

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS

Candles of Celebration

Messages from friends on their Spiritual
Journey

Edited by Desmond Yeoh



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Contents

Introduction	4
The Gap between Thoughts	5
The Jewel	13
Purification of habits and preventing the ripening of bad karma.....	15
A Near Death Experience	20
The Computer	26
Practicing Awareness	29
Expectations Pollutes Love.....	32
The Suffering that comes with Pride	35
Suffering leads to Self-Understanding.....	40
A True Story about Complete Surrender	43
Equanimity	46
The Courage that arises from Equanimity	49
Choice of a Spiritual Guide	51
The Last Conversation	53
Going back to the Divine	56
Paramhansa Ramakrishna (1836 – 1886)	58
Bhagavad Gita	63
What the Bhagavad Gita means to me	63
The Gita and Kriya Yoga.....	71
Attachment and Loss.....	82
Lessons in Life	87
Out of Body Experience.....	90

How we Handle Negative Circumstances	92
Cosmic Intelligence	97
Spiritual Progress	101
Saint Theresa's Prayer	107

Introduction

Some people question, “I am just one person; how can I make a difference?” A candle that is used to light another candle is not dimmed in any way. However, the surrounding is now brighter with two candles lit. The other candle will go on lighting other candles and the world continues to grow brighter day by day.

This understanding is the foundation of this book and hopefully, many more. This book includes articles written and contributed by my friends who found it in their heart to spare some time to share their thoughts and experiences which could benefit the readers.

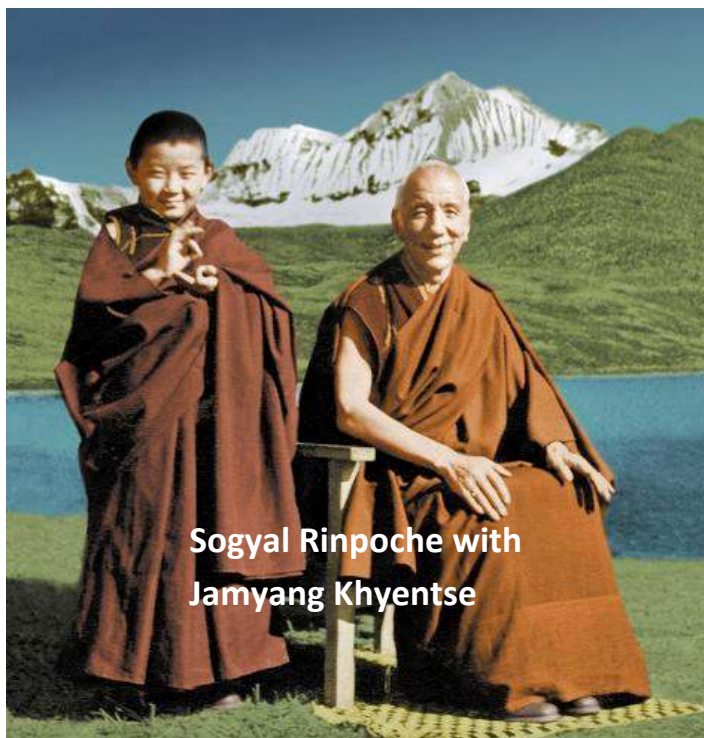
If you have an article that you would like to share with others, please email it to me at desmondyeohsc@gmail.com. It is from my own experience that the writer will benefit greatly from his own writings. That is why I am urging you to write and share your thoughts with the world. If you question, who would want to read what I write?: Please withhold that judgment and let the readers decide. If they do not wish to read it, they will just skip it. It is as simple as that. So, please share your thoughts.

I tell myself that if what I write is able to bring happiness to just one person, then all my effort would be worthwhile. I hope that you feel the same way.

The Gap between Thoughts

By Desmond Yeoh

Sogyal Rinpoche is the author of the highly acclaimed and international bestseller, 'The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying'. Born in Kham in Eastern Tibet, Sogyal Rinpoche was recognized at an early age as the incarnation of a great master and visionary saint of the nineteenth century, Tertön Sogyal Lerab Lingpa (1856-1926), a teacher to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. He received the traditional training of a Tibetan lama under the close supervision of Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, one of the most



outstanding spiritual masters of the twentieth century, who raised Rinpoche like his own son.

In his book, he told an interesting story about his Master, Jamyang Khyentse. His Master attended a festival and was greatly enjoying the entertaining performances. With him was one of his disciple from India. In the middle of the

show, the disciple interrupted the Master and asked, "Master, what is Meditation?"

The Master ignored him. Students from India are usually persistent and they will continue asking the same question again and again until they get a satisfactory answer. After a few moments, he asked again. The Master remained quiet and continued to enjoy the show. The disciple waited, and asked again.

Finally, the Master turned to him and asked, "In between your thoughts, are there gaps?"

"Y...e...s..." the discipline answered while still contemplating the question.

"That is meditation," the Master answered and turned back to the show.



Rudra Shivananda

In the June 2011 issue of his monthly journal, 'Sanatana Mitra', Rudra Shivananda wrote an article titled 'Stages of Transformation' which covers the teachings of Patanjali. In the article, Rudra wrote:

"Parinaama is a dynamic process and not a specific state of awareness- it is the process of transformation when applied to consciousness, leads to the state of Self-Realisation....The first transformation is called norodha parinaama in which the

*chitta-vrittis become suppressed by expanding the space between mental impressions¹. When one seed impression appears, there is a **momentary gap of no-mind** just as when the motion in one direction*

¹ Examples of mental impressions are thoughts, self-talk, mental pictures, recalling a memory etc.

*has to be reversed, the object in motion needs to come to a temporary rest first. The transformation occurs when the **no-mind gap is extended**. The seed impressions are caused by the karmic samskaras and vasanas – the habit patterns and programs from past lives. By application of effort, a new samskara is built up which aids in the transformation until the gap of nirodha can be extended at will and indefinitely without much resistance”.*

The ‘momentary gap of no mind’ or the ‘no mind gap’ mentioned by Rudra is the gap between our thoughts referred to by Sogyal Rinpoche’s master in the earlier story. During our day to day life, the gap between are thoughts are so brief that they are almost non existent. Our ‘train of thoughts’ that is, the shift from one thought to another is so close together that they are like beads strung tightly together. There is no space between them. Because of this, the ego or the illusory Self, appears to be something separate or something that exists inherently. We fail to see that the ego is merely conceptual or a bundle of our thoughts, memories, experiences and mental pictures.



When we meditate, we allow the gap to extend. It is like we are loosening the strings, so that the gaps between the beads are wider and becomes more apparent.

In my books, “We are here to Celebrate” and “Filling our Life with Celebration”, I talked about the importance of being aware about our thoughts or mental impressions so that we can understand the Self. However, I had a nagging feeling that what I have written is

incomplete and there is an important point that I have not emphasised on. I have now realised what I missed.

It is important to be aware of our thoughts but equally important, we must also be aware of the gaps between our thoughts or the no mind gap. In fact, it is only in these gaps that there is awareness. Outside these gaps, there is no awareness. We can observe this by meditating to a mantra. When we are caught up in our thoughts, we will not be able to hear the mantra. We may be sitting silently with our eyes closed and our ears can pick up the sounds but our consciousness will not be there. We are too occupied with our thoughts. Only in between thoughts can we hear the mantra. Similarly, when we are having a conversation with a friend, if he says something which triggers a train of thought within us, we will miss what he says subsequently. He may continue to talk but we will not hear him. Only when we move back into the gap between our thoughts do we hear him again.

When we observe the gap between our thoughts, we will be able to extend it and enjoy the silence. As mentioned by Patanjali, in between the gaps, we are in a temporary state of no-mind. The ego ceases temporarily. It is at that moment that we get a glimpse of our true Self; the pure consciousness that makes up the universe. We can feel our minds expanding as if we have tensed our muscles tightly for a long while and then becoming aware of this, we relax our muscles. There is a feeling of relief. At that point, we experience the beauty of letting go. It is important to recognise this feeling of relief in our mind when we move into the no mind gap because it will help us to move into in the gap during our daily life.

While meditating, we will fluctuate between moments of being caught up with our thoughts and moments of silence when we are in

the gaps. When we are absorbed in our thoughts, we will not be truly aware of them. Our thoughts will move so fast that we will not be able to recall most of them. However, when the train of thoughts ceased and we move into a gap of silence, there is a moment of awareness when we can recall and evaluate our most recent thoughts. This is done unconsciously as if an echo of our recent thoughts flowed into the gap momentarily. That moment is important because we are able to shine our awareness on those recent thoughts in order to understand the Self. Once the echo passes, we can then rest in the silence of the gap.

When we are in these gaps, we can just rest in its peacefulness or we could use our awareness to observe our physical body or any emotions that are present.

Everyone will have these brief moments of no mind. Therefore, everyone has the ability to observe one's true self and become enlightened. However, few recognise the existence and the importance of the no mind gap. We are fortunate to have Patanjali point it out to us. However, the responsibility still lies on us to meditate, understand and experience it.

Being familiar of the Gap allows us to extend it and rest in it in our daily life. The more we observe the Gap, the longer it remains. It is very different from our emotions. When we try to observe it, it fades. Understanding this can give us mastery over our mind.

To illustrate this, let's say that someone is rude to us for no reason. Our anger may arise gradually or it may explode and trigger an immediate reaction by us. If it arises gradually, we may catch it before it becomes overwhelming. We can move into the gap and observe our anger fading while watching our breath. **By watching our breath, we will automatically move into the gap.** Our breath will

not have the opportunity to become quick and shallow; a necessary condition to maintain the anger.

If that day, we happen to have a short fuse and the anger just blow our top, we may react by saying something rude back. We can still decide not to proceed with the argument. In between our thoughts, there would still be brief gaps. We can move our attention to our breath; take the opportunity to observe the gap between our angry thoughts and rest in it. By observing the gap, it will lengthen. Our anger will die. Our breath will be short and shallow but it will gradually slow down and become deeper. We can no longer sustain our anger and at that point, we can choose to walk away and prevent the fight from escalating.

Later in the day, we may recall the incident again and the same anger may arise again within us. Our body will become tense as if we are still in the middle of the argument. Again, in the gap between our memories, we can be aware of our emotion and this provides an opportunity to understand how 'anger' feels like in our body. We may think that we already know what anger feels like but it may surprise us to find out that we may perhaps given too much power to the anger. We may realise that anger is merely a fleeting emotion that does not have power to bind us. We realise that we have more power over it and need not react to it the next time it arises. We will no longer say, "I just don't know what came over me!"

We may also observe the tension in our body brought about by the anger. Wherever the tension is, when we bring our awareness to that part of the body, we send prana to the location and the area will automatically relax. We observe our jaw and the tension there is released; we observe our shoulders and they become relaxed. It is so easy.

This can be applied to our day to day life as well. If we are conscious of the gaps between our thoughts during meditation, we will be aware of the gaps during our daily life. No matter how small these gaps are, we have the opportunity to make a choice. We can choose to react based on our habitual patterns or we can choose to no longer be a slave to our mind, habits and conditioning. We can put our foot down and tell ourselves that our mind is merely a tool and not our master. We will not react but take control of our emotions. When we make that decision, we take back our power. We become like what the Buddha describe as a pole planted deeply into the earth and can never be swayed by the stormy winds.

When we rest in the gap of no-mind, we are being with the Divinity within. Sogyal Rinpoche refers to this as resting in the nature of the mind. When we face problems, it is important that we allow ourselves more time to meditate and rest in the gap. By doing so, we are surrendering the problem to the Divine. When we have problems, our natural tendency or habit is to worry about the problem. We disguise this habit of worrying by telling ourselves that we are trying to find a solution to the problem. However, if we are honest with ourselves, we will see that we are just creating scenarios of all the bad things that could happen over and over again in our mind. Most of them will not happen.

So, worrying of the problem will not help us. It is better to just calm our mind and rest in the gap. We surrender our problems to the Divine without any expectation of the outcome. The divine may plant a seed of the solution in our mind and when the time is right, the seed will blossom to help us solve the problem. The Divine may also direct you to the right person to help you solve the problem. Or the Divine may not do anything because the problem is there to prevent you from making a big mistake. The outcome is numerous and it is no

point that we try to figure out how the Divine will help us. Just be confident that if we rest in the gap, the Divine *will* help us.

The Jewel

By Desmond Yeoh, reproduced from the book "We are Here to Celebrate"

After practicing for many years, Ravi's Guru called for him. Ravi had to travel for three days to reach his Guru but he was more excited than tired.

After prostrating to his Guru, Ravi asked reverently, "My beloved Guru, why have you summoned me?"

The Guru held out a beautiful jewel the size of a tennis ball and

responded softly, "I want you to have this. You must keep this but can never sell it or give it away. You must carry it everywhere you go. You can show it to anyone but beware of their intentions."

Ravi accepted the gift and thanked his Guru profusely for his generosity. The jewel was beautiful. In fact, he never laid eyes on anything so beautiful. For months, he would secretly take out the jewel and admire it.

However, gradually, the fear of losing the jewel started to take hold of him. Everywhere he went, he was filled with fear and he had to think many times before he stepped out of the safety of his home. He could not sleep well because he was afraid of break-ins in the middle of the night. Any noise would startle him.

Eventually he could not take it anymore and he took the long journey to his Guru.



“My beloved Guru, this jewel has become a burden. I am filled with fear and I cannot sleep. It is worth nothing to me. Please take it back”, Ravi blurted out upon reaching his Guru.

“My child, if it’s a burden to you, it would be a burden to me as well”, his Guru responded with love in his eyes. Ravi bowed his head in shame.

The Guru smiled and instantly, the jewel vanished from Ravi’s hand. The lesson has been learnt. There is no longer any need for the jewel.

Most of our possessions are like the jewel. They are nice to look at and fill us with pride; but they are worthless. They are merely stones kept in the safe. We cling tightly to them; and the fear that comes with them. There is nothing wrong with this but it is important to remember that we are the creators of our experiences. We choose our experiences and all experiences will bring us closer to the Divine. Just remember that we have a choice.

Ravi learnt a beautiful lesson; that he already owns the most beautiful jewel – his inner peace. That is what Hakuin, a zen master, meant when he said that ‘all beings are from the very beginning Buddhas’. Someone once asked Osho how many of his disciples are enlightened. He responded, “all of them”; and he is telling the truth. The world is trying to help us see that on the day we were born, we already have all that we need to be happy. From that perspective, the world is a wonderful Guru.

Purification of habits and preventing the ripening of bad karma

By Daren Yeoh

There was a road rage incident televised in the news. A man got out of his vehicle with a weapon and assaulted another driver. There was a CC video nearby which captured the whole incident. The victim had to be hospitalised and the other was charged. This is an example of how external factors can trigger karmic actions and cause karmic stores to ripen resulting in a sequence of events that adversely affect the individual and his family. Are humans doomed to be controlled by external events? We can live in a free democratic society but if we are so dictated by external triggers, can we really taste true freedom? The Buddha says that the tears that each of us has shed or the blood that each of us has bled is far greater than all the oceans in this world combined. Do we want to continue to shed more tears in the present and future lives?

If we allow external factors to affect ourselves, then it is very difficult to find peace and bliss and there is a greater chance for bad karmic imprints to ripen before we have the chance to purify them. If one seeks happiness outside of oneself, that is, depend on others or external objects to feel happy, one can never find true peace and freedom. Also, if the focus is on the ego, one will also be affected by external factors as the ego will seek differentiation (for example, by judging or seeking dominance over another). We need to practice in a way that put focus on something else, something beyond us, something that signifies non-judgement, acceptance, connectedness and peace.

We are born with inherent tendencies and habits that go back far longer than we can remember and which affects our life in the present. It is written in our genes. Some habits are particularly

strong, such as desire, anger, greed, hatred and delusion. Deepak Chopra in his book the Crystal Cave refers to Merlin who said, “Normal mortals have so many personalities (different persons) within them, fighting with each other to come to the fore. They can never find quietude. The wizard on the other hand, has no one within him and is at peace”.



As a lay person, it is beneficial to have a practical, simple and easy to remember practice to purify our habits. The path of purification based on the teachings of Buddha is concentration, virtue and understanding.

As an example of the practice, when an external trigger hits us (say a car cuts abruptly in front of us) and we feel a negative feeling, the practice involves:

1. Firstly, be aware of the feeling (this may be anger or annoyance).
2. Do not deny the feeling, acknowledge that feeling and then let it go and allow it to dissipate into the universe (like a drop of bitter dew dissolving without a trace in a running river). You can imagine the feeling as a colour or object leaving you and disappearing into the vast universe.

3. Then bring up in your mind the positive affirmations that one following the path of kindness is striving for. Say to yourself, “gift” (you are giving the person a gift of peace; by not reacting, you are giving the driver a gift of space; a gift of wisdom) or say, “we are ultimately all connected” (the driver might be a family member or a close friend in one of our past lives) or other virtues that are meaningful to you such as patience, peace, understanding and wisdom. Alternatively, you can bring an image of a spiritual person in your mind or consider what a wise person would act or say to you.
4. Finally share the merit that you have created with all the people suffering in this world.

The above practice should be gradual. Do not be discouraged if the negative feelings are overpowering at times. Keep going. The Dalai Lama encourages us to keep developing our heart no matter what is happening and what is going on around us. Never give up.

Message from the Editor: My brother Daren, is a practitioner of Kriya Yoga and a follower of Ajahn Brahm. He has given a practical method to apply when faced with negative circumstances which involves both awareness and wisdom. When we are aware, we connect with the Divine within and allow the Divine to help us. When we use wisdom, we take back control over our mind. Our mind becomes a tool we use instead of our Master.

He wrote, ‘We need to practice in a way that put focus on something else, something beyond us, something that signifies non-judgement, acceptance, connectedness and peace’. I cannot agree with this more. We must remove our ego from our practice. When we practice

to achieve some siddhi or spiritual power or with some expectations of some spiritual experience, our ego is involved. Achieving those siddhis does not guarantee happiness. However, when we practice to train our mind and understand ourselves, we will have greater control over how we react to negative circumstances. We will be in a stronger position to apply the method mentioned by Daren in this article. Also, when we rest in the silent gap between our thoughts, we are resting in the true nature of our mind. At that moment, we are resting our head on the peaceful lap of the Divine.

He also wrote, 'The path of purification based on the teachings of Buddha is concentration, virtue and understanding'. When we strengthen our power of concentration, we are better able to redirect our thoughts from negative thoughts to positive thoughts. Daren gave a few examples in this article. Without concentration, negative thoughts can easily snowball when we are faced with negative circumstances. Meditations that involve concentration on an object such as a candle flame can improve our power of concentration.

With virtue, there are lesser things for us to worry or think about. If one has told a lie, one has to constantly remember that lie. If one has hurt another, one has to worry about revenge by the other person. On the other hand, when we bring happiness to others, they will wish us happiness. Their thoughts have the creative power to bring joy to our life even without doing anything. The same applies when we hurt others.

'Understanding' refers to understanding oneself. No other person understands us more than ourselves because we are with ourselves 100% of the time. We know the words we use to make ourselves worry or angry. With understanding comes power because only with

understanding can we change ourselves. For example, the topic of discussion on a radio programme the other day asked the question, 'If you are unhappy with your job, should you leave your job?' Most of the responses were along the lines of asking oneself; is it really the job or is it just one's negative thoughts that make one unhappy with the job. That answer is clear when we advise others. But when it involves ourselves, our negative emotions come into play and we cannot see the answer as clearly.

This is the power of understanding. Only with understanding are we able to let go of our habitual way of thinking. That is why the wise say that they can point us in the right direction but we have to walk the path ourselves. The Buddha said that the finger pointing to the moon is not the moon. We need to shift our gaze from the finger to the moon. There is no point talking about the finger when we cannot see the moon. We need to apply the techniques we have learnt to understand ourselves and transcend our negative tendencies. Only then, can our mind step down from being the master to become a tool we use to live a happier life.

A Near Death Experience

By Dr. Subassh Rajoo, Md.

Message from the Editor: I met Dr. Subassh in the first Kriya Yoga Seminar I organised back in 2006. A Buddhist could describe him as a Boddhisatva, a being who chose to be reborn on earth to help others achieve enlightenment. He has been a constant source of encouragement to me in my work as a voluntary organiser of Kriya Yoga Seminars by Rudra Shivananda in Malaysia. He has also encouraged me to persevere in my practice.

He is like a loving elder brother to me and my angel. Mutual friends have told me that his clinic is always packed with patients and I can see why. His kind and compassionate nature is like a fragrant flower attracting bees to it.

He had shared with me his Near Death Experience (“NDE”) and I have his permission to share it with you in this book.

It all happened when I was about 4 years old. I was staying in my grandmother’s house in India. My mom and sister were there as well.

I used to study in the village school which was about two odd miles from my grandma's house. I walked to school everyday with a close friend who was our maid's son. One day, on our way back from school, we passed a big tree, as we always do, but on that particular day my friend somehow managed to frighten me. He pointed to the tree and told me that there was a terrible thing on the tree. I was so terrified that I developed high fever by the time I reached home.

My fever got worse and I was bedridden. My mother was sitting beside me and she was feeling devastated as she looked at my state.

Suddenly, I was out of my body and I saw myself lying on a mat covered with a blanket. Only my face was exposed. My grandma and other ladies were sitting around me. I even observed an oil lamp at my head side.

I noticed that I was observing all this from a high vantage point as if I was at the ceiling level. I looked down at myself lying still and my loved ones sitting around me. All of them looked sullen. They must have thought that I was dying.

I was there near the ceiling watching my body and everyone down there, but who was "that me" watching from up there. That was not the physical me---but "me--the thought". As I grew up, getting into Spiritual learning and practice--I believe "that-me", who was watching from up there, could be "my-SOULSELF". Perhaps I had an "Out-of-Body" experience.

Fortunately I managed to recover and when I was well enough, I went to the Palani hill temple to give thanks to GOD for my recovery. I am thankful to my childhood friend for creating the scene for this unexpected lesson on spirituality that had a great impact on me.

Through this experience, I have learnt that --We--the physical-self are "not-the-real-we". I get to understand that the "me" who was up above, watching the scene below, is the real-me(the SOUL-ME).

I thank GOD for giving me this Insight.

Message from the Editor: I believe that Dr Subassh had a NDE. Dr Raymond Moody, MD was the pioneer of NDE and Dr Subassh's story is consistent with the many stories which Dr. Moody wrote about in his book, 'Life after Life'. In his book, Dr. Moody wrote about some common features in the experiences of people who had NDE, that is,



Dr. Raymond Moody was the first to coin the term "near-death experience."

they were clinically dead but revived by the doctors.

Many experienced floating out of their bodies and looking down on their own bodies and on the doctors working on them. They could hear what the doctors said and later surprised them by recounting what was said to the doctors. The most common experience reported by them is the

feeling of indescribable peace and bliss and being enveloped in a white light which is very bright but does not hurt the eyes. Most of them no longer fear death because they understand that life does not stop at death. They start to take life easier and generally live happier lives.

God has tried to show us through science that we are not merely our mind and body. The discovery and research into NDE is one such example. However, science has also made us unreasonable sceptics.

Once, I was talking to a friend whose brother was suffering from cancer. I explained NDE to her to show her that when someone's time is up, dying is not something horrible but something beautiful. People who come back after an NDE felt extremely disappointed and sometimes even angry at their doctor for bringing them back to the confines of their body. Whatever sense pleasure that they can get from the body is hardly comparable to the bliss they felt when they were out of it.

However, she discussed this with her husband who was a medical doctor. Her husband explained that it was hallucination and even gave it a scientific name. Giving it a scientific name had somehow taken away the mystery of NDE for her.

However, I pointed out to him that the person doing the research was also a medical doctor. They had machines placed on some of the patients to measure their brain activity. These patients were brain dead when they had their NDE. They could not have imagined the event. Even so, they could not have seen through hallucination the surgical procedures done on them and the conversation of the operation team, with such clarity that they were able to astound their doctor by recounting them after they recovered.

Rudra Shivananda taught us that it is fine to be sceptical but do not let the scepticism prevent us from investigating the truth of a matter. In fact, that is how science works. When a scientist sets out to investigate a theory, he will create experiments to either prove or disprove that theory. He does not accept it or reject it outright.

We experiment on spiritual truths by going within ourselves. Our body is the laboratory. The ego can never understand spiritual truths because it is made of thoughts and experiences. In our daily life, our mind is filled with so many thoughts that it appears to be something tangible. We react based on our thoughts and experiences so naturally that we take them as our true 'self'. It is like learning to drive. At the beginning we had to concentrate fully but after a few months, we can drive without much conscious effort. Driving has become part of our 'self'.

Enlightenment starts with freeing ourselves from this bondage of seeing ourselves as our mind and body. The ego is merely thoughts. When we know this experientially, the ego will no longer exist. The

ego will not like this because it is very scary to proof to ourselves that we do not exist. So scary that some will not even try and they even encourage others not to try.

Reading the scriptures merely add to the thoughts that we already have. Unless we are able to integrate the teachings into our own experience, scriptural studies will become a hindrance. We will become scholars instead of enlightened beings. Do you know see why most of us prefer reading than meditating? Reading is less likely to enlighten us!

How do we see that the ego is merely thoughts? One way is to experience an NDE like Dr Subassh!

We do not have a choice over this, so we need to meditate and look within. We need to observe our thoughts. We will see that the thoughts arise within us randomly and out of our control. We can test this by trying to keep our mind focus on just a single topic while meditating. It would be impossible. After a minute or so, we will probably be thinking about something else. Or we can try to tell our mind not to think. Needless to say, most of us already know that this is an almost impossible feat unless one is a highly advanced being.

If we have no control over our mind, worse still is our control over our emotions. We cannot choose when we want to be happy or sad. When we are feeling moody, we just accept it as so and wait for the dark clouds to lift. It appears that we have already accepted the fact that we have no control over our emotions. This body that we think is 'us', operates based on natural laws beyond our control. We merely observe its workings and delude ourselves to think that we are in control. Do we control the beating of our hearts or our digestive systems?

Observing these in our meditation can be both confusing and liberating. The confusion is like facing a storm and we may feel like turning away. If we recognise that the ego is merely thoughts, then the question will arise; who gets enlightened? In the Buddhist sutra on emptiness, the 'Heart Sutra', it is said that in emptiness, there is no enlightenment. How can 'thoughts' be enlightened? They just fall away and lose their power.

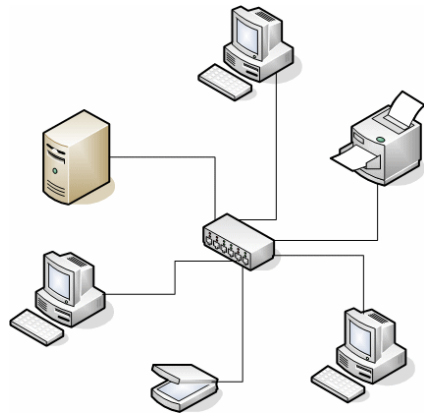
After braving the storm, we will experience the peacefulness of the calm after the storm. It is a worthwhile reward. Once we accept that we are not our thoughts, we finally recognise that we are not our ego. We become courageous. For instance, we are moved when others ridicule or speak badly at us. They are merely throwing stones at the air; empty thoughts. We no longer see the need to defend our opinions because we know that we are not our opinions and if someone is able to convince us to let go of them, they are doing us a big favour indeed.

The next article on 'Computers' expands on this article by giving an illustration of what the ego is.

The Computer

By Desmond Yeoh

Imagine that you have just created an 'artificial intelligence' computer program that enables a computer to gather knowledge through its own experience. Over time, the computer will have more and more knowledge and is able to make decisions and conclusions based on that knowledge. It does so by associating its current experience with the memory it has accumulated in its database. For example, in its database, it has information that cancer is usually fatal. When someone tells it that he is suffering from cancer, the computer will conclude that the person must be feeling sad and responds with sympathy. It decides on what is good or bad based on the same method of association.



After 10 years, you tell the computer that its parts are no longer functioning and needs to be shut down. The computer, through its experience, has learnt about death. It begs you not to shut it down as it does not want to die. You then tell the computer that it is not the 'mind' and 'hardware' but the intelligence (software) that enabled it to gather the experience. It is just using the hardware temporarily to interact with the world. Pretty soon, you will load the intelligence (software) into a new computer and new knowledge and experiences can be gathered. The computer will argue endlessly; How can this be? My name is so and so, and I am an expert in this or that area, and the other computers know me and so on. You tell it that it is not the memory and knowledge that it has accumulated. Its Real Self exists in all computers.

It appears that this example is almost real. The following article titled, "New IBM computer chip mimics the human brain" appeared in CNN on 19 August 2011:

Making computers behave like humans has taken another step forward.

IBM on Thursday announced it has created a chip designed to imitate the human brain's ability to understand its surroundings, act on things that happen around it and make sense of complex data.

Instead of requiring the type of programming that computers have needed for the past half-century, the experimental chip will let a new generation of computers, called "cognitive computers," learn through their experiences and form their own theories about what those experiences mean.

The chips revealed Thursday are a step in a project called SyNAPSE (Systems of Neuromorphic Adaptive Plastic Scalable Electronics). The two chip prototypes are a step toward letting computers "reason" instead of reacting solely based on data that has been pre-programmed, IBM says.

"Imagine traffic lights that can integrate sights, sounds and smells and flag unsafe intersections before disaster happens," said Dharmendra Modha, the project leader for IBM Research. "Or imagine cognitive co-processors that turn servers, laptops, tablets and phones into machines that can interact better with their environments."

Other scenarios the researchers envision: A computing system that could monitor the world's water supply -- measuring things like temperature, pressure, wave height and acoustics -- then give a warning when it thinks a tsunami is likely.

Or imagine a sensor that a grocery store owner could use to read sights, smells and temperatures and give an alert that produce may have gone bad.

"The computers we have today are more like calculators," Modha told tech blog VentureBeat. "We want to make something like the brain. It is a sharp departure from the past."

Let us compare ourselves to this life-like computer. Our body can be compared to the chip. The experiences and data that the computer gathers over time is comparable to our ego. The ego is merely an accumulation of experiences and information. The 'ego' of the computer can be downloaded into another computer and for that second computer; it could be called 'reincarnation'!

Practicing Awareness

By Desmond Yeoh, reproduced from the book "We are Here to Celebrate"

Sit comfortably on a chair or on the floor.

Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Breathe normally without any conscious effort to change its pace. If your breath is short and shallow, observe that. If it is long and deep, observe that. Follow the entire length of your in and out-breaths. Feel the air flow into your nostrils, lungs and abdomen and out in the opposite direction. This is called conscious breathing. This tool is all

we need to centre ourselves. Stay with this for as long as you wish.



Now, as you continue to breathe consciously, bring your attention to your body. Feel the sensations in your head, shoulders, arms, legs and the other parts of your body. Feel the weight of your body against the seat or floor. If there is any tension in any part of your body, focus your attention and send your breath

there. Healing energy fill flow to wherever you place your attention on.

Feel the sensations on your body. You may feel the wind blowing against your face and body. Enjoy it; stay with it.

Feel your entire body as you continue to breathe consciously. This will have a calming effect on you.

Listen to the surrounding sounds; the birds chirping, the wind blowing and so on. You may also hear the sound that comes from within. It is a constant high pitch sound. Paying attention to this

sound also has a calming effect. Breathe consciously. Stay with this for as long as you wish.

Next, bring your attention to your chest area and place your attention on whatever emotion there. You may be feeling joyful or bored. Whatever, the feeling is, give it your fullest attention as you continue to breathe consciously. You will notice that feelings are transient. As soon as you place your attention on them, they begin to fade. Placing awareness on our emotions can strengthen our intuition or the voice of the divinity within us.

This teaches us one thing; that everything is impermanent. With this understanding, there is freedom. Whenever, we are overwhelmed by negative emotions, we can choose not to react and just allow the feeling to fade. We begin to take control of our actions. We begin to have choices.

Continue to breathe consciously. Enjoy the practice; there is nothing to achieve but the mere enjoyment of it.

Next, place your attention on your forehead area and observe the thoughts and mental movies/mental formations that arise. We develop an intention to understand ourselves, our ego and the best way to do this is to observe our thoughts and mental formations. Listen to your thoughts and watch your mental movies while being unattached to them. Pay attention to them for as long as they last. When they fade, let them fade. There is no need to hold on to them. Rest in the gap between your thoughts. Observe and enjoy the silence of this gap where the mind temporarily ceases to exist.

If you get carried away by your thoughts and mental movies, that is fine. As soon as you become aware, breathe consciously again and wait for the next thought.

As we do this, we will see that we have no control over our thoughts and mental formations. They arise and fade on their own accord. An external stimulus may trigger a string of thoughts and if we are not aware, we will be thrown around by them.

We experience what the spiritual masters are telling us; that we are not our ego. We are not our thoughts and mental formations. We don't even own them. How can we own something when we don't control it? If we are not our thoughts, then, we are not our minds. We are beyond our mind and body. We can see this by merely watching our thoughts and mental formations.

Finally, just relax and allow your awareness to flow freely. Pay attention to whatever that is trying to catch your attention. It may be an itch, emotion or thought. Just relax and allow your awareness to be effortless.

As we strengthen our awareness through this practice, we must remember to bring the practice into our daily life. We breathe consciously whenever we remember to do so and eventually, living consciously will become natural to us and then we can let go of the effort.

Expectations Pollutes Love

By Desmond Yeoh, reproduced from the book "We are Here to Celebrate"

The word 'love' has different meanings for different people. In this world of duality, love comes with conditions and expectations. When we say 'I love you', our mouths stop at that but our minds have not finished the sentence. It adds the word 'if' after the sentence. The kind of love that brings peace is unconditional love, the type of love without the 'if' attached to it.

Our love for our babies is the best example of what unconditional love is. After all, what can you expect from a baby other than to be a baby? Ah, but when they grow, our expectations grow. We start to add the 'if' to our love. I love you if you do your chores. I love you if you do well in your exams. The love becomes conditional and becomes controlling. Conditional love says I want to be happy in our relationship. Unconditional love says no matter what happens, I want you to be happy. How I feel is not important. We are one. That is what the Spiritual Masters mean when they say that we should not be attached to our loved ones. They are telling us to give them the highest kind of love; unconditional love.



This is a true story except that I have changed the names. Rick believes that to succeed in life we must be number one. He lived this way all his life and as a result, frequently falls ill. He also imposes this belief on his daughter Serene. Serene went to two kindergartens, one in the morning and another in the evening. In addition to the

homework from the kindergartens, Rick will also make up work exercises for Serene to complete. When Serene went to Primary School, she was top of her class but never had evenings at the park. She only gets to go to the park on Sunday evenings. She did not enjoy it much because she felt clumsy compared to her friends who seems to be more firm with their hands and feet. She could only watch in envy when her friends zoomed around on their bicycles. She never learned how to ride one.

Eventually, the pressure got the better of her and she became rebellious. She fell from being the top student to the fifth position in her class. Rick was very mad and disappointed. As a result, Serene felt unloved as a person and her self-confidence declined.

University of Pennsylvania adolescent medicine specialist, Kenneth Ginsburg, said his patients included high school students whose parents told them they did not need to bother to go to college if they did not get to Harvard or Yale. Sometimes, he noted, teenagers who say they cannot imagine life without a packed schedule and profess to 'love' hours of extracurricular activities, are really afraid of disappointing their parents by opting out or scaling back. One student's schedule was so packed that she even felt guilty for bursting into tears because she thought of it as wasting valuable time!

We as parents want our children to be happy. The question is, when do we want them to be happy? Remember, craving is an attachment to an imaginary future happiness. It involves sacrificing our present happiness for an imaginary future. We often make the same mistake with our children. For example, one may be attached to the image of one's child becoming a doctor in the future resulting in one putting excessive pressure on one's child to achieve academic results. Or one

could be overwhelmed by an imagined future suffering and pictures one's child living in poverty. It does not matter whether it is an imagined future happiness or suffering; both results in high expectations of our children in the present moment. Childhood once lost can never be recovered. Let us set limits with love not expectations. Let them enjoy their childhood for we do not know what the future holds for them.

Another minus with expectations is that it clouds our ability to recognise the potentials of our children. If one think that there is no money in dancing, one may not recognise that one's child has that hidden talent. On the other hand, if we do not have any expectations of them, we can allow them to blossom into fields which they are excellent in. We want them to be happy. We want them to be who they are and not what they think we expect them to be. We must allow them to be themselves and for that to happen, our love for them must be unconditional.

The Suffering that comes with Pride

By Desmond Yeoh

Steve collapsed on the sofa in his office contemplating what just happened. He climbed the corporate ladder to become one of the top executives in this global organisation; an enviable position. This position gives him lots of power in the organisation but he is not feeling particularly powerful at this moment.

Earlier, he was making a presentation to the board of directors when one of them pointed up a small mistake in his presentation. It was a small mistake but it did not feel small to him. It embarrassed him and made him angry at the same time; throwing him off his presentation. His presentations are often convincing and inspiring; capturing the audiences' full attention. After he was distracted by the mistake, his presentation was at best mediocre. His mind kept going back to the mistake.

As he was slumped on the sofa, he tried to understand what happened to him during the presentation. It was just a small mistake and it affected him so greatly. He replayed the mental video of one of the directors pointing out the mistake over and over again in his mind.

Then it struck him.

It was his pride that allowed the minor mistake to make him suffer so much. Because of his position and the pride that comes with it, he expected perfection from himself. He would not allow himself to make any mistake. But now he realised that this is an unfair expectation. He was not always like that. When he was climbing the corporate ladder, whenever he found a mistake that he made, he would just proceed to correct it without hammering himself. Sometimes he would laugh at himself; finding the mistakes cute.

He does not allow himself this luxury anymore. His ego is so huge that he cannot allow others to see him as less than perfect.

He now sees the *suffering that comes with pride* and recognises that he needs to change if he wants to live a happier life. He thought about the other top executives in his organisation. Almost all of them have the same problem. Just the other day, he had lunch with Richard, the Global Head of Sales in the same organisation. Richard tried to get the attention of one of the waitresses but she did not see him. Richard was furious and started yelling for the restaurant manager. Steve was embarrassed.

Steve can see the similarity between their reactions. It is pride that caused them to react the way they did. They were the victims of pride. Pride is their master. Steve made a commitment to himself that from then on, he will not allow pride to be his master. He will be the master of his mind. He will not allow his habit and conditioning to dictate his life. He has the power of choice and he will exercise it.

Steve smiled as he recalled a story by Ajahn Brahm. The master told a story about when he was a young monk staying with a group of



other monks. The temple they were staying in was short of funds and they had to do the renovation and repair works themselves. Ajahn Brahm was assigned the duty

of building a brick wall. He was very careful as he laid brick after brick

to build the wall. When he finished, he stepped back to admire his handiwork. He was devastated when he noticed a brick that was a little crooked. He felt like using dynamite to blow up the wall and rebuild it but fortunately, the senior monk did not allow him to do so.

Many years later, Ajahn Brahm was asked to show a visitor around the temple grounds. He tried to avoid the wall but the visitor just walked over and studied the wall.

“What a beautiful wall”, the visitor commented.

Ajahn Brahm was dumbfounded, “What do you mean beautiful? Can’t you see that brick that is sticking out like a sore thumb!”

The visitor smiled, “Yes, I see it. But I also see the other 999 bricks that had been laid perfectly. Look, I am a house builder and we also make such mistakes. But when we do, we call it a feature and charge our customers higher”. Ajahn Brahm laughed at what the visitor said and also at his own silly expectations of himself. He is, after all, a monk and not a builder.

Now, he no longer notices the brick that is out of place.

Steve thought about how he imposed the same expectation of himself on his subordinates. He now realises that it is unfair to do so. His staffs are already doing more than what can be reasonably expected of them and if he does not change his ways, they will probably give up and resign. That would be devastating.

Steve's thoughts shifted to his 10 year old daughter, Mandy. Just last week, she came back from school with her maths results. She achieved 98% and proudly showed it to Steve. Steve took the papers and immediately flipped to the question which little Mandy got wrong. He saw that it was an



easy question and if Mandy was more careful, she would have gotten the question right and achieve a perfect score. He proceeded to reprimand Mandy for her carelessness. Tears swelled in Mandy's eyes. She was hoping for praises from her dad but received harsh words instead.

"What has gotten into me?" Steve questioned himself as he recalled this event with his daughter. My pride has taken away even the joy that he could have had with Mandy. No, he will not accept this anymore. He must change and he will.

Steve also recalled a recent meeting when his suggestion to another Top Executive was rejected. He felt as if the rejection of his suggestion was equivalent to rejecting him entirely. His suggestion became part of his ego. He felt furious but fortunately, he did not let it show. It was just a simple suggestion and it does not affect him at all whether or not his suggestion was accepted. It is funny how he reacted the way he did. He laughed and felt good to be able to laugh at himself again.

He stood up from the sofa and adjusted his tie. He felt lighter after letting go this burdensome pride that he has been carrying for so

long. His face shone brightly as he proceeded out of his office to tell each of his subordinate how much he appreciates them.

Suffering leads to Self-Understanding

By Desmond Yeoh

A friend shared with me the following story:

I was on a business trip in Thailand with a friend who comes from a family who are billionaires. We were waiting in an office lobby when my friend saw a few Buddhist monks walking out of the lobby. He then turned to me and said, “wouldn’t it be nice to be a monk; to be care free and not worry about anything”. I was taken by surprise because I truly did not expect that remark from him. He has everything that he could ever want; a loving wife, beautiful children and everything that money can buy. Why is he thinking of being a monk?

The suffering that his billionaire friend was going through made him seek for the kind of happiness that is more real. Wealth can give him physical comforts but all his money can never ease his mental suffering. Everyone, rich or poor, must suffer negative emotions such as fear, worry, craving, anger etc. They can only overcome them by training their mind so that they do not become a slave to these negative emotions.

Suffering brings us closer to the Divine. We often pray when we are facing some obstacles in life. When things are going well, we sometimes forget to pray. In Buddhism, gods are not seen as the Creator but rather, beings of higher consciousness. The Buddha said that it is better to be born in the human realm than the god realm because the suffering in the human realm provides an opportunity for the human to evolve spiritually. In the god realm, the gods are too distracted with comfort and activities that they tend to neglect their spiritual practices. They do not see a need to seek for something better. Only a person who has experienced the bliss of

enlightenment like the Buddha can see that the gods are still suffering but are unaware of it. Many of us in the human realm are unaware that we are suffering. We just see and accept it as the norm.

Tibetans are generally a happy lot. Even when they were exiled from their country following the invasion of Tibet by China, they still maintained a happy and positive attitude. They do not fear suffering. In fact, they see it as problematic when things are going too well lest they stop striving for enlightenment.



Only when we suffer, do we seek for something better. When we are poor, we seek for more wealth. When we become wealthy and still suffer, we begin to seek for the kind of inner-happiness that is not conditional upon external circumstances. We start to question our beliefs and conditioning and begin to let go of those that are not beneficial and inculcate those that can bring us inner-peace and ease.

In this world of duality, no suffering is entirely bad. Take illness and old age. None of us like it. When someone young and healthy dies, the loved ones left behind are often devastated. It may take years for them to recover from their death. However, when the person has suffered a long time due to an illness and has lived a long life, the loved ones will find it easier to let go. Even for the dying person, it is easier to let go and pass on. In this scenario, illness and old age plays a little role in lightening the load both for the dying person and for his loved ones.

Suffering is like a wake-up call to relook at our current circumstances. It makes us look deeply within ourselves to understand what we truly want out of life. It makes us re-evaluate what we think can bring us happiness. For example, one may start to question which can bring more happiness; wealth or a trained mind? As I study the Spiritual Diary that I kept, I found that most of the spiritual insights I gained came from the periods of challenges and suffering. I am sure that it is the same for Everyone.



Suffering can also lead to a genuine surrender to the Divine. When we tried everything we can, we may decide to just stop struggling and rest our heads on the lap of the Divine. We tell the Divine, come what may; I leave it in your loving hands. A person who is suffering from a terminal illness may surrender to Divine and leave the results to the Divine; death or recovery, it does not matter. All that matter is a total trust in the Divine that whatever happens, it is

for the best.

A True Story about Complete Surrender

By Balachandran

Message from the editor: After mailing out the article 'Suffering leads to Self-Understanding', I received a mail from Mr. Balachandran. In his mail, he shared with me his story that clearly demonstrates what complete surrender to the Divine truly means. When we surrender, we do so without any expectations whatsoever. We leave it to the Divine to chart our course. If we set expectations on the Divine on how our problems should be resolved, then it is a prayer and not surrender. His story is such a wonderful example of what Surrender means that I asked his permission to include it in this book. I know that it is a lot to ask this of him. Through his courage and compassion, he allowed me to share his story. I bow down to him for his kindness.

Brother Desmond peace be with you always.

Now it has been a year since I retired, and the suffering, heartaches, and the unworthiness that I feel is almost unbearable. In fact my wife wants a separation. My whole world began tumbling down, until the last couple of weeks when I decided to surrender all my doubts, my fears, my pain and my sorrow to KRISNA as it says in the GITA.

I tried getting a job for so long but was unsuccessful. Then a few days ago at the restaurant that I frequent, the owner approached me and asked me if I have any friends who want to work in his restaurant. I asked if he would accept me. He told me the job was very tough and it involves clearing the glasses and plates. I told him that I am used to hard work. So I was offered the job. It pays five ringgit an hour. I started on the 11th of July and believe me, it was a crazy 7 hours of running around non-stop everyday. I thought that I have died and

gone to hell but while I was working I offered my praise to KRISNA and I was going on and on with his song in my heart and it became effortless.

The next day there was a call from a property management company for a building manager and it looks promising. I realised something; by just offering all the pain and anger, I felt peaceful but what I did not realise was that I did not have enough faith in the Divine within. Today when I read your book it looks so familiar to what just happened to me. I am so sorry I did not give you any input for this wonderful book you have written. Congratulations for a job so well done and I know you will be with MAHA AVATAR BABAJI. JAI BABAJI.

With divine love from the inner core of my ATMAN

I bow to thee thank you my divine brother

Message from the editor: Sometimes Babaji sends me kind souls like Mr. Balachandran to encourage and inspire me. After requesting for his permission, he not only gave it, but he shared another story with me. In my previous book, 'Filling our Life with Celebration', I talked about forming a close relationship with the Divine. We should not only communicate with the Divine during our morning and evening prayers or when we are in the temple. We should do so every moment of the day as if the Divine is always with us; listening. His story below is a great example.

My divine brother, I bow down to thee with love in my heart. Please include this in your next book. I want the world to know what surrender means.

I am a simple man and I lead a simple life. The day I meet you , I felt the vibrations of a divine person in you.

I came to know MAHAVATAR BABAJI through the best selling book of all times 'An Autobiography of a Yogi' by PRAMAHAMSA YOGANANDA and I never stop seeking him. He has played hide and seek with me from the time I knew about him.

This happened to me about two years ago: I was sending my wife for a meeting in Kuala Lumpur from Malacca. When I was reaching Bangi, my car suffered a flat tyre. I steered the car to the emergency lane and stopped. I was relieved that nothing happened to us.

The next thing on my mind was to send my wife to work. I prayed in my heart Om Kriya Babaji help me send my wife to work safely. It only took two minutes for my prayer to be answered. Her colleague was driving by and she stopped to give my wife a lift. They happily left for work.

Now it was up to me to fix the flat tire and be on my way. I grabbed the jack and went underneath the car to look for a spot to lay the jack at a stable point. At that split second, I felt a very tender touch pulling me out from underneath the car. At that very moment, a motorbike came and rammed into my car. The car was pushed about a meter away. My head would have been crushed if it was not for BABAJI who was watching over me. I would have died.

If you think this is a good story please include it as well. Babaji be with us always. What ever you are; be it the biggest sinner or any kind of human being if you have faith in him he is there for you. JAI JAI MAHAAVATAR BABAJI.

I be yours in service.

Equanimity

By Desmond Yeoh

We alternate between pleasant and unpleasant experiences all the time. Once upon a time, a king asked his adviser how he can remove suffering completely from his life. His adviser then took out a stick. He said, “Your Highness, you only want the right end of this stick and not the left. So I will break the stick into two and throw away the left side”. The adviser proceeded to snap the stick into two. As soon as he did that, the King could see that there is now a new left side of the stick. He understood the adviser’s message and could see that his request was impossible.

In this world of duality, there are good and bad aspects to every event. We need to accept both with equanimity. When faced with



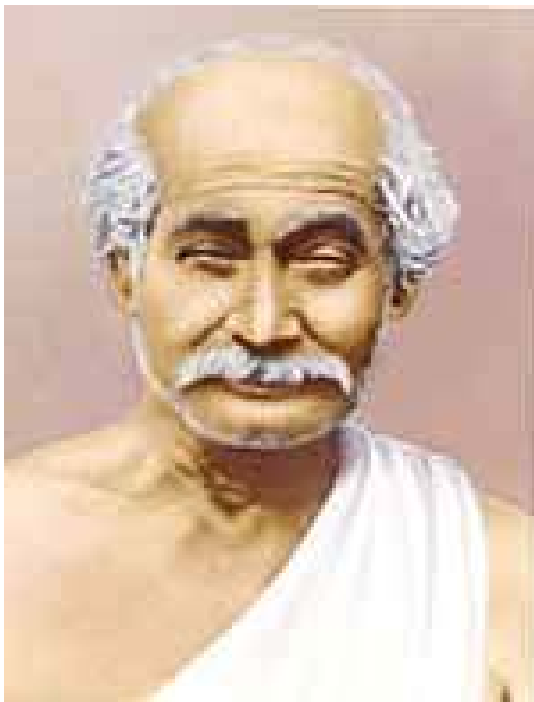
difficulties, we should also look at the positive aspects and the opportunities that are presented. I have friends who lost their jobs only to build successful businesses and careers subsequently. Behind the mask of perseverance, we will find the face of equanimity.

Paramhansa Yogananda tells about his life and spiritual lineage in the book ‘Autobiography of a Yogi’ which is named one of the top 100 spiritual books of the century. In his book, he told a story about his father which exemplifies equanimity.

After his father, Bhagabati Charan Ghosh, retired from the Bengali Nagpur Railway Company, and accountant arrived to audit the books of the Company. He was surprised to find that Bhagabati never

applied for overdue bonuses which he was entitled to. The accountant commented, “He did the work of three men! He has rupees 125,000 owing to him as back compensation”. The Company made the payment to him which he accepted it with equanimity. He said to his family, “Why be elated by material profit? The one who pursues a goal of even-mindedness is neither jubilant with gain nor depressed by loss. He knows that a man arrives penniless in this world, and departs without a single rupee”.

Equanimity arises naturally when one realises that happiness does not come from the material world but from a mind filled with inner peace. As One progresses spiritually, One will find more happiness from the Divine and less from the material world. Another story about his father from Yogananda’s book illustrates this.



Bhagabati’s subordinate, Abinash, applied for leave to visit his Master, Lahiri Mahasaya, in Benares. Bhagabati responded, “Are you going to become a religious fanatic? Concentrate on your office work if you want to forge ahead”.

Abinash was greatly saddened. While walking home from work, he ran into Bhagabati who tried to console him by telling him about the benefits of worldly success but

Abinash’s heart was not into it. He silently prayed to his Master, “Lahiri Mahasaya! I cannot live without seeing you!” Their path took them to the edge of a tranquil field which they paused to admire. Suddenly, the Master appeared a few yards away and said in a strong

voice, “Bhagabati, you are too hard on your employee!” and disappeared. Abinash went on his knees and shouted out, “Lahiri Mahasaya! Lahiri Mahasaya!”

Bhagabati was stupefied, “Abinash, not only do I give you leave, but I give myself leave to start for Benares tomorrow. I must know this great Lahiri Mahasaya, who is able to materialise himself at will in order to intercede for you! I will take my wife and ask this master to initiate us into his spiritual path. Will you guide us to him?”

Abinash agreed with joy.

From that day onwards his father’s perception of what brings happiness shifted from worldly success to the Divine.

The Courage that arises from Equanimity

By Balachandran

Message from the editor: Shortly after sending out the article on equanimity, I received another story about his life from Mr. Balachandran. If I could sum up his story in one sentence, it would be this: "I do not fear suffering for it brings me closer to the Divine".

How are you my dear brother? I know deep in my heart you are filled with peace in your heart.

Equanimity means that sadness or happiness is the same. This has been taught by all Spiritual Masters. But living by it takes years of experience. For instance, if a man suffers due to his negative past life karma, he will not understand and will feel devastated. He will feel confused until he discovers the truth by chance or through his own Sadhana. Wisdom will arise in him through the grace of the Divine, and then the pain and sorrow drops away. He eventually discovers EQUANIMITY.

A few weeks ago I poured out my heart to you about my sorrows. I was desperately looking for another job. Through the grace of the Divine, I was offered a job as a building manager. It offered a high salary but I declined. I have found equanimity in the job I am doing now. It is not a high paying job but I am content. It is a tough job but I am with my loved ones. For once in my life I am truly happy, thanks to the inspiration you gave me through your boo. Believe me, one day it will be a bestseller. Understanding that BABAJI works through us is all it takes to crush our ego and with wisdom, we become free from the shackles of desire. Life then becomes a breeze.

Lord Krishna said, "What belongs to you today will belong to someone else tomorrow. What are you afraid of? Nothing can harm you; you belong to me". I read this a long time ago but I did not

comprehend its meaning. After years of turmoil and living out the scriptures, I finally understand. So do not despair if you are faced with problems, whatever happens, there is a reason. After all, this is the debt of Karma which we all have to repay. Whether the problem is big or small, be patient and allow the Divine to work within. Jesus Christ said, "Come to me those who are heavily laden and I shall give you rest". If you have absolute faith in your heart, believe me, he will give you rest. Let these words that is pouring out from my heart touch the world, heal the world and let us all live as one.

Message from the editor: Mr Balachandran's mail reminds me about a story about the levitating saint in Paramhansa Yogananda's books, the 'Autobiography of a Yogi'.



One day, his disciple said to him, "Master, you are wonderful! You have renounced riches and comforts to seek God and teach us wisdom!" The levitating saint, Baiduri Mahasaya, had forsaken great family wealth when he was young to enter the yogic path.

The Master replied, "You are reversing the case! I have left a few paltry rupees, a few petty pleasures, for cosmic empire of endless bliss. How then have I denied myself anything? I know the joy of sharing the treasure. Is that a sacrifice? The short-sighted worldly folk are verily the real renunciates! They relinquish an unparalleled divine possession for a poor handful of earthly toys!"

Recently, I received a call from Mr. Balachandran. He told me that due to some restructuring, he was retrenched from his current job. He did not feel bad because he has truly surrendered to the Divine and knew in his heart that there is a reason for everything. Nothing is completely good or bad in this world of duality.

A short time later, his friend introduced him to a number of expatriates that are looking for a Yoga teacher and Mr. Balachandran happens to be one. Again, the Divine Mother sent a reminder to Mr. Balachandran that suffering is merely the shadow of the Divine's hand reaching down to comfort him.

Choice of a Spiritual Guide

By Desmond Yeoh, reproduced from the book "We are Here to Celebrate"

Recently, there have been more and more news appearing about scandals involving religion. A friend shared a story with me about her niece who gave her gold pendant to a spiritual head upon being told by him that the gold pendant was possessed. The spiritual head promised to destroy the gold pendant for her. When her parents found out and later confronted the spiritual head, they were informed that the gold pendant had already been destroyed.

These stories create anger and disillusionment but in this world of duality, nothing is completely bad. Such incidents shake us and make us question our beliefs and conditionings. For instance, we start to question our conditioned belief that the teaching of a person who dons a robe for many years is superior to that of a wise householder. We start to question if a spiritual head that has a 'title' is really more advanced than a compassionate, kind and loving homemaker.

We start to take responsibility for our wisdom and think through all our beliefs that had caused us to reject teachings that could have helped us live a happier life. We start to put more effort in our own practices and deepen our spiritual understandings. We put lesser emphasis on 'spiritual knowledge' and the ability to quote spiritual texts but put more effort on those that brings us inner-peace and harmony.

When choosing a spiritual guide, we need to transcend our limiting beliefs and conditioning. If we hold on to an image of how a 'guru' should look like, we will miss him/her when he/she walks pass us and does not look like the 'guru' we envisioned. Our spiritual guide does not necessarily be a monk, swami or so on. There is no guideline for the choice of a spiritual guide because guidelines can be easily imitated. It just takes good acting skills. However, the use of temptations and fear, such as the example above, is a red flag we should look out for. Temptations and fear disturbs inner-peace and does not contribute to our spiritual progress.

The Last Conversation

By Desmond Yeoh, reproduced from the book "We are Here to Celebrate"



An old man is dying and he is holding the hand of his beloved daughter. Both of them know that his time is near.

Sobbing, the daughter begs her father, "Daddy, I am not ready for you to go yet. Please don't leave me yet."

The father smiles with warmth, "My baby, this body has become a burden. Why shed tears for it?"

"Daddy, don't say that! You are and will never be a burden to me."

Tears filled the father's eyes, "I am not this body. Look at the tree outside. The dry leaves that fall to the earth do not shed tears because they know that they will soon rejoin the tree when their elements are absorbed by the roots. Everything is energy. Energy can never be destroyed but merely changes forms".

"I want you to keep this form!"

"My Baby, I am not this form. Neither are you your form. You are your thoughts. I am part of your thoughts and therefore, I continue to live in you. I continue to live in your mother and in your son. Have

you not on numerous occasions told yourself that you are becoming more and more like your father?"

The daughter smiles but sorrow still fills her eyes, "I cannot hug my thoughts. I cannot talk to my thoughts!"

"When you hold your son, know that I too live in him. When you talk to your mother, know that I continue to live in her as well."

"Daddy, there is still so much for me to do to make you proud of me. I have done many mistakes in my life that I need to undo in your eyes"

"You are all that a father could wish for in a daughter. I am part of your thoughts and therefore, I am part of you. Everything that you have done, I have done with you. Therefore, who am I to judge you? Your achievements are my achievements too; your mistakes are my mistakes too. My Baby, there is nothing that you have done that in any way lessens my love for you. I am already proud of you."

The daughter rests her head on her father's chest. The soft beat of his heart comforts her but she knows that this would be the last time her father will be able to hold her.

"My Baby, everything happens at the perfect time. My death will serve to remove another veil that clouds the divinity within you. It will remove one of the many masks that hide your face. The Divine light shines brightly from your eyes and brighter will it shine."

"How can your death bring anything but sorrow to me?"

The father continued, "Death is only for those who see themselves as their mind and body. Truly, we are beyond these. Do not see me as this body for I am not this body. Death is not the end but a beginning. It is not something ugly but something beautiful. In death,

we finally drop the masks that we have been carrying and see the beautiful face of the divine.”

These words brought comfort to the daughter. She remained silent; absorbing the final words of her beloved father.

“My Baby, I am forever with you. Love does not know death. My love will comfort you in times of sorrow; my love will rejoice with you in times of happiness; and my love will forever be your shelter and your shield”.

With these last words, the father reunited with the Divine.

Going back to the Divine

By Desmond Yeoh, reproduced from the book "We are Here to Celebrate"

As a child grows to become a man, he accumulates knowledge, beliefs and conditioning that makes up his ego. The child absorbs everything that is taught to him. He is completely helpless and is rarely allowed to question the lessons taught. He learns how to live within the society. He learns what is right or wrong based on what the society teaches him. His ego grows in line with his accumulation of knowledge, beliefs and conditioning.

Layers and layers are added until the day, he feels alone because he has crawled too far away from the Divine. The veils that he has accumulated have become too heavy. The many masks that he wears over his face begin to suffocate him.

The Divine calls out to him and he becomes a seeker. He begins to look inward instead of outwards for happiness. He seeks to understand himself and begins the torturous but infinitely rewarding process of removing the veils that has covered him for eons.

As he removes the veils, the light within becomes brighter to him. He begins to see that the waves are the sea. They are only different conceptually. He knows that by rejecting another, he is only rejecting himself and by hurting another, he only hurts himself. The veil of separation begins to fall away.

He begins to see that all experiences are opportunities to remove the veils that cloud the divinity within him. He knows that his karmic tendencies attract the very circumstances that provide him with the opportunity to remove their corresponding veils.

But this time, he acts with confidence and wisdom; unlike in the past when he reacted to circumstances based on his emotions. He is no longer blown around by the winds that come from all directions. He is like a pole sunk firmly in the ground.

He knows that when there is awareness, there is happiness. When awareness is absent, there is suffering. He knows that with awareness, he can understand the 'Self' and know that all is One. He knows that when he is present, the ego does not exist. This is because the ego is thoughts of the past and future. Therefore, when he is present, he cannot create a mental picture of himself and at that very moment, he is abiding in emptiness; in pure consciousness.

He learns that his path is just beginning for in the past, he has been walking around in circles. But now, he walks the path with joy and confidence. He walks fearlessly for he is guided by the Divine Star and sustained by wisdom and awareness. Once in a while he stumbles but the Divine hand quickly picks him up.

With joy, he knows that this is all that he needs to be happy. Happiness is no longer a future event or something to be achieved after death. Happiness is NOW!

Paramhansa Ramakrishna (1836 – 1886)

By Desmond Yeoh



Before Paramhansa Ramakrishna was born, his father, Kshudiram, had a dream of a Luminous Being seated on a throne. He said to Kshudiram, "I am pleased with your sincere devotion. I am born again and again to chastise the wicked and protect the virtuous. This time, I shall be born in your cottage and accept you as my father". At around the same period when his mother, Dhani, was praying

in a Shiva Temple, she saw a flood of celestial light projecting from the image of Lord Shiva darting towards her and entering her body. She then lost consciousness. When she came through, she felt that she was pregnant. These incidences brought joy and hope to Kshudiram and Dhani.

At a young age, he enjoyed making statues of various aspects of God. Whenever he saw something beautiful or listened to spiritual truths, he would go into a trance and lose consciousness. Once, he was asked to play the role of Lord Shiva in a performance during a celebration. As he was dressed up as the Lord, his mind soared. When he appeared on stage, he seemed to be the Lord himself. He went into a trance and streams of joyful tears flowed from his eyes. The play was cancelled but the audience was spellbound. The people

around him, including his parents, thought that he was suffering from an illness. Only in the later part of his life were these trances recognised as signs that he was the incarnation of God.

The Dakshineswar temple was completed in 1855 and the master was 21 years old at that time. The temple was funded by Rasmani, a rich widow of the Shudra caste. When the time arrived for the statue of the Mother Kali to be installed, Rasmani could not find a Brahmin priest to officiate the event because it was deemed derogatory at the time to a Brahmin to worship for a Shudra or accept gifts from a person of the caste. Rasmani sought the advice of Ramakrishna's brother, Ramkumar, who was a respected and sought-after Brahmin priest at the time. He was of the view that if the temple was made a gift to a Brahmin, no Brahmin would be considered degraded by acting as the priest. Because Ramkumar was famous for his devotion he was invited to act as a priest for the temple and he accepted.

Ramakrishna initially objected to this. It is a conditioning from his father who never accepted any gift from the lower caste. However as his spiritual knowledge increased he eventually dropped all ideas of caste and creed as the story in the following paragraph clearly shows. He too eventually became a priest of the temple. This shows that even a person of his stature needs to work off the conditioning and beliefs that he is subjected to as a child.

He often disappeared at night and returned early in the morning. One day, his nephew and devotee, Hriday, followed him and saw him meditating naked under a Amalaka tree. He even removed his 'sacred thread' that Brahmins wear. When Hriday questioned him, he replied, " this is the way one should think of God, free from all ties. Since our very birth, we have the eightfold fetter of hatred, shame, pedigree, culture, fear, fame, caste and egoism. This sacred

thread means that I am a Brahmin and therefore, superior to all. When calling upon the Mother, one should set aside such ideas”.

In the temple he was initially responsible for the worship of Lord Krishna. As Ramkumar was growing old, he convinced Ramakrishna to be initiated into the worship of the Divine Mother Kali so that he can eventually take over Ramkumar’s role as the priest. On the day of the initiation, when the sacred mantra was whispered to Ramakrishna, he gave out a loud shout and went into Samadhi. There and then, Ramkumar decided to hand over the worship of the Divine Mother Kali to his brother while he took over the worship of Lord Krishna.

The master continuously searched for the Divine Mother. He was deeply saddened because the Divine Mother has not appeared to him. One day, the suffering of separation became so unbearable that he wanted to take his own life. Before he could do so, he lost consciousness and the Divine Mother appeared to him. At first, the visions were not satisfactory to him as they were not continuous and effortless. He felt that his realisations were incomplete. However, through his sincere effort and devotion, he eventually saw the full form of the Divine Mother and communicated with her formally. Eventually, he stopped prostrating to the statue of the Divine Mother Kali because he felt that his relationship with the Divine Mother was that of a mother and child.

A mark of his openness was that he recognised a woman as his Guru and this was something very unusual at the time. He lovingly called her the Brahmani. She was well-versed with the scriptures. Their relationship was that of a mother and child. The Guru-Disciple relationship benefited the spiritual evolution of both parties greatly. He shared his experiences with the Brahmani. She compared those

experiences with the scriptures and was the first to declare that Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God. She dared anyone to challenge her views. Rasmani's son-in-law, Mathur, wanted to test her opinion and arranged for two well-known scholars of their time, Vaishnav Chandran and Gauri Kanta, to debate with her. Both scholars were eventually convinced by the Brahmani and became sincere devotees of Ramakrishna.

The Brahmani put him through a Tantrika Sadhana which he managed to master in 3 days. During his practice, he experienced the rising of the Kundalini Shakti which he described as a tingling sensation rising from the feet to the head. He would lose consciousness once the sensations reach the brain and the distinctions between "I" and "thou" vanishes. After the sadhana, his body developed a radiant golden colour. One could not tell the difference between the colour of his skin and the gold bracelet he was wearing. Seeing that this was attracting too much attention, he prayed to the Divine Mother to remove the 'outer beauty' and give him inner beauty and purity of spirit instead. The radiant golden coloured then faded.

He had many devotees and he taught in a manner that suited each person without upsetting their way of thinking. His message was that of devotion to one's own ideal while respecting those of others. He sought after other spiritual masters to learn from them and at the same time help them to deepen their own understanding. Masters who developed supernatural powers willingly surrendered the powers to the Divine Mother for the sake of God-Realisation after meeting him. The well-known scholars who enjoyed debating about the contents of Holy Scriptures suddenly lost interest in it and devoted themselves to the realisation of God. Such was the greatness of his influence on all those who had met him.

After he merged back with the Divine, his foremost disciple, Swami Vivikenanda, went on to spread his teachings far and wide throughout the world.



Bhagavad Gita

By Desmond Yeoh

What the Bhagavad Gita means to me



Chapter 1 emphasises the world of duality that we live in. It also reflects the type of thinking every spiritual seeker will go through in his or her quest towards enlightenment.

On one side, Raja Duryodhana was filled with pride with the opportunity to fight such great warriors as Arjuna and his mighty army. Defeating them would add to his fame and unfortunately, his already large ego. That is what this world of materiality is like. Passion is brought about by success, which can only be brought about by the failure of others. The oneness of all beings holds no relevance to those who are in the pursuit of success and triumph over others. Pick up any motivational books and you will see that it

encourages triumph over others. Being at the top requires someone to be below one. Being 'rich' requires others to be poorer than one. Having a million dollars holds no meaning if everyone else is also a millionaire. Most of us live within this frame of thought.

Unfortunately, most of us are raised to think that wealth is important. With wealth, we can obtain whatever we want and go wherever we want to. When I was young, the toilet in my grandparent's house was an elevated platform with a pail about 6 feet below. My parents used to threaten me that if I did not study hard and earn enough, I will have to get the job of the person who clears away the pail. This illustrates that in the early part of my life, the emphasis was on the material aspects of the world.

On the other side, Arjuna also saw the greatness of his foes. However, he did not share the same views as Raja Duryodhana. He saw his foes as heroes! He could not bring himself to kill these heroes! In his enemies, he also saw his friends and relatives. He just could not fight. He said to lord Krishna, "Hardly may I stand. The life within me seems to faint". Raja Duryodhana was driven by passion while Arjuna was held back by dispassion.

Success and failure begins to blur in Arjuna's eyes. He questioned, "Triumph and domination, wealth and ease, thus sadly won; how can it bring delight?"

In these modern times, the spiritual seeker will go through the same dilemma. Success holds no meaning if it involves hurting others. A person who truly lives by the law of karma will think very hard on his or her action in the same manner as Arjuna did in the battlefield. Even when the enemies' intention is to kill him, he could not bring himself to strike. He pondered, "Shall I deal death on them even though they seek to slay us? Killing them can only breed suffering.

For indeed, blinded by lust and wrath, they cannot see or will not see the sin; how can we who can perceive the guilt and feel the shame, not shun the crime.” Arjuna was advocating forgiveness just as Jesus Christ prayed to the Father at the Cross, “Forgive them as they know not what they do.”

In this world of duality, nothing can be clearly right or wrong. It seems that in the beginning stages of spiritual development, the world becomes more confusing. What constitutes the right thing to do following the laws of karma is not straight forward. A friend shared his story with me, “recently, my boss expressed disappointment with one of the manager working under me. That manager has worked with my boss for a number of years and it is unclear to me how he suddenly has a change of heart. My boss has the intention of removing him if he does not improve. My boss also feels that I am not tough enough on the manager. This image seems to be following me for a while! My dilemma is that if I do not pressure the manager to improve on his performance, he will lose his job. If I increase the pressure on him, he will find his job miserable. I have decided to increase my expectations on my manager in order to improve his performance. That has some negative karmic effects but overall, I think it is the right thing to do. Integrating our spiritual beliefs into our daily lives is often challenging.”

One aspect that is not so apparent in the Gita is that the Lord was teaching Arjuna right in the middle of a battle! It was not before or after the battle but right in the peak of it. It implies that we can truly learn from our sufferings or challenges. Tibetan Buddhists welcome suffering because they understand that only with suffering, is there growth. They can also see that when things are going fine, one often do not question the meaning of life. That is why they are generally happy irrespective of their experiences. Suffering also brings

compassion for those who are going through a suffering which we have gone through before. Therefore, the acceptance of suffering as an opportunity to understand ourselves and to grow, can reduce the mental suffering that comes with negative experiences.

In Chapter 2, Lord Krishna Instructed Arjuna strongly, “Forbid thyself to feebleness! It mars thy warrior-name! Cast of the coward-fit! Wake! Be thyself! Arise, Scourge thy Foes!” Despite these harsh words, Arjuna still refused to fight. He could not decide on which is worse; being the ‘victor or the vanquish’. The implied lesson in this part of the story is that we must always question everything that is taught to us, even if it comes from our revered Guru. We need to be independent and stand on our own feet. It may not be that what our Guru teaches is wrong but it may be that we have not fully grasped the teaching and understand it. Without proper understanding, we cannot apply it.

We need to put everything that has been taught to us to the test. A Christian needs to expose himself to the teachings of Buddhism in order to test his own understanding and vice versa. For instance, I agree with the Christian view that there is no reincarnation and I agree with the Hindu/Buddhist view that there is reincarnation. Both are true depending on what aspect we are looking from. If we look from the point of view of our ego, it ends at death. The ego arises from everything that is taught to us, our memories and our belongings. Upon death, they are gone. However, the consciousness that is behind our thoughts and memories live on. This is the point of view of Hindus and Buddhist. However, many Hindus and Buddhist still hold on to the perception that the ego reincarnates and that is incorrect. Lord Krishna said, “that which is, can never cease to be, that which is not, will not exist”.

In Chapter 2, the Lord said, “heat and cold, sorrows and joys, these are brief and mutable! Bear with it Prince. The soul which is not moved, with strong and constant calm, takes sorrow and joy indifferently.” This is the law of impermanence which is one of the key teachings of Buddhism. When one is experiencing joy, one can expect that pretty soon, that will end only to be replaced with suffering. When one is suffering, one can take comfort that it too will end and be replaced with joy. I can look back at my numerous negative experiences in the past and actually thank God that they happened. Even our view of a negative event is not permanent. Frequently, after a few years, they change into positive events in our minds.

Arjuna asked, “what is the mark of a wise man? How can one identify him when he sits and moves like other man?” All seekers will ask this question. Many deem those who teach those things that are consistent with their own conditioning as wise for example a Christian who talks about reincarnation would be deemed as confused. We read many books and when we hear a teacher that teaches the same thing, we assume that he is evolved spiritually but he may just be reading the same books as us. A person who can quote the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita may be well read but may not have put the teachings into practice in a way that helps him to evolve. In a way, it may become problematic if the knowledge becomes part of his ego. When that happens, he will reject all other teachings, even those that may help him deepen his existing knowledge.

Lord Krishna warned of such people, “those ill-taught ones, who extol the letter of their Vedas promising as fruits of good deeds done, much profit in new births for works of faith.” The teachings of

such people wrongly focus the seeker's attention to the fruits of their effort rather than the joy of the effort itself.

Lord Krishna responded to Arjuna's question, "Abandoning desires which shakes the mind, finds in his soul full comfort for his soul. He has attained the Yog- that man is such. In sorrows not dejected and in joys not overjoyed." In short such a person will display detachment and equanimity.

An average person is tormented by a desire to have an object. When he attains that object, he relishes it for a moment and that starts to worry about losing the object. He may even identify with the object so much so that it becomes part of his ego for example, if he drives a Volvo, he will defend the brand whole-heartedly and may even feel angry when others talk badly about Volvos. After a while, he gets bored with the object and the joy that he gains from the object diminishes and his attention is drawn towards other objects. The word 'contentment' is in a way similar to the word 'bliss' in that it is often spoken but rarely experienced. At other times, he loses the object and is overwhelmed by despair and sorrow. When we multiply this with the thousands of objects which we identify with, we can see how we can feel overwhelmed at times by these fluctuating emotions.

Lord Krishna added, "a man is wise if he maintains mastery over himself. If one ponders on an object, attraction will arise and from it, grows desire. Desire flames fierce passion which in turn breeds recklessness. He then forgets about what is right or wrong and act heedlessly. But if he deals with the object with equanimity and let it serve its free soul, then he will be tranquil. The soul of the ungoverned is not his. He does not know himself. In such a case, how can he have serenity and hope for happiness? Only with one who is

not swayed by his senses; *only he who holds mastery over himself displays perfect wisdom*".

The message is clear; we should evaluate a person based on his actions and not his words. Examples speak louder than words. We should also use this yardstick on ourselves. We should measure our spiritual evolution based on the level of mastery over oneself and not by the number of books we have read or the initiation seminars we have attended or the psychic experiences we experienced.

In the Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda, he wrote about the 'Perfume Saint' who invited him to become his disciple. Yogananda declined the invitation by explaining that he does not want to put in years of practice only to develop the ability to produce something that can be purchased from the market for a few rupees – fragrances.

In Buddha's time, while the Buddha was crossing a river with a raft, a Yogi displayed his miraculous powers by walking on water across the river. His disciple asked him why he chooses not to display such powers. The Buddha's response was similar to that of Yogananda; why should he waste his effort on such powers when he can easily cross the river on a raft.

The effort of our practice should be towards mastery over our senses. I admit that in the past, I wished for miraculous powers but I have since realized that these are secondary and if I make them my goal, I will still not achieve happiness in this lifetime.

Towards the end of Chapter 3, Lord Krishna left us with comforting words of encouragement, "constrain your entangled senses! Resist the false, soft sinfulness which saps knowledge and judgment! Yea, the world is strong but what discerns it is stronger and the mind is

strongest.” No matter how overwhelming or tempting the world is or becomes, the Gita promises that with effort, we can transcend them.

In Chapter 4, the Lord made a beautiful promise, “I come, and go, and come. When righteousness declines, when wickedness is strong, I rise, from age to age, and take visible shape and move a man with men. Succouring good, thrusting evil back, and setting virtue on her seat again”. This is a beautiful promise indeed and it can work in no other way. This is a world of duality. The left and the right must always be kept balanced. This can also be seen as a promise at a personal level. When our suffering is great, the Divine will come. From suffering, the divinity within us will grow and show itself. When everything is lost, our greatest treasure appears.

In Chapter 6, Arjuna asked the Lord what happens to those who strive to master themselves but fail before their time is up. The Lord replied, “he who should fail, desiring righteousness, being born again, begins life in a fair home amid the mild and happy. He strives anew to perfectness, with better hope dear Prince! For by the old desires, he is unwittingly drawn on by the old desire to seek the purity of the Yog. Striving strong and long, purged from transgressions, perfected by births following on births, he plants his feet at last upon the farther path.” Our efforts to master ourselves will never go to waste. Let us not waste our effort to develop supernatural powers or experiences. The most important skill to develop in our spiritual practices is to master ourselves.

A big challenge in understanding the Gita is that it appears to condone violence and killing. The Quran promises a warrior who dies in a holy war, a place in heaven and the service of virgins. It can be

easily conceived how unscrupulous politicians can use the Gita and Quran to incite violence between the Hindus and the Muslims.

However, one point of view is that the Gita is referring to the internal war within each individual with his own ego, which comprise of his habits and conditioning. The story in the Gita is merely symbolic of his internal struggle between renouncing the world and service to mankind. Based on this, we must reject the view that the Gita condones war in any circumstance.

Even if we reject this view that the Gita is referring to the internal war within each individual, the restrictions imposed by the Gita makes it impossible to go to war. The Lord told Arjuna that he is not bound by Karma because he is not attached to the fruits of his effort. That is, Arjuna is fighting without any care about winning or losing. The Lord also advised that he should fight based on the premise that it is not his work but God's work. It may be impossible even to find a single warrior that can live up to these conditions set by the Gita.

The Gita and Kriya Yoga

In spiritual discourses, often we are admonished for going after wealth and the implication is that the person who abandons the pursuit of wealth and goes into seclusion is a superior being. The Buddha is one such person and I am not disputing the fact that he is a great being. During his life, he encouraged young men to abandon their householder life to become monks and he had thousands of monks as his followers. In Thailand, forest monks are highly respected. Small amulets of well-known forest monks are worth thousands if they come from the same monastery which the monks live/lived in.

In Chapter 3, Arjuna asked, “If meditation is a nobler thing, then why do you impel me to fight?” Putting that question in another way; if meditation is nobler, why don’t I abandon the worldly life and spend the remaining years of my life in seclusion meditating?

Krishna taught Arjuna, “work and meditation are one. Nothing is ever gained from mere renouncement. He who sits suppressing all his senses, yet in his idle heart thinking on them, plays the inept and guilty hypocrite: But he who, with strong body serving mind, gives up his mortal powers to worthy work, not seeking gain, Arjuna! Such a person is honourable. Do your allotted task!”

Which is better for spiritual evolution – becoming a householder practitioner or to escape into seclusion and carry out a solitary practice? This is addressed directly in the Bhagavad Gita. Lord Krishna obviously favours the life of the householder yogi. He said, “If knowing thy duty and thy tasks, thou do not carry out the task, that will be sin!”

However, Lord Krishna is at the same time not advocating a life that is totally absorbed in materialism. He is advocating a balance between carrying out one’s duty and putting time into one’s practice.

It is only by living in the middle of it all that we can experience the various levels of emotions that comes with our experiences. There are many levels of anger and there are many levels of desire or lust. By experiencing these emotions, we can understand them and transcend them. After transcending them, we will then be in the position to help those who are going through the same problems which we have gone through in the past. This is also the path which our Satguru Babaji is leading us on. It is a path which takes courage and strength. Sometimes, in my practice, I take two steps forward

only to stumble a couple of steps backwards. But even with the steps backwards, I am growing and learning. This is the strength of Kriya Yoga.

I had in the past fantasized about living a life of seclusion with the aim of achieving enlightenment. But now I know that living a secluded life merely removes some distractions. But one still has to understand and transcend one's mind. To do so, it does not matter if one is in the Himalayas or in midst of the world; when we are ready, we will understand.

This raises a pertinent question; why then did the Buddha encourage his disciples to abandon the world to become monks? Does this contradict the Gita? I believe that his initial intention was to seek out highly evolved souls who were near enlightenment. However, as time progressed many were attracted to his way of life and wanted to emulate him. His monks did not abandon their duties; their professions merely changed to that of a teacher. When the monks beg for food, they often give brief teachings to the community. They were still serving the community as advocated by the Gita. In Chapter 4, Lord Krishna said, "the sacrifice which knowledge pays is better than gifts offered by wealth since the worth of a gift lies in the mind which gives and the will that it serves; and these are gained by reverence and by strong search of those who see the Truth and teach it".

The Gita also provides guidance on how we can have a career without being caught up in it. In Chapter 2, Lord Krishna encouraged Arjuna, who at that point was concerned about sin, by saying "as pleasure or pain, profit or ruin and victory or defeat is the same to you, when you fight with this frame of mind, you will not sin." Lord Krishna also said, "let right deeds be thy motive, not the fruit which

comes from them. Live in Action!” This is the essence of Karma Yoga. I used to think of applying the concepts of Karma Yoga only in spiritual work but it also applies to our daily work.

In Chapter 4, Lord Krishna said, “He who sees how action may be rest and rest may be action; he is wisest, he has the truth”. The question that will always ring loudly is that who will ever work without pay? Who will work without expecting a pay rise or a promotion? Actually, I have a friend who is now a top executive in large global organisation, who worked based on this principle. He never expected any promotion but if it comes, it is a bonus to him. Yes, he worked for money but he never allowed his own expectations to take away the joy of his work. There are also those who choose to work in a field which they are interested in. These people work for the joy of it and this is what the Gita is pointing us to. Unfortunately, most of us are directed towards money-making professions from a young age. Our interests are secondary. That is why it is difficult for us to understand this aspect of the Gita.

Focusing on the rewards can take away the joy from our work as my friend jokingly shared with me, “I was very happy with my job until I found out that my ex-University mate was earning more than me!”

Buddhism teaches that desire is the root of our suffering. Another way of putting it is that our ‘expectations’ create the suffering for us. If we expect things to happen a certain way, we get disappointed when it does not go that way, for example a parent may be upset about one son not visiting her everyday but may not be upset about the other son for not visiting her because he is living overseas. This is because the first mentioned son is living near her that she has a higher expectation of him. It is not the absence of either sons that is creating the suffering but her expectations that is causing it.

Working without focusing on the fruits of our effort is the path to a happy working life. It takes away much mental suffering and allows us to focus our energies on our practice. In order to do so, it would help greatly to simplify our lives so that we do not become overly dependent on our jobs to such an extent that we fear losing it. We must also let go of our expectations of keeping our jobs indefinitely.

It is also encouraging to see our work as the true sacrifice to the Divine. Lord Krishna said, “Work! Sacrifice! Increase and multiply with sacrifice. Sacrifice is paid with tithes to toil. He that abstains to help the rolling wheels of this great world, glutting his idle sense lives a list life, shameful and vain. In performance of his plain duties, man mounts to his highest bliss.” Nowhere in the Gita are animal sacrifices or visits to the temples mentioned. It is clear that the Lord sees the performance of our duties wholeheartedly, as the true sacrifice to God.

The Lord said, “Even as the unknowing toil, wedded to sense, do the enlightened toil, sense freed. The, fool cheated by self, thinks – ‘this I did’. A better-lessoned mind stands aloof even from his own acts.” The Lord taught, “Freed from all his works from the pricking of desire; renouncing the fruits of deeds, always content. Such a person, whose crave is gone, whose soul is liberate, whose heart is set on truth; to such a person, whatever work he does are works of sacrifice which passes purely into ash and smoke.”

This differentiates the wise and the unwise. The wise works without expectations and does not even take credit for his work. Jesus Christ performed many miracles but never once did his claim to be the doer. To him, everything was done by the Father. A wise person who works not for the fruits of the labour and does not take credit for his work will be freed from karma. This is because he acts not out of

habit and as such, is not thrown around by his negative thoughts and emotions; and he does not expect anything for his work. How then can he ever be disappointed?

Well-known psychics such as Edgar Cayce and Sylvia Browne acknowledge that their powers cease to work or go wrong when they start thinking of their own interest. However, when their intention is to help without regards to the fruits of their work, their predictions and diagnosis of illnesses are flawless. Before Yogi Rama, the author of 'Walking with the Himalayan Masters' left for the United States, his master told him that whatever he does without expectations of reward, will be successful. However, if it is done with some personal gain in mind, it will surely fail. These are just a few examples to illustrate what the Gita teaches about how the 'enlightened toil, sense freed'.

Lord Krishna also praised the seeking of Truth and this confused Arjuna, who asked Lord Krishna, "Lord, at times you praise the cessation of work and at other times you praise service through work. Of these two, which is the better way?" In other words, which is a better path to liberation, service to others (which is the focus of Christianity) or meditation and study of scriptures (which is the focus of Theravadan Buddhism)? Lord Krishna replied, "Whoever sees this two as one, sees with clear eyes".

The seeker must walk on both paths to realise the truth. We can read about how Maya deludes us to think that we are our mind and body but this knowledge is useless even if we can quote the scriptures word for word. We can meditate and achieve beautiful visions but when we come out of it, we are still caught up with our habitual tendencies.

It is only through service to others that we can experience the Truth. Many volunteers write about the joy they feel when they help others. Relieving others of their suffering is enough reward for them. It is through this work that they experience the words of Lord Krishna, “he that acts in thought of Brahm, detaching end from act, with act content, the world sense can no more stain his soul.” The volunteers do not expect any reward for their work. Their only intention is to relieve suffering. Whether the persons helped are grateful to them is irrelevant. I was touched by an article written by a medical Volunteer working in a foreign country. She could not communicate with the victims but it was not necessary. She said that the message of Love needs only be communicated through the eyes.

Lord Krishna made clear the causes of our suffering in Chapter 5. He said, “The passion-bound, seeking the fruits from works are fastened down. God did not create work nor the passion for the work nor the lust for its fruits; it is man that pushes for these.” Such attitudes create separatism. We see ourselves as distinct from others and this binds us to our ego. The more we focus on the fruits of our work, the more we are bound to our ego. This is because we can only gain something from outside ourselves. To do this, we must limit ourselves to our ego. It becomes impossible to break free from defining ourselves as our ego because our thoughts and actions bind us to it.

Lord Krishna said, “To the wise, the Brahman with his scrolls and sanctities, the cow, the elephant, the unclean dog, the outcast gorging dog’s meat, are all one.” The Buddha gave an example of the sea and its waves. Each wave appears separate but they are essentially water; they are One. It is like the various characters in our dreams; they are not separate because they are projected from our mind.

Our experience also shows us how inter-dependent we are of each other. The food we just ate involved thousands of people from the time it was grown to the time it ended up on our plates.

Unfortunately, even if we knew these when we were babies, our education system ensures that we forget this based on its emphasis on winning and being number one. Both require some other 'separate person' to lose.

Chapter 9 on the Gita addresses our true nature. The Lord said, "All existence is contained in me. All things are in me but not I. I am this boundless Universe." We define ourselves as our mind and body.

When we do expand our self definition, it would be to our occupations, material goods and loved ones. Expanding the definition of ourselves in this way creates only suffering for example, when our new car is scratched, it is as if we are hurt too. However, If we are capable of defining ourselves in a bigger scale to include the entire universe, then we will be able to free ourselves from the negative emotions that plague our society today.

In his book, "The Shift", Owen Waters wrote about how the human consciousness has been evolving over the centuries towards unconditional love and heightened awareness. He highlighted some research that showed how the improvement in the consciousness of just a few individuals can benefit the consciousness of humanity as whole. We are more bound together than we think. This can be easily seen from a material perspective for example, the shirt we are wearing at the moment depends on a large number of people to get to us from the cotton farmers to the factory workers to the retailers and so on.

It would be difficult for us to have our current standard of living without this sort of indirect help from others. Our link at the level of

consciousness is not so clearly visible because it is very subtle. However, if we pay attention, we can observe it. A neutral person who happens to sit next to another person boiling with anger would soon start to entertain angry thoughts. For the same reason, many of us often feel very tired after a visit to a shopping complex because of the influence of other peoples' thoughts and emotions. We can often sense when someone is negative and try to get as far away as possible from the person.

With this in mind, we must understand that our practices are not for ourselves. As we evolve, we are also benefiting the human consciousness as a whole. Perhaps this is the very reason why great masters remain on earth many years after achieving God-realisation to teach and guide us

There are many cases of near-death experiences ("NDE") whereby the patient was pronounced clinically dead but later brought back to life. There are numerous cases of patients who reported being out of their bodies and looking down on their own bodies. They felt inexplicable joy and peace from the new found freedom. We do not need an NDE to teach us that we are not our Ego. Seeing ourselves as our ego is just a habitual way of thinking that was taught to us. It is something that we can undo. The first step towards undoing this habit is by separating our work from the fruits of our work; to be contented with the work itself."

Lord Krishna advised, "Do not be over-glad when attaining joy and do not be over-sad when encountering grief, let each abide in Brahma. The joys that springs from the senses breed sure grief; those joys begins and ends! The wise mind takes no pleasure. But if a man learns to master lust and anger, he is blessed; he has happiness. Contentment, light within; his life is merged in Brahma's life". The

Lord teaches us to develop equanimity through the understanding of the law of impermanence. If we are attached to the joys of life, we better be prepared to suffer when the joys are taken away because everything is impermanent.

Lord Krishna also emphasised self-discipline. He said, “Soul is Self’s friend when Self rules over Self. A Yogi lives self-governed and at peace; taking alike pleasure and pain; heat and cold; glory and shame.” Osho taught that our mind is useful as servants but when our mind becomes our master, suffering arises. Our mind is our servant when we are able to restrain our self from acting out of habit or karma. Our mind is our master when we react out of habit for example, when we are insulted, we may react negatively even when we know acting that way would not be beneficial.

The Gita advises us to be moderate in our spiritual practice and in living our lives. The Lord said, “Religion is not for one who fasts too much or feasts too much, nor for one who sleeps away an idle mind, nor for one who wastes his strength in wakefulness during sleeping hours. No Arjuna! True piety which removes aches and ills is where one is moderate in eating and resting, and in sport. Sleeping at the right times and waking at the right times for duty”.

When we understand this call for moderation, we can then see pass the apparent contradictions which Arjuna initially saw in the teachings of Lord Krishna. At times, the Lord praises fight and at other times, the Lord praises solitude and meditation. Only in moderation can one truly evolve in this world. When we are too absorbed in daily activities, we do not have the opportunity to contemplate and understand ourselves. We cannot even see that we act out of habit and past conditioning.

However, if we devote time to meditation and contemplation, we begin to question our way of thinking and acting. We begin to question our emotions. Only then can we see that we are not in control. We have not yet mastered our habits and past conditioning. We begin to see that in the past, we have been suffering but we chose to ignore that suffering. It is like a persistent pain that we have just gotten use to. If our eye-sight is not clear and we got used to seeing things that way, we just accept it as the way it is in until one day, we stumble on a pair of discarded glasses and put them on. Only then can we see the problem. Time for meditation and rest gives us the opportunity to find those glasses. If we are too caught up in activity, we will just walk pass the discarded glasses time and time again.

However, we cannot use moderation to justify a lack of effort. The Lord advised, “One must toil until efforts end in ease and thought has pass from thinking. Shake off all longings bred by dreams of fame and gain, and shut the doorways of the senses with watchfulness. As soon the heart breaks wild and wavers out of control, one should rein it back to the soul’s governance.” We should remain watchful of our thoughts, emotions and actions until it becomes second nature for us to do so. When self-awareness becomes a habit, then ‘effort ends in ease’. The Lord said, “Hard it is for one to restrain one’s heart from wavering. Yet may it grow restrained by habit, prince; by the habit of self-control. He who will be master of himself shall win it if he stoutly strive thereto.”

Attachment and Loss

By Desmond Yeoh

Arathi and her sixteen year-old daughter, Meena, were seated in front of their beloved teacher at his ashram. It was a warm but breezy Sunday afternoon. They visit him very often and share their life stories with him be they happy or sad. This time, Arathi approached her Master with sad news. She just lost her job due to some office politics; a job which she was very proud of. She is a single mother and her job was their only source of income.

The Master listened closely as Arathi told her story. He is very proud of her as she is one of the few disciples who come to him not to solve their problems or grant their wants. She comes to him for guidance and comforting words in times like this. He appreciates her independence and willingness to face up to her own problems. In fact, the Master had used Arathi's life stories on many occasions to teach his other followers.

Some of his disciples come to him for the wrong reasons. Whenever they ask him to solve their problems or grant their wishes, he will just remain silent. They will persist but eventually move on to other Masters. He will never agree to their request as doing so would make them weak. It would blind them of their own creative power and stunt their growth. No Master should do this to his followers.

The Master's eyes radiated love and compassion for Arathi. He would take away her suffering if he could. In a mellowed tone he said to Arathi, "When we go through suffering, it is but the shadow of the Divine's loving hand reaching out to touch you. Suffering puts us in a position to fully enjoy and benefit from the gifts the Divine intends to give us at the appropriate time. The Divine never place us take on

more suffering than what we are capable of handling. And sometimes, only through suffering can our prayers be answered.”

Arathi and Meena had tears in their eyes. Arathi responded, “I know that but yet, the hurt in my heart is unbearable. I see nothing but suffering.”

The Master gave an understanding smile, “You had worked in this company for five years. I could tell that you were very proud of the job. You are suffering now because you are attached to the job. You are attached because the job forms part of your identity; your ego. You are used to seeing yourself as a Manager in this organisation. But now that you have lost your job, you will have to let go of this part of your ego. It is like a part of your ego has died but you are not prepared to let go. You cannot let go of this mental picture because you are used to seeing yourself with the job. Now, all you see is the sufferings that come because you lost that job. The attachment to your job only making you see how you will suffer because you lost the job and is blocking you from seeing the opportunities.”

Arathi remained silent. Her Master is right. She keeps picturing the good things about her job and what she has lost. The negative aspects of her job are lost to her. She recalled the time when her husband abandoned her. Meena was just a baby then. She felt like the world has ended for her and wanted to take her own life. Now, she feels blessed that he left because she found out later on that her ex-husband remarried and was later arrested for abusing their young son. She grimaced at the thought of what could have happened to Meena had they stayed together.

Being a single mother is not what society defines as a happy situation but Arathi decided long ago to not let society dictate how she can be happy. She is happy as a single mother. Her parents are very

supportive and the situation brought them closer together. She knew that Meena would not have the love of a father but she compensated with her love for her. They planned trips and did everything together. Meena, seeing her mother's sacrifices and love for her, loves her mother even more. Meena is very protective of her mother and it is sometimes hard to tell who is playing the role of the mother.

The Master continued, "Know that your job is merely a concept that you have of yourself. Once you let go of it, you will start to see the opportunities that are available to you. Allow yourself some time to grieve and then, let go of the hurt. Once you allow that part of your ego that is tied to your job to die, you will see that the ego is merely a concept. Everyday, a part of the ego dies and another part comes to life to take its place, just like the cells in your body; everyday millions of cells die and millions are born to take their place. Once you let go of that part of the ego, your mind will start to see opportunities."

Arathi reflected on her life. She reflected on her younger days and could see how different she is now compared to when she was in her teens. Her perception of what is right or wrong and what is good or bad is so different now that she is 45 years old. Yes, she was a different person then. She could clearly see what her Master is referring to when he said that one's ego changes over time. Clinging on to her existing ego is preventing her from seeing the opportunities available to her now. She is paralysed by her loss. Yes, she will allow herself a short period of grief and then she will get on with life and face her challenges head on. She had Meena to think about.

She wiped her tears away, "Master, as always, your words soothes my aching heart. I hear you. I do not know what I am going but I trust the Divine with all my heart."

The Master acknowledged her with a smile. Arathi has always been a strong lady.

Three months passed. The Arathi and Meena approached the Master. They radiated so much joy that they appeared to be bouncing as they walked.

Meena said, "Master, we have wonderful news. Mom and I have started a bakery together. We love baking and decided to turn our hobby into a business. Now Mom no longer 'works'; we are just doing what we like to do...together."

The Master smiled from ear to ear. Arathi could never be more proud of her daughter.

Meena looked down and lowered her voice almost to a whisper as she shared a secret, "When we saw you the last time, I was also suffering a loss. My boyfriend left me for another girl. We were together for two years and the loss was devastating to me. But what you said to mom gave me strength. Mom sacrificed so much for me and I did not want to burden her further with my problem. But I could not keep secrets from her for long. We talked about our losses, we cried together and we laughed together. We know that no matter what happens, we will always have each other."

Arathi added, "She has always been my pillar of strength."

"And you to me mom," Meena responded.

The Master asked, "What made you decide to start a bakery?"

Arathi explained, “We used to bake a lot and gave some of the cakes or bread to our friends. They loved them. Knowing our situation, they started to order cakes from us and we baked them at home. News got around and their friends started to order from us. Before long, our orders got so big to supply from home that we decided to open up a bakery.”

Arathi paused as a thought just occurred to her and continued, “In my last job, I used to work long hours and I hated the time away from Meena. I prayed to the Divine to help me....My prayers have been answered in a way that I could never have expected. Now I spend all my time with her.”

Arathi glanced at Meena and they both smiled. Now they truly understand that suffering is but the shadow of the Divine’s had reaching down to them.

Lessons in Life

Message from the Editor: I received this from a friend. It is too beautiful not to include it in this book. Anything that teaches us about happiness is spiritual!

Written by Regina Brett, 90 years old, of the Plain Dealer, Cleveland , Ohio .

"To celebrate growing older, I once wrote the 45 lessons life taught me. It is the most requested column I've ever written.

My odometer rolled over to 90 in August, so here is the column once more:

1. Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
3. Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.
4. Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and parents will. Stay in touch.
5. Pay off your credit cards every month.
6. You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.
7. Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
8. It's OK to get angry with God. He can take it.
9. Save for retirement starting with your first paycheck.
10. When it comes to chocolate, resistance is futile.
11. Make peace with your past so it won't screw up the present.
12. It's OK to let your children see you cry.

13. Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
14. If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it.
15. Everything can change in the blink of an eye. But don't worry; God never blinks.
16. Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.
17. Get rid of anything that isn't useful, beautiful or joyful.
18. Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.
19. It's never too late to have a happy childhood. But the second one is up to you and no one else.
20. When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take no for an answer.
21. Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the fancy lingerie. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.
22. Over prepare, then go with the flow.
23. Be eccentric now. Don't wait for old age to wear purple.
24. The most important sex organ is the brain.
25. No one is in charge of your happiness but you.
26. Frame every so-called disaster with these words 'In five years, will this matter?'
27. Always choose life.
28. Forgive everyone everything.
29. What other people think of you is none of your business.

30. Time heals almost everything. Give time time.
 31. However good or bad a situation is, it will change.
 32. Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
 33. Believe in miracles.
 34. God loves you because of who God is, not because of anything you did or didn't do.
 35. Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.
 36. Growing old beats the alternative -- dying young.
 37. Your children get only one childhood.
 38. All that truly matters in the end is that you loved.
 39. Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.
 40. If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.
 41. Envy is a waste of time. You already have all you need.
 42. The best is yet to come...
 43. No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.
 44. Yield.
 45. Life isn't tied with a bow, but it's still a gift."
- Friends are the family that we choose.

Out of Body Experience

By Puspavathy Rassiah

Message from the Editor: Puspavathy's shared with me her out of body experience during meditation and I thought it

Lately I am having weird experiences after my meditation sessions.

This happened five days ago: It was about three o'clock in the morning. After studying, I meditated and then went to bed. I was half asleep, when a white light appeared on my forehead. The white light was the sized of a 5-cent coin and shaped like a snowflake. It started to spin slowly in a circular motion then got faster. The spinning turned the small light into a huge white light. The light engulfed me and I was the light. It permeated serenity and heat. I was totally immersed in it for a few minutes.

I could see everything in my room without moving my head. I saw my husband and my kids sleeping down on the mattress. At that moment I wanted to go to my husband, in a split second I floated to him and was looking down at him very closely. Then a voice told me that I was out of my body... hearing that I got scared and was sucked back. Feeling jolted and terrified, I woke my husband...

I would like to know, whether this is an out of body experience or my mind is playing tricks on me. Can meditation give you out of body experience while sleeping? Please advice....

Message from the Editor: Such experiences happen naturally when we do not seek it. When we seek it, it does not happen because the ego will block it. When we have an out of body experience, it is important that we do not get attached to it but use it to understand who we truly are. Such an experience is the clearest proof that we are not our mind and body.

I want to also talk about near death experiences (“NDE”). They sometimes occur at the operating table when the patient’s heart temporarily stops and brain activity ceases altogether. The patients often describe themselves floating out of their body and looking at the doctors operating on them. They could even hear what the doctor said and often surprise their doctors by repeating what they heard during the operation. Most of these patients are very different persons after going through the NDE. They are happier and take life less seriously because they know beyond doubt that they are not their mind-body complex. Hopefully we do not need to have to go through a NDE to comprehend this.

How we Handle Negative Circumstances

By Desmond Yeoh



Ravi was seated beside his Spiritual Master by a large blue lake. They had just completed their meditation together and were admiring the beautiful sunrise. The gentle breeze carried the aroma from the jasmine trees that were abundant in the area. The beautiful scenery and cool morning air was invigorating.

Ravi asked, “Master, it seems to me that everyday we are faced with circumstances that disturb our peace. What is the best way to handle them?”

The Master continued to admire the sunrise, waiting for the appropriate answer to come to him from the Divine. Two persons may ask the same question but his answer would be different. That is because they are at different points on the spiritual path although the final destination would be the same.

After a moment of silence, he said, “There are many methods that we use when faced with events or things that disturbs us. Let us start with the most common but crudest method used; ‘distractions’.

Humans spend a lot of money to distract themselves. Some with untrained mind cannot tolerate boredom because their mind will torture them with unpleasant memories or create imaginary things for them to worry about. It is important to recognise that distraction merely delays one's suffering, never solving it. Instead of accumulating wealth to buy objects of distraction, it is far better to accumulate love."

Ravi thought about all the things he has acquired to distract himself from his problems and started to feel a little guilty. The Master as if sensing this, continued, "I said that distraction is the crudest strategy but I did not say that it is bad. It may keep you from feeling bored but it is not effective for more challenging problems".

Ravi could not agree with this more. He recalled just last week when his teenage daughter was late from school. He recently read about abductions and was worried sick. He tried to call her on her cell phone but the phone was switched off. He knew he was overreacting but he could not help it. He then tried to distract himself from his worry by watching television but he could not concentrate. Eventually, his daughter returned home and was late because she dropped by the library.

"I understand", replied Ravi.

"A more effective method is to use our wisdom. Let's say that someone is trying to start an argument with you. At that point, you may ask yourself if that fight is worth the fight. Does it matter if you win or lose that argument? You may even come to the conclusion that winning the argument may cause you more harm because you may turn the person into a bigger enemy. In addition, winning that argument may add to your pride and hinder your spiritual progress.

Sometimes it takes more strength to walk away from a fight. There are many ways to look at the situation”.

Again, Ravi felt guilty. The Master is the type that will shake you to wake you up. Just last week, he got into an argument with his friend over a trivial matter. Some unpleasant personal attacks were made and subsequently, he felt uncomfortable every time they crossed paths. They had many common friends. Eventually, he gathered the courage to apologise. Yes, it would have been best to avoid the argument at the first place by just being silent.

The Master remained silent for a moment, enjoying the songs sang by the birds nearby. They sounded like they were praising the peaceful energy that the Master was radiating. Ravi could see even the fishes swimming near to where they were seated.

Sensing that Ravi understood what he taught, he carried on, “The most effective method but less frequently used is the path of awareness. When the Divine sent us into this human life, He came with us. Every time we are aware of the present moment, the Divine reaches out to us and holds our hand. He never fails to do so. Awareness is the most powerful weapon given to us to face negative circumstances. Test it; whenever there is a negative emotion within, just watch it and it will immediately fade. If your mind is filled with angry thoughts, just watch them and they will immediately drop away. And then, there will be a silent gap. Be aware of that gap and it will become wider. When you remain in the Gap, you are with the Divine”.

At that moment, Ravi became aware that his mind was silent. It felt peaceful. He felt as if his mind was a muscle that had always been clenched tight and for once in his life, it is finally relaxing. He felt his mind expanding into a vast expanse of silence. He was one with the

Divine. The songs sang by the birds were crystal clear. The air felt fresher and the breeze cooler. The smell of jasmine was stronger as if the flower was held right in front of his nose. He never felt more alive and tears began to well up in his eyes.

The Master got up gently. It was time to leave Ravi alone with the Divinity Within.

Cosmic Intelligence

By Desmond Yeoh

James and Gopal shared a hut in a meditation centre located at the edge of a forest. The night air was cool and pleasant. As they rested on their mats before going to sleep, they contemplated what they have learnt from the Master during the day.



James is a Quantum Physics professor at a well known university in the US while Gopal is medical doctor in India. James has been coming to this retreat every year for 5 years now but this is Gopal's first spiritual retreat. The retreat is a good rest for the both of them from their hectic schedules.

James and Gopal got along very well from the first day they met and they loved discussing about spiritual matters before turning in for the night.

Gopal wanted to compare his experience with James and asked, "How have you benefited from these retreats?"

"I need to talk a little about quantum physics in order to answer you. Science has proven that matter comprise of atoms and empty space. Atoms are made up of electrons and protons spinning rapidly in empty space. In summary, at the core, we are essentially empty space and are no different from this candle, as an example" James pointed to the lighted candle on the floor and continued, "In

quantum physics, the more deeply we look, the more the universe looks like thoughts.”

“Like the cosmic intelligence mentioned by Paramhansa Yogananda,” Gopal contributed.

James smiled in agreement. He hesitated for a moment and continued, “I was very proud of this understanding and shared this with Guruji. He listened attentively to everything that I know about quantum physics. I thought I impressed him but after I finished, he asked me, ‘does all this matter to you whether they are true or not?’ I was stunned. He might as well hit me on the head with a sledgehammer”. Both of them laughed.

Gopal said, “Yes, it is a Master’s job to shake us hard in order to wake us. It appears that science has revealed the oneness of all beings but we still act like we are all separate”.

James sighed and added, “That is true. I realised that all this knowledge meant very little to me from a spiritual point of view because I only understood it conceptually. It stayed only on the surface of the mind and did not trigger any real paradigm shift in me. The night after the discussion with Guruji, I meditated and went within. I observed my body, emotions and thoughts, and realised that I do not really have control over them. My random thoughts are very much dependent on external circumstances and stimuli; and these thoughts affect me physically and emotionally. I observed the gap between my thoughts and saw my ego disappear during those brief spaces”.

Gopal added, “Yes, our thoughts arise so rapidly that we fail to see the gaps between our thoughts that reveal our true nature. It is like drawing a few dots on a white piece of paper. We will see the dots

but fail to see the white empty space that allows the black dots to exist”.

James saw the truth in Gopal’s example, “Perhaps that is why we are so caught up with the ego. Guruji once taught that intuition comes from the empty space between our thoughts....the white spaces on the paper in your example.... and spiritual insights arise from them....I need to spend more time resting in these gaps”.

“All of us do, my friend, all of us do” Gopal whispered softly as if talking to himself.

James nodded in agreement, “Knowledge is useful only if we can apply it. I realised that our thoughts are energy which we send out. It is important that you do not hold ill will towards anyone because they can sense it. You don’t need to say a thing. Just thinking negatively about them will cause aversion within them towards you”.

Gopal laughed as he remembered something, “Somehow, I have applied that insight unknowingly. Whenever, my wife throws a tantrum, I will try not to hold angry thoughts towards her but instead, silently send her calm and peace. She cannot stay angry with me for long!” James laughed along. They quickly covered their mouths lest they disturb the others in the huts nearby.

Gopal added, “Medical research has shown that a patient recover more quickly when others pray for them. I can now see how that works after your explanation”.

James said, “From a larger point of view, our thought energy not only affect other people, they affect the environment as well. The thought energy that comes from anger, hatred, greed and other negativities accumulate in the world and eventually explode in the form of natural disasters. On the other hand, it is the energy that

comes from love, goodwill, joy and other positive factors that bring the peace and prosperity that we experience today”. James paused and continued “Certain places have negative energies which drain us for example, casinos are filled with so much thoughts relating to greed and anger that I avoid going such places”.

Gopal added, “ Perhaps that is why I feel so tired when I go to crowded shopping centres”.

“Yes, the exchange of energy is one of the causes of your fatigue. On the other hand, spending time in nature like we do now can fill us with positive energy. I can see why Yogis prefer to spend time in secluded places”.

Gopal sighed, “That life is not yet for us my friend”. Gopal continued, “I can see how this is related to the healing techniques which involve the use of energy or prana such as Reiki, pranic healing and shakti healing. These techniques bring healing to our energy body which in turn bring positive changes to our physical body”.

They continued their discussion on healing until Gopal yawned.

James realising that they have talked passed midnight said, “I love to talk more but we need to wake up at five tomorrow morning”.

“You are right, sleep well my good friend”.

“Pleasant dreams Gopal”.

Spiritual Progress

By Desmond Yeoh

Six months after the spiritual retreat at their Master's ashram, Gopal visited James at his home in California. They got along very well during the retreat and were eager to meet each other again.

They were seated in the patio, enjoying the bright morning sun and cool spring air.

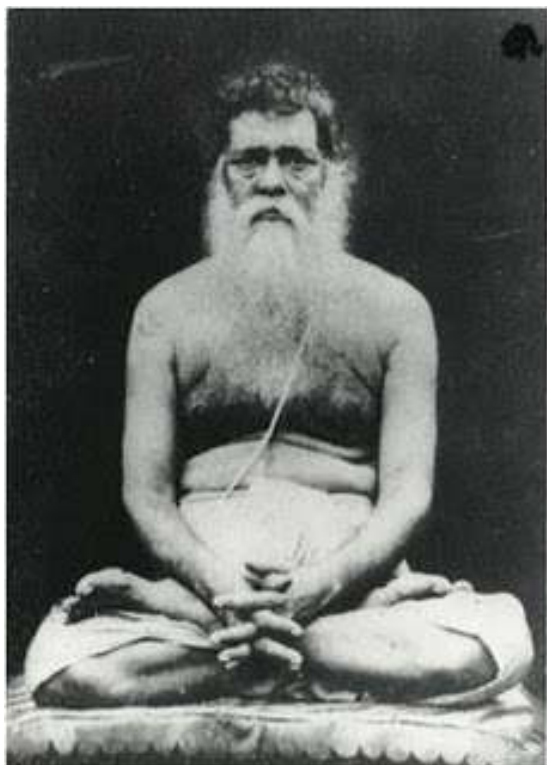
Gopal asked James, "I have been practicing the techniques learnt during the retreat diligently for the past six months but I do not see any progress". James had attended the spiritual retreats at the Master's ashram annually for more than five years and during the recent retreat, Gopal benefited from James's knowledge and experience.

James pondered the question for a moment and responded, "That depends on how you define spiritual progress. Most people define it as the development of some supernatural powers or experiencing some spiritual visions". That was what Gopal was expecting but he did not voice it out.

James continued, "But really, that is not a true measure of spiritual progress". James reached for a book on the coffee table. Gopal recognised the book immediately. It was the Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramhansa Yogananda. James flipped to a page in the book and said, "I think you will remember this story".

Gopal took the book from James and began to read the page that James pointed to. It was the story of Yogananda meeting Gandha Baba, the Perfume Saint. After twelve years of practice, the Perfume Saint developed the art of manifesting any scent desired. Yogananda commented to the Saint about this, "For manufacturing scents by

astral means! It seems, my honoured saint, you have been wasting a



dozen years for the fragrances which you can obtain with a few rupees from a florist's shop". The Saint was not offended by the remark but was actually impressed by Yogananda's wisdom.

Later, a friend told a story to Yogananda about the Perfume Saint, "I was present with a hundred other guests at Gandha Baba's home in Burdwan. It was a gala occasion. Because the Yogi was reputed to have the power of

extracting objects out of thin air, I laughingly requested him to materialise some out-of-season tangerines. Immediately the luchs which were present on all the banana-leaf plates become puffed up. Each of the bread proved to contain a peeled tangerine. I bit into my own with some trepidation, but found it delicious".

Yogananda wrote in his book, 'Years later I understood by inner realization how Gandha Baba accomplished his materialisations. Performances of miracles such as shown by the Perfume Saint are spectacular but spiritually useless. Having little purpose beyond entertainment, they are digressions from a serious search for God'.

Gopal closed the book and gazed into the distance, "Just the other day, I met someone who could put a burning hot iron into his mouth and make metal objects stick to his body. But after talking to him, I realised that he did not enjoy much inner-peace... He was still very

concerned about becoming famous and wealthy". Gopal sighed and continued, "How then do you measure spiritual progress?"

James daid, "Even Yogananda was confused about this. His Master, Sri Yukteswar, once granted him the boon of experiencing God. Sri Yukteswar tapped him lightly at his heart and he felt his consciousness expand out of his body until he became one with the universe. He felt exhaustless bliss and heard the creative voice of God resounding as Aum. For months he entered the ecstatic union. However, he was not sure if he has met God and so he asked his master, "I want to know, sir, when shall I find God?"

"You have found him," replied Sri Yukteswar.

"Oh no, sir, I don't think so!"

His Master was amused, "I am sure you aren't expecting a venerable Personage, adorning a throne in some antiseptic corner of the cosmos! I see, however, that you are imagining that the possession of miraculous powers is knowledge of God. One might have the whole universe, and find the Lord elusive still! Spiritual advancement is not measured by One's outward powers, but only by the depth of his bliss in meditation".

Gopal said softly as if thinking aloud, "I admit that supernatural abilities have been my measure of a competent master...well, it's not that bad, considering that Yogananda made the same mistake". They both laughed.

"What encouraged you to walk the spiritual path in the first place?" asked James.

Gopal searched himself and responded, "So that I can be happier. Chasing after material wealth brings more worries than the false security I imagined. I have read many self-improvement books. They

were helpful but I felt that something important is missing from them”.

James nodded in agreement, “Osho said that the role of the Guru is to help us find our Inner-Guru. It is only in the past few years that I realised the truth of these words”.

Gopal’s eyes narrowed and tilted his head slightly, “How do you know when you have found your Inner-Guru!”

“It is so subtle; you hardly notice the blessings of the divine. You may have a question and the answer spontaneously comes to you while you are brushing your teeth and is not thinking about it; or you meet someone or stumble into a book that gives you the answer. When you are faced with problems, insights arise within you in such a forceful manner that you may even laugh at the problem”. James search within himself for an example and then said, “Just the other day, someone said something rude to me and got me angry. I did not respond to the provocation but after walking away, I was boiling inside. Suddenly my own voice echoed in my mind, ‘you know, you are only hurting your own health by holding on to the anger. The other person has probably already forgotten about the incident’. My anger immediately faded”.

Gopal concurred enthusiastically, “Yes, last week I read somewhere that we should trust our ‘intuition’. It is a commonly used word but I did not really understand what it meant. A few days later, like you said, I stumbled on a book titled ‘Intuition’ by OSHO. The book gave me a true understanding about what intuition is and how to apply it”.

“That’s exactly what I meant. I bet you did not count that as making spiritual progress”.

“Not then, but I do now” said Gopal with a wide grin.

James continued, “Living a happier life is a gradual process. It is the process of removing the causes of suffering and increasing the causes of happiness in our life. The extent that we are successful at it is the true measure of spiritual progress. This is what our Master teaches”.

Gopal sighed, “He will not get many followers”. He was thinking about the other Gurus who openly demonstrated their spiritual powers to attract followers.

“Master is not concerned about gathering followers. He shares his spiritual treasures with those who are sincerely searching for God. There is nothing more that he wants,” James explained.

James continued, “Coming back to spiritual insights. They are different from knowledge. Once, a famous pundit visited Sri Yukteswar. He proudly poured out passages from the Mahabharata, Upanishads and other scriptures. After listening patiently until the pundit finished, the Master said, “I am waiting to hear from you”. The pundit looked puzzled. The Master clarified, “Quotations there have been in superabundance....But what original commentary can you supply from the uniqueness of your particular life? What holy text have these timeless truths renovated your nature? Are you content to be a hollow victrola, mechanically repeating the words of other men?”

“Ouch!” Gopal smiled. He can’t help imagining the shock felt by the Pundit.

“Insights bring changes within us. It changes our nature, as mentioned by Sri Yukteswar. Knowledge that does not create changes within us, just adds to our ego. We cling to that knowledge

and reject everything that goes against it, even those that could bring us happiness. Spiritual insights that cause us to let go of our habitual ways of thinking are the true blessings of spiritual progress”.

Gopal agreed, “Yes, the ego always wants one to add to itself; to have more of everything. The Divine wants one to let go and be at peace. The more things we have, the more things we need to think about. Our ego is made up of our thoughts. Therefore, the less we have to think about, the closer we are to the Divine.”

James nodded and smiled, “I cannot agree with you more”.

Saint Theresa's Prayer



May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

