reflection.

Vedāntin: a follower of *Vedānta*.

vidyā: knowledge.

1. **aparā vidyā:** the knowledge which is useful for worldly matters but does not lead to lasting happiness and peace.

2. **parā vidyā**: the supreme Knowledge, the Knowledge of *Parabrahman*, the eternal Principle that is the ground of all existence.

vijñānamaya puruṣha: see **pañcha kośhas**.

vikarma: see **karma**.

vikṣhepa: mental disturbance.

Virāt: the Supreme Soul in its universal gross physical form; see **Saḡuṇa Brahman**.

vichāra vimarsha: Hindi name for sharing views; deliberation.

viṣhayī: one who is strongly attached with worldly objects and situations.

Vishṇu: one of the three aspects of God, according to the Hindu trinity, who is the preserver and the sustainer of this world.

viveka: right thinking, discriminating between what is real and what is unreal, between what is temporal and what is lasting; the first limb of the *Vedāntic* discipline.

Viveka Chūḍāmaṇi: lit. “The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination”; a famous book by Shaṅkarāchārya.

Vāheguru: lit. “the wonderful Guru”; used for God in the Sikh tradition.

yama: see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

yoga: lit. “union”; usually refers to *Patañjali’s Yoga*; generally any practice or discipline for experiencing union of the individual soul with the Supreme Being.

Yoga Sūtras: see **Patañjali**.

yogī: a practitioner of one of the Schools of *Yoga*; adj. *yogic*.

yugas: the four periods or ages of the world’s existence, each having its own time period expressing its general level of consciousness. The fourth and present one is called *Kaliyuga*, the others being *Satayuga*, *Tretāyuga* and *Dvāparayuga*.

Pronunciation Guide

The system of transliteration adopted in this book is a little different than the one commonly used in other publications. The variation is with regard to *ṛi*, *ch*, *ḥ*, *ṣh* and *sh*, which are usually written as *r*, *c*, *ch*, *ṣ* and *ś*. *Anusvāra* has been shown either by *ñ/ṇ̃/ṅ/n/m* according to the different sounds it produces rather than only by *ṃ*. These slight variations in diacritical marks have been adopted in order to make the transliteration simpler and more in accordance with the correct pronunciation in Sanskrit and Hindi.

VOWELS

अ	a	as u in	but, under
आ	ā	as a in	far (held twice as long as a)
इ	i	as i in	pin
ई	ī	as ee in	meet, glee (held twice as long as i)
उ	u	as u in	push
ऊ	ū	as oo in	hoot, boot (held twice as long as u)
ऋ	ṛi	as ri in	grim (considered a vowel in Sanskrit)
ॠ	ṛī	as ree in	reel (considered a vowel; used rarely)
ऌ	lri	as lri in	— (considered a vowel; used rarely)
ए	e	as ay in	play (held twice as long as a/i/u)
ऐ	ai	as ai in	aisle (held twice as long as a/i/u)
ओ	o	as o in	home (held twice as long as a/i/u)
औ	au	as ow in	cow (held twice as long as a/i/u)

CONSONANTS

क्	k	as k in	k ite
ख्	kh	as ckh in	Eck hart
ग्	g	as g in	g ive
घ्	gh	as gh in	dig h ard
ङ्	ñ	as n in	si ng
च्	ch	as ch in	ch air
छ्	çh	as ch-h in	stau nc h- h ear t
ज्	j	as j in	j oy
झ्	jh	as dge in	hed g ehog
ञ्	ñ	as n in	lu nc h
ट्	ṭ	as t in	t ub
ठ्	ṭh	as th in	ligh t house
ड्	ḍ	as d in	d oor
ढ्	ḍh	as dh in	red- h ot
ण्	ṇ	as n in	u nder (somewhat; no sound in English exactly corresponds to ण् (full letter) as in prāṇa, guṇa, praṇāma)
त्	t	as t in	French t
थ्	th	as th in	th umb
द	d	as th in	th en
ध्	dh	as theh in	breath e h er e
न्	n	as n in	n ot
प्	p	as p in	p ine
फ्	ph	as ph in	up- h ill
ब्	b	as b in	b ird
भ्	bh	as bh in	ab h or
म्	m	as m in	m other
य्	y	as y in	y ou

र	r	as r in	rain
ल	l	as l in	long
व	v	as v in	very
ष	ṣh	as sh in	shine (pronounced as cerebral sibilant)
श	sh	as sh in	shrink (pronounced as palatal sibilant)
स	s	as s in	sun
ह	h	as h in	hot

OTHER SYMBOLS

- ◌̣ (anusvāra): lit. “after sound.”
ṅ/ñ/ṇ/n/m as **n** in **rank/lunch/under/paint** and **m** in **ramp**
 (The anusvāra ◌̣ in Sanskrit and Hindi is a nasal sound which in certain cases is marked by a dot above the line and always follows the preceding vowel. The anusvāra sounds different in different words depending upon the consonant it precedes, as shown in the above examples)
- ◌̣̣ (anunāsika) **ṅ** as **n** in the French word “**bon**”
 (The anunāsika is also a nasal sound, but unlike anusvāra, which always follows a vowel, anunāsika is immanent in the vowel itself.)
- : (visarga) **ḥ** pronounce **aḥ** like **aha**, **iḥ** like **ihi**, **uḥ** like **uhu**

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“Divine Love is the longing of the finite for the Infinite, the longing of the part to merge in the whole.”

“To serve the Guru means to sincerely follow His teachings, assimilate them and then radiate them. Offer him your pure love; serve Him by all the means you have.”

“Ego is the substitute of the real Self. Ego has no positive existence. It is like darkness. When the light appears the darkness vanishes. As a matter of fact, it never existed. Ego has a phenomenal existence. It is not real.”

“God is formless, but He is not that type of formless God, as some people believe, who cannot assume any form. He is formless and yet He is the source of all names and forms.”

“Spirituality is the art and science of life through which man can find lasting peace and happiness by the direct experience of the Spirit, which is absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge and absolute Happiness.”

“If you don't first come to know that you are in exile, you will never yearn or try to go back home. Let your need be God and God alone. By association with saints and sages, you can become aware of this need more and more.”

“Mind is a valuable tool for knowing the world, but for realizing the Truth, the Absolute, no-mind is the instrument. Mind is a transitory step in evolution; it is not the end, nor the final step.”

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