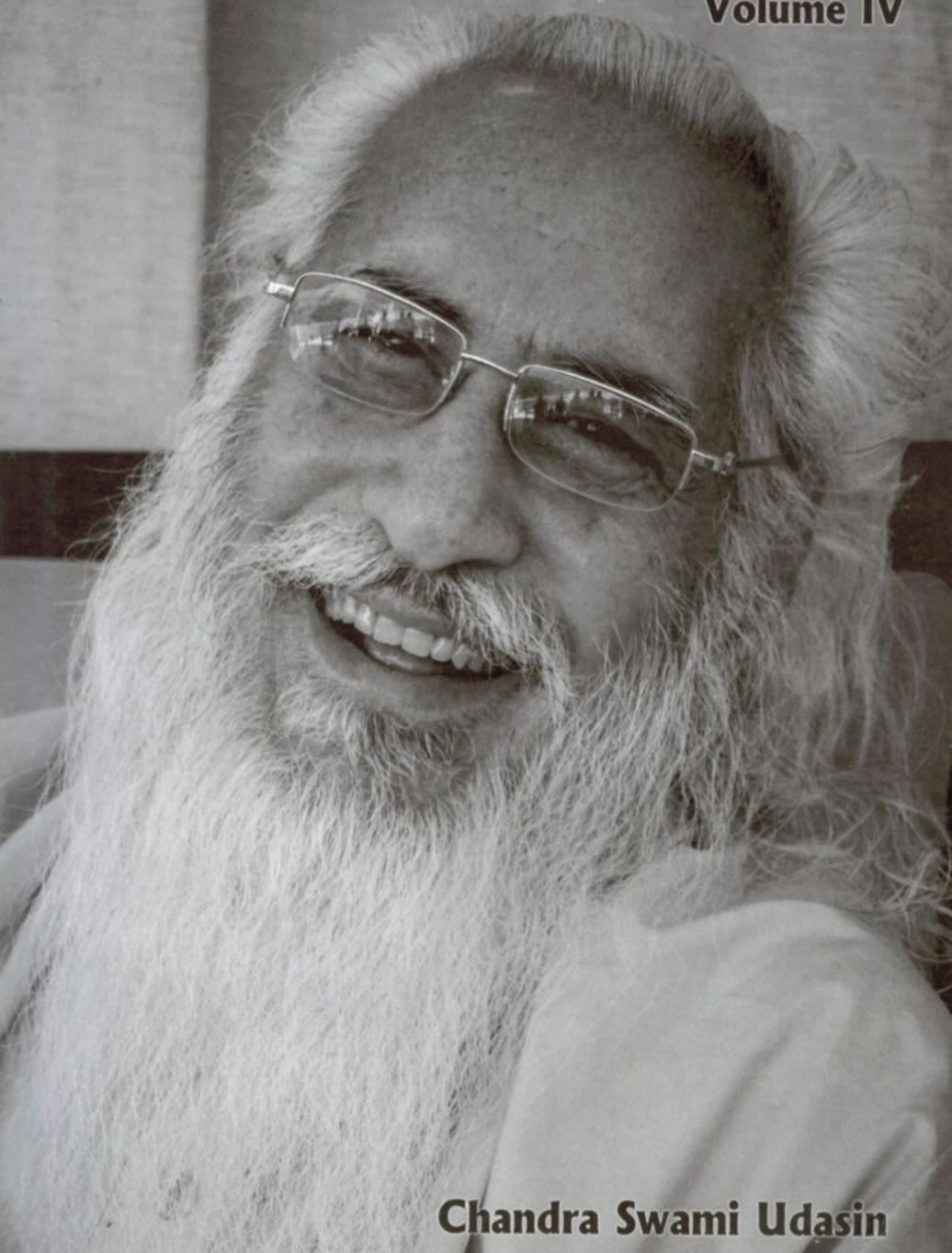


# **Song of Silence**

**Volume IV**



**Chandra Swami Udasin**

# SONG OF SILENCE

Volume IV

Chandra Swami Udasin

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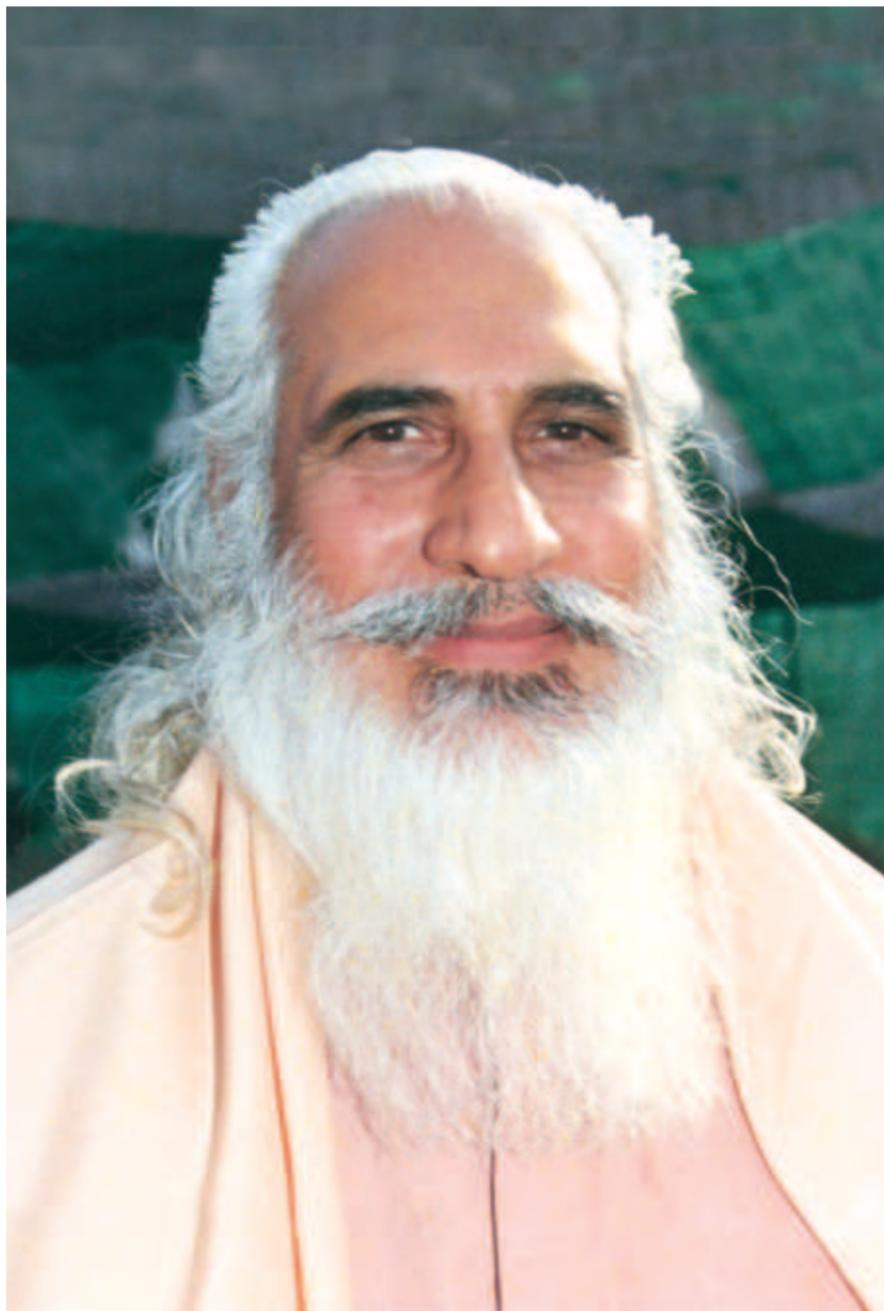
Dedicated to  
the sweet and loving memory of  
Udasinacharya Bhagavan Shrichandraji  
and Balayati Baba Bhuman Shahji Udasin



Udasinacharya Bhagavan Shrichandraji  
(1494 – 1643)



Baba Bhuman Shahji Udasin  
(1687 – 1747)



Shri Chandra Swamiji Udasin

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## Introduction

It is with great joy that we present to you the fourth volume of *Song of Silence*. As with the previous volumes, this fourth volume is a compilation of the written responses of our beloved Master, revered Sri Chandra Swamiji Udasin, to questions posed by devotees and disciples. The questions and answers in this volume relate to the three-year period between January 1998 and January 2001. At that time Gurudev was observing his God-inspired silence, and thus his answers are taken mainly from the daily *satsang* during which he used to give written answers to spiritual questions.<sup>1</sup>

As in Volume III, this compilation has been organized subject-wise and sequentially. This format enables the reader to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Swamiji's teachings and is also of great help to those who wish to explore and understand a specific topic. Naturally there is some overlapping of topics, as one answer may cover more than one topic.

Once again our source of inspiration in the process of categorizing answers for this volume has been Swamiji's masterpiece, *The Practical Approach to Divinity*. Swamiji's answers to spiritual questions are more or less a further elaboration of the essentials already contained within this

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<sup>1</sup> Gurudev did not give any *satsang* for five months from 29.03.1998 to 13.09.1998.

condensed book. Therefore the volumes of *Song of Silence*, read in conjunction with *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, will greatly help the reader's understanding.

In the first chapter, "*Different Aspects of the Divine*", Swamiji's answers relate to the fundamental nature of the Divine and his various aspects. He explains the nature of *Âtmâ* or Spirit, Pure Consciousness, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, *Purushottama*, *Sat-Chit-Ânanda*, God or *Īshvara* and so on. Although Swamiji tells us it is not possible to understand God intellectually, it is nevertheless helpful to have a basic comprehension of the different dimensions of the Divine in order to grasp Swamiji's teachings.

The second chapter, "Goal of Life; God Can and Must be Attained", focuses on God-Realization as the ultimate aim of human life. Swamiji through his answers shows us that it is possible, practical and of utmost urgency that we dedicate our lives to this goal. The third chapter, "Basic Qualifications," focuses on the essential qualities of a spiritual seeker in his quest for the Divine, irrespective of the path he chooses. These include faith in God, without which the seeker will not even start out on the path of God-Realization, deep aspiration, reflection and discrimination, which in turn generate dispassion and detachment towards the worldly objects and situations, selfless service in the name of God, and of course the ability to persevere amidst the inevitable ups and downs of the spiritual journey.

The fourth chapter is dedicated exclusively to the different limbs of *sâdhanâ* as Swamiji very much emphasizes the importance of a balanced and integral *sâdhanâ*. This chapter, "Integral *Sâdhanâ*," includes insights about *sâdhanâ*

in general, as well as on the different spiritual paths: *bhakti yoga*, *jñāna yoga*, *karma yoga* and *rāja yoga*. Swamiji's answers reveal that the path chosen will depend on the individual's predominant *shakti* i.e. *kriyāshakti* (power of action), *bhāvashakti* (power of feeling) or *jñānashakti* (power of knowledge) and that ultimately all these must be sublimated and directed towards God-Realization. All parts of the personality of the seeker (body, senses, vital, mind and intellect) need to be purified and divinized for God-Realization to become established and permanent.

The fifth chapter on meditation and contemplation covers the different types of meditation and the guidance given by Swamiji which is rooted in his own direct experience of these methods and attainment of the direct experience of the Divine. The chapter is organized according to the different methods of practice as laid out in *The Practical Approach to Divinity*. Chapters six and seven describe both general and specific obstacles and aids to meditation/contemplation, and so provide us with a deep insight into the long and arduous spiritual journey with its challenges and the mind's subtle tricks to obstruct our *sādhanā* and keep us preoccupied with the outer life.

In chapter eight, important terms like *karma*, body-mind, ego, soul, death, etc. have been discussed under the title "Metaphysical Matters." These are important concepts that many seekers wish to understand better. Swamiji gives basic and fundamental information about these matters without going into too much scriptural detail.

The final chapter compiles Swamiji's answers about the consummation of all *sādhanā*, the highest achievement of

human life, the realization of God. 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 Swamiji often refers to as Fulfilment or “Experiencing”, rather than experience.

As the focus in this book is primarily on Swamiji’s answers, many of the questions have been shortened and sometimes omitted altogether. Swamiji’s answers are always directly relevant to the inner need of the individual and his responses are simple, clear and direct. As the response is not just to the question but to the individual depending on his level of consciousness, the response may vary. 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 Swamiji’s answers but the essence of his answer can be fully appreciated only by the aspirant questioner in the unique Guru/disciple relationship. Whatever the question, Swamiji’s answers and advice are always positive and compassionate. His language is unambiguous and clear and his whole approach is practical and straightforward. His answers are never dry intellectual discourses but come directly from the place of Truth and speak to the heart of the aspirant. For this reason there is a great power in his words, leaving the aspirant’s heart and mind satisfied and uplifted, knowing he has heard the words and guidance of the Divine through the hand of Swamiji.

As the answers were written over a period of roughly three years, there are naturally some repetitions. Some have

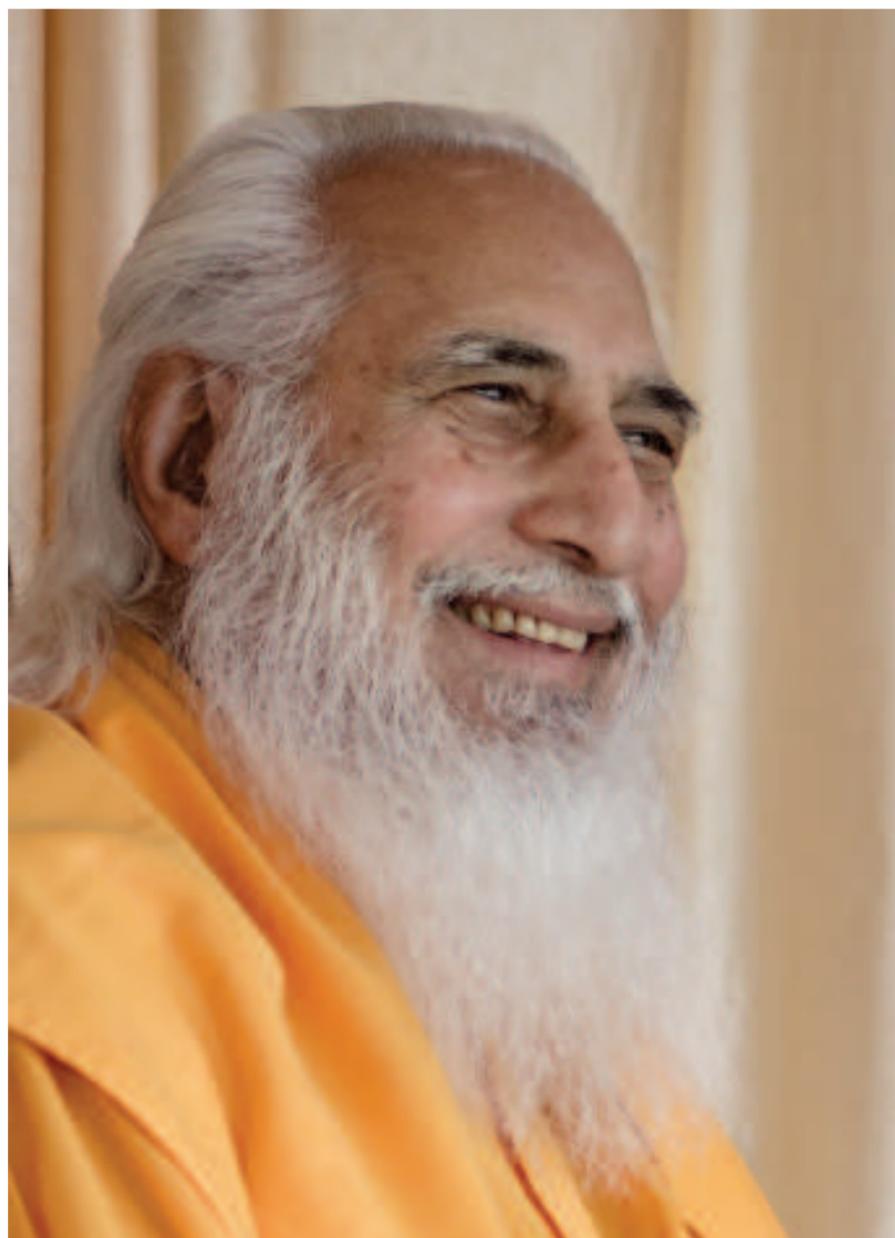
been removed, others kept for the development of a particular discussion, or to highlight the heart of Swamiji's teaching. Also, we should remember that this book contains only Swamiji's responses to the questions of devotees. The space given to each topic therefore reflects the seekers' interest in the topic rather than the actual importance of that topic.

Swamiji himself never professes to be a teacher or preacher. An important aspect of Swamiji's role as a spiritual Master is that he does not preach one particular method of practice to all. Swamiji guides each questioner spontaneously out of his own direct experience and according with the need, level and inclination of the aspirant. He has the power to guide a *bhakta* as well as a *jñānī*, a beginner as well as an advanced seeker.

Profound thanks go to revered Ma Divya Jyoti and Karunaji in this task of compiling and organizing Gurudeva's holy words for the uplift and edification of the devotees. They have had the privilege of sitting in Gurudeva's *satsang* for many years and are very familiar with his teachings and therefore most able to complete this task faithfully. Due to their work, and the meticulous editing of a team of dedicated devotees, Gurudev's words are now available to you in another precious volume. God bless them.

Our sincere wish is that the following pages will help to deepen the reader's aspiration and increase his determination to be a pilgrim on the 'pathless path' back to the Lord.

Ever at his holy feet,  
Swami Prem Vivekanand



## Life Profile of Shri Chandra Swami Udasin

**S**hri Chandra Swami Udasin was born on the 5th of March, 1930, in Bhuman Shah Village, near Lahore (now in Pakistan). Since childhood, he was blessed with the direct and unreserved grace of his master Baba Bhuman Shahji, a great mystic and enlightened sage of the 18th century. Overwhelmed by deep dispassion and an irresistible urge to realize the Divine, Swamiji abandoned his postgraduate studies in mathematics at the age of twenty-two, renounced all worldly ties, and took *sannyâsa*. He spent eight years in seclusion and deep contemplation in the mountains and caves of Jammu & Kashmir. This was followed by another period of over nine years of solitude in Sapta Sarovar *jhâdi*, a forested island on the Ganges near Haridwar, in a thatched hut abode. It was here that he was blessed with the highest spiritual Realization.

In 1970, at the earnest and repeated request of his devotees, Swamiji shifted to Sewak Niwas, a small *âshram* in Sapta Sarovar built by his devotees. In Sewak Niwas his spontaneous *sâdhanâ* and solitude continued as before. It was in Sewak Niwas that Gurudev started his mystical, God-inspired silence in 1984, which he ended in 2017 after thirty-three long years.

In 1990, far removed from the noise and crowds, he built the new Sadhana Kendra Ashram in a remote village Dumet on the banks of the Yamuna River about 50 kilometres away from Dehradun, where he came to live along with a number of devotees. This *âshram* is a sacred place where spiritual seekers follow their spiritual practice in the divine presence of revered Gurudev in accordance with his teachings. For more than forty years Gurudev gave direct guidance to the spiritual seekers during the daily spiritual question and answer sessions, first in writing, then verbally after ending his silence. Now that his age is approaching 90, he is no longer giving formal teachings, however devotees daily sing *sankirtan* and *bhajans* in his presence on the open terrace in front of his room. And to this day without fail he leads the early morning and evening group meditation sessions in the *âshram* meditation hall. He has hundreds of devotees in India and across the world. The essence of his teaching is that the highest goal of human life is to realize God, and that prayer, meditation, ceaseless God-remembrance and selfless *seva* (service) in the name of God are amongst the most important means to attain it.



Satsang with Swamiji



## Editor's Note

In order to better understand some of Swamiji's answers it may be helpful to have a basic understanding of the different aspects of the Divine. While in English the single word 'God' is used, in Hindi and Sanskrit there are a multiplicity of different names to describe different aspects of the Absolute Reality. For those who are interested, a more in-depth discussion of this complex topic is included in the appendix at the back of the book.

### **Different Aspects of the Divine**

The Absolute Divine Reality in its totality is *Sat-Chit-Ânanda*, Absolute Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. It is often referred to as *Parabrahman*, or 'the Absolute'. It has infinite aspects, which may be broadly grouped into the following two categories:

#### 1) *Nirguṇa*: Free from Attributes

*Nirguṇa* is the passive aspect of the Absolute, pure contentless Awareness devoid of any quality or attribute. It is timeless, spaceless, unmoving, unchanging and is the substratum of this whole universe. It is also called *Nirguṇa Brahman*, pure Consciousness, the *Âtmâ*, *Purusha*, the Spirit,

the Self. The realization of the *nirguṇa* aspect of the Divine is termed as Self-Realization and is generally attained by following the path of knowledge.

## 2) *Sagūṇa*: With Attributes

*Sagūṇa* is the dynamic aspect of the Absolute, with names, forms and qualities. All of manifestation belongs to the realm of *sagūṇa*, also called *Sagūṇa Brahman*, *Īshvara* or the Supreme Universal Conscious Power. Technically speaking, the term *Īshvara* corresponds to the western concept of God. In other words, *Īshvara* is the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent Lord, the almighty creator, sustainer and destroyer of this universe, full of sweet grace and unbound compassion for all. *Īshvara*'s existence is relative to the existence of the universe. The realization of the *sagūṇa* aspect of the Divine is called God-Realization and is generally attained by following the path of devotion.

## Important Terms

In his book *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, Swamiji defines meditation (*vichâra-vimarsha*) as a sort of reflection involving a flow of correlated thoughts on a single subject, and contemplation (*dhyâna*) 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, Swamiji 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.

Swamiji 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, Swamiji 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.

### **Capitalization**

With regard to capitalization, all words designating the supreme Reality or God, like *Âtmâ*, *Consciousness*, *Spirit*, *Puruṣha*, *Sat-Chit-Ânanda*, *Îshvara*, etc. have been capitalized. 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 Swamiji 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 which is used either for

Consciousness or vigilance. 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.

### **“His/Her”**

In his answers to spiritual questions, Swamiji 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.

### **Diacritical Marks**

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

## Chapter One

### *Different Aspects of the Divine*

#### ***Ātmā or Spirit***

##### **The source of everything is the Ātmā**

*Swamiji addressed someone who was wearing a beautiful pair of glasses.*

You already have the glasses of your mind through which you are distorting the real nature of what you see. If you use something regularly for a long, long period, it becomes indispensable for you. For example, when you start using reading glasses, after sometime you cannot read without those glasses. Similar is the case with the mind. We have been using our minds to know things for so many lives that now we cannot know anything without the mind. In the *Upaniṣhads* it is said that the Ātmā is the Mind of the mind, the Eye of the eyes, the Ear of the ears and so on. The source of everything is the Ātmā! The mind and senses draw their power of knowing from the Ātmā. But the Ātmā has become subservient to the mind and senses.

*Is the Ātmā contentless when it is not in contact with the mind and senses?*

The Ātmā is absolute Existence, absolute Awareness, not only contentless Consciousness. You can call It *nirguṇa-nirākār* (without attributes and without forms). But the Absolute transcends even the *nirguṇa-nirākār*. The Absolute transcends all categories. The Absolute is *nirguṇa* plus something more. The Absolute is *saguṇa* plus something more. The Absolute is *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*, plus something more. The Absolute is not a concept but the Reality.

### **The Light of all lights**

*Can you please say something about the various kinds of light, like the light of the Spirit?*

There are many types of light: physical light such as sunlight, moonlight, etc. Then there is mental light, including the light of the senses (the mind is the eleventh sense). And there is the light of the Spirit. The Spirit is called the Light of all lights. Without It you cannot experience anything.

When you see a physical chair, all lights are involved in this seeing: physical light, mental light and the light of the Spirit. In seeing a dream chair, two lights are involved, the light of the mind and the light of the Spirit.

### **The sweetness of Ātmā**

*An old lady brought some sweets to Swamiji.*

The sweetness you feel in any object or thing is actually the

sweetness of your Ātmā. And if you feel bitterness in any object, it is the bitterness of that object. It is not a joke, it is 100% true. When the joy of the Ātmā is mixed with the objects, or when it is tasted through the sense-objects, its taste becomes different. With sugar you mix up so many things and make different sweets. The taste of all these sweets is different, laddoo, jalebi, gulab jamun, rasgulla, all of them have different tastes, but the sweetness in them is that of the sugar. The sweets of different countries are different, but the taste of sugar is the same.

*In my current state, I don't know Consciousness.*

If you say that Consciousness is unknown, then you are foolish! Actually, Consciousness is neither known nor unknown. It transcends all categories. An *Upaniṣhad* says, “Consciousness is beyond the known and the unknown.” When it is said that It cannot be known, it means that It cannot be known as an object. It can be known by becoming one with It. It can be known by merging with It. How can you know something or someone completely if you are not one with it? You cannot! The absolute or complete Knowledge means the absolute or complete Love, and the absolute or complete Joy — complete, unconditioned, unconditional.

*Is it possible to reach this Absolute at once?*

It is not only possible, it is real. For the *sādhakas*, it is possible. For the realized ones, it is real.

## ***Pure Consciousness or Pure Awareness***

**Consciousness is like the light of the sun which cannot be contaminated**

*What can you say about the relationship between mind, soul and Consciousness?*

The soul is pure Consciousness plus mind. Pure Consciousness is always pure; it is also called the Spirit. It is like the light of the sun which cannot be contaminated. When the sun illumines muddy water it does not become polluted and when it illumines the clean water of a lake it does not become pure. But the light of the sun is reflected more in the clean water of the lake than in the muddy water. Similarly, the light of pure Consciousness is reflected more in the pure mind than in the impure mind. The pure mind is more calm and quiet, the impure mind more agitated.

**Levels of consciousness means states of consciousness**

*What is implied by 'different levels of consciousness'?*

You can understand it by the example of the *jīva* (soul) in the wakeful state and the *jīva* in the dream state. They are one, but they are in different states. Similarly, *Īshvara* or *Puruṣhottama* and the *jīva* are essentially one, the difference is in the states and in the names and forms. Consciousness is one.

You enter a dream. In the dream you see a dream world. Then you come out from the dream and enter into the wakeful state, and then you see this world. You remember the dream

also. But the soul of the dream world and of the wakeful world is one. Otherwise, how could you remember the dream? One who saw the dream is the same soul who is now seeing this world. It is the *jâgrat Puruṣha* (soul in the wakeful state), which becomes the dreaming soul (as well as the dream world). Similarly, it is the *Adi Puruṣha* (*Īshvara*) who is becoming this world and the soul.

Pure Consciousness is the common denominator in *Īshvara* and the soul. The difference between *Īshvara* and the soul is only the difference in their states. The level of consciousness means the state of consciousness. The evolution is in the states not in the consciousness. Evolution means change!

### **Consciousness associated with different modes of the mind assumes different names**

*In many situations I feel that there is something in me which is witnessing. Is it a step to pure witnessing consciousness or only a mental activity?*

Witnessing consciousness is the pure Consciousness reflected in a pure and stable mind, that is, the *sāttvic* mind. It is neither purely material nor pure Spirit. It is not a part of the mind, it is the pure Consciousness reflected in a *sāttvic* mind.

The modes of the mind change. When the mind becomes *rājasic*, the witnessing consciousness is reduced, as it were. In a *tāmasic* state, it is totally veiled. Consciousness associated with the mind assumes different names in accordance with the mode of the mind. It is relative consciousness in which there is the triangle of the Seer, the

seen and their relationship. Witnessing something means the functioning of relative consciousness. When mind and Spirit associate, the phenomenon of relative consciousness takes place. When this relative consciousness is very, very refined due to the *sāttvic* mind, it is called witnessing consciousness. Pure Consciousness is centreless.

### **“Consciousness” and “consciousness”**

*What is the difference between conscience and Consciousness?*

In common parlance, the word “consciousness” is usually used for the mind. The word “Consciousness” (with capital C) is also used for the timeless Spirit. The timeless Spirit is always there. It is the essential Nature of everything and every being.

Conscience means the pure mind. Consciousness is the principle of Experiencing; it is Awareness. When you do something wrong, your pure mind tells you from within that what you are doing is not right. You may or may not hear that voice of the pure mind; that is a different matter. In hard-core criminals, the voice of the conscience is completely suppressed. But Consciousness or simple Awareness is present in the sinner and the saint alike. The Experiencing principle is a faculty which can never be completely obliterated.

**Joy or happiness is the nature of Consciousness**

*Do we have to look for joy in ourselves or should we be empty to receive joy from outside? Why do some people feel happy and others feel unhappy?*

The joy you feel is directly proportional to the purity and stability of your mind. When the mind is not stable, happiness is not lasting.

*Is it identification with the objects that creates joy and sorrow?*

It is pleasure or pain that is created by the contact of the senses with the objects. Joy or happiness is the nature of Consciousness. It is reflected in the stable and purified mind. In the deep sleep state, there is no object and yet you feel a sort of joy. When you get up in the morning you confirm that you had a very peaceful sleep. In *samādhi* also there is no object and yet there is joy! The deep sleep state is, as it were, the copy of the *samādhi*.

*Bliss seems to me a better word than samādhi.*

Call it Bliss if you so like. But it is different from pleasure.

**Pure Consciousness is present in all states and yet is transcendent**

*Ramana Maharshi said that he was always in contact with pure Consciousness. Was he in samādhi while answering questions to people?*

Well, what is pure Consciousness? Have you experienced It? It is only a word for you! You cannot understand in which state Ramana Maharshi was. It is something different than the waking state. Can't one remain simultaneously in *samādhi* and in the mental consciousness?

Pure Consciousness is not a state. It is present in all the states at the same time. It is timeless. The states come and go in It. It remains as It is. The wakeful state, the dream state and the deep sleep state come and go. Pure Consciousness reflects these states, but Itself remains as It is. Pure Consciousness does not come and go. It is present in all the states, and yet is transcendent. The one who is established in pure Consciousness does not come and go. He is present in all the states and yet is beyond all these states.

### ***Puruṣha and Prakṛiti***

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

The literal meaning of *Puruṣha* is the principle living in a *puri*. *Puri* means a town; here it means body-mind. *Puruṣha* means the Consciousness within the body-mind. Body-mind is *Prakṛiti*. According to Patañjali, liberation means disassociation of pure Consciousness from *Prakṛiti*.

**The more stable and pure the mind is, the clearer is the reflection of Awareness**

*What is Awareness?*

Awareness is the *Ātmā*. Awareness can be categorized by the mind into two forms:

1. The absolute Awareness or Consciousness: undifferentiated, homogeneous, and undirected.
2. Relative awareness: differentiated, heterogeneous and directed.

You have been asking about Awareness many times and you have reflected on It again and again. Awareness is independent of the mind. The mind only reflects Awareness. The more stable and pure the mind is, the clearer and more unadulterated is the reflection of Awareness.

### **Awareness has two aspects**

*“To be aware of Awareness Itself is actually self-sufficient.”  
Please Swamiji, is this assessment clear enough to remain peaceful and in silence?*

How can you be aware of Awareness? It is Awareness through or by which you become aware of any object, person or situation. Awareness has two aspects: awareness with content, and contentless Awareness. It is the same as when you see a chair in the sunlight; you see the chair because of the sunlight. When the mind is silent the Awareness shines in its pristine purity.

*What have we to do to be established in pure Consciousness?  
Do we have to break our identification with the three states?*

You have to break what? Is the identification real? If it were real you could never break it. Identification has only a phenomenal existence. If you reflect deeply on the dream state, you will understand it. In a dream a king can become a beggar, but in reality he does not become a beggar. He is

only thinking that he is a beggar. When he wakes up, he is sure that he never became a beggar. What makes you feel that you are a beggar in the dream state is the same thing which is working in the wakeful state. What you call the wakeful state is not radically different from the dream state.

## ***Puruṣhottama***

***Puruṣhottama* denotes the absolute Being**

*Could you please explain the word “Puruṣhottama?”*

*Puruṣhottama* literally means the supreme Being. *Puruṣhottama* denotes the absolute Being who is at once *nirguṇa* and *sagūṇa*, at once with qualities and without qualities, with form and without form, and who is not only the numerical sum total of all these aspects but transcendent, and beyond.

*Puruṣhottama* does not mean the higher Being. *Puruṣhottama* means the transcendent Being, beyond the categories of higher and lower.

## ***Sat-Chit-Ānanda***

***Sat-Chit-Ānanda* is the name of the absolute Truth**

*Is there a difference between Existence and Love?*

In spirituality, the words absolute Love, absolute Bliss, absolute Awareness or Consciousness and absolute Existence have the same meaning. Absolute Love is absolute Bliss, is

absolute Awareness, and is absolute Existence. Absolute Love, absolute Bliss, absolute Awareness and absolute Existence are not attributes of the Divine. They are the essential Nature of the Divine. They are denoted in Sanskrit by one word: *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, which is the name of absolute Truth or Reality. Existence, Love, Bliss and Awareness are one and the same.

## ***God or Īshvara***

**“Eat a mango and then you will know”**

*A poet said “What is God? What is not God? And what is in between?”*

This has to be discovered by you, yourself. If I tell you, it will only be words for you. If you ask me, “What is a mango?” I will say “Please eat a mango and then you will know.” Tukaram, a great poet sage, said, “God is like the candy eaten by a deaf and dumb person.” He cannot say anything more about it. Words are useful, but only up to a certain point.

**Real means, “That which always remains”**

*God is the only Truth; does it mean that everything else is false?*

Truth, Reality, God, the Divine, *Ātmā*, Spirit, all these words are used for infinite, timeless Consciousness. Well, what is real? The materialists define what is real in their own way. They say that what is tangible, what can be perceived by the

senses is real. The spiritualists define the Real in just the opposite way. They say, “What is or can be perceived by the senses is not real.” You see the table so it is tangible. You can touch it, you can see it, you can smell it, etc. You say it is real. But what is real in this table? You are perceiving qualities only: colour, hardness or softness, smell, etc. But what is that you call a table? Suppose you burn this table, then only ashes are left. Then what is real? Real means, “That which always remains, That which cannot be destroyed.” You can never know God as you know this table or this chair. You can know God only by becoming one with God. Unless you become one with God, your knowledge of God cannot be perfect; God would be hiding some part of Himself from you.

### **God is the ground of all existence**

*How can our faith in God be real when we cannot see Him since He is without form?*

God is not only a matter of faith. God is the ground of all existence. Without God nothing can exist. God is the Mind of your mind, the Eye of your eyes, the Ear of your ears, etc. Without God, who is absolute Consciousness, nothing which exists can be proved.

### **Different words are used for God**

*Some Masters don't speak about God, why?*

Different Masters use different words for Truth. If you use the word *Nirvāṇa* or Freedom or Truth instead of God, it

does not make any difference. The word God has been exploited by many religious organizations. Buddha stopped using this word. So did Krishnamurti. They used other words for God. Can you conceive of the creation without the Creator?

*What is the relationship between God and His manifestation?*

The manifestation is categorized into two hemispheres, the higher hemisphere and the lower hemisphere. The physical, vital and mental worlds comprise the lower hemisphere. The supramental and Bliss worlds comprise the higher hemisphere. Manifestation takes place on two levels: individual and universal. All manifestation is temporal. The Spirit alone is timeless and eternal. God means the Creator, the Ruler. Can you conceive of the Creator without the creation and the Ruler without the ruled? According to *Vedānta*, the Creator is not the ultimate and absolute Reality. The ultimate and absolute Reality is immanent, as also beyond the creation and its Creator.

### **There cannot be two infinities**

*Is it very difficult to love the Formless?*

You can love someone not on the basis of his/her physical form but on the basis of his/her qualities. If you love someone because his/her body is very beautiful, then what if that person becomes very sick, weak and ugly?

The Absolute is not only formless. The Absolute does not exclude anything, nor is it only the sum total of many aspects. The Absolute is formless and with form at the same

time and beyond also. It is the mind that divides the Absolute into formlessness and form. If God is formless, then what is that which has form? And is that which has form different from God? Then there would be two realities, and both would turn out to be finite and unreal. Can there be two infinities? Materialists say that reality is only what can be seen; and practically, the materialists are in a big majority.

*What is the relationship between the Absolute and Avatārs like Krishna and Jesus?*

The Absolute assumed the form of Krishna and Jesus so that the people could see Him with their eyes and enjoy His uplifting physical presence.

### **The universal *prāṇa* is God**

*Can I say that *prāṇa* is God or that *prāṇa* is the breath of God?*

Yes, universal *prāṇa* is God. Individual *prāṇa* is part of, or a spark of the universal *prāṇa*. *Prāṇa* means energy.

*Is my breath different from your breath or the breath of any other saint?*

Breath is the air that you inhale or anyone inhales or exhales. Is the air one or many? People confound air with *prāṇa*. The difference between one individual and the other is due to their different vibrations of energy and their levels of consciousness. The difference between you and Jesus or Anandamayi Mâ is that in Jesus or Mâ, the divine Consciousness and divine Energy are more manifest than in

you, and vice-versa. You depend on that Energy. The universe is the dancing of God, His *lilā*.

*How would you define lilā?*

*Lilā* means an action that comes out of joy. It is not an action through which you want to find joy. It is an action through which you express your joy. There is no motive behind *lilā*. God is Joy absolute. He does not need to do anything. His *lilā* is like dancing; like Lord Shiva dancing. When you are full of joy and that joy flows out, that is *lilā*. Lord Shiva has been depicted in two states. Either He is shown in *samādhi*, motionless and still, His *damarū* (a percussion instrument) tied with His trident which is fixed in the earth near Him, no movement, no thought, nothing, totally absorbed in Himself; or He is shown as dancing, active, His joy flowing out in the form of dancing. The universe is the dancing of God, His *lilā*. You cannot conceive of what *lilā* is, unless you are full of absolute Joy, an unlimited and independent Joy.

You see a child who is full of energy. To express his energy, he is jumping, running without any reason. There is no motive behind what he is doing, and you say the child is playing. This is an example. Similarly, God is One and full of Joy. To express His Joy, He becomes many, assumes infinite forms and plays with Himself. He expresses His Joy in this way.

*We see Lord Shiva dancing on someone. What does it mean?*

It represents Lord Shiva dancing on the three *guṇas*. It means He is not dependent on the three *guṇas*, but He is above

them. The world and God are not two. It is God who manifests Himself into the world.

### **God is always with you**

*Is God omnipotent?*

God is not only omnipotent. He has no ego of being almighty. He is very sweet. He is the embodiment of all the sweetness that can be. He becomes the Servant of servants. He does not suffer from any complex. He is always with you. He is the ground of all that exists. He is the Being of all beings, the Mind of all minds. He is the Soul of your soul.

*I wonder how God can love everyone; we have so many weaknesses.*

Has your son ego or not? Do you love him or not? God is more tolerant than you. Why should you be afraid of God?

*Why are we afraid of God? How can we go beyond this fear in order to be able to receive all God's gifts?*

Why are you afraid of God? Is God a cruel person? We always hear from the saints that God is merciful and that He is a loving father. The Bible says so, all the holy books say so, and all the saints say so. Then, why should you be afraid of God? There are five main attributes of God:

1. God is the creator of the universe.
2. God is the sustainer of the universe.
3. God is the destroyer of the universe; He absorbs the world

into Himself at the time of dissolution.

4. God is the controller of the universe.
5. God is merciful.

God is the omnipotent controller and He has made certain laws. He also gives justice according to those laws. No one can escape His hands. Therefore, only the wicked people and criminals should be afraid of God.

### **Divine laws and tolerance**

*A basic principle of Hinduism is tolerance and we believe that God will take care of every sin and crime committed. In this materialistic world, don't you think these things are proving fatal for common men?*

You are raising this question as if God were sitting in the clouds and doing everything exclusively. That is not so! God is working in the world through laws. The world is controlled by those laws. If the people are suffering more, it is because of the fact that they are transgressing those laws or resisting living in conformity with those divine laws. And it is the materialist who is trying to transgress those laws. Tolerance does not mean to succumb to that which is against the Divine laws.

### **Different meanings of Hari**

*Please Swamiji, can you tell us something about Hari? Who is He?*

When I say *Hari* or talk of *Hari*, I mean God. But the word *Hari* has many literal meanings. One of them is the thief who steals the heart of the devotees. Another meaning of *Hari* is the one who forgives your sins, and also another meaning is the one who removes your sufferings. When I talk of God, I mean God in all His aspects. He transcends all categories. In which of His aspects do you like Him? The word *Hari* is also used for both Rama and Krishna.

### ***Shakti* means movement**

*Is shakti different from the Divine?*

*Shakti* means movement, force, power. From one standpoint, it is moving. Then it is called *shakti*. From another standpoint, it is not moving. Then it is called *Brahman*. In the *Upaniṣhads*, it is said that the Divine moves and It moves not.

## Chapter Two

### *Goal of Life*

#### *God Can and Must be Attained*

##### **What are you living for?**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

For what are you living? Can you tell me? Tell me honestly? Have you never thought over it? You are like a person sitting in a railway train, without knowing where you are going or where you want to go.

##### **The only way to be secure**

*I am always worried about my security. How can I overcome this feeling?*

Suppose you have no house to live in. You feel insecure about your living. You are worried about where to live. So you make your own house. Now you are worried for the security of your house and of its maintenance. Can the house be made secure? An earthquake or flood can demolish it. Has making your own house eradicated your worries?

Suppose you have nothing to eat or no clothes to wear. So you earn money to feel secure so that you don't have to depend upon anyone for food or clothing. But is your money secure? It can be stolen. If you put it into a bank, the bank can fail. If you invest it in stock market, the stock market can go down. So now you are worried for the security of your money also. You take an insurance cover. But the insurance company can also become bankrupt. How and where to find security? Some system of government can provide you social security as it is there in Europe, but are the European people without worries? Are they really happy? What is security? Why do we want it, if it is not there? Or is it there, somewhere, but we seek it at the wrong places and in things in which it is not? What do we really want? All this is related to the physical body.

Now about the mind. You may need emotional security. But how and where can you find it? In your mother, brother, wife, sister, husband, son, daughter, friend, Guru or where? If you find it in your wife, then you will be worried also about the security of your wife; if in your husband, then you will be also worried about your husband, and so on. And can you always keep your husband, wife, son, mother, Guru safe and sound? How to be emotionally secure, permanently? Is emotional security possible? If not, why do we seek it? If it is possible, then where can it be found? What is security?

What you can lose is not real. You have to possess or to be possessed by something which you can never lose. Then and only then can you be secure. To feel secure you have to discover something in you which is secure in all respects and always. That something is what people call by many names: God, Truth, *Ātmā*, *Nirvāṇa* and so on and so

forth. That is the only way to be secure. How can we be satisfied with something which is not lasting? How can the infinite Spirit be satisfied with something finite? Why not to give up the desire of becoming secure? It is easier said than done!

### **You may not know it, but you are seeking God**

*I observe that I have the natural habit to respond by worrying when any difficulty happens to me and that it is unnatural when I am positive.*

You say it is natural to worry and unnatural not to worry. Now the question is, “What do you like to be? Do you like to be natural or unnatural?” No one wants problems. Everyone wants to solve one’s problems. Everyone wants to be free. Everyone wants happiness. Everyone wants to live. It means everyone, knowingly or unknowingly, wants God, because God is Life absolute, Bliss absolute, Freedom absolute.

*Why do I choose negative thoughts instead of positive ones?*

Everyone is seeking God. You are seeking God. How you are seeking Him, at what place you are seeking Him, is this not a different matter? You may not know it but you are seeking God. You choose a negative thought because you think it will give you happiness. It is a wrong assessment.

### **No argumentation can prove or deny the existence of God**

*How does one believe that God exists?*

Some people brought a blind man to Lord Buddha. They said, “This man does not believe in the sun. We tried our best to convince him by arguments that the sun exists, but he refutes all our arguments and says there is no sun.” Buddha said, “He does not need arguments. He will not be completely convinced by your arguments about the existence of the sun. What he needs is treatment for his eyes. Should he get his eyesight, he would not need any argument to believe in the existence of the sun.”

No argumentation can prove the existence of God, nor can God be denied by any argumentation. You can see God face to face. You can talk to Him. You can listen to His words. The prophets did it. The sages did it. You can also do it, provided you fulfil certain conditions. The qualifications for seeing God and talking to God are given in the revealed Scriptures. You have to be qualified for that. That is what *sādhanā* is for (meditation, prayer, *japa*, breathing exercises, selfless service, etc.)

You drink water daily. But drinking or using water does not provide you any clue that it is made of oxygen and hydrogen. You have to take the water to a laboratory and perform some elaborate experiments on it. Then you come to know that water is made of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Similarly, you have to give a drastic treatment to your personality by performing some spiritual experiments and then you come to see that God is there as the substratum of your being and is the ground of all that exists.

### **One should realize the Truth in this very life**

*You urge us to realize the Truth before life passes into death. Does it mean that life has an end? Is it not imperishable?*

When it is said, “Realize the Truth before life passes into death,”<sup>1</sup> it means that one should realize the Truth in this very life, before the body dies. It is the greatest opportunity, don’t let it go away. Life in this saying means life in your present human form.

**The Divine is always available; it is we who are not available**

*I pray Thee to bless me with the fulfilment of my pressing need.*

What is your pressing need?

*Merge me in Thy Self!*

On my behalf, I am ready. Are you really ready for it? What is the obstacle? The Divine is always available, like air, like light. We are not available to the Divine, which is the crux of the problem. We give more importance to temporal things, situations, and relationships than to the Divine. We don’t feel the pressing need for the Divine as we feel for temporal things, situations and relationships. Do you agree with what I have said? True happiness has nothing to do with any situation in time and space.

*Is the aim of a human being to be happy?*

Yes, it is the happiness which is not dependent on any situation or relationship, happiness which is self-dependent,

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<sup>1</sup> In the meditation hall, on the wall facing the *sādhakas*, one of Swamiji’s quotes is written: “Awake! The time is running out. Remember the Divine. Realize the Truth before life passes into death.”

everlasting and ever-present. Divine Consciousness is the embodiment of such happiness. True happiness has nothing to do with becoming a Prime Minister or becoming a President, that is to say, with any situation or place in time and space. A Prime Minister can be happy, a king can be happy, a poor man can also be happy. King Janaka was happy, so was Shukadeva, who had no possessions.

Does the impermanence of this world and life need any proof? It is so evident, and yet everyone tries to get settled in life. What a joke!

### **What you really need is God**

*The main question I ask myself is, “What do I really want? Am I ready to give all I own (material goods, health, etc.) to reach the goal?” Would you please tell me how I could keep the thirst for God alive?*

What you really want is Happiness that is lasting. You may say that you want money, but it is not true. If someone offers you a lot of money and says, “You cannot use or spend it, nor give it to anyone,” would you accept it? You want a very sophisticated and modern car. If someone offers it to you with the condition that you do not use it, nor sell it nor give it to anyone, would you accept it? Same is the case with everything else.

Lasting Happiness, divine Love, and absolute Consciousness are synonymous words. What you really need is God that is absolute Bliss, absolute Love, Light and Awareness. When you come to know it, not only intellectually, but with your total heart and soul, you will be

able to give up anything else for God, you will be able to make any sacrifice to realize God. The thirst for realizing God directly comes at a certain stage of your evolution and growth. A child has no sexual desire or sexual thoughts. When it reaches the age of puberty, only then, he feels such desires. Similarly, the deep aspiration for God comes when you reach a certain stage of evolution. The pace of evolution can increase by association with holy sages and saints, by reading the revealed Scriptures and reflecting on them, by repeating the holy name of God, by serving the poor and needy in the name of God, and so on.

### **God is the need of everyone**

*We can see that there are many seekers, devotees of God, but we don't see that many get God-Realization first hand.*

There are many things which are not visible. Love is not visible, pain is not visible, and yet you can experience them. But how many seekers of God are there? What is the percentage of seekers of God in your town? It is like you saying that you are sitting in meditation for one hour, but maybe you are thinking of the world for 59.9 minutes and you call it meditation!

In fact, everyone is seeking God, because everyone is seeking permanent Happiness. But everyone is seeking it in his/her own way. Even the one who does not believe in God is seeking God, but he/she does not know what he/she is seeking. God is the need of everyone. You may say, "I need food," but if someone gives you food with the condition that you do not eat it, nor give it to anyone, would you accept it?

*I eat food to survive because I don't want to die!*

So, you don't want to die. It means you want to be something which doesn't die. And that which does not die is what devotees call God.

### **The most important thing for you is to realize God**

*What do you think about cloning? Is it contrary to the divine will?*

I don't know exactly what cloning is. I don't need to know it for myself. I think it should be more important for you to know how to realize God, and how to go deep into meditation, than to know if cloning is contrary to the divine will or not. One day I wrote, "It is better for one to work and try to know the Divine or "Who am I?" than to know what the divine will is."

*I am inspired by your life's journey towards God-Realization. I am going to undertake a forty-day intense sādhanā from tomorrow. Kindly bless me and please give me some advice that can enlighten my path.*

Why only for forty days? Make a resolve that you will live for God-Realization and God-Realization alone. Consecrate your whole life for God-Realization. Utilize all your energies for God-Realization.

### **The seeker lives in the world, but not for the world**

*Is there any contradiction between daily, worldly life and seeking God?*

Ramakrishna used to say that if the boat stays in the water, there is no harm, but the water should not go into the boat. The seeker lives in the world, but not for the world. He or she lives for God. Your love for God should not be conditional. The seeker says, "I must realize God." She or he does not give importance to *grihastha* or *sannyāsa*. He or she gives importance to God-Realization.

*I am not able to discern the will of God: to take up my duties, or to continue silence.*

The first and foremost duty of a seeker of Truth is to discover his or her essential and true Being. Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their dead, you follow me!" To know, "Who am I?" should be the purpose and aim of the life of the seeker. Do not confound the means with the end. Service and fulfilling of all other duties are only means to purify one's heart, which is an essential prerequisite of Self-Realization. The will of God is that you should be happy, you should be enlightened, you should realize the Truth, first-hand.

### **First become God yourself**

*I don't know what I want in my life. Is it to see God in everyone?*

It depends how you define life. The desire to live is the fundamental desire, but how to live and what to live for makes the difference. Do you think that a pig really lives? Consciousness and Bliss are inseparable. Consciousness is Bliss. If a person is crying and weeping, will you call that

person divine? First become God yourself. Only then, will you be able to see God in everyone.

### **Whatever you do, do it with the purpose of realizing God**

*Do I have to give up everything in order to get Liberation?*

Self-surrender happens only when you have spent all your energy on the path of God-Realization. You are not tired; you become empty and create a space for God to come in you. You have to live for God and God alone. If you eat, you eat for God. If you walk, you walk for God. If you speak, you speak for God. If you earn money, you earn money for God. If you produce children, you produce children for God. If you live alone, you live alone for God only. If you live in a community, you live there only for God. The whole gestalt (whole view of life) is transformed for the seeker of God.

A seeker went to a sage and asked, “Sir, what should I do to realize God?” The sage said, “Start running and feel and think that you are running for God.” The seeker was shocked and said, “Sir, how can I run all the time? Tell me some other method or practice.” The sage said, “All right, sit down and feel and think that you are sitting for God. Whatever you do, you have to do it with only one purpose, the purpose of realizing God.” Let God be the “be-all and end-all of your life.” Only then can you realize Him.

## Chapter Three

### *Basic Qualifications*

#### **Qualifications of a *sādhaka***

*Please tell us the qualifications required of a *sādhaka*.*

1. Sincerity to realize God
2. Commitment
3. Inner detachment from temporalities
4. Control of one's senses and mind
5. Non-violence
6. Love and good will for all living beings
7. Tolerance, etc.

**If you were not essentially perfect, you could never realize perfection.**

*Do we need to be perfect to see God or is it seeing God which makes us perfect?*

You have to be what you really are! If you were completely perfect, you would not seek perfection. If you were not essentially perfect, you could never realize perfection. In

your present state of existence, you are neither completely perfect, nor completely imperfect. As said in *Spiritual Gems*:

*“Man feels his imperfection in many a way. Were he completely imperfect, how would he come to know of his imperfection? And if he were perfectly perfect, how would he have the feeling of his imperfection? This makes it crystal clear that in his human state, he is neither perfectly imperfect nor is he perfectly perfect. The truth is that he is an imperfect manifestation of the perfect Lord.”*

### **The essential prerequisites**

*What is the essence of the spiritual path, or what is the most important part?*

Sincerity, alertness, regular practice of meditation, dispassion, reflection, love, selfless service — all of these are the essential prerequisites to follow the spiritual path. Seekers should make best use of all their energies to realize the Divine.

### **The factors which are common for all seekers**

*Is it a must to become a sannyāsī if we want Self-Realization?*

As far as Realization of the Self is concerned, both a *sannyāsī* and a man of family life can attain it. Self-control, discipline, commitment to one’s goal, observation of the moral values and social laws are the factors which are common for the seeker living a family life and for one living as a *sannyāsī*.

But there is a code of conduct for a seeker living a family life. There is a code of conduct for a *sannyāsī*. The family man also has many duties connected with the family which he must fulfil. His way of Self-Realization is not the same as that of a *sannyāsī*. These days, there is a different category. Some people are neither family persons, nor *sannyāsī*. So, maybe a third way has to be discovered.

### **You need a pure and silent mind to listen to God**

*What are the qualifications of those who attain God-Realization without an external Guru?*

They are like dry wood, which catches fire very soon without any problem. Others are like wet wood; they don't catch fire easily. Wet wood emits smoke when you try to burn it, it does not catch fire easily. Gautama Buddha saw a dead body only once, and it evoked dispassion in him. He renounced everything and went out in search of the Truth. Ramana Maharshi read a page in a book, *Shiva Purāṇa*, and it awakened him. These are exceptions. Otherwise, religious people read Scriptures daily and no substantial transformation happens. Many times you see people dying, but no dispassion arises. Jesus said, "Those who have eyes, let them see. Those who have ears, let them hear." We don't have those eyes and those ears that can see or hear the Truth. We don't see; we only interpret through our conditioned mind when we see something. We cannot listen; we only interpret with our conditioned mind when we hear about the Truth. Jesus hinted about those eyes which can see the Truth. He hinted about those ears which can hear the Truth.

God listens to you, but you don't listen to Him. You need a pure and silent mind to listen to God, not a mind which is like a supermarket.

### **The Divine is nearer than your breath**

*I like when you write about realized ones, but my problem is that I feel nothing, even in your presence. Why is it so? Is my heart not open?*

Faith and love open the heart. Doubts close the heart. Communication takes place only when the transmitter and the receiver both are in working order. Alert passivity is needed to receive and live the spiritual love, light, peace, harmony and life.

Suppose you have heard about an enlightened person and this person is sitting in front of you, but you don't know who he is. He is near you, but also away from you. The Scriptures say that the Divine is far away and the Divine is also nearest. "The Divine is nearer than your breath," says a Sufi sage. To know the Divine, the mind must be passive, silent and alert. The Divine is always available to us; we are not available to Him.

### **How to open the heart**

*What does it mean "to have an open heart."*

To have an open heart means being trustful, faithful, positive, simple, and undoubting like a child.

*What can we do to open our heart?*

Faith opens the heart; doubt closes it. Love opens the heart and hatred closes it. Positive thinking opens the heart; negative thinking closes it. Be more and more trustful, more and more loving, and think positively more and more. Have trust in God, have trust in yourself. Love others as you love yourself. Deep and sincere aspiration enables you to remember the Divine

*Why do we forget the Divine? Is it because of our karma? What helps us remember the Divine?*

We forget the Divine because we have a vested interest in forgetting the Divine. Should we regularly remember the Divine, it would transform our lives. Then we wouldn't be able to live as we are living in the world, with all sorts of attachments and desires, trying to fulfil them. *Karma* has nothing to do with remembering or forgetting the Divine. *Karma* is related only to the world of time. The factors which enable us to remember the Divine are deep and sincere aspiration to realize the Divine and cultivating an inner detachment from the temporalities of the phenomenal world.

### **The baby cat or the baby monkey path**

*Swamiji, I just want to tell you how much I love the atmosphere of this âshram.*

You should fall in love with God instead of falling in love with any place or any *âshram*. Everything in the world is changing and goes on changing. *Âshrams* and institutions

come up in time and wither away in time. Many places in the world which were very peaceful and vibrant spiritually at one time are no longer like that. Instead, they have even become more disturbed than ordinary places. Many religious places in Pakistan, which inspired millions of people, are now abandoned and misused. The same happened in other parts of the world.

*Up to now, I have neglected God. Even when I am away from the âshram, I need your presence to help me remember God and go deeper in meditation.*

Ramakrishna used to say that there are two kinds of seekers. The first one is like the baby monkey and the second one like the baby cat. The baby monkey catches hold of its mother firmly. The mother moves, plays, jumps, but the grip of the baby monkey is so strong that it goes on with its mother as if it was a part of its mother's body. The baby cat, you know, does not even open its eyes for many days, it just cries "mew, mew," and the mother takes full care of it. She takes hold of the baby in her mouth and is shifting it from place to place for its safety. For these two types of seekers, two words are used in the Hindu Scriptures: *shrāman* and *brāhmin*. The first is the one who believes in self-effort and is like the baby monkey, holding the Truth firmly with its own efforts. The second is one who believes in God and his path is the path of self-surrender, like the baby cat. Do you know, in Buddhism and Jainism, the monks are called *shrāmans*. It is most difficult to surrender. The ego does not allow it.

## ***Faith & Trust***

### **Belief is the first step**

*I feel I should increase my belief.*

Belief is not enough. It can never be total. Believing is useful to tread the path of Realization. That is all. If you don't believe in God, you won't do anything to realize God. Belief is the first step. For example, someone told you that there is a place called *Sadhana Kendra Ashram*. You believed it and then you came here. Had you disbelieved it, would you have come here?

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

*Swamiji, 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 trustworthy? What is the problem? 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. It not only unburdens your heart, it is also good for the eyes.

*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.

**With progress in *sāadhanā*, faith turns into trust**

*The heart can sometimes be open or closed. Does it mean that trust, faith, love etc. can be there only occasionally? Are the trust, faith, love, which are not permanently established in the heart authentic?*

Yes, a fight between doubt and faith goes on in the mind. Sometimes doubt is up and faith is down, and sometimes vice versa. But both are authentic if they influence your thoughts and deeds. With progress in *sāadhanā*, the fight between them becomes less and less and ultimately the heart becomes enlightened. Faith becomes stronger and stronger with experience and turns into trust. Ultimately, self-surrender happens. Simple trust, as that of a child in its mother, is what makes the mind relaxed and peaceful.

*I trust neither myself nor God.*

Lack of self-confidence and lack of confidence in God are directly proportional. When you have deep trust in God, your morale is very high and your self-confidence is on the peak. Prayer, meditation and some breathing exercises are very helpful for gaining confidence. Read only those books which boost your inspiration and love for God. Don't associate with those people who are always thinking negative thoughts or sending negative vibrations.

**“If God cannot give you food, how can you expect salvation from Him?”**

*I feel insecurity in my life, so I lack peace. What can be done to remove this feeling?*

There are two ways to remove this feeling of insecurity from the mind: one is complete trust and love for the Lord, the other is deep reflection on the true Self.

Ramakrishna used to say, “If God cannot give you food, how can you expect salvation from Him?” You can make an experiment, but if you fall in love with God, you don’t need to do that. The things which are the most important for life are the least expensive. You cannot live without air, which is totally free. You have not to pay a single penny for it. Next comes water. It is also available easily. Next is food. Even when you live in a wild forest, you can get food. There are wild fruits, herbs, and many things to eat.

Ramakrishna used to give another example. If a woman gives up all her relatives, home, hearth, everything and goes to live with her husband, the husband has to provide everything for her. If he does not provide food, she has the right to force him to provide everything for her.

*We can see and deal with the husband, but God, we don’t see Him!*

God may not be visible to us, but for the devotee who has fallen in love with Him, He is everywhere and is always with that devotee.

**Spiritual maturity**

*I don't give my trust so easily and my mind wants to control everything. Is it through meditation that I can overcome my bondage?*

Trust is the advanced stage of faith. Trust and faith come from within. They cannot be imposed; they should not be imposed on anyone. It is a question of inner growth and evolution. Faith and trust in and love for the Divine or for the saints and sages (holy and godly persons) come when consciousness reaches a certain level. It may be called spiritual maturity. There are certain conditions, which can make the maturity come earlier. Boys and girls living in cities reach maturity earlier than those living in remote villages because in villages there are comparatively few things that incite that desire. Similarly, persons living or brought up in an atmosphere which is conducive and congenial for spiritual growth, develop faith and trust at an early age. If you stay for some time near saints and sages, your nature may change. I have seen atheists become not only theists, but deeply devoted to the Divine when they started living in the company of sages or devotees.

It reminds me about the dialogue between a Russian leader and an Indian leader of a saintly nature. Over forty years ago, the General Secretary of the communist party of Russia came to India. He had an appointment with an Indian leader, Shyama Prasad Mukherji who was a devotee of the divine Mother. Shyama Prasad Mukherji sat in prayer in the morning and became so absorbed in it that he forgot about the appointment he had given to the Russian diplomat. So, he became quite late and apologized for it, saying, "I am

sorry, I was praying and forgot about the time of the appointment.” The Russian said, “Oh, do you believe in God? If you come to Russia and stay with me for six months, you will start disbelieving in God.” Shyama Prasad Mukherji smiled and said, “If you come here and stay with me for two months, you will start believing in God.”

In your case, maybe you have to stay for a year. It is easier to change if and when you really want to change. Trust is a divine quality; it is a virtue. A doubtful person can never be peaceful.

### **God, the Divine, Truth, religion, etc., are basically matters of faith**

Unless you yourself have seen God, you have to believe in some God-person. When you see for yourself, you don't need to believe. Belief in something is needed only so long as you don't see that thing yourself. Someone asked Swami Rama Tirtha, “Do you believe in God?” Swamiji replied, “No!” The man was surprised because Swami Rama Tirtha was always talking of God and now he was saying, “I don't believe in God.” The Swami smiled and said, “I don't need to believe in God. I see God face to face.”

### **Without believing you cannot walk a single step in any direction**

*Is it possible to reach the ultimate Consciousness without believing in God and without having faith?*

It is very, very difficult for a doubtful person to be steady and go anywhere on the spiritual path. That is why all the Scriptures in the world advise the seeker of Truth to cultivate trust and faith. Even in day-to-day affairs you have to have trust. How and why did you come here? Someone must have told you about this place, or you might have read about it in some book. You believed it and reached this place. How do you know about what you call the ultimate Consciousness? If you don't believe in it, how will you work to realize it? Without believing, you cannot walk a single step in any direction. What you call the ultimate Consciousness, other persons may call God. The word God has been misused by many people.

### ***Sincerity & Aspiration***

#### **The basic qualification of a seeker**

*How does one feel the need for God-Realization?*

To feel the need for God-Realization or Self-Realization is the basic qualification of a seeker. If it is not there, your *sādhana* becomes only a ritual. Discrimination and reflection on what you want may awaken the aspiration for God-Realization. Ask yourself every day, every moment, "What do I want? What is my need?"

#### **The need of God**

*You told us many times that we should have a deep aspiration to realize God. I would like to be starved for God.*

As a starving person aspires for food, as a thirsty person aspires for water, so the devotee should aspire for God. This is just an example. The meaning is that you should call or remember God with a total, undivided mind.

*I want to sit in meditation and remember the Divine, but I cannot.*

When you have a burning and deep interest, then it will become difficult for you to keep your mind away from God. Attention follows deep interest. You have to be very deeply interested in God, as a greedy person is interested in money. He/she is counting the currency notes even in his/her dreams. You have to fall in love with God. You will have to love God more than your son.

*In our normal, noisy lives in the world, how can we make our faith in God grow? The time for practice is limited, but above all, we are not “thirsty” enough for God.*

A time comes when one feels the need for God. You cannot be satisfied playing with toys forever. God is calling you, but you do not hear the call. You are too busy with playing. Stop running for a while, sit down quietly for some time daily, and you will hear the call. If you feel the need for God, it is a promising spiritual sign.

*Could the lessening of the influence of people around me be a measure of my progress on the spiritual path?*

Certainly, yes! This is one of the criteria by which you know where you are, and how much you have progressed on the spiritual path: you become more and more innerly detached

from the world, then your love for God, your zeal for realizing the Truth become deeper and deeper and more and more irresistible. If you feel hunger, it is a sign of good health. Similarly, if you feel the need for God more and more and if your zeal for God-Realization is becoming deeper and more intense, it is a promising spiritual sign. When the time of meeting the Beloved draws nearer, the intensity of love in the heart of the lover becomes more and more. The Beloved in this context is God and the lover is the seeker or devotee.

### **Are you missing nothing?**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

Have you ever written a letter to God? Do you write letters to your parents and friends in your heart? I read somewhere that a child wrote a letter to God and put it in the letterbox. Be like that child and you will see God. Have you ever wept for God? Ramakrishna used to say, “People weep for friends, for money, for jobs, for sons, fathers, mothers, for power and position, but how many weep for God?” You know, there was a time when Ramakrishna used to weep day and night for the *darshan* of the divine Mother. If you don’t weep for God, it means you don’t miss God very deeply!

*I don’t know God. How can I miss what I don’t know?*

Are you missing nothing? The first step, the foremost step to discover God is that you start missing God. You miss God so much that He takes over all your thoughts, actions, emotions, seekings — all what you are and what you do. Have you ever fallen in love with a person? Then you can

imagine a little what it means to fall in love. You have to fall in love with God completely. Other persons can betray your love, but God never! He is the true lover. Worldly love can last at the most until your death. But God's love accompanies you life after life, until you are merged with God forever.

One has first 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.

### **The key of success in the search for Truth**

*I am engaged in a deep search and I came to India to receive some direction. Swamiji, what can you tell me?*

Be more and more honest, sincere and committed to your search for Truth. The key to success in any kind of search, even if it is the search for the laws of this universe, is that you have to be so much absorbed in your search that you forget your physical body and its comforts. Think of a scientist who works in a laboratory day and night to discover some physical law. He is almost totally cut off from social life. Can you tell me the name of any great scientist who discovered a natural law who was very much attached to the world and running after sensory comforts? Einstein was so indifferent to money affairs that when he travelled by bus he would often make mistakes counting the money when he wanted to pay the bus-fare!

A very deep, burning interest in God-Realization has to be cultivated. The deeper the interest, the easier it is to focus one's attention on God. The interest should not be

only intellectual. The seeker undertakes discipline for the sake of the Divine.

If you live a disciplined life, you save so much energy and avoid unnecessary thinking. By discipline, I mean putting all your activities in order. It saves not only time, but also energy.

*Sometimes, I feel my sādhanā is a burden. I have had the experience of discipline in the army, but I observed that strict discipline does not make people happy. Should we follow a strict sādhanā?*

Training or discipline is imposed on soldiers from outside. But the seeker undertakes discipline willingly for the sake of the Divine. That is the difference. The seeker enjoys *sādhanā*. *Sādhanā* is not a burden for the true seeker. When you feel *sādhanā* is a burden, at that time, your interest for the Divine or Self-Realization is almost nil. You enjoy the food only when you are hungry. If and when you have no hunger, even the most delicious food will not give you any joy.

### **Put your whole heart into your sādhanā**

*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 the way of your spiritual upliftment. “Burn the bridges behind you” 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 only want 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 you 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 will you 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 in your spiritual edification. May the Divine help you!

**To discover your spiritual Master, cultivate the qualities of a seeker of Truth**

*When I listen to music, I think, "This musician plays such wonderful music, I would like to learn music with him!" Later, on TV I watch a world cup football match and I think, "This man can do everything when he has a soccer ball! I would like him to be my football coach." But as for the spiritual path, I would like to know how I can recognize an awakened person?*

To recognize an enlightened one who is united with the Divine is to recognize God Himself. To compare an expert

musician or a world class football player with an enlightened one is just childish. Well, there is no doubt that you yourself have to discover God or a spiritual Master. No one else can do it for you. Instead of knowing the qualities of God or the signs of a spiritual Master, it is more important to know the qualifications of a seeker of Truth/God/the Divine, and cultivate those qualifications in yourself. The first and foremost qualification of a seeker of God/Spirit/Divinity is the burning aspiration, the undivided interest to directly experience and realize the Real, which more often than not, is generated when one is disillusioned with what is unreal.

## ***Humility***

### **Humility is the fruit of right thinking**

*How does one diminish the ego? What is the right way to develop humility?*

Ego is the product of non-seeing. As and when you see your ego, it feels ashamed and runs away. Ego is like a shadow of darkness, which has no positive existence. It can only be dispelled by the light of Awareness. It can be weakened by the cultivation of humility, but it can be rooted out completely only by the light of Awareness. Humility is the fruit of right thinking.

### **A pure and humble man**

There was a man. He was so pure and humble that the gods were pleased with him and wanted to give him a boon. They

said, "You can ask anything and we will give it to you." The man said, "I don't want anything. Whatever God has given to me, I am completely satisfied with that." The gods said, "You can ask something for other people if you so wish. The man replied, "God knows the needs of all and is doing what is right." The gods wanted to give him extraordinary powers to alleviate the sufferings of others, but he refused, saying, "God is already doing it, there is no need for me to do it." The story says that finally the gods made this man's shadow so powerful that whosoever touched it would be relieved of pains and worries, but the man would not know it.

### **Spontaneous humility**

*What does this sentence, said by Jesus, mean: "Blessed are the poor in spirit"?*

Humility! Some people are humble but they are proud of becoming humble. It means they are not completely humble. Any positive quality, when it becomes perfect and complete in you, becomes spontaneous and you are not even conscious that you possess that quality.

*Can humility be practised?*

In the beginning you practise it, as when you learn to play on the harmonium; you have to practise a lot. But when you become adept, you can play on the harmonium without thinking, spontaneously.

## ***Reflection & Discrimination***

### **Three ways to achieve *viveka***

*What are the steps toward achieving discrimination, viveka?*

*Viveka* means right understanding. Usually it is developed by reflecting on the statements and inspired words of the saints and sages with an open and unprejudiced mind, with faith and trust. It also comes by reflecting on one's experiences and trying to learn from them. Prayer in which you invoke the divine grace only for getting *viveka* is the most efficient means. The *Gāyatrī mantra* is the *mantra* with which Hindus invoke the divine grace for being blessed with *viveka*.

### **Discipline and reflection are necessary for spiritual *sāadhanā***

*In the West, the teachings are more concerned with reflection on our reactions and emotions. You teach us to see our identification with them. What is your advice concerning these two different approaches?*

Reflection is a part of *sāadhanā*. It is a sort of analysing. Through reflection you can come to an intellectual conclusion about what is right. But the intellectual understanding alone does not lead to Realization. The seeker has to follow a system of *sāadhanā* in all its parts, whether you follow the path of Yoga, or that of Lord Buddha. Discipline and understanding are both necessary. Reflection itself is a mental activity. You can reflect on anger, its bad effects, its mechanisms, its cause. You may be able to write a big book on anger, and yet you may not be able to control it.

**You can learn from your experiences only when you reflect upon them**

*I spent seven years of my youth as a boarder in a Roman Catholic school. At that time I prayed all day long and thought I had a religious vocation. But as soon as I left this school for university, I gave up all religious practices, thinking that my life before had only been a bad dream. I wonder if the same will happen when I leave the âshram.*

Are you having a bad dream here in the *âshram*? If it is so, it is better you forget it when you go back to France! If you think and feel that the way you have lived here can lead you to Truth, you should try to stick to this way even after you have gone back to France. You can learn from your experiences only when you reflect upon them. What have you achieved by living a worldly life? Can you tell me? Have you been satisfied with that? You have spent decades trying to get satisfaction from the objects and senses, but have you found satisfaction? Has your desire ceased or been satisfied? You can try for thousands and thousands of years, but you are not going to succeed. You should reflect upon your way of life. Discriminate between what is transient and what is lasting. No changing situation, object, or relationship can give you lasting satisfaction. What do you want?

*I practise sâdhanâ, but I can see that my heart isn't totally in it. Am I just trying to escape from suffering?*

Who wants suffering? Who does not want to be free from suffering? What is the cause of suffering? What do you want? What do you need?

Reflect upon this again and again. Raise this question to yourself every day early in the morning. Late in the night, before going to sleep, reflect over how you have spent your day and what for. As an accountant keeps his/her cash-books complete by the evening, similarly, the seeker must also keep the account of his/her actions and reflect upon the actions, thoughts, and words of the day in order to be aware of how and what he/she is living for.

*How can I recognize the part in me which is able to observe correctly what I am doing and the part which criticizes, and likes or dislikes what I am doing?*

To reflect wilfully upon your actions and to be overpowered by the thoughts of past actions is not the same thing. I am not saying that you should judge or evaluate your actions or thoughts. I have said that the seeker should remain aware of what he is seeking. If one does that, one would be more sincere about what one wants to achieve in life.

Gautama reflected upon it and became free. Ramana reflected upon it. Don't live a life full of slumber, as animals do. Animals experience all sorts of sensual pleasures, more than a human being does. But they learn nothing from the experience because they do not and cannot reflect upon their experience, and so they cannot grow mentally or spiritually. Very few people, unless they are alert and vigilant, can learn from life in the world. Those alone learn who want to learn. Others are just drifting. They are living because they cannot die.

There is a cat on the terrace of your block. It is quite satisfied with the biscuits with which you feed it. It has no problems. It feels problems only when it is hungry or sick

or sex starved. There is the joy of sharing, of service, of giving, of reflecting, of music, of meditation and of the experience of the Divine. Only a human being can have such joy.

### **A place where people come and then go, is it not an inn?**

A naked sage, an *avadhûta*, went to the palace of a king. He somehow managed to enter the bedroom of the king without the knowledge of the king and lay himself down on the bed of the king for taking a rest. When the king came in, he saw a man sleeping on his bed. He said, "How dare you come here? Who let you enter my room?" The sage said: "I thought it was a *dharamshala* (an inn), so I wanted to take rest here."

King: "You fool, it is not an inn, it is my palace!"

Sage: "For how long have you been living here?"

King: "For the last fifty years."

Sage: "Who was living here before you?"

King: "My father."

Sage: "And who before him?"

King: "Another family."

Sage: "And who before that family?"

King: "I don't know."

Sage: "A place where people come, live and then go away, and then other people come, live and go away, and so on.... what is it if not an inn?"

The king reflected, understood the point, bowed to the sage and asked for his guidance to know the Truth.

Right thinking is the first step on the path that leads to realization of the Truth. Right thinking leads to dispassion towards the world of time. Every seeker of Truth should reflect regularly on the truism that he or she will not live in this world forever. This world is like an inn. No one can live in this world forever.

### **The seeker has to make the right decision at every step**

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

At every step of life there are crossroads and one has to choose, and choose so that one does not take the wrong path. In *Spiritual Gems* it is written that at every step the road is split into three directions: one going to heaven, another going to hell and the third one 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.

### **When you feel confused, consult someone more enlightened than you**

*What should one think about people who kill in the name of God?*

God is love. Can you kill someone out of love? When you love God, you will hesitate to kill even an animal, what to say of killing a human being.

*How does one discriminate? I sometimes do things that seem to me to be right, but in reality they may be wrong.*

You are on the right path! But when you feel confused about what to do, you should consult someone who is more advanced, or more enlightened than you.

*I told my friend that most people think their actions are right, even if it is not the case. But I couldn't convince her.*

Debates never convince.

### **The energy which is rightly used brings peace and happiness**

*Should I sit in meditation even when I am full of energy?*

All energies should be directed to realize the Divine. The energy that is not rightly and properly directed creates obstacles on the path of Realization. Energy that is misdirected creates tension. Energy that is rightly used brings peace and happiness.

*Sometimes, this energy is so strong I don't know what it is.*

Well, don't try to name it; it vanishes when you try to name it. What is the problem? Your joy should depend on yourself and not on outer conditions and situations. Only then will it be lasting and permanent. How can joy which is derived from changing situations be permanent? If your joy is dependent on conditions, it will not be permanent. It will be there when conditions are favourable, but it will leave you when conditions are unfavourable. Conditional joy is not real Joy.

### **As long as you are not realized there is “good and bad”**

*Some people say that there is no “good and bad” in this world. What would you say?*

If someone tells you there is no good and no bad in the world, don't believe that person. The world is made of three *guṇas*, i.e. *sāttvic*, *rājasic* and *tāmasic* qualities. The *Ātmā* is beyond the *guṇas*, but in *tamoguṇa*, it is completely veiled. No person overpowered by *tamoguṇa* can ever realize the *Ātmā*. In *rajoguṇa*, the *Ātmā* appears as distorted and therefore a *rajoguṇa* person cannot realize the *Ātmā*. In *sattvagūṇa*, the *Ātmā* is reflected as clearly as it can be. The *sattvagūṇa* person feels *Ātmā-Ānanda* (the Bliss of the Self), but still there is duality. He/she knows that the Bliss is coming from somewhere. At that time, the *mahāvākya* “*Tat Tvam Asi*” addressed to the person by one who is realized, removes the veil of duality.

If a person tells you there is no good or bad, ask that person, “All right, so what is the problem?” If there is no good or bad for you, if there are no likes and dislikes for you, you can never be provoked, you can never be excited; you will stop running after anything whatsoever and all your desires will say ‘good bye’ to you forever. You will feel Self-Fulfilled.

Someone once quoted Shakespeare to me and said, “Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” I asked him, “Can you stop thinking?” He thought for a while and said, “No.” I said, “Then how can you say that there is no good or bad for you? So long as you are living on the mental level, you cannot escape good and bad.” A person living on the mental level who loses the sense of good and bad can

become even more dangerous than an animal. An animal has no sense of good and bad, but all its instincts are controlled by nature. In the case of humans, the mind interferes with the instincts, which makes the instincts impure. In the world everything can be pure or impure. The water can be impure or pure. The air can be pure or impure. The physical body can be healthy or diseased. The senses and mind can be impure or pure. A mind full of greed, arrogance, attachment, desire, infatuation, etc., is called an impure mind! There is no good and bad only for the one who has realized directly the “One without a second!”

*I have observed sometimes that some very good people don't believe in God. In spite of that, are they close to God without knowing it?*

You can also see some persons who believe in God, but are not good people. Becoming a good person is not enough. It is the beginning, which may facilitate the treading of the path to God-Realization. Becoming a good person means becoming good in relation to other beings of the world. Being related to the Divine is qualitatively different. It is the unitive experience of Timelessness. Why should one be good? Goodness which is not based on the unitive experience of the Divine has no solid foundation. From the spiritual perspective, a good person is one who is free and enlightened. A bad person is one who is not free and not enlightened.

**The seeker should discriminate between his needs and wants**

*Should part of one's concentration be used to keep the mind on the basic inner disposition a seeker should cultivate (to*

*tell the truth, or surrender) when it does not arise spontaneously?*

The temporary pulls and pushes which tend to distract the seeker from his/her goal are involuntary. The seeker tries to overcome them instead of changing his/her disposition. The deeper and stronger the inner need to realize the Divine is, the easier it is to overcome such pulls and pushes. Prayer also gives strength to overcome the temptations and distractions of the world. The seeker should discriminate between his needs and wants.

Spontaneity is rare. It is the fruit of the consummation of self-effort. The seeker is one who is making a conscious effort to know and realize the Truth first-hand. He or she uses all his/her energies and concentration to realize the above-said aim and purpose of life.

### ***Dispassion and Detachment***

#### **Don't forget to untie your boat**

*Is it because I still feel my family ties that I cannot concentrate properly?*

When you hear the name of your son or your grandson, it moves something in you. But what happens inside you when you hear the name of God?

There is a story. Some *paṇḍits* (priests) in Vrindavan wanted to go for a pilgrimage to Prayāgrāj, where the sacred rivers Ganga and Yamuna meet together. They decided to travel by boat, which they hired for some days. They

themselves knew how to row a boat. They took all the rations in order to cook their food on the boat and also many things to drink. In the evening when everything was ready and all the preparations made, they ground the green leaves of *bhāṅg* from which *charas* is made and drank it to their satisfaction. They also made *pakorās* of *bhāṅg* and ate them. Then they started to work the oars and row the boat. All night they were rowing the boat. They were more or less in a state of intoxication because they had consumed the *bhāṅg*. The next day when it was dawn, they found that the boat was at the same place. Then they discovered that they had not untied the boat from the bank in the night when they had started to work the oars.

*So without vairâgya one cannot have right concentration?*

*Vairâgya* plus regular practice of meditation are both important to stabilize the mind. *Vairâgya* means dispassion and is the opposite of passion. But *vītarāga* is beyond passion and dispassion.

**To be totally free of worries you have to develop dispassion**

*How can we remember the Divine at every moment in spite of our daily worries?*

You remember ceaselessly the one with whom you are in deep love. Should you fall in love with God you won't need to practise any method or technique to remember Him.

A person feels worried about someone, or something, or some situation that is subject to decay and death and to which he is attached. If you want to be totally free of worries

you have to develop dispassion (holy indifference) towards what is temporal and finite, and aspire for what is timeless and everlasting. Development involves self-effort. Dispassion is the fruit of reflection, meditation, discipline and learning from one's experiences. Dispassion is a part of *sādhanā*. In the system of *Vedānta*, dispassion is the second step. The first step is *viveka*, which is discrimination or right thinking.

**Dispassion is based on discrimination. 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 *sādhanā*. Stability of mind means that the seeker is able to fix his/her mind inward without any distraction. The seeker has to start discriminating between right and wrong and follow the right with firm determination.

Discrimination and dispassion help the stability of mind. When Arjuna asked Krishna how to make his mind stable, the Lord told him, “It is only through dispassion and the regular practice of concentration that one can make the mind stable.”

*How does detachment happen?*

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

*Can we be detached from little things before we reach complete detachment?*

If you have dispassion, that 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, seat of honour, power, status and recognition.

### **The ego of renunciation should be given up**

*I think that to renounce is not proper, but rather we should be desireless.*

Do you mean to say that one should desire to be desireless? The idea of renunciation should not be given up. It is the ego of renunciation that should be given up. It reminds me of a story, a joke rather to say.

There was a saint. When people would go to him, he would ask everyone to renounce something: stealing, pride, desire, anger, etc. A man who did not have faith in saints and sages was persuaded by his friend to visit that saint. The saint was giving a discourse. The man sat there uncomfortably along with his friend and listened to the discourse of the saint. When the discourse was finished, the sage called that new man and said to him, "You should take a vow to give up something such as pride, anger, desire, etc.; whatever you want to give up." The man thought for a

while and said, “I take the vow that I will never come to you again.”

The negative tendencies should be shunned. The positive tendencies should not be renounced, but pride and ego should be renounced. There is a spiritual musing in the booklet *Spiritual Gems* in this respect:

*“Self does not attain Fulfilment either through amassing things or through renunciation. You say: ‘I have amassed all this, and I have to amass this much yet,’ or you say: ‘I have renounced all this, and I have to give up this much more.’ Such ideas arise from false ego only. Self is greater than all states. Self-Fulfilment comes from Self-Realization..”*

**“What is the difference between you and me?”**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

A sage was living in a forest. A king heard of the greatness of that sage and went to see him. The king was very much impressed and invited the sage to come and stay in his palace. The sage agreed. The king deputed many servants to serve the sage. He was provided with all sorts of comforts and very delicious food. The sage started living like a king.

After a few months, doubts started coming up in the mind of the king: should a sage live such a luxurious life? One day the king could not suppress his doubts. When he was going for a walk with the sage, he asked, “Sir, now what is the difference between you and me?” The sage continued walking and said, “Any more questions?” The king said, “You are served by so many servants as I am

served. You eat delicious foods; you wear very expensive clothes as I do. You enjoy a very comfortable life here like me. So I am confused. What is the difference between you and me now?” While walking, the sage kept telling the king to ask more and more questions, which the king was doing and the sage was listening calmly.

In the meantime they went very far from the palace and entered a forest. The sage said, “Oh, what a beautiful forest! I would like to stay here. Thank you very much for inviting me to your palace and providing so many comforts for my stay. But now, I will stay in this forest and by the way, why don’t you stay here also? You have seen everything in this life, ruled the country for such a long time. It is now time for you to devote yourself to meditation and *sāadhanā* exclusively. You have crossed the age of sixty-five years. Who knows, you may die tomorrow. You should now renounce your worldly life, stay here with me and spend all your time in God remembrance. I had accepted your invitation. Now, you should accept what I say. Please stay here, at least for six months and see how you feel at this place.”

The king became nervous and said, “I have to go back soon. Many Ministers would be waiting for me and how can I renounce my kingdom? My son is still very young. He has not yet completed his studies. Who will take care of my state? What will my wife do? She cannot stay without me more than a week. She starts weeping and crying if I am out for more than a week. I am sorry but I cannot leave my wife, my kingdom, my son.”

The sage smiled and said, “That is the difference between you and me. You are attached to so many people

and things. I am free. I can live in a forest. I can live in a palace. I have stayed in the huts of the poorest men and enjoyed living there. I have lived in forests for many, many years and enjoyed my stay there. I stayed in your palace and enjoyed my stay there as well. I have no attachment. I am completely satisfied and can live anywhere. That is the difference between you and me.”

### **True seekers work and remain unattached**

*How can we accept the role we have to play without being trapped by it?*

When an actor plays the role of a saint or an enlightened person in a movie, does he become enlightened? A serial on Saint Kabir was coming on TV. A man acted as Kabir in the serial. Do you think he could have the same spiritual experiences as Kabir? Until and unless you are centred within and have some substantial spiritual experience, it is very difficult to remain unmoved and uninfluenced by the situations you work in. But if seekers remain very alert and if they are totally and honestly committed to the spiritual search, they can work and remain unattached, like a maid servant who takes care of the children of a family in the home in which she is working, but in her heart, she feels and knows that the children are not hers.

### **The absence of the sense of possessiveness**

*If someone gives us a gift that we don't like or need, should we still accept it in order not to hurt the giver?*

Everyone has his or her own likes and dislikes. It is not necessary that if you like a thing everyone should like it. A gift is a gift. If someone gives you something out of love, you should accept it cheerfully even if it is not to your liking, provided it does not harm you.

*In the book of Swami Vivekananda about Rāja Yoga he said that the first step is yama and explains that this includes non-acceptance of gifts. Why?*

There are five *yamas* and five *niyamas*. Non-acceptance of gifts is not the exact translation. The word is *aparigraha* which means the absence of sense of possessiveness. You can see these *yamas* and *niyamas* in Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. Do you mean a *yogī* must be doing some job and earn his/her living? How will a *sādhu* live if he does not accept food and clothes? Cannot a *sādhu* be a seeker?

**Anything that keeps the soul away from God is worthy of being given up**

*Is using discrimination the only way to get dispassion?*

Discrimination or reflection begets dispassion. But the more powerful and unfailing means is the love of the Divine. *Vairāgya* is a natural by-product of divine Love. You don't need to cultivate dispassion if you have love for God. The love of the Divine eats up all passions and worldly desires. It is said that even when some person falls in love with a woman or a man, he or she is prepared to give up everything for the sake of the beloved: money, job, house and even life. But when you fall in love with God, you lose your self-

identity completely and merge in Him. When the sincere aspiration for God-Realization or Self-Realization comes up, when the life interest is changed, passion starts turning into dispassion and desire into selfless love. It is not a sacrifice, it is a joy.

A man came and touched the feet of Swami Rama Tirtha. Swamiji said, “Why do you touch my feet?” The man replied, “Sir, you are a great God-man, you have sacrificed everything for the sake of God.” (You know that Swami Rama Tirtha like Lord Buddha left his small children and his wife back home and went away in search of the Truth.) The man continued, “You left your family, your job, your friends. You are a great devotee of God. Therefore I have touched your feet.” The *Swami* smiled and said, “What is sacrifice? There is garbage in your home. If you throw it out, have you made a sacrifice? Sacrifice means you give up something that is very valuable. Excuse me, in that sense I should touch your feet, because you have given up God in favour of the temporal things and relationships.”

*Are children and wife garbage?*

For many people the temporal relationships become a hindrance on the path of God-Realization. They live only for them and die for them. If the children remind you of God, and don't make you forget the Divine, they become the means to God-Realization. Anything that keeps the soul away from God is worthy of being given up.

In Hinduism, there is a form of devotion that is called *vātsalya bhāva*. In that form of devotion, God is taken to be a father, or a mother, or even one's child and is worshipped

as such. One can have God-Realization through that form of devotion also. But how many parents regard their children as forms of God and thus remember the Divine through the service to their children?

*I don't know if it is correct to abandon our duties, even for the search of Truth?*

The level of consciousness of the seeker is changing. At one stage, what seems to be a duty ceases to be a duty in another level of consciousness. I think Buddha committed no crime by giving up his family. Even if he did an injustice to his wife, child, or aged parents, he has given another dimension of light and disinterested love to all humanity. Kabirji was a great saint. So was Lord Buddha. Each soul has its own way of reaching the Truth.

### **Suffering can produce dispassion**

*The following statements are from "The Philokalia". It is a collection of texts written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries by spiritual masters of Orthodox Christian tradition. "The soul's distress is the result of sensual pleasure. It is sensual pleasure that produces distress in the soul." And "Similarly, distress in the flesh is the result of the soul's pleasure. For the soul, felicity is the flesh's distress." Please, kindly explain why distress of the flesh is the soul's pleasure. Is suffering necessary?*

Very deep! Only the person who has said this exactly knows the meaning and can explain it. We can only interpret it. Sensual pleasures are produced by the contact of senses with

the objects. As the contact is short-lived, all sensual pleasures are *anitya*, impermanent.

Even though sensual pleasures are impermanent, they are very attractive and people are running after them and thus they cannot pursue the Truth/God, which is timeless and eternal. In this sense, it can be said that the soul's distress is the result of sensual pleasures. It should be more appropriate to say that the soul's distress is the result of becoming attached to sensual pleasures, because in that case the soul is prevented from realizing its true and divine Nature.

“Distress in the flesh is the result of the soul's pleasure. For the soul, felicity is the flesh's distress.” When someone indulges in sensual pleasures, it results also in the ailments of the physical body, which becomes distress in the flesh. And when there is distress in the flesh, it may create good sense in the soul and awaken the soul and in this way it may be said that it is the felicity of the soul. Suffering can produce dispassion. Even the reflection on suffering produces dispassion as it happened with Gautama the Buddha. Well, as I said before, the person who has written this alone knows the exact meaning.

*It is also written in The Philokalia: "Spiritual poverty is complete dispassion; when the intellect has reached this state, it abandons all worldly things." In fact, complete dispassion should be the richness of the soul. Why has complete dispassion been referred to as spiritual poverty?*

It seems that spiritual poverty here means spiritual humility. You know the words of mystics cannot be understood

intellectually. Sometimes, they look very illogical. In the *Upanishads*, it is said, “He moves and He does not move. He is far and He is near.” Now, how will you explain it by logic? These statements are illogical, but true. In the *Upanishads* there are only the statements of *ṛishis*, who did not explain those statements logically. It was the *achāryas* who made commentaries on the *Upanishads* and produced philosophical systems in order to make them logical. The statements are the same, but different *achāryas* interpreted them differently and produced different systems or schools. The Truth is the same, but it has been described differently by different *achāryas*.

### **Is a stone full of dispassion?**

*How can one develop dispassion when working with a computer, which involves more and more options, reflections, expenses?*

What has all this to do with dispassion? Dispassion does not mean that you should not do anything and be inert and motionless like a stone. Even a stone is not motionless! There is movement in a stone, even in an atom. You can notice it when an atomic bomb is exploded. Do you mean to say that a stone is full of dispassion? If you are disturbed, it means you lack dispassion.

*Does concentration help to get dispassion?*

Dispassion helps in concentration, and concentrated right thinking helps to grow in dispassion. Dispassion from

temporal and mundane affairs is a great help in meditation. The seeker of Truth must cultivate dispassion by reflecting on the transitory and impermanent nature of the world.

### **How to remain mentally detached from temporal phenomena**

*Swamiji, could you write a few lines about the transient nature of relationships and situations?*

All relationships, situations and objects in time are transient. They do not last forever. They are temporal. The seeker should see them as temporal and should not get mentally attached to them. The Spirit alone is timeless and immortal. Should you remain aware of the transience of the temporal phenomena, you can remain mentally detached from them. You go to see a movie. There are tragic scenes in the movie. If you forget that what you are seeing are only shadows moving on the screen, and if you take it as real, you will feel sad and dispirited. But if you remain aware that it is only a movie, you can even enjoy the tragic scenes. The Spirit is like the screen; it is immovable. If there were no screen, you could not see the moving shadows. The Divine is like the conscious screen in which the movie of this world is being played.

The seeker of God should see the unreal as unreal if he/she wants to know the Real. One should not be attached to what is perishable. The cause of suffering and sorrow is attachment to what is perishable. Can any person live in this world forever? If not, why should a person think that he/she would live in this world forever? Such thinking is not only wrong, but also very stupid. Most people live as if

they will never die. This attitude makes them attached to the perishable world.

## *Selflessness*

**Your actions cannot be completely selfless unless you are selfless**

*Is it possible to do anything selflessly as long as I am still identified with this ego?*

No, it is not possible to be completely selfless without the realization of the eternal and blissful Self. But the seeker becomes more and more selfless with his or her progressive growth in spiritual life. You cannot cease to be selfish unless you are full of spiritual joy which is boundless and lasting. Another thing is that your interest in your personal worldly benefits or achievements is transformed into interest in serving your Master, an organization or even for realizing the Truth.

Moreover, there is a difference between the state of being selfless and doing work selflessly. As all action arises from the state of being, therefore your actions cannot be completely selfless unless you are selfless. But the selfless Being does not depend upon the selfless actions. The existence of Being or Self does not depend upon actions. You must know the difference between being and becoming or the difference between being and doing. Doing is in time; it can never be eternal. Being is limitless; it is always eternal. Doing is phenomenal; Being is timeless.

## ***Perseverance & Patience***

### **Dry wood and wet wood**

*I have practised for years, but I am not happy with what I have achieved. I would like to receive the full grace to be able to attain enlightenment.*

There are two kinds of wood. One is dry wood. When you touch it with fire, it catches fire at once. But if the wood is not dry, if the wood has water in it and you put it into fire, it only emits smoke, it is fuming.

*For the wet wood we put kerosene on it to make it burn. In the same way, can the grace given by a perfect Master liberate the disciple?*

The wet wood should not be burnt by putting kerosene upon it. It should be kept in the sun or near a fire to dry. By and by, the water inside will dry up and then, when it burns, it will give light also. But if you try to burn the wet wood with kerosene, there will be a lot of smoke and the fire will be black. The Master (the Guru) is like the sun; in his presence the water of the mind (desires) will dry up. When the mind is completely dry (free of worldly desires), it can catch fire with the love of God and the ego will be burnt completely, giving light and knowledge all around it. Until then, one has to remain patient.

Carry on with your meditation. Become more and more sincere. Don't practise *japa* and meditation at the same time. A few years is not a very long period for spiritual edification. It requires years and years to purify and stabilize the mind completely.

## Chapter Four

### *Integral Sādhana*

#### *I. Regular Sādhana is a Must for God-Realization*

**Each and every part of the personality should be surrendered to God**

*What is the easiest way to God-Realization?*

It is the one you can follow easily according to your temperament.

*Isn't the easiest way to see God in each and every being and object?*

If you can see God in the person who beats you, you don't need any other kind of *sādhana*.

*I remember this phrase, "Serve, love, purify and meditate" as the way to reach God.*

All should be practised together; each helps the other.

*What is there after God-Realization?*

God is the end and also the beginning. Everything comes out of God and goes back into God. To understand it is not enough. Intellect is only one part of the personality. Each and every part of the personality should be surrendered to God.

*I understand and believe what you say, but still, it is difficult to surrender!*

Ego is the obstacle.

**You have to perform drastic experiments on your body-mind**

*I have read in a book about enlightenment that after enlightenment comes cosmic Consciousness, then God Consciousness and finally full Enlightenment.*

Well, one cannot exactly know what is Enlightenment, cosmic Consciousness, God Consciousness and full Enlightenment by reading books only. Books are like maps. They are useful only if you read the books and then follow the path with utmost sincerity and commitment. This leads to Enlightenment and Self-Realization. Every path that leads to Realization involves a searching discipline supplemented with reflection and meditation. You have to perform drastic experiments on your body and mind, in order to know, and directly experience what is beyond them.

Water is made of oxygen and hydrogen. But in order to know it first-hand, you have to go to a laboratory and perform experiments with water. Similarly, you have to perform certain experiments on your body-mind. Then and only then, do you come to know that there is something timeless, unchanging and unchangeable, immanent in, as

well as transcendent to the body-mind flux. You know the path. You are already on the path. What is needed is that you follow the path with faith and single-mindedness. Then you will be able to directly experience what is cosmic Consciousness or God-Realization. *Sāadhanā* means spiritual effort for the purification and stabilization of the mind.

*Sāadhanā should ultimately lead to the experience of Reality. What is the method by which one can go beyond the mind, as the experience of Reality is possible only when one goes beyond the mind?*

Yes, the experience of the timeless Reality can only come when one transcends mental consciousness. Mental consciousness can be transcended by any of the paths; through *bhakta yoga*, *jñana yoga*, *rāja yoga*, *japa* or meditation. But the experience of Reality is not the end of *sāadhanā*. Realization and Fulfilment follow the experience, usually after a long period of *sāadhanā*. *Sāadhanā* means spiritual effort for the purification and stabilization of the mind and integration of all the parts of the personality.

### **The secret of sāadhanā**

*How can I become as innocent as a child and continue to live in the world?*

By eradication of the negative tendencies. People would say that you might become so docile that you will not be able to live in the world. But the question is, “Do you want to live in the world, or do you want to find God?” One has to die to live the divine life. Do you want to please society, or to please God? Live in the world, but live for God. This is the

secret of *sādhanā*. Become as humble as grass, if you want to find God. The worldly person has to become a godly person to find God.

### **The real need of a seeker**

*I have always believed that there is a natural force guiding our destinies. However, I do not believe in rituals, chanting or visiting temples. I do not believe in a particular form of God. I wish to visualize God as a pure, vibrant light, or energy. Please guide me.*

There is a secret guidance in the life of man, but very few can know and feel it and follow it. A person who is deeply identified with images, forms, ideas and names is not able to follow the secret and invisible guidance.

It is not necessary for a seeker of Truth to believe in rituals, some particular form of the Divine or in visiting temples. What the seeker needs is the purification of the mind and the ability to look within with one-pointed attention. For this, a person has to follow some discipline which can help him/her to achieve inward concentration.

### **How does one know the truth of “what is?”**

*For a long time, my ability to accept “what is” has been dependent on my capacity to understand why something has happened, why this person is not kind to me, etc. Now I’m more able to surrender without understanding, but what I still miss is the feeling in my heart that God loves me.*

The reasoning mind cannot know “what is.” It can know only what is not, what is unreal. The reasoning mind works like a computer. Its knowing is dependent on the data which has been fed into it, its past experiences and past memories, which exist in it in the form of *sanskāras* and impressions.

To know directly “what is,” the reasoning mind has to be dropped or transcended through some method of meditation, or through love, more precisely through divine Love. Living faith and trust are the essential prerequisites of growing in spiritual life which leads to lasting peace, happiness, life, light and love. In Sufism there are two words, *Ishqa Mijâzī* and *Ishqa Hakikī*. *Ishqa Mijâzī* is human love. *Ishqa Hakikī* is divine Love. The first slowly and gradually leads to the second. Don’t confuse love with lust. Reflection implies right thinking. Use your power of reflection to know and feel the transient nature of the world of time, objects, situations and relationships. It will generate dispassion in you, which in turn will help you to go deep into meditation.

Be more and more sincere to know “what is.” Be more and more regular in the practice of meditation. Put your heart and soul into *sāadhanā*. Work for your spiritual upliftment with the spirit of “do or die.” Love emerges in the heart which is free from selfishness. Be more and more selfless, in your words, deeds and thoughts.

### **Negative *sāadhanā***

*What is meant by negative sāadhanā? Do you mean that shravana is a negative sāadhanā?*

Negative *sāadhanā* means that the seeker tries to remove his/her false identification with the objects, persons and relationships in the world of time. In a sense, every *sāadhanā* is negative. It consists only in removing the obstacles that come in the way of the seeker to realize his/her divine Nature. The soul is essentially divine. It has not to gain divinity. It has only to discover its divinity.

*My false identifications are deep-rooted since many lives. So, what is the method to overcome them?*

What we accept again and again, and unceasingly, takes root deeper and deeper in us. What we deny again and again, and unceasingly, gradually leaves us. The seeker should first see his/her false identification and then go on denying it in word, deed and thought. At the same time, he or she should accept and go on accepting in word, deed and thought what, by reflection or by faith, he or she has concluded is his or her essential and real Nature.

### ***Sāadhanā* keeps transforming the whole personality of the seeker**

*How can we gain more intensity in our prayers? Swami Rama Tirtha said, “Prayers are answered in the way they are asked.” I also have difficulty discerning between tension and passion.*

Divine passion is needed. It gives you energy to work for meeting your beloved, God. When the meeting takes place, it transforms passion into relaxation and joy. It is like closing your fist more and more strongly. When you have put all your energy into closing your fist and it reaches its peak, the

fist opens. Passion for God brings dispassion, which further turns into compassion. *Sāadhanā* keeps transforming the whole personality of the seeker. *Sāadhanā* means the rebuilding of your personality with very important changes in your psychophysical make-up in order to realize the Truth. *Sāadhanā* is like the science of alchemy.

### **To become the slave of your senses can take you to hell**

*What is the right way to deal with the senses?*

The right way to deal with the senses is to be the master of your senses and to use them for your spiritual unfoldment. If you become the slave of your senses, then they use you and can take you anywhere, even to hell. In the *Upaniṣhads* there is a simile, in which the physical body is compared with a chariot, the senses compared with the horses which pull the chariot, the mind with the bridle of the horses, intellect with the driver and the soul of man with the owner of the chariot travelling on the chariot. For a comfortable and successful journey, the chariot must be well-maintained, the horses should be strong but duly tamed, the bridle should be strong enough to hold the horses, the driver should be experienced and well-trained, and above all, the traveller, the owner of the chariot, must be intelligent, wise, aware of his or her destination and must be so strong that the driver obeys his orders and is faithful to his master. You are riding a horse. If the horse is not under your control, it takes you anywhere; it can even throw you on the ground with the result that you break your bones and become a disabled and useless creature. The seeker has to walk step by step.

*Do you think therapy could help me to overcome my ego?*

One cannot take a jump, as it were, and go out of the ego or darkness. The seeker has to walk step by step, following the discipline of some *sādhana* in all its parts. Then slowly and gradually one can come to a point where the ego is dropped completely.

### **Every approach to the Divine is a discipline**

*How can I go within?*

These days in society, there is cut-throat competition in all fields. But to go deep within is the right way to discover the Truth. How do you go within? Withdraw yourself more and more from the outer. In *Patanjali's Yoga Sūtras*, it is told clearly that to go within, you have to be more and more detached from outer things and situations. The deep aspiration to go within, the regular practice of meditation, and dispassion are essential prerequisites.

*I feel motivated to go within, but I feel reluctant to follow the required discipline.*

Every approach to the Divine is a discipline. Yoga is a discipline. *Vedānta* is a discipline. There is the eight-fold path of Buddha and there is a system for the path of devotion. These days, few seekers follow a path in its entirety, and the teachers do not teach a system in its entirety. For example, the *Vedāntic* teachers don't lay stress on dispassion, on control of the senses and control of the mind. The yoga teachers don't teach *yamas* and *niyamas*. They only teach *āsanas* or some breathing exercises.

*Guru Govind Singhji went to the forest where he did tremendous tapasyā to reach the state of God-Realization. What can I do to get the same Realization?*

You should also go to the forest and practise tremendous *tapasyā* in order to get God-Realization!

### **Vedānta has to be put into practice**

*How should we understand the statement that, “Everything in the world is One.”*

Theory is alright, but you have to realize the Oneness. It comes only through Self-Realization, which needs discipline, purity of heart, silence of mind, and also freedom from mechanical thinking. *Vedānta* is a discipline. It is not a philosophy. It has to be put into practice.

### **The spiritualist works to change his mind**

*When we feel joy without thinking, without words, is this meditation?*

The joy that comes and goes is not the real Joy. The joy which depends on external situations is not the real Joy. It does not last. The materialists are trying to change the situations in order to find happiness. The spiritualist works to change his mind. He works to purify the mind and stabilize it.

Most of the time medicines do not heal the disease. They only suppress the disease. If you have pain or a fever, it means something is wrong in your body or in your mind. Fever or pain is a sign. The same thing applies when you

seek a sensual or mental excitement. You are missing something, there is loneliness within, you want to forget it and seek entertainment to remove it.

**After a lot of struggle, you get to enjoy the fruits of your effort**

*I struggle a lot in my practice; Swamiji, please help me.*

You saw yourself on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October how much we had to struggle to find the place in the forest where I had built my hut many years ago, even though we had with us a guide who knew that forest. He is a wood-cutter who daily goes into that forest to collect wood. When you find what you seek, after a lot of struggle, you enjoy the meeting with your beloved more. Similarly, you enjoy the food more, which you get with your own hard-earnings. Your ego gets greater satisfaction. If you go on a pilgrimage by foot where you have to cross over so many obstacles, you enjoy it more when you reach your destination.

**If you stop searching for God, you will be searching only for what is unreal**

*If we withdraw ourselves from the senses, are we not creating a separation between the world and us?*

The separation is already there. You have already created it. You are an individual. You feel separated from others. The separation ends only when you realize the timeless Spirit. If you are running after the things and situations of the world

of time, how will you realize the timeless and eternal Reality? The false 'I' does not die by forgetting it. You have to face it, and it disappears. The more you try to forget it, the stronger it becomes. It is like a shadow. It is your own shadow. If you stop searching for God, you will be searching only for what is unreal. I know many so-called enlightened persons who have stopped searching for God, but their search for worldly and temporal things goes on more vigorously than before.

**“Be wary, be vigilant!”**

*Beloved and revered Maharaj, we are beginners. Please tell us what is essential for our spiritual life. (The question is asked by a sannyāsī visiting Swamiji with some disciples.)*

Your Holiness is not a beginner on the spiritual path. Your divine presence helps so many seekers in their spiritual life. Every seeker of Truth should consider himself/herself a beginner and start the *sāadhanā* every day as if it were the first day of his/her *sāadhanā*. When someone starts something, one is full of inspiration, more sincere and more vigilant. When you think that you have reached a very high spiritual stage, that is the time when you become complacent and that is the time when there is more chance of falling down.

Have you heard the Zen story in which a Master asks his disciple to climb a very high tree? A Master asks his disciple to climb to the top of a tree and then to come down. The disciple climbs to the top and then comes down. When he is only about seven or eight feet above the ground, the Master says, “Be wary, be careful!” The disciple reaches

the ground. He asks his Master, “Sir, when I was at the top, from where falling down would have been fatal, you did not warn me. You did not say, ‘Be wary, be vigilant!’ And when I was nearly safe, then you gave me the advice to be careful. Why?” The Master replied, “When you were at the top, I was sure that you were completely attentive and careful in your action!” You fall only when you think that you are safe.

## *II. The Integral Approach to Spiritual Attainment*

### **Sādhana has many parts**

*I am a beginner. How can I grow in spiritual life?*

Cultivate righteous and noble qualities in your life. The body and mind are to be tamed by discipline and right understanding.

*What are the different parts of spiritual sādhana?*

Well, *sādhana* has many parts, which we are so often discussing here. The integral approach to spiritual upliftment comprises of:

1. Regular meditation;
2. Prayer;
3. Reciting the holy name of God according to one’s faith;
4. Reflection;
5. Breathing exercises;
6. Selfless service to the poor and the needy in the name of God;

7. Reading spiritual books that give you inspiration to realize God;
8. Cultivation of disinterested love and good will for one and all in the name of God;
9. Practising alertness and awareness in all our activities;
10. Observing our inner weaknesses and wrong habits and trying to overcome them;
11. Faith is very important. Associate only with those who have faith in God, and faith in themselves.

Everyone has the potentiality of realizing God.

### **What is real life and how to recognize it**

*How can I accept life as it comes to me without being moved by my emotions? How can I be confident and faithful?*

Do you know what life is? How will you accept it when you don't know what it really is? If you don't know what life really is, you may be mistaken and accept something else, taking that to be life. To know what real life is, your mind must be calm and quiet, and your heart must be pure and full of divine Love. When your mind is agitated with emotions (positive or negative) and with disturbing thoughts (all thoughts are disturbing), then you cannot even know life, what to say of accepting life.

Pray daily. Practise breathing exercises. Sit in meditation daily. Repeat God's name daily according to your faith and belief. Make some principles for your life and try to follow them. Aspire for higher values of life. Be good and do good. Slowly and gradually you will get strength and self-confidence.

### **Direct your attention more and more inward**

*Through sādhanā I try to go closer to my inner centre. What advice can you give me, Swamiji?*

Be more and more detached from the outer objects and situations and withdraw yourself from them. Direct your attention more and more inward. Reflect on the transient and passing nature of the world of time again and again. It will help you to give up your attachment to temporal things and situations. At the same time reflect upon the beauty and joy of the timeless and infinite Existence, again and again, so that your interest to discover the Divine becomes deeper and deeper. And practise meditation, supplemented with prayer and breathing exercises, daily and regularly. Why do you want to go closer to your innermost centre? What have you been doing to achieve that?

### **First the conscious mind has to be controlled**

*Since I am here I have been practising japa and my mind is becoming more and more pacified. But during the night I have very heavy dreaming activity. Is it the mind taking its revenge while I have no power?*

You cannot have control over your dreams unless you have full control over your subconscious mind. First the conscious mind has to be controlled and tamed, which needs a good deal of discipline and right understanding. Carry on with the practice of *japa* and meditation. Be more and more sincere in your practice. Pray to the Lord and invoke His grace daily and regularly. It will help you in taming your mind. Practise conscious and deep breathing as well.

**The seeker has to follow the discipline of some *sādhana* in all its parts**

*My ego always interferes and the door of my heart has been closed for a long time. Swamiji, are meditation, observation and prayer, enough to open my heart?*

Who has closed the door of your heart? Who has created the ego in you? Have I done it? Ego is the product of non-seeing. It has no positive existence. It is like darkness. Self-interest, doubt and identification with what is not real are the root causes of the ego. When you see your ego it gets weakened. Yes, silent meditation, self-observation and prayer are the means to eradicate the ego. Meditation and reflection are necessary throughout the whole course of *sādhana*. Should seekers feel that they can't achieve the highest state with their own effort, they should pray and invoke divine grace for help. But praying, without faith in the existence of the omnipotent divine power, has no meaning. Breathing exercises – conscious deep and slow breathing, and selfless service are also very helpful.

**All limbs of spiritual *sādhana* should be practised**

*Some saints say that service is the best way to reach God and purify us. I suppose 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: it helps the one whom you serve, and it enables you to remember the Divine.

In the practice of *japa*, you only remember the Divine. But you can remember the Divine with more one-pointedness through *japa* than you can through service. Meditation also serves the same purpose, but through meditation you can be the most one-pointed in remembering the Divine. When you remember the Divine through service, your mind is not one-pointed in remembering the Divine. It is split into the physical activity and the remembrance of the Divine. And there are only a few kinds of *sevâ* through which you can remember the Divine at the same time. For example, cooking, gardening, washing, etc., because these activities do not need much concentration. If you are doing accounting, you cannot do *japa* or meditation at the same time, or remember the Divine. In this type of *sevâ*, your intention is to please your Master. For complete one-pointedness in remembering the Divine, both the body and the mind must be at rest and not moving.

The integral approach to spiritual progress involves *sevâ*, *japa*, meditation, reflection, reading of inspiring books, etc. One should practise all of these in their own right, and at their own time. If one performs *sevâ*, it doesn't mean that one does not need to sit in meditation.

### **Spiritual food**

*I am becoming conscious that I am wandering between two techniques, the practice of a mantra, which I received from Amma and the practice of discrimination according to the teaching of Arnaud Desjardins. Today, I don't know which*

*path fits me. Should I choose one of these approaches, or can I compromise between the two?*

To have good health one should eat a balanced diet. You take vegetables, fruits, cereals, milk, curd, nuts and so on. All of them are parts of the food we need. Similarly, meditation, reflection, *japa*, prayer, breathing exercises, selfless service, reading spiritual books that give you inspiration, all these comprise spiritual effort or *sāadhanā*.

You can live by eating fruits alone or by drinking milk alone, if you so wish. Or you can take milk, fruits or cereals or vegetables. All are part of a balanced diet. Similarly, meditation, reflection, *japa*, prayer, etc., are parts of spiritual diet. There is no contradiction between meditation, *japa*, prayer, etc. These are complementary, and help the seeker to reach the state of no-mind in which the Truth is revealed.

### ***Sāadhanā will give you inner strength and inner joy***

*I have enjoyed very much my stay in your āshram. My inner child wants to be loved and I feel this love fully in my relationship with you. But I also wish to become an adult, and be able to give love. Please, Swamiji, give me some advice.*

You may stay in the *āshram* as long as you so wish. We are happy to accommodate sincere seekers who live in the *āshram* harmoniously with other inmates and do their *sāadhanā* sincerely. Yes, we should give love to others. What we give to others comes back to us manifold. This is the divine law.

Be more and more humble. A humble person is loved by everyone. Strive to live for the higher values of life. Keep your desires under control. Remember the Divine always. Sit in meditation regularly. Pray daily. It will give you inner strength and inner joy, which you can share with others. With all my love and good wishes.

*Are we obliged to practise tapasyā (austerities) during sādhanā?*

*Tapasyā* implies control over one's senses and mind. You cannot realize God while remaining a slave of your mind.

### **A winning start**

*I am just starting to learn that I am at the beginning of the road. How can I be in communion with God?*

Should you really be on the road leading to God you have already made a “winning” start. Walk steadily. Cultivate more and more sincerity and deeper and deeper aspiration for communion with God. Practise meditation and prayer regularly. Adjust yourself in your situation in such a way that you can devote more and more time to prayer, meditation and selfless service along with discharging your familial and social duties in the name of God. Read inspiring spiritual books and practise rhythmic and deep breathing. This is the summum bonum of the spiritual effort one should make for God-Realization.

*When does one become ripe enough to start intense sādhanā?*

The ripening comes by *sāadhanā*. One should start *sāadhanā* as soon as one feels the need for *sāadhanā* in order to realize the Truth.

### **Always remember God and death**

*In less than two weeks, I am going back to France. Can you advise me how to keep what I have gained here on my spiritual path, and at the same time maintain my family and social life in the right way?*

Accept your family in the name of God. Accept the things and situations in the name of God, so that you are able to remember God through them. Sit for prayer and meditation daily and regularly in the morning and evening. Be more and more sincere and honest in your *sāadhanā* for your spiritual upliftment. Always remember God, as well as death, and your life will be transformed.

*Every time I come here, I am deeply inspired by the beautiful words, “Awake! The time is running out. Remember the Divine.” How can I integrate this into my daily life?*

First, once a week, go to some cemetery nearby your place. Sit there for an hour or so and reflect upon the transitory nature of this life. Second, read the book *Imitation of Christ* again and again and reflect on it. Third, pray to God daily and regularly for right understanding and dispassion.

### *III. The Signs of Spiritual Progress*

#### **The right direction**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

When you start something you are very enthusiastic, but gradually that enthusiasm weakens. This is the normal tendency. It is also the test of your *sādhanā*. If your enthusiasm is being strengthened day after day, it means your *sādhanā* is going in the right direction. If your enthusiasm in *sādhanā* is getting weakened, it means your *sādhanā* is not going in the right direction.

*How does one go in the right direction?*

By increasing your sincerity, maintaining regularity, sitting in prayer, associating with saints and sages, the *sādhanā* goes in the right direction.

*Can you show us the way to go further on the path?*

To know the way is easy, almost all already know it. What is difficult and desirable is to tread the way. The way can be summed up in three sentences:

1. Eradicate negativity from your life: negative tendencies, feelings and thoughts, illegitimate desires, anger, jealousy, pride, arrogance, fear, greed, etc.
2. Always remember the Divine.
3. Serve others in the name of God, with your body, your money and so on.

*It often seems it is because of my ego that I do things.*

As you are, you cannot do anything without the ego. What you need to do is to sublimate and transform your ego, engaging it in positive and constructive works.

### **Spiritual progress**

*Sometimes I am afraid of making progress in my spiritual life. Is it the reason why I don't progress too much?*

Spiritual progress implies the purification and the harmonization of the different parts of the personality. Well, it is true if you do anything with your mind in the state of fear or doubt your action will not be as efficient as it should be. For example, you can walk easily on a one foot wide and twenty feet long beam of wood lying on the earth. But if that beam is put over a canal and you want to walk over it to cross the canal, you may not do it because of the fear that you could fall in the canal. The beam is the same, but in one state of mind you can walk over it, while in the other state of mind you cannot.

Progress in any field is directly proportional to the determination, alertness, skill and courage that you put into your work, apart from the indeterminate factor, which is called fate.

### **True signs of progress**

*Do spiritual experiences prove that we are really on the path?*

Surely there are signs of progress on the spiritual path. The true signs are such as:

- The deepening of the aspiration to realize the Truth first hand;
- The intensification of dispassion and detachment towards what is temporal and transient;
- The enhancement of disinterested love for all beings in the name of God;
- The increasing ability to control one's thoughts, desires and emotions;
- The capacity to remain aware in day-to-day activities. There are some inner experiences which come with progress in meditation, such as:
  - Seeing different lights;
  - Hearing very pleasant musical sounds;
  - Some transporting sensations felt in certain centres of the body;
  - The feeling of simple undirected love in the heart;
  - Visions of saints and sages;
  - Visions of some other planes of existence (*lokas*).

Some extraordinary powers, such as reading the minds of others, clairvoyance, clairaudience, etc., are not true signs of progress on the spiritual path. These powers are possessed even by the *asuras* (demons). Most people practise yoga to attain these extraordinary powers. They want their *kundalini* to be awakened to get such extraordinary powers. It is *rājasic* desires hidden in the hearts of people that prompt them to work for getting such powers.

### **Blessings**

I wish that you follow the path of God-Realization with faith and determination. Seek the Divine within. Go deeper and

deeper within yourself. That is the nearest and most proper place to seek the Divine.

#### *IV. Different Paths or Yogas*

##### **Sādhana according to your ability and your temperament**

*What should a person do who cannot stop thinking even in meditation?*

One who cannot stop thinking should practise right thinking. One who cannot practise right thinking should go and serve the poor and the needy in the name of God.

*To grow in spirituality, there are many paths. Which one should one choose?*

The goal is the same. The different paths are for the persons of different temperaments and their psycho-physical make-up. All paths lead to God-Realization. Every person has three *shaktis*: *bhāva*, *jñāna*, and *kriyā shakti*. One of these *shaktis* is predominant in one's personality. According to the predominance of this *shakti*, the path of the seeker is determined. The path of devotion suits those who are predominantly devotional. The path of knowledge is for those who are predominantly intellectual, and the path of *karma* yoga for those in whom the *kriyā shakti* is predominant.

*Which of these paths will lead easily to God-Realization?*

Do you want God or convenience? If the path to realize the Divine is difficult, will you not follow it? Anyway, the easiest path to realize the Divine is the one that suits one's temperament and the one on which one can walk. The mode of *sādhanā* is changing with the change of consciousness of the seeker as well as the conditions of his physical body. The path for which you are *adhikārī*, or competent to follow is the best for you. There are not only three or four paths. There are as many paths as there are individuals. The paths as described in the spiritual books are the broader classification of innumerable paths.

*Should we follow only one particular yoga, or should we supplement one main yoga with others?*

*Bhakti yoga* does not mean that it is completely devoid of discrimination or *karma yoga*. *Bhakti yoga* means the path of Realization in which the heart leads and the intellect and *karma* assist. *Jñāna yoga* is the path in which the discrimination leads and the heart is assisting. *Karma yoga* is one in which the *kriyā shakti* is the leader helped by the heart and the head.

### **Devotion to the Lord is like the flowers of a fruit tree**

What is the role of devotion in non-dualistic teaching?

How do you reconcile devotion with non-duality? Ramana Maharshi wrote five hymns in praise of Arunachala. He was not a dry *Vedantin*. His *sādhanā* began with devotion to Lord Shiva. Swami Rama Tirtha was a *Vedantin*. But in the beginning he was a devout *bhakta* of Lord Krishna, so much

so that he would start weeping when he spoke of Lord Krishna. He would have to stop his discourse because his voice would choke up with love of Lord Krishna. Some saints say that devotion to the Lord is like the flowers on a fruit tree. First there are flowers on the tree and afterwards, the fruit. If no flowers, the tree does not bear fruit.

### **Concentration is needed in the practice of all yogas**

*When I meditate I try to stop thinking, i.e. when I see a thought I say “no” mentally. I also watch the breath. Is it all right?*

If you find it difficult to watch your thoughts during meditation, then watch your breath. Watch your breath without thinking anything. It will help you to stop the thinking process.

Sit down in your room. Close the door. Light a candle and fix it on a stool. Put that stool in front of you in such a position that your eyes and the flame of the candle are in the same line. The flame should be three feet away from your eyes. Then gaze at that flame, without blinking the eyes, and without thinking anything. If the water comes out of your eyes, don't try to stop it. Gaze at the flame for ten minutes continuously. Do it five times a day. Do it regularly for at least forty days and you will be able to go into the thoughtless state for a short period. It will give you a taste of the thoughtless state. You may also go into a trance and have the vision of some other *loka*. This practice will enhance your power of concentration. Concentration is needed in the practice of all yogas and you will also be able to concentrate on anything you wish.

**One can be a devotee in the heart and a *jñānī* in the intellect**

*What is the difference between the path of devotion and the path of knowledge?*

To believe in God and surrender to His will is the path of devotion. To discriminate between *Prakṛiti* and *Puruṣha* and identify oneself with *Puruṣha* is the path of knowledge.

*Do we have to choose between these two paths?*

Well, they are not contradictory. One can be a devotee in the heart and a *jñānī* in the intellect. In the *Upanishads*, the *ṛiṣhis* are found singing the praises of the Divine and at the same time asserting their spiritual being. They were not like the *Vedantins* of today. Even Ramana Maharṣhi sang the praises of Arunachala. Shankaracharya, the greatest *Vedantin*, was also a devotee. He has written hymns to the Divine Mother. His *Iṣhta* was Krishna. Whenever he wrote a book, he always first paid his *prāṇam* to Lord Krishna.

**All the energies should be developed and harmonized by the seeker**

*The different mārgas: karma, jñāna and bhakti are interrelated. Can you tell more about their interaction?*

One energy leads and the other two assist. So in *jñāna mārga*, the *jñāna shakti* leads and the *bhava shakti* and *karma shakti* work as assistants. In *bhakta mārga*, the *bhava shakti* leads and the *jñāna* and *karma shakti* work as assistants. In *karma mārga*, the *karma shakti* leads and the *jñāna shakti* and *bhava shakti* work as assistants. All these *shaktis* should be

developed and harmonized by the seeker of Truth. Don't you need the eyes, the heart, hands and feet in this life?

*Does a bhakta need to reflect on metaphysical aspects?*

Metaphysical means that which the senses cannot grasp. *Bhaktas* come to know the metaphysical truths through *bhakti*.

**The path of *bhakti* and the path of knowledge meet in the end**

*What is the difference between the path of bhakti and the path of knowledge?*

*Bhakti* in its highest state and knowledge in its highest state are one and the same thing. But the path of *bhakti* is different from the path of knowledge, though in both paths purification and concentration of mind are essential prerequisites.

The more you love someone, the more oneness you feel with that person. *Bhakti* reaches its highest peak only when the lover/devotee experiences complete oneness with the beloved Lord. You cannot know the Divine completely unless you are completely one with Him. If you are not completely one with the Divine, it means the Divine is hiding some part of His Being from you, and your knowledge is not complete. But both paths, the path of *bhakta* and the path of knowledge, meet in the end. The path of *bhakta* starts with duality and ends in oneness. In the path of knowledge, the essential oneness of the seeker and the Divine is intellectually assumed in the beginning and directly experienced in the end.

## 1. Bhakti Yoga

### *The Path of Love and Devotion*

#### **How the intention transforms the quality of actions**

*How does the desire or longing for union with God relate to other relationships, i.e. Guru-disciple, close familial relationships?*

When things, situations, relationships are accepted in the name of God, they don't become obstacles on the path of God-Realization. Instead, they become a means to remember the Divine and thus help the seeker. The same applies to actions. An action which is related to God, which is performed to please God, becomes qualitatively different and superior to other actions. It becomes devotion or *bhakti*.

#### **Bhakti should be supplemented with meditation**

*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. Being here, in this devotional place, has been an answer to my prayers. Do you have any other specific suggestions for developing a devotional practice from a scientific rāja yoga practice?*

*Rāja yoga* is a system of psychosomatic discipline. True, it is not very emphatic about the devotion to the Lord. In one of the five *niyamas* of *rāja yoga*, there is one called *Īshvara*

*pranidhān*, meaning the surrender to the Divine. But it is taken up there only to make the mind calm and quiet. The goal of *rāja yoga* is to attain Liberation, which is called *Kaivalya* and which is achieved by disassociating *Puruṣha* from *Prakṛiti* through *samādhi*. The goal of the path of devotion is to be united with the Divine. The Divine is the focus of all a devotee's *sādhanā*. Liberation is not the goal, even though Liberation automatically follows union with the Divine. As for myself 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 by devotion to God.

### **Love can only be experienced**

*Can you please talk about divine Love. Is it a feeling, a knowing, an understanding or something else?*

It is the longing of all parts of the personality to meet the Divine. This meeting includes feeling, understanding and knowing the Divine. Not only that, but something more which cannot be grasped by the thinking mind. Can the experience of love be explained to someone who has never fallen in love? Love can only be experienced; it cannot be grasped by hearing what it is.

It reminds me of a story told by a sage. There were two girls, unmarried girls. They were fast friends. One of them got married and went with her husband to live with her in-

laws. She wrote a letter to her friend, describing her experience. She wrote in her letter about the place where she was living, about the people related to her from her husband's side, and some details about the nature of her husband and many other things. But how would she explain the experience of the conjugal pleasure with her husband? She could not, and ended the letter with the words: "What more can I tell you, dear friend, which you can understand? That which is heard can never be exactly that which is seen. You will know it yourself when you get married." Similarly, you will know what divine Love is only when you fall in love with the Divine.

### **Love is your essential Nature**

*How do we love?*

Love is the manifestation of joy. It is not seeking joy. If you demand love, you have to give love. Only then can you get it. Love is not something which you have to earn. It is already there in you. It is your essential Nature. You have only to become aware of it. Do you need money to have love? Do you need good health to have love? Do you need a sharp intellect to have love? What do you need? Everyone can have love; it is free.

*It is difficult for me to love others and myself when I feel tired and weak. What is the way out?*

Is love an activity? Is love a doing? In doing something you are bound to get tired sooner or later. Love is not doing something. Love is not becoming something. Love is your essential Being. One has to discover one's essential Being.

**Love means the inner Joy flowing out**

*I did not fully understand what you said last night regarding love of family and friends being basically a selfish form of love. Is it so?*

Relationships in a family and with friends are not basically selfish. But it is true that one cannot be completely unselfish unless and until one is filled with boundless and timeless inner Joy, which is found only through and by Self-Realization. The urge for everlasting and boundless Joy is innate in every being. It is not the product of any training or education or *sanskāras* or relationships. Family and friends provide a person with an opportunity to be more and more unselfish.

Generally, what is called love is a sort of fight between two persons in which each tries to overcome the other and become the boss. The wife tries to control the husband; the husband tries to control the wife; the mother wants to control the children and the children also want to control their mother. This may happen even in the relationship of a Guru and a disciple, each trying to control the other.

Love never tries to control. Love means self-surrender. Love means surrendering one's ego. Love means giving up completely! Love means the inner Joy flowing out. It does not seek joy. It is Joy itself.

**Love knows no argumentation**

*I would like to know how to fall in love.*

You can do something out of love, or as a duty, or spontaneously, or even mechanically. It is very difficult for

intellectuals to fall in love with God, or even with some person. They calculate everything.

*Can we practise falling in love with God?*

The practice is only for those who have not fallen in love with God.

*How can I recognize if I am an intellectual?*

The one who is always thinking about the pros and cons of falling in love is an intellectual. Love knows no argumentation. Love and live. Love is not an action. Love is the power which kills selfishness.

### **Love involves the spirit of self-sacrifice**

*Can you please tell us what is the difference between attachment and love?*

Attachment involves selfishness. In attachment there is desire, conscious or unconscious, to get pleasure from the other. Love involves the spirit of self-sacrifice, the spirit of giving comfort to the beloved. Attachment binds. Love liberates. In attachment one feels dependence on the other. In love, one realizes oneness with the other. Attachment brings suffering. Love begets happiness.

### **Divine Love removes all mental problems**

*Is there some specific technique in the Indian tradition, such as exists in Sufism, to help the disciple who encounters emotional or psychological difficulties which hinder his path?*

The Sufi path is the path of love. Sufis practise *Zikr*, the continuous remembrance of the Divine. They are mad in the love for God. They become one with God through their love for God. And they strictly follow the moral injunctions of Islam. There is no higher psychotherapy than the therapy of divine Love. Divine Love removes all mental problems. In the path of devotion, you have to direct all of your emotional energy and thinking energy towards the Divine, and also the energy of action. You have to live for the Divine and die for the Divine. The Divine becomes the be-all and end-all of your life. God becomes your father, your mother, your guide, your lover, your beloved, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, your entertainment, and your whole life.

### **Divine Love burns up all attachments**

*A few days ago you said “You should feel suffocation without the Realization of the Truth.” As I understand it, this aspiration necessarily creates tension, but you also said, “All kind of tension has to be avoided. It works against peace.” So how is it possible to feel this aspiration and at the same time not to have any tension?*

Should the aspiration to realize the Divine create tension in you, you are very fortunate and blessed. Ramakrishna used to say: “People weep for worldly things, they weep over worldly relationships, but who weeps for God?” Have you ever wept in the love for God? As the love for God destroys all attachments to mortal things and relationships, similarly the tension for realizing the divine will destroy all other tensions, unite you with the Divine, and then subside. As fire burns all the wood and subsides, similarly divine Love

burns up all attachments. Jesus said: “The zeal for the Lord has eaten me up.<sup>1</sup>”

I know people who start *japa* with hundreds of *mālās* daily. For some days, they are very enthusiastic. Then the spirit of doing *japa* starts to waver and they do ninety *mālās* per day, then eighty *mālās*, and so the practice comes down and down. Then they reach ten *mālās* per day. The right way is to start from ten *mālās* per day and then go on increasing slowly and gradually. *Sādhana* is not like a hundred metres sprint. It is rather like a long marathon. You must keep your stamina to finish the race.

There was a Sufi woman saint. Her name was Rabia. She lived alone in a hut in a village and would keep the door of the hut closed. She was always absorbed in the remembrance of the Divine. Once the people of the village heard a voice coming from inside the hut crying, “I am burning, I am burning.” The people rushed to the hut, but there was no smoke or flames seen coming out of the hut. Another Sufi saint was there at that time. When he heard the cry, he understood and said: “It is not the ordinary fire in which Rabia is burning. It is the fire of God’s Love.” Divine Love burns up all your attachments and finally the ego. May you have more and more divine Love and divine tension!

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<sup>1</sup> Swamiji says: “When I write about Jesus, I may not be quoting the exact words, but the spirit. The words may be different and you may not find them in the New Testament. Jesus never wrote a book. What is written about Jesus or what he said was written by others years after. So how can we be sure if Jesus said that or not? Jesus did not speak exactly the same words which are in the New Testament.”

**You are the seeker and you are the destination**

*To love myself I should first know myself. So, how can I know myself?*

You can know the Spirit only by becoming one with It. First you have to love your beloved. Slowly and gradually you learn to love the Divine. If you don't love your father, how can you love the Father/God? The family or society is a sort of school where you get training to love, and be more and more unselfish.

*I have a problem with relationships. I am not able to love others because of my own weaknesses.*

Then renounce all relationships that stop you from loving! But if you accept relationships, you have to be more unselfish in them. You are the seeker and you are the destination. You are seeking yourself in others. But you don't find yourself anywhere unless you go deep within yourself and discover yourself there. When the non-self is completely abandoned, you find the Self. It is the most difficult thing and the easiest.

**Your greatest need is God**

*How can we make our love for God grow?*

Reflect on the divine qualities of God. It is He who is giving you life. It is because of Him that you can see, hear, think or move. You should thank Him daily that He has not made you a donkey and you don't live like a donkey. Try to overcome your weaknesses. Work for the purification of your heart. The more your heart becomes pure, the more you feel

the need for God. Think for awhile. What is your real need? Tell me what is your greatest need? I am not asking what should be your need. I am asking what your real need is. If you sincerely feel that God is your need and you feel it ceaselessly, this is what is called love for God.

You are in love with God, but you don't know that you love Him. Are you not missing something? Have you ever reflected deeply on what you are missing? You are missing God. You are missing the Infinite and Eternal and you are seeking It in finite things and temporalities. The finite cannot satisfy you and it causes you to wander in all directions searching for something which you do not know. Do you know the mountain deer that has musk concealed in its navel? The fragrance of musk is very enchanting. The deer smells the musk but does not know where the fragrance is coming from. So it goes from one bush to the other seeking that sweet fragrance, but cannot find its source. That is the condition of a bewildered soul.

Pray to God daily for Him to bless you with divine Love. Do not pray for worldly things. Cultivate dispassion towards all that is less than God. When you stop desiring what is not God, the energy of desire is transformed into love for God. It is not the price. It is only the preparation to pay the price.

### **Love and Joy manifest in the peaceful mind**

*What can I do to open my heart completely and perhaps receive grace, too?*

Love the Divine. Give your heart to what is eternal, permanent and everlasting. Reflect again and again upon

the transitory nature of all that is seen or known by the senses. It will make your mind peaceful. Live in this peaceful state more and more, and you will start feeling an inner joy. The real love and joy manifest in the peaceful mind.

Love is not excitement. Every type of excitement makes the mind agitated and thus becomes an obstacle to the manifestation of peace and love. An agitated mind is like a moving mirror. You cannot see your face, as it is, in a moving mirror. Similarly, you cannot experience true love and joy when your mind is agitated.

Love and joy open the heart and vice-versa. An open heart experiences the inner joy which is not dependent on sensory objects or situations. Sit in meditation regularly. Meditation is deeper if you have dispassion, if the transitory phenomena cannot attract your attention. Through meditation you will experience peace, and in the state of peace inner joy will manifest.

*Someone shared his experiences and his relationship with the Divine.*

It is always new; the joy you get through divine Love is always new, as is the Divine Himself. It is so absorbing, so charming, so fulfilling that nothing remains to be found, nothing remains to be known, nothing remains to be done, nothing remains to be asked for!

**There is a unique joy in suffering from love for the Divine**

*What can be said about the suffering that goes along with divine Love?*

There is an Urdu couplet, “My beloved God does not care for me, the one who is acutely suffering from His love, but it is good that He does not cure me.” There is a unique joy in suffering from love for the Divine. Here is a story from the *Srimad Bhagavat Purāṇa*:

Radha was sitting in *padma āsana*, on the bank of the Yamuna River near Vrindavan, with her eyes closed as if she was meditating. It was a very unusual scene. Radha never would sit in meditation. She was mad with love of Lord Krishna. She would always play with Krishna and listen to his flute and go into divine ecstasy. She did not need to sit in meditation. Another *gopī* saw Radha sitting like a *yogini* and was surprised. She shook her and asked, “What are you doing?” Radha said, “I am meditating in order to push Krishna out of my heart. He has taken over my heart and does not leave it even for a second. He has made me good for nothing for the world!” If you are mad with God’s love, you don’t need meditation because you are always full of divine Joy and ecstasy.

### **Devotion for God begins with fear of God**

*Opening myself to God scares me a lot, but my desire to meet Him is also very strong. The only thing left is to let that desire grow. Is that right?*

Devotion to God is usually accompanied by awe and fear in the beginning. There is nothing wrong in it. Everyone, except the one who has realized his/her divine Nature, suffers from fear. Some suffer from the fear of losing their health, wealth,

position and friends. Some are afraid of their wives or husbands. Some suffer from the fear of disease and death. Fear of God, who is omnipotent and omnipresent, may bring about moral transformation in the devotee. But the more one grows in devotion and moves closer and closer to God, the feeling of fear is replaced by love for God. Guru Nanak says, "Devotion to God begins with fear of God and ends in divine Love, which unifies the soul with God." So, you should not be scared. God is not cruel. He is the source of all peace, love and light. Devotion to God breaks all the bonds of the soul and makes it free and happy. Divine Love also enhances the power of receptivity. It opens the heart.

### **Love and fear cannot stay together**

*Yesterday, you told us about a sage, a devotee of Lord Krishna, who would cry and weep during his discourses in remembrance of the Lord. For me, when I feel my heart expanding in love for God, my tendency is to resist it. I feel afraid because I could dance, sing, etc., to express this love in some way, I am afraid of losing control. But this morning in meditation I was so pleased to feel this love beginning to burn in my heart! How can I let myself go more and more into this feeling of love?*

Very fortunate and blessed is the one who loses control over oneself when he is filled with divine Love. If love makes you afraid, it is no love at all. Even worldly love removes your fears, what to say of divine Love. Love and fear cannot stay together. Love removes fear; attachment creates fear. When you are in the state of love, you are not even afraid of

death. You have no fear of losing respect, money, house and relatives, even your body.

Love does not want anything. It is complete in itself. It does not expect anything because it is full. Love gives, but there is no ego of giving. Even when a ray of love enters your heart, you start bubbling with inner joy. Love is the panacea for all ailments and sufferings.

*What can we do to get love? As love is everywhere, shall we simply remain open?*

Love is everywhere, and still it is untraceable, like God. Whom do you love more? You love yourself more. Am I right? If you leave your country, you leave it for yourself. If you go somewhere, you go there for yourself. If you do something, you do it for yourself, and if you do not do anything, you do not do it for yourself also.

*What more can you tell us about love?*

Love should not be spoken of. It should be kept in the heart. When you speak, you may be expressing your love. But is it necessary to express your love? Can't you contain it in your heart?

*How can I allow this love to grow in me?*

Love does not grow; nor does it decay. Can love change? Divine Love is reflected in the purified heart only. Remembrance of the Divine purifies the heart. What is the difference between remembrance and memory? Memory is the ashes of the past, and remembrance is living in the ecstasy of the eternal present!

**If you cannot fall in love with God, fall in love with a God-man**

*We always try to restrict our love to one person and possess him or her. By that way, love flies away.*

In the West, it is very difficult for people to fall in love with the Divine. There, the whole emphasis is given to what is impermanent, to the objects of the senses, to the temporal phenomena. How can you feel peace when your attention is riveted to what is changing? There are all types of comforts and conveniences in the West, but no peace.

If you cannot fall in love with God, fall in love with Jesus, fall in love with Krishna, with Rama or with any person who is established in God.

When you are starved of human love or divine Love, you start keeping cats and dogs with you so that you can love somebody at least. In the West some dying people make a will in the name of their cat or dog.

*Some chocolates are offered to Swamiji, so everyone is hoping to get one.*

God is much sweeter than chocolate. God, once found (discovered), is found forever. Chocolate you have to get again and again. If you get many chocolates and eat them very frequently you will get fed up with them. But in the case of God, you never get fed up with Him. The more you love Him, the more fulfilled you feel. Longing for chocolate is neither human love nor divine Love.

### **There are many ways to express adoration**

*Could you talk about adoration?*

When you are very much impressed by the power or the beauty of someone or something and you express that state of mind, it is adoration.

*Can't adoration be expressed through the feeling of plenitude?*

You may express it in many ways. You may fold your hands and salute. You may prostrate, you may smile, you may weep, you may dance, you may sing; there are so many ways of expressing. Or you may even not express it at all and remain silent and motionless, that is also a means of expression. It is like expressing your love.

There is a story about a *bhil*, an uneducated tribal, who worshipped Lord Shiva by bringing water in his mouth because he had no pot. He poured the water on the *Shiva lingam* from his mouth. Lord Shiva was very much pleased by his worship.

### **The Divine should be realized within oneself**

*What is the spiritual heart?*

I don't know anything about the spiritual heart. In the *Upanishads* the term *hriday akāsh* is used and it is said that the vision of the *Ātmā* happens in the *hriday akāsh*. In the *Gītā* also the Lord says, "I reside in the hearts of all persons." I think it is a symbolic expression of saying that the Divine

should be realized within oneself, instead of seeking Him in the places, situations and relationships of the world. Spiritual heart means the heart full of devotion and love. Passionate love for God alone can make one aware of one's beloved God, uninterruptedly and constantly.

### ***Prayer***

*To call, pray, and invoke the divine power and grace form the essential parts of bhakti yoga.*

#### **Prayers should be done from the core of your heart**

*For one year I have been praying every day, but not at a fixed time. I pray when I feel the need to pray. Is it better to have a fixed time for my prayers? I always say, "Lord, come and dispel the darkness of my heart and make me feel and know Your holy wish so that I accomplish it." Swamiji, is it a good prayer for me?*

Yes, it is a good prayer. Do this prayer from the core of your heart, in the language of feeling, everyday and many times. It is not necessary to pray at a fixed time, but pray daily and regularly. Also express gratitude to the Lord for what he has already given to you. He has given you a sound body and a sound mind. Express your gratitude to the Lord for it, and make best use of your body-mind in serving others in the name of God and in treading the path of Self-Realization.

*How can we always be in union with God and pray unceasingly?*

You can be in union with God unceasingly only if you have realized Him directly. Prayer is one part of the spiritual *sāadhanā* for God-Realization. You cannot pray unceasingly.

*What is the impact of prayer?*

Prayer has tremendous power. Through prayer, you invoke the power of the Almighty. But the prayer should come from the depths of the heart, and the one who prays should be able to communicate with the omnipotent God. The prayer which is confined only to words does not have much power. Most people say prayers only as a ritual.

### **If you cannot control your thoughts, pray to the Lord**

*Yesterday, after one sitting of meditation, I felt very sad and frustrated at the chaos in my mind. Sometimes, I wonder if this chattering and associative thinking is ever going to stop.*

It is a very promising sign if and when the seeker of Truth feels upset and sad, but not frustrated, when he/she cannot relax or concentrate during meditation.

If you cannot control your thoughts during meditation or otherwise, it shows how much freedom you have. It should weaken your ego. It should encourage you to pray to the Lord. If you cannot remove your weaknesses by self-effort, you should pray to the Lord. Prayer is a very important part of spiritual effort. Even the Buddhists who, according to the teaching of Buddha, are not supposed to pray to or depend upon anyone for freedom and enlightenment, repeat again and again, “*Buddham sharanam gacchami*” – “I take refuge in the Buddha.”

## **The different levels of prayer**

*Can we address our prayers to our chosen deity?*

Yes, prayer in its consummation turns into selfless love for God. The three levels of prayers are:

- Petition
- Intercession
- Gratitude to the Divine.

*If I pray for someone else, how can my prayer help that person?*

This prayer is called intercession. It is a technical word of Christian theology which means to ask blessings or requests for others. If you pray for yourself it is petition. If you pray for others, it is intercession. If prayer can help you, why can't it help others as well? But you should be able to approach God, communicate with God in prayer of petition or intercession, and your prayer should be legitimate. If you pray to God that he should help you in winning the horse race, do you think it is legitimate? A man prayed to God, "If I win a lottery of one million dollars by Your grace, I will donate one thousand dollars out of it in Your service, in making a church, a temple or a mosque." He prayed and prayed but never won the lottery. Then, he said, "O Lord, if You don't trust me, then keep those one thousand dollars with You and let me win the lottery of one million minus one thousand, please!"

*Whenever I pray, there is always a hidden desire for materialistic gain. How can I get out of this?*

Prayer makes you remember the Divine. If you pray for materialistic gains, you remember the Divine. If you pray for your spiritual upliftment, you remember the Divine. Remembering the Divine has its own impact on the mind. In the *Gītā*, it is said there are four types of devotees. Or it may be said that devotion has four stages or levels. It is also said that all the devotees are praiseworthy. But the devotee who remembers the Divine only out of love is the highest.

Prayer has many levels. At one level prayer turns into non-asking. It turns into the experience of Fulfilment: Thy Will is my will!

**The prayer should be directed to the Divine who is at once immanent and transcendent**

*When I was a child, I remember that praying to God was like praying to a person. Later, I didn't practice religion anymore. I think I maintained a link with the Divine through art and through nature. Now, in prayer, it is disturbing for me to say, "My Lord". I cannot consider God as a person anymore.*

How can a person conceive of the Impersonal? Are you a person or not? How can you pray to the Impersonal? Even if you do, the Impersonal is not going to respond to you. He is not concerned with you at all. To be in communication with the Impersonal, you will have to give up your personality. Can you do that? If you do not feel the need to pray, and if you can solve all your problems by yourself, or

through man, or nature, or through art, then well and good. But no one has ever been able to do that. You can try, maybe you can succeed.

*When we pray to the Divine, should we direct our prayer to the immensity of the Creator who is beyond us, or to the Divine who is within us?*

The prayer should be directed to the Divine who is at once immanent and transcendent. You cannot pray to the Divine in only His impersonal aspect. Being impersonal, He is not concerned with you. You cannot pray to the Divine in only His personal aspect. Being personal He becomes totally involved and influenced and limited.

**“Thou art, O Lord, the be-all and end-all of my life”**

*You wrote that the mind should be where the body is. What does it mean?*

What I meant was that one should not be absent-minded. You should concentrate your mind on what you are doing. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” said Jesus. Let God be your treasure. There is a *shloka*, which most Indian devotees recite every day, “O Lord, Thou art my Father, Thou art my Mother, Thou art my only Relative, Thou art my Friend, Thou art my Wisdom, Thou art my Treasure. Thou art, O Lord, the be-all and end-all of my life.”

Reciting this *shloka* is one thing, and feeling its meaning from the core of one’s heart is quite another.

### **If you are one with God, you don't need to say any prayer**

*I don't find it right to pray to obtain something, as if we want to change God's plans. I also think it is in contradiction with the Vedantic concept of non-duality. If we pray to God, we remain in duality. I think prayer is a way of being in contact with God, of feeling his presence.*

If you are established in non-duality, if you are completely desireless, if you feel completely Self-fulfilled, then you don't need to say any prayer. Shankaracharya, the greatest exponent of non-dual *Vedānta*, pays obedience to his Guru and to his *Iṣṭa*, Lord Krishna, when he starts writing on *Vedānta* and it does not make him a dualist. When you are talking of God who makes plans and who is separate from you, then does it not make you feel that you are dualist? Why do you meditate? How do you meditate? Do you want something through meditation or not? You meditate and pray to feel the presence of God, you say. It proves that you are not one with God yet.

### ***Self-Surrender***

#### **Make the best use of what God has given to you for your spiritual growth**

*You lay a lot of emphasis on surrender to God. How does one completely surrender to God?*

Surrender to God happens slowly and gradually when we make best use of what God has given to us for our spiritual growth, through the purification and stabilization of our

mind. You are a student; you should follow the discipline of a student. In the morning and evening sit in prayer and remember the Divine. Recite *Japji Sahib* daily and reflect on it. You should devote one to two hours each day to your religious and spiritual development.

*I am struggling in my process of surrendering to God; do you have some advice?*

Surrender happens when you have made best use and spent all of your energies in a positive way on the path of Self-Realization. It is the consummation of self-effort and self-will. You cannot force surrender to happen to you.

You should make best use of what has been given to you: your body, mind, intellect, your wealth, your social position, etc. That is what is required of you at this stage. So long as even a bit of energy is left with you unused, it will not let self-surrender happen. Self-surrender will happen by itself at the right time.

### **How to become the free instrument of God**

*People often say, "I want this, I want that, I want to go there," and so on. Is it the 'I' which decides or is it life or God?*

Have you self-will or not? God works in you freely only when you have given up your self-will. You become the free instrument of God only when you have completely surrendered yourself to God.

*Who knows what is good for me and what I need? How can I abandon myself to God?*

Give up desire and self-will, and God will use you as His instrument.

### **Surrender to the Divine is the fruit of unconditional love**

*Can you make me feel more deeply “surrender to the Divine”?*

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.

### **Concentration and relaxation are not absolutely different**

*Effort or effortlessness, what is the right attitude?*

There are two paths which lead to Self-Realization. One is the way of concentration; the other is the way of relaxation. If you concentrate on a point, when the concentration reaches its consummation, the point gets dissolved in the ether of Consciousness. You were a science student. You know about the relationship between an atom and ether. An atom is a vortex in ether. They are not absolutely different from each other. When effort reaches its consummation point, it turns into effortlessness. If you close your fist, applying your whole effort and energy, the fist opens when you have exhausted

the effort/energy. Self-surrender or effortlessness happens when you have exhausted all of your energy in making effort.

Total self-surrender leads to complete union with “What Is,” where duality is completely abolished.

### **Dynamic surrender**

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

Surrender is a state of mind. It is not inaction or inertia. It is giving up one’s self-will. What is required for spiritual progress is dynamic surrender, the performing of actions without self-will, without the 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, thinking which is not biased, which is positive, which is in conformity with the teaching of the inspired Scriptures and in conformity with the teachings of the enlightened ones.

### **Spontaneous action is the fruit of complete self-surrender**

*As long as the ego is there, is it possible to act spontaneously?*

There is one type of action which you can call a planned action. You first think, plan and then act. There is another action called spontaneous action. In spontaneous action, there is no space between the thinking and the activity. The child is active all day, more active than you. But he is not planning anything.

Spontaneous action is the fruit of complete self-surrender. First of all, the seeker should not only perform actions with a total mind and complete involvement, but also surrender the fruit of his actions. Then, a stage comes when he starts to feel that he is not the doer, even though there is still the feeling of separateness and duality. In the consummation of *sevâ*, not only the sense of doership is abolished, but also the sense of separateness, the sense of being a separate individual being. One then becomes completely free and spontaneous.

## **Grace**

### **Grace is the divine power working secretly in the world**

*You said that work is needed for Realization. Is God's grace also needed? What is grace and how does one receive it?*

Wholehearted self-effort for Self-Realization on the part of the seeker and special grace from the Divine are needed for Self-Realization. Grace is the divine power working secretly in the world for the welfare of all beings. Those who are open, faithful and trustful are benefited more from the working of the divine Power.

### **Self-effort is made to be fit to receive grace**

*How to solve the contradiction between one Master who says that we have to struggle to do our sādhanā to achieve Realization, and another Master who says that there is nothing to do because only grace can bring us to Realization?*

Should one be completely peaceful and free, then there is no need of doing any *sādhana* or making any effort for Liberation. Moreover, there is no contradiction between grace and self-effort. Self-effort is made to be fit to receive grace. Grace is available to us, but we are not available to grace. We are so much preoccupied with what is temporal and passing that we cannot receive grace.

*I would like to be able to receive divine Love and be able to give it.*

Is your real Self asking that or are you saying that for advertising yourself as a loving devotee. There are two types of motives, the real motives and the advertised motives!

### **Self-effort and grace**

*In spite of all my efforts, I wonder if I will ever achieve Self-Realization?*

Liberation cannot be achieved by self-effort. But those who do not make any self-effort for Liberation never get liberated. Liberation is the product of Self-Realization, called God-Realization by the devotees, which happens when the hardest effort on the part of the seeker and the unreserved grace on the part of the Divine meet. The seeker must make best use of all his or her energies on the path of God-Realization and invoke divine grace. Only then, he or she can have Realization and Liberation.

Those who realize the Truth never claim that it was due to their own efforts. All your efforts are in time and space and the Truth is timeless and eternal. Unreserved

divine grace must intervene from above and take the seeker beyond all limitations. Even if you sacrifice your life for God, so what? In reality you have made no sacrifice because this life did not belong to you. The devotee says, “In reality, even by giving my life back to You, I have not done anything great. I can never pay the price of your grace. Your grace is priceless. The truth is that I could not pay the price, even by sacrificing my life.”

When you see God face to face, directly, you find out that He is so great, limitless, and infinite, while your effort was so limited, so small. You would never say that you realized God with your own effort.

### **Finding God is not the result of self-effort**

Those who do not make any effort to find God, never find God. However, finding God is not the result of self-effort. Those who realized God made effort, devoted all their energies, spared nothing to realize God, and when they found God, they also found that it could not be the result of their efforts. But to go on making all efforts to get the temporal things and do nothing to realize God or realize your true Nature, shows clearly what you are interested in. God is so great that when you find God after making wholehearted efforts, you say, “O, it cannot be the result of my efforts, which were so small.”

## 2. *Jñāna Yoga*

### *The Path of Knowledge*

**There are two principles, the changing and the unchanging**

*I want to concentrate on the non-doer, and contemplate “I am That”.*

The Spirit, called *Puruṣha*, is not the doer. It is *akartā* and *abhokta*, it is pure Awareness. It does not change at all, It is always the same. The physical body and the mind are the parts of *Prakṛiti*, which is always changing. By the apparent contact of *Prakṛiti* with *Puruṣha* another entity is formed which is called the soul or *jīva*. The identification with the physical body and the mind makes you feel that you are a soul, a doer, with so many limitations. To realize the *Puruṣha*, the *Ātmā*, this identification has to be broken. By meditation, you can transcend the body consciousness and the mental consciousness.

If you understand this classification, it will not be difficult for you to understand that there are two principles in you at the same time, the changing one and the unchanging one, the doer and the non-doer. You can identify yourself with any of them. In the *Upaniṣhads*, the same has been told in a simile. It is said that on a tree two birds are sitting, one eats the fruits and feels pain and pleasure according to the kind and quality of the fruits. The other does not do anything; it simply watches or sees.

You may follow the path of *jñāna yoga*, “I am That,” as you say. It is the most difficult path. You have to give up

your attachment to your body and your mind. Only then can you follow this path.

### **Absolute Knowledge and relative knowledge**

*You spoke the other day about the knower, the known and the knowledge. What does knowledge mean?*

Knowledge, in that triangle, is the instrument of the knower or it is the relationship between the knower and the known. It is relative knowledge. It is not the Knowledge, “*Chit*” as used in *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. There, Knowledge means absolute Knowledge. The word “*jñāna*” is used in both types of knowledge, relative knowledge and absolute Knowledge. Relative knowledge is dependent upon the mind or senses and the objects of perception. All knowledge about the phenomenal existence is relative knowledge. In relative knowledge Consciousness is split. That is why no such knowledge can give satisfaction to the soul. All the sciences are included in this type of knowledge.

There is a dialogue in the *Upaniṣhads*: A *ṛiṣhi* goes to Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanat Kumar and says, “I have achieved mastery in all the sciences: physics, chemistry, psychology, biology, mathematics etc. but I have not found peace.” Then, the Kumar brothers tell him that peace is in *nāma*. *Nāma* here means the Divine, the eternal and timeless Consciousness. Knowing is only owning or recognizing. You cannot know anything unless you know it already, but you have forgotten it.

**What kind of knowledge do animals have?**

The knowledge of animals is an even lower knowledge than what a human being has through the mind. Animals know through instinct. Their knowledge is not mental. The difference between an animal and a human being is that the latter can reflect upon his or her experiences and learn; animals cannot reflect.

**The real “I” and the false “I”**

*How does one reconcile these two phrases, “There is nothing else other than me” and “We should go beyond me, mine, my?”*

There are two “I’s.” One is the real “I,” the Spirit. The second is the false “I,” the ego. The ego has to be given up. The real “I” has to be asserted.

*How is it possible for an ordinary human being to discern which is the real “I” and which is the ego?*

To discern between the real “I” and the false “I” is not difficult. The false “I” is changing. It is limited by time and space and by the law of cause and effect. One may not know the Real, the Everlasting “I” through the mind, but is it difficult to know what is not real? Anything which is not lasting, is not real. Leave what is unreal. Only then you can reach the Real.

Discrimination means to understand that what is seen is not real. The Seer is real. The existence of the world is only phenomenal. It is not real. The Real is neither bound

by time and space nor by any state. The Real is absolute Consciousness. It is Consciousness alone which is not bound by time and space. It is there in the wakeful state, the dreaming state, as well as in the deep sleep state. These states come and go, but Seeing is always there.

**Through discrimination you can know that you are not the physical body**

*Could remembering that I am the Ātmā help me to disidentify myself from the body?*

First of all, you should be conscious that you are not the physical body. Feel the unreal as unreal. It will enable you to realize the Real.

You don't know who you are. You have no experience of your true Self. But through discrimination, you can know that you are not the physical body. Reflect again and again that you are not the body.

The Ātmā IS. It does not become. Becoming is the world-process. Being is the Ātmā.

*Does identification mean to become one with?*

No! Identification means that you imagine or think that you are the body. You never become the body!

**Speaking about Truth is not realizing the Truth**

*Should we keep a balance between what we give and what we receive, or is it only when we are awakened that we can really give?*

You can give to others only what you have. Some people read books, gather information and start imparting that information to others without realizing the Truth for themselves. They are like professors teaching in the colleges. They are not happy themselves. They suffer from all the weaknesses of an ordinary person, even though they have memorized so many books. If you have done experiments and found some truth on the basis of your experience, it is a different thing to share it with others. Touching God or even touching the manifestation of God is not possible unless one's mind is purified, stable and completely silent.

**The real cause of pain and suffering is to forget your eternal Nature**

*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. Now when you say not to be identified with our thoughts or feelings, I think I use the same kind of process. But I am not sure it is a good way because it makes me feel split apart. What does it mean exactly “not to be identified with our thoughts and feelings” and how does one 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 will 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, which is not limited by time and space, no thoughts or problems of the physical body can

disturb your peace and joy. You have to be centred in your absolute Existence, not 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 of 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 simply 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.

### **When you know God, you know yourself**

To know oneself is essential to know God. When you know God, you come to know yourself. When you know yourself, you come to know God. The qualification and the way is the same. The end is also the same.

### 3. Karma Yoga

#### *The Path of Selfless Work & Service in the Name of God*

##### **What do you mean by karma yoga?**

*Karma yoga* means any *karma* (action) which you do with joy in the name of God, without the expectation of any fruits. In the path of Liberation, *karma* is an obstacle. It binds the doer. But *karma yoga* is a help. It enables you to remember the Divine and it also purifies your heart.

##### **The right attitude for doing sevâ**

*Please tell us what sevâ means. How should it be practised?*

*Sevâ* means serving the poor and the needy in the name of God. It is one of the main parts of spiritual effort. Prayer, meditation, reciting of holy names, reading holy Scriptures and reflecting upon them, periodic association with sages and saints are the other parts.

*Can you tell me what is the right attitude for doing sevâ?*

Serve your Guruji!

##### **Are you “breaking stones” or “serving God?”**

*Is it true that it is our duty to fulfil certain responsibilities in this world, such as towards our nation, family, etc., or are these only excuses for not even trying to seek God?*

God can be sought and found wheresoever one is living. In the *Upanishads* it is said, “*Pūrṇamadah pūrṇamidam*” – “God is there and God is here also.” Should the duties and responsibilities towards the family be fulfilled in the name of God, these become the means to remember the Divine, and turn into *sādhanā*.

In a village a temple was being built. Many people were breaking the stones which were to be used in building the temple. One was asked, “What are you doing?” He replied, “Don’t you see? I am breaking stones. If I don’t do this work I won’t get paid. How would I live if I have no money? How will I be able to support my family if I don’t break these stones?” Another man was asked, “What are you doing?” He said, “A temple of God is being built. I am rendering my services. I am serving God.” Both are doing the same work, physically. But one is happy and enjoying the work in the name of God, remembering God. He would also get his wages. The first is irritated. He is not enjoying the work. He is breaking the stones. He is not building the temple. The attitude of both persons is different even though they are doing the same work.

In this world, most of the people are like the person who said, “I am breaking the stones.” Very few are like the one who was building the temple and through that work remembering the Divine. A person is telling the beads of the rosary and is remembering the Divine. Another person is breaking stones for the temple of God and remembering the Divine. Qualitatively, there is no difference. By breaking stones for building the temple, you are not only remembering the Divine, but also doing something that is very useful for others. If you are telling the beads of a rosary, you are

remembering the Divine (if your mind is not wandering), no doubt, but what utility does moving the beads of a rosary have for others?

Any activity that enables you to remember the Divine is as good as telling the beads of a rosary, or even better. If you serve someone in the name of God, it makes you remember the Divine and it has a social benefit as well.

*For me, it is difficult to remember God while living in the world, as what we see is so confusing.*

If it is so with you, then it is better for you to tell the beads of a rosary and remember the Divine in that way.

### **You are like a conscious kite whose string is held by God**

*How do karma yoga and sevâ purify one's mind?*

*Karma* binds. All *karmas* prompted by desire bind the soul. Virtuous *karmas* prompted by *sâttvic* desire bind the soul, even if they yield pleasant results. As fire is associated with smoke, similarly all the *karmas* which are prompted by desire are associated with ignorance and bind the soul, as says the *Gītā*. Avoiding all *karmas* in life is almost impossible, as is 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 total mind and alertness, and surrender its fruits to the Divine in all humility as an offering.

In this way the *karma* becomes associated with God and its quality changes.

The second progressive stage is that you perform *karmas* to please the Divine and obtain 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, the 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.

*Sevâ* 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 for 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 would begin to be purified. Not only that, an unprecedented stability, strength, peace, awareness and love would come into your life. Do you remember, last September we went to a public school near Shimla? They had a signboard on the premises of the school, “Work is worship.” I told the Principal to make it, “Work done in the name of God is worship.”

*When working I feel joy, love and interest in the activity, but I don't remember the Divine, nor do I practise japa. Is it worship?*

No, not at all! That type of work cannot be called worship, but it is a very *sāttvic* work.

**It is better to serve others than to help others**

*It is said that to help others, we have to start by helping ourselves. But I don't understand how to love myself without inflating the sense of ego. How can I help others in an unselfish way?*

If you want to help someone financially, you must be a rich person. If you want to help a drowning person, you must be a very good swimmer or be standing on a rock for support. It is better to serve others than to help others. If you consider yourself a helper, it may inflate your ego and the person whom you help may feel burdened by your help. Serve others in such a way that the person whom you serve should not know about it. If you give something to someone with your right hand, your left hand should not know it, as Jesus said. When you give something to someone when it is asked, it is *bhikshā*. When you give something to someone unasked, it is charity.

*I would like to better understand the difference between "to help" and "to serve."*

When you feel that you are helping someone, you feel superior to the one whom you are helping. Service to others usually involves humility, but it can also become perverted. There is only a difference of attitude.

### **To serve others in the name of God is worship of God**

*I am very pleased to do so-called good actions, but a few days ago you told us that we also have to give up the ego of “doing well.” So, what should I do? Should I reduce my impulse to serve?*

I don't see any ego in you. You are so humble. I have never seen you bragging about any good action you have done. Serving others in the name of God is a part of spiritual *sādhana*. To have an urge to serve others in the name of God is a positive attitude, which is helpful on the path of God-Realization.

Once, Ramakrishna was going to Vrindavan for a pilgrimage. Mr. Mathur was in charge and accompanied the group along with Ramakrishna. On the way Ramakrishna saw some poor people who had no clothes on their bodies and they looked weak because they did not get enough food to eat. Ramakrishna told Mr. Mathur to feed this family and give them clothes. Mr. Mathur said, “I have only enough money for the pilgrimage.” Ramakrishna refused to proceed further to Vrindavan and told him to spend that money on those poor people.

Any service done in the name of God makes you remember the Divine and it is as good as meditation. To serve poor people only as a social service is only a *sāttvic* action. But to serve others in the name of God is worship.

*I visit elderly and dying people. Can this activity help me to remember that it is God Himself I meet in people of this kind? I enter a special state of mind during these visits. How can I be in this same state with everyone I meet in my daily life?*

Is God found only in old and dying people? If you cannot feel the presence of God in living people, in children, young people, in all types of living beings, how will you feel the presence of God in old people? If you need more and more dying and suffering people to feel the presence of God, is it a good state of mind?

I appreciate your service to the suffering people, but try to feel the presence of God in one and all. If you give pain to someone, it comes back to you manifold. If you give comfort to others, it comes back to you manifold also. That is the law. That is the reward of social service. But if you remember God through your work, it gradually leads you to God-Realization.

You go and take a bath in the Ganges. If you have no faith, only your body will be cleansed. Now, if you take the Ganges as the manifestation of God and take a bath in it, not only your body is cleansed while taking a bath, but you remember the Divine through the Ganges, and it has a double effect on you. Even an atheist, one who does not believe in God, can serve the poor. That is a good action. It helps to purify the mind. To serve others in the name of God has an additional, higher dimension. When a devotee serves someone in the name of God, it is not only a good action, it is worship also. Worship must involve the remembrance of God.

*Two friends and I had planned to open a house to receive teenagers who have problems. We were not able to succeed with this plan. Is it because we were not ready for this kind of mission? Are there other desires to be satisfied before it?*

Well, if you fail in continuing with or starting a social mission, it can have many reasons. Social work done selflessly and in the name of God helps you to spiritualize your vital energy. Therefore, selfless service is considered a part of *sādhanā*. You cannot give up all desires at once. You have to sublimate them and spiritualize them.

### **Selfless action leads to union with the Divine**

*If we have to break our addiction to doing actions (karmas), why did Lord Krishna ask Arjuna to fight?*

Some people stop working even before becoming enlightened, people like Mr.... Is it fair? An action prompted by selfishness binds the doer. Selfless action or action performed out of love for the Divine becomes a means of remembering the Divine and ultimately leads to union with the Divine.

Krishna pleads with Arjuna and exhorts him to perform the divine action. “Plead with” means to try to convince someone with arguments to take a certain line of action. Arjuna was a warrior by nature. He was a *kshatriya*. He could not live without fighting. He was always fighting for the right cause, for protecting the helpless, fighting against injustice and oppression. But when he had to fight against his own relatives who were unjust and oppressive, he said it was not good to fight, it was better to take *sannyāsa* than to fight one’s own cousins and elders. At that time Krishna told him what his duty was in those circumstances. He pleaded with Arjuna not to run away from life and instead to face the challenge. He taught him about right action and wrong action and above all, divine action.

**Service should be done out of love**

*I spontaneously tend to help others and to listen to them. But I always reach a point in which I feel that the other becomes a burden.*

It is better to serve others than to help others. And one should serve others according to one's means and capacity. Only then can you enjoy serving others. It is true that when someone makes demands and you are not able to serve or help him you feel a sort of burden. It is quite natural. When you are forced directly or indirectly to do something, you feel a burden. For example, you come here daily at 11.00 a.m. and you feel joy because you want to come here. But, if you are forced to come here, you will do it for a few days, but then start feeling it as a burden. Moreover, the service should be done out of love, without expectation of any return. One should not even expect a word of thanks in return. Whatever you do out of love can never be a burden on you. There is joy in such service. What is the goal? If you feel joy in serving, the service itself is the goal.

*What is the meaning of "sattvaguṇa charity?"*

*Sattvaguṇa* charity is the charity which gives you joy. It should not create a sense or a feeling of burden or inconvenience. That is why it is said that one should give according to one's means.

**The way to perform action in the right spirit**

*How can a busy person silence his/her thoughts completely? For that person, meditation will be a process which goes against the current because he/she is thinking all the time.*

It would depend on how you do your activities. The seeker who performs actions in the name of God does not become attached to them, even though he/she puts his/her whole energy and attention into the action. If thinking of an action still persists in your mind after you have stopped doing that action, it means the action has not been done with the right spirit and the right attitude.

*I often observe that it is difficult for me to act and not to expect the fruit of my action.*

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, “To do actions is in your hands, but the fruit of the action is not in your hands.” Therefore it is useless to think about the fruit. All the energy and attention should be spent in performing the action. If you are thinking of the fruit of the action, your efficiency in performing it is reduced.

**There is no comparison between temporal and eternal values of life**

*In my profession as an osteopath, may I share with my patients what I have learnt during my sādhanā?*

Being a healer is as good as being a doctor. It has nothing to do with spirituality. It is a science like any other science. If you become a scientist and help society in some way, it has nothing to do with Self-Realization. If you serve others in some way in the name of God, only then does that service become a means of communication with God. Otherwise it is only a *sāttvic* action. You get back what you give to others.

*I know people who serve others without dedicating their service to God, but I feel they are better people than some others who claim to be spiritual.*

That is what I am saying, it is social service. It is not bad. It is good. But there is no comparison between temporal values and the eternal values of life. If you heal the body of a person, will it end all the suffering of that person forever? It cannot. Gautama (Buddha) was a prince. He could depute hundreds of doctors in the service of society. But he renounced his kingdom and went out in search of the Truth. Can you compare Lord Buddha with a doctor who spends his whole life in the service of humanity?

Serving others is a virtuous action, no doubt, if the service is selfless. But if the service is done to gain recognition or with any other vested interest, then it is only an investment. Meditation and prayer are very necessary to be completely selfless. Therefore, you should sit in meditation daily and regularly in the morning and evening and in the day you should serve the people in the name of God. Service rendered out of compassion is a part of spiritual *sādhanā*. But to get rid of the ego, which is the first and last obstacle on the path of God-Realization, meditation and prayer are indispensable.

I will tell you about a religious man. There was one Sardar Hari Singhji in Jammu. He started to work as a peon in the Jammu & Kashmir Government. He told me that his pay as a peon was only fifteen rupees per month. But he spent ten percent of his salary on the poor and needy people and in serving saints. He observed this rule all his life, up to his last breath. He retired as a settlement officer of Jammu

& Kashmir when he was getting eight hundred rupees per month. After his retirement, he got the pension of four hundred rupees per month. He not only continued to give in charity ten percent, but increased it to fifty percent. Out of the four hundred rupees of his pension, he would give two hundred rupees in charity every month. One hundred rupees, he would give to his wife and told her that she could spend it as she liked. He spent only one hundred rupees on himself for his medicines, etc. for as long as he lived. And no one knew where he was distributing the two hundred rupees in charity. It was totally hidden. When he died, there were only three hundred fifteen rupees in his bank accounts. He was not giving charity as a social obligation. He was doing it in the name of God, he was a religious person.

There are many values of life: familial, social, moral, religious, spiritual. You can live for any value. But some people live like animals, mechanically, without any aim and purpose of life. The real fruit of all selfless social service is that one day you will feel the need for God and God-Realization, and you will become an ardent spiritual seeker.

### **God cannot be cheated**

Two days ago, we went to a bathing *ghat* on the Ganges and we saw many benches which some devotees had arranged to be built with their donations. On every bench the name of the donor was written. It is said that we receive back ten times what we give to others. But if you give with the desire that you will get ten times more, then you may get half of what you have given only. God cannot be cheated.

A person used to distribute things among poor people but would keep his eyes down as if he was feeling ashamed. Someone asked him, “Why do you feel ashamed and keep your eyes down as if you were feeling guilty?” The man said, “It is the Lord alone who is the Giver, but people think that I am giving. That is why I feel ashamed.”

#### 4. *Rāja yoga of Maharshi Patanjali*

##### ***Hatha yoga and Rāja yoga***

*What is the difference between hatha yoga and rāja yoga?*

*Hatha yoga* is the discipline of the physical body, which is a part of *rāja yoga*. *Prāṇāyāma* and *āsanas* comprise *hatha yoga*. But in Patanjali’s yoga not so many types of postures (*āsanas*) and *prāṇāyāma* are given. These have been developed by *hatha yogīs* belonging to the *tāntric* tradition, who concentrated on the opening of the different *chakras* and awakening the *kuṇḍalinī*, the sleeping divine power located in the lowest *chakra*, called the *mūlādhāra*.

*Rāja yoga* of Patanjali is the path of psychosomatic discipline, which leads to the Liberation of the soul, and which is attained by the separation of *Puruṣha* from *Prakṛiti*, Spirit from matter. The higher parts of *rāja yoga* are *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. Meditation is an essential part of *rāja yoga*. *Pratyāhāra* is the control of senses, withdrawing the senses from their objects, as eyes from form, ear from sound, nose from smell etc. *Dhāraṇā* means dwelling or holding the mind on some object. *Dhyāna*

is the flowing of the mind on one object with the exclusion of all the others. *Samādhi* is the state in which the object of *dhyanā* merges into the subject. The subject and the object are resolved into one.

*What you said about dhâraṇâ, I thought it was the description of pratyâhâra.*

*Pratyâhâra* and *dhâraṇâ* are like the two sides of the same coin. They cannot be separated. You can fix your attention on one object only when you withdraw it from all the others.

### **Description of a rāja yogî**

*I think my karma in this life is to be a rāja yogî, a muni, like you were when you were a young man, not to be in a comfortable âshram or house with a family, etc. Am I in mâyâ or in my dharma?*

What do you feel? Are you in *mâyâ* or in your *dharma*? It is the result of good *karma* that one is attracted to follow the path of *dharma*. The devotees would say it is the grace of God pulling you towards God. There are very few who are attracted to God or Truth at your age. Can you tell us what you remember about your past lives? Even a person's imagination tells us much about the person. What do you want to be now? Do you want to be a *rāja yogî*, living in a cave, or do you want to live in a comfortable house? Read *Rāja Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda and follow its discipline with sincerity. Carefree people have a good sleep. A *rāja yogî* strikes the balance between all his activities, between sleep and wakefulness, in diet and in other activities. He

does not sleep too much or too little. He does not eat too much or too little. He behaves in every matter with temperance.

*What is rāja yoga?*

In all *yogas* and 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 other *yogas* very easily and successfully. *Rāja yoga* is the soma-psychological discipline to control the modifications of the mind. In one of the first *sūtras* of *Patanjali's Yoga Sūtras*, this description of yoga is clearly given, “*yogash chitta vritti nirodhah*” – “Yoga means the complete stopping of the modifications of the mind.”

*And what is kuṇḍalinī yoga?*

Meditation is a part of the *sādhana* for awakening the *kuṇḍalinī*. But *prāṇāyāma* is the predominant aspect of *kuṇḍalinīyoga*.

*Kuṇḍalinī* is awakened in the path of devotion as well as in the path of knowledge. *Kuṇḍalinī* means “the hidden divine power in man.” That power is not completely sleeping in you. If it were so, you would not be able to think or even walk or move your hands.

## Chapter Five

### *Meditation & Contemplation*

#### *I. General Concepts*

**That which is beyond mind has to be realized**

*It is said that this world is only an illusion. How can we feel responsible, or even do sādhanā, if we do not exist?*

“I am not.” Can it be ever experienced? To say that I don’t exist will be like using your tongue to say that I have no tongue!

*Through my mind I know that I exist, but there is something beyond my mind which is more important, and that I don’t know.*

Yes, that is important. That which is beyond mind has to be realized. That is what spiritual effort is for. The way to realize it is to turn the attention back from what is known, from all objects, and direct it towards the knower, but first try it during meditation!

**One starts in meditation by fixing one's mind on a single object**

*Please, can you tell us what meditation is, how to practise it and why to practise it?*

Meditation means withdrawing one's attention from all inner or outer objects and turning it to its source, which is the infinite, timeless Consciousness. All objects, outer or inner, have no independent existence, and therefore in that sense, are not real. It is therefore mandatory for the seeker of Truth to withdraw the mind from objects. But it is not easy to withdraw one's attention from all the objects because we are always working with objects, dealing with them, in both the wakeful state as well as in the dreaming state. Therefore, to reach the thoughtless and objectless state, one starts in meditation by fixing one's mind on a single object, to the exclusion of all other objects. This object, on which the attention is fixed to the exclusion of all others, may be a single holy name, a *mantra*, a divine form, a divine thought, or a divine quality. By practice, one can reach a state in which one becomes totally absorbed in a single object. After reaching that state, one can easily go into the above mentioned thoughtless and objectless state by dropping that single object also.

Those who have faith and love for God fix their attention on the name (or the form) of God of their faith. As they love that holy form or holy name, it is far easier for them to concentrate on that name or form. Because of love, it is not only easier for them to concentrate, but they very much enjoy that type of concentration, or meditation.

*I attended all four sessions of meditation, but I couldn't concentrate.*

Meditation is to the soul what food is to the physical body. Some people only take care of their physical body, with the result that their soul becomes weak. If you don't feed your soul for a long period, for months, it is surely going to be weaker and weaker and unable to face the challenges of life. It will not be strong enough to face the temptations that distract the soul from the path of Truth. In the same way as the physical body needs physical exercise or work to maintain its health, the soul needs to remember the Divine or do spiritual exercises to maintain its spiritual health.

Seekers spend lives and lives to make their minds silent and discover the Truth, and you have practised meditation only for twenty-four hours in six days. So you can understand why you have not succeeded in controlling your mind. It is easier to become the Prime Minister of one's country than to have complete control over one's mind.

### **Keep your mind where your body is**

*The fact that I have to make choices worries me. I have the desire to go and see Yogī Ramsuratkumar for various reasons, but I also need to learn to concentrate more and more, and being here can help me. Which is the right decision for me to take?*

The desire to have the *darshana* of saints and sages is a good desire. When you go to the south you should go to the *âshram* of Yogî Ramsuratkumar and have his *darshana*. As long as you are here, you should keep your mind here also,

and try to stop thinking when you are practising meditation. Keep your mind where your body is.

### **The best meditation is to do nothing**

*What is the best way to concentrate for a beginner? It is difficult for me to meditate for four hour-long sessions a day. What is your suggestion?*

Do not do meditation or anything else. Just sit quietly and do not think or do anything. The best meditation is to do nothing, in the wakeful state. Doing nothing, just remaining quiet, alert, wakeful and without thinking is the best meditation. Do not go to sleep either. When you sit quietly and do not think, there is a tendency to go to sleep. You should not go to sleep at that time.

If you cannot sit quietly, recite the holy name of the Divine. If you cannot do that, do *sevâ*, service. Work performed in the name of the Divine is worship of God. There are many ways of worshipping God. Worshipping some symbol of God ritualistically is one type of worship of God. Reciting God's name is another type. Meditation is the third type and so on.

There was a very big monastery in Japan, spread over hundreds of acres of land. There were farms, buildings, stores and cowsheds. Once, the king went to see that monastery. The manager took the king everywhere and showed him the farms, cowsheds, kitchen, dining hall and other buildings. There was a very big hall a little away from the kitchen. The manager showed the king all the places in the monastery except that hall. The king noticed this and said, "What is

that big building for? What are the monks doing there?” The manager replied, “When the monks don’t want to do anything, they go there and sit in that hall quietly. They do not do anything there.” Can’t you sit quietly? Can’t you remain still without doing something?

After all, if you do something, surely you will get tired sooner or later. But when you do not do anything, the question of getting tired does not arise. During activity, you spend your energy. During rest, you regain the energy. Sleep gives you rest. But during meditation, you get complete rest, because meditation is not an action.

### **Just sit, do nothing and relax**

*I feel as if everything is moving inside me. Even though I have done serious sādhanā at Arunachala for nine years continuously, now I feel that my place is in France.*

*Sādhanā* should become more and more joyful after so many years of practice. There is, however, nothing wrong if you want to go back to France and share your spiritual experiences and achievement with others. Continuous and regular practice of *sādhanā* performed in a place spiritually charged by Ramana Maharshi must have given you a good deal of inner peace and joy which you can share with others. What do you mean when you say “moving?”

*I feel that all my cells are moving and revolting at the same time.*

Revolting against whom? Is this movement of cells pleasing or displeasing? Is your revolt against the *sādhanā*? No

particular *sāadhanā* is imposed here on anyone. You can just sit, do nothing and be relaxed. Do not do any *sāadhanā*. Sit quietly, do nothing and relax. But doing nothing is most difficult.

*I expect a lot from my relationship with you and I don't know if it is correct to express it to you?*

“Give and take” is a natural process. It can go on consciously or unconsciously. If one is open, one can feel it and enjoy it. If not, even then it goes on.

### **Meditation means a state of no-thinking**

*Which method of meditation would be suitable for me? There are so many methods in all the traditions that doubts arise regularly within me. Can you tell me how I should meditate and what attitude I should have during meditation?*

If you do not want to think anymore, that is the best attitude. Do not think at all during meditation. Meditation means a state of no-thinking. If you so like, you may pray: “O Lord! Make me stop thinking.” When your thinking stops and you are not sleeping, the flash of Truth comes to you. Such experiences as expansion of the physical body or its contraction may come during meditation. Be indifferent to such experiences. Don't give them any spiritual importance. These experiences are connected with the movements in the body. Supplement love of God with the practice of your method of meditation. Be deeply interested in the realization of the Divine, and then follow some method of meditation.

A man is very poor and cannot make both ends meet. He is told that a big treasure is buried in his home at such and such place and, if he could get it, he would become self-sufficient for his whole life. If he believes what he has been told, he will start digging in that place. Would he enjoy that digging or not? The deeper he digs, the more he will feel a sort of hope and joy, if his belief is simple and without doubt. You must believe in what meditation is going to give you in the long run. It is very important.

*What is the difference between meditation and japa in daily life (walking, working and so on)?*

Both meditation and *japa* are means of remembering and communicating with the Divine. The seeker tries and practises to always remember the Divine. Meditation and *japa* should be practised daily and regularly with total and undivided concentration. It can only be done by sitting calmly, without moving your body and by stopping all other activities. But you cannot do it continuously for the whole day and night. Some seekers cannot sit even for one hour. So, many separate sessions of meditation and *japa* in sitting posture can be arranged and organized according to the situation in which the seeker is living.

Meditation cannot be practised while walking or doing work, but *japa* can be. In such tasks as keeping accounts or writing books, or making plans, or portraits, or any other work that needs undivided attention and interest, even *japa* cannot be practised. One can surely practise *japa* while walking, cooking, washing utensils or clothes, driving a car and other such activities that do not require much attention and single-mindedness. Can you work on a computer and

practise *japa* at the same time? I don't think it is practical. It is better to do such work that needs total attention with the spirit of service to God and with devotion and dedication than to do it while practising *japa*. Once one's interest in life is totally changed, one's whole life undergoes a transformation. The spirit and intention behind activities are changed. It is only in this sense that Shri Aurobindo has said, "Life is Yoga." It does not mean that one should practise meditation or *japa* in all activities.

### **Remembrance of God in day-to-day activities**

*When I put my attention on God, I strongly feel His presence, but I lose the feeling of Him as soon as I go back into activity. What should I do to always remember God?*

To be completely absorbed in God during meditation is one thing, and to remember Him during active life is quite another. Man has the capacity to think of many things at one time. For example, a man is driving a car or a scooter. He is driving the car, paying attention to the road, to the mechanism of driving, and yet he may be thinking about some of his family affairs in which he is deeply involved and interested. In the same way, a person can remember God while working. What is needed is the deep interest in God, and the practice to remember Him during working hours.

When you start learning to drive a car or a scooter, you have to remain completely focused and concentrated on what is straight ahead. You cannot look to the side. You cannot talk to anyone. But once you become an expert in driving, then you can drive the scooter and at the same time use a

mobile phone and talk to your friend. It all depends on how expert you are in driving. Similarly, when you become an expert in remembering the Divine, you can also do it when you are working. It depends upon how much you have practised.

A lover is thinking of his/her beloved while working. He or she is so much attached to the beloved that he cannot forget him even during day-to-day activities. You have to fall in love with God. Then you won't be able to forget Him at any time or at any place. Have you ever loved someone deeply in this world? Then you can understand the point.

### **Ten wild horses**

*When I sit in meditation I feel I have ten wild horses in my head. When I go for a walk in nature or sit by the river, then I feel that I am peaceful. So, what should I carry on with?*

The ten wild horses you see during your meditation are nothing but your mind assuming the form of these ten horses without your consent. When you open your eyes and see the world or nature, your mind is occupied by seeing the world and nature; it feels no need to assume the form of wild horses. It is only during meditation that you come to know how much control you have over your mind.

*I'm a beginner; I don't know how to meditate. Will you help me, please?*

In the dictionary the meaning of the word "meditate" means "to think." In spiritual parlance, to meditate means to stop the thinking process. Sit down calmly, and don't think

anything. In the beginning you may simply watch the movement of your breath. It will help you to stop the thinking process.

**After the thinking process stops, one may enter into some higher level of consciousness.**

*What is the best method to stop the thinking process?*

There are two states of awareness, one in which the attention is focussed; the second in which the attention is not focussed anywhere, neither inside nor outside, nor on an object, thought, idea or word. To focus the attention on the centre between the eyebrows, or what is called the third eye, is one method of concentration. In that method also, one has not to think, but only to concentrate one's attention at that point. That point is very magnetic and strongly attracts the attention, with the result that one can easily withdraw oneself from the outside world and remain centred within. The purpose of all methods of meditation is to stop the thinking process. When the thinking mind stops, a higher consciousness takes over. There are other levels of consciousness higher than the mental consciousness. After the thinking mind stops, one may enter into some higher level of consciousness; one may enter the simple, dimensionless Consciousness. The quality of the experience of entering into different levels of consciousness is different.

*You advised me to stop thinking, but when I was undergoing Vipassana training, where we are asked to “stop thinking”, I felt I may become unconscious or faint, or go mad. Kindly shed light on this subject.*

It depends on you, what you want to become. Stopping the process of thinking is needed to experience what is beyond the reach of the mind. In dealing with the world, you cannot avoid thinking; you must think, but rightly. The mind is the instrument of relative perception. It cannot grasp the Absolute, the Divine. In order to realize the Divine, you have to learn the art of stopping the thinking process of the mind. The revealed Scriptures, sages and saints all say that the Divine is beyond the reach of senses, mind and intellect.

*Why must one concentrate on an object during meditation? Why not wait and just 'be'?*

If you are waiting for something, that something becomes the "object". The one who waits is the subject and the one being waited for is the object. So long as your mind is working, you cannot escape the duality of subject and object. Successful meditation begins with duality, but ends with the experience of non-dual Being. The duality is in the becoming. The non-duality is in the Being. As long as you are one who waits, you are in duality! Waiting is a process of mind. And when you wait, you wait for something. So that something becomes the object of your waiting.

*Is waiting not a technique of meditation?*

You may meditate in that way. Close your eyes and just wait, without thinking anything. But it is not the meditation of just being. Waiting is not being! Yes, it can lead you to the experience of being. All meditation should, in the end, lead to the experience of being. All meditations should ultimately stop the thinking process without going into sleep. But for a successful meditation, dispassion is absolutely necessary.

Dispassion means, to a certain degree, inner detachment towards what is temporal.

**All methods of meditation separate the witnessing consciousness from the mind**

*What does it mean to remain a witness during meditation?*

All methods of meditation, including the *japa* of a *mantra*, separate the witnessing consciousness from the mind. Some people contemplate on a form. This technique also serves the purpose of separating the mind from the witnessing consciousness. When you close your eyes and see the image of any object, the mind assumes the form of that object, and the witnessing consciousness sees that image by separating the two. If you could continue seeing one image, all the other images would stop and eventually that image would also cease. The mind stops moving or becoming. In the contemplation on a form, the witnessing consciousness is there and is seeing the image. In *japa*, the witnessing consciousness is present and hears the *mantra*. The purpose is to remain a witness. You can remain a witness to thoughts also. The practice will eventually stop the mind from generating thoughts. To remain a witness means stopping the current which goes into the mind through the identification of the witnessing consciousness with the mind. These are techniques for stopping the thinking process. The thinking process can also be stopped through divine Love.

**To turn the mind inward is what is called meditation**

*How does one stop body identification?*

Withdraw your mind from the body, from the objects. Turn it inward, backward to its source. That is what is called meditation!

*But how do we go to the source, when the source is not known?*

Don't care for the source. Only withdraw the mind from what is seen, the objects outer or inner. If you can do it for one minute, it means it is possible to do it for one hour also.

*When I came here, I had many questions in my mind to ask you, but as time passes, the numbers of questions are decreasing. Where are they disappearing?*

One should go within and find out where the questions come from and where they disappear.

*What is your advice for my meditation?*

Stop thinking! But should you be thinking, then think about God, the infinite, the timeless Consciousness. Turn your attention back to the One who is thinking. That is meditation.

### **Withdraw your attention to the source of your mind**

*What does Ramana Maharshi mean when he says, "You have to find the source of your thoughts"?*

What he said was, "Turn your attention back to the source of your mind or thought." He used the word thought for the mind. The source of the mind and of everything is the *Ātmā*. There is a statement in the *Upaniṣhads*, "How to know the knower?" "How to know the Seer?" That is what Ramana

Maharshi is saying. The way is that, during meditation, you should withdraw your attention from what is known, the objects, outer or inner.

*Isn't the mind the source of our thoughts?*

Mind is the sum total of all the thoughts, desires, emotions and reactions — all that is mental. Mind is the faculty, or you may say the energy, which thinks and feels.

*During meditation, should we try to dissolve the mind to reach the state of no-thought?*

The mind is there, it only becomes inactive during meditation. When the conscious mind is passive, for quite some time, then either the subconscious comes up or the supermind takes over. There can be no complete vacuum. Mind is comprised of thoughts, feelings, memory, imagination, and emotions. It is changing from one form to the other.

### **The divine black hole**

*How does one dive into the Unknown and choose the right moments to go deeper and deeper in one's spiritual life?*

Stop thinking of what is known; withdraw your attention from the known during meditation. Slowly and gradually, when you are able to do it, you will start having the glimpse of the Unknown. Diving deep into the Unknown becomes easier after that. Regular and daily practice of meditation is needed to be able to withdraw one's attention from all the outer or inner objects, situations, relationships, that comprise

the known. Now what is the known? All that is or can be perceived through the senses and the mind is the known! The Unknown transcends the grasp of the senses and mind. To know directly the Unknown and to dive deep into the Unknown, the functioning of all the senses and mind has to be stopped completely and you have to remain simply alert. In this state of alert passivity, the Unknown is revealed. The Unknown is very, very magnetic. Once it is revealed to you, you are pulled into It. It is like a black hole; you may call It the divine hole.

*Can we say that the Unknown is also our true Nature?*

Your true Nature is what can never be separated from you. So, what is it that can never be separated from you? You should first know what is not your true Nature. And what is not your true Nature? That which can be separated from you at any time or at any place is not your true Nature. Do you understand?

### **The easiest method to realize the formless Reality**

*How does one realize nirākār, the formless Reality?*

*Nirākār* can be realized by negating or discarding all the forms, all the images from the mind. During meditation, when all the forms are discarded, what remains is *nirākār*. *Nirākār* can also be realized by first concentrating on a single form or on a single word to the exclusion of all forms and names. In the final plunge, that single name or single form also merges in *nirākār*. It is the easier method because in the day-to-day activities, the mind is dealing with the world

of names and forms most of the time and it is not so easy to discard the world of names and forms all at once. One may concentrate on one divine form of one's faith, with which one can be in rapport emotionally.

### **The purpose of meditation is to remember the Divine**

*We have four sessions of meditation per day. Should they all be done according to the same method or do you, Swamiji, recommend different practices for each sitting?*

It is better to practise one technique of meditation. But if you feel tired of one practice, you can change the technique for some time. The purpose is to remember the Divine. You can remember the Divine through meditation, through *japa* or through some other method.

### **Alertness during meditation is the backbone of all methods of meditation**

*I lack sincerity because I am not sure I believe in God. I also lack purity because I am completely absorbed in my family life. Under these conditions may I meditate?*

Yes, you can surely meditate. You may not have absolute sincerity, but you have a certain degree of sincerity when you want to meditate. Purity can be there in the family also. Purity means purity of intention. A family person can also be pure if he or she discharges his or her duties without any malicious motive.

Concentration comes from regular practice for a long period. Alertness during meditation is the backbone of all

methods of meditation. Be more and more alert during meditation. Don't let the practice become mechanical. Be more and more sincere also. My help will come to you if you open yourself to me wheresoever you are.

*What is meant by this last sentence you have written?*

To be open means to be passive and alert, attentive. The more you are alert and passive, the more you are receptive. The more your mind is calm and unagitated, the more attentive you are.

**Vigilance is the master key for success in the practice of any method**

*I find it very difficult to concentrate and meditate.*

Successful meditation requires regular practice for a long time, performed with properly directed earnestness and commitment. The thinking process must be stopped. Concentration on one object is easier than making the mind totally blank. Start with concentrating on your breath, without thinking anything, or concentrating on a *mantra*. Vigilance or alertness is the master key for success in the practice of any method of meditation. Should any thought come or arise during meditation, it goes away within a fraction of a second if one does not become identified with it. One has to remain alert in order not to become identified with a thought.

Moreover, a very disciplined life is needed for successful meditation. Meditation is like swimming. You learn it by practice. One cannot learn swimming merely by reading theories about it.

**Meditation is the method to communicate with the timeless Being**

*During meditation I observe that there are mental images. However, I am not sleeping. Is it part of the process?*

During meditation one should not entertain or cherish the images which are seen. If you stop entertaining them, they will disappear. Don't take any interest in them when they appear.

*If and when your face comes during my meditation, Swamiji, may I concentrate and meditate upon it?*

One may concentrate on the form of a saint in whom one has faith, trust and love. One of the *Yoga Sûtras* of Patanjali advises it. It is useful for the seeker.

*And what about past events which come into the mind during meditation?*

One should try to learn from past events. That is how you can make good use of the memory of the past. Otherwise, you cannot do anything with the past. You have to be liberated from your past as well as from your future. That is the purpose of your *sādhanā*. One has the potentiality of transcending the memory of the past and the imagination of the future because there is something in you which is timeless, which has nothing to do with the past or the future. Meditation is the method to communicate with the timeless Being and become one with It.

*I feel so sorry for myself because I cannot meditate properly; what can I do?*

It is good if you feel pained when you cannot meditate. You should weep also. It is a good beginning. If you feel pained because you cannot meditate, it is a very good sign.

### **Concentration brings power, relaxation brings peace**

*What is the difference between concentration on a point and meditation on a point?*

In meditation, the mind is moving on one subject. In concentration, the mind is riveted to one object or one thought. If you can concentrate in your work it should not be difficult to concentrate during meditation. Give some support to your mind for concentration during meditation.

*What kind of support can we use?*

You can meditate on what you have heard or read. A scientist reads some theory or a philosopher reads some system, then they work on it, meditate, perform experiments and make new inventions. Meditation is of two kinds: one in which you concentrate, the other in which you relax. Both ultimately lead to the same divine state in which the object and subject become one. A Christian mystic said: "I came down due to my weight. I was lifted up by God's grace."

Absolute concentration and absolute relaxation is the same thing. The focussing of the attention at one point leads to concentration and being a disinterested witness leads to relaxation.

*When I am tense, I sometimes try to relax.*

How can you try relaxation? Trying means becoming tense. When you are competing in a race, especially a sprint, at the start you have to be in a mental state that is neither tense nor relaxed. It is the same with *sādhanā*. If you become very tense, you become nervous. If you become very relaxed, you become complacent. In both cases, you cannot make a good start. So, follow the middle path, a balanced path. Concentration brings power. Relaxation brings peace.

*Is perfect concentration the same as perfect contemplation?*

The word contemplation is used for concentration on one point. It may be one name, one form, or one idea. Meditation involves a thinking process of sequential thoughts and ideas. Contemplation is repeating the same idea again and again, or concentrating on one idea. It is explained in the book “Practical Approach to Divinity.”

### **Meditation and Relaxation**

*Sometimes during meditation we come in contact with our subconscious. Then, it is difficult for the mind to be relaxed. Would it be an aid to make our body relaxed before meditation?*

The subconscious is like a supermarket. It contains all kinds of stuff: eatables, clothes, machines, shoes, all sorts of books, such as the Bible and the *Gītā*, and even pornographic books, cars, currency notes, etc., and godly thoughts also! It depends on which part of your subconscious you are communicating with. Yes, body and mind are very deeply correlated. It is easier to relax your mind if your body is relaxed.

*When I meditate, practising attention, I feel some tension in my body. But after the meditation, this feeling disappears. Is it normal?*

Tension is associated with the mind. So long as the mind is there, tension must remain there more or less. When one is occupied in some activity, one might not feel tension. But during meditation, because one is not occupied, or is less occupied, one becomes aware of the tension which is already there. During meditation the capacity to see and feel increases. Attention sharpens during meditation.

It is like the movement of the mind. Some people complain that when they sit in meditation, the movement of their mind increases. In fact, it is not so. During meditation, you are able to see the movement of your mind. When you are occupied with some activity, you are identified with the mind and are moving at the speed of the mind. Therefore, you do not see the movement of the mind at that time. You can see the movement of the mind only when you are not identified with the mind, when you are not moving at the speed of the mind. It proves that during meditation, you are comparatively still, otherwise you would not see the movement of your mind. Forced concentration, however, creates tension.

There is a focussed attention and a non-focussed attention. During meditation, when your attention is focussed, it is natural that you have one kind of feeling, and another feeling when you get up and walk. Walking does not require focussing the attention at one point. One may feel many types of sensations in the body during meditation. It depends upon the quality and the depth of the meditation.

*By what method can we go more deeply into meditation?*

By regular practice, dispassion and detachment. Dive headlong within yourself!

**It is not advisable to concentrate on the lower centres**

*Would you suggest a technique of meditation for me? I don't know which one is best for me. The only thing I know is that I want to know my true Self.*

If you want to realize your true Self, you must stop identifying yourself with your false self, which is the ego. All techniques of meditation are based on the above mentioned statement. You can use the technique in which you are most attracted. Supplement divine Love with the technique you follow, lest you end up becoming a technician.

*My technique of meditation is to focus my attention on the breath and to concentrate on a point below the navel. I tried to concentrate in the middle of my chest, but it excites a lot of mental activity. Could you help me?*

The point between the eyebrows is the centre of vision. It is connected with the brain. If you want to concentrate on a single thought (idea), it is proper to keep your attention at that centre. If you concentrate on any centre below the heart-centre, it may stimulate the solar plexus or the lower centres with the result that your mind tends to be attracted to the lower tendencies and lower values of life. It is not advisable to concentrate on the lower centres, unless the seeker has reached quite an advanced stage of spirituality. None of the

lower centres have yet been stimulated (in you), but if you keep on concentrating there, the lower centre may become activated and then you will be in trouble. Every centre has its own force field, and the working of that force field has its own particular direction of acting.

*So, how should I concentrate?*

Should you fall in love with the Divine you would not need to concentrate. Then, your mind would flow to the Divine effortlessly. Cultivate deep interest in spirituality. Attention follows interest. Jesus said that your heart is where your treasure is. Make the Divine the be-all and end-all of your life. Let God be your treasure.

### **Make the best use of all your energies**

*I just wanted to thank you for the four days I've spent in this âshram. It has been an intense experience for me, especially in regard to meditation. I had never meditated for so much time in a day. Now I have the feeling that this is just the beginning of a path that I would like to follow.*

The Divine is attracting you. He loves you most – more than your parents, friends, and even more than your girlfriend, if you have one. Respond to His love. Be grateful to Him. Thank Him daily that He has blessed you with human life. It is only in human life that a soul can work for its complete absolute Liberation/Freedom/Bliss and attain it. Do not let this opportunity fritter away. Make the best use of all your energies. Devote more and more time to prayer and meditation, daily and regularly. It will give you the inner

strength to face the challenges of life. It will give you eyes to see the divine light, and ears to hear the divine voice. May the Divine be propitious and draw you more and more to Himself. A right beginning is of paramount importance. A wrong beginning is very harmful.

Accept your life as a pilgrimage. You are the pilgrim and God, the Truth is the destination. Realize the Truth before life passes into death. The journey is long and life is short. Have you ever noticed that travellers get up very early to start their journey when the journey is long? Make the best use of your present. Don't think that prayer and meditation are for old persons and to be practised only in old age, as some people think.

**You should have the sincere will to spare time for meditation**

*Can I reconcile my daily life, which is so busy, and the life which is going on here in the âshram?*

You can adjust yourself to your situation in France, and sit in meditation at least twice a day, once early in the morning and again late in the evening. "Where there is a will there is a way."

It reminds of me a story told by Swami Rama Tirtha. A man went to Swami Rama Tirtha and asked him the same question that you just asked me. Swami Rama Tirtha told him this story: "A person was complaining, crying and shouting and saying, 'Look, there is no space for me on this earth. Three fourths of the earth is occupied by ocean. On the remaining one fourth of the earth, there are billions and

billions of ants and other insects, animals and human beings. Oh, it is so crowded. So I have no place to live.’ The logic of this man was no doubt correct, and yet there was plenty of space on earth for him to live.”

Similarly, even though you have so much work to do, surely you can spare time for meditation as well. It is quite practical and possible. You only need to have the sincere will to do so. Apart from sitting in meditation early in the morning and late in the evening, you should somehow associate your daily work and activities with the Divine. If you do so, the work becomes a means to remember the Divine and is transformed into worship. Any action performed in the name of God, with the right intention and motive, serves the purpose of meditation.

*All week long, I am running around absorbed in professional activities, and at the same time there is the work needed at home for the family. How can I manage to find time for meditation?*

You are free from work on the weekend. How do you spend those days? Do you spend that time in meditation? If not, what makes you think you will spend your days in meditation if you are free from work for the whole week? It is an excuse, a trick of the mind to postpone meditation. It makes you think that you cannot meditate now: the situation is not favourable, so you should not sit in meditation. Thus, you are postponing meditation, thinking that you will meditate after you have retired from active life. Your mind is fooling you. Beware of your mind!

**One must include love with the technique**

*At the beginning of my practice of meditation, I was told to concentrate on my breath. But I read that this technique can be dangerous. Is it true?*

There is nothing wrong in concentrating on the breathing process. It is an easy technique. But the quality of concentration changes when it is connected with God. One must add love with the technique. Otherwise, one only becomes a technician.

*Is it the same as the practice that is taught in Vipassana courses?*

In the practice of *Vipassana*, the breathing or other sensations in the body are observed. It can bring peace. But love of the Divine is missing in that practice.

Meditation devoid of love of the Divine is usually very difficult. Divine Love makes the meditation sweet and easy. In the West, the problem is that people don't have much faith and trust in the Divine.

**There is no danger at all in meditating more and more**

*Is it advisable to increase the practice of concentration and meditation in order to cope with a difficult situation like divorce or death in the family? Is there a risk when one goes deeper into meditation?*

Prayer and meditation give you inner strength to cope with all the unfavourable situations as also with the favourable situations. Both pleasant and painful situations can distract

you from the path of Truth. In favourable situations you can become excited and tend to forget the Divine. In adverse situations, you can become discouraged and disappointed and forget the Divine. So, it is advisable to increase the period of prayer and meditation, but one should also know that the quality of meditation is more important than the quantity of meditation. There is no risk or danger at all in meditating more and more, if your meditation is the right meditation.

*How do we know if the quality of our meditation is good?*

It is very simple to know if your meditation is good, or not good. If you feel relaxed during meditation and your mind remains concentrated on a holy divine name, on a holy divine form, or on a divine quality, your meditation is good. But if you're sitting and thinking worldly thoughts, thinking of your girlfriend or boyfriend or planning how to make money, etc., the meditation is not right.

*I start meditation with worldly thoughts and at the end I feel relaxed, is it right?*

The first state is not right, the later state is right.

*Meditation is the highest part of sādhanā. So should we meditate all day?*

Can you meditate all day? How will you digest your food, if you are sitting all day? People who spend most of their time sitting and meditating eat very little. You can meditate all day only when you are so absorbed in meditation that you forget your body completely during meditation. Otherwise, you will be merely sitting with your eyes closed and will be daydreaming.

*I want to meditate, but I have to deal with all the activities and problems of my daily life and up to now I haven't been able to succeed.*

If there were no problems, there would be no need for meditation. A problem means a limitation. The purpose of meditation is to realize 'That' which is beyond all limitations. When one's life interest is changed, most of the problems drop away.

### **A glass room to meditate**

*You have mentioned the idea of constructing a special room, which would be provided to keep apart from the schedule of the âshram in order to meditate all day long.*

The wall of this room should be made of transparent glass so that we can see from outside if you are meditating (Swamiji laughing)! If you don't want to see outside, you have only to close your eyes. In Tibet there were some caves in which the lamas would go inside for five years, ten years, twenty years. The door would be closed and food was supplied to them through a hole. I have decided the place where that glassroom would be made. It is not a joke! It will have no books, no biscuits, no nuts inside, only one *Gītā*, one *Bible*, one *Koran*, one *Dhammapada* and one *Gurubani*, no philosophical books.

### **You can save a drowning person only when you are an expert swimmer**

*You said we could feel vibrations when the mind is purified. Sometimes I can feel vibrations, though my mind is not yet*

*purified. A lady with whom I meditate told me that I could help others with this faculty. Swamiji, what can you tell me about that?*

I don't remember in what context I had talked about vibrations. There are different kinds of vibrations, positive and negative. Only the vibrations of positive thoughts and emotions purify the mind.

You can save a drowning person in the river only when you are an expert swimmer, or when your own feet are on a solid rock. Otherwise, you may drown yourself in the process of trying to save a drowning person. Let your own meditation first reach quite a high state before you start teaching meditation to other people and helping them.

*I try to concentrate on a light outside myself without the support of a chakra while at the same time I repeat my mantra. I get a feeling of extreme bliss in the heart-centre from that practice. Should I concentrate directly on the anâhata chakra since the feeling comes from there?*

You know, you cannot fully concentrate upon one form and upon a *mantra* or a word at the same time. If you do so, your mind will be divided. It will be moving from the form to the word, though very fast. It will not become stabilized on either one of them. For example, if you are completely absorbed in listening to a person, the whole of your mind is working through the ears, and you will not see if some other person passes near you or even in front of you. Similarly, if your mind is focussed upon seeing something, meaning the mind is totally working through the eyes, you will not hear a person if he/she is talking. Therefore, for the sake of concentration, one should not practise *japa* and the visualization of a form

at the same time. Moreover, the proper centres for making *japa* and visualizing a form are different in the body. In the practice of *japa*, the *mantra* has to be recited and heard at the same time at the heart-centre. In the practice of visualizing the form of one's *Iṣhta*, that form has to be imagined and seen in the *ājñā chakra*, which is connected with the brain. All the forms are made at that centre.

## *II. Methods of Meditation*

### *1. The Negative Method: Stopping & 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”.

Slowly and gradually, as the practice matures, the mind becomes completely empty and imageless, reflecting nothing but the essential peace and pristine purity of the indwelling Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the *satsaṅgs* gathered in this volume, there were no questions asked about the “Negative Method”. Therefore we have included the above quotation from Swamiji’s book “The Practical Approach to Divinity”.

## 2. *The Positive Method*

### A. *Concentrating on a Divine Form*

#### **Meditation on the cross**

*My feeling is that I wish to meditate on the cross, can I do it?*

Sit down, make a mental image of the cross on your forehead within the eyebrows and concentrate on it. That is the proper method of meditation on the cross. You should practise *japa* at another time and keep your attention on the heart-centre during the practice of *japa*. If you want to associate the cross with Jesus you should imagine the form of the cross that is the Christian cross.

### B. *Concentrating on a Divine Name (Japa)*

#### **How to practise *japa***

*What is the proper way to practise *japa*?*

There are three kinds of *japa*. The first is one in which the holy name or *mantra* is chanted vocally and its sound is audible to those around. The second is the one in which the *mantra* or holy name is chanted in such a way that the lips and tongue move but the sound is not audible to those sitting around. The third is one in which neither the sound of chanting is heard nor do the lips and tongue move. It is a completely mental activity. The third type is believed to be the highest, but it is most difficult to maintain one's

concentration. The first type and second type are easier to practise than the third one. The second is higher than the first.

*Is it the physical eyes that concentrate on the heart?*

The concentration on the heart involves the mental attention and not the physical eyes. One can practise *japa* with one's eyes closed. Should one feel sleepy during the practice of *japa*, one may keep one's eyes lowered and half closed, but it is the mental attention which is to be fixed at the heart-centre.

*Is it necessary to have a feeling of divine Love while we are doing japa?*

There is a couplet in Hindi. The poet saint says, "Carry on with the reciting of the holy name, whether you recite it with love, or even with disdain, it must bear the holy fruit of divine Love sooner or later. You may sow the seeds, right side up or upside down in the field, but either way they do sprout and ultimately bear fruit."

### ***Japa is a technique for stopping the thinking process***

*What is the benefit of japa?*

*Japa*, the repeating of the holy name of God of your faith, is a very scientific and effective technique discovered by the sages for purifying the subconscious mind and remembering the Divine. The thinking mind (intellect) cannot grasp the Truth, nor can it transform your life. Intellectually, you know that anger is harmful, and yet you cannot overcome it. The

roots of all the vices and negative tendencies are in the subconscious. *Japa* is the technique to stop the thinking process and purify the subconscious mind. It should be practised with faith and devotion. Don't let it become mechanical.

### **How to reach the state in which self-effort ceases**

*Could you tell me more about hearing the mantra while practising japa? Is it possible to concentrate on two chakras at the same time? For instance, may one hear the sound in the heart and see the image of the Divinity in the ājñā chakra?*

When a mother calls her child, or even hears the name of her child, she feels a sort of love and joy. Similarly, when a devotee utters the name of God, he/she should feel joy. When the *japa* is performed in such a state of love and devotion, then there is no need of following any technique. Simply recite the *mantra* with the spirit of devotion. Your mind will be absorbed in the *japa*. Then, no technique of concentration during *japa* is needed. *Japa* can either lead you to the state of *mahābhāva*, or it can lead you to the soundless sound, the *anāhata* sound. In both cases, the identification with the physical body is broken and you experience a very deep and intense inner joy. You simply remember the Divine through the divine name or *mantra* of your faith and feel joy. But some people say that when they recite God's name or repeat a *mantra*, there is no concentration; they don't feel any joy. Their mind is wandering here and there in worldly things. Such people need to follow the technique of *japa*.

Technically speaking, there are two main centres in the body in which the mind moves and functions alternately. This movement and functioning of the mind is so fast that an ordinary person, who is normally preoccupied with the outward activities and situations, cannot notice it. These two centres in the body are: the heart-centre, called the *anâhata chakra*, and the centre between the eyebrows, called the *âjñâ chakra*. When the mind thinks of any form or any idea, it is through and in the *âjñâ chakra*. All the forms or images or ideas are formed at that centre. When the desire to do something arises, the mind is in the heart-centre. The movement of the mind between the heart and the *âjñâ chakra* is so fast that it appears as if the mind is there in both centres at the same time. The space between desiring and thinking seems to be zero.

The other function of the heart-centre is that it converts energy into sound. At the time of *japa* the attention should be fixed at the heart-centre. When reciting the *mantra* mentally, feel as if the *mantra* is being recited at the heart-centre, in the middle of the chest, and at the same time, mentally hear the *mantra* being recited at the heart-centre. So long as you hear the recitation of the *mantra*, the mind will not go anywhere. If and when the mind goes somewhere, the hearing will stop, even though the recitation may go on mechanically. This technique of mentally hearing and reciting the *mantra* helps in concentration and at the same time stops the mind from wandering here and there during the practice of *japa*.

Whenever there is a vision during meditation, it is always at the *âjñâ chakra*. If you are reciting a *mantra* at the heart-centre and some vision (seeing of any inner form or

light) happens, the attention at once rushes to the *ājñā chakra*, as the vision takes place at that centre. But, if you are concentrating on any divine form at the *ājñā chakra*, and some inner sound is heard within, your attention at once rushes to the heart-centre. This centre is the centre where sounds originate. Sound and light are actually interchangeable. Light changes into sound and sound changes into light. But they are experienced at different centres in the body during meditation. The difference between sound and light is only due to a degree of vibration in energy. Light and sound, form and name, both are energy. In some books, you will see someone seeing one's beloved form in the heart. That is symbolic. Actually, the form of the beloved is always in the *ājñā chakra*. As when you see your beloved *Iṣhta*, there is a feeling of deep love, that is why it is symbolically shown in the heart.

A man wrote to me that when he was reciting a *mantra* (the *Gāyatrī mantra*) he started seeing faces and hearing peculiar sounds. He said, "I am afraid that I might become mad." I replied to him, "The *Gāyatrī mantra* embodies a prayer to the Lord to remove madness and ignorance. How can it make you mad? Don't be afraid. It is cleansing your subconscious."

*Could you kindly give some spiritual guidance? When a seeker of Truth reaches such a state that he hears the "soundless sound" (anâhata) spontaneously all the time and feels joy, what should he do to advance further on his spiritual journey?*

When the seeker of Truth reaches the state in which one starts hearing the magnetic "soundless sound" called

*anâhata*, one has to do nothing after that; self-effort ceases and that *shabda* does everything to take the seeker to God-Realization. That soundless sound, with its constant and continuous inherent joy, completely purifies the subconscious of the seeker, integrates his/her consciousness and finally merges the seeker with the Divine. No further effort is necessary after that!

### **Mind can be purified either by *japa* or by reflection**

*Are we obliged to know all our weaknesses in order to purify them, or do our spiritual practices purify them?*

The repetition of a *mantra* is the easiest way of purifying the mind. Self-observation and then trying to remove your weaknesses by reflection is also a method of purification, but not so efficient. In the first method, the power of the *mantra* does the work; in the second, you are dependent upon your power of discrimination.

*How does the power of the mantra work?*

If you drink milk, it gives you strength. You need not know the mechanism of how the milk is converted into energy. Is God not more powerful than you? Through the *mantra*, the power of God works. Through reflection, you use your power of discrimination which is limited. Now, it depends upon how you repeat the *mantra*. If you repeat the *mantra* parrot-like, then it does not work forcefully. Tulsidas said, "Everyone repeats 'Ram Ram', including the robber, the thief as well as the devotee, but the Lord cannot be pleased without love." When the repetition is taken over by the

subconscious mind, it becomes effortless and it is called *ajapa japa*. You start with effort and in the end, it becomes effortless. When you start learning the harmonium, you have to be very, very attentive and calculating. But when you become an expert, your fingers move effortlessly.

### ***Japa is a very effective method of transforming one's life***

*I am a Buddhist. Would you recommend a way to practise japa, which is very appealing to me, even though it is not a part of the Buddhist path? If so, with which mantra? Could I use a mantra like, "Om Mani Padme Hum"?*

Who says that in Buddhism *japa* is not recommended? You yourself have written the *mantra* which is widely practised in the form of *japa* by millions of Buddhists. *Japa* is the practice that is followed by almost all the religious traditions. You may recite and practise the *mantra* you have written, if you have faith in it. It is the patent *mantra* of Buddhists. *Japa* is a very scientific method of transforming your subconscious mind, as is meditation. Repetition of a *mantra*, or divine idea, again and again enables the meaning/vibrations of the *mantra*, or the divine idea, to go deeply into your subconscious mind, in which your personality is rooted. It is a very effective method of transforming one's life.

*Is it true that in order to cleanse the subconscious, the repetition of the mantra should not be mechanical?*

Mechanical repetition is that in which the *mantra* goes on automatically, but your mind is thinking something else, or

wandering here and there. When the *mantra* is taken over by your subconscious, it becomes effortless and your mind is absorbed in the *mantra*. You know, nothing is one hundred percent mechanical in this world. Consciousness is everywhere and timeless. Nothing can escape Consciousness. The scientists have discovered that even the movement of electrons and protons in an atom is not mechanical.

### **The recitation stops because it has served its purpose**

*I read in a book that japa can be practised at the navel centre. Can I practise like that, knowing that I am pregnant?*

An average *sādhaka* should not do the concentration on the navel centre. The proper place for the practice of *japa* is the heart-centre (*anāhata chakra*). Keep on practising the *japa* of your *mantra* at the heart-centre as you are doing. Do not do it at the navel centre. There is no harm at all in practising *mantra japa* during pregnancy. *Japa* will not only benefit you, but also the child in your womb.

*What about the repetition of the mantra? Is there an end to it? What is its outcome?*

The recitation of the *mantra* stops at a certain stage. However, you should not stop it wilfully before the recitation of the *mantra* stops by itself. There is a stage when the recitation becomes effortless. That is called *ajapa japa*. But this stopping of the *mantra* is neither practised wilfully, nor due to negligence. The recitation stops because it has served its purpose. The recitation leads you into the spontaneous

feeling, power, or meaning of the *mantra*. At that stage, the recitation stops by itself.

*Is japa an obstacle to the Realization of the formless God?*

*Japa* is not an obstacle in the Realization of the formless Reality. *Japa* is helpful. *Japa* itself stops at a certain stage.

### **Practise with total concentration**

*If we do continuous japa mentally throughout the day while doing routine work, with more or less concentration, will we attain our goal or not?*

Continuous practice of *japa* during day-to-day activities is very helpful but it is not enough. The seeker should sit in meditation or do *japa* regularly and daily, early in the morning and in the evening and practise with total concentration. Those who are retired and don't have to attend to their jobs should sit in meditation at least four times a day.

*Is it right to do japa while playing sports?*

Which sport? When running or jogging you can practise *japa*, but when you are playing a match, you cannot. You must concentrate on what you are doing. If you cannot stop your thoughts when you are sitting comfortably, i.e. when your body is at rest, how will you meditate when you are playing football? While playing football you have to be scheming to dodge the players of the opposite side and score a goal. In such activities as walking, bathing, eating etc. in

which no scheming or planning is needed, one can practise *japa*.

**Should *japa* be synchronized with the heartbeat?**

*Often I use the sensation of my heart beating as one uses a mâtla, to help my concentration. Would you encourage me to do so?*

Yes, that is a very efficient method of *japa*. All cannot hear the beating of their hearts. It needs some inwardness to hear one's heart beating. If you hear your heart beating, the mental recitation of the *mantra* can be synchronized with the heartbeat. It is very helpful for concentration. The heartbeat is heard when the mind is calm and focussed inward. Or it is heard when one is very upset and the heart starts beating very fast.

**It is not advisable to shift your attention from one place to another**

*If we want to meditate on the different chakras with specific mantras, should we ask the Guru which mantra to use, or is it possible to use one of the mantras which are in some books?*

It is not advisable to shift your attention from one place in the body to the other during meditation; that is, from one *chakra* to the other. The purpose of meditation is to concentrate on one point in order to stop your moving mind, and finally to transcend the mind. Moreover, all *chakras* are connected with one another. If one *chakra* is opened, its vibrations reach the other *chakras* which are gradually

opened by themselves. The heart-centre is in the middle. It is therefore more appropriate to concentrate on the heart-centre. There are so many *mantras* written in books. How would you choose a *mantra*? You read the merits of one *mantra* in a book and start its practice. Then you read the merits of another *mantra* and want to practise that also; then the third, the fourth and so on. And you will not be able to stick to one. Practise the *mantra* that you have received from your Guru and stick to it.

### **Importance of pronouncing a *mantra* correctly**

*According to the holy Scriptures the pronunciation and the way of repeating a mantra is very important. Why is it that different Masters advise us to repeat the same mantra differently?*

The recitation of a *mantra* can be done with different motives. If the recitation is done with a specific purpose, as in an *anuṣṭhāna*, its pronunciation must be correct, and all the rituals must be correctly observed; otherwise, the *anuṣṭhāna* will not be successful. Not only that, it may yield adverse result. But if a *mantra* is recited only to invoke the grace of God, and to please God, or out of love, that is to say without any specific temporal objective, then the manner of pronunciation does not matter. There is a *shloka* in the *Gītā*, referring to the *niṣhkāma karma*, which can never yield adverse results. The little child calls its mother in broken words because it cannot speak the words properly. Will the mother not respond because the child is not calling her in a proper way and pronouncing the words of the call correctly?

### **God looks at your devotion and the spirit with which you recite God's name**

*What should we do, and how long does it take to be completely absorbed in our nāma japa?*

Successful *nāma japa* requires only the reciting of the holy name of God unceasingly with unconditional love and deep devotion to God. Slowly and gradually, it cleanses all the parts of the personality of the seeker and he/she becomes inebriated, as it were, with the holy name and is filled with divine Joy. How long it takes depends upon how much divine Joy you drink, and what is the quality of the drink, how much time you devote for *nāma japa* and what is the quality of your practice while doing *nāma japa*; that is to say, with how much intense and deep love of God you recite God's name.

*If our way of repeating the holy name is not correct, can it harm us?*

Valmiki recited MAR, MAR instead of RAM, RAM, but with love and trust and he achieved *samādhi*. God looks at your devotion and the spirit with which you recite the name.

There are some special *mantras*, which are recited for a special worldly purpose. They must be recited with proper connotation and proper rituals, otherwise they can even be harmful. There are some *mantras* through the recitation of which you want to control someone (some power). If all the rules and rituals are not followed properly in reciting those *mantras*, you can be harmed; some people become mad. There are *mantras* by which you can control the ghosts and use them for selfish worldly purposes. You have to recite

those *mantras* daily with special rituals and you can get extraordinary powers. But in old age, when you cannot perform those rituals properly, those spirits will harm you. I know of one or two such cases. But, to call the Divine out of love, without any worldly purpose, you can use any name; there can be no harm at all.

### **Hearing the *mantra* helps to remain the witness**

*It is very difficult for me to divide my attention four ways at the same time, such as the heart-centre, the feeling of surrender, the repetition of the mantra and the hearing of the sound of the repetition. How should I proceed?*

You may simply repeat the *mantra* with the spirit (feeling) of self-surrender to the Lord. Should you be able to get absorbed in the remembrance of the Divine by this practice, then there is no need to follow any other technique. Some people say that their mind wanders here and there, and is full of so many thoughts while they are chanting the *mantra*. Such people are advised to follow a simple technique: recite the *mantra* mentally and hear it mentally at the same time at the heart-centre. In this way, the part of the mind that wanders here and there, remains occupied in hearing the *mantra*. In this practice, there is the mental activity of reciting the *mantra*, and at the same time, there is the hearing which is a sort of witness to the activity of reciting the *mantra*.

Through this technique, the material part of the mind is separated from the witnessing consciousness, with the result that, in due course of time (after the past momentum is over), all the thoughts come to a standstill. Your mind

moves or thinks only when you, the witnessing consciousness, are identified with it. As soon as you become a witness of your mind, the identification is broken and the thoughts subside. It may take some time for the thoughts to subside completely. The mind may continue moving for some time with its past momentum. But if you remain a witness, your identification with the mind is broken, and it eventually comes to a stop. You can understand it by the example of an electric fan. The fan is moving because of the electric current. When you switch off the button, the fan still continues moving for some time due to the past momentum. If you don't turn the switch on again, the fan will stop after the past momentum is exhausted.

*Who does the repetition of the mantra?*

The repetition of the *mantra* is done by the mind, which is a part of *Prakṛiti*, but *Puruṣha* is seeing or listening to the recitation. That is how *Prakṛiti* and *Puruṣha*— the material part of the mind and the witnessing consciousness — become separated. That is how they are felt as separate.

**The power of God is invoked through a *mantra***

*Has the word mantra a particular meaning?*

One meaning of the word *mantra* is: what makes the mind silent. *Mantra* can be used for different purposes. In fact, through a *mantra*, the power of God is invoked. That power can be used for curing illness, or for the purification and stabilization of the mind. When a *mantra* is repeated daily and regularly for a long time, with devotion and faith, it

becomes effortless. The *mantra* is taken up by the subconscious mind and becomes effortless, like breathing. Its vibrations fill you with joy.

**Through *mantra japa*, you are connected with the Divine**

*My practice of japa brings me tension. What should I do?*

Practise *japa* with the spirit of self-surrender to the Lord. It will give you relaxation and peace. The practice of *japa* purifies the mind because through *japa* you remember the Divine. Through *mantra japa* you are connected with the Divine who is absolute Purity, absolute Peace, absolute Love, absolute Light, and absolute Bliss.

**Let your practice involve love for God and God-Realization**

*Since you know me, Swamiji, please tell me which technique of meditation I should use.*

Prem bhakta (the devotee asking the question) should supplement *prema* with the technique of his meditation. Let your practice of the technique of meditation involve love for God and God-Realization. Concentrate at the heart-centre and practise the remembrance of the Divine. Let the Divine be your Beloved, the be-all and end-all of your life. If you take the feeling of the Divine in an abstract sense, should you be unable to practise the presence of the Divine, recite the holy name in which you have living faith and trust at the heart-centre and be totally absorbed in it. Recite mentally the divine name with the feeling of self-surrender to the Divine.

### **The Divine is very, very sweet and so is His holy name**

*It is said that the repetition of the holy name of God purifies our entire being. Is this process of purification more effective when we feel bliss while practising japa?*

Certainly, yes. Should you feel bliss in reciting the holy name of God, it shows that the heart is already purified to a great extent. The Divine is very, very sweet and so is His holy name. If one does not feel sweetness and bliss in remembering the Divine and reciting His holy name, it shows that there is something wrong with the person. Sugar is sweet. But if you eat sugar and it does not taste sweet to you, it means the body is suffering from some disease. The *ayurvedic* physicians say that if *pitta*, the fire element in the body, is increased beyond a certain limit the sugar will not be felt by you as sweet; it is a disease. Similarly if one does not feel the sweetness and joy in doing *japa*, it means that the mind is suffering and the heart is not pure. *Japa* is an exercise which is recommended in *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, *jñāna yoga* and even in the *yoga* of Patanjali.

### **Take refuge in God, He removes so many obstacles**

*I use the mantra, “Jesus Christ, my Beloved, I am in you as you are in me!” When repeating it, it begins to follow the breathing process automatically. In The Practical Approach to Divinity, you wrote that it could be dangerous to practise in such a way. Can you give me your advice?*

In *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, I had said that one should not recite the *mantra* with the breathing and at the

same time concentrate at the navel centre. You can recite the *mantra*, synchronizing it with the rhythmic breathing, without concentrating on the navel centre. The navel is the centre of the vital force. If the energy at that centre is stimulated when your heart and *ājñā chakra* are not fully developed, it may be dangerous. Well, if you recite the *mantra* in which you have put your faith in Lord Jesus, he will protect you.

In the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, there is one word, *Īshvara praṇidhāna*, which means taking refuge unto God. If you do *sādhana* under the protection of God, he removes so many obstacles on the path that you might not be able to remove by self-effort.

**Without devotion and love, *japa* becomes only a technique**

*How can we go deeper into the practice of japa?*

When the great saint Meera said, “Krishna, Krishna,” and when you say, “Krishna, Krishna,” there is a lot of difference. Without devotion and love, your meditation becomes only a technique and you a technician. When a mother utters the name of her child, she feels a sort of inner joy. The more one-pointedness made in the chanting of the *mantra*, the better the quality. Moreover, there must be faith in the *mantra* and a feeling of inner joy when you recite a *mantra*.

The practice of the *mantra* is one of the methods of stopping the thinking process. The result depends more upon the quality of your practice than the quantity of the chanting.

## **You have forgotten God, your true relative**

*How should I remember God?*

As you remember your grandson. When you hear or speak his name, it creates vibrations in your heart. It is the same with God when the relationship between God and the devotee becomes conscious. Similarly, when a devotee hears or speaks the name of God, his/her heart is moved. You know, sometimes there is an accident; the patient loses his memory and forgets his relatives, his son, his mother, wife, etc. The same type of accident has happened to you. You have forgotten God, your true relative. You are in a hypnotic state.

*I read this sentence in one of your books, “My Lord, take care of me, I take refuge in you.” I would like to use it as my mantra. Is it correct?*

Yes, repeat it with complete faith, trust and love. If you cannot meditate or practise *japa* with love and joy, do it like taking medicine.

*I like to write OM. Can I include this writing in my practice?*

To write *OM* is already a *sādhanā*, but to write *OM* on your heart is even better.

### *C. The Practice of Concentrating on a Divine Idea*

#### **Fixing the mind on one divine idea**

*What is the meaning of dhyâna?*

*Dhyâna* means fixing one's mind on one object, inner or

outer, or on one thought related to the Divine. You can choose one divine idea, according to your beliefs, and concentrate on it to the exclusion of all the other ideas. For example, suppose you believe that God is everywhere, then you should sit down and concentrate on this idea to the exclusion of all other ideas. Also keep your attention on the forehead in the middle of the eyebrows while you are concentrating on this idea.

**“I am not only this physical body, I am the pure, limitless Spirit”**

*I understand the point that I am not the body, but I am still very attached to it. What should I do about this?*

Your understanding is right, but it is only skin-deep. It has not penetrated all the parts of your personality. So, it cannot transform your life. You have to reflect again and again; you have to repeat the single thought, “I am not only this physical body, I am the pure, limitless Spirit”, like a *mantra*, all the time. Repeat this idea with each and every breath of yours, day and night. Then it will enter your subconscious. When your subconscious also takes up this understanding, then your actions will be transformed as well.

#### *D. Self-Inquiry or Self-Searching*

**Self-searching is a type of meditation**

*Is self-searching also a kind of meditation?*

Yes, self-searching is also a type of meditation. In fact, it is not meditation (*dhyâna*), but ‘reflection’ involving the

thinking process. In the *Vedantic* discipline, as systematized by Shankaracharya, there are seven parts. The first four parts involve social and moral discipline, which are helpful in the practising of the inner parts called *shravaṇa*, and *nididhyāsana*. The second of the three inner parts, that is *manana* or reflection, is called self-searching.

The modern *Vedantins*, 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 or reflection also. But very, very few practise *nididhyāsana*. Understanding the first four intellectually does not mean practising them.

*Nididhyāsana* in *Vedānta* implies concentrating or contemplating only on a single non-dual *Vedantic* idea, which is not *manana*. *Manana*, or reflection, is practising sequentially many logical ideas connected with *Advaita Vedānta*. It implies concentrating on the subject of non-dual *Vedānta* or concentrating on many logical ideas that are non-dualistic.

### **“Who am I” is the basic question**

*I understand at the mental level, “Who am I”, but I lack earnestness to make strong effort to have the direct experience of the divine Reality. How can I cultivate willpower to develop an honest, earnest effort? I don’t have strong will power.*

Pray daily and regularly. Ask for dispassion and divine Love. Practise slow, deep and conscious breathing, on an empty stomach, for fifteen minutes in fresh air four times a day. It

will make your will stronger and stronger. The most important thing is to breathe consciously. Now your breathing is going on mechanically; you are not aware of the movement of your breath when you are breathing. If you breathe consciously, the breathing starts becoming regular and rhythmic. The pattern of your breathing has a great impact on your mind. If your breathing is regular, slow and deep, your mind starts becoming slow and quiet also.

“Who am I” is the basic question. All other questions are secondary. To know “Who am I” directly may take years and years of earnest effort to make the mind pure and silent, and to disassociate yourself from what is not ‘I’.

A seeker of Truth was leaving the village in the early hours of the morning. He passed a garden which looked very secluded and quiet. He wanted to sit and meditate in that garden. He jumped over the boundary wall and went in. The guard, hearing the noise of someone walking inside the garden, became alert and asked, “Who is there? Who are you?” As he approached the man smiled and replied, “For the last forty years I’ve been trying to know the answer to this question, but I have not yet been able to know who I am.”

### **Stop identifying yourself with what you are not**

*Who are you, and who am I for you? Is Truth always here waiting for a smile from me to take me in its arms?*

I am what I am. You should ask yourself who you are. Stop identifying yourself with what you are not and you will come to know who you are. Turn the direction of the arrow of your attention to the knower, the one who raises the questions

in you, and you will be able to know the knower. The Truth is not limited by time and space and the law of causality. It can be realized now and here. You are loved by God. You are very important to God.

*In meditation this morning, I saw myself, this body that is a woman, but I don't know who this woman is.*

You don't know what you are. But you can know what you are not. Anything which is separated from you or can be separated from you at any time is not your real Self. With this logic, you come to the conclusion that you are not the physical body; you are not even the mind. Now, to know yourself you have to stop identifying yourself with your physical body and your mind. When the identification is completely broken, you will directly know what you are.

Finally, you reach something which cannot be separated from you at any place or at any time and that is your Self. 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 your Self 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 180 degrees and direct it to your Self. That is what is called meditation.

### **Identification means feeling one with something**

*How can I discriminate between the identification with my true Self and other identifications?*

It is the soul which identifies itself either with something which is in time and space or with the Spirit, which is timeless. Something in time and space, with which the soul identifies itself, may be anything, any situation or any person. Identification means feeling one with something. Does this answer cover your inquiry?

Nasruddin once went to a busy crowded place in a town. He had tied a thread on his wrist as a sign of his identity so that he was not lost in the crowd. One of his friends was with him. For taking rest they went to a park and Nasruddin went to sleep. His friend took off that thread from the wrist of Nasruddin and tied it on his own wrist. When Nasruddin woke up and saw that thread on the wrist of his friend, he thought for a while and said, "If you are me, then who I am?"

### **Contemplate on your body as unreal**

*How can I reflect on Truth when I don't know It?*

Can the Real die or be destroyed? Then, is your body real or unreal? If you contemplate on your body as unreal, many obstacles in your *sāadhanā* will be removed, almost all the obstacles: desire, jealousy, fear. If you think that this world is real, it is wrong thinking.

In *Spiritual Gems*, there is one aphorism which says, "Separate yourself from all relationships and all activities and then ask yourself, "Who am I?":

*"Do you not feel yourself completely lost in activities and relationships? Eliminating activities and relationships from your life, have you ever felt your pure Being? Pause awhile and*

*withdraw yourself from these activities and relationships and ask yourself the question: "Who am I?" When activities and relationships are absent altogether, realize That which remains. It is verily the inexhaustible spring of nectar! It is verily the unlimited treasure of eternal Life!"*

### 3. The Neutral Method

#### *The Practice of Witnessing*

**See your thoughts from the perspective of a witness and they will subside**

*I can control my thoughts only for a very short time. Please, give me your advice.*

If any thought arises, and you don't identify yourself with it, it drops by itself in a few seconds. Do you know how long a thought lasts? The thought of *Brahma*, the Creator lasts for a *kalpa*. The thought of a man lasts only for a few seconds. He has to repeat that thought continuously to remain in that thought. But when you become identified with it and cooperate with its repetition, it becomes a thinking process — mechanical thinking.

*What does thinking process mean?*

The thinking process is the process in which the mind is continuously thinking, in which the co-related thoughts are flowing in series. You may call it the flowing of co-related thoughts in sequence. The thinking process starts when you become identified with one thought and start working on it.

**How can one stop the thinking process?**

When you become identified with your thoughts, you are moving with them, and there remains no one who would stop the thoughts; you become the thinking process. See your thoughts as a witness, without becoming identified with them, and they will subside. They move only when you are identified with them. They draw energy from your soul.

*What do you mean when you say that we identify with our thoughts?*

Identifying with your thoughts means identifying with your mind which thinks. Not identifying with your thoughts means that, by using your will, you should not think. If any thought comes into your mind, you should either refuse and reject it, or ignore it. Do not entertain it. Do not work on it. You can do this only when you look at your mind as an object, as separate from you. In short, do not become the mind. As you see a table as an object, look at the mind as if it is an object.

Identification means becoming one with the thoughts. Don't confuse observation with thinking. Identification with something means becoming one with that thing. If you reflect, you are thinking. You are one with the mind. Is your mind not working when you are reflecting? Not identifying with the thoughts means not thinking. When someone gives you a bad name, you become upset. It is so because you have identified yourself with the bad name. All your identifications and relationships with others have their source in your identification and relationship with your physical body.

**The purpose of meditation is to separate the energy of doing from the one who watches**

*What should I do when my mind is wandering?*

Watch the mind without identifying yourself with it. It gets the energy to move from you; it moves only when you become identified with it.

*I don't know how to watch my mind. Please, could you explain it to me?*

First of all, simply watch the incoming and outgoing of the breath for ten minutes. It will make the breathing process slow and rhythmic. After that, you can fix your attention at the point between the eye-brows on the centre of the forehead and simply watch, without thinking.

The energy of doing and the one who watches are so mixed up and identified with each other that an ordinary person cannot separate them. The purpose of reflection, meditation or *japa* is to separate them. The whole world is born through the meeting of *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti*. As soon as you separate them, your world disappears. *Prakṛiti* is the doer and *Puruṣha* is the witness. You are the *Puruṣha*, you are not the doer. The doer is always doing; it never stops doing. *Prakṛiti* is active, but blind, whereas *Puruṣha* is inactive, but it always sees. Even in the court of law it is not allowed for the witness to be the doer or vice-versa.

**You can become aware of the separate identities of the witness and the doer**

*How does one practise non-identification and become aware of the witness?*

The Seer or the witness and the doer are not the same. In the *Upaniṣhads* it is said that on a tree two birds sit. One eats the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the second simply remains a witness. In the human physical body there is a witnessing Consciousness and there is also a doer, the energy which is functioning in and through the body in the form of senses, mind, intellect, vital force etc. which is termed as *antahkaraṇa*, the inner or subtle body. You can become aware of their separate identities when you look within.

*Is knowing the same as being?*

Non-identification means rejecting the thought that you are the physical body or the mind, or any object of perception. You have to assert that you are the knower and not the known. You see this table. Are you this table? You are the subject, the knower, and the table is the known object. The same logic can be applied to the physical body and the thinking mind. Meditation and other spiritual exercises are the methods to directly know and experience the difference between these two basic principles and to know that your essential Nature is pure Consciousness, which is not the doer.

This substantial spiritual experience enables you to remain uninfluenced by objects and the impact of changing situations, and then you can go further and have the non-dual and integral experience of the Absolute. To know through the mind any outer or inner object, is a sort of becoming. To know oneself, to be aware of one's essential Nature, is Being. The object is a veil for the ignorant. It turns into a mirror for the realized one. Relative knowledge has its utility in the phenomenal world. Pure, contentless Awareness is the essential Nature of Being. Associated with the pure mind, it assumes the form of a witness.

**Mind and Consciousness are mixed up. Meditation is the technique to separate them**

*Sometimes during meditation I try to follow my breathing, but I am only aware of my busy mind. What shall I do?*

To remain only aware of the movement of the breath and forget everything else is one way of concentrating the mind. The breath is the object of concentration in this method. While concentrating you are active. While remaining only a witness of something, you are passive. “Seeing” is not “doing”. You are not breathing wilfully. You are seeing your breath as a witness; it is not doing.

*Should we divide Consciousness in order to be active and passive at the same time?*

It is not dividing Consciousness. It is separating Consciousness from the mind. Mind and Consciousness are mixed up. Meditation is the technique to separate them. Meditation is the technique to separate seeing from doing, to separate the *Puruṣha* from *Prakṛiti*, to separate the Seer from the seen, to separate the *Ātmā* from the body/mind. The Spirit and the body/mind are so mixed up that they seem as if they are one.

**Watching thoughts is the treatment to get rid of mechanical thinking**

*When I first arrived at the āshram, I was meditating without a problem. But the past two days, my mind has been stronger than my practice. What should I do?*

You have become addicted to identifying yourself with your mind. That is the problem. But watching is the treatment to get rid of this addiction. When you are sitting in meditation and watching your thoughts, it means you are undergoing the treatment. Take this treatment regularly and you will be able to overcome the problem of mechanical thinking.

### **The master key of all techniques of meditation**

*Whatever little I know about meditation, I know it only through books. I sit quietly, repeat the prayer, but even after great effort, I cannot control my thoughts. What should I do?*

You have read about meditation in books. What have you not understood? It is not difficult to understand the definition of meditation. The difficulty comes in the practice of meditation. Everyone knows intellectually what swimming is. But not everyone can swim. Learning meditation is like learning swimming. How do you learn swimming? You get into the water, not so deep that you may drown, but enough to keep your head above the water. Similarly, for learning meditation, you have to sit and try to keep yourself, as it were, above your thoughts and sensations. For that you have to be alert and vigilant that you don't become identified with any thought or any sensation. That is the master key of all the techniques of meditation.

When you simply watch your mind and stop identifying with it, the energy with which the mind thinks and moves ceases flowing to the mind and the mind stops thinking after a few minutes. This is one of the methods of meditation.

*I am unable to stop the thoughts. When it happens, immediately other thoughts arise.*

After a few minutes, you put the button on again, that is the problem.

### **In watching, the mind stops thinking**

*Can you describe the practice of watching?*

In simple watching, there is no thinking, no thought, no interpretation of what one is watching. In watching, the mind stops thinking. The world loses all meaning when you stop thinking. In concentration, there is a focus. In relaxation, there is no focus. Simple watching leads to relaxation. Simple watching is not as easy as it seems. Usually one is not watching, but thinking that “I am watching.”

### **Seeing, hearing, touching disinterestedly**

*What is meant by “to see”?*

I had written that you should see your thoughts disinterestedly as you see the birds flying in the sky. When you see the birds flying in the sky, it does not provoke your mind to think because you are not in any way related to them.

*What is the true seeing, seeing without the mind?*

So long as the mind is there and the seer is identified with the mind, the seeing cannot be completely pure. There is

still a *tripuṭi*, a triangle of the knower, the known and the knowledge (relative) in that example, but such seeing, when you see the birds flying in the sky, does not disturb your mind, because you have no self-interest in that kind of seeing. That is an example of seeing disinterestedly. Awareness can be practised not only through the disinterested seeing, but also through the disinterested hearing, touching, etc.

### **Is alertness the same as Awareness?**

Alertness is the essential quality of Awareness. You should not act mechanically. When you eat, you must be aware that eating is being done. As you practise conscious breathing, you should practise conscious walking, conscious eating, conscious washing of utensils or clothes, etc. The point is that you should see your thoughts as a witness. Do not be identified with a thought. If you identify yourself with a thought, then one thought will create a second thought, the second will create a third thought and it will become a thinking process. The thinking process involves a chain of co-related thoughts. More often than not this process is mechanical. Creative thinking is very rare. Creative thinking is free of *sanskāras*.

## Chapter Six

### *Obstacles on the Spiritual Journey*

#### *I. Obstacles to Meditation & Contemplation*

##### ***The Wandering of the Mind***

###### **Be a guard, be vigilant**

*How can I clear my mind of unnecessary thoughts during meditation?*

Don't think wilfully during meditation. Should any thought come or arise, do not identify yourself with it and it will subside. Be a guard, be vigilant. The thief comes in the home only when the owner of the house is sleeping or not vigilant. The problem is that the owner of the house, the guard, starts colluding with the thief. In such a situation all that is precious in the home is stolen.

###### **You see the mind moving only when you are a little detached from it**

*When I sit in meditation, my mind becomes more active.*

Some people say that when they sit in meditation, the mind becomes more disturbed, more active. It is not true! The fact is that your mind is always disturbed or active. When you sit in meditation, you come to observe the movement of your mind. In day-to-day activities, you are identified with the mind, and do not observe that it is moving. You see the mind moving only when you are a little detached from it. For example, when you are sitting in a moving train you don't see the train moving. You see that the train is moving only when you look out the window at something that is not moving.

### **It is very difficult for a tense person to sit alone**

*Despite my religious practice, I cannot concentrate in meditation. What is your advice?*

In the West, people usually pray to God mostly on Sundays. On weekends religious people go to church and temples, and common people go out for enjoyment. The more people are tense in a society, the more means of entertainment they need. It is very difficult for a tense person to sit alone and be with himself or herself. He or she needs to divert his/her attention from the inner turmoil. That is one of the reasons that you cannot sit in meditation. When you sit quietly, you become aware of what is inside your mind.

### **The mechanical thinking process is an obstacle in meditation**

*How does one get rid of the useless thoughts, all our negativities? I observe that thoughts make it very difficult*

*for me to repeat the mantra and I become nervous and anxious.*

Let the thoughts come. Don't identify with your thoughts and they will start subsiding. The life of a thought in the mind of a man is not more than a few seconds. The thought dies by itself if you don't identify with it. But if you start working on that thought by identifying yourself with it, then the co-related thoughts keep on coming and it becomes a thinking process. This sort of mechanical thinking process is an obstacle in meditation.

Anyway, it needs a very long, regular and persistent practice to get rid of all thoughts. Seekers work for years to be completely free of thoughts. Becoming nervous or anxious does not in any way help to stop the thoughts.

### **You have to balance your mind**

*When forgotten memories come to the mind during meditation, is the purpose to cleanse, to make space? You said that we have to make space for God. How can we do that?*

Making/creating space does not mean to entertain the memories. Creating space means stopping all the modifications of the mind. Memory is one of the five modifications of the mind as mentioned by Patanjali. Sleep is also one of the five modifications of the mind. Therefore, do not think that when you are sleeping, you are making space for God.

*Should we suppress our minds?*

You don't have to suppress your mind; you have to balance your mind. It is not suppressing, it is self-culturing.

### **Memories keep the mind moving**

Why does P. want to keep the scratches he got during his walk in the jungle? Remembrance that needs a sign is not the natural and highest type of remembrance.

Remembrance is memory, so how can we live without memories? Should we lose our memory? In our daily lives it is necessary to know what we need to do, such as to book one's air ticket.

Some memories can destabilize the mind. Some others, however, can excite the mind in a positive way, but both keep the mind moving. At least, during the period of meditation, your mind should stop its contact with the past, as also with the future. Only then, can you have a successful meditation. And you have to extend that meditation from moment to moment, until it becomes continuous. Keep one hour for doing that. Live a disciplined life. Don't think about your air ticket mechanically. Keep some other time available for planning.

### **Desire moves your mind**

*We have to give up all worldly desires to get Realization. But it is said that desirelessness arises only after Realization. So, it seems contradictory...*

You should reduce your desires as far as possible. Desire moves your mind. A moving mind cannot reflect the Truth

as it is in itself. It is the obstacle to Realization. You cannot give up all the desires at once. First of all, you should give up those desires that are connected with the future. And of those desires that are associated with the present you should fulfil only those that are noble desires, which are good for the health of your body and mind, and for others.

### **When words stop completely, the thinking also stops**

*How can I be free of thoughts?*

The mind is full of words and words. It is not so easy to be free of thoughts if your mind is full of words, because words create thoughts, and thoughts are expressed through words; it causes a chain reaction! For example, you hear the word “chair” and at once, the word is changed into the thought of a chair. Can you think without words?

When you want to think, you should think. When you don't want to think (as during meditation), then no thoughts should come into your mind. But, if you have no control over your mind, then you will think when thinking is not required and you will not be able to think when you need to think. That is what happens during meditation. You don't want to think during meditation, but you still think. Thinking is associated with words directly or indirectly. When words stop completely, the thinking also stops.

Activity is possible without thinking. It can be instinctive. The activities of animals are much more instinctive than based on thinking. Animals create less problems for themselves. Man creates many more. Man creates problems for himself and then remains occupied in

solving them. Animals face problems instinctively, problems which are inevitable. This is the negative side of the thinking mind. The positive side is that man can know the higher values of life and live for them.

### ***The Tendency to Sleep During Meditation***

#### **Sleep in meditation is worse than the wandering of the mind**

*For me, the problem is I often fall asleep when meditating. What should I do?*

When there is a tendency of going to sleep during meditation, one should practise fast breathing for a few minutes. When thoughts begin to subside, there is the tendency to go to sleep. This tendency has to be overcome. The obstacle of sleep in meditation is worse than the wandering of the mind. When you go to sleep, you cannot do anything to stop the wandering of the mind. If a sick person dies, then nothing can be done anymore because he or she cannot undergo any treatment to remove that weakness. When the mind is wandering during meditation and you are not asleep, you can try to stop the wandering. But if you go to sleep, who will stop the wandering? The wandering of the mind shows that you are sick mentally but still alive. You can treat your disease. If you go to sleep during meditation, you cannot even try to stop your wandering thoughts. If sleep is the state you want to go into, eat too much or get yourself physically or mentally tired or else take a sleeping tablet and you will go to sleep! Then, there is no need to meditate. Vigilance and alertness are opposed to the state of sleep.

*What about Consciousness?*

Consciousness is not opposed to sleep. It is through Consciousness that you experience the state of sleep. Consciousness is there in all the states.

*Who experiences sleep?*

Sleep means that the mind has merged into what is called *tamoguna* or inertia. But soul-consciousness is still there, which experiences that state of deep sleep. Even during sleep, there is the triangle of the knower, the known and the knowledge. That is how sleep is different from non-polar *samādhi*, in which the triangle of the knower, the known and the knowledge is abolished.

*When I meditate, sleep overpowers me. I cannot avoid it. What should I do?*

You have to cultivate more and more interest and liking for meditation. Usually one goes to sleep when one does not like or is not interested in something. For example, if you are not interested in what I am saying, or if you don't like it, there will be a tendency in you to go to sleep. Or when you go to see a movie and you don't like it, what will happen? Either you come out and stop seeing the movie or you go to sleep. Why does sleep come? It comes when you are very tired or when you are bored.

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sûtras*, where the obstacles to meditation are given, sleep is mentioned as the greatest obstacle, even greater than the wandering of the mind during meditation.

**Proper sleep at the proper time**

*How can we avoid sleeping during meditation?*

When your body and mind are too tired, you cannot avoid sleep during meditation. If you don't exercise your body in the day, i.e. not doing physical exercise, it will not be helpful for meditation. And if you work too much and the body is tired, it will also hinder your meditation. Proper food, proper work, proper sleep at the proper time, all these are helpful for a successful meditation.

**Tension, relaxation and lethargy**

*Is relaxation of the mind and body necessary for good meditation? I often need to keep some mental pressure and physical tension in my body to meditate, otherwise I fall asleep. How does one fight sleepiness during meditation?*

Perhaps you are confusing relaxation with lethargy. There is a radical difference between relaxation and lethargy. Relaxation implies pure Awareness, while lethargy involves lack of awareness. Tension is caused by perverted awareness. Tension is better than lethargy but, in order to attain the state of pure Awareness, tension has to be overcome. Should you feel the tendency of lethargy, you should practise dynamic meditation instead of passive meditation.

Dynamic meditation involves doing something during meditation. Passive meditation implies simple watching. Concentration on some *mantra*, that is a divine phrase, or concentration on one divine idea is dynamic meditation.

Simple watching, watching without thinking of any external or internal object, is passive meditation.

The practice of *bhastrikā prāṇâyâma* or *kapālbhāthi prāṇâyâma* is also very helpful for overcoming sleep during meditation.

### **Sleep can be decreased by practice**

*Unfortunately, if I don't get eight hours of sleep a night, I feel sick for the whole day. I have this problem here and also at home. I would always like to meditate before going to work, but my work starts early and I rarely manage to get up in time. What should I do?*

Very simple. Go to bed very early. If you go to bed say at 8 p.m., you can easily get up at 4 a.m. At your age you need eight hours of sleep. You have to cultivate the habit of going to bed at 8 p.m. If you follow this routine for two months regularly and continuously, it will become a habit. Or, if your situation allows, you can have six hours of sleep in the night and two hours in the day after lunch. Gandhiji was a very busy man. He used to sleep only for four hours in the night. The quantity of sleep or food one requires can be increased or decreased by practice.

*When we are tired, we can no longer control our minds during meditation...*

Yes, fatigue of the body or of the mind is an obstacle in meditation.

### ***The Tendency to Change One's Practice and One's Guru***

#### **You should not change your *mantra* again and again**

*When we have not been initiated, can we choose a name of God or a mantra and repeat it?*

Yes, you may choose the holy name of God which attracts you most and repeat it with love, trust and faith, without becoming initiated. After all, all the names of God are holy and can lead to meeting the Lord, sooner or later, if they are practised with faith and trust. It is better that you do *sankīrtan* daily for a short period in which you chant many names of God, so that you are reminded that all names of God are holy. You have to be very careful that you don't become narrow-minded. But you should not change your *mantra* again and again as you change your dress. For concentration, it is very important that only one *mantra* should be practised as *japa*. One advantage of getting initiated is that you become engaged, married, with one and only one *mantra*, that *mantra* becoming your life partner. Otherwise you hear about the glory of many *mantras* and you cannot decide which *mantra* you should practise. Secondly, you would be prone to change your *mantra* if you read or hear that some other *mantra* is more powerful. Divorce from your *mantra* with which you have been initiated is not permissible.

#### **You have to assimilate what you receive from outside**

*I don't feel any improvement in myself in spite of all my japa and other practices. Why is it so?*

Because you forget your death! How much were you changed after your heart attack! It was not momentary but for many, many months. As soon as you came back from the hospital you donated one lack rupees to *Sadhana Kendra Ashram*.

You changed your Guru many times to find one who could give you a ready-made Self-Realization. You went to Nisargadatta Maharaj and got initiation from him. You got initiation from Swami Ramdas also. They were very great saints. You stayed in Ramdas' *āshram* in Kerala for a long time. You wanted to make me your Guru too, (Swamiji laughing) but I said, "Enough is enough."

*Yes Swamiji, you are right. How is it possible that I still feel incomplete in spite of the great saints I met?*

You have to assimilate and make your own that which you receive from outside. Otherwise it cannot always be with you. Should you eat very rich food, but are unable to digest it, it will not give you strength.

### ***Temptations and dangers from subtle planes***

**The physical body is like an island in the ocean of astral forces**

*A written question has been given to Swamiji, but only the following answer has been read.*

I will tell you a story that won first prize in a competition of short-story writing. A man was travelling in a train. He asked the other man sitting next to him, "Do you believe in ghosts?" The man replied, "Yes!" and disappeared...

There are many varieties of ghosts. Some of them have the power to assume any form they wish. They can assume the form of a human being or even of an animal. In one minute, they can change their form ten to fifteen times. During meditation, if your mind is connected with the astral plane, you can see a being changing its form very fast. It becomes a great hindrance during meditation. I have met some seekers who were in this state and very much disturbed. As soon as they would sit and close their eyes, they would start seeing such changing forms. Ghost means a “disembodied soul.” The lower part of the astral plane is very much disturbed. It is like an ocean in which the waves are dashing against each other. The energy-souls are ruffling with one another in this plane. This plane is full of so much instability. When your mind is connected with this plane, it becomes very restless. It may cause you to have nightmares. You may see a flood and yourself being tossed in it. You may see the mountains cracking, engulfing you and such other scenes. You would wish to come out of that plane as quickly as possible. Your consciousness would rush to the physical body to escape those scenarios. You know, this physical body is like an island in the ocean of astral forces. When there is a storm in the ocean, you want to come onto an island to escape the storm.

When you go inward, you don't encounter God at once. The first thing you encounter is your physical mind. The discursive logical mind belongs to the physical mind. Afterwards, you encounter the astral world. After that, the mental world, which has so many layers. After that, you may encounter the supramental world, then the Bliss world and finally you come to meet the Divine. This inner journey is much more difficult than going to the moon or Mars.

*I believe that it is not necessary to deal with the subtle worlds. We should go straight to non-duality.*

If one can do that, nothing better! But if one cannot give up the concern for the physical body and physical world, how would that person be able to give up the concern for the subtle worlds, which are much more powerful than the physical world? Even a person like Buddha, who renounced his kingdom in search of Truth, had to face those worlds.

## *II. General Obstacles on the Spiritual Journey*

**You cannot force the realization of Truth to come to you**

*It seems I am passing through a crisis on my spiritual path. I have the feeling that I'm not making any progress. My mind is full of doubts about my capacity to find God. I feel lost.*

How do you measure or assess the progress that you have made on the spiritual path or your spiritual effort? You cannot force the realization of Truth to come to you. There are certain obstacles or impediments on the path of spiritual Realization. The seeker of Truth works to remove those obstacles by self-effort and also invokes the grace of God for helping him or her to do that. That is what *sādhanā* means. Those obstacles can be classified into three categories:

1. Impurities of the mind;
2. Unsteadiness and wavering of the mind;
3. The veil of ignorance.

The whole purpose of *sādhana*, including prayer and intellectual understanding, is to remove those obstacles.

**Love and awareness are the two antidotes of all negative tendencies**

*I have witnessed the violence between husband and wife pretending to love each other. How can we neutralize the violence which is in us?*

Violence can be overcome in two ways: either by love or by not identifying yourself with the emotion of violence when it comes up in you. It will need perpetual practice of awareness. Love and awareness are the two antidotes of all negative tendencies. Can you kill or beat a person whom you love? If some people do it, it is not love; it is only passion. Their so-called love is actually violence, a fight. Each one is trying to dominate the other. If they are violent, let them be like that. They must be very disturbed and tense within. One day they will be forced to give up hatred in order to be peaceful. Love is complete in itself. It does not demand anything.

**Your weaknesses hinder your ability to communicate with the Divine**

*You show us our weak side more than our strong side. Why?*

You become more and more strong when you overcome your weaknesses. How will you try to overcome your weaknesses if you don't know them? Moreover, strength comes through communication with the Divine, and weaknesses hinder your

communication with the Divine. Prayer, meditation, *japa* and breathing exercises constitute the positive approach to overcome your weaknesses.

### **Ups and downs**

*I feel the spiritual path has a lot of ups and downs.*

Yes, the spiritual path is full of ups and downs. Walking on the spiritual path is like climbing a mountain. It is not like walking on the plains. Have you seen the road going to Mussorie? It is going up, then coming down and then going up again.

*So, in spite of the ups and downs, we have to persevere?*

Practice makes a man perfect. When you tread the spiritual path, you come to know many secrets of spiritual life yourself. If you drive a car in the mountains daily, slowly and gradually you become an expert at driving in the mountains.

### **The Lack of Spiritual Honesty**

*I have observed much deterioration in moral values, as is evident by the rise of corruption in personal and professional lives. I don't get involved in it, but I don't have the courage to fight it. What should I do?*

It is quite tragic. One should face the situation and not be tempted to become corrupt and immoral oneself. It is the practical way to teach others and influence them.

You can be dishonest in your *sāadhanā*, also! Some say it is more difficult to be honest with yourself than to be honest with others. You don't need to be especially intelligent and thoughtful to be honest. But to be dishonest, you need a good deal of intelligence and cleverness!

## ***Desire***

*What is desire?*

Desire means a longing for something that is separate from you.

### **When you give up desire your vision becomes clear**

*How can I remain present when facing body-mind suffering, the meaning of which I do not grasp?*

To remain present, you don't need to grasp the meaning of suffering. You have simply to give up desire. When you give up desire your vision becomes clear and the Truth is revealed to you. In the *Gītā* it is said, "Desire, anger and attachment are the doors to hell." As a matter of fact, anger and attachment are the products of desire. At another place in the *Gītā* Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "Desire and anger are born of *rajoguna*. Very difficult to overcome, take them to be your greatest enemies."

### **Can you tell me what your need is?**

*How to overcome desire?*

Remember the Divine. Reflect on the transient nature of objects, situations and relationships. When you see that a thing is changing, you don't run after it. Reflect on what is your need!

*I want peace.*

Do you want permanent peace or impermanent peace? Can you get permanent peace from and through the objects, situations and relationships which are not permanent? You may not know what is permanent, but at least you can know what is not permanent!

### **All pitfalls can be classified into three desires**

*The spiritual path or journey is full of pitfalls and temptations. Which are the most serious and how can one cope with them in the best way?*

All the pitfalls on the spiritual path or journey can be classified into three desires:

1. *Kameshana*, sexual desire;
2. *Vitreshana*, desire for riches;
3. *Lokeshana*, desire for name and fame; desire for recognition.

Continuous reflection on the transient nature of the pleasures of the world, the remembrance of one's death, and above all, the burning aspiration and love for the Divine are the means to overcome desire. Desire does not let the thinking process stop; it keeps the mind always moving. Bhartrihari says, "O desire, from God you have made me a *jīva* (man), what do you want to do with me now? Do you want to reduce me to an animal? Please leave me alone!"

**Complete silence comes from complete desirelessness**

*When I was observing silence recently, I could observe the movement of energy in my body. What can you say about it?*

Silence means the release of energy. Silence is complete relaxation. How can there be complete relaxation if something is suppressed? Complete silence comes from complete desirelessness. The capacity to observe increases during silence. Alertness is directly proportional to stability of mind, as well as to the depth of interest.

*Sometimes, I can observe the instability of my mind.*

When the mind is being pulled in different directions, it is not stable. If a cart is being pulled in different directions, what will happen to it? The mind may not only be unstable, but it can also be mad. When you see your mind, it disappears. You only THINK that you are seeing it; that is the problem.

*I could also observe my desires.*

One desire brings up many, many desires. To fulfil one desire, you have to desire so many things. Suppose you have a desire to go to U.S.A.; to fulfil it, you have to desire so many things. Desire means to get something other than you.

**The more wordly desires you have, the less love you have for God**

*Could you tell us how it is possible to sublimate and spiritualize desires? To make it clearer, could you give us some examples?*

God has given you eyes. With the eyes you can see programs on TV that excite your desires. You can also read the Bible with your eyes and get inspiration to remember God. It depends upon you how you use your eyes. Similarly, you can use or misuse all that has been given to you by God — your physical body, your senses, your mind.

### **The seeker has to discriminate between need and desire**

*Are not most of the desires quite natural?*

What is natural and what is unnatural? Is it natural to possess a Mercedes car or to run after getting a Mercedes car? Don't take a loan to purchase a car. Is it natural to have the desire to become a prime minister or a king? The seeker has to discriminate between need and desire. Desire can be overcome; need cannot be overcome. You feel cold. You need to cover your body. It does not mean that you should have cloth costing one hundred dollars per metre. You are hungry. You need food. It does not mean that you have to eat *jalebi*. If you are born as the son of a king, then it is a different matter. Have you not read the stories of kings who renounced their kingdoms to discover the Truth? Buddha was a king. Mahavir was a king. Moreover, interests change. When you were a child, you were interested in toys. When you grew, you became interested in your studies. Afterward, you became interested in earning money. After that, you became interested in getting married. Maybe, you will become interested in having children after some time, and so on. Desire changes its face again and again. And a second desire may arise even before the first one has been fulfilled.

You know, when you have no desire, you are at peace. When the desire for something arises, your peace is disturbed.

When you get that thing which you desired, the desire subsides for the moment and you again get peace. By mistake you think that you got peace through getting that thing. Actually you regained peace when the desire subsided. The desire for something again arises and again peace is disturbed. Why should you do anything when you feel fulfilled? You cannot feel fulfilled unless and until you realize your true Being, and you cannot realize your essential Nature unless you are free from desires. It is desire which moves your mind. You cannot realize the Truth when your mind is moving.

### **The fulfilment of desire never brings lasting satisfaction**

*What should I do when a desire arises? Sometimes I can stop it by reasoning; sometimes it is easier to stop it by having the desire fulfilled. But whatever choice I make, the roots of the desire are not cut.*

Reflect on the nature of desire and what the fulfilment of desire brings. Desire is like itching. When you feel the itching, you scratch. It gives you temporary relief, which you call pleasure. It lasts only as long as another desire does not arise, or as long as you don't feel the itching again. The fulfilment of desire never brings lasting satisfaction. Meditate on your death again and again. Imagine during meditation that you have died, your body is lying there and your friends are weeping and none of them can help you at that time. They cannot even see you or talk to you. The remembrance of your death helps to make your desires

subside. Lord Buddha used to send seekers of Truth to live in the graveyard for some days so that they would see life from another angle. The deeper your aspiration for the Divine, the lesser is the intensity of your desires. The same energy that becomes desire is transformed into the aspiration for the Divine when the awakening comes.

*Why do people have such difficulty absorbing themselves in spiritual life nowadays?*

The greatest obstacle in the path of spiritual progress is desire, the desires of the world. These days, every modern means like TV, radio, cinema, press, etc., is trying to stimulate/incite desires. All other negative tendencies like anger, greed, infatuation, pride, fear, etc., which stop the spiritual progress, are the product of desire.

## ***Attachment***

**The cause of suffering and sorrow is attachment to what is perishable**

The seeker of God should see the unreal as unreal if he/she wants to know the Real. One should not be attached to what is perishable. The cause of suffering and sorrow is attachment to what is perishable. Can any person live in this world forever? If not, why should a person think that he/she would live in this world forever? Such thinking is not only wrong but also very stupid. Most people live as if they never have to die. This attitude makes them attached to the perishable world.

**Spirituality wants you to give up your identification with the body-mind**

*In God, the duality between masculine and feminine no longer exists. In man/woman, an inner marriage between the feminine and the masculine seems to be the ultimate goal. Before this can happen, I feel that both these dimensions need to be fully experienced in our being. But, as a Western woman, I feel cut off from the feminine face of the Divine. What is the feminine face of God? Who can I pray to?*

There seems to be a contradiction in your statement. On one side you say that there is no duality of masculine and feminine in God. According to this, if you want to realize God, you have to stop being a woman or a man. You want the “inner marriage” only when first you become a woman or a man. First you lose the goal (non-duality) and then you want to achieve it. How strange! You seek a woman when you become a man; you seek a man when you become a woman. Spirituality wants you to give up your identification with the body-mind. Only then, do you realize the Spirit, which is beyond all duality.

***Anger***

*In some circumstances, I can't help getting angry.*

Daily, you talk of God and say that not a leaf can move without the will of God. When you become angry, where does your knowledge go?

**Anger can be overcome only by love**

*You said that we should not be overwhelmed by anger, but I read that sometimes Swami Vivekananda expressed his anger.*

I am not telling you to keep anger inside you. I am saying that you should give up anger. Tell the anger, “Please, good bye! I don’t accept you.” When anger comes, remember someone whom you love most, and the anger will subside. Anger can be overcome only by love. It can never be overcome by anger.

You cannot justify your anger just because Swami Vivekananda was angry sometimes. When Swami Vivekananda would sit in meditation, he would be free of all thoughts. Be like him! He was the master of his mind. Please, don’t be the slave of your mind! Be like Swami Vivekananda in all respects. Please don’t imitate his anger only!

**Once you see negative emotions, they subside**

*I am often angry when I meet some difficulty. I may even insult others, and I regret it afterwards. What is anger and how can I stop it at the very beginning?*

Anger is the product of desire. When there is obstruction in the fulfilment of desire, anger is created. When anger comes up, you become identified with it. If you could see your anger when it arises, the intensity of the anger would diminish, or subside. You have to be alert and watchful. Only then can you see your anger, only then can you overcome

your anger. When anger is there, you don't see the anger. When anger comes up, you are not aware of the anger, nor are you aware of yourself. At that time you are only aware of the fault of the person with whom you are angry.

Should you become aware of the anger and aware of yourself at that time, the anger would subside. Because you are there, as a separate being from the anger, you can do something to overcome it. But the problem is that you are not present. You become the anger.

*Is it a similar process for sadness?*

Watch your sadness and it will disappear. When you see negative emotions, they subside. You can try it and see for yourself. You have to see the sadness as you see a chair or a table, as an object, and it will disappear.

### **It is self-will that turns into anger**

*Once, someone got very angry at me. At that time I could remain quiet, but afterwards I felt sick. Why?*

Well, that illness of the body was cured in a few days. But if you had a fight with that person, you would have remained disturbed for months and months. If a man is angry and scolding you, but you keep quiet and don't speak, how long would that man keep on speaking? Within a few minutes he would stop scolding you and there would be no fight. It requires two hands to clap.

*Sometimes it happens that I feel obliged to pretend that I am angry to get things done as I want.*

Anger can be pretended but love cannot. Love is much deeper than anger. Anger is like a wave that subsides. True love never behaves like a wave, which increases and decreases, going up and coming down.

*I don't feel affected when I pretend to be angry.*

Not being affected is not enough. You also need to cease to be the mind; you have to be the Spirit.

*If expressing our anger is not right, then what should we do?*

Anger comes up when something goes against your will. It is the self-will that turns into anger. If you suppress your anger, only you are upset, but if you express it, the other person is also upset. He will call you bad names in his heart if he cannot speak against you. If a clerk is angry at his officer and cannot express his anger there, he expresses his anger to his wife when he comes back home. And if the wife cannot speak against him, she will start beating the child. And the child will start breaking the plates. Every activity of a person reflects the state of mind of that person at that time. If a man is angry, he will handle everything in a different way. He won't even close the door softly.

*I feel that through anger I can deal better with my subordinates.*

It is not true! Others don't respond to you out of fear. Love is stronger than fear. If a person does something out of love rather than fear, the quality of the work will be better.

## ***Sexual Desire and Lust***

### **How to deal with one's sexual desires**

*Is it ok to be in love with a woman or man, provided we can keep it in its purest form?*

When all your love is directed to the Divine, such a question does not arise at all. The energy that becomes desire is the same energy that becomes love for the Divine. The purpose of *sāadhanā* is to transform the energy of desire into divine Love. Those who still need relationships with others should follow the rules and laws of the society in which they live; otherwise they invite avoidable problems in their *sāadhanā*.

*Can we love someone with whom we are not married?*

You should get married and live the ideal life of a householder if you cannot control your desires. The Divine can be realized by a married person and a *sannyāsī* also. But the disciplines of both these paths are different.

*We are weak people, not realized ones, so we feel the need of others' love.*

We are talking only of seekers and not of realized persons. And we are not talking of the general population. The general population has no higher ideal of life before them. They only live to “eat, drink and be merry.” The seeker who cannot live alone and direct all his/her devotion to God should go through family life.

*I believe that I should follow blindly your advice but at the same time I am trying to understand what is good for me.*

I have never asked anyone to follow me blindly.

*If we have fallen in love, is it sinful to break that relationship because we fear increasing our body consciousness?*

If you take someone's hand, you should not leave it. If you cannot remain committed to your worldly relationship, how can you remain committed to God?

*I am struggling in my marriage. Should I go to a secluded place for a few months to overcome my difficulties, as you did when you left for the jungle?*

I did not go to the jungle to avoid women. I went there to spend my whole time in the remembrance of the Divine. If you go to the jungle to get rid of women, they will follow you in your dreams.

Three people go to an enlightened person. To one, the sage may ask him to renounce. To the second, he may say to fulfil all his social and familial responsibilities in the name of God and sit regularly in prayer and meditation. To the third, he may give other advice. If one leaves his family for God and afterwards he regrets it or he is running after women, then what? One can renounce an emotion which is not legitimate. That is why a Guru is needed.

Have you read that Swami Vivekananda once said, "All *sannyāsīs* should be thrown into the sea and let them be drowned!"

*Swami Vivekananda also encouraged householders to take sannyâsa.*

When a sage says something to a person, if he encourages a householder to renounce, it is personal advice. Swami

Vivekananda did not teach that anyone and everyone should give up his wife and children and become a *sannyāsī*. Did he? I have read Swami Vivekananda. I have never read that he instigated all the householders who wanted to become *sannyāsīs* to renounce everything.

The seeker wants freedom. The seeker's aim is Liberation, which abhors dependence. There is not only one desire; there are hundreds of desires buried in the subconscious. The seeker wants to eradicate them; he does not want to satisfy them. There is no comparison at all between the happiness found in the remembrance of the Divine and the pleasures obtained by the contact of the senses with their objects. The pleasures which are begotten by the contact of the senses with the objects are not lasting. Moreover, there is dependence on them, dependence on the senses, dependence on the object of the pleasure, dependence on the mind.

### *Ignorance*

**In your state of ignorance you feel yourself confined in a particular body-mind**

*If I am God and God is perfect, then why am I not perfect too?*

You are a sleeping-dreaming God. A king becomes a beggar in dream. A king goes to sleep and in his dream he becomes a beggar and all his kingdom and riches are of no use to him. Similar is the case with you. You are God, but in your dream (state of ignorance), you feel yourself confined in a

particular body-mind, and your essential perfection is of no use to you. You are not aware of your true I, and you are not established in your true I, which is God.

*How to come out of this dream?*

For Self-Realization and to come out of the slumber of ignorance, you have to live a disciplined life, you have to purify your mind through positive thinking and prayer and make your mind completely silent through meditation.

### ***Discouragement, Negative Thoughts & Depression***

#### **Negative thinking is the greatest obstacle on the path of Realization**

*I feel like there are two persons within me; one who knows that peace exists, another one who does everything to make me fail on this path. How can I get rid of the voice that tries to make me fail on the path?*

There are many parts of a personality. These can be classified into five *Puruṣhas*: body consciousness, vital consciousness, mental consciousness, supramental consciousness and Bliss consciousness. When you go deep within you can feel the existence of these *Puruṣhas*. Body consciousness feels that it is full of limitations and not free. When you are identified with it, you become a pessimist. The more you go deep within, the more freedom you feel. Negative thinking is the greatest obstacle on the path of Realization. The truth is that you have divine potentiality and you can realize the Divine.

**How to eradicate negative thoughts**

*In order to stop negative thinking, is it enough to practise observation?*

One method is to counter a negative thought with a positive thought. There is a *sûtra* in Patanjali's *Yoga Sûtras*, which says, "A negative thought/emotion can be removed by the opposite positive thought/emotion." But this method does not stop the thinking process, though it may remove the negative thought. To stop the thinking process, one has to reject thoughts, or be a disinterested witness of them. When thoughts come, do not accept them and they will go away.

*What do we do with the negative thoughts that emanate from others?*

You cannot stop others from sending their thoughts to you. But surely you can reject those thoughts. A man comes and spits on the face of Lord Buddha. Buddha smiles and says, "Thank you."

*Does it bring peace to pray for those who offend others?*

Yes, Lord Buddha changed the intent of an elephant charging at him. So, what to say of a man!

*It seems to be a common attitude to think wrongly about others...*

Are you perfect in every respect? Why do you expect others to be perfect, if you cannot be perfect yourself? If you could see your own weaknesses, you would be able to bear the weaknesses of others. Jesus said, "Let the one who has never committed a sin throw the first stone." All the people who

were going to stone a woman turned away. The woman's life was transformed. You cannot reform a person by thinking poorly of that person. By doing that, you only strengthen the bad qualities of that person. Hatred cannot be removed by hatred. It can only be removed by love. Love is the panacea for all ills.

### **How do we defeat negative thoughts?**

*During the meditation this morning, there was a fight between negative thoughts and energy in the heart. What can I do to be stronger and develop more willpower?*

In the *Vedas* there is mention of *prāṇaupāsana*. There is a story in the *Vedas* that there was a fight between the demons and the gods. The gods won that fight by performing *prāṇaupāsana*. In man, demons are represented by negative thoughts, and gods are represented by positive thoughts. And there is a constant fight going on between them. *Prāṇaupāsana* implies the affirmation that I am the *prāṇa* and not the physical body. I am the *prāṇa*, which is the son of the Creator, the Lord! By strengthening this affirmation, one is able to win over negative thoughts. The *prāṇaupāsana* implies identification with the *prāṇa* and disidentification with the physical body. Jesus had said, "I and my Father are One." It is the same teaching.

### **The urge for life is the most basic urge**

*I don't have the taste to live any more. What should I do to find the desire to live again?*

The desire to live is the most fundamental urge in the human being, or rather in all living creatures. The urge for life, which is free from death, the urge for happiness that is everlasting is the most basic urge. It is one of the proofs that there is an eternal Life, an eternal Bliss, which the spiritualists name as Spirit. The urge is there in every living being, irrespective of country, caste, creed, colour, education, and social status. It cannot be suppressed whatever you do. It's only a matter of which way you choose: wrong or right, indirect or direct, long or short, to realize this urge. All other desires are substitutes for this basic urge.

If you don't want to live, you don't need money, you don't need food, you don't need a house, you don't need a car, you don't need a friend, you don't need anything. You don't even need a teaching or message. What is your difficulty in dying, if you don't want to live? Think it over! If you had really wanted to die, you would not be here. Perhaps you want a life that you regard as a nice life. Now, the definition of a nice life is different for each individual.

### **The source of love is within you**

*I have received a lot. However, I find it difficult to love, to open myself. I am invaded by negative thoughts and fears, which overwhelm me. What should I do?*

You have received a lot, you say. Try to assimilate what you have received. Otherwise you would lose what you have gained. Whatever comes from others, from outside, cannot be with you always unless you assimilate it and make it your own. Love is not an action. It is a state of your inner Being. Dive deep within and you will discover it. For love,

dependence on others is not needed. The source of love is within you. Should you find it, all your fears will vanish. Attachment begets fear and bondage. Love dispels fear and brings freedom. Be strong. When negative thoughts come, remain vigilant and they will not disturb you.

### **Try to find joy within**

*I find it difficult to communicate with others and also with myself. I suffer from loneliness, isolation from others. What can I do?*

Communicating with others is not difficult when you are able to communicate with yourself. First try to communicate with yourself. Go within and try to find joy within. Love/joy is the greatest force. It will give you strength, remove your loneliness, and will enable you to communicate with others in the divine way, more powerfully. People will be attracted to you and will love you. Sit in meditation daily and regularly. Pray to the Divine.

### **Do not go back to the world**

*What can you say about the state of suffocation when love is there, but you feel as if love is not there?*

It is not suffocation. It is the dark night of the soul: no interest in the world of time, but no experience of the timeless Spirit.

*How does one get out of that state?*

“Burn your bridges behind.” Do not go back to the world, even when you are not able to find God yet. Let God be “the

be-all and end-all” of your life. When you are going somewhere and you have crossed over a bridge, you should burn that bridge, so that you cannot go back, even if you are tempted to do so. It means burn the seeds of worldly desires in you. If you only cut the branches of a tree, they again sprout.

## ***Tension***

### **Forced concentration**

*While concentrating on the heart-centre during meditation, I felt a pressure at the point of concentration in the heart. I stopped meditating and it disappeared very quickly. What would be your advice?*

Forced concentration may cause pain in the heart or in the head. Supplement love with your *sāadhanā*. Don't be a technician. How can one feel pain in the chest when one is remembering one's sweetheart? Meditation should relieve your pain if you have any in your chest. What brings pain in your head is thinking of your enemy. Do you take God as your enemy?

### **Tension should not disturb your meditation**

*While practising japa, I feel like I make too much physical effort related to the breathing. That creates some tension. Should I try to remain relaxed?*

Forced concentration does create some tension. Negative thinking also creates tension. One becomes completely

relaxed during meditation only in a very advanced state of meditation. A little tension should be there, otherwise you will go to sleep during meditation. Tension should not disturb your meditation.

*Can we have emotions, which are the expression of our longing for God, without tension?*

The longing for God should be deeper, rather than very intense. Then it will not create such tension as would disturb the peace of mind.

Supplement divine Love with the technique of *japa*. It will neutralize the tension created by the concentration. Be in the spirit of self-surrender while mentally reciting the *mantra*. Do not do anything with the rhythm of the breathing during the practice of *japa*. Let the rhythm of the breathing be natural. If the mind becomes slow, the breathing becomes slow itself. Love brings relaxation. Attachment breeds tension.

### **The seeker should remain unmoved by the problems of the physical body**

*During meditation I have tension in my shoulders and inside my head, which is very disturbing. What should I do?*

Tension in the physical body does distract one's attention during meditation. These tensions may be in the body on account of some physical ailment or due to some stress in the mind, conscious or unconscious. If it is a physical problem, then treatment should be taken from an expert physician. If it is mental, then it can be overcome by right

thinking, or by surrendering oneself to the Divine. Slow, deep and conscious breathing is helpful in both cases. You should pray and practise conscious breathing for ten to fifteen minutes before starting your meditation. Slowly and gradually, with the deepening of meditation and the rising level of consciousness, one is able to remain unmoved by the problems of the physical body. That is what the seeker must achieve. The physical body is never totally free from problems. It has its own limitations and the older it gets, the more problems it has, because with the advance of age the power of resistance of the physical body is decreased. The seeker should not keep his mind suppressed. Right decisions should be taken as soon as possible and wrong thoughts should be given up. Otherwise you are not at peace and you cannot go into deep meditation.

## ***Fear***

### **You have so many fears in your subconscious**

*Where does fear come from?*

Fear is in the mind. At the time of birth, the mind is not active. Fear at that time is in the subconscious of the child. At present also, you have many fears in your subconscious. For example, you are not afraid of a snake at this moment. But, if a snake appears and starts coming towards you, the fear of the snake is felt. The same is the case for death. At this moment, you are not afraid of death. But when death stares you in the face, you may start trembling or crying, or your heart may stop beating. Fears may be in the

subconscious mind. Attachment also may be in the subconscious mind. You don't feel that you are attached to the body, but if there is a threat to it, the fear of the body being taken away from you comes up.

### **You are afraid of what you do not know**

*I am really afraid of animals, but I don't know where this fear comes from. How can I be free from it?*

Animals are not so dangerous because it is easy to anticipate their behaviour. They don't pretend. They cannot pretend. It is more difficult to deal with a human being than with an animal. You are afraid of what you do not know. Darkness or ignorance is the cause of fear. You can go to the forest in the day-time and enjoy being in the forest, but in the night, you are afraid of going there because you cannot see in the darkness. Moreover, the people who live in cities, who have not lived near or dealt with animals like cows, dogs, horses, oxen, etc., are usually afraid of them.

It reminds me of a *Mahātmāji*, who had been an associate of Gandhiji when he was young. He lived in Meerut. Once, we met together in the home of one of my devotees in Meerut. We were introduced to each other. He gave very moving discourses on *Vedānta*. He had also written many books on *Vedānta*. I was staying in *Sapta Sarovar jhādī* in Haridwar at that time. He expressed his desire to come and stay with me in the forest for a few days. I said, "You are most welcome." He came and stayed with me in the hut. At about 9 p.m., he felt the urge to go to the toilet. There was no toilet in the compound of the hut. I told him to go out into the forest, but he felt afraid and said to

me, “Please give me a lamp.” I lit a kerosene lamp and gave it to him. He went out and eased himself behind the hut just near the fence. He was so afraid that he could not go even ten yards away. The next day, he went back to the town!

**Reflect on your true Nature or love the Divine to get rid of fear**

*How do we defeat fear?*

Most negative tendencies, including fear, are products of identification with the physical body. Identification with the physical/mental body is the root cause of all sufferings. Reflect and meditate on the true and essential Nature of your Being again and again, and regularly. It will help you get rid of fear.

The other way is to have a living faith and trust in God, to always remember Him and resign to His will. Divine Love dispels all kinds of fears. Love the Divine with your whole heart.

**The evil forces can do no harm to the devotee of God**

*I feel frightened if suddenly disturbed during meditation.*

What makes you frightened? Are you afraid of your death? If death comes while you are seeking the Divine, it will be the most blessed death. The seeker is, in a sense, already dead. In one of his poems, Swami Rama Tirtha says, “How can a person be killed who is already dead? How can a dead person be frightened?” He was making a challenge to death in that poem.

Have faith in the Divine. Have faith and trust in your immortal *Ātmā*! Feel that God is protecting you; no one can do any harm to you. Think it again and again. If you change your mental attitude, the sensation of fear will turn into the feeling of divine assurance. Sometimes, evil forces try to frighten you so that you stop meditation. I myself had such experiences for a few days in the beginning of my *sādhana*. The evil forces can only frighten the seeker, but can do no harm to the devotee of God. Supplement love of God and faith in God with your meditation technique. It is very important.

Meditation is required to dispel fear. When you become frightened during meditation, it is really a very serious matter. Instead of practising the technique of meditation in which all thoughts are to be rejected, practise active meditation for some days. Active meditation means to contemplate on some divine quality. You should meditate on the divine attributes of God. Meditate on the thought that God is always with you, He is omnipotent and He loves you. It will help you.

### **Disease, pain and death cannot be separated from the body**

*Two years ago I suffered from cancer. I fear the return of this disease. How can I stop the fear of illness, body pain and death?*

No one likes suffering, and yet no one can escape suffering completely as long as one is in the physical body and is identified with it. Even the great sages and prophets had to suffer the limitations of the body. Disease, pain and death cannot be separated from the body. Reflection on this truism

can lead to the search for Truth, as it did for Gautama Buddha.

Live a disciplined life. Eat balanced food. Practise breathing exercises. Take a brisk walk daily and regularly, and above all, keep your mind calm and quiet. Have living faith in the Divine. Reflect on the nature of your essential Being. Meditate and recite the holy name of God of your faith. It will give you the inner strength to face any situation.

### *Adverse Situations*

#### **The seeker has to adjust in his or her present situation**

*If we live with people who live an ordinary life, i.e. they eat meat, drink wine and whisky, watch TV early in the morning and late in the night, I think we have to be tolerant with them. But if they prevent us from doing meditation what can we do?*

If you want to meditate, but someone prevents you from doing that in one way or the other, you should not stay with that person. You cannot change others; you should change your attitude, or change your place if it is not conducive for your *sādhana*. You can have a separate room, or go to some peaceful place in the morning and evening and sit there in meditation. There is no need of changing the family. Get up very early in the morning when the baby is sleeping and sit in meditation. Or sit in meditation at another time when the baby is sleeping.

The seeker has to adjust himself or herself in his or her present situation in such a way that he or she can devote more and more time to meditation. Moreover, fulfil your duties in the name of God. In this way you can remember the Divine even while you are working. Don't take your baby as yours. Take it as belonging to the Divine and take yourself only as a caretaker of that baby. It is best if you take it that the Divine has come to you in the form of that baby to accept your services. It will transform your service to the baby into divine service.

**The mind has to be trained to face favourable and unfavourable situations**

*When you love someone, you wish him or her good, and when your love is sincere, you do him or her good. Conversely, when someone dislikes you, or even worse hates you, his or her bad feelings harm you. What is the right attitude?*

Anger or hate cannot be removed by anger or hate. It can only be overcome by love. You can defeat a person by force, but you cannot win someone by force. You can win someone only by love. Even wild animals respond to pure love. The cousin of Lord Buddha was very jealous of him. He always tried to harm him. He even tried many times to kill him. Once he had arranged an inebriated elephant to charge upon Lord Buddha. The elephant ran towards him to kill him, but as he approached, he was overpowered by the love vibrations of Buddha. He stopped near him and bowed down.

Should one be filled with such divine Love, he/she cannot be harmed. But everyone is not a Buddha. The seeker

of Truth should not hate anyone and should not try to harm anyone.

*Can we protect ourselves?*

Self-protection is permissible. Self-protection is possible in many different ways. One should try to avoid confrontation. To ignore the hater is another method.

Everyone reacts to a situation with his mind. The mind has to be tamed and trained to face favourable or unfavourable situations calmly and without being disturbed. Even favourable situations can bind the soul. Favourable situations may become even greater obstacles on the path of spiritual progress if the seeker is not alert and vigilant. There are pleasant dreams and unpleasant dreams. If the dream is pleasant, you want your sleep not to be disturbed. If the dream is unpleasant, it may wake you up.

**If you see beauty everywhere, you have lasting peace and joy**

*Is not nature God Himself? God makes the beauty, the kindness, the truth. So why to destroy nature, which is for me the divine presence?*

Man is subservient both to nature and God. In spite of so many advances in science, man has not been able to stop natural calamities like floods, earthquakes, erupting of volcanoes etc. You know how much devastation was caused in France, Europe and in the USA last year by storms and now in Zimbabwe and Bangladesh. Millions of people were affected, their houses destroyed, cattle died, numerous human lives were lost. Nature is under the control of God;

man is under the control of both nature and God. Can you feel the beauty in the devastating mode of nature? Well, very nice, if you can feel beauty in seeing countless corpses of dead people spread all around after the storm has subsided. You can only admire it if you take it as a painting and not real. Storms do not come only in European cities. They come in the mountains, also killing very simple and poor people, villagers, who have not done anything to destroy nature like in the cities. What about the cattle? Why do they die and suffer in storms? They have not done anything to destroy the beauty of nature as man has done. There is a beauty in death also, but that is a different viewpoint. Without death, no evolution would be possible. If you can see the beauty everywhere, only then will you have lasting peace and joy. If you don't see beauty in the women and men with big bellies, then your perception of beauty becomes limited.

### **Giving thanks to God**

*G--- arrived today from France. For the last several years he has been in a wheelchair with his two legs paralysed.*

In Gandhidham, I saw one of the daughters-in-law of Masterji (a devotee). Both her legs were paralysed up to her knees due to some disease. But I found her so happy and smiling...I cannot explain it! Today, I wrote a letter to Masterji, telling him that only a great saint or a completely surrendered devotee of God can be in the state of grace as she is, always thanking God. I wrote to him that though I have come back to the *âshram*, my mind is so often thinking of her, smiling, laughing and giving thanks to God.

**“Love one another as I loved you”**

*Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you: that ye love one another as I have loved you. By this, shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Please Swamiji, could you shed light on this? What is love in daily life with others, in a community of Jesus’ devotees, and in this âshram?*

This commandment of Jesus should be followed strictly by the devotees living in Sadhana Kendra Ashram. All of you please note it!

*Do you mean that we have to accept everything?*

Not to accept is one thing, and that is acceptable, but to become enraged and to use foul language against someone is not right. Now, getting rid of past conflicts is very difficult. It is even more difficult than to get rid of the future. But there can be no liberation without getting free from the memory of the past and the imagination of the future. If you are not attracted to your past, it means you are growing up. If you are attracted to your past, it means you are getting old. But one can learn from one’s past. That is the only good use of one’s past.

*Self-control is helpful to avoid conflicts. But how can self-control be developed?*

You cannot control your mind as long as you are identified with your mind. Can you? The roots of anger, desire, fear, greed, etc., are hidden in the subconscious, and you have no

communication with your subconscious. How will you uproot them? It can be done either through invoking the grace of God or by going deep into your subconscious through deep meditation. There is no other way. That is why, though you know anger is not good, even then, you cannot control it.

### **To aspire to know the Truth is only the first step**

*I don't know what I want in my life.*

Do you really want to know? To aspire to know the Truth is the first step to Realization. You have to try in the right way. To be here in the *âshram* is not enough, though to be here is better than to be in Delhi or in Paris.

*I am living in a big city, is it an obstacle to my sâdhanâ?*

A man from a remote village in the mountains went to Delhi for the first time. In the railway station, he saw people running on the platform. You know some come late, and to catch their train they have to walk fast, almost running. The villager thought, "Something dangerous has happened here, all people seem to be running in different directions." In the village, life is quite slow; people are not so much conscious of time, but in cities, life is so fast. It is difficult to cross the roads. Everyone seems to be in a great hurry. So, it was very abnormal and strange for the villager to see such a thing. He decided to go back, saying, "I will come to Delhi some other day, when everything is normal and there is no danger."

**Unfavourable situations and their impact on the mind**

*How does one help a person who is suffering a lot, but doesn't believe in God?*

Give that person love, medicine and service, so that person can feel there is someone who wants to share his or her pain. It will give her or him some mental peace. Tell the person that birth, death, disease, old age are bound to happen to the physical body. No one can completely and forever escape them. One should accept what is inevitable, with patience and courage.

*It's not so easy to give all these explanations to a person who does not believe in God...*

This is reasonable, helpful and correct to say, even if someone does not believe in God. If you mentally accept the inevitable and unfavourable situation, the sting or the impact of that situation on your mind becomes weakened. The devotee of God can accept it out of his faith in God. The atheist can accept it as being the law of nature. There is a difference. The devotee of God can even enjoy the unfavourable situation, the atheist cannot; he or she can only accept. The lover can enjoy suffering for the sake of her or his beloved, isn't it so? The mother does not sleep all night when her child is ill. She feels happiness to serve her child, even if she does not get sleep for the whole night. Ordinarily if someone does not let you go to sleep in the night, you feel very much offended. If you don't get food to eat for four days, you will be miserable. If you offer your food to your child and do not get anything to eat yourself for four days, or if you voluntary fast for four days, you are not miserable.

If someone snatches fifty dollars from you, you will be upset. If you offer fifty dollars to a needy person or to your beloved, it gives you happiness, even though outwardly the fact that you have become separated from your money is the same.

### ***Competition with Others***

#### **This world is a place of cut-throat competition**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

Maybe there will be a competition between French and Swedish people in the *âshram* in the future. In the world, there is competition everywhere: among businessmen, among politicians, among family members, husband and wife, students, bureaucrats, scholars, seekers of Truth, and even among Masters. This world can be called a place of multifarious competitions. Is this world not a place of competition, cut-throat competition? From childhood, the parents teach the children to compete to come first: in studies, in sports, etc. They say, “Don’t come second; come first.” So, to come first becomes an instinct which accompanies you till death. Competition is bad in everything. In competition you cannot be indifferent to the others. “Holy indifference” is the essential prerequisite of peace of mind. Playing is not competing, but it is true that sports are being commercialized and it is not good. If spiritual teaching can be commercialized, then you cannot condemn the sportsmen. In the West and now in India also, spirituality is becoming an industry. Educational institutions and hospitals also have turned into an industry for generating money.

*It is said that competition helps us to give the best of our capacity.*

It is not true! The peaceful mind is the most efficient. All the great discoveries in the world have been made in a composed state of mind, and tension free. Competition generates tension.

## ***Bad Company***

### **The influence of bad company**

*In the Yoga Vashishtha it is said, “To stay in the company of idiots is like sitting in the forest on the branch of a tree which is going to be cut down. Whatever you may do for these people is no more useful than beating the air with a stick.” Where is the compassion in all that?*

Does compassion mean to stay in the company of idiots? There is a divine idiot and there is a divine wise person. If you could transform idiots into wise persons, *Vashishtha rishi* would not stop you from going and staying with idiots. He is only warning you that if you go and stay in the company of idiots, you may also become an idiot. You see, when a child starts associating with the children who are addicted to drugs, he or she also becomes addicted to drugs. The influence of the company one keeps can make a person a saint or a criminal.

There is a story. A Greek artist wanted to make a portrait of a very innocent and simple person. He thought it would be easier to find such a person in a child. So he went from

one nursery school to the other to find the child who was the most innocent and pure-hearted. And he found one. He made that child sit in front of him and spent many hours drawing a portrait of that boy. After working for many days, he finished the portrait of that boy: the most innocent boy. The portrait was so nice that it won the first prize in an exhibition.

After about twenty-five years, he wanted to make the portrait of a hard-core criminal who would look like the embodiment of all the criminality in the world. He went from one prison to the other, in search of such a criminal. He found one who was standing behind the bars in a prison. He decided to make a portrait of that man behind the bars and got the permission from the concerned authorities to do that. So he went in front of the cell of that criminal and spent a few hours daily in drawing the portrait of that man. The criminal asked him: "Why are you making my portrait? What will you do with my portrait?" The artist replied, "Twenty-five years ago I made the portrait of a child who looked like the most innocent child in the world. The portrait won first prize in an exhibition. Now I want to make a portrait of a person who looks like the most hard-core criminal and have been looking for him. Finally I found the man in this prison, and it is you." When the criminal heard this, he started crying and weeping. The artist was surprised to see a criminal crying and weeping, which is very unusual. He asked the criminal the reason for his weeping. The criminal said: "The child whose portrait you had made twenty-five years ago was none other than me." The artist was shocked and said: "How did you, the most innocent child, turn into a hard-core criminal?" The criminal replied: "I fell into bad company."

**Be careful of the company you keep**

*Right now I work in society, but I'm sure that I'm not able to do that kind of job and wonder if my destiny on earth is otherwise.*

Can you live without society? As long as you are in the physical body you are bound to be sharing with others what you have and what they have. You have to be careful and vigilant that you keep the company of those people who live in this world for some higher moral and spiritual values. The realization of such values alone can bring peace to the restless mind of man and bring unity to the people of the world!

***Hypocrisy*****In hypocrisy, the intention is to deceive others**

*What is hypocrisy? How can I recognize if I am a hypocrite?*

Hypocrisy means that you show yourself to others what you are not. For example, you tell others and behave with others as if you are an enlightened person, but you are not. That would be called hypocrisy. Or you are a poor person, but you dress yourself with very expensive clothes to show that you are a rich man. It would be called hypocrisy. In hypocrisy the intention is to deceive others.

*Do you know which is the greatest hindrance in spiritual success? It is hypocrisy. The shadow of a hypocrite sends shivers even in gods.*

*-Spiritual Gems*

## ***Indulgence and Complacency***

### **Complacency in *sāadhanā* shows lack of interest in God-Realization**

*I know that patience is part of the spiritual path. How do I know when I need to have more patience with myself without becoming complacent or lethargic?*

Patience and perseverance are a must in *sāadhanā*, but these should not be confused with complacency. Can you sit relaxed when you are very hungry and your stomach is crying for food? You cannot! You must do something to get food, even beg for food if you cannot get it otherwise. You cannot be complacent. Similarly, if your interest in God-Realization and your zeal for the Truth is deep and intense, you can never be complacent in your *sāadhanā*. Complacency in *sāadhanā* shows the lack of interest for God-Realization.

*What is the difference between being wise and being lazy?*

A lazy person is one who is conscious of his or her problems and limitations but does not try to face those problems and overcome them. He or she is living in a fool's paradise. The wise person is one who is aware of his or her weaknesses and tries to overcome them. He or she does not indulge in day-dreaming, but uses his or her energies in a creative way to be free and happy.

### **Don't become a slave of your mind**

*The pleasure of eating good food keeps our senses alert, but how to avoid it?*

When you taste the inner joy, it is not difficult to give up the pleasure of the senses. Don't you search for sense pleasure? What will you do with that energy if you don't direct it towards the search for God/Truth? It will not let you be at rest. God has given you so many gifts. How do you use them?

Don't become a slave of your mind. Your mind does not obey you when you are weak. Keep in conscious touch with God and you will become stronger and stronger.

*I feel so tired that I don't know how to follow my path.*

How do you become tired? A healthy mind is peaceful, unwavering, and strong; it can resist all sorts of temptations. It is without attachment, hatred, anger, lust, etc., and without doubts. If you cannot give up doubting, doubt your doubts. If you cannot give up desiring, desire to be desireless.

## ***Judgement and Criticism***

### **Everyone is free to think**

*A devotee asked a question to Swamiji. Another devotee became angry at the questioner, telling him, "Such questions should not be asked again and again to Swamiji."*

What has provoked you? If you are provoked, it means you are still far from the Truth. Why do you come here? A person is asking me something, and you have started imposing your ideas on him. He did not ask you anything. No one will listen to you unless someone has faith in you that you are

enlightened. Don't waste your time imposing your ideas on others. By your attitude you only create conflict.

Everyone is free to think. Why should everyone think as you think? Why should you impose your ideas on others? As you are free to think, others are free to think also. He was asking a question to me because he has faith in me and you have started imposing your ideology on him. Is that a right attitude?

People don't come here for debate. Most of them come here to listen to me. Some come only for my *darshan*; some come for doing *sādhanā*. This *āshram* is not made for debates. I myself don't impose my teaching on anyone. I reply only if someone asks me a question, and my answers vary from person to person. I can see that there are many paths.

### **If you cannot stop judging, then judge yourself**

*If someone calls me a bad name, I cannot but react.*

If you are hurt, it is your weakness. If someone says to you that you are a sinner, it hurts you like a bullet. Actually, why should you judge the intention of the other? If you cannot stop judging, then judge yourself. Jesus said that you should not judge, otherwise you will be judged. If you become innocent like a child who does not judge, you will be loved by all. If you become zero, no one can hurt you.

### **Be like a tree**

*I feel easily hurt when someone makes some comments about me. I don't know what is the right attitude. Should I ignore*

*the person who makes the comments or reply to the comments with the risk of hurting in return?*

That is a common question. How not to be perturbed if someone makes remarks which you don't like? Why should your peace depend upon the opinions of others? Ignore those comments. Be like a tree. The tree gives cool shade even to those who hit it with stones.

There is a joke. Someone told a man, "Your wife has become a widow." The man started to weep and weep. On his way home, he met another friend. As he was still weeping, his friend asked him why. He said, "Someone, just now, has announced to me that my wife has become a widow." The friend told him, "But you are not dead. So how can your wife be a widow?" The man reflected a while, understood the point and became pacified. If someone calls me a thief and I have not stolen anything, why should I feel disturbed when I know that I am not a thief? Regular prayer and meditation will give you the inner strength to keep your balance.

### **Are you perfect?**

*How can I not react when I see someone doing something wrong?*

If you see someone doing something wrong, ask yourself, "Have I never done any wrong? Am I free from all weaknesses and infirmities?" When you see your own faults and shortcomings, you won't dare see the shortcomings of others. Why do you expect others to be perfect if you are not perfect yourself and if you cannot make yourself perfect

in spite of all your efforts? If you see someone doing something wrong, don't be offended. Be loving. Guide him or her as a mother guides her child. If you become disturbed by seeing somebody doing something wrong, you are doing a wrong yourself. Keep yourself cool and guide the wrong doer with love and affection.

*How can I avoid useless speech and its bad consequences?*

You cannot stop others from speaking, but you can refuse to listen to them. Instead of reforming others, we should reform ourselves.

### **How to stop negative thoughts about others**

*How do we stop the mind from being filled with feelings of irritation, impatience and uncharitable thoughts?*

Do not identify yourself with your conditioned mind. How do you stop bad thoughts about others? Have you bad thoughts against me? Negative thoughts can either be overcome by positive thoughts, or they subside if you remain a disinterested witness to them. The third method is to reject them.

## ***Illusion and Delusion***

### **The world is not an illusion, it is a delusion**

*You said that the world is not an illusion but a delusion. What is the difference between illusion and delusion?*

Illusion means that a thing does not exist at all. You create it with your own mind. Mind has the power to imagine non-existing things by associating different things which exist in the phenomenal world; for example, a donkey with horns. The donkey exists in the phenomenal world, so also the horns. The mind can associate them and create an imaginary donkey which has horns. Such a donkey is an illusion. Delusion means that you are perceiving something wrongly, owing to your bias or due to some other cause. For example, you dip a rod in a tube full of water; the eyes will show you that the rod is not straight. Or, you are travelling in a moving train and when you look outside, it appears that the trees outside are moving. This is a delusion. Delusion means wrong perception. So the world is not an illusion, it is a delusion. To make things more understandable, the *Vedantins* say that there are three types of existences, or one Existence in three forms:

1. *Pārmārthik sattā*: numenal existence – Godhead or *Brahman*.
2. *Vyāvahārik sattā*: phenomenal existence. The world you see outside has a phenomenal existence.
3. *Pratibhāsik sattā*: the imaginary world as you see in your dreams.

The river you see outside has a phenomenal existence. The river you see in your dreams is imaginary. Numenal existence is the absolute, timeless, everlasting Existence. It is *Brahman* or Godhead. The mountains, rivers, etc. have a phenomenal existence. The physical body has a phenomenal existence. Anything created by the individual mind is imaginary. When you see a river or mountain in your dream, it is imaginary. Were it real, your body would have become wet and your room full of water!

## ***Negative Habits and Vices***

*All intoxicants make your nervous system dull. Why is the use of intoxicants allowed for sâdhus?*

All *sâdhus* do not use them. When you start smoking, after sometime you get addicted and you cannot give it up even if you want to do so. All intoxicants make your nervous system dull and inactive and you forget your tension; it is the same with alcohol. Most people start drinking alcohol when they feel depressed or when they are worried. It helps them forget their worries. But after sometime they become addicted.

### **It requires discipline to overcome habits and thoughts**

*If I see my bad habits, will they disappear? Do we need a guide to purify ourselves?*

Seeing is not doing. Also, it is very difficult because of the association of the mind and *prāṇa* with the Seer. It is not so difficult to know one's habits and thoughts. But to overcome habits and thoughts needs a good deal of discipline and training supplemented with right understanding. Guidance is needed in every field of work.

Thoughts subside when you see them without identifying with them, but habits are not thoughts. Habits are based on impressions in the subconscious. They don't disappear at once because it is not easy to communicate with the subconscious. You have to go very deep in the subconscious in order to root out those impressions.

How are habits formed? They are not formed in a moment or in a day. You do something again and again for months together and then a habit is formed. To root out that habit, it requires time and practice.

## *Nightmares*

### **You have no control over your dreams**

*I often have nightmares and I don't sleep well during the night. After these nightmares, I awake with a very strong throbbing in my heart and a deep feeling of fear. I am afraid of darkness. What can I do to get better? In my youth, my actions were not correct.*

You cannot do anything with nightmares in your dreams because you have no control over your dreams. You can only pray to God when you are awake, that He be merciful and rid you of this suffering during your dreams. When going to sleep at night, you should remember God and go to sleep reciting the holy name of God in which you have deep faith. Should you do it with trust and do it daily and regularly, your problem would gradually disappear. Do not eat too much food at dinner-time. Keep your stomach empty by twenty per cent of its capacity when you go to sleep at night. "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Health is wealth! A person of character means a person of integrity, an honest person whose words, thoughts, and actions are in harmony, one who has control over one's senses and mind.

## ***Self-Importance***

### **Don't start preaching before you have realized God**

*How can one recognize the moment when one should stop solitary and introspective sādhanā and express in society what one has understood?*

One should not stop the *sādhanā* for Self-Realization, whether this *sādhanā* is of solitary and introspective type, or of some other type, unless and until one has realized the Truth/God first-hand. To start preaching or teaching about God before one has realized Him is a distraction and a hindrance to Self-Realization, even more than other mundane preoccupations. If you do so, it may inflate your ego and delude you into thinking that you are a realized one, even if you are not, because of the respect you get from devotees and seekers.

### **To become special is the root cause of suffering.**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

Ninety-nine per cent of persons want to be special and want to be regarded as special. The ways and patterns of becoming special and looking special are different for different persons. It makes me recollect the advice of an old sage given to me forty five years ago. He said, "To become special is the root cause of suffering." To become special is to become separated from others, it delimits you. And limitation is the cause of suffering. Once someone said to Swami Rama Tirtha, "Sir, you are a great one." The Swami smiled and

said, "Please, do not delimit me by calling me great." The *jīva*, the soul is special. There are innumerable souls. Special ones are many. The simple one is one, and one only. Simple means without qualities, *nirguṇa*. There cannot be two *nirguṇa*. The difference between one person and another is owing to qualities.

**"Your cup of tea is already full."**

*How can we hear the voice of God?*

God takes the place of that which is empty. If our hearts are full of words, we cannot hear the voice of God. If one's cup of tea is already full, there is no place for God. There is a Zen story. A professor went to meet a sage. He started speaking, telling what he had understood about life, God and Spirit. He was speaking and speaking. For half an hour, one hour, the sage was silent and listening. In the end, the professor said, "Teach me something." The sage smiled and said, "Your cup of tea is already full. What can I add into it?"

### ***Pain and Suffering***

**Darkness has no positive existence**

*No question. Swamiji writes:*

Some believe that the world is Shiva dancing in ecstasy. Is that right? Then, how would you explain the suffering in the world? The suffering is for the *jīva*. For Shiva there is no suffering. Darkness does not exist for the sun.

*The rays of the sun create shadows, don't they?*

The sun removes the shadow. How does the sun create the shadow? Darkness has no positive existence. Suffering, which is the creation of ignorance, has no positive existence.

### **What is past is past**

*How do we deal with old wounds that give us pain?*

Don't touch the wounds again and again. Apply a balm over them, expose them to light and fresh air, and they will heal in due course of time. It is the same with mental wounds. Apply the balm of divine Love and awareness and be relaxed. Do not scratch them. They will gradually heal. What is past is past. You cannot do anything about it. Regard it as a dream that has passed away. Sometimes the doctor burns the wound to heal it, and you experience more pain in that. But that pain is part of the healing.

### **You suffer as long as you are attached to your body and mind**

*When I see my children suffering, I also suffer. What can I do?*

When you become enlightened, you will not suffer. It is not only the mothers that suffer in the world. Everyone in this world mentally suffers, as long as he is not enlightened. The body of your child is a part of your own body. It is natural that you have the same attachment with that body as you have with your own body. When the attachment with your own body ceases, your attachment with the body of your

children will also cease. You suffer as long as you are attached to your body and mind.

### ***Reading books instead of practising sādhanā***

#### **Realization is not something you learn**

*When reading a book on life and death, many questions came to my mind.*

Don't read so many books; you will become confused. If a book creates doubts in your mind, it is not good to read it. Books are read in order to remove doubts. To read so many books is like walking in a dense forest.

*Should we forget what we have learned from different teachers also?*

I am not a teacher. I don't impose ideas, systems and viewpoints on anyone. A teacher teaches what he has learnt. Realization is not something you learn. If you have really understood, you do not need to learn. There are books and books and books. You can read a new book each day. They will never be finished, but your life will be finished.

## Chapter Seven

### *Aids on the Spiritual Journey*

#### *I. Aids to Meditation & Contemplation*

##### ***Proper Diet***

##### **Meat-eating tends to make your heart deaf and dumb**

*If I am non-vegetarian, will it be a problem for my sādhanā?*

Meat is not a natural food for human beings. The protein in animal meat is not easily digested. Some doctors say that the disease of cancer is proportionally higher with non-vegetarians than with vegetarians.

Non-vegetarian food involves violence. Go to a place where the animals are butchered and your heart will tell you if it is right to kill animals or not! Non-vegetarian people are indirectly involved in killing animals by the butchers. “Why to make your stomach a graveyard by eating animals?” to speak in the words of a Western writer. God has made so many vegetables, grains and fruits to eat! Then what reason is there to kill animals? Meat-eating tends to make your heart deaf and dumb to the sufferings of others and to the wish to alleviate them. In India, non-vegetarian food was recommended for soldiers only.

I was a non-vegetarian till the age of about sixteen or seventeen years. Once I went fishing. A fish was hooked. I pulled it out of the tank. It was thrashing about and trying to get back into the water again. Blood was flowing from its throat. It was panting for life. My heart was moved. I threw the fish back into the water. After that, I never ate any meat, including fish and eggs.

*But Jesus ate fish.*

Can you compare yourself with Jesus? Can you stay on the cross and say to God, “Thy will be done,” and remain happy? Jesus said, “The zeal for the Lord has eaten me up.” Have you ever felt that zeal for God? Have you ever wept for God, in the love of God? Jesus owned no house. He said, “Birds have their nests and the foxes have their dens to live in, but the Son of God has no place to rest.” You said, “Jesus used to eat fish, why not I?” Anyway, I don’t force anyone to be vegetarian. I say what I feel. You may agree with me or not. You are free.

*But will I be able to do sādhanā if I eat meat?*

Why not? You can eat fish and enjoy it and do *sādhanā*. Maybe, by that *sādhanā* your mind will change at a certain stage.

### **Eating meat and drinking wine**

*In France, I was advised to eat meat because my body became too weak.*

Meat is not a good food. The meat proteins are difficult to digest and the meat fat tends to close the arteries of the heart.

Moreover, to digest meat, you have tendency to drink wine also. Many people who are used to meat eating are also used to drinking alcohol. If you become addicted to alcohol, it spoils not only your family life, but you start living in a dream-world and become more and more cut off from reality, not only the absolute Reality but the phenomenal reality also. There is a Persian saying, "In the beginning you drink wine, and in the end wine drinks you." In Islam, drinking alcohol is a taboo.

*To drink half a glass of wine a day is not enough to become alcoholic.*

All those who drink give the same arguments as you are giving to justify their drinking. There is a saying that a person drinks alcohol in order to forget his loneliness or to forget his sorrows. One who is happy does not need to drink. Do you know what Guru Nanak said? "All the ecstasies, which one obtains by drinking alcohol or by using other drugs are lost in the morning (or after some time), but the ecstasy which one gets by the remembrance of the Divine never abates."

*You said that vegetarian food is necessary to follow the spiritual path. What is your reasoning for that viewpoint?*

Non-vegetarian food is not natural for human beings. It makes you aggressive, violent. It is the food of military men.

*Can we say that our mind is influenced by the food we eat?*

If you stop eating food completely, first your body becomes weak, then the senses. Afterwards your mind becomes weak; you lose your memory and thinking power. Every food has its own qualitative effect on the body-mind.

## ***Deep & Conscious Breathing***

**Breathing exercises are as important a part of *sāadhanā* as prayer and meditation**

*Do you recommend breathing exercises?*

The breath is very deeply co-related with the mind. If your breathing is irregular and arrhythmic, it is not possible to calm down your mind. Therefore, breathing exercises are very helpful in *sāadhanā* and are as important a part of *sāadhanā* as prayer and meditation. Well, if you can completely relax your mind with prayer or meditation, your breathing will tend to become rhythmic and regular by itself. At a certain stage, when you can go into deep meditation, the breathing exercises may not be necessary at all. Have you ever noted that when you are full of anger or when your mind is very tense or worried your breathing becomes fast and irregular? Conversely, if you make your breathing regular and slow by an exercise, your mind tends to be calm and quiet. That is the theory behind the practice of *prāṇāyāma*. I don't recommend *prāṇāyāma* to old people or those who have no control in eating, drinking and making merry, those who live without any moral restrictions. *Prāṇāyāma* may be harmful to such people. But the exercise of simple conscious and deep breathing can harm no one.

In the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, it is written that *prāṇāyāma* is helpful in removing the veil of ignorance. The *sūtra*, “*Tatah ksheeyate prakāsh āvaranam,*” says, “By *prāṇāyāma* the veil that covers the light of Consciousness is removed.” *Prāṇāyāma* is one part of the discipline of

*Patanjali Yoga*. All parts of the discipline are interconnected and they are complementary.

### ***Prāṇâyâma* as the main exercise of one's *sādhanā***

*When I do breath retention during prāṇâyâma practice, I often have feelings of panic and fear. How can I overcome this fear?*

In the same way as you should eat a balanced diet for your physical health, similarly, for your spiritual health, your practice should be balanced with regard to meditation, *japa*, breathing exercises, reflection etc. *Prāṇa* is the link between mind and body.

The pattern of movement of *prāṇa* affects the physical body as well as the mind. The movement of breath, the movement of the heart, as also the movement of the mind are very deeply co-related. *Āsanas* and *prāṇâyâma* are parts of the discipline of *rāja yoga*, which help to stop the modifications of the mind. The pattern of breathing is very deeply connected with the pattern of thinking. When you are fearful, the breathing becomes faster and the heartbeat also becomes faster. When you are relaxed, the breathing becomes slow and deep. Inhaling and exhaling rhythmically helps to synchronize and harmonize thoughts.

Retention of breath is not advised for beginners in the practice of *prāṇâyâma*. *Prāṇâyâma* is a technical exercise and must be practised very appropriately and methodically by observing all the rules of dieting, self-control etc. For six months in the beginning, only inhaling and exhaling should be practised regularly and daily without any break. The retention part of *prāṇâyâma* is started only after that.

*I cannot practise prāṇâyâma for seventy or eighty seconds; the maximum I can do is thirty or forty seconds.*

There is no fixed time for inhaling or exhaling. One should not strain very much. If you can inhale for ten seconds, it is all right. The ratio of the period of inhaling the breath, stopping the breath and exhaling the breath is generally recommended to be, 1- 4 -2. That is, you inhale in ten seconds, you should hold the breath for forty seconds and exhale the breath for twenty seconds. There is no need to count the period or seconds. Only observe the rule that the period of exhaling is about double the period of inhaling and that of retaining the breath is about double of exhaling.

In the beginning of *prāṇâyâma* practice, one should not hold the breath. One should only inhale and exhale. I am talking of those who want to practise *prāṇâyâma* as the main exercise of one's *sādhanā*. Then, one should sit for the practice of *prāṇâyâma* four times in the day for half an hour each time. One has to observe many strict rules about diet and about sexual behaviour. Otherwise, *prāṇâyâma* can do more harm than good. But if you want to do only a few *prāṇâyâma* as an aid to meditation, that is a different matter. You can even retain the breath. *Prāṇâyâma* should never be practised with a full stomach.

### **Breathing exercises and self-confidence**

*How can I overcome my shyness and lack of self-confidence?*

Shyness is a cardinal virtue for a woman. Lack of self-confidence is a drawback. It should be overcome. Breathing exercises are very helpful in building up self-confidence.

You should practise conscious deep breathing daily for half an hour early in the morning sitting in the fresh air. Here in the *âshram*, you may sit on the terrace at 5.40 a.m. and practise conscious deep breathing for half an hour. You may synchronize *OM* with the breathing. *OM* has very powerful vibrations, which purify the mind and uplift the soul.

### ***Proper Posture***

#### **Slowly and gradually, increase the time of sitting cross-legged**

*With effort, I can keep my legs folded during meditation. But when I lay down to sleep in the evening, my legs become very agitated and tense.*

Do not sit cross-legged for one hour in meditation. Start sitting cross-legged only fifteen minutes in the beginning. For six months sit regularly, without a break any day, for fifteen minutes. Then, the next three months sit for twenty minutes daily. Then, for the next three months sit for thirty minutes daily. In this way, increase the time of sitting cross-legged without interruption. Slowly and gradually, within two years, if you practise regularly, you will be able to sit cross-legged for one hour without any trouble or pain in your legs. Now, after fifteen minutes change the posture.

My legs were stiffer than yours. There was a time when I could not sit for fifteen minutes cross-legged at a stretch, but with regular practice for a few years, I could sit cross-legged for three hours in one go without pain. At your age it is not difficult. By practice, you can sit cross-legged even for two hours without pain. But it requires patience and regular practice.

As you advance in age, your legs and your whole body become stiffer and stiffer; the joints lose their elasticity more and more. A child's body is very elastic. An older person's body becomes stiff with age.

At the time of death, your body becomes like dried wood. After some hours, when the body becomes cold, you cannot bend it at all. Therefore, where there is no lift, soon after a death, people bring the dead body from the first floor to the ground floor.

### **Should you feel pain, it is better to change the posture**

*When I have physical pain during meditation, is it better to just try to observe the pain, or should I make some adjustment to my position?*

It is true that the pinch of pain is reduced when you observe the pain as a witness. Should you feel pain after some time by sitting in one posture during meditation, it is better to change the posture. But the period of sitting in one posture comfortably during meditation can be increased by regular practice. Moreover, the more you are absorbed in meditation, the longer you will be able to sit in one posture comfortably.

### **Mudras (postures) are correlated with states of mind**

*Sometimes, when I'm in deep concentration during meditation, my head bends towards the back. Why is it so, and what should I do?*

The head can bend when the mind is deeply absorbed in meditation. But with increasing awareness, the body and

head tend to be in a straight position. *Mudrâs* are co-related with states of mind. When you are in a fit of anger, the *mudrâ* of your body changes at once. When the mind is relaxed, the body assumes a different *mudrâ*. The practice of postures is based on this theory. Remain alert and aware during meditation.

## *II. General Aids on the Spiritual Journey*

### ***The Guru or Spiritual Guide***

#### **The true Guru**

*“Guru” literally means, “One who leads from darkness to Light.” What are the Sanskrit roots?*

The true Guru is one who has realized the Divine, who can communicate with all types of seekers of Truth, who can guide them and who has no ego of being a Guru. In *Sanskrit* one root has many meanings. Guru also means the heavy one, implying the one who cannot be moved or influenced by favourable or unfavourable situations. Guru means the one who lights the path of Truth for seekers to follow. Not only that, the Guru takes the hand of the disciple like a mother, and leads him or her to where all paths terminate.

#### **The Guru is like a ladder**

*Is our love for God transferred to the Guru if God and Guru are one?*

God and Guru are one. The difference is that it is very difficult to communicate with God directly, while with your Guru you can communicate easily. The Guru can play the role of God because he has realized his oneness with God on the one hand and he can relate to you on the other hand. The Guru is like a ladder. On one end he is connected with you, on the other end he is connected with God. It is said that a Guru never dies. He is beyond the confines of time and space. He is the “unmoved mover”, as said Aristotle for God. Where and how can He move if He is everywhere? Movement involves time and space. He is timeless and spaceless.

### **The Guru is an instrument in the hands of God**

*You wrote something that is difficult for me to understand: “I can give you my help. I cannot make you receive it.” How can I make myself receptive to your help? The other phrase disturbing me is, “The Guru is a musical instrument. You have to know how to play it.”*

Did I say that “the Guru is a musical instrument; you have to know how to play it?” I would never say that. A true Guru can never be made into an instrument by any man. He is an instrument in the hands of God. To be an instrument in the hands of God means to be completely free, because God is free. You become that to whom you surrender completely. If the Guru becomes your instrument, he will become like you. It is a wrong statement or a statement made as a joke with regard to the fake Gurus.

Yes, the grace of God or of the Guru is always coming to the disciple, just as the light of the sun is available to one

and all sitting here. But if one goes into a room and closes all the windows, he or she will not receive the light of the sun. It is the docility, humility, sincerity, unshakable faith and aspiration arising from the heart of the devotee which enables the seeker to receive grace. If any of these is lacking in the devotee or disciple, he or she is not able to receive the grace of the Guru.

### **Every enlightened person is not necessarily a Guru**

*How may we help our relatives on the path to Realization, even those who have no spiritual inclination, so that they too may find peace?*

If people see you are happy, self-satisfied, peaceful, they will come to you and ask your guidance, because everyone is seeking peace in one way or another. Otherwise no one is going to hear you. If you go back to France and teach your parents, they will laugh at you saying, “See, a small child, teaching his parents!” Teaching is one thing, sharing another. Even a prophet is not listened to by his relatives. There is a saying, “A prophet is not recognized in his own country.” Your relatives see you at the level of their physical relationship with you; therefore, they cannot gain from you, even if you are enlightened. Ved Vyasa *ṛishī* was one of the greatest *ṛishīs* of his time. He is the author of most spiritual texts on Hinduism. But he did not teach his own son, Shukhadeva. He sent his son for guidance to another enlightened person. X may reach the highest state of enlightenment, but Y cannot benefit from it because he always feels that X is his son. Y himself is a devotee of God; he can understand to some extent the state of X. Yet,

to overcome the sense of relationship based on body consciousness is not so easy. To communicate spiritually with a person needs only a spiritual relationship. Communication between two persons takes place only when the space between them is not disturbed. The case of a real Guru is different. He comes down to help his disciples. Every enlightened person cannot be a Guru. A Guru is enlightened, no doubt, but he is something more: he has the ability to come down to communicate with ordinary people without losing contact with the Divine. He is like an *Avatāra*, you may say. You can understand it by an example. There is a professor with a doctorate in mathematics, a highly qualified person. Do you think he could teach mathematics to the students of first class standard in a nursery? It would be very difficult for him. Can you imagine Einstein coming to the Bengali colony (a community of poor people living in the vicinity of the *âshram*) and teaching physics to the children there? He would have to be able to become child-like in order to teach the children. Well, it is only an example to explain what I wrote before, that every enlightened person cannot be a Guru.

### **In Realization the servant and the Master become one**

*Ātmā or the Self is said to be the most important Guru and once it is available, we do not need any other Guru. How does the Ātmā work as a Guru? How can it solve our problems?*

How many people can communicate with their *Ātmā*? “*Ātmā* is the Light of all lights,” say the *Upaniṣhads*. If you can

communicate with your *Ātmā*, you don't need guidance from anyone. But the question is "how to bell the cat?" (i.e. how to perform an impossibly difficult task?) *Ātmā* is just an empty word for many people, which does not stir anything in them when they hear it or say it.

*Is the Guru God Himself or is He God's servant?*

A Guru who is a realized one is God functioning as a Guru. In Realization the servant and the Master become one. The lover and the Beloved merge into each other.

### **The choice of your mind is generally wrong**

*How can we find the true Guru?*

The way to find the *Satguru* is similar to the way you find the Divine. How would you judge that the Guru you are going to have is enlightened and realized? Your mind is full of conflicts and doubts. With such a mind, it is not possible to choose a *Satguru*. The choice of such a mind is generally wrong.

You should try to purify your mind, according to the injunctions laid out in the holy and revealed Scriptures and pray to God that he enables you to meet an enlightened one. Don't be in a hurry. Go to different saints and sages, listen to them and try to feel the vibrations in their company.

### **The love for your Guru draws you more and more to God**

*You said, "God and Guru are one. The difference is that it is difficult to communicate with God directly, while with your*

*Guru you can easily communicate.” So, if we cannot love God, we can or should love the Guru. But isn’t it dangerous? I am afraid of attachment. I don’t want to fall into that trap.*

The Guru is the embodiment of divine Consciousness. When you love your Guru, you do not love his/her physical body, but the divine Consciousness expressed through that body. What is the trap in which you don’t want to fall? The Guru’s presence and your love for your Guru draw you more and more to God. Are you afraid of God? God’s love frees you from all sufferings. Even human love, if there is no selfishness in it, is purifying. I am afraid you are confusing love with attachment. Love makes you free, attachment binds you.

### **Your Master is always with you**

*I felt so much pain after the death of my Master. I was with him for thirty-three years and for the past year I have been lost. What can I do?*

Masters do not die. The Master means, “The one who has realized timeless Consciousness”. When the body of the Master dies, it is the last residue of his *karma* which is destroyed. Moreover, it is not so important how you die. What is most important is how you live. Your Master is always with you. Feel his presence in your heart and you will receive the same love and light from him as you received when he was in the physical body. When the master sheds his mortal sheath, his relationship with his devotees is not broken. He keeps on guiding his devotees, even more forcefully, if the devotees keep themselves open to him.

*Yvan gave me initiation to his mantra. Unfortunately he is no more. So, now I don't know if I should continue my sādhanā alone or if I should try to find another guide.*

You should follow the teachings of your Guru with complete faith and trust. The best way to pay tribute to your Guru and to serve your Guru is to practise whole-heartedly the *sādhanā* which he has taught you.

### **The main spirit of initiation**

*Do initiations used in many spiritual practices have any value if a Guru (preceptor, initiator) uses them for non-spiritual purposes (e.g. for material gains)?*

You know, there are so many approaches, so many paths to discover the Truth. The seeker cannot decide himself or herself what path he or she should follow. He takes up one path, follows it for some time and then gives it up and follows another path. He reads so many books, so many philosophies. Initiation means that he is set by the Guru on one path, which he must follow with the spirit of “do or die”.

In India, initiation was never sold or given with any self-interest by the Guru. The Guru, who has realized the Truth, or who is far advanced in spirituality on the basis of his spiritual experiences, initiates the seeker on one path, according to the competence of the seeker. This was the main spirit of initiation. It has been misused by many self-seeking teachers these days with the result that many people have started resisting initiation. If you find advertisements in newspapers or certain magazines declaring that initiation is a must for everybody, it is for commercial purposes.

## **Through initiation, you inherit spiritual wealth**

*What are the advantages of initiation?*

One advantage of initiation is that you get something in inheritance also. A man works hard, earns some money and then invests it in some big project to become affluent. Another man inherits some wealth from his parents and then invests it and works hard, increasing the wealth. The first is like the *sādhaka* who has not been initiated. The second is like the one who has been initiated.

One sage gave a parable. A rich father gave a big amount of money to each of his two sons and told them to go and start some work with that amount and be self-dependent. One went and gambled, lived a very luxurious life, without doing work, with the result that he frittered away what had been given to him and became a pauper. The other son invested the amount intelligently and worked hard, becoming a multibillionaire. This is how inherited wealth can be increased or frittered away. It is true for spiritual wealth or worldly wealth. It is only an example, and examples are not perfect in every respect. There are other advantages of initiation as well. But everything also has its negative side. If you misuse your initiation or turn it into a business, then you go down and down. You can become a yoga teacher if you know something about yoga, but there are persons who don't know the ABC of spirituality and are Gurus in India.

If a right man uses wrong means, the wrong means work in a right way. But if a wrong man uses right means, the right means work in a wrong way. So first, be a right

man. With fire you can cook your food, but with fire you can also set someone's house on fire.

*Lately, a few enlightened Masters seem to have behaved exactly like ordinary people: lying to students, taking their money indecently, exploiting them sexually etc. How is it possible that enlightened Masters behave like this?*

Persons with such qualities are not enlightened Masters at all. No revealed Scripture in the world would refer to them as enlightened Masters. They are, in fact, masters of words and can hypnotize the people with their oratory and intellectual scholarship. They are very well informed, but in practice, they are as unsatisfied and unfulfilled within as ordinary people.

**No real Guru will say, “Come and get initiated from me.”**

*If I had the bad luck to have been initiated in Reiki by a Guru whose motives were not spiritual, would I really be empowered to heal people using the healing energy?*

You have been initiated into Reiki. You should tell us whether you have the power to heal others. Have you healed anyone? If you can heal others, it is very nice to do so. Serve others selflessly. I don't think it has anything to do with Self-Realization or God-Realization. No real Guru will say, “Come and get initiated from me.” He may even refuse to give you initiation if he feels that you don't deserve it. It is the seeker who feels that he needs guidance and goes to the Guru, requesting initiation.

*What should I do so that I can become your disciple in the true sense?*

A disciple in the true sense is the person who follows the discipline that his/her Master has instructed.

*What is the difference between a devotee and a disciple?*

A devotee is only a devotee. A disciple is both, a disciple as well as a devotee. The disciple is related to the Master. It is a special spiritual relationship between two people. Devotee means one who is devoted to someone, even though he/she may not feel that the relationship is that of a Master and disciple.

## ***Balanced Living***

### **A disciple saves and conserves energy**

*Does keeping oneself busy with an organized day, such as working, playing sports, laughing, singing etcetera, prevent the mind from going inward? Or, can this be integrated with spirituality?*

A disciplined life with organized day-to-day activities can be helpful to go inward. Discipline saves and conserves energy that you can use for constructive purposes. You can use that energy for your spiritual upliftment. Gandhiji said: "Discipline is to disorder what bulwarks are to storms and floods." It is like taming the floodwaters of a river and using that water for constructive purposes.

## ***Reading Holy Scriptures and Spiritual Books***

### **Books tell you to eat the mangoes**

*How long should we read spiritual books?*

Till you assimilate the teaching completely. In the words of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, “Some go to the mango orchard and count the mangoes. Others go there and eat the mangoes.” The books tell you to eat the mangoes, what else do they tell you? If you are reading and reading the virtues of eating mangoes and do not eat them, what is the use of reading the books? The *sādhaka* should read the books that inspire him/her to sit in meditation and remember God more and more.

Do not read too many books. You will become confused if you do so. Read only those books which inspire you in your *sādhanā*. Read the lives of great saints and sages, and of holy and inspired ones. Read the life of Jesus again and again and follow his teachings completely in their letter and spirit. Read Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi, how they lived, what they did to realize the Truth.

### **Scriptures are the map of the kingdom of God**

*To what extent is the knowledge of the Scriptures useful for the spiritual seeker?*

This knowledge is like seeing the map of Paris. If you know the map of Paris, you can go there and find any place in that city. The knowledge of the Scriptures is like that. Scriptures are the maps of the kingdom of God. But, by only seeing

and reading the map of the kingdom of God, you do not really see or enter that kingdom. It gives you only second-hand knowledge. It does not give you the first-hand experience. It is useful only if you follow the guidelines given in the Scriptures for the direct experience of what you have read or heard.

There are so many paths, and there may even be so many ways of expressing a single path. I am not saying that one cannot find out the Truth without reading books. I don't think Jesus had read so many books. Ramana Maharshi did not read many books. Ramakrishna Paramahansa did not! Truth or God is hidden within you. If you turn your attention within, and go deep within, you can discover the Divine without reading any book. I don't think there is a need of reading so many books. Read only those books which inspire you to remember the Divine, or which inspire you to go deep within. Otherwise it will be like seeing the maps of France printed by so many different presses. The scales given in different maps of one country may be different. It may confuse you if you read them superficially.

Reading spiritual books is like reading the menu of a delicious meal. But some people start to eat the menu. That is a wrong and negative attitude.

### **Listen, reflect and meditate upon the spiritual teachings**

*How does one assimilate the teachings of the sages?*

Very simple! You assimilate the teachings of the sages in a similar way as you digest your food. While eating you should not gobble up the food very quickly. Eat slowly, making full

use of your teeth, don't make your stomach do the work of your teeth. Listen to the teaching very attentively. Then, reflect again and again upon what you have heard in the day and then meditate upon it deeply. This is called *shravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* in the language of *Vedānta*. Follow the first part of the *Vedānta* discipline — that is, dispassion, control of senses, control of mind, etc. — earnestly and sincerely. Don't make the spiritual teaching only an intellectual exercise. Moreover, do not read or listen too much. It may cause confusion, as when you eat too much, it may cause you indigestion.

### **Real understanding makes you satisfied and fulfilled**

*I keep myself in borrowed knowledge and I feel unsatisfied.  
Please Swamiji, help me to go deeper.*

People only read or speak about the *Gurubani*. Some understand its intellectual meaning, but that is not real understanding. When real understanding comes, it transforms the mind and fills one with the joy which begets no desire, no regrets, no seeking.

There are professors who teach the *Vedas* and *Vedānta* in the colleges to post-graduate students. There are so-called *jñānīs* who teach the students in the colleges. But if you go near them, you will find they are as miserable as ordinary persons, full of desires, attachments, hatred, anger, greed, etc. They have not really understood the *Vedas* and *Vedānta* or the *Gurubani*. Real understanding makes you satisfied and fulfilled. That is true understanding. It can come even to an illiterate person who has not read any book.

## ***Peace and Silence***

*Swamiji, what is silence for you?*

For me, silence is not a *sâdhanâ*. For me, silence is not an austerity. There was a time when I was not speaking, nor writing, nor meeting anyone for many years. There is no motive now behind my not speaking. I am not practising silence.

### **The source of peace and joy**

*When I'm here or in the âshram of Arnaud Desjardins, I feel my heart open and I become able to give and to receive, but it is not lasting. How to keep my heart always open?*

Avoid what closes your heart. It is true that one can receive only when the heart is open. It is easier to keep one's heart open at some places and in certain situations. But you have to gradually reach that point where your peace does not depend on any outward condition. That will be possible only when you have discovered that the source of all peace and joy is within, and you can remain aware of and united with this source. Go more and more deeply within yourself. It is possible only through daily and regular meditation.

Anything received from outside does not become our own unless we assimilate it. If we don't assimilate it, it will leave us sooner or later. We may eat a lot of food, but only that part of it which we digest and assimilate becomes transformed into our body-mind energy.

*My doubts don't allow me to become peaceful. Sometimes I feel I believe in God and sometimes I don't believe in God.*

Restlessness is created by the conflict between faith and doubt, by the conflict between hope and despair. There is no peace in “becoming”, in becoming anything, even the king of the whole world. The source of peace and joy is Being. Being is the real Self, is Waheguru. Waheguru is a holy name of God. Becoming is the world.

### **There can be no Bliss without peace**

*Can you tell us the meaning of “OM shantih, shantih, shantih OM?” Does it include the feeling of Bliss?*

OM is the mystical word which symbolizes all aspects of the Divine. Its vibrations are very, very powerful to evoke the divinity present in all beings and things. *Shantih* means peace.

“OM shantih, shantih, shantih OM” is a *mantra* by and through which the prayer is made to God for the world peace as well as for the peace of the individual who recites this *mantra*.

Well, there can be no Bliss without peace. Bliss is a more positive word. Peace can be defined as negation of tension, disturbance. Bliss is a positive experience. Bliss is *Ānanda* and peace is *shantih*. Bliss is synonymous with absolute Consciousness and absolute Existence. There is one word used for them. It is *Satchidānanda*.

*Since I came near you, I feel a deep peace in me.*

Maintain this inner silence. Live in it more and more. Truth is revealed in complete inner silence. Your actions reflect your inner state. When you are silent within, your actions become non-violent, harmonious, full of love and goodwill,

disinterested and selfless. There is a saying in *Sanskrit*: “*maunam svakriti lakshanam.*” – “Silence is the sign of acceptance.”

### **Silence can only be achieved by giving up desires**

*Can you please explain why you are keeping silence?*

This question has been answered many times. There is no motive behind my silence. Silence which is observed with some motive is no silence at all. Silence can only be achieved by giving up all motives and desires.

I had started observing silence forty-four years ago as a part of my *sāadhanā*, but slowly and gradually I fell in love with it. Silence in its consummation is always motiveless, like love. Everything comes out of silence and goes back into silence. Silence is the essential Nature of Being.

*To live in solitude, does it help to control the mind?*

Solitude means living quietly at a place which is solitary without external noises and disturbances. But, if you are mentally disturbed, living in such a place becomes more disturbing and painful. When you are disturbed you are not silent at all. There is a silence which is observed as a part of *sāadhanā*. It is with motive, and it is useful. The holy Scriptures have recommended it. That silence is a part of the discipline for controlling your senses and mind.

A seeker went to a sage and said, “You know what question is in my mind. I will not tell it to you by speaking. Please, answer my question.” The sage said, “All right, I’ll

give you the answer without speaking. Please, listen to it in your heart carefully.” And the sage remained silent...

*Should we keep silence to make the best use of our mind during daily life?*

First, practise silence of mind during meditation. If your mind does not remain silent when you are meditating with closed eyes in a closed room, how can it remain silent in active life?

### **Silence as *sāadhanā* and spontaneous silence**

*How important is silence on the spiritual path?*

Speech is one of the means of communication with others. Silence is the most efficacious means of communicating with yourself. Do you need to speak when you want to go within and communicate with yourself? Silence is the state of Fulfilment in which “why, what, how, if, and but” all cease.

*I am interested in silence. How to become silent?*

When you don't want to speak, silence comes by itself. When do you not want to speak? You don't speak when you realize that it is not important to speak. There is a silence which is a part of *sāadhanā*. It is an exercise for self-control. Self-control is indispensable on the path that leads to Self-Realization. One who cannot control his speech cannot control his senses and mind. Control of one's thoughts is an essential prerequisite of spiritual unfoldment.

There is a silence which is spontaneous and motiveless. It is the sign of Fulfilment. It is a sign of desirelessness.

When a pot is empty and you pour water into it, it makes noise. When it is full, it stops making noise. It is an example, but no example is perfect. The import is that motiveless silence is the sign of desirelessness or Fulfilment. Ramakrishna used to give another example. You fry something on fire; for example you fry butter. It makes a noise. When it is completely done and fried, it stops making a noise. If you put something which is not cooked in that fried hot butter, like a raw potato, it again makes a noise. When that thing becomes cooked, the noise is again stopped. That noise is from the uncooked potato and not from the fried butter.

### **Silence means to remain completely relaxed**

*When I feel I'm not bringing enough happiness to my surrounding, I sit silently. Is it correct to do so?*

A happy person alone can bring happiness to the fellow beings around him or her. Sitting silently and quietly enables you to recognize your essential Being and be happy without any reason.

*Can you explain this sentence, "Silence is neither good nor bad. It transcends the pairs of opposites."*

What has been written is the explanation. Silence is possible only when your mind stops reacting, when it maintains equanimity. You live as if you are not; you are living as a dead person! Silence, in practice, means "let go." Silence means to remain completely relaxed.

*In meditation, I can reach a certain state of silence. But there is still someone watching. How to “let go” of this watchman?*

Keep on watching that silence during meditation. You cannot stop the watching. The non-polar state is one in which the Knower, the known and the knowledge become one. It happens by itself.

### **It is the silence of mind that is of paramount importance**

*What are the different levels of austerity in the practice of mauna, starting from not speaking, but communicating through writing and gesture, to the most austere level, which is to shut oneself away in a hut or a cave?*

Silence of speech is not complete silence, nor is shutting oneself away in a hut or a cave complete austerity. Silence of speech, should it be practised sincerely, is a part of *sāadhanā* to make the mind silent. It is silence of the mind that is of paramount importance for Self-Realization. Speaking may be necessary for some persons to communicate with others. How can speech help you when you want to communicate with yourself? Through speech you express yourself; you go out, as it were. Silence is to be excommunicated from others, to come inward, as it were. Communication with others through words is very superficial. Deep communication between two persons happens only when the space between them is not disturbed, when they are in harmony and have mutual trust. It is easy to communicate with simple persons. For complex ones,

who are full of words and ready-made beliefs, it is not easy to communicate.

*Is it very difficult at times to stay in silence? When you want to communicate some deep joy, or when you are disturbed, how do you share that? What is the most profound thing or experience you've learned in the silence?*

I enjoy silence and do not feel any difficulty at any time to stay in silence. Speech is not the only way of communication. Silence is a more powerful means of communication. The most profound thing I have experienced in the silence is silence.

## ***Pilgrimage***

### **God is more manifest at certain places or in certain persons**

*What is a wise and skilful way to approach holy or powerful places, holy men, auspicious occasions or any other "external spiritual boosters"?*

God is one and He is omnipresent. But He is not manifest in the same degree in all places and all beings. There are certain places and certain persons in whom God's Power, Awareness, Light, Peace, Bliss are more manifest than in others. That is what makes the difference between Jesus and you, or between Mecca or Jerusalem and Paris.

Take the example of fire. Fire is present even in a stone, but the stone does not burn your hand; you cannot cook your food on a stone unless the fire hidden in the stone is first made manifest. It is true that at certain places or in certain persons, the divine presence is more manifest. The

other thing is the capacity of the perceiver to feel the presence of God in a particular thing or person. If your force of perception is very strong, it can penetrate all layers of matter and you can feel the presence of God even in a stone.

A place, thing or word which has been used/worshipped as a symbol of God or God's presence by millions of people for thousands and thousands of years, with faith and trust, becomes alive or charged with divine vibrations. Not only that, if a thing is worshipped as a symbol of God, even by a single person who has very strong faith and perfect concentration, even for a few years, that symbol starts reflecting the power and presence of God. And if you go near it, even if you are a non-believer, you will become a believer. That power or presence which is felt there is not the creation of the perceiver. In modern psychology this phenomenon is called second-hand objectivity.

### **The nearest pilgrimage place is the heart**

*Can you suggest some spiritual places of significance, other than the Golden Temple, in Punjab and Haryana?*

Every place is a spiritual place. And the nearest pilgrimage place is the heart. Some places are more spiritually vibrant. The Golden Temple is one of them. You can feel that vibration if your heart is open. But some people do fight in the Golden Temple also, like in Jerusalem. These days, security guards are protecting the places of God. Even some *mahātmās* (saints) have their own security guards. Someone told me that one *mahātmā* gives spiritual discourses standing inside a bulletproof glass cabin!

## ***God Oriented Family Life***

### **Do everything in the name of God, for pleasing God**

*I am a family woman and I'm committed to my family. What is the right way to live a proper family life and to maintain the life of a seeker at the same time?*

Family life, if lived properly, is not an obstacle on the path of Realization. Ninety-five percent of the *Vedic r̥ishis* who achieved the Revelation were householders.

*The obstacle is not my family, but my attachment to my family. So what should I do?*

If the whole family is committed to God-Realization, it is easier to realize God for a family person than a recluse.

If you are a non-doer, where does the question of attachment arise? If you are non-doer, you are beyond all relationships. Unless you reach the state of being a non-doer, do everything in the name of God. You are washing utensils here in the *âshram* daily. Why cannot you do it in your home with the same spirit? Are you doing it here with love or with attachment? You do it here for pleasing God. Why can't you do the same in your home, for pleasing God?

### **Live as co-travellers on the path of Realization**

*Swamiji, is my present relationship with a woman compatible with spiritual life?*

Spirituality is not against such relationships, provided the latter are accepted with the mutual understanding of living as co-travellers on the path of Realization of the Truth. But, if you go into such a relationship for the sake of seeking sensual pleasures, then you are not a seeker of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is within, of the lasting happiness, which comes from the Realization of God or Self-Realization.

*For you, what are the true values to live in harmony as a couple?*

For me, you know, no problem! I am alone. God has possessed me. He does not suffer me to be with anyone else other than Him.

Anyway, for you, the harmony as a couple is possible only when both partners are completely loyal to each other. Doubts, lack of mutual trust and lack of love spoil the harmony between the couple. If their love is based only on passion, it is sure to end up sooner or later in disaster. Passions do not last long. True and selfless love is the panacea of all disharmonies created in a couple. Love knows it is necessary to make sacrifices, it is complete in itself.

### **Human relationships can help you in your spiritual progress**

*I feel much love for someone who came into my life. I consider this relationship as God's grace and as a necessary part of my evolution. But, at the same time, it takes much of my energy. I would like to give more attention to the Divine. I am disappointed that I don't miss God with as much intensity as I love my partner! Nevertheless, I remember*

*God with gratefulness for this human love. But should I be more detached?*

There is some confusion, some contradiction in what you have written. On the one hand, you say that someone came in your life, you see it as God's grace and you take the relationship as necessary for your evolution. Then why should you be disappointed? You should be grateful to God for that. Sit down in meditation daily and express your gratitude to God for that. Human relationships, things, situations, activities, when accepted in the name of God, become the means to remember the Divine and can help you in your spiritual progress.

**If the life-partners are both seekers of Truth, it is easier to realize the Truth**

*Inside myself I feel the heavy weight of my ancestors and my history. Till now, I couldn't imagine a life-partner who did not belong to my tradition. Nowadays, I am asking only if he is a seeker. Isn't this enough?*

The conditioning is there. But there is something in us that is not conditioned. In and through the conditioning also, one can realize one's true and essential Being. What is needed is the deep interest of discovering one's true Being. Yes, if life-partners are both seekers of Truth, it is far easier for both of them to realize the Truth. The seeker of Truth may be of any religious tradition. All religions, if followed in their right perspective, can unite the soul with God.

## ***Parents and Children***

### **To rear the child properly is the most appropriate work for the mother**

*Nowadays many women have to work and they cannot be with their children as much as they wish. How can we give them the right education?*

The heart of a child is like a clean slate. You write many things on his slate. When you tell him not to tell a lie, because of his innocence, he does not know what a lie means. In the subconscious of the baby, there are many things, but only a few things become manifest by the company of his parents. In olden days, the parents were the Guru of the child up to the age of seven years. Now, it is up to the age of three years or so. The mothers go to attend Parliament, leaving the child in the nursery. There was a cartoon in the newspaper. A father is giving a bath to his two-year-old son, saying to someone, that the child's mother has gone to attend Parliament. To rear the child properly is the most appropriate work for the mother. In this world, mother's love is the deepest love, the most unselfish. The children are not so much attached to the mother as the mother is attached to them.

*Nowadays, even the mother's love has become selfish. I can see with my own mother that she dealt with me according to her own desires and weaknesses.*

I have seen an instance of a mother caring for her daughter so much. The daughter is mentally retarded and does not recognize her mother. For the last twenty-five years, the mother has been taking total care of her. What is her self-

interest? Your mother can expect many things from you. But what can a mother expect from her daughter who is mentally retarded and does not even recognize her? The mother is a mother, whether she is Indian or Greek or American.

**One should maintain a loving relationship with all the members of his family**

*What sort of relationship should a seeker maintain with the family into which he is born? How to handle the emotional outbursts of parents, especially of one's mother? If visiting such mothers upsets our rhythm of life, should we refrain from doing so?*

If the seeker is a family person, she/he should maintain a loving relationship with all the members of his family, according to the tradition of his family. A *sannyâsî* is not supposed to maintain any relationship with his family. *Sannyâsa* is regarded as a new birth.

According to Hindus, mother and father should be regarded and respected as God. They are the instruments of creating the bodies of their children. So long as one is identified with the body, it is quite proper for one to treat one's parents with love and respect as one would love and respect God. In the *Vedas* there are verses in this regard.

***Right Livelihood***

**You have to follow certain moral and ethical codes of conduct while earning your living**

*How to avoid the power of society, which is so strong?*

Seek and live in the company of those who live for the higher values of life, who are sincere seekers of Truth, and regularly read inspiring books about saints and sages. This is the easiest way of avoiding the bad influence of society.

*I have to keep contact with this society through the work I am doing to earn my livelihood, so what should I do?*

Well, no saint or sage asks you to stop earning your livelihood honestly. There are so many seekers and saints in the world who are householders. They earn their living and they also sit regularly in prayer and meditation. You have to follow certain moral and ethical codes of conduct while earning your living. It will not be difficult for you to do so if you have deep aspiration to realize the Truth or to realize the Divine. Reflect daily and regularly on the impermanent and transient nature of the world of time. It will help you cultivate dispassion and enable you to avoid the traps.

### **Import of a right profession**

*Why do animals suffer? Will the owner of a poultry farm be responsible for the killing of birds, though he only raises them and sells them for the customers?*

The suffering of animals is not mental. Their suffering is limited only to the physical sensations. It is due to their association with their physical bodies. Yes, the owner of a poultry farm is responsible for the killing of the birds. Practising a right profession is one of the codes which the seeker of Truth must follow.

## ***Rituals***

### **Different ways of remembering the Divine**

*What do you think of ritual worship like pūjā, or ārati?*

*Pūjā, ārati, pilgrimage, japa, yajñā, meditation, reading of holy Scriptures, plus service to the poor and needy in the name of God etc., are the different ways of remembering the Divine. Which way do you prefer?*

### **Only realized ones can remember the Divine without the help of any symbol**

*Is not the worship of God through symbols only imagination?*

The worship of God, whom you have not seen and whom you do not know, cannot be done without symbols. The symbol may be a name, a form, a person or anything. Those who say they do not worship through symbols are wrong. Only the enlightened or realized ones can remember the Divine without the help of any symbol.

Worshipping with the help of a symbol does not mean just worshipping a stone, or a person, or a *devatā*; it is the Divine which is worshipped through these symbols. It is called *pratīk upāsana*. The symbol may be a stone, a Guru or *devatā* or any symbol. The Divine is present in everything and every being and He can be invoked in anything or any person. There is a *mantra* in the *Upaniṣhads* which says that before the mind reaches anywhere, the *Ātmā* is already there. The *Ātmā* is faster than the mind. The *Ātmā* is the fastest, yet at the same time it is unmoving.

## ***Repentance***

### **The soul can grow through repentance for its past *karmas***

*Do the Vedantic Scriptures talk about repentance and if they do, what do they say about it? Can sincere repentance rub out or change karma?*

The *Vedantic* Scriptures mostly talk about absolute Existence, *Brahman* and its essential Nature. Repentance is talked about in that part of the Scriptures which is related to the nature of *karmas* and their fruits. Repentance is necessary for bringing a radical change in the attitude of the doer. It can surely mitigate the effect of *karma*. *Karma* in itself is insentient. It does not know what is right or wrong, good or bad. It is God who determines the fruit of a *karma* and the soul is forced to reap the fruits of the *karmas*. But the purpose is the growth of the soul through experience and learning. The soul can grow by reflection, through repentance for its past *karmas* and experiences. That is what nature wanted to give to the soul by punishing it. Therefore, the effect of *karma* is mitigated. Repentance purifies and teaches you more effectively than punishment can do.

### **How to wipe out the effect of sins on the mind**

*The human being commits sins both intentionally and unintentionally. Does confession and non-repetition of sins, along with nāma japa, completely wipe out the effects of the past sins? If so, before whom is the confession to be made?*

Confession, deep from the heart, not only as a ritual, sincere repentance, invoking the benign forgiveness of the Divine

and the heartiest resolve not to repeat one's sins do wipe out completely the effect of sins on the mind of the sinner. It is so, even though the effect has already gone down to the physical body.

*Should we feel guilty for our mistakes?*

If you don't feel guilt for your mistake, how will you improve? If you justify your weaknesses, it becomes your second nature. Guilt means that you feel that you have done something wrong. If you don't acknowledge your weaknesses how will you remove them?

### ***Old age: An Opportunity***

**Now, look to Him**

*I am just retired. It gives me the opportunity to spend more time with my husband, children and grandchildren. But should I dedicate more time to my spiritual practice rather than to my family?*

Now you should dedicate your life more to God than to anything else. You have seen everything in your life. What do you want to see or experience more in the life of relationships? It is better you give up attachment to the objects of senses, which promise peace and satisfaction, but never fulfil. You must have learnt this from your own experiences if you have lived a life of alertness and reflection. God is the most loving. He loves you more than your husband, lover, or children, etc. Look to Him, now. Give Him a chance in your life, now.

## ***Brahmachārya***

**The same energy that becomes desire becomes love for God**

*What does brahmachārya mean?*

*Brahmachārya* means to transform all of one's desires into love for God. There are many forms of desire: the desire for comforts (it includes the desire for money and wealth), the desire for power, the desire for name and fame, sexual desire, and so on. The desire to live is the most fundamental. The sexual energy is the lowest form of energy in a human being. The energy is one. The same energy which becomes desire also becomes love for God.

All spiritual *sādhanā* is meant to transform desires into love/knowledge of God, which alone makes man truly free. Sex and sexuality are not exactly the same thing. Animals have sex, but they are not sexual. They have sex at particular periods according to the natural law. There is a law and if you break it, you have to suffer in one way or the other. This law is not only with regard to sex, but works on many levels: on the physical body, on the *prāṇa*, on the mind, etc. There are also physical laws.

*How should I proceed to transform the sexual desire/energy into love for God?*

The more interested you become in God, the less the worldly desires can overpower you. Love the Divine with your whole heart. This is the practical way of transforming the sexual energy into love for God. But it may take you a long time. You are a married person. Cooperate with your wife. She is a spiritually-minded person. She will help you to tame and

overcome your sexual desire and transform it into the love for God. She is deeply devoted to God.

*Since so many years, I have been doing my best to overcome this difficulty, but without success. What should I do?*

You are not a married person, you will have to do much more practice. A Sufi saint came to Rabia, a lady saint from Basra (Iraq) and said, “Rabia why don’t you get married?” She replied, “I have surrendered my mind-body totally to God. How can one marry if one has no body?” Even if it is difficult, does it mean that you should not try?

## ***Sannyâsa***

### **Definition of the *sannyâsî***

*How would you define a sannyâsî?*

In the *Gītā*, there is a *shloka* giving the definition of a *sannyâsî*, “The one who does not desire, who does not hate anyone, who maintains the sense of equanimity between pain and pleasure and between friend and foe is a *sannyâsî*.”

### **One can take *sannyâsa* at any stage of one’s life**

*What does it mean to be a sannyâsî? Can one take sannyâsa at any stage of one’s spiritual development or does one have to be a spiritually mature person?*

The interpretation of the meaning of *sannyâsa* changes from time to time. In former days a *sannyâsî* was one who had

renounced the world, who would live like a recluse and devote himself or herself exclusively to God-Realization. Nowadays, a *sannyāsī* is expected to work for the upliftment of society, both materially and spiritually, even if he or she has not realized God. To live and work for God-Realization or salvation is taken to be selfishness.

It is true that renouncing the world when one does not have complete inner detachment and dispassion does not bring peace, freedom and happiness. On the contrary, it creates more complexes in one's mind and brings misery. One can take *sannyāsa* at any stage of one's life, provided one is possessed with dispassion and a sincere aspiration to realize the Divine.

## *Spirituality and Society*

### **If individuals change, society changes**

*Do some societies help individuals grow?*

Who makes the society? The individuals! If individuals change, society changes. There have been individuals in society who left such a great impact that the society changed its course and direction. Jesus was such a person. You may not be able to change society, but you can change yourself. There have been great saints and sages in the West, also. Greece has produced great men like Socrates and Aristotle, Pythagoras, etc. Some political systems are conducive for the spiritual progress of the individual; some are not. In the West, you are free to choose your path.

*When you follow a spiritual path, often you become socially isolated.*

Why should the seeker of Truth be a social person? The seeker of Truth aspires to be accepted by God. He/she does not aspire to be accepted by society.

### **The income must balance the expenditure**

*I have a quest for God and I wish to go deeper into meditation by withdrawing myself from my busy work life. But there is a pull on the other side: society is in need of me and it is my duty to serve the society I belong to. But if I continue to work only, I can't find time for meditation. What should I do?*

Serving the society for the sake of society is one thing, but to serve the society as a part of your *sāadhanā* to realize the timeless Reality is different. There is no contradiction between service and meditation. They are complementary. As a matter of fact selfless service is not possible without a good deal of meditation. What you receive in meditation, you can give to society in the form of service. The income must balance the expenditure.

It reminds me of Lord Jesus. He was in total retreat on a mountain, devoting Himself completely to the remembrance of the Divine. After that he came down and mixed with the people. He felt, as it were, a lowering of the level of consciousness, as if something had been taken away from him. If you want to take a drowning person out of a lake, your own feet must be on a hard rock.

## ***Âshram life***

### **Active life and passivity both can be made useful**

*What is best: to follow the life of this âshram, or to live alone in a cave?*

A balanced life is most conducive for spiritual development. Wherever you live, be alert and live like a *sādhaka*. Active life and passivity both can be made useful for one's spiritual development. Such virtues as humility, tolerance, speaking softly, etc., are related with others, and they can be cultivated or developed only by living with others with the motive of cultivating these virtues. You cannot cultivate them by living alone in a hut. The *âshram* is like a commune in which *sādhakas* live. The goal of all of them is the same, which is to realize God. Everyone in the *âshram* should try to cultivate the above mentioned virtues which are expected from everyone living in the *âshram*. Then, the *sādhanā* will be much easier in an *âshram* than in society where people do not even know what they are living for. Not all of them are living for higher values of life.

To live alone is helpful for going inward, but if you live in a hut, you have to live there like a *sādhaka*. Otherwise, there will be no use of the hut for your spiritual development. Someone came to me today and said that he wanted to meditate alone in his room and not come to the 9 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. sessions of meditation. I said to him, "No, I would like you to sit in meditation for at least four hours a day. In your room, you may be sleeping or doing something else. Moreover, there are sixteen hours more left for you to sit in your room and meditate alone. If you don't want to spend

four hours, how would you spend all the day in God-remembrance? Rules are necessary for those who have not reached the state of *parābhakti*, those for whom God-remembrance has not become spontaneous or those who enjoy the meditation so much that they cannot do anything else than meditation. Why should you not sit for meditation in the hall?”

Living alone is useful for the *sādhaka* if he or she spends most of the time in *sādhanā*/meditation while living alone. Otherwise, it is of no use. It depends upon the person how much he or she can make use of that solitude for his spiritual development.

**“Please treat the *âshram* and everything in it with love, care and respect”**

*In the entrance of the meditation hall, there is a sentence on the wall, “The âshram is the body of the Guru. Please treat the âshram and everything in it with love, care and respect.” Is only the âshram the body of the Guru? Should we not be treating everything, everywhere as the body of the Guru, as the body of God?*

Many people/devotees staying in the *âshram* do not care for its cleanliness, and they do not take proper care of the articles kept in the rooms. In every room, two glasses and one steel jug are kept. After a month or so they are not found in the room. People bring them down and don’t put them back again. Even chairs are missing from the rooms, and some people take the room keys with them when they leave the

*âshram*. Therefore, this instruction had to be written in the *âshram*. It was suggested by a devotee of Swami Muktanandaji of Ganeshpuri near Bombay, who had been staying for long periods in different *âshrams* and is quite acquainted with the habit of people coming to stay in the *âshrams*. He said that this instruction written in some *âshrams* had a positive and good effect. Devotees have reverence and respect for the Guru. If they don't follow this dictum when staying in the *âshram* near the Guru, how would they do it everywhere? It is not only written in front of the meditation hall, but at two or three other places.

We should also remember that everything has its supporting deity or *devatâ*. If you don't use a thing properly, it is showing disrespect to that deity. That thing will not like to stay with you; it will tend to leave you sooner than later. Give due care to everything and use it properly.

## Chapter Eight

### *Metaphysical Matters*

#### ***General concepts***

**If you rise above reasoning, it is the greatest victory**

*A few days ago, we spoke about reason and love. I would like to deepen my understanding.*

Reason is the faculty which makes a human being superior to animals. It has to be used and exercised in order to differentiate between right and wrong, between good and bad. Right reasoning can lead to dispassion. But, as far as the direct experience of Truth, the Divine, the One without a second is concerned, reasoning has no role at all. It has to be transcended, either through Love for the Divine, or through the practice of yoga or through meditation.

*I have reflected a lot and come to the conclusion that only through reasoning I can free myself from all my difficulties.*

Well, if you can transcend reason by reason, that is very good. Usually, at a certain stage, reasoning starts working in a circle. Even in *Vedānta*, which starts with reasoning, the first step, *viveka*, that is right reasoning, ends up in

*nididhyāsana*, which is a kind of meditation on a single conclusive thought, *Brahmākār vritti*. This step is reached not only by reasoning, but by meditation supplemented with discipline. You know very well the seven fold path of the system of *Vedānta*. In the path of love or *bhakti*, reasoning plays a very subordinate part or no part at all. The *bhaktas*, devotees of God, don't want *mukti*; it is *mukti* which runs after the *bhaktas* and wants and requests them to be accepted! *Mukti* is the shadow of *bhakti*. When you attain *bhakti*, you get *mukti* as a *jhūngā* (bonus).

Actually there is no end to “Why?” If you try to remove your doubts by reasoning, you end up becoming a philosopher. Philosophy and spirituality are as apart as heaven and earth. True love alone has the power to remove doubts.

I used to put many philosophical and metaphysical questions to saints and sages. In the metaphysical system of *Vedānta*, there is a metaphysical term “*māyā*” and the *Vedantins* say that *māyā* is indescribable; it is neither real nor unreal, according to them. Can you understand something that is neither real, nor unreal? I had put the question to a very old and high saint, “What is *māyā*?” He tried to convince me through argumentation, but I continued to refute all his arguments. Finally, he smiled and said, “That with which you are obsessed at this time is *māyā*. ‘Why, how, if, but’ – all this is *māyā*.”

But maybe it is good to reflect until we see the limits of reasoning and come to the conclusion that we don't know. Then we can do nothing but surrender. Surrender is a very wrong word. If you rise above the reasoning and doubting mind, it is the greatest victory. Self-surrender is not a defeat.

It is a victory over the ego. True love is the most efficient means of getting rid of the ego. I mean true LOVE! Unfortunately, people confound love with fighting, with imposition, with demand, with complaints, with desire, with expectation, etc. True love abhors all these.

### ***The Law of Karma***

#### **Who has made your destiny?**

*Should we try to have some control over our destiny or should we say that “what should happen will happen”?*

Destiny does not fall from the sky. Who has made your destiny? Your own *karmas*! And still you are creating new *karmas*. You have not stopped creating your destiny. You are still creating your destiny. Nothing in this world is static. Everything is changing. Only the *Ātmā* is unchangeable because It is infinite.

#### **Proof of the law of *karma***

*How are we to believe that we will be reborn after death?*

A blind person cannot be convinced by argumentation about the existence of the sun. What he or she needs is an operation on his or her eyes. The law of cause and effect is universally accepted without any dispute. What we call the law of *karma* is actually the law of cause and effect. What you sow, you must reap. If a man sows the seeds of wheat, can he ever reap the fruit in the form of rice? What reason can be given

for the suffering of a child when it has not done anything wrong in this life? You can infer from this example that the soul of the child must have done something wrong in its previous lives. Proof is of three kinds:

1. Direct proof: You can see your past lives in *samādhi*, if you want to do it.
2. Inference (by argumentation): You can infer that there was a past life and there will be a future life as well.
3. Words (testimony): There are some children who remember their past lives until a certain age. They tell you about it. A *ṛiṣhi*, who can see into the past or into the future, can tell you. You have to believe in his words. Have you seen your great-great grandfather? You only believe the words of your father or your grandfather about what your great-great grandfather did.

*Could you tell us more about God's laws?*

All the laws of nature are God's laws. The law of cause and effect, which is the corollary of the law of *karma*, is the greatest law working in the world of time. The law is, "As you sow, so shall you reap." The law is that whatever you give to others, it comes back to you manifold. If you give pain to others, it comes back to you manifold and if you give comfort to others, it will also come back to you manifold.

### ***Sañchita Karma and Prârabdha Karma***

*It took a long time before I began to follow a spiritual path. I was living without God and at times my actions were wrong. What will be its consequences on my future lives?*

The effect of actions that have not yet started bearing fruits can be destroyed. Such actions are called *sañchita karmas*. Their effect, which is in the form of impressions in the subconscious mind, can be destroyed through sincere repentance, through making a resolve not to make the same mistakes again, through prayer and cultivation of noble and divine thoughts. Should one become enlightened and realize one's timeless and divine Spirit, all such accumulated impressions are burnt. "*Jñāna agni dagdha karmanam*," says Lord Krishna in the *Gītā*. It means, "The fire of spiritual knowledge burns such *karmas*."

There are some *karmas* which are called *prârabdha karma*, which can be vaguely translated as fate. They are like the arrow which has been let off from the bow and cannot be brought back. The fruit of such actions has to be reaped; it cannot be destroyed. The physical body you have got is the result of your past *karmas* called *prârabdha*. There is very little scope for changing it. Can you make your height eight feet?

*Is it due to prârabdha karma that we take birth in such and such a family?*

A strong *prârabdha* is defined as that in which you don't have to think, and you don't have to make any effort to get something or devise any plans. At the time of birth, anything one gets is surely the fruit of one's past *karmas*. But a person aged sixty years cannot say that whatever he/she is getting is due to his/her past life *karmas*. Life is not made only by past *karmas*, but also by present *karmas*. Now, how does one recognize if something is *prârabdha* or a desire begotten by wrong company and wrong behaviour?

Well, *karmas* have nothing to do with the Spirit. They can influence the body and the mind only. The Spirit is beyond all *karmas* and their influences. Very few can have the direct experience of the timeless Spirit and be established in It.

**If you sow a seed of wheat, you get the fruit of wheat**

*I read that we should not expect any result from our actions?*

If you get the fruit anyway, then why think of the fruit? Moreover, if you are thinking of the fruit while doing the *karma*, you cannot do the action with a total mind. Also, you don't want all of the resulting fruit, but you only want the favourable fruit. Very few people can perform action with alertness. Most people work like a machine. Their action is not completely free. Therefore, they are not free to get its result according to what they wish.

Most people act in a state of emotion or in a state of inebriation. They don't know if they are doing good or bad. It is like sowing seeds in a state of intoxication. You may sow a seed of wheat thinking that you are sowing the seed of corn, but when the fruit of wheat comes, you become angry and think that injustice has been done to you. You can sow the wrong seed, but nature cannot make a mistake.

*Sometimes we feel we're doing right actions, but they produce a wrong effect...*

According to you it was a good action, but if the action was truly good, the result would have also been good. This is the law of *karma*. Moreover, the seed does not give fruit

instantly. It germinates, then it becomes a plant, and then a fruit. Sometimes you mistake the fruit of one action with the other because you cannot relate the seed to the fruit. Only the action of an enlightened person bears instant fruit. Actually, he does not sow a seed. His *karma* is the expression of his joy. In his case, the seed and fruit are the same.

*You said that we will receive ten times the result of our bad karmas. Is it true for the good karmas also?*

It depends how you sow the seed and how the seed is nourished. The crop can be increased or decreased. But a seed of wheat will bear the fruit of wheat. These days genetic engineering is doing a lot of research to increase the crop of grains. And there is a spiritual genetic engineering, also, to increase the quality of your *karma* in order to get a multiple spiritual crop.

*I feel afraid of the future, of the consequences of my past karmas.*

There is something in you which transcends the past and the future. By becoming aware of it, you can transcend the past. *Karma* does not mean that you are a machine and helpless. *Karma* means that you are responsible for your *karmas*.

*Karma* does not mean fatalism. It means you have relative freedom. What you sow, you must reap, sooner or later. You may reap the fruit in this life or in some other life. You don't get the fruit instantly. If a thief commits a theft today, he may be imprisoned after one year. It is not necessary that he gets the fruit instantly.

**Who is responsible?**

*If we reflect on the basis of the law of karma, can we say that everything happens by God's will through the working of his laws?*

The law of *karma* says that you are free to sow the seed, but you are obliged to reap the fruit. When someone dies, you go and console the relatives and say, "It is the will of God." But when someone gets married, or a baby is born to someone, you don't go and say, "It is the will of God." It is as if God is only the Destroyer.

A baby is born blind, who is responsible for it? The baby? Its parents? Society? God? Who? I think that all are responsible, the child, the parents, society and God also. If God solely makes one child born very healthy and the other a blind child, then His justice can be challenged.

**Performing karma is like sowing a seed**

*It is said that the main effect of our previous bad karmas is a hindrance to our spiritual progress and that the secondary effect is pain and suffering. Is it true? Can the ill effect be reduced? If so, how?*

The effect of bad *karmas*, whether they have been done in the past or are being done now, is what is called bondage. *Karmas* force the soul to take birth again and again. Performing *karma* is like sowing a seed. More often than not, the fruit, the crop, is reaped in the future lives. As far as the hindrance in our spiritual progress is concerned, even

the good *karmas* can hinder the progress if the good *karmas* are done for the gratification of one's ego. Spiritual Realization is not the fruit of good *karmas*, even though the *karmas* performed with the right attitude are indirectly helpful to one's spiritual progress.

Suffering cannot be avoided completely so long as one is in the physical body. Otherwise, how can painful diseases, from which some great sages suffered, be explained? The physical body has its own limitations which the saints and sinners both have to bear.

Yes, the effect of past *karmas* can be reduced. The effect is felt by the mind. If the mind is strong and illumined, it can remain detached in pain or pleasure. Prayer, meditation and breathing exercises make the mind strong.

### **The fruits of our past *karmas***

*Is it necessary that a baby with good karma be born to good parents with a healthy body and in a loving environment?*

Certainly, yes. We get our physical body, parents and the conditions in which we are born according to the fruits of our past *karmas*, the fruits ordained by God according to our past *karmas*. The *karmas* themselves are insentient. It is God who confers the fruits of *karmas*. But you are free to make good use of what you have or what has been given to you. That is why you are responsible for your present *karmas*. Even a person who has favourable conditions and a very healthy body due to his/her past *karmas* can misuse what has been given to him/her. Haven't you seen how some people have healthy bodies, yet they misuse them?

**The law of *karma* does not teach fatalism**

*I am moved by what one of your devotees told us about the attitude of his wife facing suffering for many years. In order to be faithful to the law of karma, she refused to take any medicine to soothe her pains. Could you tell us more about the Hindu tradition towards sickness and pain?*

No one can accept pain joyfully because pain is not the essential Nature of human beings. But if you cannot get rid of pain, you have to compromise with it in order to be peaceful mentally. Then you accept it as a result of your *karma* or as the will of God and try to learn from the painful situation. The Hindu tradition has developed its medical system and also other systems to get rid of pain and suffering. The law of *karma* does not tell you to stop taking medicine if you are sick. The law of *karma* does not teach fatalism. It teaches you to do right actions. If you are hungry, should you accept the pain of hunger, taking it to be the result of your past *karma*? Pain or sickness is caused by breaking some laws on the physical or mental level.

**God works in this world on many levels**

*How does the law of karma work?*

You are bound by *karma*, God is not bound by *karma*. He is beyond the law of cause and effect. He can work through the law, or He can sometimes work transcendently. You can understand it by an example: your mind influences your physical body, or say matter, in so many ways. It can influence your physical body through emotions. It can act

on your body wilfully and consciously. And it does influence your body when it is in the super-conscious state. Similarly, God works in this world on many levels. Sometimes, you see some miracles to which no law of nature applies. A child can fall from the eighth storey of a building and survive. You may say it was impossible. God saved the child!

*If God is so powerful, why doesn't He uplift all the poor people and those who are in the lower planes?*

He is doing it. He is doing it very intelligently, not as you want.

**You cannot be neutral in everything as long as you are in mental consciousness**

*If everything is due to God's will, why has God created the law of karma?*

*Karma* is insentient. *Karma* does not know whether an action is good or bad. It is God who gives you the fruit according to your *karma*.

*Is it possible to see the fruit of karma and not judge it as good or bad?*

Why not! There is good or bad for you so long as you wilfully do a *karma*, so long as you are a doer, so long as you live in mental consciousness. There is another dimension of life in which you transcend mental consciousness. Then good and bad cease for you.

*By feeling neutral, do we avoid creating new karmas?*

To remain completely neutral is not possible so long as you are in mental consciousness. You may be neutral in a particular event, but not in everything. X does not believe in her weakness. She says everything is the will of God. So the question of removing weaknesses does not arise for her.

### **What is important is what you are in the present**

*Is it possible for a man to become a woman in his next life or vice versa?*

Have you ever become a woman in your dreams? It is very, very rare that a woman becomes a man or a man becomes a woman in their dreams. The same is true of birth. It is very, very rare that a man becomes a woman or vice versa in the next birth.

*An astrologer from Bombay told me that I was a young boy in my previous life who drowned himself and that I will know why this time I took birth in the West as a woman.*

Well, no proof! He could have said that you were the Prime Minister of England in your previous birth. What you were in the past or you will be in the future is not so important. What is important is what you are in the present! Your future will be bright if you live your present nicely and make good use of all your energies. Your future is going to be miserable if you make wrong use of your energies in the present. You cannot do anything with your past. You cannot do anything directly with your future. The past had a great role in making your present and your present has a great role in making your future.

*Why is it so rare to change gender from one birth to the next?*

It is rare that the gender of a person is changed in the next life because persons are so deeply identified with their genders and their minds during this lifetime. But if someone is fed up with his gender in this life and is very much desirous of having the opposite gender in the next life and if his *karmas* are according to what he/she wants, he may get his gender changed. It is God who gives to the soul the body and its environment according to the *karmas* and deep impressions of the soul. There is the law of *karma*. God is above this law. Your mind influences your body through desires, emotions and actions, voluntary or involuntary. But your mind can act on your body through *samādhi* also. Similarly, God works in the world through the law of cause and effect, or transcendently. But the latter is rare.

**It is your choice if you want to be born and die again and again, and go on suffering**

*Can you give more details why we should not feel that we are the doer?*

When you do something, you are sowing a seed. You have to reap the fruit of your *karma*, whether you want that fruit or not. This is justice. Therefore, it is said, “As you sow, so shall you reap.” If you sow the seeds of wheat, you get wheat as fruit; if you sow the seeds of corn, you get corn as fruit. What is not clear in it? There is nothing wrong in it. You go on sowing the seeds and getting the fruits. It is a vicious

circle. When you sow the seeds, you don't get the fruit immediately. You create so many *karmas* in life that you have to take birth again and again to work out the fruit of those *karmas*. So, you are wandering in the vicious cycle of birth and death. If you like it, it is your choice, but birth has its own suffering; the body has its own limitations and you can never be totally free of suffering while in the physical body. So, it is your choice if you want to be born and die again and again and go on suffering.

*What you have explained does not fit with what I have understood from my Master.*

You should have faith and trust in your Master and follow his teachings. Perhaps, you have not understood his teaching rightly. Does he ask you to go on creating new *karmas* and wandering in the vicious cycle of birth and death? If you ask me about *karmas*, I talk about *karmas*. Have you not asked me about the doer? Can there be a doer without doing or without *karma*? The definition of *karma* is given very clearly in the *Gītā* which says, “*Karma* involves three things:

1. The doer;
2. The activity done by the doer;
3. The means with which the doer performs the activity.”

**If one commits a wrong action it affects the whole universe**

*How do individual and collective karmas work?*

Individual *karmas* and collective *karmas* are deeply connected since the individual and society are deeply

connected. *Karma* is individual as well as collective. Even in this life, the *karma* of one person influences the lives of other people who are closely connected with that person. In a family, or even in an institution, if one commits a wrong action or even thinks a bad thought, it affects the family, the institution and the universe more or less. If your father becomes the president of France, it will affect your life in many ways, even when you are in India.

There are three types of *karmas*: *prârabdha karma*, *sañchita karma* and *vartamâna karma*. The effect of *sañchita karmas* can surely be destroyed. The effect of *prârabdha karmas* cannot usually be destroyed by the *jīva*, but the Lord can destroy that also. Surrender your *karmas* to the Lord.

### **The timeless Spirit is beyond the law of *karma***

*The mind is subject to the law of karma, so how do we escape it?*

*Karma* and *akarma* are essentially one. It is the mind which separates them. In the *Gītā*, there is a *shloka*, which says, “One who sees the *karma* in *akarma*, and the *akarma* in *karma*, is a *yogî*.”

The law of *karma* applies to the world of time. The timeless Spirit is beyond the law of *karma*. There is no birth and death for the Spirit. Birth and death belong only to the body. If you can deny the body, you can also deny birth and death. Can you deny the body? Mind separates the timeless and temporal, and mind is also the link between the two. This statement is like the statement, “Mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation also.” The mind

has to be tamed and used for one's spiritual progress to a certain point. After that it has to be told "goodbye and thank you."

*I read in some Scriptures that no karma can be wiped out.*

If you have been creating *karmas* all your life, you have been also working out the past *karmas*. Earning and spending go on together and your credit is more, otherwise you would have been born as a buffalo.

### **What you had achieved spiritually is not lost**

*Is it true that we may not get a human life in the next birth?*

Yes, a seeker can get into any other body temporarily to exhaust or work out some particular *karma* or *sanskāra*. But it is a temporary arrangement devised by the Divine. What you had achieved spiritually is not lost by going into another body for some time. When you take the human form again, you start to move on the spiritual path from where you had left when you were in the human form previously.

### **The *karmas* of the soul cease to exist only when it attains Realization**

*Can we stop the karmas?*

The *karmas* of the soul as well as the soul itself cease to exist only when the soul realizes its essential, divine Nature. As water mixes with water, in liberation the soul is merged into *Brahman*.

We have three bodies:

1. The physical body;
2. The astral, mental, subtle or *prāṇic* body;
3. The causal body.

If you don't want to be separated from the physical body, how will you achieve liberation? But committing suicide is not the way. You get another inferior body if you commit suicide. It is not so difficult to get separated from your body. It is very, very difficult to get separated from your mind.

*At the time of dissolution of the universe, what happens to the soul?*

In dissolution, all souls and their *karmas* are not destroyed. They are absorbed into *Brahmā*, the creator. The souls come up again in the next cycle and are given the status according to their *karmas*. You can compare the dissolution of the universe with the deep sleep state of the Creator.

## ***Body-Mind***

*God gave you a mind, because you wanted it. Give it back to God and you will be free from all responsibilities.*

### **The physical body is the soul's vehicle**

*What is the right relationship with the physical body?*

The physical body is to the soul what a vehicle is to its owner.

*Is the physical body intelligent?*

No, the physical body has no intelligence, as a vehicle has no intelligence, even if some systems working in the vehicle may be computerized.

*You said the body has no intelligence. But what about the claim (in psychology) that the body has a memory?*

It has a memory like that of a computer. But you don't say that a computer is intelligent.

*Does the ego disappear when the physical body disappears?*

No, the ego does not disappear with the death of the physical body. The ego disappears with Realization, in the sense that the realized one is not used by the ego.

*When we have physical pain, who suffers?*

When there is physical pain, it is the soul which suffers.

*Is the physical body the reflection of the soul?*

The physical body is the vehicle, like a car. The soul is the owner of this vehicle. The vehicle should be well maintained. Otherwise, it is not easy to travel. But don't say, "I am the body." If the owner of the car says, "I am the car" you will say he/she is stupid. *Ātmā* is the Substance (the Reality). The physical body is the shadow. The shadow has no independent existence. Your physical body is the creation of God. Your dream body is your own creation. You, as an individual soul, create your dream body. The mind is only an instrument of the soul.

**Don't confuse the driver of the car with the car**

*Is it important to feel that I am unique as a soul?*

Are you the physical body? Who is thinking? Who is speaking? Is it your physical body which is speaking or thinking? Reflect over it again and again, so that you may not confuse the driver of the car with the car. If you are able to disidentify yourself from your body, more than fifty percent of your problems will be solved. And if you can cease to identify yourself with your mind, all the remaining problems will disappear. When you are identified with the physical body you cannot feel what is called divine Love.

*Is it possible not to be identified with the mind even if we don't reach the state of no-thought during meditation?*

If you can see your mind, why can't you cease to identify yourself with your mind? When you are able to see your mind as you see a table or a chair, it is very easy to be detached from your mind. You can also see your body as an object. You can see your mind also as an object. You can see the mind as different from the body; Self-verification is the highest proof. The existence of the mind being separate from the physical body can be inferred also. During meditation observe your thoughts as a witness. This practice will weaken your attachment to your mind.

**You have to purify and harmonize your different bodies**

*I always have a lot of questions in my mind. I wonder why, and also whether it is useful to ask them?*

There is no end to questions. An answer to a question may satisfy the intellect and yet the person may not be satisfied, because a person is not only the reasoning faculty. A person has so many limbs. The intellect may accept an answer and the heart may not. The intellect and heart both may accept, but the *prāṇa* may not. The intellect, the heart and the *prāṇa*, all of them may accept, but the body may not.

*I cannot understand why it is so difficult to get rid of the mind or go beyond it, though we know it is creating most of our problems.*

What are you? At the moment, you are only the body/mind. You do not know first-hand if you are something beyond the body-mind. You are always dealing with it in your wakeful state and in your dreaming state. All your other associations are made through your body-mind. It is the most difficult task to disassociate yourself from your mind or go beyond it. First of all, you should try to purify your body-mind, instead of trying to go beyond it. It can be done through discipline and right understanding. The purified body-mind reflects a higher consciousness through which you can gradually transcend the mind and body consciousness. A purified and steady mind is a means of Self-Realization. An impure mind is an obstacle.

*Does the personality come with the soul in every incarnation? Have we to purify them both at the same time?*

The soul is the central being. Have you ever known yourself as separate from the physical body? Knowing it intellectually is not enough.

The being supporting the physical body is called *annamaya Puruṣha*. The being supporting the vital force is called the *prāṇamaya Puruṣha*. The being supporting the mind is called the *manomaya Puruṣha*. All of them live in your body. The *annamaya Puruṣha* always wants to be at rest. The *prāṇamaya Puruṣha* always wants to be doing something and the *manomaya Puruṣha* always wants to be thinking about something. You have to purify them and harmonize them. You can do it only if you are above all of them. You cannot integrate them if you are identified with them. Complete harmony among them is necessary for God-Realization.

### **The astral body and the physical body**

*Someone told me that these days some very sensitive and sophisticated cameras have been made which can take a photograph of our astral body. Is it true?*

A photographer took a photograph of someone. When he developed the negative, there were two forms in the photo, one sitting in the chair and one standing behind that form. Much research was made about that, and they came to the conclusion that the form standing behind was that of the astral body of that man. The psychic body and the astral body of a person have exactly the same form as the physical body of that person. In your dream state, you move, walk and work with your psychic body, which is of the same form as that of your physical body.

*Can the astral body go far from the physical body? And can we be aware of the astral and psychic bodies? Can we use*

*the astral body on our spiritual path? What is the connection between these bodies?*

Yes, the astral body can go far, but the link is not broken; the link is broken only in death. The connection remains so long as you are alive. It is possible for you to be aware, but you are not. Not everybody uses even one's physical body for spiritual purposes. These bodies are interacting with one another, just as your physical body and mind are interacting with each other.

*Can we be conscious of their interaction?*

You are not conscious of their interaction, but the interaction is taking place. You are not aware of your breathing all the time, but the pattern of your breathing is influencing not only your physical body, but also your mind. That is why *prāṇāyāma* is an exercise which can help you in your *sādhanā*, in purifying your mind.

### **Different energies of the human body**

*I have learned that the mind is an energy field. Do you agree? Does it differ from prāṇa? What is the relationship between these two energies?*

The whole universe is an ocean of energy. In that ocean, there are so many vortexes. A vortex of energy creates a centre. Every centre of energy has its energy field. The individual mind is a centre of energy with its specific energy field. Ego, intellect, thinking faculty, and the five senses of knowledge are different forms of the mind. *Prāṇa* is also energy but of a different vibration. It is the life force. The

difference between all these energies is not of kind, but only of vibration. Basically there is no difference between the objects, the senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego.

Mind, ego, and intellect are the different names of the same energy with different frequencies. It is the same with the different senses. All are made of matter. Matter itself is energy. Mind is a rarefied matter. Intellect is a more rarefied energy than the mind. Ego is the most rarefied matter. Energy/matter is the manifestation of Consciousness. Consciousness is the fundamental Principle, which means Godhead.

*Is this same energy you are mentioning dependent on the physical body? What does it become during and after death?*

Energy is not dependent upon the physical body or matter. It is rather the other way around. The physical body is dependent upon energy. This energy is in the form of *prāṇa* and mind. When the *prāṇa* and mind go out of the body, it disintegrates or dies. Desire, emotions, thoughts etc. are modifications of the mind. The aspiration for the Divine becomes manifest in the mind which is pure. Modern science says that matter and energy are not two things. Matter can be transformed into energy and vice versa. Even the mind and the physical body are not absolutely different. Were they absolutely different, they would not interact at all. What do you feel? Are your body and your mind the same thing? Are you the physical body?

**The root of all types of attachments is body consciousness**

*Is it not true that people who stay too long at one place may become attached to that place?*

Everyone has to live somewhere! All attachments to situations, things and persons are born of the attachment to one's physical body. So long as the attachment to the physical body is there, the attachment to things, persons and situations cannot be removed or even avoided.

*With the development of these new technologies, such as the internet etc., my feeling is that all barriers can be removed. What do you say about it?*

The root of all those barriers is body consciousness. How can websites, etc., remove your body consciousness and the barriers? People will be using these means to expand their religions and sectarian ideologies, when already there is enough competition going on in this respect.

### **Use your body to discover the Truth**

*Is enjoying wearing nice clothes the same as those men who spend their Sundays washing and polishing their car?*

Wearing nice clothes on your body is like covering your car with a good tarpaulin to protect it from sun and rain, and washing your body is like polishing your car. Eating food is like putting fuel in your car. The car is to be used for travelling. If you wash your car daily, polish it, put it in the garage and don't use it at all, or you use the car for going and committing a robbery, then this is disuse or misuse of your car. Similarly, if you nourish your body and don't use it as a means to discover the Truth, or you use it only for sensual pleasures, then it is not the best use of the body.

**Attraction to the world splits the mind. Love for God unites the mind.**

*There is one part of me which wishes and prays daily to be established in the Divine and be protected from indulging in sensual pleasures. But there is another part of me, which in practical life sways me to enjoy sensual pleasures. There is also a third part, which feels guilt and nags me for having indulged. How can I overcome the second and third part, and be established only in the first?*

The mind is split in many parts, and there is no harmony between these parts. One part wants one thing, the second part another thing and so on. The life of a person having such a split mind is like a cart that is being pulled in many directions at the same time. When such a condition becomes very acute and intense, the person loses consistency in all matters and is termed as a psychologically disturbed person who has lost his/her balance. To a certain extent, every ordinary person has a split mind and when a certain limit is crossed he/she is termed as schizophrenic. Attraction to the world splits the mind. Love for God unites the mind. It is so because the world is heterogeneous and the Divine is One. If you are thinking always of the world, the mind cannot become united.

In the heart, the fighting between opposite thoughts and emotions is also going on. Very few hearts are quiet and relaxed. In one moment, you want to become a *sannyâsî*. In the next moment, you want to become a king. The mind is split! In one moment, you behave as if you are the boss. The very next moment, you may behave like a lamb. You have so many faces!

**Every state of mind has its peculiar effect on the body and vice-versa**

*When I start to meditate, deep breathes come from inside spontaneously and I don't know what to do with them.*

Does it disturb you? Do you feel pain when it comes up? Why do you want it not to happen? During meditation, if the meditation is very deep, the body may react. Sometimes, some part of the body may revolt. But if the seeker keeps himself or herself quiet, the reaction or the result gradually stops.

Body and mind are not different in kind; they interact with each other. Every state of mind has its peculiar effect on the body and vice-versa. When you are very angry, your face becomes red, the eyes assume a different appearance, the body may start trembling. When the mind is in the state of love, the body tends to assume a different posture, the tensions in the body subside, and so on. The change in the body affects the mind also. That is the theory behind the practice of the *mudrās* and postures of the body. Proper postures and *mudrās* tune up the mind. The way of breathing and the states of mind are more deeply connected than the states of the body and the mind. *Prāṇa* is the link between body and mind. Therefore, *prāṇāyāma* is also a part of yoga.

**Transformation of the physical body is more difficult than mental transformation**

*It seems there is some correlation between tensions in the body and the agitation of the mind. Is the cleaning of the receiver-emitter effective or is it only a change on the level*

*of consciousness? Is the dissolution of the cage happening because the level of energy rises under the pressure of concentration? And how do we explain the reappearing of the cage after a moment, with the same intensity?*

The state of mind does influence the state of the body. Agitation and tension in the mind adversely affect the physical body. Changes in the physical body also influence the mind. That is why disciplining the physical body is recommended for successful meditation. Transformation of the physical body is more difficult than transformation of the mind. It is so because the mind is more flexible. The cleansing of the receiver implies transformation of body/mind.

The dissolution of the cage happens not because of the raising of the level of energy, but because of the raising of the level of consciousness. Concentration raises the level of energy; relaxation raises the level of consciousness. The cage reappears because the seeds of ignorance and desire are not completely burnt. The consummation of concentration can also lead to relaxation.

**The beauty you see in nature depends on the state of your mind**

*Has a man who has achieved dispassion risen above all passions, positive as well as negative? By positive passion I mean love for the beauty of nature and human art. Do you enjoy such beauty?*

The beauty of nature has no independent existence. The beauty of the divine Self is absolute, that is the difference.

The beauty you see in nature depends on the state of your mind. The villagers who live in mountains and forests do not enjoy the beauty of those mountains. They come down to the plains and cities to earn their bread to eat. Do you think a starving person can feel or enjoy the beauty of nature? An enlightened person can enjoy spiritual Bliss even if he or she is starving.

Nature has no independent existence. Earthquakes, floods, storms, hurricanes are also natural phenomena. Can you enjoy them? We were in Hong-Kong last year. There was a big storm, which could have turned into a hurricane. All people remained indoors, closed all the doors and windows of their houses. No one dared to come out and enjoy the storm.

### **Only the things belonging to the same state interact**

*What exactly is the relationship between a dream and physical reality?*

In a dream, you create everything, but you are not aware of this fact. So, if you see a snake in a dream you start running away from it; you are not aware that it is your own creation. The same principle of ignorance that is working in the dream state is working in the wakeful state as well. You would say that the water you see in a dream is not real because it does not make your bed sheet wet. It is so because the bed sheet belongs to the wakeful state and that water is the water of the dream state. Only the things belonging to the same state interact. If you are thirsty in your dream, the water bottle standing beside you on the table, near your bed, is useless because it does not belong to the dream state.

Normally, the things of the dreamland are useful only in the dreamland. But occasionally the things of the dreamland can also interact with something which belongs to the wakeful state. For example, you see a tiger in the dream. The fear you feel in the dream may be so intense that your physical body may start trembling. Why is it so? Because both states are the states of the same mind. There is no absolute difference between what you experience in the dream and what you experience in the wakeful state. God is always there with you, but it is of no use to you because you are dreaming.

### **Different states of mind**

*How does the mind distinguish between this and that? To obtain samādhī, do we have to practise dhyāna?*

The mind divides. The intellect unifies. The differentiation between things, persons, and situations is created by the mind. The mind is like a prism. When the light passes through a prism, it is split into many colours. In the same way, the one Existence is felt or perceived as manifold through the mind. The mind has to be transcended in order to realize the Divine. *Dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhī* are the progressive steps to go beyond the mind and realize the One.

*When I am dreaming, as soon as I wake up, I am aware that there is a change. If I consider that my life takes place in a sort of dreaming state, what will happen if and when I wake up from this dream? Will my consciousness change and everything else remain the same? Shall I still need to sit in satsaṅg?*

Dream consciousness and wakeful consciousness are two different states of the same consciousness. When you go into a dream, the level of your consciousness changes. When you wake up from a dream, the level of your consciousness again changes. What we call the wakeful state is really not the state of enlightenment. Perhaps you are asking if someone becomes enlightened, will he again need *satsaṅga*? Well, when you become enlightened, will you be eating food or not? Will you be breathing or not? When you become enlightened, whatever you do is spontaneous. Your actions don't originate from desire. The consciousness which changes is not the real Consciousness. It is the mind which changes. The states called the dreaming state, the wakeful state and the deep sleep state are states of mind. Then, who becomes enlightened? It is the soul which is in ignorance, and it is the soul which becomes enlightened.

### **Mind has many varieties**

*Could you please explain the universal mind and the higher mind? What is their relationship with what we call the mind?*

Everything in the world of name and form is energy. This ocean of energy has innumerable vortexes in it, which are called the five elements, senses, mind, vital forces called *prāṇa*, etc. Mind has many varieties called mind, over-mind, super-mind, and universal mind. Universal mind is the sum total of all the individual minds. The higher mind is the purified mind with *sāttvic* qualities, like compassion, contentment, self-restraint, love, good will, etc.

Take the example of water. When it is heated to 100 degrees centigrade, it becomes steam and its name and qualities are changed. The critical point is 100°C. Similarly, when the mind is transformed to a certain critical point, its qualities and name are changed. Above mind is the over-mind and above over-mind, the super-mind. The relationship between them is like the relationship between a baby, a child, a youngster and a mature adult.

There is a wild horse and a tamed horse. You can ride a tamed horse or you can use it for many useful purposes. If you ride a wild horse, you will often fall down and hurt yourself, or the horse will take you wherever he wants. You have no control over it. The higher mind is like a tamed horse. The supermind is the mind in a much more evolved state. In the supramental state all the pairs of opposites start to be reconciled, the dualities begin to be resolved. The opposites are still there but they don't feel contradictory. Instead, they are felt to be complementary.

**As with everything in the world, mind can be impure or pure**

*Are compassion, peace and other higher feelings, modifications of the mind? Do these feelings, like the lower emotions, also have to be purified from the mind for Realization to occur?*

Yes, compassion, peace, and other higher feelings are modifications of the mind. It is the purified mind. Everything in the world of time can be impure or pure. Water may be pure or impure. Everything in the world can become polluted: water, air, body, mind. Have you ever seen a person dying?

When a man dies, he cannot hear, cannot see, cannot smell etc. and his body starts disintegrating within a few hours after death, emitting a foul smell. Have you ever seen a dead body?

The purpose of all *sādhana* is to purify and stabilize the mind. The pure mind reflects the free Spirit as it is. The impure mind disturbs the reflection. Anger pollutes the mind. Is there any controversy about it? When one is angry, one loses clarity of vision. In the *Gītā*, it is said that passion and anger are the greatest enemies of a seeker of Truth. All the holy Scriptures (leave aside some modern Gurus) ask the aspirant to purify his/her mind and overcome these lower qualities.

**The present is eternal. The past and future are modifications of mind**

*We are advised to be in the present but I feel one is always in the present. Even when one remembers a past incident he pulls it back to the present and enjoys it again. Similarly, one pulls through imagination the future to the present and enjoys it. This means one is always in the present. Then what is ‘always living/being in the present’?*

How is one in the present when one is thinking of the past or the future? A person living on the level of mental consciousness cannot experience the present, what to say of living in the present? As soon as you think of the present, it slips into the past. What is present is actually the timeless moment. It can be experienced by a mind which is free from all modifications. Time is energy. Time is always moving. The mind is the instrument of knowing what is in time. The

present is eternal. It cannot be grasped by the moving mind. The past is in the memory. The future is in imagination. They are not existential. Memory and imagination both are modifications of the mind.

There are five basic modifications of the mind according to Patanjali:

1. *pramāṇa*
2. *viparyaya*
3. *vikalpa* (imagination)
4. *smṛiti*(memory)
5. *nidrâ* (sleep)

*So how can I live in the present?*

Stop thinking. According to Patanjali the definition of yoga is, “*yogash chitta vritti nirodhah,*” – “Yoga is stopping the modifications of mind.” The next aphorism says that when all the modifications of mind are stopped, the Seer is established in its essential Nature, because there is no modification of mind with which it could become identified. That is called the state of no-mind. When the mind is not there, the question of *Puruṣha*, the simple Consciousness, becoming identified with the mind does not arise. *Puruṣha* becomes completely disassociated from *Prakṛiti* and is experienced by Itself in Its simple, pure Nature. That is what is called Self-Realization. The goal of Patanjali’s *Yoga* is Self-Realization.

**Stop individual thinking**

*Question not recorded.*

Can there be any language without thought? Please, reply. Words are used to express one's thoughts. Words and thinking are so closely inter-related that it is not possible to think without words.

*When a baby cries, its mother comes and caresses it without uttering any word. We can also understand a language through attitudes and gestures.*

A cry is not a word. In that case, all the animals are speaking when they utter sounds. Can you call these sounds a language? For the mother, her language is the language of the heart. It is not the language of thoughts. It can be said that silence is also a language, the deepest language. When you speak without a thought, what will you speak and how will you speak? For the language through attitudes and gestures, why do you call it language? Call it gestures! Language is one means of communication. You are confusing the word "language" with the word "communication". Communication is possible without gestures, without words and even without thoughts. But there can be no language without words.

There is a communication through what is called telepathy. L. is in France. His mother is in India. But she can feel and know how L. is, without talking to him, even without thinking about him. The more closeness there is between two persons, the deeper the communication. You may talk to someone for hours and hours and yet it is possible that there is no communication.

*How to go beyond thought?*

Very simple. Stop individual thinking and the universal thinking will be reflected in your mind. That is why the mind should be completely passive, silent and stable in order to realize the Divine or the divine will; passive or full of divine Love.

### **The backbone of the thinking process**

*How can we perceive the Divine who is so near?*

Stop thinking! If you think and think, you become a philosopher. If you stop the thinking process, that is the way to have direct experience. Stop your thinking for awhile and see why it is not so easy, why it is difficult. What makes it difficult?

*How do we stop thinking?*

The mind is the link between body and Spirit. When it identifies itself with the body, desires come up and make the mind think. If it can detach itself from the body, then desires subside and it becomes calm and quiet.

*I am watching my thinking process to decrease it, but I fear I will never succeed.*

Desire is the backbone of the thinking process. If you cannot give up desiring, then desire to be desireless. Fear is also the product of desire; fear implies a sort of negative thinking.

*I find so many difficulties in my practice. Why?*

Because your understanding is only intellectual, it has not penetrated all the parts of your personality.

**For a *sādhaka*, every moment of life is a moment of test**

*My only goal is to enjoy the Bliss of pure Existence. Should I live in a forest or in some hermitage? It seems very difficult to overcome my mind while staying in the world. What is your advice?*

If you live in a monastery or in a forest but your heart is in the world (or say in the market place) then you are in the market. You have to cultivate a very deep and passionate interest in spiritual life. It will automatically make you disinterested in worldly objects and situations. It is easier to transform your mind than to change your body because the mind is more flexible. Well, to control the mind completely, persistent reflection as also discipline is required.

You are to be trained like a military person. The military personals are not allowed to mix with society; they are not allowed to take part in politics. They are given physical training and infused with patriotic spirit so that, when the time comes, they can sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country. The purpose of their whole training is to prepare them for a single moment when they are face to face with their enemy on the battlefield. That moment is the moment of their test. But, for a *sādhaka*, a spiritual seeker, every moment of life is a moment of test. So you can understand how much training and discipline of mind and body is needed for him or her.

This is the negative side of the thinking mind. The positive side is that man can know the higher values of life and live for them.

**“O desire, please leave me alone!”**

*It is said that we are already God. But I am so often hurt when I don't get what I want. How should I deal with this contradiction?*

Wounds of the body heal sooner than wounds of the mind, except cancer. Mind is like a small ocean. The body is like an island in that ocean. In common parlance, it is said that the mind is in the body. But the fact is that the body is in the mind. This physical body has been given to you to express only a very small part of your mind. One cannot express his whole mind through only one body. That is why one has to assume physical bodies again and again. As well, one assumes different kinds of bodies, such as of man, woman, animals, plants, etc. Don't you have many contradictions and conflicts in your mind? Sometimes you want to give up all material things; sometimes you want to become a king and own the whole country. Sometimes you want to be alone; sometimes you want a partner. Sometimes you want to rule; sometimes you want to serve. Sometimes you want to eat delicious food, sometimes you want to fast, and so on. You are full of all sorts of conflicts, so how can all your desires be fulfilled in one life? One desire is not yet fully realized and another is generated. Am I right?

I have read a book, a classic, *Vairâgya Shatakam* containing one hundred poetic couplets on dispassion written by sage Bhartrihari, who was earlier a king but later renounced his kingdom and became a wandering *sannyāsī*. He says in one couplet, “O desire, please leave me alone! You have made me a man from God. What do you want to

make me now? Do you want to make me a beast, a beast from a man? Enough is enough, kindly leave me alone!”  
 Is God dependent and the slave of desires? How can you call yourself God if you are being tossed helplessly in the current of pains and pleasures? Be honest and say only what you feel. Your statement is like the statement of a person who is sitting in a dark room, saying that the sun is all light. There is nothing wrong in the statement itself.

### **The mind is everywhere in the body**

*Where is the mind located in the body? Are the body and the mind separate or one?*

The body is like a wave in the lake. Is the wave separate from the lake? The mind is like a lake of water. The body is like a bubble in that lake.

The mind is everywhere in the body, from the toes to the head. But in different states, it is focussed or concentrated at different places in the body.

*In the case of paralysis of a limb of the body, is the mind still present in it?*

The mind is operating, but the *prāṇa* almost stops functioning in that area.

### **Mind is the product of non-seeing**

*My mind is very disturbed by emotions. Can you give me some advice about it?*

Can you show me your mind? Have you ever seen your mind? Close your eyes and see inside; where is your mind? The mind disappears as soon as you look within. The mind is the product of non-seeing. Mind means *mâyâ*. *Mâyâ* disappears as soon as you see it. *Mâyâ* is the product of non-seeing. In *Vedānta*, *mâyâ* is called ignorance. As soon as you recognize *mâyâ*, it disappears. When you recognize a thief, he will not steal because a thief steals only when you are sleeping, or in your absence.

Everyone of you, right now close your eyes, and see if you find your mind anywhere in your body! Where is the mind? Just look within and tell me: do you see any mind? Do you see any thought? Just watch. Don't think that you are watching. As soon as you see, the thinking stops. That is the teaching of the *Upanishads*. It is the teaching of all the enlightened Masters.

The mind comes up only when Seeing is not there. Seeing does not need time, two minutes or a thousand years. It is instant, everpresent. If you don't want to see, no one can make you see. Seeing is not a process. Seeing is not a possibility. It is the actuality. Seeing is not an ideology. Seeing is not true ideologically. Seeing is true as absolute Truth.

*How is it possible that with our impure mind we can experience the "Real Seeing"?*

Is the mind unstable by nature? If so, how can it be made stable? If the mind, which is unstable by nature, is made stable by any method, that stability will not last forever. When you enquire what the mind is, your enquiry ends up finding that the mind does not exist. That is what I said in

the beginning. That is exactly what applies in the case of *mâyâ* also. Experiencing is always there. In reality, it can never be absent. It becomes identified with the different states. Do not do anything mechanically — that is *sādhana*!

*You once wrote that the mind is everywhere in the body. How can the mind exist and not exist at the same time? There appears to be a contradiction.*

To me, it does not seem there is any contradiction. The different states of one mind may be contradictory at different times, because the mind is changing. It has a phenomenal existence.

**Throw your mind away, even if it is the most sophisticated computer**

*I have been advised many times to learn how to use a computer. I don't feel interested in it, so what should I do?*

The mind works like a computer. Its decisions are based on the data that is fed into it. Its working is conditional. Similarly, the knowledge gained through the mind is based on the *sanskaras* or the impressions of your past experiences. It is not creative. [At that moment the lunch bell rang.] How do you recognize this bell? Through past *sanskāras*. God is not recognized like that.

There is no human being in the world that has no computer. Do you know that the mind is the most sophisticated computer? No computer has been made yet whose memory capacity and sophisticated functioning are equal to that of the human mind. The more the mind is

purified and stable, the greater is its capability to know correctly. Otherwise, all the data becomes corrupted. When all the modifications of the mind are stopped, one knows first-hand one's true and essential Nature. After all, it is the human mind that has created the computer. For God-Realization you don't have to enhance the working of your mind; on the contrary you have to stop its working. Mind is the instrument of knowing others. If you want to know yourself, after a certain stage, it becomes redundant; you have to throw it away. After a certain stage, it becomes an obstacle.

*When I observe my thoughts, they stop, but my breathing process also slows down.*

True! When the thinking becomes slow, the breathing also becomes slow, and vice-versa. That is the theory behind the practice of *prāṇāyāma*. If by any exercise you make your breathing process slow, the thinking process also becomes slow. And when the breathing or the thinking becomes slow, you become more alert. Have you ever noted that when you want to listen very attentively, you even stop your breathing? But if the breathing stops completely, the metabolism of the body stops, and the body will die (disintegrate). Breathing is the first vibration of the *prāṇa* in the body. It keeps the body, the mind and the senses alive.

### **Don't entertain such metaphysical thinking**

*Was the first soul pure? What about karma at this moment? The manifestation emanated from God who is perfectly pure. How did impurity begin?*

The world has no beginning. It is like a circle. There is no beginning of a circle. Every point on the circumference of a circle can be taken as a beginning. Lord Buddha used to answer this question by giving an example. He said: “A man is hit by an arrow and is suffering. He should try to remove the arrow. What is the use of thinking about where the arrow came from and who shot that arrow?” When people asked Lord Buddha where ignorance came from, how the cycle of *karma* started, Buddha would give this example and persuade people not to entertain such metaphysical thinking. He taught that one should give up desire and attachment through the practice of meditation.

Have you realized that the world is a manifestation of God? Have you realized God? If yes, then the question of impurity does not arise for you. God alone exists and all your suffering is gone. Are you filled with divine Joy, with the presence of God? Are you?

### **Things look beautiful when your mind is peaceful**

*I am so happy to see the beautiful surroundings of this place...*

Things look beautiful when your mind is peaceful. When your mind is upset or the body is very sick, the gestalt changes. When your mind is very upset, what you see outside does not look beautiful. Is nature attractive to a disturbed mind?

*Are compassion, mercy and all emotions that manifest in the heart also stored in the chitta?*

Compassion, mercy, etc., are the higher states of mind, the positive side of the mind. The word “heart” is used for the feeling aspect of the mind. Feeling is deeper than intellectual thinking. It has more power than intellectual thinking. It is why, perhaps, it is said, “From the head, come to the heart.”

*According to Scriptures, for God-Realization, the opening of the knot of the heart is essential. How do we open it?*

This knot is the complex of being an individual. The complex of being a person, the complex of being separate from the Divine, separates you from others.

**To stop the activities of your mind, either cultivate divine Love or practise meditation**

*How can we give up the mind in order to go into the supramental state and progress on the spiritual path?*

The mind is the sum total of desires, thoughts, emotions and imaginations. The mind stops working either in a spell of deep love or in a deep meditation. You should cultivate divine Love in your heart or practise meditation to stop the activity of your mind. First try to give up your mind during meditation. If you could taste the joy of giving up your mind for a short period, it would become easier for you to give up your mind.

*What exactly does it mean to ‘give up the mind’?*

For a second, you give up desire, and can experience peace here and now. Desire turns into attachment and that is the root cause of suffering. This is what Buddha came to realize

after years and years of *tapasyā* in the forest. Desire means a longing for something that is separate from you. To seek God means you are seeking yourself. It is not a desire. God is your inmost Self. As a matter of fact, even through desire, you are seeking yourself, but it is the wrong approach. Hear the glories of God again and again, and you will certainly fall in love with Him. He is very sweet. He loves you more than your father, mother and girlfriend. If you cannot love God, love a Godman. Through the love of a Godman, you will be attracted to God.

### **Mind cannot know the One**

*If we are all one, are the ego-minds the same for everybody?*

The mind divides. Mind cannot know the One. Whatever the mind knows, it knows it by making comparisons. The minds of different people are different, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The difference is in the ratio of *sattvaguna*, *rajoguna* and *tamoguna* in the mind.

*What should I do to know the Truth? What should I do to live in the present?*

You cannot live in the present so long as you are living on the mental level. The mind cannot even grasp the present. You should do *sāadhanā*, go into *samādhi* and then know directly whatever you want. You cannot know by the mind that which cannot be known by the mind. Mind is not the proper instrument for knowing suprasensual things. Every instrument has its own purpose and utility. Eyes can only see forms. Ears can only hear words; they cannot see. The

nose can only smell and so on. The mind has its limitations. It cannot know each and everything.

### **When the mind stops, you experience the immovable Reality**

*Is it really possible to stop the mind?*

In one of the *Spiritual Gems*, it has been said that the world, which is movement, is the perception of a moving mind. When the mind stops, you experience the immovable Reality. There is a *Zen-Bodh-Katha* (a Zen story). There were three Buddhist monks walking in the forest. They stopped to take rest under the shade of a tree. One monk said to the others, “The leaves of the tree are moving.” The second said, “No, it is the wind which is moving.” The third said, “You both are incorrect. It is the mind which is moving!” The perception of all movement is due to the moving mind. To experience your true Nature, you need a pure and stable mind.

### **When the mind is transcended, all divisions cease**

*A strong smell often causes me to vomit; how can I be free of this problem? Is it created by the mind?*

Well, no one likes a bad smell. Some people may be more sensitive, for them it may be more difficult to bear a bad smell and they may vomit. There is nothing wrong with them. You should avoid the things that emit a bad smell, or the places that are full of a foul smell. You may keep some perfumes with you, as some ladies (even gents) do in order to smell good.

The world is made of pairs of opposites: foul and fair, good and bad, high and low, hot and cold, day and night, etc. If you want to be free from bad totally, you will have to give up the desire of good also, because the pairs of opposites always co-exist. They cannot be separated. To reach heaven, you have to pass through hell. There is no direct way to heaven. I am not joking. Even the virtuous have to pass through hell, but they cross hell within seconds, whereas the ones full of vices are stuck in hell for hundreds of years.

Yes, it is the mind that divides and splits the non-polar Existence into poles. You can experience the non-polar Existence/Consciousness only when you go beyond the mind. There are so many layers of mind. When you go within, you don't encounter the Divine all at once.

*I heard this sentence, "Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so." What does it mean?*

It does not mean that there is no good or bad. It means that good or bad is there only up to the mental level. It is the mind that makes the distinction. When the mind is transcended, all divisions cease. When someone quotes this saying to me to prove that there is no good or bad, I ask that person, "Is there no good or bad for you?"

More than 95% of the problems in the world are created by the mind of man. The remaining 5% of the problems are created by the limitation of human existence, by the limitations of your physical body. Are you not worried or concerned by the problems of birth, disease, old age and death? Even Lord Buddha could not accept them; how can you accept them? His search for Truth began in order to get

rid of these limitations. All activities, including so-called scientific research, are like “housekeeping in a dream”.

## ***The Conscious, Subconscious and Unconscious Mind***

### **The four states of mind**

*Can you tell me where are worries, suffering and pain when we are in the state of deep sleep?*

In deep sleep, the mind is unified, but totally inactive. The principle of Awareness is there in deep sleep, but there is no confirmation of it because it is the mind which confirms and the mind is not active in the deep sleep state.

The deep sleep state is the seed state. As the tree is hidden in the seed, all problems of the personality are hidden in the unconscious. The mind has four states: unconscious, subconscious, conscious and superconscious. The superconscious is the state of *samādhi*.

*Can we know when it is the subconscious mind which is working?*

You can. You can bring your subconscious to your conscious level. That is what you are doing through the ‘lying’ practice in Mr. Arnaud’s *āshram*. When your conscious mind is inactive, the subconscious starts coming up, as in the dreams. If you could make your mind inactive during the waking state, you would be able to see your past. There are other techniques by which you can control your breathing process also. But these have nothing to do with Self-Realization.

## ***Dreams***

*Swamiji asks someone to read aloud a paragraph of a book explaining the dreaming state. Then he writes:*

The example of the dreaming state is only given to prove that the senses can act even without the light of the sun, or of the moon, or of a lamp. In the dream, you see the whole world as you see in the waking state, even though there is no sun, no moon and no outer light. It proves that the lights of the mind and the senses are superior to the outer physical lights.

### **Control of dreams**

*What is the difference between the dreams I have during the night and this waking state life, which also seems to me a dream? How can I come out of this dream?*

Day dreaming is wilful. Night dreaming is the working of the subconscious mind. You have no control over it. Someone asked Gandhiji, “Have you complete control of your mind?” He said, “In the wakeful state I have complete control over my thoughts. But in the dream I have no control.” Any thought that is very strong and continuous in the wakeful state is usually carried on in the dream also.

*How can I clean my subconscious mind?*

How can you clean your subconscious with self-effort if you cannot communicate with your subconscious? You can communicate with your subconscious in the wakeful state only when the thinking process in the wakeful state stops completely.

*What advice can you give me about the dreams I see?*

Dreams represent your cries for that which you cannot get in the wakeful state in spite of your intense desires. Dreaming is like a safety valve of a cooker. You will become mad if you are forced to have no dreams. Dreams are even more important than the deep sleep state.

*How should I handle all these dreams coming to me?*

Forget the past, as if it was a dream. You cannot do anything with the past. Make the best use of your present.

### **The dream body**

*Do we have the sensation of “me and mine” and the feeling of separateness when we are in a subtle body?*

Certainly, yes. You have the subtle body with which you are identified. Moreover, that subtle body of yours has exactly the same form as your physical body. When you go into a dream you do everything with your subtle body, but you see that subtle body exactly in the same form as your physical body. Similar is the case in the subtle worlds. When you walk in your dream, you walk with your dream body. And that dream body of yours has exactly the same form as your physical body in the wakeful state.

*What about the causal body?*

The causal body is like a seed. It has no form. The form of the tree is hidden in the seed.

### **Don't be concerned about dreams**

*What is the importance of dreams?*

Psychologists say that dreams are more important for good health than deep sleep. Every person has dreams at night. Some remember them when they wake up; others do not remember. Through experiments, scientists have noted that if you completely stop a person's dreaming at night, he or she will become mad very soon. They attach a machine to your brain while you sleep. When you start to dream, the machine starts to make a special graph on the paper. As soon as it does so, they wake you up. All night they wake you up as soon as you start dreaming. They let you enter deep sleep, but no dreams. They found that if you are stopped completely from dreaming for several days continuously, you become mad. Lack of deep sleep is also bad for health, but lack of dreams is much worse for health.

*Please, give us some advice about dreams.*

Don't be concerned about dreams. There are more important things to be taken care of in life. If you keep awake, the dreams will cease. Keep your eyes open. I mean the eyes of wisdom. What you call mind is not the total mind. It is only a superficial layer of the mind.

### ***Ego***

**The purpose of *sāadhanā* is to get rid of ego**

*I have been surprised to observe some fights between people in the āshram.*

If we fight in the *âshram*, as people fight and quarrel in their homes over their rights, then what is the use of living in the *âshram*? The purpose of *sâdhanâ* is to get rid of ego, which is the cause of all disturbance and bondage. Where you live and what you do is not so important. What is important is how you live and with what spirit or motive you perform your actions. Ego is the first and last obstacle on the path of Self-Realization.

*How do we understand the illusion of ego? Should we cut all our relations to get rid of it?*

It is not so difficult to understand intellectually the illusion of ego. One can know the definition of ego and the definition of illusion and yet be possessed by ego. For gaining intellectual understanding, one need not cut one's relations with the family and have complete control on one's mind and senses. But even then, one has to follow the discipline needed by a student: the student goes to some college or school, follows the rules and regulations of that school, and undertakes all the discipline required of students during their course of study.

### **The seeker should give up his ego cheerfully**

*I'm reading about the importance of losing one's ego. Could you give some practical suggestions how one could work at losing the ego? Is the ego the same as the "false self" that we create?*

The seeker has not to lose the ego. He or she should finally give up the ego cheerfully or outgrow it. The ego should

first be purified and directed to God. Without the ego you cannot do anything, except when you become a conscious instrument of God. Ego creates the false self. Ego is the faculty through which the Self becomes identified with the non-self. Ego can be overcome either by Love for the Divine or by divine Awareness.

*Does controlling the mind lead to the extinction of the ego?*

Mind and ego are not different in kind. Both represent the same energy. The difference in mind and ego is the difference in vibration of that energy. Control of the mind is necessary for the purification of the mind. Ego can be weakened through prayer and through the practice of witnessing.

### **Spiritual discipline is not for making the ego perfect**

*I am making a constant effort to be perfect and to keep an appearance of perfection. How can I change this attitude?*

The ego can never be made perfect. Spiritual discipline is not for making the ego perfect. The purpose of *sāadhanā* is the direct experience of one's essential and divine Self which is essentially perfect, absolute and self-dependent. Ego is the first and the last obstacle to discovering one's Divinity. Who is it that wants to give up the false desire of making the ego perfect? There must be someone who would give up this desire. Who is it?

*When we feel that we are the doer, is it due to the ego?*

The sense of doership is the ego of doing. But there can be an ego of non-doing also! There are three main energies

that comprise the personality, *jñānashakti*, the power of understanding; *bhāvashakti*, the power of feeling; *kriyāshakti*, the power of doing.

*Can there be a “noble ego?”*

Some seekers have problems of inertia, some others of tension, and some of their noble egos. Yes, there is a noble ego. If you do something constructive and are proud of it, it may be said that you have a noble ego. You have to give up doing wrong as also the ego of doing right.

*Please explain the sentence you wrote a few days before: “Some cannot do anything wrong, but they still have a subtle ego of doing good.”*

I will tell you a story in this regard. Once, some devotees were sitting near Ramakrishna Paramahansa. A bug came out from the carpet on which they were sitting. Ramakrishna caught that bug and gave it to a devotee saying, “Take it out and kill it. Then, throw it in the garbage.” The devotee took the bug, went out, and left the bug in the corner of a bush without killing it. When he came back, Ramakrishna asked him, “Have you killed the bug?” The devotee said, “No sir, I could not do it, because I felt it was not good to kill a creature of God. To kill any living being is wrong. I could not do it. My conscience did not allow me to kill. I have left the bug in the bush outside.” Ramakrishna told him, “Who are you who can save or kill anyone? God is the only doer. A leaf does not move without the will of God. It is your ego that makes you think that you are killing or saving. You must give up this ego if you want to be liberated.”

So, you see, that was the advice given to a competent person: you are not the doer. You are not one who can do nothing wrong. The rule is that you have to give up doing wrong as also you have to give up the ego of doing right. But you should never do wrong and say that it is not you but God who is doing wrong. You have to give up your infirmities. To give up evil and to give up the ego of virtue is the right attitude. But modern-day seekers give up virtues and keep up the ego of evil!

There is a rule: “A virtuous action can be performed with the ego or without the ego, but an evil action cannot be performed without the ego.” On the mental level, the ego is there. You cannot avoid it. There are many degrees or levels of mind. Animals are conditioned to follow certain rules. Man can become God or he can slide down. There is a mental level which is even below the state of animals. In the West, I have heard some teachers say that spiritual *sāadhanā* is the result of ego. So, according to their teachings, you should stop spiritual *sāadhanā* and go on indulging in all worldly affairs, right or wrong!

### **Ego is like a shadow**

*I so often have a feeling of insecurity. I pray to get help, but what more can I do to overcome it?*

So long as the ego is there, the feeling of insecurity cannot be totally eradicated. The ego has no real existence. It is natural for it to feel insecure. In all forms of prayer, the ego is more or less involved. The highest prayer is most passive. The highest prayer is the one in which you request God to

help you in overcoming the ego. The ego is like a shadow. The shadow appears by veiling the light.

*What do you think is the best way to dissolve our ego?*

Can you see your ego? Try it for a few minutes. You will not find it anywhere. Ego is the product of non-seeing. The easiest way of dissolving the ego is to be more and more aware. Be aware in all the day-to-day activities. Be aware of your breathing. See your thoughts as a witness. Sit relaxed and just watch your breathing. You may start with this practice.

### **Ego goes away as soon as one leaves it**

*How can the ego, which is said not to exist, create so many problems?*

When it is said that ego does not exist, it means that ego has no independent existence. It is like a shadow. It has phenomenal existence, like the existence of every object in time and space. What is a shadow dependent upon? Ego is not connected with God, yet it is dependent upon God. The snake you see in the rope is dependent on the rope and yet it is not connected with the rope. Ego goes away as soon as one leaves it. One can surely exist in the world without ego. Surrender your ego to God. Let Him use your ego.

### **So long as you have an ego, do not stop following the path of Self-Realization**

*Does God prefer for us to beg Him to take us to Him or to wait joyfully with love and have no expectations?*

God wants us to be joyful, free and liberated. He does not want us to be beggar-like. Selfless service, prayer, meditation etc., are the aids to free one from the ego.

*Before being established in silence, is it not necessary to accept the noise of the ego and not to create some more noise by saying incessantly, “shut up,” or even using a method to escape from it and thus to give it the power to annoy us? Like a lake after a storm, you have to wait for the sludge to settle before the water becomes clear.*

For being established in silence, you have to be silent and not full of noise, though some people may need noise and noise and more noise in order to become fed up with noise, so that a deep aspiration for being silent becomes manifest in them.

Silence comes when you go above trying and not trying. If you stop trying, you will not become silent. I have seen persons who stop doing *sādhanā*, saying that it is the working of ego, but they are working even harder than before to be successful in temporal achievements. This is *mâyâ*, the trick of *mâyâ*/mind to stop them from following the path of Self-Realization.

The ego cannot live without desiring or doing something. So long as you have an ego, if you stop following the path of Self-Realization: meditation, selfless service, *japa*, reading of revealed Scriptures and reflecting on them, it will spread its working more and more in the mundane and temporal domain. You were saying a few days ago that searching for God is the working of the ego. I have heard this from many so-called enlightened ones in the West.

*Someone told me that we should starve the ego until it disappears.*

Starve the ego? But how to starve the ego? Starving means doing something. And M. would say that doing something is the working of the ego! If you stop everything completely, very good, but do not stop doing *sādhana*!

**You first have to see yourself as different from your ego**

*During meditation there are some moments of tranquillity, but the ego doesn't want to let go of itself. I have experienced a few moments in which there was only "pure Consciousness".*

Who is seeing the ego? How can the ego drop the ego? You say, "I have experienced a few moments in which there was only pure Consciousness." You cannot see pure Consciousness as an object. You can be the pure Consciousness. First you have to see yourself as different from your ego, before you can do anything with your ego. Your metaphysical understanding is not yet clear. You first have to distinguish between the ego, the soul and the Spirit. Pure Consciousness is realized only when the ego completely subsides.

***Soul***

*To God and Nature the soul is feminine. The relationship between Rādhā and Kṛishna represents the relationship between the soul and God.*

### **The pilgrim, the pilgrimage and the destination**

*Does Consciousness, as the pilgrim, stick to the path of the soul pilgrimage?*

The word Consciousness is used to denote many principles. It denotes the Spirit, which is the Divine, the absolute and eternal Consciousness. It also denotes the soul, which is individualized Consciousness. When you say that Consciousness is the pilgrim, it signifies that Consciousness is the soul. It is the soul which is the pilgrim. The Divine is the destination, and walking on the path leading to the destination is called the pilgrimage.

The soul (*jīva*) is individualized Consciousness. Godhead or Spirit is the absolute and timeless Consciousness. God is the absolute Consciousness which comes within the scope of time and which is controlling all that is in time.

### ***Jīva and Īshvara***

*Can we say that one is able to create and destroy one's own world?*

Such an individual creation is called *jīva srishti*. It is a very superficial layer of the world created by God. It is this *jīva srishti* in which there is suffering. The mind actually does not create the world. It interprets and gives its own meaning to the world created by God. *Jīva* (soul) and *Īshvara* (God) have a common denominator, which is called Godhead or *Brahman*. *Jīva* and *Īshvara* are one in Spirit, which is

attributeless and timeless pure Consciousness. But the power of *jīva* (soul) and *Īshvara* is not the same. *Īshvara* is all-powerful. *Jīva* has limited power.

*The other day you said that illness makes the soul suffer. Can you explain why, please?*

The soul is identified with the body. When the body is ill, the soul suffers. I said the soul and *Brahman* are one in essence.

### **When the ego is purified, the soul yearns to go back home**

Ego and soul always co-exist. But there is a purified ego and an impure ego. When the ego of a soul is purified, the soul yearns to go back home; it yearns to merge in its source, as a fish yearns to go into water. When the ego is impure and full of desires and negative thinking, it seeks happiness and peace and satisfaction where they are not. The soul with an impure ego is always restless and disturbed.

*Could you say something about the meaning of “to go back home,” in terms of Self-Realization?*

Going back home means going to God. The soul comes from God and wants to go back to God when it realizes that this world of time is not its real home. It feels as if it is in exile, as a king lost in the forest. First, be a soul instead of being only a physical body. A soul thinking that it is the physical body is like the driver of a car taking himself or herself to be the car.

## ***Death***

### **The physical body is like an overcoat**

*While trying to meditate I was mentally transported to my house, and I felt my body was left there like an empty bag. Is the death experience something similar?*

There are several bodies. These bodies are like a dress. You have a shirt. On the shirt you wear a coat. On the coat you are wearing an overcoat. You can take off the overcoat and go anywhere. The physical body is like an overcoat. By taking off the overcoat, you do not cease to exist, to live. Death means shedding your overcoat.

### **There is something in you which never dies**

*Is the time of death already fixed?*

Worries and physical diseases shorten the life span. When you are worried, your breathing rate is fast. You are consuming more life-force.

*Why are we so much afraid of what is certain?*

There is something in you which never dies. It cannot reconcile itself with death. That which never dies does not come and go.

### **The purpose of death is to break your slumber**

*For the last two months, I have been experiencing the suffering of many people around me (cancer, suicide, divorce,*

*abortion). This rush of events, in a short time, makes me ask, "What sense does it make?"*

Life sends these experiences to you to wake you up, to break your slumber. This is the true purpose of suffering, disease and death. Gautama (Buddha) saw a dead man only once, and it awakened him. We see so many people dying and nothing happens to us. We are in a state of coma, as it were. The first thought which should come to a wise person when his/her close friend or relative dies is, "I may also die any time." Such a thought is helpful in putting one on the right path. Death is a great messenger. Do you consider death as your friend or as your foe? If you consider it as a friend, be prepared to receive it and welcome it. If you take death to be your foe, be prepared to face it and fight it. But never forget death. If death comes and you are not prepared for it, you are sure to lose and death is sure to win.

*Then how should we understand the message of death correctly?*

The message is very clear: what we take as life is not real life at all. It is a flow of death. We are in the process of dying and we think ignorantly that we are living.

### **The remembrance of death is helpful in getting rid of attachment**

*Death can cause us much grief, be it death of a dear one or facing the fact of our own death. Is it better not to think about death and accept it, or is it something we should think about every day?*

Death is a fiction. No one can ever experience death. Death actually means change of form, or the change of level of consciousness. The separation of the physical body from the inner subtle body is called death. The grief over the death of someone is caused by attachment. If death were the cause of grief, then everyone should be grieved over the death of some person. The mind does not die with the death of the physical body. So long as the mind does not die, the soul (which is mind and Spirit) continues, assuming innumerable forms to work out its *sanskāras*. Not only that, by creating new *karmas* also, the cycle of birth and death goes on endlessly. The remembrance of death brings a change in the attitude of a person. It is helpful in getting rid of attachment.

The seeker of Truth should not forget death. Forgetting death does not solve any problem. Lord Buddha used to send some seekers to graveyards to stay there for some time. Have you ever attended the funeral of a dead person? You must. From the spiritual standpoint it is better to attend a funeral than to attend a marriage ceremony. Gautama (who later became Lord Buddha) saw a dead body for the first time and it made him reflect over death, which later turned into aspiration to know That which is deathless. It was the beginning of his search for Truth.

**What is not there in the beginning and not there in the end, does not really exist**

*My first child died in my womb before I gave birth. I did not see its body, but this death was a trauma for me that is still painful. Does this child still need my help?*

Try to forget your past. Try to forget the incident of the death of your first child. Take that as an unpleasant dream that has passed. You should try to fix your mind on God.

*Does a foetus have a soul at the moment of the conception, during the life of the foetus or only at birth?*

The soul enters the body of the mother at the time of conception, but it is not conscious at that time. It becomes conscious only when the formation of its body in the womb of the mother is complete. The child was not your child before he was in your womb. It is not your child now. What is not there in the beginning and not there in the end does not really exist. In the middle it only appears to exist.

*I don't understand why my child has never been my child?*

Because he is no more your child now, and he was not your child before he came into your womb.

*But does it exist?*

Yes, it exists, but not as your child!

*You said, "The name and the form belong to the physical body." For me the name and form of my son are still present in my heart. Do I have to be detached from them also?*

It is the image of the name and form of your son that are still present in your heart. But the soul of your son might have assumed some other name and form. Do you remember your past life, the name and form which you had in your past life? No! Similarly, the soul of your son, if it has taken a new birth, would have forgotten not only you but his own

previous form and name as well. There is no use keeping that form or name in your mind now. Let there be God in your heart now.

### **Meditation on one's death**

*How can I meditate on my death?*

This type of meditation is to give you a self-imposed shock which can awaken your sleeping soul. Sit down, close your eyes and imagine that you are dying. You are on your death-bed. Your friends and relatives are around you and you die. They take your body to the church. After performing some rituals and prayers, they take you, or rather your body, to the graveyard, bury you under the earth and return home. For a few days they remember you, but then they start forgetting you. No one remains concerned about you. No one can accompany you. On the first day after your death, they are more interested in your bank balance and your bank pass-book and chequebook than in you.

### **Without birth and death, evolution of the soul is not possible**

*I would like to ask you more about death.*

Death means the separation of the subtle body from the physical body. Subtle body consists of the mind, senses and vital force. Wherever there is the subtle body, there is the reflection of the Spirit, and it is called the soul. So it may be said that it is the soul which is separated from the physical body when death occurs. The Spirit never dies. It is the timeless and eternal Consciousness. The soul lives as long

as the individual subtle body exists. As the mind (or the soul) does not die with the death of the physical body, it is born again; it again assumes a physical body according to its actions and desires. The fear of death is caused by the attachment of the soul to the physical body as well as to the earthly things and relationships.

Death comes when the soul has exhausted its vital energy in the body, which has been given to the soul to reap the fruit of its past actions through that body. Death takes away or snatches everything from us: our house, our friends, relatives, our bank balance, etc., to which we are so much attached. That is why we are afraid of death. The first attachment is with the physical body. Then, through the body, other relationships with objects, situations and persons are formed. If you can give up the attachment to the body, it is not so difficult to give up other attachments.

*Would you also please comment on the different ways people die, such as by accident, after being ill, after a long physical suffering, or on one's bed, and so on?*

No person dies with his own will, nor can one choose how and when to die. When the time of death approaches, some excuse/way is made by nature for the soul to leave the body. Moreover, it is not important how a person dies. What is important is how a person lives, and what is the mental state of a person when he or she leaves his or her physical body. Spiritually speaking, dying after a long physical illness on one's bed is regarded as a better death, because the soul can prepare itself for the death mentally. Even in old age, there are changes in the mind of a person; he or she becomes more inclined towards God. One becomes more conscious

of the limitations of the physical life. The perspective of life changes.

*You said that the subtle body is composed of mind, senses and vital energy. Mind, does it mean that the psychological characteristics of the person remain after death? Senses, does it mean that the soul can see, hear, and smell?*

Nothing but the Spirit is unchangeable. The mind, body, senses and *prāṇa* are always undergoing change. The fact is that they are different forms of *Prakṛiti*, which is always changing. The personality is changing; that is why the soul has to assume different bodies to express the new personality. No one can escape death. Death is as necessary as birth. Without birth and death, evolution of the soul is not possible. When the soul is conscious it means that it is seeing, hearing, smelling, thinking, and interacting with others. In the dream state also, you express your personality. As a matter of fact, your dreams reveal your true personality. In the wakeful state, you cannot express yourself freely because of social rules.

### **The purpose of *sādhana* is to prepare for death**

*Up to now I was unable to feel the fear of death, but it has started.*

You are so fortunate that you have started feeling the fear of death. If you remain aware of the reality of death, you will start preparing to face it. By forgetting death, no one can start such preparation. You should also remain aware that death is certain, but when and how it will come is totally uncertain. It will help you not to be complacent in your

*sāadhanā*. We can also say that the purpose of *sāadhanā* is to prepare for death in such a way that, when it comes, you are already dead to death. You have to die every moment, die to things, relationships, situations, your body, your mind, your opinions, your thoughts. Only then can you face death without any pain when it really comes.

Some people die many times in life before death comes. I asked an old man, “What are you living for?” He thought for a while and said, “I am living because I cannot die. I am waiting for death.”

*Sometimes I wake up with the feeling that I am dying.*

How can you feel death? It is impossible! If you die, who will feel?

## ***Time of Death***

**At the time of death the person is not free to think**

*How can I explain to my mother, who is so afraid of death, that we won't be separated after her death?*

Why to tell her something wrong? Do you really think that you will accompany her when she dies? Many people are separated from others during their life, and many, many times; what to say of death? Do you remember your mother, father, family, life partner from your last birth? In what way are you not separated from them? Are you in contact with any member of the family you had in your past birth? If not, how can you say that you will remain in contact with any

member of your present family after death? You don't remember your past lives. It is a great boon from God. Were it not so, you would become mad.

*Then, how can we help someone who is at the doors of death? How can we make him or her get closer to God at that moment?*

For helping someone, don't wait for that person to be at death's door. Help that person in life more and more. At the time of death, the person is not free to think, not free to understand; he or she has exhausted the limit of freedom given to him or her. You can only pray for that person. Some people read the *Bible* or the *Gītā* to a dying person, but it is most difficult for him or her to listen at that time. You are travelling on an aeroplane. The fuel is finished, and the pilot announces that the plane is going to crash in a few minutes. At that time, if someone reads the *Bible* to you, will you listen?

*Is the type of our next incarnation due to our state of mind at the moment of death?*

The state of your mind at the time of death is determined by the actions which have influenced your mind very deeply. So, the *karmas* performed by you in your life are the cause of the type of your next birth.

**At the time of death, your thinking becomes almost one hundred percent mechanical**

*When a person knows that she is dying, what is the thought which can help her to get a good reincarnation?*

At the time of death you are not free to think what you want to think — not at all. Even now very few can think what they want to think. You can know it when you sit in meditation. During meditation, are your thoughts completely under your control? If not, how can you expect that at the time of death you will be able to think what you would like to think? At the time of your death, if you have some pain in your body, your mind will be centred on that part of your body. You will not be able to detach your mind from the body. Can you do it now? If not now, how will you be able to do it when you are suffering from pain? Now, you have relative freedom. At the time of death, even this freedom is taken away from you. Any event or relationship which has impressed you most deeply in your life comes to be remembered by you at the time of death. Your thinking becomes almost one hundred percent mechanical. Even before the approach of death very few can think creatively.

**The fear of death is caused by identification with the physical body**

*I think more often than before about my own physical death. Through this reflection, I see that it is impossible to say that I am not afraid of death. Please, how can I surrender to the universal law: birth, death, birth, death and so on?*

Yes, birth and death is the inevitable law, which one cannot avoid when one is in the physical body. Birth and death cannot be separated, like day and night. One who is born must die, sooner or later, and one who dies must be born sooner or later. But there is something in you which never dies and which is never born. It is the timeless

Consciousness, pure, simple and contentless, which is your essential Being. So long as you don't have the direct and first-hand experience of this timeless principle, you cannot overcome the fear of death.

The fear of death is caused by identification with the physical body. Some people say they are not afraid of death. But it is not true. They are forgetting death. To forget death is not the right way of overcoming the fear of death. It is like a pigeon closing its eyes when he sees a cat coming to eat it. Fear of death, like the fear of God, brings about certain changes in the mind of a person. It is helpful from a spiritual point of view, to a certain extent. Yes, death snatches everything from you, everything which you have earned or accumulated on the physical level or even on the social level.

There is intense physical pain for a few moments at the time of death, but that cannot be compared with the mental tension, agony and suffering that an ordinary person has to face during his/her life. If you could detach your mind from your body, you can avoid that physical pain at the time of death. You should practise to detach your mind from your physical body right now. If you are not able to detach your mind from your physical body now, in the normal condition, you won't be able to do it at that crucial moment. In the last moment, when the life force pulls itself from the physical body, it creates pain for a few seconds. It is so intense that some may not be able to bear it and may become unconscious. A human being with a physical body can feel pain (or pleasure) only up to a certain limit. After that, he becomes unconscious.

## ***After Death***

### **You never die**

*What happens to the soul after death?*

Very simple! The afterlife experience of all cannot be the same, as our present experiences, which are the experiences after our previous death, are not the same. It is the body which dies. You never die. No one can ever experience his or her death. It is impossible. If you can experience death, it means you are not dead. It is the identification with the body which creates the fear of death.

### **Wise people would burn the body as soon as possible**

*I understood that Realization of the Self or of God can be attained only with this body and on this earth. Is it true?*

Yes, that is true. If you are realized here, you are liberated here and now. But there are two types of liberation according to the Vedas: the *jīvanmukti*, and the liberation by stages, *krama mukti*.

The book *Vedanuvachan* by Baba Nagina Singh teaches that performing oblations can lift the soul to the world of gods. The human soul is very much attached to its physical body. It does not want to leave the body. When the body dies, the soul is hovering around it. The wise people would burn the body as early as possible. When the wood is burnt, it is changed into three things: ashes, smoke and fire. Similarly, when the body is burnt it changes into ashes,

smoke and fire. Then, the soul attaches itself to one of them, either with ashes, smoke or fire, according to its affinity, by the law of affinity. If the soul is very much attached with the earthly things, it attaches itself with the ashes. We are talking of the souls who are not enlightened.

*Why is it important to throw the ashes into the holy Ganges?*

It is important because the soul cannot enter water.

*All this knowledge makes sense to the ritualistic activities.*

It is a science.

*But Swamiji, why bother with how the body will disappear?*

Are you not giving importance to the body now? How will you stop attachment to the body when the body dies?

*What happens to the soul whose body is not burnt but buried?*

If the body is buried, the soul is roaming around the grave, unless the body is completely disintegrated or unless the soul is guided by someone to the other worlds. In that case, the gods guide the soul from one world to the other. The Guru can guide the departed soul if he has approached the psychic world, if he can travel to the psychic world in *samādhi* (if he is living). Your personal deity, a god, an *Avatāra*, or a prophet in whom you have faith can also guide the departed soul.

*Is the practice of japa useful at the moment of death?*

The power of the *mantra* is the deity of the *mantra*. The *mantra* has its own deity and that deity can guide the soul also.

*Will Osho be able to guide me?*

If he has approached the other worlds, he can guide you. If you believe in Jesus and depend upon him, he can guide you. Krishna can guide you. Mohammed can guide you. Buddha can guide you. Any of them in whom you have developed deep respect and faith can guide you.

**After death, the soul is in a different plane of consciousness**

*A lot of publicity is made to attract people to give their bodies to medical science after death. What do you think about that subject?*

It would be much better if one gave, while alive, one kidney or one eye to a patient whose both kidneys have failed or to a patient who is blind. It requires more courage and spirit of sacrifice. After death, the best and scientific way of disposing of the dead body is to cremate it as early as possible. The soul is very much attached to the physical body. After death, the departed soul does not want to go away from the dead body. Therefore, after death, the earlier the body is destroyed, the more the departed soul is free to go ahead on its sojourn.

*In our Scriptures, we read about the life of ṛiṣhi Dadhichi who gave his bones to allow the victory over the demons in the war of that time. Is it not the same principle?*

He gave up his body wilfully. A *ṛiṣhi* means an enlightened person. He is not attached to the physical body. From the social standpoint, it is very beneficial for society to give one's body to science. But there are certain laws according to which the departed soul travels to other planes after death.

If one is not detached from the physical body in life, how is it possible for one to give up attachments in death? There is a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, which says, “If you have not attained freedom in life, it is wishful thinking that you will attain *Mukti*, Liberation after death!”

*It seems to me that we also need courage to decide now that this body will be given for dissection to medical science?*

If you decide something in one plane of consciousness, that decision does not apply in another plane of consciousness. After death the soul is in a different plane of consciousness. For example, in your dream, you decide to donate your physical body. Will you keep your word when you are awake? Moreover, there is a spiritual chemistry. When the body is burnt, it is converted into ashes, smoke and flame (light). The departed soul, which was attached to the physical body, associates itself either with the ashes or the smoke or the flame part, and travels into different planes.

### **Some souls are held up in the astral plane**

*My husband, C, died last month. May I have some information concerning his journey to other planes of life?*

What/who was once called “C” does not exist at all now. The name belongs to the physical body, as also the form, and as the body has disintegrated, therefore the name “C” along with that form has become irrelevant. The soul assumes a new form with a new name when it is born again. There is no fixed rule about the soul going to other planes of existence after the death of the physical body. Those souls

who are very much attached to earthly things, situations, and relationships are held up in the astral plane which is adjoining the earthly plane. Their attachment to the earthly things does not allow them to proceed on their journey. Nor can they come back on earth and mix with their old friends and relatives because they have no earthly (physical) body. Nor can they enjoy the earthly pleasures even though they want to. So, they are held up in the astral plane for years and years, maybe hundreds of years. Souls in the astral plane are very restless, even though they are more powerful than men on earth. They live there with their astral bodies with other such souls. They can move very fast, covering thousands of kilometres in a second.

*I believe that by the faith he had in you, Swamiji, he continues on his journey and he is not trapped in the astral worlds.*

Maybe he is in this *âshram*.

## **Ghosts**

A wife and husband may love each other very much but, if you appear to your husband/wife after your death, he or she will run away, saying “ghost, ghost!” It is not a joke. I, myself, have known such a case. I was staying in Kankhal in Haridwar. I knew a very rich family there. They were living in a big bungalow, a little away from the town in a remote corner. Once, at about 11 a.m., I was standing in front of the *âshram* where I was staying. I saw the father of this family going in his car. He stopped and did *prāṇam* to me. At about five o’clock in the evening I came to know that the man had died in a car accident.

At about 7 p.m. I went to the bungalow of the family to console the members of that family. But I found the house empty. Only one servant was there. He told me that the family (the wife and two children) had left the house and shifted to one of their houses in the town, as they owned many houses in the town. The servant told me that the wife of that man was very much afraid that the ghost of her husband would come in the night and the children would be scared. So, before evening, the family left that house which was far away from the other houses, and moved to their house in the middle of the town.

Hindus believe that if someone dies in an accident or is murdered, the departed soul becomes a ghost. The departed soul of such a person is very much disturbed after death. The more a departed soul is attached to earthly things, persons and conditions, the more that soul is attracted to live as a ghost near the earth; that is, in the lower astral plane, in the form of a ghost.

**The limit of experiencing pain and pleasure is extended when the soul has a subtle body**

*Does the soul go to hell or heaven according to its karmas?*

Hell and heaven are as real as this world on earth. But from the transcendental standpoint, no world is real. On this earth, in the physical body, you can feel pain or pleasure only to a certain extent or limit. After that limit, you become unconscious. But when the soul has no physical body, and has only a subtle body, the limit of feeling pain or pleasure is increased. Hell is a particular plane of Consciousness and

also a corresponding plane of existence in which the soul with the subtle body stays. In hell, the limit of experiencing pain is enhanced. In heaven, the limit of experiencing pleasure is also enhanced.

Somebody sent me a new definition of hell and heaven given on the internet, “You are in hell if you have an American wife, a Chinese house, British food and an Indian salary. And you are in heaven if you have an Indian wife, a British house, Chinese food and an American salary!”

### **How to help the soul get out of the astral world**

*My father committed suicide a few months ago. Now he comes to my mind during my meditation, or in nightmares when I am asleep. What happens to the soul of those who commit suicide? What can I do to help him?*

Committing suicide does not solve problems. In fact, it creates more problems after death. Generally, the soul of such a person who commits suicide becomes a ghost and stays in the lowest layer of the astral world, which is joined with this earthly plane. The life in this lowest layer of the astral world is very turbulent and the souls staying in this world are very, very disturbed.

You can help the departed soul of your father by praying for him. There are special *mantras* also, through the chanting of which the departed souls can be helped. Special rituals invoke certain gods and those gods help the departed soul go out of that plane and proceed further on its journey. Such rituals are performed by professional priests with proper rules. The soul of your father wants your help. You should

pray for it and do whatever you can. You can repeat some *mantra* daily for two or three hours and offer its fruit to the departed soul of your father.

*Which mantra should I practise, as I have never practised any mantra until now? And by whom should the rituals be performed?*

Then you should only pray. In Haridwar there must be some such people who perform these kinds of rituals. I knew one of them twenty years ago. He was staying in *Sapta Rishi Ashram* at that time. He was famous and people would book him many months in advance. Once I had asked him, “Do you do only this work or do you also do something for your own spiritual evolution?” He told me, “Yes, I am devoting one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening for my own spiritual progress and doing the remaining rituals to earn my livelihood.” He was a family man. To practise rituals is a science!

To help the soul in its next journey, some people arrange the recitation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* after the demise of the soul. Some recite the *Bhagavat Purāṇas*, some the *Rāmāyaṇa*, according to their faith. Some perform *yajñas* with proper rituals. There is one special *Purāṇa* for that, and its name is *Garuda Purāṇa*.

### **Some mantras can help a departed soul**

*My mother died recently. How can I help her departed soul?*

You should pray to God that He gives peace to the departed soul of your mother. There are some *mantras* by which some

deities can be invoked to help the departed soul. Some rituals are performed by professional *paṇḍits* who can contact these gods or spirits in other planes and request them to help that departed soul in the plane where it is at the moment. It is a science. In the south of India, there are still some very learned and disciplined *paṇḍits* who perform such rituals properly, according to the rules and regulations which are laid out in the Scriptures. There are also other aids which can be rendered to a person who has gone to some other plane. But you know, these days everything has become commercialized, even religion. Some incapable persons may do it just for the sake of earning money.

*By yoga one can control one's own body/desires. Then, should a yogî be able to depart from the human body at his or her own will?*

What leaves the body at the time of death is the soul. Yes, a perfect *yogî* is able to give up his/her body at the time he or she wishes. He can even postpone the time of his death.

### **You should pray for departed souls**

*More than fifty years ago, my brother died at the age of sixteen. I still remember him, so what can I do for him? Is it possible that because of my attitude, he doesn't go forward on his journey?*

Yes, if the relatives go on bemoaning the death, the departed soul is more attracted to them and is more disturbed. You should pray for his departed soul. Fifty years are nothing. Departed souls may live in the astral plane for hundreds and

hundreds of years. They have an astral body which does not die so easily as the physical body.

*My sister spent six months in the womb of our mother with the dead body of her twin sister who died three months after conception. She is still very disturbed. What can be done?*

That is an extraordinary case. She must have a very special relationship with the soul of that baby. In Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, there are special rites and *mantras* by the power of which the departed soul can be guided in its journey after death.

### **What if you live a few more years?**

*After my death, I am thinking of giving my body to medical science so that some organs can be used, such as the kidneys or eyes, to save somebody else. What do you think about it?*

It is a noble idea to give your organs to others, but it is not a noble idea to receive the organs from others. What if you live a few more years? One should not be so much attached to the physical life that one would wish to receive the organs of others. It is a noble idea to give your blood to others, but it is not a noble idea to receive blood from others.

*I don't feel afraid of death. Should I be?*

How can you be afraid of your death when you are not seeing that it is coming? When you are aware that it is coming, you will certainly be afraid of it. Only two types of people are not afraid of death: one who is enlightened, one who is sleeping.

Even great *yogîs* are afraid of death. The fear of death is the most basic fear and the longing for life is the most basic longing. These are dispelled only through enlightenment. The desire to live is the basic desire. All other desires are born of this desire. Death is a very useful thing. Even the remembrance of your death can transform your life. The seeker of Truth should also go to the surgical ward of some hospital and observe the patients there.

Are you afraid of a snake? What are you afraid of? If you are afraid of the death of your children, it proves that you are also afraid of your death. You are identified with your children, that is why you are afraid of their death. It means you are afraid of death.

**The departed soul goes to other worlds according to its *sanskāras***

*I wonder if there is some kind of life after death.*

As a matter of fact, this question is very deeply connected with the question “Who am I?” Am I only the physical body, which is seen and felt, or am I something more also? If what I call ‘I’ is only the physical body, then it is obvious that the body disintegrates after death, it becomes earth or ashes, meaning that what is called ‘I’ is turned into earth. But those who have conducted research in this field have come to the conclusion that man is not only the physical body. Man is comprised of the physical body, senses, *prāṇa*, mind, intellect, ego and Spirit. At the moment of death, only the physical body dies, but the mind, senses and other faculties do not disintegrate.

*What is this thing which does not disappear with the body at the moment of death?*

The Spirit associated with the mind, senses, ego and intellect is called the soul. It has no physical form; therefore it cannot be seen by the physical eyes. There are many things in the world that cannot be seen with the physical eyes. For example, there is pain, there is fear, there is anger, etc. They cannot be seen, but they cannot be denied either.

After death the soul moves to other worlds. There are many other worlds, which cannot be seen by the eyes: there is the astral world, the psychic world and so many others. The departed soul goes to these worlds according to its *sanskāras*, its *karmas*, its idiosyncrasies, and its strong *vāsanās* (*desires*). There is no one rule for all souls about where they go. So long as the mind and *vāsanās* are not disintegrated, the soul goes on moving from one world to another. It may come back again on earth and assume a physical body according to its *vāsanās* and personality, to be able to express them.

Some souls remain conscious in their after death journey, some are in a dream state and some remain unconscious until they come again into the womb of some body.

**“I am not your son anymore”**

*I am remembering my departed relatives and I keep suffering because I don't know what to do for them.*

Pray for the peace of their souls. Feed the poor in their names. Help the handicapped in their names. Make other charity services in their names. What else can you do now? All

relationships in time are temporary. They do not last forever. All unions in time end up in separation. This is the inexorable law. One should always be aware of this truism.

There is a story in the *Mahâbhârata*. Abhimanu, the son of Arjuna, was killed in the war. Arjuna was very much attached to him, so was Draupadi, his mother. They were very sad and disturbed about the death of their son. Lord Krishna tried to console them but they were still overpowered by their grief. They were crying and weeping. Krishna said, "Abhimanu has gone to a higher world and is quite happy there. You should forget him." But they were not consoled. Arjuna wanted to meet the soul of Abhimanu and he implored Lord Krishna to arrange his meeting with Abhimanu in the other world. So, Krishna took him to the other world and presented him to Abhimanu, who did not recognize Arjuna. Arjuna called him, "my son" and tried to embrace him with love. He put his hand on the head of Abhimanu in order to bless him, but Abhimanu moved aside and said, "What are you doing? I am not your son anymore. In fact, we had many other types of relationships in some other past lives. Forget me, now I am not related to you in any way." Arjuna was hurt. His attachment to his demised son faded and then Krishna brought him back.

## ***Rebirth***

*"The process of death starts as soon as the body is born. Birth follows death and death follows birth. It is a vicious circle, which moves on till the soul discovers its essential and true Nature, which is timeless, eternal and absolute Bliss/Consciousness."*

**What happens to the soul after death?**

*My name is Rawa Chand. I am eighty-two years old and near death. I would like to know what would happen to me after death.*

Rawa Chand is the name of the person. The name should not be confused with the thing or the person. A sage said, “When you confuse the name with the thing, this is called belief.” The word chair is not the chair. After death, what happens to the name “Rawa Chand” is not going to influence at all the person who is addressed by the name “Rawa Chand”, because the person will forget this name completely in his new life. Do you remember what your name was in your previous life or previous birth? Some people want their name to remain in the world forever and be remembered by people. For this, they do many things. This desire is based on sheer stupidity.

Now the question is what will happen to the person called Rawa Chandji after death? The immediate next birth of the departed person is according to the thoughts and desires of the person at the time of death. And the thoughts and desires at the last moment of life are determined by how the person has lived his life. The deepest impression of his actions and events left on the mind of the dying person determines his state of mind in the last moments. That state in those crucial moments can only be influenced by some very powerful sage, as Ramana Maharshi did for his mother, or some powerful Master (Guru) like Ramakrishna could do to his most faithful and devoted disciples. The next birth of a person is according to his state of mind, the level of his consciousness at the time of death.

**It is possible for the soul to reincarnate in an animal body**

*Is it possible to be reincarnated in a form other than that of a human being, such as an animal?*

Are you not satisfied with being a human? Yes, it is possible for the soul to reincarnate in an animal body, provided the soul becomes more and more filled with animal traits. Nature provides the soul with an appropriate physical body in which it can work out its past *karmas* and tendencies. If a person cultivates animal tendencies in the present life, it is natural that he is given an animal body in the next birth.

The physical body is a dress for the soul. As you change your dress at different places and different times, similarly the soul goes on changing bodies. It is a must for the evolution of the soul. For you to change your dress at different places is also a social obligation.

**The aspirant's aim is to get out of the vicious cycle of birth and death**

*I reflected on rebirth and I feel that our approach to life will be different if we believe in rebirth.*

Is the complete evolution of the soul possible in one life?

*If it is the will of God, surely the soul can evolve in one life.*

Do you mean to say that it is God who is impeding your evolution? The will of God is the evolutionary force secretly working in this universe, in everyone's life. You can cooperate with this divine force or resist it. If you cooperate with it, it hastens your evolution, if you resist it, it not only

delays your evolution but you suffer also. Think of a piece of wood floating down the river along with the current of the water and think of a man swimming in the river. If the man is swimming along the current, he can overtake that piece of wood and go down (into the sea) faster than the piece of wood. But if he swims against the current, he will take more time to reach the sea than the piece of wood. God wants you to be free, but he does not force you. He is not a tyrant. He is not aggressive.

*I believe in reincarnation, but as a seeker of Truth I am only interested in this life, feeling that I should find God now.*

From the standpoint of the soul, rebirth is true. But, from the standpoint of the *Ātmā*, the timeless Spirit, it is not true. Moreover, the aspirant's aim is to get out of the vicious cycle of birth and death and not to prove whether it is true or not. Once an aspirant went to the sage Oriya Baba and asked him this question, "Sir, is the doctrine of rebirth true or not?" Baba said, "It would have been better if you had asked, tell me the way that I don't come into the body again." Even the prophets have to suffer when they come into the body.

### **The theory of rebirth is most rational**

*Do you believe in rebirth? Do we come in the form of human beings again and again? My daughter died at the age of fifteen. After her death, there was a birth in my family and I believe that she has come back. Can it be so? Does the sex remain the same in most of our births?*

All the religions, which were born in India, and all the saints and sages of these religions believe in rebirth. From the rational viewpoint also, the theory of rebirth is most tenable and appropriate. Do you think the evolution of the soul can be completed in one birth, when nature takes millions and millions of years to transform one element into another? It does not sound reasonable. Without the law of *karma*, birth and death, as well as the diversity of things, situations, relationships and beings cannot appropriately be explained.

Yes, the soul of your deceased daughter can come back again in your family by the law of association and *sanskāras*. Generally, the sex of a person remains the same in his or her next birth. But there may be exceptions to this rule. By the way, the seeker of Truth does not aspire to experience directly the fact of rebirth. He or she wants to get out of the cycle of birth and death and discover the Truth which is eternal, beyond time and space, beyond the law of cause and effect.

**For your good, Nature or God has made you forget your past lives**

*My question concerns reincarnation: is it possible to meet a person who you are close to in this life in your next life?*

Certainly yes. You can meet a person who you are close to in this present life in your next life, but you don't recognize him or her. And that is nice. Otherwise it may create many problems. For example, if you recognize that he/she was your life-partner (your husband or wife) in the past life, you would be attracted to that person and your present relationship as a wife/husband would be disturbed.

Suppose you come to remember one hundred persons who were your husbands and wives in many lifetimes, what will you do? Your relationships of this life are already too much for you, how would you be able to cope with life if you came to remember the relationships of so many past lives? For your good, Nature or God has made you forget your past lives.

*Do enlightened people remember their past lives?*

Enlightenment does not mean remembering your past lives. When you become enlightened you realize that you were never born and you never die. You are the eternal, pure, divine Consciousness.

### **Belief and direct proof**

*It is difficult for me to have blind belief about rebirth.*

Well, it is not a question of belief only. One can experiment for oneself. Two children are born to the same parents, but they have different temperaments; they have different psychic make-ups. Does it not prove that they have acquired those traits in past lives? There are some children who remember their past lives. And it was proved by investigation that what they told about their previous parents and the places where they lived and what they were doing was correct. Many such cases happen in all parts of the world. Lord Buddha narrated many of his past lives. Guru Govind Singhji said that in his past life he was a *ṛiṣhi* living in a specific spot in the Himalayas. Millions of Sikhs and devotees go to that spot for pilgrimage.

*But most of the people don't remember their past lives.*

If an ordinary man comes to remember his past lives, he will become mad. It would be too much for him. Many things happened to you when you were a baby of one year, but you do not remember them. Does it mean that those things never happened to you? The remembrance is not the proof of the existence of something. Something may exist even if we do not know it now.

There are many kinds of proof. There is direct proof. There is also what is called inference, e.g., you see smoke somewhere, then you can infer that there must be fire. This inference is quite rational. It is not blind belief. Then there is another kind of proof: that is called *shabda pramāṇa*. I have not seen Gangotri. One of my friends has gone there and seen the source of the Ganges. He tells me many things about Gangotri. I have not seen them myself. But I trust what he is saying. That is called the *shabda pramāṇa*. But I can also go to Gangotri and see it for myself. If we do not want to believe, we have to do research and discover the Truth for ourselves. I have not seen my grandfather. I have to believe what my father or mother tells me about him. Should I not?

*We are always arguing whether such and such a thing exists or not. Is it the right way to attain knowledge?*

There is nothing wrong in logical argument. No argument can disprove the existence of past lives or life after death. Surrender yourself to God. He will take care of you. When you go to sleep, who takes care of you? To surrender oneself to God is the highest worship.

### **If you have discovered God, it is forever**

*I would like to understand the difference between “going to heaven” and “going to God”.*

The stay in heaven does not last forever. You have to come back again after reaping the fruits of your virtuous actions. But, if you have discovered God, it is forever. The vicious cycle of birth and death, of coming and going, is broken and you are one with divine Light, Love, and Bliss forever. That is what makes the difference between going to heaven and going to God.

### **God’s Will, Self-Will, Man’s Freedom**

*“The will is free when it is not prompted by desire. It is not free when it is prompted by desire.”*

### **Free action**

*Do we have free will?*

We have the potentiality of free will, but usually we think and will according to our *sanskāras*, according to our accumulated impressions caused by our experiences and *karmas*. The one who has become free alone has free will. If you are not free, your will cannot be free, nor can your actions be free.

*I feel if we could welcome what is given to us every moment as a gift from God, and act accordingly, we would not create new karmas.*

What do you mean to say? Do you mean to say that whatever situation arises, we should act as provoked by that situation? Or our action should be prompted from within, initiated by our divine Being? How can you act from your real centre, unless you have experienced your real Being and you are established in It? It is better first to realize your true Being instead of thinking about what the right action is and how you should act. Your action can only be according to where you are and what you are. When there is an action provoked by an outward situation, it should actually be called reaction. Pure action always comes from within and should be called divine, because it comes from your innermost centre, which initiates the action. Only that action can be free. But as I have written earlier, free action is not possible for anyone who is not enlightened and liberated.

### **The spiritual meaning of freedom and wisdom**

*This morning only two words appeared during my enquiry: freedom and wisdom. Please Swamiji, how could these words apply to my sādhanā?*

Freedom? What is freedom? How do you define it? By freedom, do you mean that you do whatever you want to do, irrespective of the social or religious norms? In the spiritual context, freedom means that you are not subservient to the desires of your mind, or to temptations, or to the pulls your senses feel towards sense-objects. Such freedom is achieved through direct experience of the Self, absolute Consciousness, which is complete in Itself, and has an independent Existence.

Wisdom implies right understanding. Right understanding is helpful on the path of Realization.

### **Which type of horse are you?**

*What is destiny? Should one believe in destiny? Is destiny different from God's will?*

Destiny means those past *karmas* that are ready to bear fruit in this very life. Man has the freedom to do, but the fruits of his actions are determined by God according to His laws. Destiny depends upon the will of God, but God's will does not depend upon destiny, that is the difference. God's will is free and can act transcendentally also, beyond the law of cause and effect. Man does not only enjoy the fruit of his past actions, but performs new actions, as if sowing new seeds. It can be said that man is both free and bound. He is free in sowing new seeds, but he is bound to reap the fruits of what he has sown in the past. Man's freedom is relative, but he is potentially divine and can realize his divine Nature and be absolutely free.

*Is man free to become the instrument of God or not?*

You become a free instrument of God when you give up your self-will completely. Long ago, I had heard a story. There was a king. He ordered the construction of a place surrounded by four boundary walls, one after the other, a place where the horses could be kept and brought up. Then he ordered horses from different countries. Every horse was tied at a particular place. The horses were fed for some years. They became very strong.

One day, the king ordered the beating of drums at that place and firing shots in the air, in order to scare the horses. The horses were scared and they wanted to run away. A few could break the rope with which they were tied, but many could not. The few who broke their rope tried to run away. Some jumped over the first boundary wall, but few could not. Those who had jumped over the first boundary wall tried to jump over the second boundary wall. Some of them could jump over but some could not. In this way, only a few could jump over all the four boundary walls.

Then the king ordered all the horses brought to him and said, "The horses that have crossed all the boundary walls are for me! I will ride on them." Those horses that crossed over three boundary walls were given to the ministers; only the ministers could ride on them. Those horses that had crossed over two boundary walls were given to the secretaries for their use, and so on for the first boundary wall. But those who could not break their ropes at all were used as ponies for carrying goods. So, which type of horse are you?

If you cross over all the desires and self-will, you become the free instrument of God's will, like the horses that crossed over all the boundary walls and were chosen by the king for his use.

### **Self-will is the first child of the ego**

*How to know God's will?*

Give up self-will and you will be able to know the will of God. Self-will binds you; it is the cause of all suffering.

When you surrender to God's will completely, no one can make you disquiet, unhappy. Self-will is the first child of the ego. On the human level, you have to discriminate between legitimate needs of the body-mind and the desires that lead you away from the path of Truth. No Scripture stops you from eating food!

*As an ordinary person, how can I know how to behave according to the will of God?*

Every person, whether one is a common person or not, should feel responsible for his or her actions. We talk of God's will. Does God's will seek anything? If we seek anything out of desire and run after that thing, how can it be the will of God? Is the will of God lacking something? How would you define God's will? How will you know the will of God if you do not know God?

*I would like to go somewhere, but I don't know what the Divine is saying to me.*

Where do you want to go? Go deep into your heart where the Divine resides. The Divine tells you that you should be relaxed.

### **Man has relative freedom**

*Man is a product of biological heredity and environment. The influence of his upbringing, education etc, are determining factors. To what extent does man have free will?*

How can your will be free if you are not free? As a human being or anything else, even an atom cannot exist without

the presence of God, who is free. Therefore nothing, not even an atom, is absolutely mechanical, although the freedom in an atom is very negligible. Should it not be so, it would mean there is no God in an atom. To deny the element of freedom in anything or any being is virtually to deny the presence of God in that thing or being.

Man has relative freedom. He is more free than minerals, vegetables and animals. But he has the potentiality of becoming absolutely free. Freedom differs from person to person. Some are more free, some are less. There are some whose mind is more conditioned than others. It depends upon the stage of evolution of a person. All human beings are not on the same level of evolution.

### **Only the one who has realized God becomes totally free**

Man is not a machine. Man is responsible for his actions. He is responsible because of his relative freedom. Man's freedom is not absolute, nor is it zero. Had it been absolute, then he would not be responsible and he would be absolutely free. If man's freedom were zero (which can never be), then also he would not be responsible. You are responsible when you have relative freedom. If you have the potentiality of being free, and you are not properly using the relative freedom which has been given to you or which you have achieved through evolution, who is responsible for that? If you drink and smoke and develop bad habits, is God responsible for it? There is confusion when you take everything or every person either as perfectly free or perfectly predetermined. That is wrong. In manifestation there is duality, different degrees of manifestation of the Divine.

When the soul reaches the stage of a human being, it becomes responsible for its actions.

Who does not want to be free? Every human being wants to be free. But everyone defines freedom in his or her own way. Some people think that if you can fulfil all your desires you are free, and they are always trying to create means to fulfil their desires. They are materialists. Others say you are free when you have no desire. And they try to get rid of desire. Freedom has different meanings for different persons. Animals are not responsible for their actions, nor is God responsible. Animals are not responsible because their freedom is very, very limited, almost negligible. God is totally free. Man is between animals and God. He is responsible for his or her actions. When he or she becomes one with God consciously, God-Realized, he or she also has no responsibility and is totally free.

*I understand why animals aren't responsible for their acts. I understand that ordinary people are responsible for their acts. But why does a person who has achieved God-Realization have no responsibility?*

The realized one has no self-will. Therefore, he/she is not responsible for his/her actions. He is either the non-doer, having realized his *nirguṇa* nature, or he is transcendent, like *Puruṣhottama*, who is above and beyond both the doer and non-doer. This experience, in which one realizes that one is the doer and the non-doer at the same time, is not logical. Such experience is supramental. On the mental level, it is not possible. This transcendent aspect of Reality cannot be grasped through the mind, which is the instrument of relative perception.

**One has to be aware of one's bondage before one can attempt to be free**

*Arnaud Desjardins says something like, If you have love (ordinary love) which is made of greediness and desires, you also have hate. The same is true if you feel the need to be saved; it means you also have the need to save others. These examples prove that our actions are not free. There is a need (neurotic need) to give. He says we should be aware of this fact. How can we not be wrong? Should we act even though we are making mistakes?*

Well, Mr Arnaud can explain what he has said better than anyone else. Love and attachment should not be confounded. What is called hate is inverted attachment. Only those who are saved can save others. Only one who is free can perform a free action. One has to be aware of one's bondage before one can attempt to be free and become free. One should try to learn from the mistakes one has made. To accept and acknowledge one's mistakes needs great courage. You should go to Mr Arnaud and seek guidance from him. His presence will help you more than only reading his books.

**Who has made your mind, you or God?**

*God has made the world. So, isn't it God who is responsible for our suffering? Man has only made the human body.*

There are two worlds, one which is made by God, the other by the *jīva*, that is *jīva srishti*. The *jīva srishti* is not real. Moreover, the suffering is in the *jīva srishti*. The human body is created by God. How can you say that man has made

the human body? A human being does not know the whole system of a human body. Man is only an instrument for creating the human body. But with the human body, different persons make different kinds of relationships. To one, it is a friend, to the other it is a foe, all such relationships made by man are called *jīva srishti*. These relationships are the causes of pleasure and pain. Who has made your mind, you or God? The projections of your mind are your projections.

A man dies. Ten different people react differently to that death. Do you mean that those reactions have been created by God? Are these reactions the creations of God? That is why I am saying pleasure and pain are the projections of the individual mind, which the soul has been making for lives and lives. Should it be said that God has made you the enemy of someone? Should it be said that if you kill someone, God is responsible for that?

The personality is made by the *karmas* and the thinking of the individual soul for many, many births and not by God. Otherwise, you would have to explain why there are so many differences between one person and the other. Why does God make one person stupid and the other person wise? Many people see the sunset. When a starving person sees the sunset, will he or she enjoy it as much as you enjoy the sunset when you look at it?

### **You may take life like a game of cards**

*We are always making choices in our daily lives. How can we recognize the right choice?*

Had you no choice, then you would not be responsible for any action you do. But the freedom of choice of the individual

is limited. The ratio of freedom and predetermination varies in every individual. That is what makes an individual different from others.

You may take life like a game of cards. You are given certain cards. You have the choice to play with those cards only. If you play the wrong cards, you lose the game. An expert player may win the game even if he or she has weak cards. A bad player can lose the game even if he or she has strong cards. If you play the right cards at the right moment, you win the game. By evolution of the soul, the element of freedom increases, yet at death you have no choice but to play the only card left in your hand. At the beginning of the game you have more choices. You have many cards in your hands and can play any of them. But as the game progresses, the number of cards with you is reduced and your choices also. As long as you have two cards left with you, you have the choice. When only one card is left in your hand, then you have no choice but to play that card.

At the time of death, you have no choice. You have played all your cards. You cannot think what you want to think. Your thinking at the last moment of your life is determined by how you have lived your life.

### **We create our sufferings and so we can also remove them**

*I have met many great sages and saints who have given me different advice, which seem to me contradictory. Is this world a dream?*

You see a train. Do you mean to say that the train has not been manufactured in any factory, and it has been created

by your mind? Indian philosophy is not wrong, but some people preach it in the wrong way for their vested interests. Indian philosophy says that our suffering is due to our own creation. God does not create it. We create our sufferings and so we can also remove them. In the world of God, there is no suffering.

*If the body is created by God, then is not the mind also created by God?*

The mind is a process. It is not a thing. The mind is always changing. Why would God give a pure mind to one and an impure mind to another? We are responsible for the purity or the impurity of our minds! If a person is smoking, is it God who is making him/her smoke? Mind is much more flexible than the physical body. You are freer in your mind than in your body.

You cannot be a machine. It is against human dignity. To deny freedom in you means to deny the presence of God in you.

### **Freedom is real; bondage is unreal**

*Do karmas determine the next life or is it due to God's grace?*

*Karma* is insentient. The soul is given the body or the environment by God, according to its past *karmas*. The law of *karma* is under God, but God is not under the law of *karma*. The term "man" means the being with mental consciousness or mind. Man is not completely free. He is only in a transitional state. The bondage of the soul is not

real. Had the bondage been real, the soul would never become free. Freedom is real; bondage is unreal.

*And is not this freedom the same for every person?*

The freedom of man is changing. One man is more free than another man. It is not static.

### **True Freedom**

*I am in conflict with my parents about my coming to India and what I am doing here. What should I do?*

Some parents are spiritual but their children are materialistic. Some children are drawn to spirituality but the parents are materialists. The same conflict is often seen between husbands and wives. This world is full of conflicts. In the West, these family ties are not as strong as they are in India, and that also creates conflict. Too much freedom has spoiled and disintegrated the family life. Everyone wants peace, happiness, whether they are spiritual or materialistic. The approach is different. The materialist says that the spiritual seeker is living in a self-created dream and chasing a wild ghost. The spiritual seeker says that the materialist is trying to "get milk out of sand."

*I fear the influence of my parents on my spiritual life.*

You are afraid of your parents' influence. They are afraid of the influence that the dirty and polluted atmosphere in India will have on you.

*I want to be free from the opinion of my parents, as from anybody else, so that I can practise my sādhanā freely.*

You seem to want freedom from everything, from everyone, except from your mind. Is it so? Swami Vivekananda used to say, “If you want to know how much you are really free or not, then sit down, close your eyes and see if you can control your thoughts or not.” True freedom lies in not being the slave of your mind and senses.

Absolute freedom and absolute bondage should be the same. But absolute bondage is impossible, because God is free and God is present in everyone.

## Chapter Nine

### *Spiritual Experiences, Enlightenment, Realization and Fulfilment*

#### *Experiences of sounds and visions*

**When you go inward, you may hear many types of sound**

*I often hear a sound from within which helps me to concentrate, is it a good practice?*

There are so many sounds going on within. Whenever there is movement, there is sound. In the physical body, the blood is flowing, the breath is moving, there is movement of the cells also. So, when you go inward, you may hear many types of sound. If you hear a sound, which is pleasant to you, it may attract and absorb your attention and help you to withdraw your mind from outside. That is the only benefit for a spiritual seeker. Otherwise, it has no spiritual significance.

*When I practise concentration, some faces appear to me and interfere with my concentration. Do they come as a result of that person's thinking, or as a result of my own thinking?*

It can be a one way affair, either only by you, or only by the other. It can also be a two way affair; that is, each thinking of the other!

### **Going away from the physical world and entering the subtle world**

*What is the meaning of the different colours that we see in the body during meditation: white for water, green for air, red for fire, blue for ether and yellow for earth?*

If you see blue colour coming to you during meditation, it simply means that ether is predominant in the body at that time. There is an outer world, which we see through the five senses outside. If you analyse it, it is also a mixture of colours and sounds, or more subtly, it is only *guṇas*, qualities and nothing more. But the substance, which supports these qualities, which is the ground of the *guṇas*, cannot be perceived by the senses. There is an inner world also. When the attention is directed inward, one comes to see the inner world. You may see colours, hear sounds, see forms, and feel some sort of energy. If your mind is connected with some other world through meditation, you may even see the beings and things of that world. During meditation, one can see many things. Some inner experiences are very pleasant. Some are very unpleasant. There is no spiritual importance of such experiences, except that your attention is going inward, your mind is becoming more and more subtle. In that sense it may be called progress, going away from the physical world and entering the subtle world.

*Do all these colours become golden when they merge together?*

There are also colours of the other *tattvas*, such as mind, over mind and super mind. These are more vibrant and dynamic. They are more attractive and absorb the attention, giving more joy.

*So, what does it mean when I see colours or lights, or hear sounds during meditation?*

It means that the mind is looking inward and is looking attentively inside. We are composed of five *tanmātras*, which are the five pure elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Each of them has a different colour, for earth it is yellow, for fire it is red, for water it is white, for air it is green and for ether it is blue. Every element has its own vibration. Wherever there is a movement there is a sound. The resistance in the movement of energy produces sound. For example when you are hearing the sound of the Yamuna River it is because the movement of the water is being resisted by the stones.

### **The Ātmā is the real Light**

*Does the flow of the incredibly pure golden light within the sushumnâ happen only once?*

There are so many kinds of lights. There is the light of the sun, the light of the moon, the light of the stars, or the light of lamps. These are outer lights. You cannot do anything without these lights. You cannot even walk easily if there aren't any lights there. Then there are the lights of the senses, the light of the word or speech, the light of touch, the light of smell, etc. When there is no outer light, you can walk

with the help of sound, or touch or smell, etc. Then there is also the light of the mind. If the mind is not there, the senses do not function, the eyes cannot see, the ears do not hear, the nose does not smell. Mind can work independently; it can see without the eyes, hear without the ears, smell without the nose, touch without the skin. In the dream state, this power is demonstrated very clearly. In the dream state, the eyes are closed, but you see many forms. The light of the mind is not independent. The mind borrows its light from the *Ātmā*. The *Ātmā* is the real light. The *Ātmā* is called, “*Jyotishâm api taj jyotis*” — “The Light of all lights” in the *Upanishads*.

The golden light that is the object of perception is not the real light. Don't give much importance to such lights, which are seen. Turn the arrow of your attention back to the Knower, to the Seer and you will be able to realize the Light of all lights, the infinite and divine Consciousness. The *sâdhaka* may see certain colours or lights or hear certain sounds when he/she turns inward. These colours or lights seen or the sounds heard are usually of the *tanmâtras*, the pure elements which are called *apanchikrit bhûtas*. Sometimes very dynamic lights are seen which influence your inner state of mind very deeply. Seeing such golden light during meditation produces a peculiar vibration in your body-mind and you feel transported, as it were. Such experience is the indication of the dawning of some substantial spiritual experience. If you become attached to such experiences or the inner pleasures they give, it becomes a hindrance on the path of Self-Realization. This has been clearly stated in the Patanjali's *Yoga Sûtras* where there is the mention of obstacles to Self-Realization.

**The glimpse of inner joy helps in shattering the clouds**

*Sometimes, we are briefly conscious of being full of joy. Why are those moments so short?*

Unless the body-mind is purified completely, the inner joy felt during meditation cannot remain ceaseless. The clouds of desires cover the sun of Consciousness/Bliss again and again, but the glimpse of inner joy helps in dissipating these clouds. Therefore, the more frequently these glimpses come, the better it is. It is the indication that the clouds are becoming rarefied; the body-mind is getting purified.

The mind is like a mirror in which you see your face. If the mirror is dirty, you cannot see your face. Also if the mirror is moving, even though it may be clean, you cannot clearly see your face. Therefore, in all types of *sādhanā*, stress is placed upon the purification and steadiness of the mind.

**The visions of saints and sages come to help the seeker**

*In my family, religion has been associated with esoteric practices, communication with dead people, clairvoyants, premonitions etc. As a child, I was terrified, and this fear associated with the fear of becoming mad is still there. In Kankhal, I had a significant dream in which Ma Anandamayee was trying to send me an image of her but told me it wasn't possible because I was so afraid. How can I get free from this fear?*

Communication with dead people, with clairvoyants, with spirits or any person or thing which is less than God is like

mud in comparison with communication with the Divine. The seeker of Truth needs to shun, slowly and gradually, the desire for all that is finite and not lasting. The visions of saints and sages come to help the seeker. Why are you afraid of such visions? What makes you afraid? Are you afraid of death? There is only one way of getting free from all fears and that is to be detached from the things and persons of the world of time through the love-knowledge of the Divine. There is no other way. You already know how to gain the love-knowledge of the Divine. Try to assimilate through practice, discipline and meditation what you know intellectually about the Truth or the Divine.

**To see any sage in meditation is very auspicious**

*For several days in my dhyâna, Guru Nanak Devji came before me. I was concentrating to have the vision of Krishna, Rama or Ambama. Why did Guru Nanak Devji appear to me? Should I read Guru Granth Sahib? In a course book for secondary classes, my co-author wrote that in the South, when Guru Nanakji was working with a sultan, he was charged with embezzlement. There was an outcry against him. I was asked to remove the chapter, which I did. Is Guru Nanak Devji happy with me?*

The integrity of Guru Nanak cannot be questioned. Many times his parents gave him money and asked him to do some business. Instead he would bring rations and feed the saints and sages. He was given a job in a shop. He was counting some packets and giving them to customers. When he reached the number thirteen, he entered into a state of divine

*mahâbhāva* because thirteen is pronounced as “*tera*” in Punjabi, which also means “Thine,” addressed to the Lord. Can such a person be charged with embezzlement? It is unthinkable.

To see Guru Nanak Devji or any sage in meditation is very auspicious. Some people want to have visions of sages and cannot. If you have a vision of a sage, it should be considered the grace of God and also the special grace of that sage whom you see in your meditation.

*How is it possible to see Jesus, or any sage, if they have transcended their mind and merged into Brahman?*

*Brahman* manifested itself and assumed the form of Jesus, and many people saw Jesus. Then, Jesus merged into *Brahman*. If *Brahman* can assume the form of Jesus for thirty-three years, why cannot *Brahman* assume the form of Jesus for a few seconds if you want to see Him?

### **Everyone doesn't have visions**

*I wonder if visions are real.*

When Swami Vivekananda went to the *Khirbhāvani* temple of the divine Mother in Kashmir, he had a vision of the divine Mother there. Not everyone who goes there has such a vision. The divine Mother is everywhere, but at certain places, She is especially manifest. Fire is also everywhere. It is present even in a stone. But if you touch the stone, your hand will not be burnt. If the wood is burning, you will burn your hand if you touch that fire.

**The visions of saints and sages come to the seeker to change something in him**

*I often have the vision of Mother Sarada Devi. Is the Holy Mother of my vision real?*

Where is that Mother now? The Divine Mother can appear in any form, but she has no form in reality. In your vision she was relatively real. A human being can conceive of God only in a human form. The formless God cannot be realized by you until you are disidentified with your physical body. The visions of saints and sages come to the seeker to change something in him. When that is done, visions stop coming. They come to those seekers who need visions. It also depends upon the level of consciousness of the seeker during meditation. The seeker starts seeing things, forces and beings of a particular world with which his/her mind comes in contact during meditation. This is not a lower, but rather a higher level than our normal level of consciousness during the wakeful state. During sleep also the mind is detached from the physical body. Therefore its power increases. The hold of time and space becomes almost negligible on the mind in the dreaming state. If you start cherishing or entertaining visions, then they can become a hindrance to spiritual progress.

*I most often reject these visions, which in the end disturb my meditation.*

That also is not proper. You have to remain passive. Let a vision do the work for which it has come. It will subside by itself. If you resist, it also means that you are attached with it in a negative sense.

**A vision influences one more deeply than a dream experience**

*Are dreams and visions the same?*

A vision is not a dream. It is seeing something directly without the interference of the thinking mind and the external senses.

A vision is based upon an inner experience which is the experience you get through a deeper and purer state of mind. A vision influences your personality much deeper than a dream-experience does. The influence of what you experience during dreams is not as lasting as the influence of a vision. If you see a saint in a dream, his influence may last for some months. But if you have the vision of some saint in meditation, the influence may last for years and years.

**Don't resist such experiences**

*Some deep experiences in which I can feel love and my connection with the Divine through Jesus come to me spontaneously. I feel difficulty in dealing with such situations. Respected Swamiji, can you give me some explanation about these happenings?*

If you feel love and your connection with the Divine through Jesus, you should be very happy. What is your difficulty in dealing with such situations? You are very fortunate that you have been chosen by the Divine. Many seekers wish to have love for the Divine. They do *sādhanā* but cannot have such experiences, and you say that they come to you spontaneously. Why do you want to control such “happenings”? Do you want to stop the feeling of love for

the Divine? If so, why? The love for the Divine removes all obstacles on the path of Realization. It is happening because the Divine has chosen you. Don't resist such experiences. If you resist them, they will stop.

*Why is it so difficult for me to come back when I am in communion with the Divine?*

Why do you want to come back? When you are in a state of love and happiness, you don't need to clarify anything. You need to introspect and clarify only when you are in confusion or in some difficulty. Love and bliss are only possible when there is no doubt and confusion. When you spontaneously feel love for the Divine, live in that and enjoy it. Don't cultivate doubts and confusion in yourself. It reminds me of a saying by a Sufi saint, which is somewhat like this: When a baby is on the lap of its mother and drinking milk from her breast, can the baby ever doubt the mother and her love?

## ***Intuition***

*Senses, mind and intellect are the instruments for knowing the world. Supramental intuition is the instrument for knowing God.*

### **Intuition and right action**

*Should we follow a strong intuition? How do we know if a strong thought is intuition or only a thought coming from our minds?*

Intuition happens only when thoughts stop, when the mind is completely relaxed. One can follow one's intuition or may

not follow it. If you don't follow your intuition, you miss an opportunity of a right action. Intuition is always real. Are you never relaxed? Is your mind never silent? Don't stop using your discrimination. Moreover, when you do an action, you should see whether it is in conformity with social and moral laws or not. If you are confused, you should consult a person whom you take to be more intelligent than you.

*Is intuition of the same nature as witnessing consciousness?*

Intuition is something else. It is the direct knowledge of something without the interference of mind or senses, without depending on the mind and senses. Actually, intuition happens only when the mind is silent and the senses are passive.

### **Difference between ego and intuition**

*How does one discriminate between ego and intuition?*

The ego creates problems. Intuition solves problems. That is the difference between ego and intuition. Ego is the cause of agitation. Intuition brings clarity and peace. It is not difficult to discriminate between ego and intuition.

### ***The state of no-mind***

**You must have the experience of non-thinking Consciousness**

*Can we be without action?*

The soul can be acting or not acting, thinking or not thinking,

willing or not willing. When it is not acting, not thinking, not willing, it is pure Consciousness. Thinking is not possible without Consciousness, but Consciousness can be without thinking. You must have the experience of non-thinking Consciousness. *Patanjali's Yoga* is the discipline to have that experience. That experience can also come through following other paths. That simple Consciousness is present in all the states.

### **You have to be prepared to face the state of no-mind**

*Sometimes in the morning, I awake from my sleep and have no thoughts, nothing, as if I was in the state of no-mind and I cannot bear these moments. I am too afraid.*

Yes, it can be so. The first time Swami Vivekananda was taken into the state of no-mind by Ramakrishna, he started crying, saying, "I am dying." If you are always identified with your mind and the mind starts disappearing, you feel that you are dying. You take yourself to be only the mind or body at your present level of consciousness. You are not aware of your real centre, which is deathless. Therefore, when the body dies, or when the mind starts disappearing, you will start crying. For an ordinary person, who is always identified with thoughts, the state of no-mind is unbearable. It is like death to him or her. He or she would become unconscious with fear at that time. You have to be prepared for that state. Through meditation and *sādhana* you are preparing to face that state. If it comes too suddenly you may become mad. Many people became mad in *sādhana*, when they tried to enter into that state forcibly, if they were not yet fit or prepared for it. Seekers ask the saints and sages

to be blessed with that state, but only a Vivekananda can be given a taste of that state.

*What does the state of no-mind mean?*

Where there is no-mind, there is no time. Time consciousness indicates a certain degree of tension. Spirit is completely tension-free and so It is timeless. In a way it is similar to the deep sleep state with Consciousness centred in Itself.

*Once, during my meditation I had such an experience of no-mind. I became aware of time only when I heard all the small sounds in the room a hundred times louder than they actually were, but no other sensations. Swamiji, can you explain?*

“No-time” experience is very, very strong. This experience has the potentiality of destroying all attachment with whatever is in the world of time and space. When it happens or comes again and again, it turns into the Realization of the timeless, eternal and infinite Spirit or Consciousness.

### **Spiritual experiences cleanse the heart of the seeker**

*I often feel a sensation of fire in my heart.*

Fire sometimes presents only heat, sometimes heat and light, both. When you talk of the feeling of fire in the heart, what do you mean? Heat, or heat and light both, the feeling of heat and a burning sensation? Any experience of joy is the experience of God in one form or the other. There are so many sweets, *gulāb jāmun*, *barfi*, *jalebi*, etc., but sugar is present in all sweets. The taste of the different sweets differs

because in each sweet there are some other things mixed with the sugar. Similarly, the joy that is felt through different modifications of the mind is the specific divine Joy mixed with a specific state of mind. The divine Joy that is revealed in the state of no-mind is the pure divine Joy like the pure sugar. The divine Joy experienced through no-mind is the same for all. The divine Joy experienced through the mind has a different taste for different people. Enjoy it as the divine presence, as you have said.

It reminds me of a Hindi couplet from a saint. It says, “Fie on the human life which is not filled with divine Love. Fie on the understanding which is bereft of divine wisdom. Fie on the knowledge which does not transform the life of the knower. Fie on the joy which is not based on the experience of the divine presence.”

*These experiences do not last long. When they leave, should we intensify our sādhanā or wait patiently until they come again?*

One should know that it is normal. Experiences come and go. No experience is everlasting. What is everlasting is the Experiencing, the eternal Consciousness. The spiritual experiences that come and go have a purpose. They cleanse the heart of the seeker and prepare him or her for the revelation of the everlasting divine Consciousness. Therefore, the seeker should not feel distressed when he/she feels a lack of intensity of divine Joy. One should be patient and carry on with one’s *sādhanā*. The movement of divine energy is in a waveform, like the movement of all energies. There are crests and ebbs in the wave, though it is moving ahead. Some Christian mystics have called these

dry spells the “dark night of the soul”. A spell means a specific feeling for a temporary period.

## ***Samādhi***

***Samādhi* leads you to the experience of That which is beyond all states**

*Kindly tell us about samādhi.*

*Samādhi* means to die to the false self. When saints and sages die, the devotees build their *samādhis*, their tombs. You all went to see the *samādhi* of Mâ Anandamayee yesterday. If one dies to the false self while living, that is the true *samādhi*.

*Samādhi* is the state in which one is free from ego and established in one’s divine Nature. *Samādhi* is the state in which the mind stops working and the supermind takes over to lead your life. *Samādhi* is the state of supramental intuition.

*Samādhi* is of many kinds. In *savikalpa samādhi* the mind still remains in a very subtle form. The highest *samādhi*, in which the knower and the known become one, is called *nirvikalpa samādhi*. It is non-polar. In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the relative perception ceases. In fact you cannot call it the highest. It is devoid of the duality of high and low. In *savikalpa samādhi* the mind is there, totally concentrated on the object of concentration.

*I read that samādhi was not connected with Liberation. How is it possible? Is samādhi permanent?*

It must have been in reference with some inferior type of *samādhi*. There is pseudo *samādhi* also! *Samādhi* literally means the state of *samādhān* in which all your questions, conflicts, enquiries, and doubts are resolved.

No state can be permanent. *Samādhi* leads you to the experience of That which is beyond all states. You are like a dead person when you are in *samādhi* and yet alive. You are dead to the world-phenomena and alive to the timeless Eternity.

*Is it true that an ordinary person can't live in samādhi, but a saint or sage can live in this state?*

One has to come down from the state of *samādhi* until the *karmas* of the body are exhausted. An ordinary person is also in *samādhi*, but he/she does not know it. It is like a person sleeping in a garden full of fragrant roses.

### **In *turîya*, you come to know the pure Awareness**

*What does turîya mean?*

The word *turîya* is used for *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is a state different from the three states: wakeful state, dreaming state and deep sleep state. *Turîya* is different qualitatively from the three other states. *Turîya* literally means fourth. The fourth is the *Ātmā*, the principle of Awareness. It is not a state. The other states come and go in the *Ātmā*, whereas the *Ātmā* always remains the same. In *turîya*, you come to know directly what is the pure Awareness or the *Ātmā*. It is present in all the states, but is also transcendent. This is how the four are related with one another.

### Experiences of different spiritual states

*A few days ago you talked about bhāva (feeling), mahabhāva and bhāvâtîta. If we take the door of emptiness instead of feeling, do we also experience these three states: turîya, mahâturîya and turîyâtîta?*

*Bhāva* means feeling. When the divine feeling becomes very deep and intense, so much so that one forgets one's physical body and everything about the world and is totally absorbed in the love of the Divine or in the contemplation of one's *Iṣhta*, it is called *mahâbhāva*. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the devotee of Lord Krishna, often used to go into *mahâbhāva*. Ramakrishna Paramahansa also had the experience of the *mahâbhāva* state. During the *mahâbhāva* even the physical body becomes divinised with the divine feeling. If the seeker follows the path of passive meditation, he or she directly goes into the state of no-mind. This is without having the experience of the *mahâbhāva* state. *Turîya* or *mahâturîya* are the states of the absorption of the mind in some aspect of the Divine. *Turîyâtîta* is not a state but the Reality, the infinite Consciousness. Realization can come through the practice of passive meditation, which leads to the thoughtless state, or it can come through the path of devotion which leads to *mahâbhāva*.

**“I was more alive in that state than you are in your present state.”**

*I saw someone who stayed for nine days in a cave, which was closed, without food, water, and light: with nothing. Was he in samādhi?*

A human being can adapt himself to any climate. Animals cannot. When this man was in the cave his process of metabolism had stopped. But, when he came out of the cave, his weight went down, and the body became weak.

A doctor visited Lahiri Mahashaya in Benares. L. Mahashaya asked the doctor, “What is the definition of death according to your medical science?” The doctor said, “No heart-beat, no pulse, metabolism stops, etc.” Then L. Mahashaya closed his eyes and told him, “Please check me after five minutes.” After twenty minutes, L. Mahashaya came out of that state and asked the doctor, “Was I alive or dead?” The doctor said, “Sir, you were completely dead!” L. Mahashaya, smiled and said, “I was more alive in that state than you are in your present state.”

## ***Realization***

**The knower can be known by completely disidentifying itself from what is known**

*What does Self-Realization mean?*

Who knows what Self-Realization means? The one who asks the question has to realize the Self. In the real Self, there cannot be any doubt or any questions or any inquiries. This phrase appears in the *Upaniṣhads*, “How to know the knower?” If you know the knower, the knower becomes the known. So, the knower can be realized only by being the knower. The knower can be known by completely disidentifying itself with what is known. In the very beginning of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* it has been explained

that so long as any thought is there, you become identified with it. When all the modifications of the mind stop, the Seer or the Self cannot identify Itself with any thought and It is established in Itself.

**When the thinking process stops, the Spirit or *Puruṣha* shines in its pure Nature**

*How to realize our true Nature?*

First you have to trust that you are not the doer. But trust cannot be complete unless you realize first-hand yourself as the *Puruṣha*. That is what is called Self-Realization.

Realization happens only in the thought-free, silent and purified mind. The mind and Spirit are so much mixed up that it is difficult to separate the witness from the thinking mind. When the thinking process stops, the Spirit or *Puruṣha* shines in its pure Nature. That is what is called Self-Realization.

That is why the thinking process must be stopped in the wakeful state. In the wakeful state, the Spirit or *Ātmā* is identified with that state. In the dreaming state, It is identified with the dreaming state, and in the deep sleep state It is identified with the deep sleep state. To realize what you really are, you must go out of all these three states.

You have not seen yourself as being free of these three states, that is why you don't realize your true Nature. The dreaming state is not your real Nature, because it is not with you when you are in the deep sleep state. Similar logic can be applied to the other states. Whatsoever can be separated from you in any place, at any time or in any state is not your

real Nature. The true Self is the witnessing Consciousness. It is present in all the states.

### **A flash of spiritual light can come for a moment**

*Is it possible to have the experience of witnessing even when the mind is not pure?*

There is darkness in the night and you cannot see anything. When it is cloudy or raining, there is a flash of lightening and, for a moment, you are able to see. Similarly, when the mind is calm and quiet, a flash of spiritual light can come and one can for a moment be aware of one's true Being. But it is just like a flash.

### **Realization means when God/Truth becomes real to you**

*What does satori and Nirvāṇa mean?*

*Satori* is a word used in Buddhist terminology. *Satori* means enlightenment. *Nirvāṇa* means complete annihilation of the individual separated self. The literal meaning of *Nirvāṇa* is 'extinguishment', the ceasing of the cycle of birth and death for the soul. Enlightenment means to know first-hand directly, and not by intellectual understanding, that I am the eternal Being, *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*.

*What do you mean by direct Realization?*

God-Realization means when God becomes real for you. Now God is only a concept for you. You don't have the direct experience. The *Ātmā* is not real for you. It is the

body which is real for you. That is why you are afraid of death. For example, you have not gone to Mount Kailash. You have only heard about it, and you can think of it. But when you go to Kailash and see it for yourself, then it will be a direct experience for you.

### **Chronological order of spiritual achievement**

*During the prayer we say before each meditation, “Give me strength to seek Thee and see Thee, give me strength to see the Truth and live the Truth!” Is it not the same, to “see” and “live”?*

First you see God face to face, directly, in *samādhi*; afterwards, the experience gradually and slowly turns into Realization and you start living in God consciously and unceasingly. Experience, awakening, enlightenment, Realization and Fulfilment are the different steps of spiritual attainment.

*Could you kindly explain what the following means: experience, awakening, enlightenment, Realization?*

Experience is just a glimpse, as if there is a flash of lightening and the darkness vanishes for a moment.

Awakening usually comes abruptly and suddenly, you may say like a bolt out of the blue. It may come with some spiritual experience or it may come even with one's approaching death in some very dangerous situation. Awakening usually does not last long, and usually it does not transform one's life.

Enlightenment is higher than awakening. It is always based on direct spiritual experience. Enlightenment is not mental. It happens when the mind is completely silent, inactive, but alert. It happens in the state of complete alert passivity. It does bring a certain transformation in life. The outlook of life and perspective are radically changed with enlightenment. We can say that enlightenment is the state in which you feel Self-Fulfilled, in which all your wants lose their importance. But there are still some traces of ignorance lingering in the subconscious. Usually it happens in a flash and it is not permanent. It may come and may go. It is a flash of spiritual intuition, for a moment. If the experience is repeated time and again it goes on cleansing the subconscious, and when the experience is established in all parts of the personality, the Realization happens.

Realization is the ripening of enlightenment or the stabilization of the experience of enlightenment. Enlightenment is sudden. Realization is not sudden. It may take years and years, even many lives. Purification of the mind and stabilization of the mind are the essential prerequisites and both are interdependent. Realization means when That - the One without a second, becomes real for you, in all times, in all places and in all states. To see the Reality is enlightenment. To imbibe and assimilate It is Realization. Enlightenment means seeing the Divine face to face and Realization means living in God ceaselessly.

Fulfilment is the fruit of Realization. But all of these: awakening, enlightenment and Realization are rare, though much advertised by the teachers who claim to have found the Truth. Hope for the best and be prepared for the worst!

**There are different stages in the process of purification**

*In our material world, an individual acquires knowledge in phases, such as you become a graduate, then a post graduate and so on. In the process of Self-Realization, are there such stages? In other words, is there something like partial Self-Realization?*

Some people put this question in a single sentence, “Does Realization come suddenly or by stages?” The answer is that the experience of the Self comes suddenly, unexpected, in a flash. But the experience does not last because the transformation of all parts of the personality of the seeker is not yet complete. The experience turns into Realization and becomes everlasting only when there is complete purification and transformation of all parts of the personality. In this sense, it can be said that there are different stages in the process of purification. It can be understood by an example. The sun is covered with clouds. The clouds are moving, or their density is changing. The sun may appear through the clouds for a moment and then again the clouds may cover it. But when the sun appears again and again through the clouds, the clouds are gradually dissolved and vanish. The heat of the sun is the cause of the formation of the clouds and the heat of the sun is also the cause of the dispersion of the clouds. The sun is the source of heat and light, both. Similarly, the Divine is the source of Power and Consciousness. The sun is the most visible symbol of God, that is why the sun is worshipped.

You can know whether you are going in the right direction or in a wrong one. There are signs of that, but you cannot locate your position as to how far you still are from

the Divine. This is not possible because the Divine is infinite, beyond time and space, and beyond the law of causation. Delhi is two hundred and fifty kilometres from here. So, when you travel to Delhi, you can calculate that you have travelled fifty kilometres and there is still a distance of two hundred kilometres left to reach Delhi. But with Self-Realization, no such calculation can be made.

*Probably, the Master knows where the disciple is standing?*

The Master does not need to know or to tell it to you. He pushes you to go on and on in the right direction, and to not look back. If you approach the fire, you feel more and more heat. If you approach the Divine, you feel more and more joy, which is not dependent on any object, situation or relationship. You become more and more peaceful. You have more and more power to face the challenges of life; you can remain more and more balanced whether in pleasing or adverse situations. You start feeling yourself as the Divine is.

### **Purification of the mind and Realization**

*I am sure of the existence of God, of a supreme Being, but I cannot feel Him. I came here pushed by a force. I don't want to miss this opportunity. So, could you give me some light to live in God's love?*

To live in God is not possible unless you first realize God. The experience of God comes to you when your mind is completely purified and silent. Purification means to get rid of attachment, hatred, jealousy, anger, and all other negative tendencies. A purified mind alone can be made silent. The

pure love of God manifests in a pure mind. To see God in everyone is not so easy. It is not so difficult to see God in Jesus, Rama, Buddha, Mohammed and Mahavir. But to see God in a robber or in a scorpion is not so easy. Can you see God in a scorpion and love it and embrace it?

Once Swami Rama Tirtha was meditating on the bank of the Ravi River in Lahore. He was a professor of mathematics in a government College at Lahore at that time. He saw a snake on the bank of the river. He was in a state of Krishna Consciousness, repeating “Krishna, Krishna”, so he went after the snake to embrace it. The snake ran away and hid itself in a bush. Rama Tirtha, losing his body-consciousness, sat there, absorbed in Krishna’s love for the whole night. The next morning, he came out of that state and went back home. Before becoming a *Vedantin*, Rama Tirtha was a very great devotee of Lord Krishna. When he would give discourses on *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*, he used to start weeping and crying in love for Krishna, on the stage, in front of an audience of thousands, and the discourse had to be stopped. This happened many times.

Devotion to God purifies your mind. If a devout *bhakta* becomes a *Vedantin*, he or she very soon can have the experience of the non-duality of *Brahman*, because the mind has already been purified. When Totapuri, the Guru of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, instructed Ramakrishna on how to go into *nirvikalpa samādhi*, in which the experience of *advaita* happens, Ramakrishna took only three or four days to go into that state. Totapuri was amazed and said, “The state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which I could only experience after a rigorous and continuous practice of yoga for over forty years, Ramakrishna could attain in only few days.” It

was so because the mind and heart of Ramakrishna had already been completely purified through devotion to the divine Mother.

*I understand all that very well intellectually but it does not come down into my heart.*

It is not so difficult to know intellectually what God is. You can go to a college, read religious philosophy for a few years and you will not only know about God intellectually, but you will also be able to give discourses and teach others about God!

*Can we see God in everyone if we do not know what God is?*

If I see a person weeping and crying in pain, how would I feel that he/she is God? When you see the world, you don't see God, and when you see God, you don't see the world. You cannot see a snake and a rope at the same time in the same thing. But your reaction will show what you are seeing: a snake or a rope! You cannot see God in others unless you see God in yourself.

*Seeing God in others is out of my reach. This keeps me apart from others.*

Seeing God in others is very difficult. How can you see God in anyone if you see some fault or weakness or limitation in him? And how will you see God in others if you have not seen God within you? You cannot see God in others unless you see God in yourself. God is everywhere. It is only after you have seen God within you that you see Him in others. Therefore, you should try to see God within you. That is the

nearest place where you can see God. And for seeing God within you, you have to withdraw your attention from outside and direct it within. You have to go within and look there for God. That is what is called “the backward flowing of the attention”. That is the keyword for Self-Realization or God-Realization. This expression, “backward flowing”, was coined by Jung, the great psychologist. He used this expression in his commentary on the sayings of a Chinese Taoist mystic school, in the book, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.

### **Spiritual awakening is like dawn, Realization is full daylight**

*When spiritual awakening has happened, Masters say that this is not the end of seeking. What is left to be found after it?*

Yes, spiritual awakening is not the end. It must turn into Realization, otherwise it cannot satisfy and fulfil the seeker whose journey is not finished. Spiritual awakening is like dawn; Realization is the full daylight, when the darkness vanishes completely. In spiritual awakening you see the path clearly, but you may not yet have the strength to follow it.

*In “The Practical Approach to Divinity” you have written: “While Realization of the Self is a very high spiritual experience, it is not the ultimate goal. It is only the experience of one aspect of the Divine.” Can you explain more about these stages?*

In this book, when it is said that Self-Realization is not the end of the spiritual search, it means that the experience of

the immutable, *nirguṇa* Consciousness is not the highest spiritual experience.

*What is the difference between the real Self and Brahman?*

There is no essential difference between the real Self and *Brahman*. Realization of the real Self and Realization of *Brahman* is one and the same thing. The vicious cycle of birth and death stops forever for the one who has realized the true Self or *Brahman*.

### **Realization is individual**

*Gandhiji said, “Even in the middle of destruction, life carries on. There must be a higher law than the one of destruction!”*

Creation and destruction go together; they are like two sides of a coin, which cannot be separated. Birth and death are like day and night. They appear to be opposite, but both are parts of one movement, two aspects of one phenomenon. Absolute Reality is beyond both creation and destruction. It is infinite and timeless Consciousness. Only through the Realization of timeless Consciousness can one get out of the vicious circle of birth and death. This Realization happens in a purified, stable and completely silent mind.

*What is the meaning of “Realization is individual”?*

It means that if you attain Realization, it does not mean that all others also get Realization along with you. Were it so, then all would have become enlightened when Buddha got enlightenment.

*But when one attains Realization, isn't it helping all the other people around him?*

Well, what you are saying does not mean that Realization is universal. Those who say that Realization is universal think that no individual can be liberated alone.

*When a person is liberated, does it help others?*

When a person is liberated, it automatically creates a wave movement by which evolution is advanced. Liberation means disintegration of a personality. When an atom is broken, so much energy is released. When a person is liberated, infinite energy is released. If you vacate a place, many rush up to fill that place.

*When a group of people work together for Liberation, is it helpful for all of them?*

It is easier to work for Liberation if some seekers work together. But it does not mean that you are helping someone. They are not making peace, but invoking peace. How can a non-liberated person help others in their liberation? Can a sleeping person awaken the others who are sleeping?

### ***The Realized One***

*When a jīvātmā has realized the Truth, directly and immediately, he/she is no longer karta (the doer) or bhokta (the enjoyer). His state and actions transcend the law of cause and effect. The laws of this phenomenal world do not bind it. Such a soul is very, very rare.*

### **When God has become real to you**

*I still wonder about the meaning of Realization. Is a realized one still like a normal person?*

The realized one is a perfectly normal person. All others are abnormal. They have to do something to remove their abnormality. Others, you should call common persons.

Realization means the direct and immediate experience of the Divine (without the interference of the conditioned mind), which has become stabilized and has penetrated into all parts of the personality of the seeker, divinising them totally and completely. Realization means that God has become real to you and transformed you from a conditioned person to a free being, Self-Fulfilled, needing nothing, seeking nothing, doing nothing, desiring nothing and expecting nothing.

### **The realized one sees only the Divine, whatever be his state**

*By which signs can we recognize a realized one?*

Freedom from desires and complete control of one's mind and senses is only one sign of Realization. There are also other more important signs of Realization. In the second chapter of the *Gītā*, many signs of a realized one are given.

In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the realized one sees the Divine face to face (directly) in His impersonal *nirguṇa* aspect. With his eyes open, the realized one sees the Divine in His *saḡuṇa* aspect. He sees the Divine and only the Divine, in whatever state he is. The realized one is established in the Divine, who is unmoved and unmovable.

**“Everything is divine” is only for the one who has realized the Divine**

*I was taught that everything is divine. What is the difference between a man working at a monotonous job in a factory and practising japa?*

Through *japa* one is remembering the Divine. By working in a factory, one is manufacturing goods for the comfort of the body. Don't you see any difference between them? When you are remembering your beloved girlfriend and you are working in a factory is there no difference? For a devotee of God, God is much sweeter than a girlfriend. “Everything is divine” is only for the one who realized the Divine in everything. For others, only what is pleasing, what is favourable seems to be divine. But when any unfavourable situation comes, you become upset and disturbed. Would you say that you are feeling the Divine when you are disturbed? “Everything is divine” is a statement made by the *rishis* who realized God in everything. For a common man, it is only fiction, or a story.

I have heard about a priest: when he would give a speech on God, he would start with the sentence, “Now, I will tell you a story.” Preaching is one thing. You may be an excellent preacher of God, without having the experience of God at all. In organized religions, they train the preachers or priests like you train any teacher imparting to them the art of teaching. Enlightened ones come to give a shock to awaken people. They don't come to preach.

**You can see the beauty in everything only when you are realized**

*If I am able to see the beauty in everything, does it mean that I can see God?*

How do you define beauty? If you see a person suffering from cancer and crying, will you be able to see the beauty in that situation? If a child falls from the roof of a house and breaks its bones, will you be able to see the beauty in that? You can see the beauty in everything only if you come to realize that the world is not real. It is only like a painting made by the greatest artist, that is to say by God.

You see a painting in which a child is dead. The body is lying and the mother is weeping over it and crying. If you take that only as a painting, you can appreciate the artist. But if you take that scene as real, will you be able to appreciate it? I have seen people weeping while seeing a tragic scene in a film.

**After Self-Realization the physical world stops being a veil that covers the Divine**

*After achieving Self-Realization, a person realizes the irrelevance of the physical world. Paradoxically, such a person has to continue living in the same physical world, though after Realization, such a physical world would have no charm for him.*

After Self-Realization the physical world does not become irrelevant to the realized person. On the other hand, it becomes relevant. It assumes the role of a mirror, in which

the divine Being-Consciousness-Bliss is discovered to be reflected; it stops being a veil that covers the Divine. The physical world is the physical body of the Divine. The Spirit embodied in the physical world is called *Virāṭ* in the *Upaniṣhads*. All the apparent contradictions and paradoxes are resolved for the one who has achieved Self-Realization. You cannot say that the physical world has no charm for the realized person. When his or her eyes are open, the realized person sees his or her beloved God in all names and forms, the *saguṇa sākār svarūpa*, the aspect of the Beloved with attributes and forms. When he or she closes the eyes (withdraws the senses inward), he or she enjoys the *nirguṇa nīrākār svarūpa*: the attributeless and formless aspect of God.

### **After knowing That, nothing else remains to be known**

*With complete knowledge, can a realized person see for example the working of the atom without a microscope, or observe the universe without a telescope?*

No! The realized person does not need to know the working of an atom, or even of the universe. He knows directly and immediately the true and essential Being of the atom or the universe and is Self-Fulfilled and self-satisfied. He has known THAT first-hand, after knowing which, nothing else remains to be known and found. Do you think that a realized person must know how to drive a car or fly an airplane? Ramana Maharshi did not know how to drive a car. Does it mean that he was not realized? When you know the gold, you become convinced that all the ornaments of gold are

nothing but gold. You are not deluded by the different forms and shapes of gold ornaments.

**A realized person acts as God wills him to act**

*To put it simply, does a self-realized person never do anything imperfectly?*

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 or she becomes an instrument in the hands of God. He acts as God wills him to act. Can you, or do you know how God acts?

**The suffering of a realized one is like a hot piece of iron in the ocean**

*Swamiji, does your Self-Realization have anything to do with the reality of suffering people, such as the situation of women all over the world, etc.?*

The suffering person suffers because of himself or herself. The rulers are suffering and the ruled are suffering. The women are suffering and the men are suffering. The poor are suffering and the rich are also suffering. Suffering is not there only for a particular category of persons. The one who has realized the Divine, the infinite and timeless Consciousness, is alone free of suffering.

*What is the difference between the agony that people go through as a result of mundane life and the agony which is coming from God?*

God is Existence absolute, Awareness absolute and Bliss absolute. How can agony and suffering come from God, who is Bliss absolute? Agony or suffering is the result of being separated from God, or better said, forgetting God. But this forgetting cannot last, cannot be forever. It is temporal and phenomenal. Therefore it can be removed, and removed forever, only by the Realization of God.

*So, a realized one does not suffer?*

The suffering of a realized one who is united with God is like a hot piece of iron put into the ocean. That hot piece of iron cannot make the water of the ocean hot. You may also say that the suffering of a realized one is like a wave on the surface of the ocean. It cannot disturb the ocean, which is infinitely vast and deep. The same is the case with pleasure. Pleasures do not in any way excite the realized one. As a matter of fact, pain and pleasure both involve excitement. Pain is negative excitement and pleasure positive excitement. The realized one is free from both. He or she is like a lotus in the lake which water cannot make wet.

### **A God-Realized person is like God**

*A monk, who knows you from the time you were living in the forest at Haridwar, told me that you are the master of your death. What does it mean?*

Different people have different opinions about me. Anyone is free to make any opinion about me. I don't mind! An ordinary person is a bundle of opinions.

*When we meet people who say they are enlightened, what shall we think about them?*

In the Scriptures much has been written about a God-Realized person. At the end of chapter two of the *Gītā*, there are some *shlokas* which depict the inner state of a God-Realized person. But about how such a person speaks, walks, behaves or lives, nothing has been said. These outer activities of the God-Realized persons are not all alike. The *sādhaka* should ask about the qualifications of a *sādhaka* rather than asking about the qualifications of a *Siddha*. A God-Realized person is like God. Can you know or imagine how God acts? Can you explain earthquakes, floods, epidemics, and other events which cannot be attributed to any person on the earth?

*Can you explain how the realized one can be the master of his death?*

Is God afraid of death? Can God die? Then how can a God-Realized person be afraid of death? Or how can he die? He has realized that he is not the body-mind, which is subject to death. He has realized the immortal, eternal Being. The vicious cycle of birth and death stops forever for the one who has realized the true Self or *Brahman*.

## Appendix

### Different Aspects of the Absolute Divine Reality

The Absolute Divine Reality is pure Is-ness and has many aspects. Often, when writing in English, Swamiji uses the word ‘God’ to express any of the different aspects of the Divine, while at other times he uses the more specific and technical Hindi/Sanskrit terms used in *Vedānta* philosophy. Therefore, let us try to understand these different aspects of the Absolute Divine Reality.

The Supreme Reality is essentially *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, that is absolute Existence, absolute Consciousness and absolute Bliss. It is variously called the Absolute, the Divine, *Parabrahman*, *Brahman*, *Puruṣhottama*, *Tat* (That) etc. It has infinite aspects and all these aspects are ever-present in it, yet it transcends them all. Gurudev says the ultimate Reality cannot be understood or explained intellectually. We can only say ‘God IS’ and not what God is. Even so, the realized ones and the holy scriptures sing of His infinite glories and wonderful mysteries and speak of the two main aspects of the Divine—‘*nirguṇa*’ and ‘*sagūṇa*’. These two terms are with respect to the word ‘*guṇa*’, therefore it is better to first understand the word ‘*guṇa*’.

### **Guṇas**

*Guṇa* does not mean only quality or attribute, like the redness of the flower or courage of a soldier, as is commonly understood. *Guṇa*, according to *Sāṅkhya* and *Vedānta* systems of philosophy, collectively refers to *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, the three fundamental elemental materials that

comprise *Prakṛiti*, or Mother Nature, the matrix of the whole created universe. In their primordial state these three *guṇas* coexist in perfect equilibrium. Also called *Prakṛiti* (or *Pradhān*), in this state the three *guṇas* are absolutely inactive, undifferentiated and unmanifest. Without any beginning *Prakṛiti* is the divine cosmic power of the Absolute that binds the individual soul with the veil of ignorance. According to *Sāṅkhya* philosophy there are two eternal principles: *Prakṛiti* and Consciousness. But according to *Vedānta*, the Absolute Divine Reality is one without a second and is the only eternal principle; *Prakṛiti* is the power/*shakti* of the Absolute and is present in it like its shadow.

*Sattva guṇa* comprises light, awareness, discrimination, wisdom, purity, virtue, spiritual inclination. *Rajas*, the active principle, is responsible for activity, passion, desire, and restlessness. *Tamas*, the dark one and the last of the three *guṇas*, comprises ignorance. Its main characteristics are sleep, indolence, darkness, inertia, foolishness, stupefaction and inclination towards evil.

*Guṇas* are inert, insentient and unconscious and therefore cannot manifest and interact among themselves without being involved with divine Consciousness. While they need Consciousness for their manifestation, divine Consciousness is self-evident, self-existent and independent of *Prakṛiti* or *guṇas*. But It can also interact and be involved with the *guṇas* resulting in the composite of Consciousness and *guṇas* that is *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛiti*. Therefore, the *guṇas* are better described as adjuncts of pure Consciousness rather than Its qualities or attributes because they can both be associated and disassociated from pure Consciousness. It is important to remember that these three *guṇas* never exist independently of each other. They always coexist, though

in varying proportions, giving rise to the unique characteristics of the manifested entities they constitute.

When acted upon by divine Consciousness, the process of creation or manifestation is set into motion through the intermixing and interplay of the three *guṇas*, first at the universal level and later at the individual or micro level. Thus all manifestation at the universal (macro) and individual (micro) level, at the gross, subtle and causal level, all matter, energy, qualities/attributes, static and dynamic forces including physical, vital and mental energy, all activities and movements, all living and non-living beings, all time and space are the product of the intermixing of *guṇas* with divine Consciousness. In one of his sayings in the booklet *Spiritual Gems* Pujya Gurudev says, “Believe it or not, a Consciousness continuous and perfect permeates through minerals, vegetables, animals, human beings and gods. They are distinguished from one another not by their essential Consciousness but by the degree of manifestation of the perfect Consciousness in them.”

Thus we see that all creation with its infinite diversity and multiplicity is nothing but the modifications undergone by the three *guṇas* or *Prakṛiti* with divine Consciousness involved in it in varying degrees. The process of dissolution of the universe is just the reverse of the process of creation in which all creation finally merges back into primordial inactive, unmanifest *Prakṛiti* — the undifferentiated state of equilibrium amongst the three *guṇas*. This process of creation and dissolution is cyclic and goes on endlessly.

### ***Nirguṇa Brahman: Free from Guṇas /Adjuncts***

*Nirguṇa Brahman* is the non-manifest passive and conscious aspect of the Absolute Divine Reality. As the name suggests, It is without the involvement of *guṇas* or *Prakṛiti*. It is simple, pure contentless, non-dual Being, the infinite, undivided, indivisible and eternal absolute Consciousness. Immutable, It transcends all space-time and causality and also physical, vital and mental worlds. Without any centre and split of subject-object, It is all pervasive, self-existent and the unmanifest substratum of all manifestation. It is called *Nirguṇa Brahman*, the *Ātmā*, *Puruṣha*, the Spirit, and the Self. Being non dual (*advaita*), there is no otherness in it. Realized by the Self, in the Self and through the Self, it is often termed as Self-Realization and generally attained by following the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*). It is realized in the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* when all the modifications of the mind are completely stopped. Then, Consciousness is purged of all the adjuncts of the *guṇas* and It shines in Its pristine non-dual Purity. Some scholars equate *Nirguṇa Brahman* with the Absolute Divine Reality but Gurudev says the Absolute transcends and includes everything.

### ***Saguṇa Brahman: With Guṇas /Adjuncts***

*Saguṇa Brahman* literally means the Absolute Divine reality with *guṇas* or associated with the *guṇas*. When the supreme Divine wills, the Divine Consciousness (*Puruṣha*) interacts with the *guṇas* (*Prakṛiti*) at the cosmic level and what is called *Saguṇa Brahman*, the composite of *Puruṣha* & *Prakṛiti*, or Cosmic Divine Power becomes active. Therefore the Absolute, when circumscribed by *Prakṛiti*, also known as *māyā*, is called *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īshvara*

or God. In *Saguṇa Brahman* or God *sattva guṇa* is predominantly present and therefore the divine Consciousness is fully manifest in Him and the *māyā* with which It interacts, becomes His *Shakti*, His Divine Power. There are three further aspects of *Saguṇa Brahman*:

- a. When pure Consciousness is associated with the totality of gross bodies of creation, It is called *Virāt*. All the gross bodies of animate and inanimate objects including moons, stars, galaxies etc. in the creation are situated within the cosmic gross body known as *Virāt*.
- b. When the pure Consciousness is associated with the totality of the subtle bodies in creation, It is called *Hiraṇyagarbha*, which is the cosmic ego, cosmic intelligence, cosmic mind and the cosmic *prāṇa* (vital power). All individual subtle bodies, that is individual egos, minds, *prāṇas* are contained within this cosmic subtle body called *Hiraṇyagarbha*. All the gross creation arises from It.
- c. When pure Consciousness is associated with primordial *Prakṛiti*, It is called *Avyākṛita* or Unmanifest. It is the cosmic unmanifest seed of all creation as well as the starting point of all creation. *Hiraṇyagarbha* and *Virāt* arise from It.

As an individual soul has individual causal, subtle and gross bodies, so also *Saguṇa Brahman* has cosmic causal, subtle and gross bodies.

Thus it is clear that *Saguṇa Brahman* is the beginning of all manifestation and corresponds roughly with the term 'God'. He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of this infinitely multifarious universe which is at the same time infinitely huge and infinitely subtle, the source of all cosmic

laws, the compassionate father as also the executor of the law of *karma* (i.e. law of cause & effect), the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, the great benefactor and redeemer of all, the mighty upholder and protector of the saints and the virtuous, the destroyer of the wicked and evil who is at the same time both just and compassionate. Infinite and unsurpassed is His majesty and glory and infinite are His mystical ways (*līlā*). He is the almighty ruler and the master of different worlds. There is nothing outside of or beyond Him. He is the ultimate Self (*Ātmā*) of all including the cosmic powers called deities or *devas* (demi gods) performing their respective functions under His supreme command. For this reason He is also called *Kārya Brahman* (dynamic aspect of *Brahman*).

Different schools of Hinduism express the *Saguna* aspect of *Brahman* differently. They variously call Him *Īshvara*, *Vishnu*, *Divine Father*, *Divine Mother Durga*, *Divine Power* as well as the confluence of *Puruṣha* and *Prakṛiti* i.e. *Shiva-Shakti*.

*Saguna Brahman* is experienced in the supramental state, i.e. the sublime purified state of mind, that is to say in the state of *savikalpa samādhi*. It is important to remember that *Nirguṇa* and *Saguna* are not two independent entities, they are the different aspects of the same Absolute Divine Reality. Gurudeva says that one can realize different aspects of God separately and also have an integral realization of all aspects of the Absolute in the end. The Divine lives of the great sage *Ramakrishna Paramhansa* and our beloved Gurudeva and many other saints are testimony to this truth.

We hope this brief discussion sheds some light on this unfathomable topic.

## Glossary

**abhoktā:** non-enjoyer of the fruits of actions; *Puruṣha* or pure Consciousness which is only witness is called *akartā* (non-doer) and *abhoktā*.

**achārya:** a great scholar in some faculty of learning (viz. music, literature, etc.); a knower or exponent of the *Vedas* and other Scriptures; a learned spiritual master; a teacher in a school/college.

**adhikārī:** worthy; competent.

**ājñā chakra:** the sixth of the seven *chakras*, located on the forehead between the two eyebrows, considered the centre of vision, ideas and knowledge. The meditation on a divine form or a divine thought is done at this *chakra*.

**advaita:** lit. “non-dual”; often refers to the *AdvaitaVedānta* of Shankaracharya, according to which Reality is One without a second, and none exists save *Brahman*; see also **Vedānta**.

**ajapa japa:** see **japa**.

**akarma:** see **karma**.

**akartā:** the non-doer; *Puruṣha* or pure Consciousness is *akartā* and *abhoktā*. It is the witness.

**anāhata chakra:** 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 sound :** 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.

**anitya:** what is not permanent.

**annamaya Puruṣha:** see *pañc ha koṣha*.

**antaḥkaraṇa:** lit. “inner instrument”; inner instrument of cognition/relative knowledge of the *jīva*, the composite of *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *chitta* (memory) and *ahaṅkāra* (ego):

1. **manas** (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; it 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 *jīvan mukta*.

In common parlance *antaḥkaraṇa* is also used for mind, *buddhi*, *chitta* or *ahaṅkāra*. Mind, *buddhi* and *chitta* represent the same energy, but function differently.

**anuṣṭhāna:** a set of rituals or religious practices performed for a certain set period by invoking the divine power. *Anuṣṭhānas* are usually performed with the aim to realize some specific objective, either spiritual or worldly.

**apanchikrit bhūtas:** the five fundamental material elements, i.e. earth, water, fire, air and ether, in their pure subtlest primordial state; also called *tanmātras*.

**aparigraha:** see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**ārati:** a hymn sung by devotees in praise of God or Guru or one's *Iṣṭa* to receive benediction and divine grace.

**āsana:** 1. seat; 2. body posture (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*, *grihastha*, *vānprastha*, *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. *Grihastha 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 Maharshi Patanjali, also commonly called *Patanjali Yoga*, *rāja yoga*, or *yoga*. It is not merely a systematic philosophy, but 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* or moral codes of conduct with respect to behaviour in society: *ahimsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truthful conduct), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmachārya* (celibacy) and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness).
2. **niyama:** lit. “rules”; these are also five, and concern self-discipline: *shaucha* (outer and inner purity), *santoṣha* (contentment), *tapas* (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. **dhāraṇā:** 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 *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.

**asura:** demoniacal being.

**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.

**avatāra:** lit. “descent”; the absolute Reality/Infinite/God assuming a physical body and becoming apparently limited, as in the case of Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, Lord Jesus, Lord Buddha etc. to push up the process of evolution.

**Avyākṛita:** see **Saguṇa Brahman**.

**Ayurveda:** an ancient medical science, based on experience and observation; adj. **ayurvedic**.

**barfi:** a rectangular shaped sweet prepared from milk.

**Bhāgavata Purāṇa:** one of the foremost ancient Scriptures of Hinduism. It preaches spirituality through inspiring stories, including the divine *līlā* of Lord Krishna. It is also a historical text alluding to the old Hindu socio-religious systems.

**bhakta:** devotee of God.

**bhakti yoga:** the yoga or path of loving devotion and surrender to God, through which a devotee finally realizes God.

**bhāṅg:** hemp (technical name: cannabis); an intoxicant taken by drinking or smoking.

**Bhartrihari:** the well-known scholarly king who later renounced his kingdom, became a recluse and wrote many inspiring books in Sanskrit.

**bhastrikā:** a yogic *kriyā* consisting of inhaling the breath very fast and immediately exhaling it fast. It makes the prāṇic energy of the body very active.

**bhāva:** feeling or emotion (see also *mahābhāva*).

**bhāva shakti:** the energy of emotion and feeling.

**bhikshā:** food received by begging.

**bhoktā:** a *vedāntic* term meaning the one who enjoys the fruit of action.

**brahmachārya:** lit. “abiding in *Brahman*”; celibacy; see **āshram**.

**brahmachārī:** a person observing celibacy; see **āshram**.

**Brahmākār vritti:** that state of mind in which the seeker identifies himself/herself with *Brahman*, i.e. the absolute divine Reality.

**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.

**chakra:** lit. “trap”; energy centre situated inside the spinal cord. The energy gets trapped there and its type/quality is changed.

**charas:** an intoxicating drug prepared from hemp flowers.

**Chit:** absolute Consciousness; one of the three essential aspects of *Brahman*, the others being *Sat* and *Ānanda*.

**chitta:** see **antaḥkaraṇa**.

**dalit:** a term used for socially downtrodden and exploited people.

**damarū:** a small, two-sided, stringed drum; Lord Shiva is often depicted holding a *damarū*.

**darshana:** lit. “looking at” or “seeing”; 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 they are supposed to be based on

the direct realization of the Truth and not merely intellectual thinking.

**devatā:** a god; celestial power.

**Dhammapada:** a collection of the sayings of the Buddha in verse form.

**dhāraṇā:** see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**dharma:** 1. universal cosmic order. 2. natural duty of an individual according to one's level of consciousness and specific situation. 3. that which sustains the world. 4. right action.

**dhyāna:** 1. meditation; 2. in Hindi *dhyāna* means contemplation; the seventh discipline of *Patanjali's aṣṭāṅga yoga*.

**Garuda Purāṇa:** a Vaishnavite text containing details of life after death, funeral rites, reincarnation, etc. Hindus generally read it as part of the last rites. It also deals with astronomy, medicine, grammar, and much more.

**Gāyatrī mantra:** a mantra from the Rigveda which is highly revered by all traditions/schools of Hinduism. The mantra is in the vedic *gayatri* metre, hence its name. The mantra is: “*Om bhūr bhuvah svaḥ, tat savitur vareṇyam, bhargo devasya dhīmahi, dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt,*” which means, “We meditate on the glory of that divine Being who has created this universe; may He enlighten our intellect!”

**ghat:** a series of steps leading down to a holy river.

**Gītā:** lit. “song”; usually designates the *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the most revered Hindu sacred Scriptures, believed to be the essence of the *Upaniṣads* and considered a *vedāntic* Scripture. It contains sublime spiritual teachings imparted by Lord Krishna through a dialogue between him and his disciple Arjuna on the battlefield.

**gopī:** commonly refers to the cowherd girls of Vrindavan who had unconditional devotion towards child Krishna.

**grihastha:** householder; the second stage in life according to orthodox Hinduism; see **āshram**.

**gulāb jāmun:** a popular ball-shaped Indian dessert made from milk-solids, flour and sugar.

**guṇa:** 1. the three fundamental modes of *Prakṛiti*, or primordial Nature:

- a. *sattva* or *sattvaguṇa* represents light, intelligence, purity, selflessness and inclination towards spirituality (adj. *sāttvic*);
- b. *rajas* or *rajoguṇa* represents the vital energy, activity and desire (adj. *rājasic*);
- c. *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.

2. In common usage *guṇa* means a quality or attribute, such as the hardness of stone, sweetness of sugar, truthfulness, anger, etc.

**Gurubani or Guru Granth Sahib:** holy Scripture of Sikhs containing hymns (*shabads*) in praise of God which exhort one to remember God devotedly and to live for God-Realization. Completely non-sectarian, the hymns are soaked in the spirit of intense passionate divine love. They are rich in mysticism and use imagery from day-to-day life profusely. It was the 5<sup>th</sup> Sikh master, Guru Arjun Dev, who by his divine intuition compiled the hymns composed by the first four Sikh masters and some other Hindu & Muslim poet-saints.

**Hari:** one of the names of God used by devotees of God; the name *Hari* is also used extensively in *Shrī Guru Granth Sahib*, more than any other name of God.

**hridayakāsh:** the centre in the physical body where a devotee full of God's love has the vision of God.

**Iṣhṭa:** lit. “chosen”; personal God; the chosen deity of an individual worshipper (also called *Iṣhṭa 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 **Saḡuṇa Brahman**.

**Īshvara praṇidhāna:** surrender to God; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**jāgrat:** lit “waking”: the first of the three states of consciousness (waking, dream, deep sleep) associated with the *jīva* or individual soul.

**jāgrat Puruṣha:** the soul in the wakeful state.

**jalebi:** a popular Indian sweet made with wheat flour in the shape of a pretzel.

**Janaka:** king of Mithila and the father of Sita in *Ramāyaṇa*. He was a very religious and spiritually inclined man.

**Japji Sahib:** a universal hymn of God composed by Guru Nanak Devji, considered to be the essence of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

**japa:** the repetition of a *mantra* or a name of God; **ajapa japa:** when the *japa* is taken up by the subconscious mind and goes on spontaneously without effort, like breathing.

**jhāḍī:** lit. “bush”; usually refers to a cluster of trees, dense forest, or orchard where monks live in seclusion to perform their spiritual *sādhanā*; in this book it refers to the forested island on the banks of the Ganges in Haridwar where Swamiji lived for about 10 years.

**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.

**jīva shrishṭi:** the world created by the soul as a result of the identification of the Spirit (*Ātmā*) with the body-mind.

**jīvanmukti:** see *mukti*.

**jñāna shakti:** the energy of understanding or knowing.

**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*.

**kaivalya:** a term used in *Sāṅkhya* Philosophy and *The Yoga Sūtras* of *Patanjali* meaning liberation, when the Seer is established in its Self (*Ātmā*).

**kalpa:** aeon; according to Hindu Scriptures there are four *yugas* or ages: *Satya Yuga*, *Tretā Yuga*, *Dvāpara Yuga* and *Kali Yuga*. Each *yuga* represents a general level of consciousness and morality. *Kali Yuga* is the fourth *yuga*, marked by chaos, ignorance and immorality, while *Satya Yuga* is the first *yuga*, marked by truth, virtue and knowledge. *Kali Yuga* lasts for 432,000 human years. The length of the other *yugas* is 2, 3 and 4 times this period. These *yugas* succeed each other in cyclic rotation. One thousand such cycles of rotations of the four *yugas* is equal to a *kalpa*. A *kalpa* is equal to 4.32 billion years and is one day of *Brahmā*, the Creator and His night is also of the same duration.

**kameshana:** sexual desire.

**kapālbhāti:** a body cleansing technique of *hatha yoga* which involves repeated short and forceful inhalations and exhalations.

**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.

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 Swamiji, *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*.
- 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 but 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 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.

**kartā:** lit. doer; a scriptural term for one who has the sense of doership and therefore reaps the fruits of his/her *karmas*.

**krama mukti:** see **mukti**.

**kriyā:** 1. activity; 2. a particular practice of *haṭha yoga*.

**kriyā shakti:** energy of action.

**kṣhatriya:** a member of the warrior caste.

**Kumar (Kumāra) brothers:** four *riṣhis* (Sanat, Sanak, Sanatan, Sanandan) who are the psychogenic sons of *Brahma*, the Creator, and are believed to be always existing like God till the world lasts. The mention of these *riṣhis* comes both in the *Vedas* and *Purāṇas*. Sanatan Kumar has founded the ancient monastic Order named *Udasin*.

**kuṇḍalīnī:** divine energy (*shakti*) which remains latent in the *mulādhāra chakra* like a coiled snake and becomes active when roused by specific *yogic* exercises or *sādhanā*.

**ladoo (laddu):** a ball-shaped Indian sweet made of flour and sugar.

**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.

**lokeshana:** desire for name and fame; desire for recognition.

**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.

**mahātmā:** lit "great soul" ; a saint.

**mahāvākya:** commonly refers to the four great *Upanishadic* *advaitic* (non-dualistic) sayings in the form of concise statements affirming the ultimate unity of the individual soul with the absolute divine Reality called *Brahman*. They are:

- i. *prajñānam brahma* – Consciousness is *Brahman* (*Aitareya Upaniṣhad* of *Rig Veda*).
- ii. *ayam ātmā brahma*– This Self (*Ātmā*) is *Brahman* (*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣhad* of *Atharva Veda*).

iii. *tat tvam asi* – That thou art (*Chāndogya Upaniṣhad* of *Sāma Veda*).

iv. *aham brahmāsmi*– I am *Brahman* (*Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* of *Yajur Veda*).

**mālā**: a rosary for doing *japa*; a garland.

**manana**: spiritual reflection; the sixth part of the seven-fold *vedāntic* discipline (see **Vedānta**).

**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.

**mārga**: way, path.

**mauna**: silence.

**mukta**: the liberated one who has directly realized the Truth.

**mukti**: liberation.

i. **jīvan mukti**: liberation while still in the physical body; liberation in this very life.

ii. **krama mukti**: liberation by stages, after shedding the physical body.

iii. **videha mukti**: when a realized one sheds the physical body upon death, this is called *videha mukti*, meaning final liberation even from the physical body.

**mūlādhāra**: the first of the seven *chakras* (energy centres); it is situated in the lowest extremity of the spinal cord, where the *kuṇḍalinī* lies coiled.

**muni**: sage, ascetic.

**nāma**: name.

**nāma japa**: the practice of repeating a holy name of God.

**Nasruddin:** an ancient Persian folk character, telling stories in the Sufi tradition as well as wisdom tales from many faiths; he appears in thousands of stories which usually have a subtle humour and a pedagogic meaning.

**nidrā:** sleep.

**nirākāra:** without form.

**nirguṇa:** the attribute-free aspect of the Divine (in philosophical/spiritual parlance).

**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**.

**nishkāma karma:** see **karma**.

**niyama:** see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**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.

**padma āsana:** the lotus posture of sitting.

**pakorā:** a popular fried Indian snack made of chickpea flour (*besan*).

**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. **ânandamaya 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.
2. **viññānamaya koṣha**: the second covering on the *Ātmā*, that of ego and intellect, which encases the *ânandamaya koṣha*. It makes the pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* appear as the knower, chooser, doer of action and the enjoyer of the fruits thereof.
3. **manomaya koṣha**: the third covering/sheath, that of the mind and five senses of perception (*jñānendriyas*), which encases the *viññānamaya 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.
4. **prāṇamaya koṣha**: the fourth covering, which encases the *manomaya koṣha*, is made of 5 *praṇas* (five types of vital energy, namely *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*) and five senses/means of action (*karmendriyās*). It makes the relationless, non-doer *Ātmā* appear as if the doer, speaker, giver, mover and as if associated with hunger, thirst etc. *Viññānamaya koṣha* together with *manomaya koṣha* and *prāṇamaya koṣha* are called the subtle body.
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.

**paṇḍit**: a scholar versed in the holy Scriptures; a priest.

**parābhakti**: the highest form of devotion to God.

**parama**: an epithet meaning supreme.

**pāramārthik sattā:** the absolute eternal Existence/Being; a term used for absolute divine Reality; see also **vyāvahārik** and **prātibhāsik sattā**.

**Patanjali:** sage and author of the *Yoga Sūtras*, yoga aphorisms which comprise the philosophy of *aṣṭāṅga yoga*. See also **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**pitta:** an ayurvedic term referring to the fire element in the physical body.

**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*.

**pramāṇa:** an important term discussed in Indian philosophical systems; it denotes the means of acquiring 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 a realized one or the words of the *Vedas* or revealed Scriptures. It is considered to be a very important foundation of faith in the spiritual path even though it is considered inferior in comparison to direct knowledge of the Truth, i.e. *pratyakṣha pramāṇa*.

**prāṇa:** breath; vital energy; adj. *prāṇic*.

**praṇām:** bowing down before someone out of reverence; salutation; prostration.

**prāṇamaya puruṣha:** the pure Consciousness or *Ātmā* identified with *prāṇamaya koṣha* ; see **pañcha koḥa**.

**prāṇaupāsanā:** *prāṇa* means vital energy; *upāsanā* means worship; *prāṇaupāsanā* means an affirmation by the seeker that “I am not this physical body; I am *prāṇa*, I am the soul; I am the part and child of the omnipotent, all pervasive universal Soul—God; I don’t die with the death of my physical body.” *Prāṇaupāsanā* implies belief in the law of *karma* implemented by God and a conviction that ultimately through the course of *sāadhanā* one is destined to meet and merge with God, the divine Father.

**prāṇāyāma:** control of *prāṇa* through regulation of breath; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**prārabdha karma:** see **karma**.

**prātibhāsik sattā:** the apparent and illusory existence such as the mirage of water appearing in the desert or a rope appearing as a snake; see *vyāvahārik* and *pāramārthik sattā* also.

**pratīk upāsanā:** worship/remembrance of God through a symbol.

**pratyāhāra:** the withdrawal into the mind of all the senses, which are by nature extroverted, from their corresponding objects of perception ; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**prem :** lit “love”; selfless love.

**pūjā:** act of worship.

**Purāṇas:** lit. “ancient”; a vast genre of Indian literature about a wide range of topics, particularly myths, legends and other traditional lore ; There are 18 *Maha Purāṇas* (great *Purāṇas*).

**puri:** a town; a distinctive name given to one of the ten Orders or the *Dashanami sannyāsīs*.

**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.

**Puruṣhottama:** lit. the supreme Being. *Puruṣhottama* denotes the absolute Being who is at once *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*, at once with qualities and without qualities, with form and without form, and who is not only the numerical sum total of all these aspects but transcendent, and beyond. The term *Puruṣhottama* appears in chapter 15 of the *Gītā*.

**rāja Yoga:** lit. the royal path; a term used for the eight limbed path propounded by sage *Patanjali* in his *Yoga Sūtras*.

**rajas:** the second of the three *gunas*; it represents the vital energy, activity and desire; adj: *rājasic*.

**Ramāyaṇa:** a holy Scripture authored by sage Valmiki which narrates the *līlā* (divine sport) of Lord Rama; a great epic containing profound moral and spiritual teachings.

**rasgulla:** a syrupy dessert made from ball shaped dumplings of Indian cottage cheese and semolina dough, cooked in light syrup made of sugar.

**ṛiṣhi:** lit. “seer”; the *ṛiṣhis* are the realized *vedic* sages to whom the *Vedas* were revealed.

**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 (fem. **sādhvi**).

**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*. 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, the Creator, Sustainer, 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 *antaḥkaraṇa* 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 *sattvaguna* with minimal traces of *rajo-guna* and *tamo-guna*. 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. **taijasa**: 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.

**sākāra**: with form.

**samādhi**: complete absorption of the mind in the object of contemplation; the eighth discipline of Patanjali's *aṣṭāṅga yoga*. *Samādhi* comprises a variety of higher mental states:

1. **savikalpa samādhi**: the *samādhi* in which a distinction between the knower and his or her object of knowledge remains.
2. **nirvikalpa samādhi**: the *samādhi* in which the distinction between the knower, the knowledge and the known vanishes absolutely; see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**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. **mahat-tattva**: 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 jñānendriyās**: five senses of relative cognition, i.e. hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell. These also evolve from the *sāttvic* aspect of *ahaṅkāra*.
6. **five karmendriyās**: five senses of activity evolve from the *rājasic* 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.

**sankīrtan:** devotional singing in chorus.

**sannyāsa:** renunciation; the fourth and last stage (*āshram*) in life according to orthodox Hinduism; the monastic life of contemplation and *sādhanā* in which all the worldly ties are severed and which is exclusively dedicated to the goal of God-Realization.

**sannyāsī:** a renunciate; one who has received *sannyāsa dīkṣhā*, initiation into *sannyāsa* [fem. **sannyāsini**].

**sanskāras:** mental impressions stored in the subconscious mind (*chitta*).

**Sat:** absolute Existence.

**Satchidānanda (Sat-Chit-Ānanda):** lit “Existence-Consciousness-Bliss”; represents *Brahman*, the absolute Consciousness.

**Satguru:** a realized Guru or spiritual Master.

**sattva:** the first of the three **guṇas**; it represents the modality of luminosity, intelligence, purity, selflessness and inclination towards spirituality; adj. : *sattvic*.

**sevā:** lit. “service”; selfless service performed in the name of God.

**shabda:** word ; **shabda pramāṇa:** see *pramāṇa*.

**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 and knowing.

**shanti:** peace.

**Shiva:** 1. the destroyer aspect of God; one of the divine trio in Hinduism, the others being Brahma and Vishnu. 2. also used for Godhead. 3. wellbeing; auspicious; good.

**Shiva lingam:** *lingam* literally means sign of identification; as God has no form, a round stone termed as *Shiva lingam* is worshipped by devotees; common people associate this symbol with Lord Shiva and it is installed in Shiva temples.

**Shiva Purāṇa:** one of the many *Purāṇas* which contain spirituality expressed through mythology; it is associated with Lord Shiva.

**shloka:** a verse.

**shrāman:** refers to the seekers of Truth who believe in self-effort as the means of Realization of Truth; the word is associated with Jainism.

**shravaṇa:** hearing of the *vedantic* teaching or study of the Scriptures under a competent guide; one of the three inner disciplines of Shankaracharya.

**shristi:** creation ; **jīva shristi :** creation of the individual soul.

**Shukadeva:** son of the sage Vyasa, *sannyāsī*, and the main narrator of *Bhagavata Purāṇa*.

**siddha:** a spiritual adept/realized one; the one in possession of some supernatural powers.

**smṛiti:** lit “recollection”, “memory”; the second part of the Hindu Scriptures (e.g. the *Purāṇas*) remembered and handed down by tradition, and distinguished as such from the *Vedas* or *Shruti*.

**sushumnā:** the central and most important inner energy canal, located in the middle of the spine and through which the *kundalinī* arises and flows in the subtle body; also known as *brahma nadi*.

**svarūpa:** one’s own inmost reality/being.

**tanmātras:** a technical term of *Sāṅkhya* and *Vedānta* meaning the five fundamental physical elements – earth, water, fire, air and ether in their subtlest and purest form (also called *tanmātras* of smell, taste, form, touch and sound).

**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*.

**tapasyā:** ascetism; the practice of austerity which is part of *niyama* in Patanjali’s *aṣṭāṅga yoga*.

**Tat tvam asi:** see **mahāvākya**.

**tattva:** lit. “fundamental reality”; principle of anything; according to *Sāṅkhya* there are twenty-four principles of *Prakṛiti*, i.e. primordial cosmic Nature. See **Sāṅkhya**.

**tripuṭi:** a technical term meaning the ‘triangle of the Knower, the known and the relative knowledge.’

**Tukaram:** a 17<sup>th</sup> century poet-saint of the *Bhakti* movement in Maharashtra.

**turiya:** lit. “the fourth” ; since *Brahman*, the pure Consciousness, is beyond the three states of consciousness experienced by the *jīva*, the bound individual soul, it is called “*turîya*” or the fourth.

**Upaniṣhad:** 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: *Bṛihadāraṇyaka*, *Chāṅdogya*, *Īshāvāsya*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Māṇḍukya*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Prashna*, *Taittirīya*, *Aitareya*, *Shvetāshvatara*.

**upāsana:** lit “sitting near” : “upa” = near, “āsana” = being seated; 1. meditation on Brahman with attributes, as prescribed in the Scriptures ; 2. meditation on a deity in whom one feels the presence of God or on a rite in a symbolical way.

**vairāgya:** the spirit of dispassion or disinterestedness towards all that is transient and phenomenal whether belonging to this world or other worlds.

**Vairāgya Shatakam:** a book written by the sage Bhartrihari containing 100 profound sayings on the subject of *vairāgya*.

**Valmiki:** author and personage of the *Ramāyaṇa* ; he acted as a robber ; an accidental contact with a sage changed his life : by the repetition of the name of Rama, he attained the supreme state; since a *valmīka* (anthill) had grown over his body during his austerities, he came to be known as “Valmiki”.

**vartamāna karma** : an action which is being done now and will bear fruit in the future. See **karma**.

**vāsana**: underlying desire, latent impression.

**Vashishtha ṛiṣhi**: One of the great ancient *ṛiṣhis*. The Guru of Lord Ram; the great *vedāntic* Scripture *Yoga Vashishtha* is named after him; see also **Yoga Vashishtha**.

**vātsalya bhāva**: one of the various *bhāvas* or feelings with which devotees can relate to God and remember God. In this *bhāva* one adores/loves God either as a child of God or as God being one's child, as in the relationship between baby Krishna and his mother Yashoda.

**Vedas**: lit. "knowledge"; the most ancient Scriptures in the world, considered to be an encyclopaedia of knowledge, both worldly and spiritual; the word of God, revealed to the *ṛiṣhis* in the state of *samādhi*. The *Vedas* are taken as the highest authority in all Hindu philosophies. They are four in number: *Ṛig Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, *Yajur Veda*. There is no single author of the *Vedas* ; adj: *vedic*.

**Vedānta or Uttara Mimānsā**: 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 Ved Vyās, the *Bhagavad Gītā* which are collectively termed *prasthānatraya*. 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 Shankaracharya. 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 *vivartvāda*.

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 *sāadhanā chatuṣṭaya* 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* (forbearance or endurance), *samādhāna* (concentration of mind) and *shraddhā* (faith).
4. **mumukṣhutva**: 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* ideal thought which emerges in the mind as a result of deep reflection.

**vikalpa**: imagination.

**viparyaya**: a term used in *Patanjali's Yoga Sūtras* meaning false, erroneous knowledge.

**vipassana**: a Buddhist meditation technique in which the practitioner has to be the witness of one's body sensations, emotions and thoughts.

**Virāt**: the supreme Soul in its universal physical form; see **Saguṇa Brahman**.

**vītarāga:** the state in which the mind is free of attachment.

**vitteshana:** desire for riches.

**viveka:** discrimination between the Real and unreal.

**vyatireka:** a *vedāntic* term (*neti-neti*) meaning the method of disagreement whereby one discriminates between the Real and unreal. In this method all the things belonging to this world phenomenon, being impermanent, are excluded from the Reality. It is in contrast to the technical word *anvaya* (*iti-iti*) which is the method of agreement in which one believes that everything is God.

**vyāvahārik sattā:** a *vedāntic* term meaning phenomenal existence which one experiences through the senses and mind, but which is changing and is not eternal. This world is *vyāvahārik sattā*. See also **pāramārthik sattā** and **prātibhāsik sattā**.

**yajña:** worship, sacrifice; holy fire in which oblations intended for God or other deities are offered by devotees. In the *Vedas* fire itself is a great cosmic deity and is considered the mouth of the cosmic Being called *Virāt*.

**yama:** see **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**yoga:** (lit. “yoking”, “joining”) union with God ; any practice or discipline for experiencing union of the individual soul with the Supreme Being; in its classical meaning, it refers to *Patanjali Yoga* as expressed in the *Yoga Sūtras*.

**Yoga Sūtras:** yoga aphorisms expounded by Patanjali. They comprise the philosophy of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* (or *Patanjali yoga*), one of the six Hindu *darshanas*. See **aṣṭāṅga yoga**.

**Yoga Vashishtha:** a great *vedāntic* Scripture of 32,000 verses. It contains the teachings of the sage Vashishtha to his disciple, Lord Rama, as to how to realize the absolute Reality (*Brahman*) beyond the impermanent world.

**yogī**: a practitioner in one of the schools of Yoga (fem. **yogini**).

**Zikr** or **dhikr**: a form of devotion associated chiefly with Sufism, in which the worshipper is absorbed in the rhythmic repetition of the name of God or His attributes.

## Pronunciation Guide

### VOWELS

अ	<b>a</b>	as <b>u</b> in	<b>but, under</b>
आ	<b>ā</b>	as <b>a</b> in	<b>far</b> (held twice as long as <b>a</b> )
इ	<b>i</b>	as <b>i</b> in	<b>pin</b>
ई	<b>ī</b>	as <b>ee</b> in	<b>meet, glee</b> (held twice as long as <b>i</b> )
उ	<b>u</b>	as <b>u</b> in	<b>push</b>
ऊ	<b>ū</b>	as <b>oo</b> in	<b>hoot, boot</b> (held twice as long as <b>u</b> )
ऋ	<b>ṛi</b>	as <b>ri</b> in	<b>grim</b> (considered a vowel in Sanskrit)
ॠ	<b>ṛī</b>	as <b>ree</b> in	<b>reel</b> (considered a vowel; used rarely)
ऌ	<b>ḷri</b>	as <b>lri</b> in	— (considered a vowel; used rarely)
ए	<b>e</b>	as <b>ay</b> in	<b>play</b> (held twice as long as a/i/u)
ऐ	<b>ai</b>	as <b>ai</b> in	<b>aisle</b> (held twice as long as a/i/u)
ओ	<b>o</b>	as <b>o</b> in	<b>home</b> (held twice as long as a/i/u)
औ	<b>au</b>	as <b>ow</b> in	<b>cow</b> (held twice as long as a/i/u)

### SPECIAL CONSONANTS

ङ्	<b>ṅ</b>	as <b>n</b> in	<b>sing</b>
छ्	<b>ch</b>	as <b>ch-h</b> in	<b>staunch-heart</b>
झ्	<b>jh</b>	as <b>dge</b> in	<b>hedgehog</b>
ञ्	<b>ñ</b>	as <b>n</b> in	<b>lunch</b>
ट्	<b>ṭ</b>	as <b>t</b> in	<b>tub</b>
ठ्	<b>ṭh</b>	as <b>th</b> in	<b>lighthouse</b>
ड्	<b>ḍ</b>	as <b>d</b> in	<b>door</b>
ढ्	<b>ḍh</b>	as <b>dh</b> in	<b>red-hot</b>
ण्	<b>ṇ</b>	as <b>n</b> in	<b>under</b> (no sound in English exactly corresponds to <b>ṇ</b> as in <i>prāṇa</i> , <i>guṇa</i> , <i>praṇām</i> )

त्	<b>t</b>	as <b>t</b> in	French <b>t</b>
थ्	<b>th</b>	as <b>th</b> in	<b>thumb</b>
द्	<b>d</b>	as <b>th</b> in	<b>then</b>
ध्	<b>dh</b>	as <b>theh</b> in	breat <b>the</b> <b>here</b>
फ्	<b>ph</b>	as <b>ph</b> in	<b>up-hill</b>
भ्	<b>bh</b>	as <b>bh</b> in	<b>abhor</b>
ष्	<b>sh</b>	as <b>sh</b> in	<b>shine</b> (pronounced as cerebral sibilant)
श्	<b>sh</b>	as <b>sh</b> in	<b>shrink</b> (pronounced as palatal sibilant)

## OTHER SYMBOLS

ॡ (anusvāra): lit. “after sound.”

**ṅ/ñ/ṇ/n/m** as **n** in **rank/lunch/under/paint** and **m** in **ramp**  
 (The anusvāra ॡ 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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