

The Spiritual Journey of Peace and Happiness



We are here to Celebrate!

Desmond Yeoh SC

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This book is dedicated to my Satguru,
Babaji Nagaraj. May heaven be created on
Earth.

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Preface

We are all striving for the ultimate goal of enlightenment. But, what do we do while we are at it? Do we just make do with our lives the best we can until we achieve the coveted goal? No, we do no such thing. The journey towards enlightenment is a journey of self-understanding. It is to be enjoyed. We are all on a comfortable bus towards a beautiful place but the scenes along the way is also beautiful; to be enjoyed. This is the purpose of this book and that is why I call it ‘We are here to celebrate!’ We truly are because we are meant to be happy. There is no doubt about it.

This book is also about being open and willing to learn from everything and everyone. A Buddhist friend commented to me, “My friends are of the view that I am straying from Buddhism by practicing Yoga”. I shared with her that the practice of Kriya Yoga has deepened my understanding of Buddhism. How can we say that we are straying from anything when we are able to gain a deeper and more practical understanding of it? The comment inspired the chapter Yoga and Buddhism, which was added in the last minute. Ivonne Delaflor wrote, “I am a non-believer in belief systems anymore...I have opened my mind to TRUST more in whatever evolves in the moment. I have met the guru in every stone, in every blade of grass, and in every human being”¹. I pray for the day when all of us can make the same heart-felt statement.

Every experience is an opportunity to understand ourselves; our limiting beliefs, perceptions and conditioning. Even meeting our enemies face to face presents an opportunity to understand ourselves and is to be valued. All our experiences, seemingly good or bad, are of value to us. There are no random events.

This book started with my Spiritual Diary. When I look back at it, I could see the guiding hand of the Divine. I want to share these experiences and insights with you. Writing this book has been a self-revealing process for me and my wish is that it benefits the readers by

¹ Source: ‘Invitation to Love’ by Ivonne Delaflor.

shaking some of their beliefs, perceptions and conditioning. They are like heavy loads that are unnecessary. Just let them go and enjoy the journey. After all, the journey and destination are one; they form the overall experience of joy and love.

Desmond Yeoh

Foreword

A very special trend is taking place in our world today. There is a great movement in the direction of Spiritualism and Self-Realisation, in spite of the great chaos around us, caused by just a handful of persons. BUT, there are also a handful of great souls, who are making us aware that "This World Is Full of Love". They have dedicated their lives to guide us towards this direction of Love, Spiritualism and Self-Realization.

One such person is Mr.Desmond Yeoh Seng Cheong (my Spiritual Brother). If not for whom many of us, and I myself, will not have had the opportunity to participate in BABAJI'S esteemed Kriya Self-Realization Path. He has dedicated himself to propagate Spiritualism, Self-Realisation and Love with BABAJI'S guidance. The first step he took was to organise Babaji's Kriya Yoga Meditation courses in Malaysia (bringing the benefit to many people).Now his second step-- he has undertaken to write this great book

His book opens the gateway to guide our enquiring minds along the path to "The Higher Truth" of Love, Spiritualism and Self-Realisation. As you read this book you find yourself saying "hey! these are the very doubts in my mind, and these are the answers I am looking for towards my spiritualism. Oh! my God, I am grateful for clearing my perception and showing the way to the Higher Truth in a simple way that a simple mind can understand. Desmond has written this book with lots of important details in a simple way, with illustrated examples for easy understanding. This book should be one of First book to be read by an aspirant towards Self-Realization and Spiritualism.

As I read through this book, two statements hit me hard in my head:

(1)"There Is Nothing To Achieve" i.e. Just Let Go:

(2)"Surrender" i.e. Let Your ego Go.

Just let go and surrender and follow the Guidance and Teachings of BABAJI, and all else will follow.

When I came to the section on "SURRENDER" and realised this great truth as to how my ego was holding me back from real Spiritualism, I

just could not help myself feeling the great tension in my lachrymal glands--just managed to hold back the tear drops from falling. I could feel BABAJI'S VOICE in Desmond's book.

This book will bring a great wealth of knowledge to all of us who are earnestly looking and moving in the path of Self-Realisation.

OM KRIYA BABAJI NAMA AUM.

Dr.Subhassh Rajoo

Introduction

Taking Responsibility and Empowering Ourselves

Yoga is the cessation of identifying with the fluctuations arising within consciousness. – Patanjali (source: Kriya Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Siddhas by Marshall Govindan).

Subjectively, we all share the same divine essence; we are one in the Divine. – Rudra Shivananda.

All beings are from the very beginning Buddhas. It is like water and ice: Apart from water, no ice. – Hakuin, Zen Master.

It is difficult to find happiness within oneself but it is impossible to find it anywhere else. – Arthur Schopenhauer.

All dharma is empty. – Buddhist Sutra on Emptiness.

The moment you ask, “Where is God?” you have raised a wrong question because God cannot be indicated anywhere. He is not in a particular direction, he is not a particular thing, he is not a particular being. God is universality. – ‘This Very Body, the Buddha’ by OSHO.

Your real Self is the abode of eternal peace and happiness. Every human being tirelessly seeks it in the world through action, emotion and knowledge. The search for bliss goes on. None has ever found it. – ‘Vedanta Treaties’ by A. Parthasarathy.

In their essential state, our bodies are composed of energy and information, not solid matter. This energy and information is an outcropping of infinite fields of energy and information spanning the universe. – ‘Ageless Body, Timeless Mind’ by Deepak Chopra.

All the above quotes are just pointing to one fact: We are not our mind-body personalities (our egos). Behind the veil of our egos, is happiness. It is so simple and easy but the world is so distracting! The world is

like the video games our children play. It makes them forget themselves; forget to eat, forget to bathe and forget to sleep! Our egos are the layers of beliefs, perceptions, habits and conditioning that cover our true self, which is Love. But once we are aware of them, they fall away by themselves.

These quotes also indicate that God is not a person or entity separate from us. When we were young, our parents solved all our problems and we did not have to worry about anything. We did not have to take responsibility for our decisions because we knew that if anything went wrong, our parents would solve our problems. However, as we grew older, this comforting illusion started to fade until a point that we began to feel vulnerable. So, most of us started to look for another father/mother figure in God. But by doing so, we separate God from ourselves and this creates a lot of confusion in us. We ask God, “Why, of all people, did you allow this to happen to me?” or “Why do you allow such cruelty in this world?”

This is something very difficult to swallow because we want God to bless all our decisions. We want God to lead us to the right spouse, job and so on, so that we are comforted to assume that everything will be alright and we do not need to take responsibility if things do not turn out right. It appears to be the only way we can feel safe in this world of uncertainty.

However, if we accept that the Divine lies within us, we begin to take responsibility for our experiences and truly learn from them. We empower ourselves and unleash the creative forces within us. We start to look at our negative experiences in our lives and associate them with our weaknesses so that we can work on them to improve ourselves. We stop blaming God or others for our negative experiences and we start to see the opportunities for growth that our experiences present us.

Keeping a Spiritual Diary

My purpose of writing this book is to deepen my understanding of myself and in the process, share my understanding with others.

This book is written based on my Spiritual Diary; my source of comfort. Whenever I am bombarded by negative thoughts and emotions, I will write them down in my Spiritual Diary. As soon as I write the negative thoughts down, comforting thoughts will automatically follow. This Spiritual Diary is the communication link with the Divinity within me and it gives strength to the Divine's voice.

Whenever I receive insightful teachings from my spiritual friends, I will write them down in the Diary. When I find gems in spiritual books, I will write them down in my own words and express what they mean to me. When I read books, I use them as a mirror to understand myself. Sometimes, we do not know that we have certain bad habits until somebody highlights them to us. The teachings in the Spiritual Books are only relevant to us if they shake certain long held beliefs that we are attached to. When they do, it is good to write them down in one's Spiritual Diary.

I only started to keep a Spiritual Diary in 2006. My only regret is that I did not start it when I was first initiated into Kriya Yoga back in 2002. Keeping a Spiritual Diary forces us to admit our weaknesses and obviously, I was reluctant to admit them, even to myself. I hope that this book will encourage you to maintain a Spiritual Diary if you have not already started to do so. The following is an extract from the book 'The Voice of Babaji'¹:

“Keep a daily spiritual diary. Initially it is indispensable and of paramount importance. It is a whip for grading the mind toward God. Let it be your guru as it will open your eyes and develop the power of reflection. It will help you to destroy your negative and evil qualities, born of actions in the past. Maintain a daily diary and receive in exchange solace, peace of mind and quick progress on the spiritual path.”

¹ The Voice of Babaji is a compilation of three books: *Mysticism Unlocked*, *Babaji's Masterkey to All Ills* and *Babaji's Death of Death*, by V.T. Neelakantan, S.A.A. Ramaiah and Babaji Nagaraj. In 1952 and 1953, Babaji appeared to V.T. Neelakantan and his teachings were recorded in the above books.

We can write anything in this spiritual diary - every positive and negative thought, speech or action done for the day (or not done but should have been done). We can talk about the practice that we did (or did not do) for the day and the results. We can write about the thoughts that bring us peace and those that bring us suffering. Everything will become jewels - wisdom that you can turn to when problems arise.

When I started with my Spiritual Diary, I did not have the intention to write a book out of it and therefore, I did not note the source of the insights that I gain. The insights may be from books, from friends or from the Divine.

We learn through our Experiences

Why am I writing this book? Before I answer that, I like to illustrate how a Guru trains us with a simple example. Let's say we are driving a racing car and are about to crash against a side wall. In such a situation, we should always look towards where we want to steer to instead of the wall. Habitually, we will look towards the wall and inevitably, crash into it. The Guru will tell us that it is understandable but keep creating opportunities for us to train ourselves until we get rid of this habit of looking at the wall. When this habit is overcome, we will then have removed one layer of the habitual pattern that forms part of our ego. I see this happening in my own life. Every time, I am faced with a situation which test my karmic tendencies, thoughts often come into my awareness, telling me whether I have chose wisely. Whether I acted based on my karmic tendency or I acted wisely, a lesson will be taught. I feel responsible to share these lessons with you and hope that you benefit from them.

Wisdom cannot just be taught; it must also be experienced. The masters teach that we are not our thoughts. These are merely words until we truly experience the teaching in our meditations. Only by observing how our thoughts arise spontaneously within us that we start to appreciate the teaching. When we start to see our experiences as

opportunities for growth, then we can start to truly appreciate life as a human being.

The theme of this Book

The theme of this book is about being happy now. Yes, we will be in bliss when we are enlightened but let us enjoy the journey. We can be happy now because happiness is within us. We can even say that we are designed to be happy.

There are a few Spiritual Masters I have quoted in this book. It is appropriate that I mention them here to avoid repetition. I have quoted from articles written by MG Satchidananda (Marshall Govindan) and his wife Durga Ahlund. They are the founders of The Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Archaryas (www.babaji.ca). This organisation conducts initiation seminars throughout the world and I volunteer my services to organise the seminars in Malaysia. MG Satchidananda's autobiography entitled 'How I became a disciple of Babaji' is a very interesting book to read. I have also quoted from monthly journals and books written by Rudra Shivananda (available at www.rudrashivananda.com). Rudra resides in USA and travels throughout the world, including Malaysia and Singapore to conduct Kriya Yoga initiation seminars and healing workshops. The writings of these masters are practical and useful because they write from their personal experiences and out of love.

I hope to emulate these masters in writing this book. I hope to shake some of the readers' beliefs, conditioning and self-image so that this book serves as a good mirror of the Self. In doing so, some of what I have written in this book may arouse some discomfort; but I hope that from the discomfort, an effort to understand the Self is stimulated.

When I use the term 'Self', I am referring to the ego. Other writers use the word 'Self' to mean the divinity within or the One being in all. Both have completely different meanings and I need to clarify this upfront to avoid confusion.

This book is a tribute to Babaji Nagaraj, my Satguru and Divine Father. May he continue to guide us with Love and Compassion. As Paramhansa Yogananda wrote in his book ‘An Autobiography of a Yogi’, if you take one step towards him, he will take seven steps towards you. Such is the extent of his compassion towards us.

Purpose of Life

Happiness

What is the purpose of our lives? Some of us may have very lofty answers which involves some kind of achievement to make a name for ourselves. But really, the answer to the question is very simple. The purpose of life is to be happy...NOW.

Happiness lies within us. We easily feel it when we remain aware in the present moment. The ego looks for happiness externally because it knows no other way. All of us have different formulas for happiness. Some is wealth and only wealth. For some, it's a combination of wealth, good looks, friendship and so on. We try various formulas but cannot seem to find the right one. Eventually, we realize that there is no right formula because happiness depends on our consciousness. When we stop identifying with our ego, we begin to rest in our own true nature; inner-peace, happiness and love.

Danny's view is that happiness is a combination of wealth, relationships, health and entertainment. He grew up in a well to do family and as such, like most of us, held on to the belief that wealth is critical for our happiness. He graduated as a top student from his university and started work in a large organisation with big goals for himself. To him, happiness is a future event. It is something he will one day achieve when he accomplishes all the goals he set for himself. For now, his life is filled with long working hours and stress. He accepted this as a necessary part of life and thinks that the people who are unwilling to sacrifice for their future are just plain lazy. He has a simple conclusion, if one is poor, than one must have been unwilling to work hard in the past.

These beliefs stayed firmly with him until one day, the Divine decided that it is time to shake this belief of his; in a compassionate way. His perceptions started to change when he met his parent in-laws. They were poor but they were much happier than his parents. Everywhere they went, they made friends easily and everyone seems to light up in

their presence. They do not own much but do not seem to crave for anything. Living simply was a natural way of life for them. They lived the life that our Spiritual Masters teach us to do and yet, they do not read many spiritual books or attend spiritual talks.

They are living examples to Danny of what happiness is all about. Happiness is about being selfless, loving and kind. Happiness is not a future event. Happiness is to be experience every moment; in the present. Danny realised that REAL spiritual practice is not the yoga postures and meditation techniques he has learned in an effort to reduce stress; but it is about how he lives his life.

Once I read a book on the Vietnam war. The author who wrote the book had 70% of his body burnt from a bomb explosion when he was a boy. The boy eventually became a monk and he walked around the world with his bare feet for the sake of world peace. That book made me think if all my ‘problems’ are really worth my worrying. We live in a peaceful country, are free to choose our own religion, have clothes to wear and enough to eat. We are free from physical suffering but are burdened by mental suffering.

This world of duality is filled with inconsistencies. The world teaches us that we need wealth in order to feel secure and happy and so we struggle to accumulate wealth. We forgo our current happiness for the sake of an imaginary future happiness, which for most people will never arrive. What is this ‘imaginary future happiness’ that I am talking about? Well, if we picture ourselves in the future, staying in a big house with an expensive car parked in the garage; that is imaginary. We may see ourselves bubbling with joy in the future, but in the present moment, we are suffering from craving. Not only that, we may place ourselves in difficult situations in the present to achieve that ‘imaginary future happiness’.

We believe that wealth can give us security but as we accumulate more wealth, the more we are afraid of crime against us. A penniless monk can walk anywhere without fear or insecurity. We strive for power so that we are respected but we choose to ignore the jealousy that others

feel towards us and their wish for our downfall. What a funny world this is. When we lose our job, we see the lost income but ignore the new freedom and opportunities we now have. The habits that we have! Were we always like this? When did we start forgetting that the most important time to be happy is the present moment? When did we start to confuse our imagined future happiness with our current happiness?

But, fortunately, we are divine. The divine will never forget us even if we have forgotten Him. Whenever suffering arises, He shines out to remind us that He is forever with us; that we are all One. He brings strangers to help us so that we can experience unconditional love and kindness. Those who never thought of themselves as compassionate people suddenly give all their strength to help others whenever there is a catastrophe. Then we realize that happiness has always been built into us. We don't need anything to be happy. We are love, happiness and bliss.

We crave for wealth, power and worldly things because we want to be special. We want those things that can draw attention to us because the ego lives in separation and wants to be special. The need to be 'special' keeps us attached to the ego. We tell ourselves that when we achieve our dreams, we will be happy. How far are we from the truth! Our cravings grow with bigger goals! Seeking happiness by imputing happiness on externals is illusory. Happiness comes from within. External things cannot guarantee happiness. Something that brings joy to a person may bring fear to another, for example some people love cats and some people are just terrified of them. Therefore, whether an object brings joy or suffering depends on our perceptions. Our perceptions are in essence, our thoughts. True happiness, one that is not based on delusion comes from making one's mind still and looking inside to see what one truly is. The excitements that we chase after are mere distractions from our inner-suffering of separation which we refuse to acknowledge. Because we deny it, we do not know that we are actually suffering.

Ego and Maya

We are our thoughts

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 exist in all computers.

Let us extend this to a network of 6 billion computers. The soul is the master program which controls the operating system of each one of the computer -- it has disconnected itself from the programmer and from the network. The ego is the subsidiary program which controls the input/output system and has grown so big that it is controlling the master program itself. Awareness is if the master program connects with the programmer who designed the hardware and wrote the software.

If we observe our children grow up, we can see the similarity with the above analogy. When my daughter was a baby, she was purity personified. No burden of memories, knowledge or perception; mere purity. As she grew, I observed that she started to pick up knowledge and habits that corresponded with her environment. First, she acted more like her mother, the person she spent most of her time with. Then she picked up behaviours of her father, grandmother and friends, and even from the television. What I enjoyed looking at was the way she walked like me when we go on our evening walks.

That experience gave me a glimpse of what the ego is. I saw that my ego is my knowledge, perceptions and memories. I am beyond all these. My perceptions and beliefs are binding me from growing. I have to let go of them to truly learn and experience what the Masters are teaching. Our guru need not be a person. Let go of that perception too. The whole world is our Guru... We are the universe.

“What is the Self? It is memory... At whatever level, high or low, it is memory. Therefore, to understand the whole process of ‘myself’, I must understand memory, ideas and thought; which are the same things. There can be no self without thought or memory. So I must understand memory... You see the self, the you, is but a bundle of memories which project themselves in the form of thought. Thought and the self are not separate; they are one. This can never be the Truth nor can it reveal the Truth. We must come to that which is beyond the mind beyond memory, beyond time.” – M McDonald-Bayne¹.

All enlightened masters have realised this. We have not. We understand it intellectually but we have not realised it. But, this knowledge is important as a pointer. Sometimes, when we try to answer a mathematical question, it is easier to work out the solution if we first look at the answer. Spiritual knowledge is like that. It acts as a pointer and we have to work with that. Each one of us has to observe and understand our ‘Self’. No one else can do it for us.

¹ M McDonald-Bayne was a sought after healer of his time. He wrote about his life in the books ‘Beyond the Himalayas’ and its sequel ‘The Yoga of Christ’.

Our beliefs are our thoughts. So are our conditioning, perceptions and knowledge. Researchers in the field of metaphysics say that the more they look, the more the universe look like ‘thoughts’ rather than clumps of matter. There is no separation between the thinker and his thoughts. It’s the chicken and egg story. One produces the other and vice versa. When there are no thoughts, there is no thinker. When there is no thinker, there is no ego and Reality is revealed. ‘I’ always have conflict with ‘my thoughts’. Who is the sufferer? No one. The sufferings are merely habitual tendencies being played out.

We cling on to the identities that we have of ourselves. Our identity may be based on our profession, wealth, relationships, looks and assets and so on. However, we are not these things. We are not even our bodies. We make use of this mind and body to interact with the world just like how we make use of a car to move around. Some people even identify with their cars, that is, they depend on their cars to feel good about themselves. When they land into financial difficulties and have to sell their car, their entire world collapse. Some of us identify with our job titles to such an extent that we cling on to the job even when circumstances clearly indicate that it is time to let the job go.

Bill Gates’ definition of himself includes Microsoft. Microsoft is part of his ego and therefore, anything that happens to it, affects his ego or definition of himself. There will be a lot for him to think about and it can be a heavy burden. So, as we strive for worldly success, we must remember that the things we gather will form part of our ego and may become burdensome to us. It is important to remember that a person’s ego can extend beyond his own mind-body complex.

The masters encourage us to develop equanimity so that we do not cling to perceptions and cause these perceptions to become part of our self-identification. For example, if one identifies strongly with a particular view of the world, any comments that contradict that view will hurt him. However, if he develops equanimity and accepts that nothing is completely good or bad, right or wrong and true or false, he will not identify with the perception as ‘his view’ and he can more openly accept other people’s point of view.

We are all part of the cosmic consciousness. We are not illusions just like our dreams are not illusions. Our dreams are real as long as we are in it and we identify with our dream body. When we wake, the dream is no longer relevant because we no longer identify with our dream body. But we identify with our ego when we are awake and then the world of duality is real to us from that perspective. So, our life is really a dream too. We put so much emphasis on the physical that we ignore the reality. This is similar to us putting too much emphasis on our dream body that we ignore the dreamer. Even if we take different forms in our dreams, we still do not realise that they are merely our mental creations. When we are dreaming, if somehow we become aware that we are only in a dream, we will not be caught up in the dream. We can enjoy it and even create the circumstances that we want.

Once while listening to a devotional song, my six year-old daughter asked me who the Divine Mother is. I was stunned for a while because this is such a confusing concept to explain. Then I told her, “When you dream, there are many characters in your dream. Because all these characters are in your dream, you are all of them. As far as the dream is concerned, you are the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother of the universe is something like that. We are all part of her and she is part of every one of us.” Put in this way, she could understand the concept.

Young children are happier because they have not developed their egos fully. They do not think so much of the past and future. They only think about the game they want to play in the present. Ah, there is where peace lies. To remember how we used to be and to live that life.

Time is a concept and this itself says it all. To live happier lives, we must learn to use time without being caught in it. We suffer because we are caught in TIME. We travel to the past and to the future unconsciously. Because of that, negative emotions such as guilt, anger and craving arise. By unconsciously travelling to the past and the future, our ego becomes stronger and this disturbs our peace of mind in the present moment.

Striving to be a Nobody

“See the nothingness of the self, know that you are a nobody, your humility will be the channel which the spirit can do its work.” – M McDonald-Bayne.

Real spiritual progress involves making a mental shift from being a ‘Somebody’ to a ‘Nobody’. A Spiritual Master in Malaysia once wrote a book entitled ‘Striving to be a Nobody’¹. The title of the book itself speaks highly of that spiritual master. To become a ‘Nobody’, the mental attitude of humility is critical.

Humility is a virtue that is necessary to maintain inner-peace. When we are humble, our focus is kept at achieving the ultimate goal; Self-Realisation. With humility, we do not need to concern ourselves with what others think about us. The ego tells us that we need to be special to be successful, but our wisdom says otherwise.

We do not need to keep up a front or an image which we like others to see. If we make a mistake, we can laugh about it instead of feeling embarrassed. When others speak negatively about us, humility helps us to see if there is anything we can learn from the remarks to improve ourselves and if not, to merely recognize that it is their own personal view. Actions speak as loud, if not louder than words. Our actions will speak for themselves and will either negate or confirm what the other person said.

Humility is even more important from the aspect of our spiritual practice. If our spiritual achievements give us a feeling of self-importance, then our ego becomes involved and we begin to chase for more and more spiritual experiences. Spiritual practices are meant to give us peace and happiness in the present moment. They are not meant to create cravings and bind us more tightly to our habit of identifying with our ego. We will discuss more about this later on in this chapter.

¹ The author of the book is the late Bhante Suvanno who resided in Penang.

Emptiness

Defining emptiness

Everything that exists in the world, including every one of us, is 'empty' because thoughts and memories are empty. Our identities are based on our thoughts and memories. All our experiences are now filtered through our memories and experiences. The egos that we all hold so dearly are merely thoughts and memories.

This can be understood intellectually, but to stop identifying with the 'fluctuations in our consciousness' or with our mind-body personalities, we need to experience this. It is beyond our mind and therefore, cannot be explained but the Masters assure us that it can be experienced. It is call self-realisation or enlightenment.

Even in our dreams we cling to our mind-body personality. When I was a toddler, I used to be able to consciously choose to wake up whenever I had a nightmare. I would imagine myself coming back to where I was staying, into my room and back into my body. I did not identify with my dream body. As I am writing this, I could still picture the images clearly in my mind. As I grew up, I lost this ability as I identify more and more with my ego. Recently, I had a dream of purple leaves lifting me up from the ground. It was a pleasant experience but as I was lifted higher and higher, I started to worry about falling and that took the joy out of the dream. In a similar way, when we identify with our ego when we are awake, we take away the joy of being human.

Ego can only exist if there is a belief in separation. We may identify with our religion and the ego tells us that our religion is better. Within the same religion, our ego will say that our group is the right one and the other groups have strayed from the original teachings. Each group is an ego of its own. Let us recognise the ego-involvement when it shows it face. Let us decide our own paths for ourselves. We can easily do so by observing how the teacher and his disciples live their lives.

We can observe our own progress when we are under the teacher's guidance. Are we becoming more conscious? Do we understand our Self more clearly? We can only grow if we remain flexible and open. Only then can we use all knowledge and events as mirrors to understand our own beliefs and conditioning. Our beliefs and conditioning are the veils that are blocking us from seeing our own divinity.

We have millions of layers of beliefs, perceptions and conditioning that we accumulated in this life and in our previous lives. We are the only ones who can remove these layers of conditioning. We are the only ones who listen to ourselves, see our mental formations and feel our emotions 100% of the time. No Master can do this for us. We are our own best doctors. To understand our 'Self', we do not use medical equipments, we use awareness.

Importance of understanding the concept

Why it is important to understand the concept of emptiness or no-self. It is closely related to the concept of cause and effect. Because the ego is not fixed or permanent but changes all the time, then, there is a possibility of increasing our mental well-being by reducing the causes of suffering and increasing the causes of happiness. One may argue that some negative events that happen to us are beyond our control. However, if we analyse this deeply, we can see that a lot of suffering that we endure are due to our habitual reactions to events for example, if we hear someone say something negative about us, we can let it pass or choose to take action and create an enemy. As human beings, we suffer more from mental suffering than physical suffering. So, if we remove the causes of mental suffering, we can live a happier and more fulfilling life.

The negative mental habits we possess are as varied and different as our faces. Everyone is different. But there are basic patterns that we have in common and spiritual masters will address those basic patterns such as desire, aversion, anger and so on. However, how we use those

teaching and apply them to our mental habits will determine their efficacy.

To apply those teachings, we need to constantly be aware of our thoughts and emotional patterns. An effective way to do so is to maintain a spiritual diary. It has two benefits. Firstly, if we are able to write down our thoughts when we are flooded with a negative emotion, we are able to become more objective because we need to use our left brain when we are writing. We calm down more easily and the solution to the problem will come to us more easily. The solution may also come as wisdom to see that the problem is not as big as we make it out to be when we are emotionally charged. Secondly, when we come back to our writings later, we can truly understand our thinking process and the thoughts that give rise to our mental suffering. So, the next time similar thoughts arise, we can easily catch them and let go of them before our emotions run wild. For example, people suffering from panic attacks are advised by their doctors to observe their thoughts and identify those thoughts that trigger the panic attacks. In this way, they can be aware when those thoughts are arising and take action before the panic attacks occur. This involves using awareness to understand oneself.

Causes of Happiness

Many books have been written about living happier lives and the methods are varied. My list of the 'causes of happiness' are based on a loving husband and wife team I have known for many years. I must admit that they are probably the happiest people I have ever met. I observed the way they lived and in the following paragraphs we will discuss certain patterns that are both practical and highly effective.

Live simply. This is the advice that the masters of all religions constantly give us. Living simply means maintaining a lifestyle of a middle class family and living within one's means. Living simple lives free up our time to do the things that are important in our lives. In these modern times, we are always torn between making more money and spending more time with our family. Working overtime takes priority

over our spiritual practices. After a certain point, material comfort contributes very little to our happiness. It is important to recognise that point.

I have a friend who is always talking about buying a bigger car. When I visited his home, I realised why he was in such a need to do so. All his neighbours own a few expensive cars. I could see the pressure that the environment was placing on him.

Accumulate friends, not enemies. If we can walk away from a fight, it is better to do so. This is not a weakness. Acting against our tendency to get into arguments and defend our standpoint requires wisdom and strength. We need to choose our battles because not all battles are worth the effort.

Spend more time with wise and happy friends. By 'happy friends', I mean those who live their lives with wisdom and love. Spending time with them increases our energy levels instead of draining them. We learn how they live their lives and this helps us to see where we can improve. Once I was having lunch with the loving couple I mentioned earlier. There was a man name Low, who was walking from table to table selling lottery tickets. He had some physical disabilities due to a high fever he suffered when he was young. When Low reached our table, the couple flashed the brightest smiles you have ever seen and invited him to sit with us for a drink. They have been long time friends and even had nicknames for each other. Despite Low's physical disabilities, he was wise and we learnt a lot from him about enjoying simple pleasures in life.

Enjoy simple pleasures in life such as walks in the park, reading, looking at the rain, sunrise or sunset, playing or talking with our children, meditation and so on. We do not need material things to make us happy and as parents, it is best that we teach our children this early on in life. If we buy them lots of toys, they will grow up depending on material things for their happiness.

In Spiritual Matters, There is Nothing to Achieve

Once I prayed to Babaji to show me God. One night, I had a dream of a wise man telling me, “there is nothing to achieve”. I then walked into a temple and sat in meditation in front of a golden Buddha statue. I repeated the phrase in my head and immediately everything turned into bright white light. When I woke up, I could still remember the dream vividly. From then on, I always remind myself that there is nothing to achieve. Our ego can also get involved in our spiritual development if we see ourselves as ‘Spiritual’. We see enlightenment as a future event and even our daily practice becomes ‘work’ for us.

“So many persons become initiated and then wonder; why have I not yet realized God? They expect that simply by learning to use the tools offered by yoga, they will realize their aspirations. While the tools and the aspirations may remain, however faded, what is missing is the will to apply oneself moment to moment. It is not what you did last year, or what you intend to do later on that is important in the field of yoga and Self-realization, but what are you doing in each moment. You can choose to bring awareness into every act, into every mundane moment of the day or you can allow your old habits of distraction, inertia and unconsciousness dominate your life.” – MG Satchidananda.

Our very expectations may dampen our perseverance. Rudra Shivananda wrote in his June 2008 Journal (available on www.rudrashivananda.com), “First we must understand that the spiritual path is not on a trend which is a graph-like straight line moving upwards at forty-five degrees or some other inclination, but more like a series of plateaus punctuated by a sharp upward jump. It is during the plateau periods when no apparent progress is being made that the students becomes dejected and would often give up. The plateaus are periods of consolidation and actualisation of our potential and their lengths are determined by the intensity of practice as well as the karmic tendencies of the students”. Having read this, please do not expect the ‘sharp upward jump’ or we will be missing the point!

OSHO taught that the inner-guide helps us find bliss and happiness and not ‘success’ as the ego defines it¹. If one’s intention is to achieve success for ego satisfaction, it is better not to identify with the inner-guru. Our inner-guide’s goal is to bring us to happiness and this may involve temporary set-backs for example, a person may lose his job only to venture into a successful business which he wanted to get into all his life.

Hatha Yoga

Our practices need not be complicated. It must be enjoyable and must bring peace to us when we practice them. Once I prayed to Babaji to tell me how I can improve on my practice. In a dream, I saw Babaji practicing Asanas. Before that, I was neglecting my Asana practices because I saw them more as physical exercises rather than a spiritual practice. I rather jump straight into practicing pranayama and meditation which involve the mind. Needless to say, I was wrong. Asanas helps us to relax and clear the energy blockages in our energy channels. When combined with the breath it becomes a wonderful means of strengthening our awareness.

Joy and relaxation is an important part of Hatha Yoga. When performing the poses, ensure that it is joyful and relaxing – no strain. Then, prana will flow. How well the prana flows will depend on the level of our awareness. When we maintain awareness, the prana will flow towards the focus of our attention. Place your attention on your breath and notice it becoming calm and slow. At the same time, pay attention to the sensations of the body, areas where there is tension and areas which are relaxed. Enjoy it. We use the poses to increase our level of awareness. Let our body be our vehicle to self realization. We use it as one of the tools to understand our true nature.

¹ ‘Intuition, knowing beyond logic’ by OSHO.

Enjoying our practices

Our practice must be enjoyable and therefore, we rest when we are feeling tired. We should not push ourselves too hard on our Saddhana. We must remember not to turn our spiritual practice into a chore. Playing with our children can also be a spiritual practice if we do it with mindfulness. However, we must not be lazy as well. There must be a balance between effort and rest. If we push ourselves too hard, the practice will not be enjoyable and there will not be progress. However, if we do not practice much, our progress will be minimal. Balance is the key.

We must also remove the competitive spirit from our practice. Rudra Shivananda wrote, “There is no attainment for those who compete on how well they can hold a physical posture or how long they can hold their breath or how long they can hold their meditation without moving; only pain and suffering. Practice has to be performed for practice sake without attachment or desire in order to reach higher consciousness and any competitiveness with others or even with one-self, serves to strengthen the ego.”¹

Once I prayed to Babaji and asked him how I can feel happiness constantly. In a dream, I heard a strong voice saying to me, your happiness will increase with your Saddhana. The best barometer to gauge if we are practicing correctly is to observe our state of mind after practicing the techniques for a period of time. If there is an improvement in our awareness and we understand ourselves better, then the practice is suitable and benefiting us. However, this may be easier said than done because the improvements may be gradual and not noticeable. It is only after a year or so when we think back about our state of mind then, can we see a noticeable difference.

When the ego gets involved in our spiritual practice, we start to have expectations. We expect to have out of this world experiences. We expect the Spiritual Masters to recognise us. We expect others to respect us. These expectations will take the joy out of our spiritual

¹ ‘Olympics and Self-Realization’, August Journal, by Rudra Shivananda (www.rudrashivananda.com)

practices and take us away from the very objective of our practices; which is to be happy in the present moment. Babaji, if at anytime our pride gets the better of us and affects our spiritual practice, please remind us of the ultimate goal. May we always be humble in our hearts and not be overcome by pride.

When practicing, we put in the best effort and leave the rest to the Divine. Spiritual progress must not be made into a goal. Trying to achieve Siddhis or psychic powers is the work of the ego. I say that because it is an attachment to an imagined future happiness and this is reflective of how the ego works. We think when I have this and that experiences, we will be happy. Anything that is based on the past and future is the work of the ego.

When we achieve something, the feeling of pride will bring us one step backwards. Being attached to our spiritual progress will only strengthen our egos if we see ourselves as an 'advanced spiritual person'. Attachment to the idea of being 'spiritual' can also bind us to the world of duality. It is like walking 98% of the way only to be lost again. It is not worth it. Remember what we are after, inner peace and bliss; not recognition or respect. If someone ridicules our spiritual beliefs, we should be able to enjoy the joke as well. He may be right and the Divine may have sent him to shake off the last belief that has been binding us from true freedom.

Let us not bring this sense of competitiveness or self-importance into our practice. What is important is that we bring ourselves happiness and peace in the present moment. When we meditate, we enjoy the awareness and peace that comes with it and we are happy whether or not we have any fantastic visions or similar experiences. Our practices are targeted at increasing our self-awareness which leads to understanding of the Self and the delusions that we identify with. We peel away these delusions layer by layer until reality or pure consciousness is revealed.

Once while watching a Kriya Yoga Siddha, Yogiraj Gurunath Siddhanath, on Youtube, I noticed that some rude comments were

made about him. That got me very upset. Then I asked my self how the Master would react if he saw this. He would probably laugh! Then I tried to understand why I got angry. I got angry because I identified with the Kriya Yoga practices and I have been ‘personalising’ it. Then, I realised that my ego has gotten involved.

Who should we believe?

There are so many different teachings from different spiritual masters that the masses become very confused. That is why many choose to just stick to a certain set of beliefs and reject everything that contradicts it. They will not even question why after so many decades of practice, there is very little improvement in their wisdom and emotional well-being.

This begs the question; does it really matter who is right? Does it matter if God is a separate being or the cosmic intelligence which forms our very core? Does it matter if there is heaven or hell, or if we are already in heaven or hell depending on how we live our lives? Our goal is to be happy but because our moments of happiness seem to be the exception rather than the rule, we project happiness into our future by picturing ourselves owning everything that we want, our children being VIPs and other events that we think will bring us happiness. But we must remember that this ‘imaginary happiness’ is not real and means very little to our current state of mind.

Most of us would agree that our state of mind will determine how we react to events that happen to us and therefore, determine our emotional well-being. We know this but still, negative thoughts and emotions are so overwhelming that we are helpless when they arise. Therefore, spiritual wisdom and practices must improve our ability to understand ourselves and embrace our negative thoughts and emotions.

We must learn to differentiate between spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge does little to remove our conditioning and limiting beliefs. Wisdom, on the other hand, shakes us hard and removes the

conditioning and beliefs that limit us. Wisdom gives us the ability to acknowledge our negative habits and even if it does not remove those habits, it has put us in the position to see them every time they arise and eventually, those habits will lose their hold on us. The belief of “no pain, no gain” or ‘we need to work hard to be successful’ has created numerous workaholics. But then, Deepak Chopra came out with the ‘principle of least effort’. He explains that by doing less, we can achieve more because by allowing ourselves more personal time, we allow our intuition and creativity to help us and the entire universe will move to help us achieve our goals.

Wisdom gives us courage to stand on our own two feet. It gives us strength to take full responsibility for our circumstances and to face them in such a way that we come out stronger. We cannot expect the Divine to protect us from negative events because without suffering, there will be very little growth. But the wisdom that we gain from our practices will help us make the right choices and give strength to our loved ones.

Purpose of Meditation

“True meditation is a self-revealing process. Meditation is to uncover the process of thought.” – M. McDonald-Bayne.

The objective of meditation is not to achieve spiritual powers or visions. These are side-effects which can strengthen our egos if we allow our pride to swell up. The main objectives of meditation are:

- 1) To calm our mind and body. It is to help us to relax and get out of the habit of rushing about and chasing after distractions. Distraction from what? Distractions from our inherent feeling of lack that comes from the ego perspective. Our constant mental chattering and random images causes a feeling of lack or weariness. Instead of addressing the cause of this feeling, we often choose to distract ourselves from the feeling by looking for exciting things to do. This does not address the problem but adds on to it by leaving the body

tired and weak. Distraction is not the solution. Understanding; is the solution.

- 2) To watch the 'fluctuations in consciousness' that arise and to understand them. This helps us to understand which are our predominant negative emotions; be it anger, envy, pride, being sorry for oneself etc. We look at these fluctuations and understand how our mind works up these emotions. We understand the 'strategies' and weapons which our mind uses to make us suffer. Who do you think is the most able person who can make you feel negative? You are. Your mind knows which thoughts distress you the most and will use these thoughts repeatedly. By watching these thoughts from an unbiased point of view, these thoughts will gradually lose their emotional charge. The next time they arise, their effects will be minimal.

When we sit in silence and let the mental chatter die down, we get glimpses of our true nature. Our conditioning arises in the form of thoughts, images and feelings and we watch them in a calm manner. While we watch, we begin to understand how our conditioning makes us suffer. We understand what types of thoughts create desires, anger, worries, jealousy etc. We watch but we do not get caught up with them. When we understand without resistance, such thoughts begin to lessen their hold on us and eventually lose their power to move us. Why, because we are now familiar with them. When such negative thought arises, we are able to maintain a calm state of mind. Eventually, during our day to day life, such negative thoughts no longer affect us. We note them instantly and let them go.

- 3) To develop a habit of not identifying with the fluctuations in consciousness. We build up the habit of being detached and maintaining the witness perspective. The best way of overcoming the habit of living unconsciously, is to replace it with a good habit. We want to develop a habit of being present. We want to be fully aware from moment to moment. MG Satchidananda said that when

there is awareness, there is happiness and when it is absent, there is suffering. That is why all spiritual practices require awareness. If one can maintain the witness perspective, one will eventually stop identifying with the body-mind personality and then there is unity with Being or Spirit, that is, the yogi's true nature.

Through meditation we develop the ability to remain present; to be aware of our thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions. Awareness is a skilful means of seeing what is false; we see the workings of our ego and we understand them. We experience their impermanent nature and we see that they are merely fluctuations in accordance with cause and effect.

When we meditate, the goal is Self-understanding and not to get some 'expected result'. When we expect something, it blocks Self-understanding. All practices, whatever name we call them, are meant to lead to one thing, increased awareness which is the ship that sails to one's true self, the seer instead of the seen; the screen which all the scenes are played; the silence between the thoughts.

Gradually, we can bring our meditation practice to our daily lives. Start with a few occasions when you will practice awareness for example, you can commit to remain aware whenever you are waiting in line for something. This is the best time to practice awareness. As you increase your ability to remain aware, you can then increase the number of occasions whereby you will maintain awareness. Keep increasing the number of occasions until awareness becomes natural to you. This is the way to develop good habits.

During the Level 1 initiation, we learn the meditation practice of Kriya Dyana Yoga. MG Satchidananda has this to write about the practice:

“The practice of Kriya Dhyana Yoga purifies the subconscious and helps to replace habitual thinking and acting out with the very conscious awareness that one is being guided in all activities. It begins during brief moments during sessions of meditation when one becomes aware of one's thinking or feeling, as their witness, and

progresses to remaining aware during daily activities and even during sleep periods. One learns to be attentive and to discriminate and reject those habitual thoughts which are not helpful to remaining at peace. It leads ultimately to the experience of Samadhi.

The Kriya Yoga Sadhak should gradually increase the time devoted to these practices and integrate them into the awareness cultivated during one's daily activities. Meditation is not a goal in itself, but a means to an end. It should manifest by our becoming increasingly aware in the "little things of life". All of our experience thus becomes a field for our practice of "sadhana" or remembrance of Self awareness."

We can also meditate when we are with others. A Spiritual Master once said that the kindest thing you can do for another is to listen with awareness and stillness, without doing or saying anything. The peace that we feel in our hearts will flow to him and gradually, peaceful thoughts will fill his mind.

If we learn to enjoy meditation, we will be forever free from the feeling of boredom. A few years ago, after a weekend of activities, I went home and started to feel bored. Instead of looking for more distractions, I decided to analyse this feeling of boredom. Boredom felt like a change from being distracted to being calm. In other words, it is inertia. It is merely a change in feelings that we term as boredom. After seeing this, the feeling of boredom immediately disappeared. I sat down and enjoyed myself meditating.

Cultivating Awareness

'In terms of practice, cultivate the Witness state first during routine activities, like dishwashing, housecleaning, walking, eating, bathing, from the beginning to the end, continuously. As the Witness state becomes more stable, remember it during activities which require more concentration or attention: repairing something, shopping, listening to someone speak on the telephone; later when it is more firmly

established, cultivate it while the mind is engaged in reading or other activities which require much concentration. Even then, part of the consciousness can remain as a Witness, in a state of "internal focus," while the rest of the consciousness is concentrating on the tasks or challenges at hand, that is, "external focus." If most of your time is absorbed in challenging activities which require much "external focus" then imagine, and then find ways to simplify it, and to reserve more time for pastimes which will enable you to cultivate "internal focus." Why is this important? It is what I like to refer to as "the game of consciousness." Every time you play it, that is, you practice being present and aware, that is the Witness, bliss appears. Guaranteed! And every time you forget to be the Witness, suffering appears; automatically. You can easily test this. It is the only game in life where you always win. In all the other games, you ultimately lose, because only Presence, Consciousness and Bliss are eternal and infinite. Everything else is limited by time or space, and hence, temporary.' – MG Satchidananda.

When there is awareness, there is happiness; when it is absent, there is suffering. It is not enough to know this; we must make a 'commitment' to remain aware as much as possible. Even if we commit to ourselves to remain aware, we will very often be overcome by our habitual tendencies to let our mind fluctuate. We need to maintain a consistent Yoga practice. That is, we first train our mind to remain aware when there are minimum distractions; when we are meditating. We then bring that awareness to our daily life and according to MG Satchidananda, that is when real Yoga begins. Merely practicing Yoga without bringing that awareness to our daily life is a waste. Actually, that awareness will flow into our daily life naturally if we maintain a consistent practice and make the commitment to remain aware, to enjoy the bliss of being aware and not being tossed around by the giant waves of life.

In November 2007, I asked Rudra Shivananda, "What is the most important ingredient or factor for self-realisation?" He answered with certainty, "Awareness: But awareness takes up prana and our Kriya Yoga practices enable us to have sufficient prana to do so." I have read

a few of his books and I loved them because all his teachings are like the above answer to my question; they are simple, practical and easy to understand.

Kriya means "action with awareness." It is derived from the word karma, which means "action with consequences," or "action with reaction." Awareness occurs whenever part of our consciousness separates itself from that which is involved in the five senses, thinking or other movements of the mind, and standing back, merely watches. Awareness occurs whenever we are fully present with whatever is occurring, and when we choose to be the Seer, or Witness to the drama of our lives. One practices various techniques or "kriyas" in order to cultivate such awareness in all five planes of existence: physically through the asanas, or physical postures, vitally through Kundalini pranayama breathing, mentally, through special meditation techniques, intellectually through Kriya mantra yoga, and spiritually, through the cultivation of Kriya bhakti yoga of love and devotion. – MG Satchidananda.

In this section, I will describe the method I use to maintain the Witness perspective. It may not be the only or the best method; you will have to try out various methods and see what works for you. I do not want to imply that I am able to remain in the Witness perspective constantly because I am not able to do so. However, to develop the witness perspective requires practice because we have the habit of living unconsciously and thus, allowing ourselves to flow with our karma. There are some useful tips to change this.

We get mentally tired because we allow ourselves to be thrown about by the karmic circumstances and the resistance we put up to try to control our external circumstances. Fighting the external circumstances takes up a lot of energy; wasted energy that could have been used to maintain our calm and serenity. From this moment onward, let us observe our breath and maintain full awareness. When we chose to experience life as a human, we were given a tool that can bring us back to our true nature. As long as we live, we have it. It is our breath. When we breathe consciously, we automatically become aware of the present

moment. We just have to come back to our breath every time we get distracted by excitement or negative emotions.

We remain a child in our hearts. When we are conscious, when there is no thought, we are pure: As pure as a new born at that very moment. Remember and enjoy that purity. I AM. In REALITY, all the knowledge and experiences of the world is irrelevant. In REALITY, only purity exist; only LOVE.

Breathe!

The breath is the most effective tool to bring your attention back to your body. The rate and depth of our breathing change with our emotions. By observing our breath, we can make an inference about our current state of mind. If you are being enveloped by a negative emotion, place part of your consciousness on your breath and another part on your heart centre. It is at the centre of your chest. Wherever the feeling lies in your heart centre, place your attention there. The heart centre is where an emotion is strongly felt. Continue to focus on your breath and the feeling in you heart centre. Give it attention and truly feel it. Don't brush it away, don't fight it. Feel it, understand it and then, watch it fade. We do not intend for the feelings to fade, they do so on their own accord like everything else. Nothing is permanent in the world of duality. From the observation of our emotions, we experience impermanence rather than just knowing it intellectually.

The same applies to our mental formations. If images are appearing in our minds constantly, we place our attention on our breath and focus on our forehead area so that we can really pay attention to the images. We then observe whatever images that appears in our minds. We watch them without judgement. If they are scary images, shift your focus between the image and your emotion of fear, and continue to maintain awareness of your breath. Once while I was meditating, scary images kept appearing in my mind. Instead of trying to block the images from my mind, I observed the image closely to see how scary it can get. In a matter of seconds, the images disappeared. I did not try to block the images in any way. I just gave them attention. Whatever we place our

awareness on; there is where we choose to send our prana or life-force to. The flow of prana to any parts of our body will heal any negative energy that is present there.

We use the same technique with our self-talk. We listen to them with attention; without resistance. When there is awareness, we can look at our thoughts, reactions and emotions in an unbiased way. With that, we get an understanding of the Self. We understand our habitual patterns and they fall away, one by one until there is nothing left. No self but Reality. We have already discussed this in the section on meditation. The goal is to bring that intention to understand ourselves right smack into our daily lives; where the real battleground is.

Our ego loves for the 'I' to feel superior and special. The self loves a story and in any story, the self wants to be the hero. When we watch a movie, the hero always gets the attention. The self is always trying to create a story, a struggle, a fight and then a victory. Once the victory is achieved, the self moves on to another story. No wonder we cannot have peace of mind easily. Sometimes, the ego also seeks to strengthen the sense of self by creating an image of one as a victim. The mind just wants to create an image of itself so that there is something to hold on to or something to think about. Without the ego, thoughts are unnecessary and the mind becomes redundant. When the thoughts cease to arise, only pure consciousness remains. Here is where we can find inner peace and ease.

When we face a stressful situation and get lost in the circumstances, we often take two approaches. We either find someone to lash out at or we find something to distract us from the situation temporarily. Both methods are not healthy as they only reduce our ability to face difficulties in the future. The best approach is to step back from the situation and watch ourselves.

One way to know the state of mind that we are in at the present moment is to observe our emotions and the feelings in our body. Our feelings do not lie. If we are feeling uptight, then you have been caught in negative thoughts. Our mental body is very closely connected with our

emotional body. A good exercise to do at that point is to breathe and place our attention at our heart centre if we are burdened by some negative emotion or on the parts of our bodies where there is tension.

Power of Intention

As I was writing this book, I used myself as the subject of observation to understand the workings of negative thoughts and emotions so that I could articulate them more clearly. In that process, I learnt an important aspect of awareness which I practiced in the background but did not notice its importance until now. Because as I was writing this book, I had the INTENTION of understanding how negative thoughts and emotions arise. With the INTENTION of understanding them, the negative emotions tend to fade away very quickly. Of course, since I wanted to understand the negative emotions and the thoughts that give rise to them, I did not intend for the negative emotions to fade away so quickly. The point is, with the INTENTION of understanding the ‘Self’, my awareness was stronger and brighter. That is why the negative emotions faded away very quickly.

So, the process of being conscious in our daily lives involves the combination of awareness, breath and the intention to understand the Self. My respected readers, to create the ‘intention to understand’, I encourage you to keep a Spiritual Diary. Whenever negative emotions arise, go to your Spiritual Diary and write down your understanding of them. Write down the entire process of how the negative emotions arose and grew in intensity; describe in detail the negative thoughts, where and how the negative emotion was felt and the feelings in the body.

Once in a moment of inspiration, I sent out an SMS to my friends, “Keep a Spiritual Diary. Babaji will communicate with you through it.” I meant it.

Equanimity

In the process of understanding the Self through awareness, we must not expect anything. We welcome every experience because they provide the opportunity to understand our various beliefs, conditioning, self-image and the emotions they arouse in us. That is why Spiritual Masters call upon us to develop an attitude of equanimity. Being with someone who easily arouses our anger provides more learning opportunities than being with someone we like. Don't worry; I am not saying that we should go all out to be with the people we are adverse to. We should just recognise the opportunities for growth which are available to us when we are with them.

The Masters taught that we should not try to control our thoughts but rather, merely maintain awareness of them. When a negative thought arises, there is no need to brush it aside as it will create conflict. Instead, look at it to try to understand its cause, which is a conditioning that you cling on to. Nothing is purely good or bad. In reality, nothing is clearly good or bad; right or wrong. Playing with ideas in one's head causes conflict and is a useless exercise. Merely listening to our thoughts with interest and awareness is much easier and effective compared to trying to change one's personality and way of thinking. With awareness, one's way of thinking changes on its own. It is an indirect benefit just like Siddhis or psychic powers are mere indirect benefits of our constant practice, not benefits which we intentionally seek after.

Inner-peace

This world of duality promotes 'unconsciousness'. Watch a movie and one's mind will become restless. Try meditating after you watch an action-packed movie and you will know the negative effects it has on your awareness. So, what do we do? We avoid externalities which hampers our awareness. We involve ourselves in peaceful pastimes such as visits to the parks, beaches, lakes etc. We make meditation an enjoyable pastime. Since I learnt to truly meditate, I have never felt

bored. How could I? Any free time is an opportunity to meditate. When the body is tired, we lose our awareness more easily. Negative thoughts and emotions tend to flood us. It is a habitual pattern. At such times, instead of looking for things to distract us from our thoughts, take the opportunity to meditate and look at those thoughts. We seek to understand them so that they will no longer have a strong hold on us.

Inner peace is one of the foundations of happiness. We have inner-peace when we cease to identify with the fluctuations in our consciousness; when we cultivate the Witness perspective. Excitement, which we often mistake for happiness, is not happiness. It is a form of fluctuation in our consciousness. Stop striving for the ego and strive for peace. Strive for communion with Babaji. Let go of this need to be special. Maintain peace of mind and find self-realization. Don't get distracted by petty thoughts and petty adventures.

Live in the present, one day at a time. Let go of all your hopes and dreams. Let go of all the expectations you have about what is necessary for a happy life. Just be happy with what you are and have today. There is no need to make sense of this life. There is no other life purpose apart from being happy...NOW. Happiness is something that no one can strive for. You cannot get a university degree on happiness. Happiness arises naturally. If you are present, you may catch the bliss that arises naturally from time to time. Happiness is a state of being. When we fall in love, we get a glimpse of true happiness because we forget ourselves. Suddenly, our past and future does not matter, as long as we are with our loved one. When we are with our loved one, we are absorbed in the present moment.

Happiness can only be found within; behind the veil of our egos. So, when one goes around searching for happiness and try out different combinations of external factors (family, career, friendship etc) to get happiness, the goal is often elusive.

If we analyse our daily lives, we will find that approximately 90% of the time the external events happening to us is neutral, that is, they are neither good nor bad. We have the opportunity to convert this 'neutral

periods' into periods of joy and happiness by being aware and conscious of our every thought, speech and action. When we are aware, at that very moment, we are identified with the Divinity within us and not with are ego. Our intuition speaks louder and our actions are guided for our greatest good.

Once upon attaining enlightenment, a Spiritual Master spontaneously expressed his realization, “joy at last to find that there is no happiness in this world”. Happiness lies within, in the mind and it is lasting only when we are one with God, the cosmic consciousness which is timeless, deathless and ever joyful. I am not saying that this world is filled with suffering. The world is how we choose to see it. Heaven and hell is here on earth. We are in heaven when we identify with the Divine. We are in hell when we are overwhelmed by our negative emotions. Some may be so identified by externalities that when a friend walks pass without acknowledging him, he feels devastated. That is a hell created by his mind.

Self-Realisation

So, what is Self-Realisation? Here is my definition of Self-Realisation. I am not self-realised, so forgive me if my understanding is incorrect. To me, it is a state where we know that we are not our mind and body and we know it with as much certainty as we know we have hands on our body. When a ball is thrown to us, we automatically catch the ball without checking to see if we have hands. Similarly, a self-realised being will react to events from a perspective that he is not the mind and body personality and accordingly, act calmly and wisely, without being overcome by emotions. Therefore, self-realisation or nirvana is not something to be achieved. There is nothing to achieve. Achievement is the work of the ego, not the divine¹.

When you are looking at a something beautiful.....breathe consciously
When you are beside a loved one....breathe consciously
When pleasant feelings arise...breathe consciously

¹ Self-Realisation is discussed further in my subsequent book, 'Filling our Life with Celebration'.

When negative emotions are arising...breathe consciously
When stress is arising...breathe consciously

Your breath heals and allows you to enjoy the present moment.

Mantras

“Whenever one is assailed by negative thoughts or problems, the most effective means to dispel them is simply to chant "Om Kriya Babaji Nama Aum" or another name for the Lord that one holds dearest. Chant it with love and devotion. The Lord's Grace will descend and one will experience fulfillment” - MG Satchidananda.

Whenever I am assailed by my negative thoughts which my awareness cannot overcome, I will chant the Babaji mantra for 108 times. Automatically, my mind will calm down. I wrote these experiences down a few times in my own spiritual diary. In the book ‘Sacred Messages to Parents’ by Ivonne Delaflor¹, it is said that the number 108 is the universal number. Whenever a practitioner chants any mantra for 108 times, his mind will calm down automatically and he can easily focus on his practice. The diameter of the sun is 108 times the diameter of the earth. The Sri Yantra, a powerful symbol used in Vastu Shastra to purify negative energies, has 108 lines. The intention to chant any mantra for 108 times will, by itself, help us to focus and calm our minds. Needless to say, it is useful to start our practice with the chanting of any mantra for 108 times. In Kriya Yoga, we use the Babaji mantra as mentioned above.

¹ Babaji communicated telepathically with Ivonne Delaflor and through ‘automatic writings’ the communication was recorded in the above book. Our doubting minds will make us question the validity of this claim. True or not, it does not matter. Any book that shakes our self-limiting beliefs and conditioning would be of a great benefit to us. This book did just that for me.

Negative Mental Habits

Thinking is Suffering

"If it costs our peace of mind, it costs too much." – MG Satchidananda.

"Thinking is suffering," a spiritual friend once shared this insight with me. Three simple words and he just described the secret of happiness. In the book 'Kriya Yoga: Synthesis of a personal experience,' Ennio Nimis wrote, "To me, everything was as easy to explain as for a theorem, our misery lies entirely in one thing, the tyranny of thought."

Why does our intellect make us suffer? Doesn't it recognize that such mental suffering only introduces toxins into our body? Why does it not point towards the true source of peace and happiness – the divine within everything? Our intellect will not do so because if it does, the ego is no longer special. The ego exists in separation and wants to stand out; to be special. When the ego judges someone, the person will feel superior and special. The ego does not care if the act of judging someone else fills the person's heart with anger and frustration.

To be more precise, it is our conditioning that brings suffering. Our conditioning and our thoughts are the same thing. We think the way we are conditioned to think. How we were raised plays a role in our conditioning, for example, when we were young, our parents may have compared us with others and pit us against others in order to make us strive harder. Their intentions were good but the comparison conditions us to pressure ourselves, long after our parents have stopped doing so. It takes a good habit to replace a bad one. The habit, and it's the only habit worth developing, to replace this adverse conditioning is the habit of awareness.

Negative thoughts bring suffering to the one harbouring those thoughts. The problem is that it is not painful enough to make us withdraw from them. It is unlike when we touch something hot, we immediately withdraw our hand from it. But our heart can tolerate a lot of pain. So

when negative thoughts bring heartache, we can still cling on to them for a very long time and tolerate the pain. It is a silly habit!

That is why observation of our feelings is important. When we observe the effects of negative thoughts on our emotions, we recognise that we are suffering. If we are not conscious, we may not be even aware that we are suffering. We only say that we are angry or feeling victimised but we do not really recognise how much suffering the emotion is bringing us. We do not know that we are suffering and we go on indulging in the negative thoughts.

Let our hearts be our guide. The heart never lies. It never gives us complicated answers. If a thought is not good for us, it will tell us immediately. If a thought is pleasing, it will show us straight-away by flooding us with inner-peace and ease. The heart is a wonderful guru. Let us give our hearts our full attention. Let our heart guide us.

Our negative thoughts do not only affect ourselves. Negative thoughts about others will be picked up by them, causing them to feel uncomfortable with us. Thoughts are energy and we all have antennas to pick up these energy signals unconsciously. MG Satchidananda wrote, 'The societal effect of one Yogi's positive thinking or blessing, is much more powerful than the dispersed negative thinking of a thousand ordinary folk'. This is one of the reasons why we need to integrate our spiritual practices in our daily lives. We cannot act one way when we are in the temple and another way when we are not. In Buddhism, there is a practice called Metta or loving-kindness. We radiate kind and loving thoughts to all beings, including our enemies. It replaces our negative thoughts with positive ones and naturally brings peace to our hearts.

We need to maintain our peace of mind for the sake of others. Our minds are part of the Global mind which determines what happens in this conceptual world. By maintaining our peace of mind, we are influencing the world to move towards God. It is especially important that we do so now that violence is so prevalent in this world. It is therefore important for us to take care of our bodies and make our mind

strong. With a strong mind, we can easily maintain our awareness from moment to moment and have inner-peace. Let us not allow our intellect to make us suffer. Take note of it, revert to your breath and let it go. Remember, when there is awareness, there is happiness; when it is absent, there is suffering. Without awareness, there can be no inner-peace. Without inner-peace, there can be no happiness.

Mara or the Devil is often depicted as a separate entity. Our mind loves stories of good versus evil. But there is no such thing. The only way Mara can hurt us is through our thoughts. Mara is our negative thoughts. Mara is our negative karmic tendencies. So, there is no enemy out there waiting to destroy the world and there is no war to fight. The war is within all of us. Everyone of us must fight our own battles; the battle with our egos.

Research has proven that 90% of what we think about today is the same as the thoughts we had yesterday. If the same thoughts keep coming back to us over and over again and have the same negative effects on us, then there is no real progress for us. What we want to do is to reduce the emotional charge that is associated with the negative thoughts to the extent that they only arise on the surface of our minds and do not stimulate any negative emotions.

One of the greatest benefits that we can gain from meditation and from 'being present' in our daily lives is that we will understand our negative mental habits. We cannot solve a problem unless we are aware that the problem exists. We want to arrest these negative mental habits before they manifest in our physical bodies in the form of diseases. Negative thoughts play themselves in our head like a broken record. As long as we allow these thoughts to generate negative emotions within us, they will play themselves over and over again in our head. The more frequent they happen, the stronger they get. This is called habit.

Do you know what your negative mental habits are? To help us answer this question, let us read through some real life stories to see if they mirror our behaviour.

Limiting beliefs

Johnny has been raised as a Buddhist and the teachings have brought him inner-peace. There are some topics which he could not really understand but he believes that he will eventually find the right Buddhist book that will clarify his confusions. He loves to discuss the subject with fellow Buddhist. However, he finds it difficult to discuss about religion with friends from other religions. He will often compare their beliefs to his and quote from Buddhist literature to support his arguments.

One day, a Buddhist friend, Dave, saw that Johnny was clinging on to the vast knowledge that he has accumulated on Buddhism but this very knowledge is limiting his spiritual evolution. Dave asked, “Johnny, we both appreciate that Buddhism is the best religion for us but sometimes we must also learn from other religions. Otherwise, we may think that we understand a particular Buddhist teaching but actually, we have not understood it correctly. When we read a book from any wise person, irrespective of his religion, we must read it with an open mind. We cannot just accept it because it corresponds with our current beliefs and reject them if they do not. No, we should read it and consider if our current beliefs are correct or are they just limiting us. This is the only way for us to grow”.

We all have beliefs and we often cling to them like our greatest treasure because they have formed part of our identities. Beliefs are merely beliefs. They are not facts. That is why different people have different beliefs. We can truly grow spiritually only when we have an open mind and the willingness to let go of our beliefs. If we are wearing sunglasses with yellow shades, everything will look yellowish. To see their true colours, we need to remove those sunglasses. Only then will we stop filtering everything through those glasses. Similarly, to stop filtering knowledge with our self-limiting beliefs, we need to remove them. There is no other way.

When we are with wise ones, truly listen. It would be of no benefit to us to try to show off our knowledge of spiritual matters. We talk only if we want to clarify our understanding or seek their views about our current beliefs. If they say something that shakes our existing beliefs, take note of it. They have done us a very big favour indeed. Use it as a topic for contemplation at a later time. Sometimes, the letting go of long held limiting beliefs comes easily but sometimes, we have to work at it.

Sometimes, we may cling on to certain beliefs and when we read, we feel delighted when those beliefs are confirmed and reject the teachings when they are inconsistent with our beliefs. By reading the spiritual books in this manner, we are allowing our past conditioning to filter away wisdom. We must be open and allow our beliefs to be challenged. Only then, can those beliefs that bind us to this world of duality be peeled away.

How do we truly benefit from spiritual teachings? First and foremost, we must not confuse knowledge with wisdom. Knowledge is of the mind and will die with it. Wisdom arises from Reality, such as, contentment. Contentment does not arise from thought but is more of the absence of the thoughts that creates craving. When we read spiritual books, we are after wisdom not knowledge. Therefore, we read with the intention of understanding ourselves and applying them in our daily lives. The book becomes a mirror to reflect who we are. Sometimes, we have certain bad habits which we are not aware of until somebody tells us about it. So, when we read spiritual books, we must always ask ourselves how the teaching applies to us. Keeping a spiritual diary helps us to do this. I hope that you will start to keep one if you have not already done so.

Anger

Jim gets irritated very easily. He has very high expectations and is extremely judgemental about others. Everyday, he replays in his head the negative things that others have done and rehearses the tongue

lashing he intends to give out. He fails to recognise that his judgemental behaviour is the cause of his anger, which seems to be dominating his life. The constant stress that he puts on his body is taking a toll on his health and his annual health check-up reflects his deteriorating health. Jim judges others but fails to see that he does the same things too. He expects perfection from others but does not see that he himself is not perfect.

All of us have this habit. It is just a question of degree. Whenever we judge others, we need to ask ourselves if we are also guilty of that behaviour. In most cases, we are. The divine is in every one of us and if we truly recognise this, we will see others as our equal. The more superior we feel compared to others, the more we suffer from this habit of being judgemental and easily angered.

Being angry and judgemental is a habit. We think that if we remove the person causing the anger from our life, we would be free from anger. But our past tells us that this is very far from the truth. Even if the person goes away, pretty soon, we will find a new target to feed our habit. It is a never ending cycle.

There is a school of thought that says we cannot bottle up our anger and we need to release it. Some take this as an excuse to lash out at others. If we clearly see that all thought patterns are habits, we will know that this cannot be true. If anger dominates us in the office, it will also dominate us at home.

Patience is also a habit. We increase our ability to be patient by increasing our level of awareness. Anger follows a certain pattern. External or internal stimuli will induce negative thoughts, which in turn stimulate negative emotions. An external stimulus may be the face of an enemy and an internal stimulus may be a memory of a hurtful event. When negative emotions increase in intensity, we can feel our chest tightening and our breathing becoming shallow and quick. If we are unaware of our anger-stimulating thoughts when they arise, be aware when they manifest in our breath or the feeling in our chest area. Truly feel it and analyse the feeling of anger; and watch it fade away.

This can be easily taught to young children as well. I thought this to my daughter when she was five years old and she could apply it easily. When she was feeling sad or angry, I told her to observe the feeling in her heart. I told her that there is a monster there when she is sad or angry but by observing the feeling, the monster gets smaller and smaller until it disappears. As she observes the feeling in her heart, I will ask her if the monster is getting smaller (in other words, is the negative emotion reducing) and she would say yes. Eventually, when I ask her if the monster is still there, she would say no and her mood will be better.

One of the conditions for anger to arise is the perception that the other person has ill will against us. I will illustrate this with a true story; Jim was waiting in a restaurant and another couple walked in. The waiter immediately brought towels to their table. Jim looked around and noticed that he has not been given any towel. If Jim saw this as a mere oversight by the waiter and ask for it, there would be no problem. However, Jim perceived that the waiter was giving special attention to the couple. He got angry and made a big fuss out of the situation. Our perception of the mistakes our direct reports make is also a good example. If we perceive their mistakes as mere mistakes which is common, anger will not arise. If we add our own conditioning into the mistakes for example, if we perceive that our direct reports are being lazy and selfish, then anger will arise.

A friend shared his experience with me which also illustrate the force of perception, “I have been having a different perspective with a co-worker on how a product has been priced. I have been making arguments in my mind; sometimes with a feeling of frustration as to why my point is not seen or the other person does not understand the issues enough. Then suddenly, I realised that I owe a lot to the other person. He is in part why I am sitting in my position now. Then I had a feeling of gratefulness and love. The subsequent discussions with that person were not disagreements at all – it was easy and we were finding that we were focusing on common views rather than differences. It is easier to argue your case if you share it with the

feeling of love.” His awareness of his frustration created understanding, which loosened the hold of the negative emotion on him. This enabled him to change his perspective of things and turned his negative emotion into a positive one; that of gratitude and love.

Craving for more

Dave had been dreaming of a new expensive car. He has been driving his old car given to him by his father for a number of years now and he wants to make a big change now that he has recently earned himself a promotion. Eventually, he did buy the car. As he reflected back at the entire event, he felt that he was much happier when he was looking to buy the car and now that he owns the car, he feels neutral. However, now he is worried of his car being stolen and he cannot park his car as freely as he used to. He had to spend a big sum of money to purchase a car lock he could trust. When it was time to renew his car insurance and road tax, he realised that he forgot to budget for the additional costs. The ‘imaginary happiness’ he had before he purchased the car was just that – imaginary.

MG Satchidananda wrote, “As the wise have discovered, desires just feed upon themselves, creating ever new desires, and locking one into a vicious circle of ever new desires. The end result is always suffering, whether one gets what one wants or not. If one doesn't, one becomes frustrated and confused. If one gets it, one becomes afraid of losing it, or it eventually loses its appeal and becomes boring.”

When we catch ourselves craving for something or someone, we place our awareness on the images we create in our minds. For example, if one is craving for a new car, one may picture oneself driving comfortably, singing along with the radio and others looking with envy. We look at the images and give them our full attention. These images crave our attention and when we give them attention, they stop crying out for more. They start to lose their emotional charge and control over us. When we crave for something, our views are very narrow. We only see the pleasant aspects. We do not see the additional costs and

insecurities that come along with the object. There is often a misconception that the object craved for is critical for one's happiness, that is, one cannot be happy until the object is obtained. This is clearly not true.

Desire is the strongest chain that binds us to our ego. The ego loves to accumulate material things. The more things one owns, the more things the ego can identify with. To market a product, just create an image which the ego can associate with and the product will sell very well. Branded clothes sell well because of the image the owner can project rather than the quality per se. Once a friend told me that she used to buy a particular brand of clothing until she found out that it was a local brand! Suddenly, the brand did not appeal to her anymore.

When we crave for something, our minds will always be thinking how to get it and how miserable we are because we do not have it, and how happy we will be when we get it. It creates a projection of happiness into the future. The picture of joy we have when we finally own the desired object is crystal clear, coupled with the feeling of excitement. When something comes in the way, anger will arise to torment us.

Rudra Shivananda wrote, "When we are unable to satisfy a desire or our attempts to satisfy a desire is thwarted, the emotion of anger arises. We become angry and strike out at everyone around us. We also become angry at ourselves for the failure to gratify ourselves. Anger becomes an automatic reaction to the inability to satisfy a desire and so we oscillate between desire, satisfaction or pleasure and anger, sometimes spending much more time and energy in the desire and anger phases than the actual enjoyment phase"¹. Often, the actual enjoyment of the desired object is not as pleasurable as we initially imagined it to be and in a short time, we lose interest in the object and look to fulfil other desires in an unending cycle. Reducing our desires is like removing the DVD from the player. The player cannot function because there is nothing to play. It just remains still. Our minds are like the player. It is always on a lookout for DVDs to play.

¹ "Non-attachment", May Journal, by Rudra Shivananda.

We have been chasing after wealth and power for many lifetimes. Why do we do that? They are merely conditions of the mind and the joy they give last only for a brief moment. After that, the feeling turns into worry of losing them. Recognize that when we crave for something, we are suffering and when we get the thing we crave for, we still suffer except that the suffering changes form; into worrying about losing the object. Our minds are then preoccupied with securing or protecting the object. When craving arises, recognize that feeling. Recognise that it is a form of suffering and also think about the suffering that will come with getting the things craved.

Nowadays, there are many books on financial freedom and everybody is talking about it. Essentially, the books teach us to save and accumulate enough investments so as to generate sufficient passive income to maintain our lifestyles. But if we look at our nature, how much is enough? We think we are not financially well off because we always compare ourselves to those who are richer. If we compare ourselves to the bigger world, we will see that we are in heaven.

There is an easier and more effective way to achieve financial freedom. This method can also be easily taught to our children by modelling our lives around this method. The method is to live simply and reduce our wants. A swami who has nothing to his name and wants nothing is truly the richest man in the world. He knows that he has everything that he needs for his happiness and is therefore free from desires. We should not live in luxury now at the expense of our future years. We do not want to put ourselves in a position that makes us dependent on anything. Live simply. Striving for things and planning how to get them steals our awareness. We try to reduce our toys as they only take up the time that can be better used for our spiritual practices; to read, meditate and volunteer for charitable work. We put all our energy into our practice. We only need to depend on the Divine.

One of the classic ways the ego justify craving for more money is that one can do more charity when one is rich. A good friend shared a paradox with me; why must God give money to a person so that he could give to the needy, instead of giving the money to the needy

directly. The act of charity is to help ourselves develop the habit of selflessness. The amount is not important. It is the joy we feel when we give that is important. Whenever, we make a donation, let us send out thoughts of love to all beings. We pray, 'by this act of charity, may all beings have happiness.' The thought of love at that point will be very powerful.

We already have what we are seeking. If we just separate the seer from the seen, we can remain in inner peace and bliss. This is true happiness. Isn't this what all of us are seeking; happiness? Don't we already have it? By seeking it in the seen, we lose sight of the happiness that we are born with. Take the witness perspective and immediately, inner peace and ease comes to us again. We perceive that the material things that we are after will bring us happiness. That means, our true goal is happiness. Choose the direct approach to happiness by cultivating the witness perspective. We use our awareness to see how our desires take control of us. Very often it takes the form of a picture in our head of how we will enjoy the object craved for. Very often, the enjoyment is exaggerated and the negative aspects are blocked out. We watch our emotions and the sensations in our bodies. As with other emotions, desires will fade. Once they fade, we can begin to think rationally and decide if the desired object is worth our effort and time.

Material progress is secondary to spiritual progress. Spiritual progress can bring us peace and happiness and we can share that peace and happiness with our loved ones. This is the creative power of intention. Material progress creates stress, fear and worry. Our experience tells us that and it is not a case of sour grapes. We are tired of chasing after material achievements and that is why we are seeking for something that is beyond this world of duality. Once we achieve our material goals, we only end up craving for more. We have all that we need now; we do not need anything more. That does not mean that we turn away from material progress. No, let wealth come without us craving for it. Let it come as a by-product of our contentment.

Imagine that an enlightened person is willing to grant you anything that you wish for and ask you, “What do you want?” You are given only one wish. What DO YOU WANT?

The Jewel

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.

Jealousy

Andrea had a job she loved. She has been with the company for more than ten years and has quickly climbed up the corporate ladder. She had a big office and was respected by her colleagues. Then one day, Patricia was promoted to her level and Andrea did not feel that Patricia deserved the promotion. She only got promoted because of office politics and Andrea saw it as unfair. Andrea felt that she too deserved a promotion. Andrea was jealous of Patricia’s promotion and the attention she was receiving from the senior management. She had always been the flavour of the month and she loved the attention.

Andrea eventually resigned from her position to join another company. She lost her big office and is now doing work that she does not enjoy. In her previous job, her work was greatly appreciated but now, she is just seen as doing what she is paid to do.

When Andrea resigned from her company, she sent a message; either she goes or I go. Even if Patricia resigned, Andrea must recognise that she would not have gained anything apart from a temporary feeling of ego-satisfaction. But she would have damaged the perception the senior management has of her. Patricia's gain is not her loss. This fact was not clear to her as she was blinded by jealousy. The ego strives to be special and if someone blocks the light that is drawing attention to her, jealousy arises. Harming others out of jealousy does not make any sense because one stands to gain nothing except negative karma.

Jealousy arises from our habitual need to compete and win. This is partly due to the conditioning we received when we were growing up. When presenting our academic report cards to our parents, they looked to see what position in the class we achieved. In sports, the winner is glorified and the losers ignored. This habitual need to compete and win takes the joy out of life. When playing games, just play for the sake of playing and not winning. When we hear about others' accomplishments, let us rejoice in their good fortune and celebrate. Let us feel good for them. It definitely beats making ourselves miserable.

The feeling of jealousy stems from our pride. It arises from the perception that the other person is superior in some way and this conclusion is made from a limited point of view. We may compare one skill with the one person's strong point and see it as a weakness on our part and then compare another skill with another person and see it as a weakness too. This is not being fair to oneself. We cannot compare each and every skill we have against the strength of different persons. It is a losing case from the start. If Mr. A is a better speaker than Mr. B, that does not mean that Mr. A is a better man than Mr. B. Both have their strengths and weaknesses. Anyway, their happiness does not depend on one being better than the other.

The Workaholic

Joey works very long hours. She cannot understand why she is never able to complete her work. However, she feels proud when she is running all over the place and getting things done. When she is with her colleagues, she will always talk about the various projects she needs to handle and how there is no one else capable of handling them. Her colleagues could sense the pride within her and just allow her to express herself. She does not notice the stress that is taking its toll on her body. Joey has a toddler son at home and she is feeling very guilty about the long hours. But when she is spending time with him, she feels guilty about not spending time on 'more productive' work. So she starts to think about her work. Although she is physically next to her son, she is not present with him and he could sense it. This takes the joy out of being with her son.

One day, after some of the projects were completed and no new ones were assigned to her, she suddenly found herself feeling guilty about having some free time. She began to worry about her job even though her rational mind knows that her company needs her terribly.

Joey was raised on the belief that if there is no pain, there is no gain. In a way, it also arises from the habitual need to compete and win. She feels a sense of importance when she works long hours but she is unaware of it. However, her colleagues are clearly aware of this but found it impolite to tell her. Because of this belief, she often places herself in a position to be assigned more projects than she could handle.

If one holds on to the belief that 'if there is no pain, there is no gain', then there is a possibility that one gets a sense of importance from working long hours. That is probably what most 'workaholics' believe. If we want to let go of this belief, we first have to let go of the need for gain. So, this popular phrase is changed to 'if there is no expectation of gain, there is no pain'. This is the very foundation of Karma Yoga which will be covered in a later chapter.

When we are with our children or grandchildren, be fully present with them. Enjoy every second, from moment to moment. Let them remind us how to be a child again. Let them help us to forget the false ego that we have created for ourselves. Let us laugh with them and forget ourselves. Imagine that there is no one else in the world but you and your children; really play and enjoy yourself. Put away the toys. Play the simple games you used to enjoy when you were young and create new ones. You will be impressed how creative you can get. Your children will love them. They will forget that you are their parent and see a friend instead. Be in love.

Worry

William cannot help but see his future in a bleak way. His mind is constantly worrying. When he is at work, he worries about his personal matters. When he is not working, he worries about his work. *He constantly pictures himself suffering in the future.* For a single subject, he will imagine how things can go wrong in a number of ways. When asked why he worries so much, he often justifies that by thinking about the things that can go wrong, he can prepare to face them. But pressed further about how he prepares to face them, he goes blank.

We have been trained to worry from young. Parents cannot help but to instil fear in their children to stimulate action especially when their examinations are approaching. Creating fear in them seems to be the fastest possible way to solve the problem. We do not have to keep this habit. In almost all cases, the thing that we worry about never happens. In the rare occasion when it does, it is never as bad as it we picture it to be. Even then every event has a positive twist to it. The negative event may seem bad at the time but we will see the positive side of it when we look back upon it a few years later. Whenever, I catch myself creating an imaginary future suffering, I will stop and breathe. I tell myself that I will deal with actual problems, not imaginary ones.

This does not mean that we do not take precautions but we do so objectively. For example, if we are concerned about a project at work,

we sit down and intentionally focus our attention on the project and plan our next steps. This is planning. Worrying is not planning. If you are concerned about thefts in your neighbourhood, do not keep expensive jewellery in your house. These are objective decisions made without any negative emotions.

To allay one's worry, one may look to astrology and other means of fortune telling. Personally, I find that fortune telling tends to strengthen the ego's hold on me. It does this by creating imaginary future events in my mind. Be it good or bad, either way, it disturbs my peace of mind. For example, when the fortune is good, it strengthens my craving for more and destroys any contentment I have in the present. When it is bad, it creates worry.

That is why MG Satchidananda said that a practitioner should not rely on astronomy or fortune telling but develop a mind of equanimity. He wrote, 'A yogi prefers to cultivate equanimity and willpower, come what may. Over reliance upon astrology makes one a slave to one's karma, through fear and 'self-fulfilling prophecy.' The right use of 'will' coupled with reflective insight and yogic discipline is generally a better use of one's energy and intelligence. One learns to master each situation as it comes. A yogi seeks to surrender to what may come, to purify himself of desires, preferences and fears, and so become a perfect instrument for the Lord. "Not my will but Thy will be done," allows "the jiva to become Shiva" ultimately, as Divine Grace descends in the form of Self-realization and other siddhis.'

However, this does not mean that one should ignore warnings and advice provided by spiritual masters. Nothing happens by accident. If one have the good fortune to receive such warnings and advice, one should follow them. There is nothing to lose. But after all the necessary precautions have been taken, we rest in equanimity and in the spirit of surrender. We tell ourselves that we will face actual problems as and when they arise; not imaginary ones.

The main argument for reliance in fortune telling is that one can prepare for any bad situation such as financial difficulties. However,

why should we only prepare when we are expecting bad fortune? Why don't we just live simply and have a generous heart so that whatever happens, we will not be severely affected. Even in the aspect of health, just prepare by eating healthily, getting enough rest and perform hatha yoga exercises.

There is no better preparation than devotion and surrender to the divine. We do not limit ourselves to our mind and body. Divination is only in respect of this mind and body. They are our tools. We are not our mind and body. It is like spending time to check the fortune of our cars to figure out when they will breakdown etc. It is a waste of time. It is better to maintain the car the best we can. Any issues that crops up in the future can be addressed then and there, not now. We are not our mind and body. We only use our mind and body to interact with this world of duality. The self is only one entity. Our families are only small parts of the big family – the universe. It is better that we spend the time meditating and spreading thoughts of love and peace throughout the universe than to worry

We sometimes turn to fortune telling in the effort to protect our loved ones. Again, there is no better protection than our own spiritual practice. We are also benefiting our loved ones in our practice. Concentrating on our practice is the best preparation we can make for our loved ones. Don't be distracted by fear. Trust in the divine and let us rid ourselves of the doubts that confuse us. The Divine is with us. There is nothing to fear. Enjoy the peace that we now have. Let us not let anything take that away from us.

When something bad happens, know that it will not last. After suffering, only joy can arise. Accept both with equanimity.

Pride

Mandy loves to tell others about her expensive purchases and her escapes to expensive holidays and restaurants. Whenever she meets someone new, she will show a keen interest about the other person's

career and benchmark herself to them. If the other person is not up to her standard, she will start to distance herself from him/her.

Mandy's ego is defined as 'a rich upper-class woman' and she clings tightly to that image. She chooses to associate herself only with people who fit into that description. However, by doing so, she has restricted her own growth. She does not see that if she opens up her circle of friends, she will learn from them and grow emotionally and spiritually. By limiting herself to those who fit into the image she created, her chances of growing out of this boundary that she created for herself is also limited.

Because she sees herself as a 'rich upper-class woman,' any mistake that she does is devastating to her and she will replay that image over and over again in her head to make herself miserable. She is not able to laugh at her own mistakes. Mistakes are devastating to her because she wants others to see her as intelligent and wise. After all, she is a 'rich upper-class' woman' and such persons do not make themselves look stupid. In short, she does not allow herself to make mistakes and when she does, she will be very tough on herself. She will say to herself, "how can you be so stupid" or "that was such a silly thing to do" and so on.

Pride blocks humility and restricts our ability to learn from others and to grow spiritually. Pride arises because the ego wants to maintain the image it has created and that is very tiring because one has to put up a front and cannot be at ease with being oneself.

One who is swollen with pride will have few friends. Boasting about our accomplishments and the things we own will make the listening party feel inadequate. The next time we get the urge to boast, we must ask ourselves how that would benefit us and the other person.

Fault-finding

Tim has a very comfortable paying job and the work he has to do is fine but there are just some colleagues who seem to be out to make his life difficult. If only they were not in the company, his working life would be great. He enjoys driving his fast car but there are some inconsiderate people on the road who intentionally waste his time by driving too slowly. If only they could be removed from the road. If only all the inconsiderate and unkind people can be removed from the face of this earth, then he would have happiness.

Tim has the habit of blaming others for his lack of happiness. He does not take responsibility for his own happiness but relies on others to make him happy. This is obviously a hopeless case because he can never find something externally, which can only be found in his heart. It is like searching for a tropical forest in the Antarctic.

Fault finding is easy to do. We can easily find fault even with saints! Once after reading about the Great Mahatma Gandhi whom I admire very much, I brought up a discussion of him with a friend from India. I mentioned that India is very fortunate to have had a leader who demonstrated that Spirituality can be practiced even in politics. However, I was shocked when my friend began to list out certain negative aspects about Gandhi, which I saw as merely his own perception and interpretation of things.

When we do not have any major problems, our minds will tend to keep busy through fault-finding. We do that because fault-finding pleases the ego and makes one feel superior. We set a higher standard for others compared to ourselves. When we make a mistake, it is common. When others make a mistake, it is silly. An idle mind is the devil's workshop. If we can rid ourselves of this habit, we can convert these neutral periods into times of peace and happiness.

We need to let go of the need to blame others and control the universe. Who is responsible for our own happiness? We are, for only we can bring happiness to our own hearts. We cannot depend on others for our

own happiness. All the stars may be shining brightly above our heads, even dancing, but if we do not let go of our habitual tendency ('our karma') to assign blame and do not take responsibility for our own happiness, we will not realise that we already have happiness. It is just that we do not know how to enjoy it.

The best friend of the fault finding habit is self-criticism. They are always together. The ego is very good at self-criticism. It takes an actual experience and makes a generalised statement about it. One makes a wrong investment decision and the ego says, "You are lousy at investments". One makes a mistake and the ego says, "You are stupid or careless". Such generalisations are unfair. We know that they are unfair but yet we are affected by them. It is habitual; a particular thought will generate a particular emotional response. What we need to do to break this habit is to watch our self-criticism with awareness. We give them our full attention, with the intention of understanding how we criticise ourselves. When we do that, the criticisms will slowly lose their emotional charge. Whenever we make a mistake, the best thing to do is to acknowledge it, think of how we can avoid repeating it and move on. There is no need to indulge in self-criticism, which zaps our energy unnecessarily.

Give up the fault finding mind. We cannot blame the externalities for the internal dissatisfaction in our hearts that arises from our separation from the Divine and our misinterpretation of who we truly are. Neither can we expect externalities to give us happiness. How many times have we told ourselves that we will be happy and satisfied when we get this and that, only to be disappointed when we eventually achieve it.

MG Satchidananda wrote, "Judgments are harmful because they reinforce the quality condemned, not only in the person being judged, but also, and most significantly in the one who is judging. When we form a judgment about another, for example, thinking, "that person is so greedy," we are actually dwelling upon the quality of greed, and are therefore strengthening it within ourselves. Like worry, which can be

defined as “meditating upon what you don’t want,” judgment of others is meditating upon what you do not like in yourself”¹.

We must also remember the creative power of our thoughts. Durga Ahlund wrote, “The prana is directed by the mind and vitalizes whatever the mind thinks about. Attention directs prana. We send life force to whatever we give our attention to. Whenever we think about anything, we are directing the prana into those thought forms. A thought is not just something confined to the brain. A thought is projected out and reflected in life. If a thought become habitual and stimulate emotional responses, it becomes a very powerful force of creation. We create our own life situations, whether we realize it or not. Let go of all negative expressions of the mind and the [Real] Self shines through. Fed with the love, peace and fearlessness of the [Real] Self, our consciousness gets the truth, that all bodies are pervaded and animated by the same vital energy and by the same consciousness as that within our own. That is real progress. And that is what is required to eliminate the mixture of ignorance and knowledge.”

We create what we think about. If we are always complaining in our minds about our jobs or our bosses, we will create negative work situations; long hours and demanding bosses. So, let us stop directing our thoughts to these negative situations and cut-off the prana supply to these negative forces. Remember, we are responsible for our own inner-peace. Externalities cannot give us or take away our inner-peace. Let us go against this habitual pattern of fault finding and start creating positive circumstances for ourselves.

A good question to ask when we judge others is “am I like that too”? Or “Do I also do that”? Most of the time, we will find ourselves guilty of the same behaviour which we judge others of.

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

¹ ‘Judgment, or How to Avoid Harming Others and Ourselves’ by MG Satchidananda (www.babaji.ca)

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.

Clinging to suffering

Diana views life as filled with suffering and in her view, she will just get by day after day the best she can until her last day. She holds on to the belief that life is filled with suffering. She enjoys watching dramas depicting suffering and it seems like she watches the show to confirm her belief. She attracts people with problems to her. If she is able to listen to them emphatically, then it is fine but listening to their problems leaves her feeling depressed. When she is with her other friends, she shares these sad stories with them. Over time, her friends start to avoid her because conversations with her drain them of energy.

Diana’s belief is not uncommon. After all, all religions talk about suffering. The first teaching the Buddha gave after he attained enlightenment was on the Four Noble Truth:

- Life is Suffering
- Suffering has its causes
- Cessation of suffering
- Path that leads to the cessation of suffering

Unfortunately, we tend to over-emphasize the first two lines and see enlightenment as a future goal to be attained later on in life or in our

future lives. I must admit that I have the habit of thinking this way too. But all four lines or 'truths' are to be understood and practiced simultaneously. A simple way of practicing the Four Noble Truths is to understand that when there is awareness there is happiness and when it is absent, there is suffering. We suffer when we live our life unconsciously. We can prevent ourselves from being thrown around by our random thoughts and emotions by maintaining the witness perspective. It is wrong to say that life now is suffering and happiness is some future event. No, both happens in the NOW depending on our state of awareness.

“You may explore heaven and hell, but you will have to come back to earth alone and realize what a charming place it is. It is here alone that you have an enviable school to train you. This life gives you scope to give your right hand to someone who does not know the clasp of friendship, to sing your sweetest song to another who has heard nothing but discord, to give your fairest roses to someone else, in whose life flowers have never bloomed and to scatter roses of joy freely over hearts that are gloomy and dark. The earth is your right, royal training ground, here to make you perfect.” – From The Voice of Babaji.

Life as a human being is to be savoured. We only have to live consciously; then whatever we need will be manifested. Live life joyfully. Be present. Laugh with life. Be at peace. Celebrate! We are not here to toil just to survive, pass the time and die. The Human Life is a celebration of its own. Enjoy every moment. Celebrate every moment. Live in love! See the divine in everything. See your daughter or son in every child. See the Divine Mother in every woman. See Babaji in every man. Learn from everyone and everything. Live in simplicity! We need little. We already have all that is necessary for happiness; consciousness.

Breathe and be one with GOD.

Our thoughts and conditioning are the culprits!

These examples are but a few of the many conditioning and beliefs the human mind can conceive. For us to truly understand ourselves, we need to be aware of the mental images our ego creates. But from these examples, we can see how the images we have of ourselves, and our beliefs and conditioning make us cling to suffering. Joey's belief of 'no pain, no gain' causes her to work long hours and suffer a lot of stress. Johnny's limiting beliefs and refusal to learn from people of other religions has placed a ceiling on his spiritual growth. Mandy's image of being a 'rich upper-class woman' caused her to be very tough on herself and limits her circle of friends. A belief is a thought. So are our perceptions and conditioning. They arise from our intellect, which are thoughts. If we recognise that they are not beneficial, we can let go of them; just like any other habits we have gotten rid of in the past.

When circumstances affecting our lives change, so will our dominating negative mental habits to accommodate the new circumstance. Our ego can easily find problems with everything. Our ego is very creative!

When we are able to watch our thoughts impersonally like a movie, we can understand our own conditioning and habits. When we understand our conditioning and habits, we are no longer affected by them. It is as if we are peeling off the habits and conditioning layer by layer until we reach a point where we no longer identify with our body, mind, feelings, perceptions and thoughts. Everything arises and passes away without affecting us.

In the book 'Beyond the Himalayas' authored by M McDonald-Bayne, a Spiritual Master mentioned that a seeker first realize that his thoughts are filled with anger, hatred, jealousy and other negative thoughts. He sees that these images and mental formations have no power of their own EXCEPT THAT WHICH HE GIVES THEM. He also realizes that these thoughts are not him and he learns to observe them impersonally. After that, the seeker is on his own to progress further and realize that there is only one reality and that God exist in everything and everything is God. There is no separation. He develops one-pointed concentration

and is not overwhelmed by his mental formations. He sees reality. He is able to control the functions of his body, the beating of his heart and his blood circulation. His mind and body responds easily to his instructions. BUT THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING OF THE WAY AND HE MUST FIND THE REST OF THE WAY HIMSELF AND BY HIMSELF; FOR NO ONE CAN SHOW IT TO HIM.

Negative emotions are based on time, that is, if you remain aware of the present moment, the negative emotions cannot arise. For example, worry is based on an imaginary future negative event, anger is based on the memory of a past event, and craving is based on an imagined future happiness arising from the items craved for and so on. If I ask you to get angry now without thinking of the past or the future, you will not be able to do so. That is because we have taken away the necessary conditions for suffering, which is (1) thinking or being 'unconscious' and (2) time (not being present). To free ourselves from mental suffering, we must train ourselves to remain present and if our mind jumps to the past or the future, we gently disassociate ourselves from these thoughts and bring ourselves home to the present moment.

I received this wonderful passage from a friend but I am not sure of its source: "Too many spiritual people try to avoid negative emotions, transcend them, or deny them. They want to leap straight to love and peace when they feel a negative emotion. I call it the "spiritual bypass". Interestingly their spiritual development is stunted until they dive into the very human realm of emotions. Enlightenment requires fully embracing the whole human experience, not rising above it or escaping it."

This is telling us not to be adverse to negative emotions. Boredom and disappointment has proven to aid meditation, based on my own experience. We can actually enjoy boredom and disappointments too if we appreciate that the feeling of bliss do not come from external circumstances but from within us. With the right internal conditions, we can easily have bliss and inner peace. We just need to relax and enjoy ourselves during our meditation.

True happiness comes when we are not bound by negative emotions – worry, anger, craving etc. When these negative emotions are absent, there is a neutral feeling which is very relaxing and peaceful. We can truly rest in this state and let go of the need to control external circumstances. We will never be able find enough leather to cover the earth to protect our feet but we can easily find sufficient leather to cover our feet. This is one of the famous teachings in Tibetan Buddhism. It teaches us to work on ourselves rather than try to control external circumstances.

The first time I attended the Level 1 initiation back in 2002, we concluded with the technique for communicating with Babaji. We were told to ask Babaji a question and wait for the answer. My question was that of ‘ego’ or ‘non-self’ as Buddhism defines it. We had been sitting on the floor crossed-legged for two whole days and my legs were aching. As soon as I asked the question, the pain in my leg disappeared. I knew that it was the answer to the question but I could not understand it. Later, I read a book that questioned, “Do you think your body belongs to you? When you are having a stomach ache, can you tell your body to stop the pain? No you cannot because the body does not belong to you. You are just borrowing it for a while and eventually, you have to return it.” Only after reading this book, which I believe Babaji arranged for me, could I understand the significance of the message or blessing that Babaji presented to me on that day. For a few days after the initiation, whenever I closed my eyes to meditate, I could see the outline of Babaji in my third eye. This was an additional sign of encouragement which Babaji blessed me with.

This is an extract from my Spiritual Diary. I did not edit it because I want to portray my feelings when I penned it down: ‘I know that the thoughts are not me and I do not control them. They arise and pass away. I know they are impermanent and yet, I am tormented by them. Why is that so? Because you have not realized what is the truth and what is not. You still cling on to separation because it reinforces something you cannot let go, something that is dear to you but yet is the cause of all your suffering – your ego. It clouds you from inner peace and ease; the one true goal worth striving for. Other goals are

like poisoned honey, once achieved, they bring worry, anxiety and anger. You may say that the anticipation of it brings joy. No, it brings distractions from your suffering temporarily. But it also brings anger when you meet with obstacles, which slow you down from achieving your precious ‘goal’. Distraction is not what you want; inner peace is what you want.’

I mentioned “precious goal”. I was wrong on that part. Inner peace cannot be a goal because it can only be experienced in the present and not in some imaginary future time.

Everything that we perceive as right or wrong in our daily lives is made up in our mind. When we judge something as right or wrong, know that it is merely our perceptions. We then observe and use these judgements to understand our own perceptions.

Understanding Others by understanding the Self

The washing machine has broken down and this frustrated Anne. The more she tried to get the machine to work, the more frustrated she felt. She started to see herself doing the laundry with her hands and her mood deteriorated. She started to find fault with Tim, her husband. Tim listened to her with compassion because he understood how negative emotions work. He knows that when negative emotions catch someone unaware, the person will most often react to them. He saw that the imagined future suffering of doing the laundry manually has triggered the feeling of frustration in Anne. He did not want to add to the frustration. Anger cannot be sustained when it is one sided. In a short while, Anne calmed down and both of them started to discuss how to solve the problem.

When we are able to see how quickly we can be overwhelmed by negative thoughts and emotions, it is easier for us to understand others when they are bombarded by these negativities. With understanding, we are less likely to be influenced by the negative emotions of others

and this enables us to deal with the situation more effectively; with love and compassion.

Understanding the workings of the ego, the Self, provides us with the wisdom to help others. When we listen to their problems, we are able to identify the beliefs, conditioning or self image that is the underlying problem. I will give you an example. Rick is frustrated because his daughter is not at the top of the class. He keeps questioning how his daughter is going to Harvard if she keeps this up. You then see that he has a mental image of his daughter in Harvard fixed in his mind. He holds a narrow belief that his daughter will only be happy if she graduates from Harvard. We cannot change the daughter's result but we can help Rick by challenging that belief, in a compassionate way.

When we listen to the problems of others, it is important that we maintain our awareness and listen without being emotionally affected. Breathe and listen. If we are able to stay aware and unbiased, we are more able to see the solutions to their problems. If they are too focused on past hurts, compassionately bring them back to the present by discussing the various choices they can make. Help them to think rationally rather than emotionally. This is the best gift that we can give to our friends.

When a friend is strongly influenced by a negative emotion, it is no use to give them any advice on spiritual matters at that point. The best thing to do is to maintain awareness on our breath and listen to them intently in order to understand the thoughts and beliefs that are blinding them just like how we would observe our own thoughts and beliefs. We maintain a calm state of mind and listen empathetically without being emotionally affected ourselves. Our inner-peace will benefit our friends and help them to calm down. At that point, we discuss with them about their thoughts and beliefs and if appropriate, share with them the appropriate practices that can benefit them. We can also highlight alternative views and solutions to the issue so that they can look at the problem more objectively.

‘Modern’ techniques for managing negative emotions

Motivational speakers generally advise us to replace our negative thoughts with positive affirmations. We are to set passionate goals and just focus on those goals and as far as possible, think positively. In fact, being optimistic is an important trait which job interviewers look for and which interviewees try to project. Positive thinking is one approach; sometimes it works but sometimes, our negative thoughts and emotions get the better of us.

Reading or watching movies about Spiritual Masters such as Paramahansa Yogananda, Yogi Rama and Mother Teresa is very useful as they leave positive imprints in our mind and inspire us to develop ourselves to become better human beings.

People suffering from panic attacks are advised by their doctors to observe their thoughts and identify those thoughts that trigger the panic attacks. In this way, they can be aware when those thoughts are arising and take action before the panic attacks occur. This involves using awareness to understand oneself and this is another technique for managing our negative thoughts and emotions.

These are not modern techniques but methods taught by the ancient masters since time immemorial. We cannot link these practices to any particular religion. They are universal truths. Spiritual practices are not meant to guarantee us a place in heaven or protect us from negative events but rather, they help us to live our life fully and consciously. The practices make the world a more beautiful place to live in.

Inherent feeling of lack

“As I began to observe my mind, its automatic responses and movements, I discovered the games it was playing and how these were obstructing my growth. I recorded my personal desires, those controlled and uncontrolled and my goals, what I was reaching for, and what my mind feared it might miss out on or what it might lose. Kriya Yoga has helped me develop a true understanding of the need for self-study. I learned the value of the yogic qualities of ‘Detachment’ and ‘constant practice’. Detachment released my mind from confusion and anxiety. Detachment and constant practice helped me to simplify and to cheerfully make the right choices for my life. With these tools I uncovered deep attachments, tendencies and desires, which had kept me bound to rounds of suffering. It was detachment and constant practice which helped me to identify my needs from my desires and to discover what is truly worth having, enduring happiness.” – Durga Ahlund.

We are constantly bombarded by our thoughts and external stimulation. To make things worse, we are so used to external stimulations that when things are quiet, we go out looking for more. If you expose a baby to too much external stimulation, the baby will either become very agitated or the baby will block off the external stimulation by going to sleep. People who live near airports have higher stress hormones even long after they got used to the noise.

Our constant internal dialogue arises because we erroneously take our body, mind, perceptions, thoughts and feelings as our Self. The confusion and negative emotions that we feel constantly creates a feeling of dissatisfaction or lack. A fellow student of Kriya Yoga said to me, “we are all suffering but we do not know it!” It is a feeling that life is not satisfactory and that is why we keep chasing after things for the ego to identify with. We hope that we can eventually find something or someone to make us feel complete. The wise ones make the effort to remain aware and to be cautious not to associate themselves with external circumstances. They do not blame external

circumstances for the feeling of lack and therefore, do not seek to distract themselves from it.

Imagine that you are the only person in this entire universe. There is no one or nothing else. There is just white light all around you and you have been in this light for years. There is nothing to think about because there is no reference to compare to. We think by comparing or referencing our current experience with our past experiences. This is called conditioning. We are not creating anything new when we think. For instance, imagine the colour 'rue'. You cannot do it because you have not seen it. Now I say that it is the colour of the sky. You will very likely picture some variant of the colour blue. Now I tell, it is the colour of the sky at dawn. Your colour will become darker. Now, I tell you that it is the colour of the sky at dawn right after the explosion of a star. Now, different people will imagine different colours but at least we can imagine a colour because there is a reference point for us to start from. This whole exercise is to illustrate how we think.

Can you now understand why it is so difficult for the Saints to teach us about the Reality that exist within all of us? The Divine is beyond thoughts and therefore we are not able to conceive that the Divine is within us and everything. Just like how we cannot picture the colour 'Rue' unless some references are given.

If we come to the realisation that the universe is one, then all our references and conditioning will fall away. But until we reach that point, we will be bombarded by random thoughts and images which come with emotional charge, depriving us of our inner-peace. The only way we know to get out of this is to distract ourselves. It is like playing loud music to drown out the other noises. It serves the purpose but leaves us equally drained and tired. When a movie is being projected on a white screen, we are not able to see that it is white. We have to stop the movie to see it.

Freedom of Choice

Many see spiritual development and wealth as opposites. I had a conversation with a friend which is a good example of this belief:

Friend: “The people who lead the world and make changes are not spiritual people.”

DY: “That is not entirely true; what about Mahatma Gandhi?”

Friend: “Yes but people like that are rare. He is the divine born in a human body; but he was murdered in the end”

DY: “It does seem in this world that the leaders tend to be ruthless and uncaring people. However, this does not mean that this world is right and it does not mean that the world will stay this way permanently.”

Friend: “I agree with that. However, I notice that spiritual people tend to be soft. I want to fight and meet problems head on.”

DY: “When one’s awareness is not strong, one will act in accordance with one’s karma or habitual tendencies. If one is impatient, any disturbance from another person will cause one to react aggressively. A person, who has strong awareness, whether or not we see him as ‘spiritual’, will always have a choice, to act in accordance with his habitual tendencies or to act wisely. When anger arises, he is aware of the anger and does not allow the emotion to dominate him. He then makes a choice whether or not to argue with the other person who provoked him. He will only do so only if it is beneficial. Having that choice is not being soft. Rather, it is being wise. If one only reacts to one’s karmic tendencies, then one is a prisoner of one’s conditioning. The person does not have true freedom of choice.”

My friend did not want to believe what he thinks; that is why he brought the subject up. You see, the divine is coming into his life in many ways. On one hand, he is happy about it but on the other hand, he is worried about his material wealth. We know where real happiness

lies but yet, we are still attached to the tinsels we have gathered. I am glad he discussed this with me because this subject has crossed my mind before but I did not contemplate it deeply enough.

Many believe that spiritual practices can affect one's career or progress in life. I admit that I once held this doubt as well. The saints in the past did not build a fortune for themselves. So, the obvious conclusion is that spiritual practices are not good from the perspective of wealth. Now, this is taking a very narrow view. These saints are truly free from the attachment to wealth and as such, do not chase after them. They have true freedom of choice. Mahatma Gandhi is a good example. He could have lived in a castle if he chose to, but he knew that will not lead to happiness. We are still bound in the prison of our attachments and narrow views. We still think that we cannot be happy unless we are richer than our neighbour. What can we do; we have been brought up by our parents to think that wealth is very important for our happiness.

The only thing that our spiritual practices do is give us freedom of choice. We get to choose wisely rather than live our lives in accordance with what others taught us, our beliefs and our conditioning. We have not really considered if all that has been taught to us is right or wrong from the perspective of our own happiness. Our higher awareness enables us to enjoy whatever that we already have and this gives us happiness in the present moment. Is this not better than clinging on to some imaginary future happiness, which brings us mental suffering in the present moment?

There are many examples of great spiritual beings that have carried out their responsibilities as householders, raised great children and held successful careers until retirement. Lahiri Mahasaya, Marshall Govindan, Rudra Shivananda and Deepak Chopra are only a few examples. They lived their lives as examples for us to follow.

Spiritual progress and material progress may seem to be at polar opposites but once the creative power of our thoughts and intentions are clearly understood, the rules of the world will change. Nothing is permanent.

Joy at Work

Do you remember the last time you worked so well that you were whistling away and the job just got done quickly and efficiently? Certain conditions need to exist for that to happen and we will discuss them in this chapter.

Peace is what we are after and this needs training. Actually, it is easier to have peace but our habitual tendencies tend to make us waste our energy and 'work' towards making ourselves miserable. But this is merely a habit which can be easily replaced if we put effort into it. When we perform a task with full attention and awareness, we will find that it has a calming effect, and brings joy. The work actually gives us more energy instead of leaving us feeling tired. However, this does not happen all the time due to our negative habits. It is useful to understand them so that we can be aware of them as and when they arise.

Work Stress

Stress in our daily lives is due to the habit of rushing around and jumping from one task to another. Time is just a concept of the mind. When you are rushing, you artificially make the time 'shorter' and create unnecessary stress. Stress manifests itself in our physical body as a feeling of tightness in the chest area and tension in shoulder area. The breathing becomes very shallow. We know that stress harms the body. This life is precious and as such, we must give our body a lot of attention in the process of understanding the ego.

Whenever the physical manifestation of stress appears, make it a point to stop whatever you are doing and take a short break. Just do one thing at a time, step by step and watch the things fall away. Relax, concentrate on your breath and place your attention on your chest area. Eventually, you will feel the relaxation in your heart. You will be able to complete the work at hand more efficiently.

Stress needs certain conditions to exist before it can manifest. One of the conditions is the perception of a lack of time. A complicated task is

challenging or interesting when we have more than ample time to complete it. If a time limit is imposed and it is perceived as insufficient, the challenging task becomes a stressful one. We may not be conscious of the perception, which may be operating sub-consciously and we may be rushing unnecessarily. So, one way to reduce stress is to remove the condition for the feeling to sustain itself, for example, when we stop to get ourselves a drink of water whenever we are under stress, we remove the perception of a lack of time and this helps to reduce stress. We also remind ourselves that when we are under stress, we tend to make more mistakes. The reasons are obvious; we skip from one task to another and this affects our focus. In addition, the perception of a lack of time will prevent us from reviewing our work and detecting our mistakes. So, rushing can never be justified.

Once upon a time, a Spiritual Master saw a young disciple sweeping the floor. The Master had to rush to another place to give a talk but instead of rushing, he walked towards the young disciple, placed his hands on his shoulders and told him, “If you want to do something, give it your best shot”. What the Master was advising him to do was to sweep the floor with full awareness and truly enjoy it. Yes, sweeping the floor can be enjoyable if it is done consciously.

“When something is done well, it generally means that it was done by someone who was fully conscious as to what they were doing. Undistracted by the petty desires of the mind, intelligence is able to channel itself intensely through the person, with force and inspiration,”
- MG Satchidananda.

Another condition is the perception of the enormity of the work on hand. Our minds will be thinking of the next thousand steps to complete and the more steps which we are unsure of, the stronger our stress becomes. We should not mistake this for planning. To remove this condition, we need to focus on the immediate step to complete. We tell ourselves that we will address the immediate problem and focus on future problems as and when we reach them. Thinking this way reduces the perception of the size of work from a mountain to a mole hill.

Our mind tend to make our problems look bigger that they actually are. With awareness, we see the reality of things. Such is the power of awareness. Remove the two conditions whenever stress tries to show its face and pretty soon, you will be singing away while doing your work. For the first few times, the effort to take short breaks and to think one step at a time will be a conscious choice. However, over time, this too will become a habit and stress will be an unusual occurrence.

Try to leave some time after lunch to meditate or practice Yoga Nidra (conscious sleep). This will remove the tension in the body, which is another factor of stress. Meditation will slow down the pace of our thoughts and reduce their emotional charge.

Recognize that when we feel over-loaded, the situation is not permanent. Stressful and relaxing days overlap each other over and over again. During stressful days, we remind ourselves that they are impermanent and calm ourselves down. Recognise that certain tasks can be done during the relaxing days. During relaxing days, we remind ourselves that they too are impermanent and stressful days will come. On such days, we prepare for the stressful days. We try to get as many things out of the way as possible. Whenever we have some free time, try to improve on our knowledge and skills so that we can complete our work quicker and more effectively during the stressful days.

This is similar to our spiritual practice. During the better days, when there are no major problems, we use them to prepare ourselves with intense spiritual practice. We increase the period of our practices to strengthen our awareness. This increases our ability to recognize the feelings in our body and the mental formations that brings us suffering. When we recognize them, they become smaller and smaller; less daunting. Remember, bad days are impermanent. Good days also are impermanent.

Another habit that can take the joy out of work is complaining in our heads. One way to bring joy into our work life is to go to work with the conscious intention of not judging and complaining in our minds. This

enables us to retain our energy and focus them on our work. When we do so, the work becomes enjoyable.

There is a good and bad side to everything. This is the law of this world of duality. If asked, is wealth good or bad, we will not be able to give a definite answer. When we do not like someone, we can shift our thoughts towards his positive traits and pretty soon, he will no longer seem too bad. In Buddhism, this practice is called *Mudita*. When we judge others, let us stop and think if we are also guilty of the behaviour. In most cases, we are. There is a wonderful passage in ‘The Voice of Babaji’ which states, “There is no such thing as an accident in the cosmic universe. Grow bolder in all adversities, waxing warmer with the heat of everlasting light. Let all condemnation of others be deemed your own. If you adjust the microcosm, the macrocosm will adjust itself for you. You cannot see outside, what you are not inside”.

When we complain to ourselves, it is like someone nagging at us constantly. Our own mind is very good at finding the points that can really stir us. If we cannot and would not tolerate someone else nagging at us constantly, why do we allow these complaining thoughts to arise and carry on in our mind? When these thoughts arise, know that they are not fruitful, and the nagging must stop. Don’t give them strength. Note the thoughts and move your concentration to your breath. That will help us to understand ourselves by understanding the thoughts that arise within us. Gradually, our mind will become peaceful again.

Bringing Spirituality to our workplace

It is now harder than ever to believe that you can bring spirituality to the office. Many argue that this is a dog eat dog world and we need to be ruthless to succeed. That is true; but only if you choose to cling to suffering.

I like to share with you Jason’s story¹. Jason believes that we must integrate our spiritual practices into our work life. He makes the stand that we cannot speak about love and compassion during spiritual

¹ This is a true story except that I have changed the names of the people in this story.

gatherings and shed that view when we go to the office. Often, when he expresses such views, he will get only silence from the rest of the group. Everyone agrees with the statement but somehow, do not believe in it.

The Divine gave Jason the opportunity to prove this point and at the same time strengthen his belief. Jason moved into a new job which at first seemed like a dream job but soon turned into a nightmare. His boss, Ray, is a tyrant and has created a lot of mistrust within the department. Even worse, Jason's direct reports saw him as Ray's man and automatically see him as the enemy. His direct reports refused to cooperate with him and claim ignorance when asked about various matters. To make matters worse, Ray is very tough on the team. He refused to approve leave applications and Jason had to fight hard to get their leaves approved. Ray wanted to retrench some of the older personnel but Jason disagreed, giving strong arguments why those personnel needed to be retained. He also needed to give justification for retaining Ray's own secretary. On occasions when Ray wanted to issue show cause letters to a certain staff, Jason blocked it by explaining that the cause of the problem was outside the personnel's control. Ray reluctantly agreed to all of Jason's decisions.

Not knowing Jason's efforts to help them, his subordinates continued to give him problems and on one occasion, one of his direct report shouted at him because she had too much work. Jason quietly pulled her aside and said to her, "I do not think that anyone should shout at another person. Even if you shout at me, I will not do it to you because I respect you". That was the last time she shouted at Jason. Jason kept reminding himself that the divine is within everyone and therefore, held no grudges against his direct reports for the way they acted. He understands their lack of trust and stood by his belief.

Jason's job confirmation was extended because in Ray's view, he was too soft. Jason stood by his belief. He asked God why he was led to this job and it was answered even before he finished the question. You see, the universe will grant us what we are after. When we pray for patience; God will give us the opportunity to be patient. When we pray

for strength, God will give us the opportunity to be strong. This is the only way we can overcome our mental conditioning.

Jason prayed for a job that he can be happy with and he did get it. Because of the problems faced, he was not attached to the job. He did not care if he lost the job and because of that, he had the sense of freedom and the courage to stand by his beliefs. He truly understood the happiness that comes from letting go. As soon as he understood that, things started to change. His direct reports began to trust and support him. He was later confirmed and given a significant pay increase because the senior management wanted to retain him. Ray had to back off on Jason because of the pressure from the Senior Management.

This is a true story which unfolded before my eyes because Jason shared them with me the entire time. This story has strengthened the extent of my surrender to the divine and I thank him for the gift. It is a gift of faith.

The point is to carry out our responsibilities without any selfish intentions, knowing that we cannot take what is not ours and cannot lose what is ours. When performing a task, carry it out without any expectation of returns. Sometimes we worry too much about the results and this takes away the joy from the task itself. Everything that happens is meant to happen.

A Practical Understanding of Karma

Karma is defined as cause and effect. Personally, I like to define it as habitual tendencies as this definition makes it more practical. One way of seeing the workings of karma is to observe, through awareness, our negative emotions that arise from external events or stimulation.

Negative emotions are not by themselves bad. When they arise, they provide us with the opportunity to practice what we have learnt from spiritual masters and develop wisdom. Whenever negative emotions are present, we are presented with a choice; to react to the negative emotions and even harm others or, we use our awareness to understand ourselves and our wisdom to end the habitual/karmic tendencies for good. There is no point in reading tons of spiritual books if we do not practice the lessons that are taught in them.

Negative emotions such as jealousy, anger and craving arise because we have that karmic seed within us. When they arise, we can choose to strengthen them or burn them. We strengthen them by reacting negatively when the emotions arise such as wishing ill will for the person behind that negative emotion. However, we can burn that Karma by not reacting to it and being aware when the emotion arises. We use our wisdom to diffuse that emotion so that we do not react to it. We look at the thoughts that caused the negative emotions to arise. In the future, whenever those thoughts arise again, they will no longer have such a strong hold on us. Eventually, we will have freedom because we are no longer controlled by our emotions. Writing in a spiritual diary is an effective way of doing so.

Patanjali defines Yoga as the cessation of identification with the fluctuations in consciousness. The goal is not to stop the fluctuations in consciousness or to block them in any way. It is nature; no one can change that; just like no one can stop the wind from blowing. The goal is to stop identifying with these fluctuations; to stop being absorbed in these fluctuations. The fluctuations that arise represent our karma; the seed lying dormant until the necessary conditions for the seed to sprout arises. Then we have a choice, whether to burn that karmic tendency

(for example habitual pattern to be angry) completely by choosing to act wisely or to strengthen that karmic tendency further by reacting based on that negative emotion. If we are able to remain calm by watching our breath and recognizing the negative effects of anger, then gradually, that habitual pattern or karma will disappear. Negative emotions are like layers and layers of dust which covers our true identity. When the dusts are sufficiently reduced, our true nature, which is love, reveals itself.

The problem is, whenever we clear a layer of dust, we place new layers to replace them. Here is a simple example. Some time ago, I watched a horror movie 'The Legend' which Will Smith was the main actor. Recently, I drove pass a billboard with Will Smith's face and instantly, my memory of the movie was triggered and my mood was affected by the violent scenes played in my head. I observed that this is how Karma works. By watching the violent movie, I planted a seed. When the right condition arises (Will Smith's picture), the seed sprouts and manifests as negative emotions. The problem is; the seed can sprout a few times until I get used to it. Awareness is the broom to sweep it away. There are two points to make from this story. Firstly, whatever action we choose, we need to be aware of the consequences. We choose the future consequences when we make the current choice. Secondly, a karmic seed can manifest itself over and over again until we make the conscious choice to burn it with wisdom and awareness.

When we perform Karma Yoga, we should not think of it as service but rather, as a means of removing our selfish desires; at least for the period of the activity. According to MG Satchidananda, this provides an opportunity for the divine to manifest. The best time to overcome the ego is when it is at the strongest, that is, when the body is tired, weak and hungry. That time, the ego will yell and shout and lash at anybody near and also lash at oneself, raising the toxin levels in the body and sapping the body of all its energy. When this happens, accept the yelling and screaming ego. Give it love and attention. Give it full awareness. Know that it is the conditioning from many lifetimes. Let go and surrender to the Divine.

When we serve others, we maintain the frame of mind that we are rendering service to Babaji or the Divine in others. We do not expect any return and we dedicate the fruits of our work to the Divine. That is the real meaning when we offer fruits to an image of the divine. We are not offering the physical fruits but rather, the fruits of our service to the Divine. Expectations of any reward will only disturb our peace of mind. Confusion is what we get when we chase after the ‘fruits’ of our labour. Serve and expect no returns. That is the source of peace in serving Babaji.

Virtue is something we struggle with. Our mind is often in a conflict when we think we should be more compassionate, more loving, more charitable and so on. This is unnecessary. When we live in the present and live consciously, we will not react according to our Karma. Virtue will arise on its own. Virtue is meant to be natural, not something we struggle with; just like love, which arises naturally. You do not have to think about it.

A common belief is that our experiences are the result of our karma. The masters also teach that we create our reality. These two points seem contradictory and yet they are not. Karma is basically our reactive habit or conditioning we have grown up with. Our choices are based on our habitual patterns and conditioning. For example, if one has a bad temper, it is not difficult to predict how he will react if someone insults him. However, if we are free from our habitual patterns and conditioning, we are then free from that aspect of karma. In this example, if the person is able to transcend his habit of getting angry, then he can choose his response based on wisdom and create new realities for himself.

Practicing Awareness

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.

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.

Placing awareness on our emotions can strengthen our intuition or the voice of the divinity within us. This is covered in a later chapter.

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. 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.

A friend asked me what the experience of awareness is like. No one can describe the experience of awareness or consciousness because it is beyond the mind. The mind is made up of thoughts and memories. Consciousness is not our thoughts and memories and therefore, the mind does not know it. Awareness exists only in the gap between our thoughts; in the space of no-mind.

We can only experience awareness in a relative sense, that is, when there is an object to be aware of. The object may be external (for example, the television, a flower etc) or internal (our thoughts, feelings, emotions, mental pictures, breath etc).

The awareness of an average person will be focused on external things. The internal objects are completely ignored. For example, if we are asked to describe an exciting movie we just watched, we can describe the movie in minute detail. But if asked, which parts of your body were tense during this or that scene and what were your emotions and how long did the emotions last etc? We will not be able to answer such questions because we were not aware of them.

That is why most people seek happiness outside themselves and not inside. How can one find happiness within oneself when one doesn't look inside? Meditation helps to turn our awareness inwards. I read that eventually, our awareness becomes so subtle that even the internal objects fall away and when there is no object to be conscious of, even consciousness slips away. The meditator then enjoys Samadhi.

Love

We are Love

A child's life is filled with love. Everything that she knows or cares about is love; the tenderness in her parents' eyes, their caresses, hugs and kisses, and soft lullabies. Babies radiate love. One look into their eyes and we can feel their love. Be present with them when they are asleep and we can feel the peace they radiate. When you come into their awareness, you become part of their identity. They love you as much as they love themselves.

As we grow up, we begin to suspend the feeling of love to make way for negative emotions such as anger, craving, jealousy etc. We begin to lose this habit of feeling love and develop the habit of suppressing our true nature which is Love. We are encouraged to radiate loving kindness during our meditation practices but unfortunately, when we come out of our meditation and get back to our daily life, we cease to do so. But life is not meant to be lived this way. If we can develop the habit of suppressing our true nature, which is Love, we can redevelop the habit of staying in love all the time. When you are with your loved one, especially children, feel the love. Truly be with your children. Breathe. Radiate your love for them and feel their love for you. Watch movies or read books which ignite the feeling of love in your heart. Relive loving memories. Slowly but surely, we can find ourselves again.

Once I asked a friend to share with me a cherished memory from her childhood. She told me that when she was young, her family was very poor and sometimes, they just managed to get by. In her younger days, she loved a particular brand of chicken biscuits which was relatively expensive. Whenever she asked her father for the biscuits, her father would never say no to her. Somehow, he will always find the money to get it for her. Our precious memories are always that of love. Love is what we are.

Spiritual Masters are reflections of Love

Love gives our spiritual teachers the strength to help us. I sometimes wonder why Babaji is so tough on the people he is close to. Then an example came into my awareness; if a father had a hundred children out of which two are capable and the other 98 are handicapped, the father would put a lot of reliance on the two capable children. The sincerity of the two capable children to carry out their responsibilities with love and compassion is truly admirable. Rudra Shivananda is one such Master. I shared this analogy with Rudra and told him how grateful we are to him for the sacrifices that he is making for all of us.

A heartfelt prayer done out of love can be very powerful. Once I attended a Satsang with some devotees of Amritanandamayi, the hugging saint. The participants were singing devotional songs which I found to be enchanting. I sat down and began meditating. In a short moment, I felt inspiration rising within me. I started praying for the happiness of all beings and made the following prayer:

Mother, I know that you are within me but I only know this intellectually. Please bless me so that I am able to know with certainty like I know my arms and legs are part of me. Bless me so that I can see you in all beings. Bless me so that I am able to help others and when I am tired, bring me back into your arms and give me strength and encouragement. Mother, I am your baby. Bring me happiness with your loving smile and may my smile bring you happiness as well. Hold me close to you so that I am filled with your love and warmth. When I try to crawl away, gently bring me back with your love and compassion. Mother, I am confused and there is a burden in my heart. Please fill me with your love.

I then opened my eyes and my gaze rested on Amma's picture. Her eyes looked alive and she was looking directly into my eyes. I could feel the energy rise within me. I felt joy and bliss.

Before I went to the centre, I was feeling very tired. I almost convinced myself to just rest and meditate at home. What happened was completely opposite. I left the centre feeling energized and filled with joy. Mother, we are your children struggling to find you. Please shine your love on our path so that we are able to find you easily.

A few days later, I penned these words in my Spiritual Diary, “Material gains are nothing compared to the love of my Divine Mother. I remember yesterday the joy I felt when I look at Amma’s picture. It was as if she was actually there looking at me with love in her eyes. That is true joy and happiness. Why chase after power and wealth which leads only to suffering if we are not able to control our mind. Attaining a position will lead to the fear of losing that position. We often create a picture of happiness in the future from getting something by filtering out all the negative aspects. This ‘imagined’ future happiness causes suffering in the present moment because it brings about craving or the feeling of discontentment. When one goes around searching for happiness and trying out different combinations of external factors (family, career, friendship etc) to get happiness, the goal is often elusive. We already have all that we need, here and now. All of us have the Divine within us and we are all within the Divine. We just need to sit, relax and calm ourselves to enjoy the bliss within us.”

Happiness is a state of being. When we fall in love, we get a glimpse of true happiness because we forget ourselves. Suddenly, our past and future does not matter, as long as we are with our loved ones. We are absorbed in the present moment. This is how we should live our daily lives. Deepak Chopra wrote, “to love, be loveable”. Be a baby again. Don’t choose to be ‘loveable’ only to certain selected people. We choose to be lovable when we are with everyone.

In the Lamrin teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, there is a contemplation that can help us to develop unconditional love. It highlights the fact that we have taken countless rebirths and all beings have in one life or another been our mother. Now, if you are a parent, you can understand the unconditional love that you have for your own

child. All beings have, in one life or another, felt that way towards us. Before praying for the happiness of others, I usually contemplate this truth. It adds gratitude and love to my prayer.

Expectations pollutes Love

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 seem 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! ¹

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

¹ Source; The Star dated 10 August 2008.

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.

A Candle that Lights Another

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. The following stories of Tzu Chi volunteers in Africa illustrate this¹.

Adelaide Njapha

Adelaide Njapha's story was filled with blood and tears. "Some mobsters burst into house after house in the village, killing people and stealing valuables. They fired eight shots at me, and they killed my children." Adelaide described the tragedy that happened over a decade ago as calmly as if she were relating someone else's story. The horrible event was triggered by dissension between different political cliques. Although Adelaide did not belong to any of the groups, she still became a victim of their conflict.

"At that time, I really hated those people," she said. After surviving the incident, she tried to locate the murderers with the intention of avenging the deaths of her children. She told herself she would ask a group of friends to kill those mobsters when she tracked them down. It wasn't until a friend invited her to volunteer for Tzu Chi that her hatred started to subside.

¹ Source: Tzu Chi Quarterly, Spring 2008. Tzu Chi is a non-profit organization which is not affiliated with any religion although it was founded by a Buddhist nun. Its aim is to help those in need and alleviate suffering in the world.

"Tzu Chi volunteers came from distant Taiwan and told us that they'd come here to give us love. They hoped we could also love our neighbours and the people around us." The love she received from Tzu Chi helped soothe her pain and gradually she, a Catholic who knew that it was a virtue to forgive and forget, let go of her hatred and started forgiving the people who once hurt her. "Tzu Chi, like my Catholic faith, teaches me to love others as I love myself."

After joining Tzu Chi, Adelaide bravely walked into an enemy village whose residents had once hurt her so badly, but she went there not to seek revenge but to bring love. "In the beginning I was afraid that they would kill me, but now I'm not afraid anymore because they all know what I'm doing there."

After experiencing bloody violence and the pain of losing her children, Adelaide now focuses her life on raising her only granddaughter and caring for her people in an effort to resolve hatred and conflict with love.

Mini Qhelephi Ngcobo

In a corner of a village, some female volunteers were cooking food in big pots; the smoke from the burning firewood enveloped them. Children as young as five years old wolfed down the food handed to them. The amount they ate was enough to feed a regular adult, but they still looked like they could take in more. Tzu Chi volunteer Huang Chun-kai said that it was because the children were too hungry; it might be their only meal of the day.

The rice and vegetables the children were eating were all donated by volunteers and villagers. Whenever there is a shortage of food, volunteers cook cornmeal for the children so that they can at least get some nourishment.

Mini Qhelephi Ngcobo, who has adopted 73 orphans, is very grateful for the food donations from local villagers, who are doing their best to help out.

The stream of love has also affected young people. Mini said that students from a nearby university had joined up to volunteer their services, and that her nine-year-old son, Thabani Ngcobo, influenced by her charity work, had also started donating his pocket money to help people.

Thabani often plays with the orphans his mother has adopted, and he often sees his mother and other volunteers cooking meals for his playmates. Wanting to help, he saves his pocket money in a small can and then gives the money to the volunteers. "Please use the money to buy food for them." Thabani's naive words bring smiles to the volunteers' faces. His little gestures of love indicate that new seeds of love have taken root in the native soil.

The Spiritual Masters advises us to serve without any expectations of reward. We may see this as difficult to do but the stories above shows that this is something that comes naturally. Adelaide and Mini were victims of circumstances themselves but the love of Tzu Chi volunteers changed their lives and they became volunteers themselves. They serve others because they remember the love they felt when they were helped. The joy of serving is the only reward they ever want.

Our Love can be Sensed

MG Satchidananda wrote, "studies in psychology have revealed that most persons form fairly accurate impressions of others within a few moments. It is as if the human being is able to quickly scan others and absorb, even intuitively, many valid factors. However, these impressions provoke reactions that are usually coloured by one's own tendencies and feelings, which in turn create judgments. For example, a recent study of people being interviewed revealed that interviewees who felt empathy for their interviewers, tended to be selected for the position, even though their answers and qualifications were often not adequate, while interviewees who felt some dislike or antipathy for the

interviewer did not succeed, even when their answers and qualification were exceptionally good. This indicates that the interviewers formed judgments about the interviewees based upon subjective factors, including emotions, even intuition, more than upon objective facts. In other words, we have the ability to sense the judgments others have about us”.

“Blessing others, loving others is always a better alternative to judging. Our thoughts and prayers have significant effects on others, and we can really make a difference in the lives of others by our good thoughts and blessings. On an occult level, thought forms have a life of their own. When we think of others, good or ill, we produce thought forms that attach themselves to these persons and influence their behavior and experiences”¹.

Our thoughts are projected outwards in the form of energy and get picked up by the other party. If the thoughts are positive, they will induce positive feelings in the other party and vice versa. That is why loving and kind thoughts attract others into our lives.

¹ ‘Judgment, or How to Avoid Harming Others and Ourselves’ by MG Satchidananda. The article can be found in his website www.babaji.ca

Surrender

Where all Religions are Pointing to

Yogiraj Gurunath Siddhanath advises that all path leads to God or enlightenment. The best path for a person is the path that suits his/her mental dispositions.

Ultimately all religions teach us to stop identifying with our mind and body and ego. When we do not identify with the ego, there is no longer any need to think so much of the past and the future. Viewed another way, when we think of the past and future, we identify with the ego and this disturbs our peace. When we remain in the present moment, we are fully aware of the present. We can only see the screen when we stop the movie projector. We are the screen, the movie projector is our identification with our mind-body personality and the movie projected on the screen is our thoughts.

All religions point towards the understanding of the false Self and the realization of who we truly are – pure consciousness which is bliss, joy and peace. Pure consciousness can never be tainted. The Masters from various religions tells us to be selfless and practice virtue. Christianity teaches that God is omnipresent. There is no where that God does not exist. Hinduism teaches we are God and the oneness of all beings. A core teaching in Theravaden Buddhism is that of ‘Anata’ or ‘no-Self’. It teaches that the ‘I’ does not exist. The core teaching of Mahayana Buddhism is ‘Sunnyata’ or emptiness. It teaches that everything is empty of inherent existence and that nothing exists independently on its own. Towards the end of his life, the Buddha insisted that he be called the Tatagatha which means ‘suchness’. He does not want his disciples to confuse him for his mind and body. Once we cease to identify with our mind and body, separation cease to exist and virtue arises naturally. Virtue no longer requires effort and mental conflicts cease.

Once, a Buddhist monk approached a man of another religion for food. To a Buddhist monk, the offering of food to a sincere monk provides an

opportunity to the giver to gain bountiful merits in accordance with the law of cause and effect. It is called 'Dana'. The man was reluctant to make the offering as he was of a different religion. The monk explained to the man that his heart is not of any religion, not Buddhist, Muslim or Christian. Religion is only important in this world of duality and not in the cosmic consciousness where duality does not exist. When our ego identifies with 'our religion', problems arise. There are wars that are carried out in the name of religion. This shows how 'unconscious' our world is now.

My Chosen Path

A famous saint, the late Yogi Ramaiah used to say that Babaji could raise up any number of souls to the level of saints, sages and siddhas, if they would but surrender to Him. The path that I chose to let go of my ego is that of surrender to Babaji. Ego exists based on time, that is, thoughts of the past and the future. By surrendering to the divine, I let go of the past because whatever happened to me in the past is necessary to bring me to my current spiritual development. Nothing happens randomly. Events happen for one ultimate purpose; for our spiritual evolution. All of us contribute to the spiritual development of others in our own way. Even our enemies contribute to our spiritual development because they provide us with the opportunity to understand how anger and forgiveness arise within us. They help us to understand ourselves.

I let go of my future because I know that Babaji has been guiding me all my life and I know that he will continue to guide my loved ones and I until the day we merge into God consciousness. By surrendering to the Divine, we let go of our worries about the future and our expectations of how the future should be. We often mistake 'worrying' for planning. We justify being absorbed in thinking about the future for the sake of planning. Planning is done objectively. If our thoughts of the future are highly charged with emotions, it is not planning! It is either worrying or craving.

Let thy will be done. Babaji knows what is best for me. I do not have an omnipresent mind. I cannot see the full implications of events. The law of karma is difficult to understand. I cannot tell if something that happens to me is good or bad. There are always a left and right side to everything – a good and a bad. We live in a world of duality.

Everything positive must come with a negative aspect. Only Babaji knows what is best for me. Therefore, I surrender to HIS guidance. He is my Satguru and HIS only interest is my enlightenment. Therefore, I accept whatever that comes. I avoid setting standards and expectations. I know that later, I will see why things happened the way they did. Then, I will understand, and will thank Babaji for it. I am sure of that.

Amritanandamayi gives a very good reason why we should surrender to the Divine. We are like little children and life is always presenting us with a choice between a bowl of colourful candies and a bowl of gold. Very often, most of us will choose the bowl of candies because we have tasted the candies before and we enjoyed them. Who knows what this bowl of golden colour stones will taste like?

We often have to have something to look forward to; to feel ‘happy’. But that feeling is ‘excitement’ not happiness. There is a big difference. Excitement disturbs our peace of mind but happiness brings us inner-peace. One is chasing after an imagined future happiness, and the other is joy and bliss in the present moment. We need to be aware to be able to know the difference.

The wise do not take delight in the seemingly positive events and do not suffer in seemingly negative events. We do not know what is positive and what is negative. Only time will tell. The only thing that we can be certainly positive of is enlightenment. That is our ultimate goal. Everything else is but fluctuations in consciousness. Do not identify with them. We observe their effects on our body and emotions, and let them go with pure awareness. Awareness is the condition for inner-peace and bliss. A lack of awareness is a necessary condition for mental suffering.

Let us enjoy the scenery that the Divine has created for us. See the bigger picture, the overall scenery instead of focusing on the small imperfect details. All the imperfect details merge together to form the overall beautiful picture. Just be still and enjoy.

Human life is very fragile. There are thousands of diseases that could kill us. Everyday we read about death from illness, accident and crime. We read about cruel personalities who could kill others without a second thought. However, there is a universal force that can protect us. It is called by many names – Cosmic consciousness, the Divine, GOD etc. The name does not matter. Babaji is one of the manifestations of this force. By surrendering to Babaji, we can be free of fear and worries. Even if unfortunate things happen to us, it would happen in a manner whereby we can advance spiritually. By surrendering to Babaji, I am not afraid of being reincarnated thousands of times in the future as long as Babaji continues to protect and guide me. I want to be a perfect instrument of this universal force which manifests as Babaji.

Babaji is my source of comfort amidst all these suffering. In the book the Voice of Babaji, Babaji made a promise to Neelakantan that he will guide and protect him and his loved ones in their current and future lives until they merge into God Consciousness. Although Babaji did not tell me the same thing but I know that his love for all his children is the same. Therefore I am comforted that we are all protected by the Divine.

Children are very good at surrender. When they are in the arms of their mother, they surrender completely to their mother's protection. Whatever problem that arises, they know that their mother will solve them. We should surrender in a similar manner to our Divine Mother. SHE will care for us and protect us, if we allow her to. So, even with small problems, give them to the Divine. Divine Mother knows best. She loves us and will only allow beneficial things to happen to us even though they may seem bad at the moment. Leave it to Divine Mother. If I think back at all the seemingly negative events that happened to me five years ago, I now see that they were necessary. I would not change a thing because I would not be where I am now if those events did not

occur. If you look back at the events that happened to you in the past, it is very likely that you will make a similar conclusion.

When faced with a problem, we should remind ourselves that all things are impermanent. The night will give way to the day in due course. We accept our problems with equanimity and we know that 'this too will pass'. We then use the suffering as a subject for contemplation and gain an understanding of this world of duality. We use it to train our minds, increase our ability to remain aware and be at peace.

I like to repeat my illustration here on how a Guru trains us. Let's say we are driving a racing car and are about to crash against a side wall. In such a situation, we should always look towards where we want to steer to instead of the wall. Habitually, we will look towards the wall and inevitably, crash into it. The Guru will tell us that it is understandable but keep creating opportunities for us to train ourselves until we get rid of this habit of looking at the wall. When this habit is overcome, we will then have removed one layer of the habitual pattern that forms part of our ego. I see this happening in my own life. Every time, I am faced with a situation which tests my karmic tendencies, thoughts often come into my awareness, telling me whether I have chosen wisely. Whether I acted based on my karmic tendency or I acted based on wisdom, a lesson will be thought.

Organising Kriya Yoga Seminars

When I volunteered to organise the Kriya Yoga initiation seminars in Malaysia, I was worried. I was particularly concerned about incurring losses on the seminars resulting in financial pressure on the teacher. The cost of the air ticket for the master, Rudra Shivananda, to fly from USA to Singapore and Malaysia is substantial. When I went around looking for an appropriate venue, I was further discouraged by the costs quoted. These costs will increase the proposed contribution for the seminar and give the impression that the seminar is a commercial undertaking rather than a sincere effort to spread the teachings.

At that point, a thought came to me to surrender to Babaji. Intuitively, I had (and still have) the assurance that Babaji will take care of everything and instantly, my worries went away. The ideas just came naturally and everything fell into place easily. The number of participants in the past seminars was just right for the size of the hall. I did not have to turn anybody away. You see, when we carry out our responsibilities with the attitude of surrender, the Divine can help us more easily because the interference from our ego (our selfish thoughts) are removed. The Divine will always help us, if we allow it.

Surrender must come from the Heart

When I pray to the Divine, I do so with thoughts of surrender. I believed that my attitude of surrender was genuine until certain events occurred that made me realise that it was superficial. The first event was in November 2007 when I attended the Level 2 initiation seminar conducted by Rudra Shivananda. During the seminar, he shared with us the objectives of various mantras which we could choose for him to transmit to us. One of the mantra was the mantra of total surrender to Babaji. He mentioned that by chanting the mantra, Babaji will take over control of our day to day lives. Forgive me if I misinterpreted him but basically, that was the impression I had. I was stung for while. I am happy with the way things are. I do not want to change it. Of course, that was my ego talking. After the seminar, I thought long and hard about the event and contemplated the meaning of surrender. At that point, I truly decided to submit fully to the Divine's will, whatever it may be. However, my ego was still expecting good things from the Divine, that is, those that the ego accepts as good.

One day, on discussing a certain topic with Rudra, he asked me, "What do you expect from a Guru?". The question triggered a very important question; What do you expect from Babaji (or from the Divine)? All this while, I was expecting worldly things such as the perfect job, protection from harm and so on. I realised that these are merely things which points to what I truly want; inner-peace, bliss and happiness. I want that from Babaji. But this is a paradox because the 'I' is the

obstacle to the goal sought after. I want to stop identifying with the 'I'. All of us have the same goal. We just need to realise what is false to see the truth. To do that, we need to understand ourselves and to understand ourselves; we need to have awareness in our daily lives. The path to self-realisation need not be made more complicated than this.

Choice of a Spiritual Guide

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.

Babaji in my Life

I am placing this towards the end of this book because I believe that in our spiritual quest, our experiences are of secondary importance compared to the ultimate goal of everlasting happiness or self-realisation. Although spiritual experiences may sometimes encourage us to intensify our practices, they can also be a distraction if these experiences feed the ego. However, I would like to share some of my experiences not already talked about in the earlier chapters to show the unconditional love that the Divine has for all of us.

In 2002, I stumbled on a book entitled ‘The Autobiography of a Yogi’ by Paramahansa Yogananda. The book attracted me to Kriya Yoga and I wanted to learn the highly praised techniques. There is a passage in the book stating that if one prays earnestly to Babaji, he will answer one’s prayers. I closed the book and prayed for Babaji to send a master to teach me Kriya Yoga. I am sure that if Babaji answered my prayer, I will meet the teacher best suited for my mental dispositions. That prayer was promptly answered. Within two weeks, my wife saw an advertisement in the newspaper for an initiation into Kriya Yoga and both of us attended the seminar. The initiation was conducted by the Babaji’s Kriya Yoga Order of Archaryas.

Babaji was quick to send me signs which I interpret as ‘signs of encouragement’. On the second day of the initiation, my one year old daughter woke up and performed the hand mudras taught at the initiation. We thought that it was an amazing coincidence.

I learned all that I hoped to learn during the initiation. Towards the end of the initiation, while the Archarya was addressing the entire class, she suddenly looked into my eyes and said that when Babaji ask, you must serve. That stuck in my mind for a while but it took about four years for me to realize the significance of that event.

In 2006, I had a yearning to serve the Divine and do some charity work. So, I prayed to the Divine to create an opportunity for me. The thought

that came immediately into my awareness was that I needed to take the first step. So I decided to do some recycling work at home by sorting out different types of papers and recyclable items to make the job easier for the collectors. I gave the recyclables to a charitable organization. Within two weeks of that heartfelt prayer, I received an email message from MG Satchidananda, the founder of the Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Archaryas, asking if I would like to assist in the organization of initiation seminars in Malaysia. I jumped at that opportunity!

I organized the first seminar in 2006. On one occasion, I was speaking to another volunteer over the phone in a restaurant about the seminar. A couple sitting on another table overheard my conversation and came over to ask me for a flyer. They called me on the same day to reserve places for the initiation seminar. Babaji's blessing for the couple also serve to tell me that he is taking care of the seminar, so I need not worry much about getting enough participants. The couple later shared with me that only a few weeks back, the Autobiography of a Yogi was placed on their bedroom table by a loved one and they have just finished reading the book before learning about the seminar.

Most of us receive messages from Babaji in the form of thoughts. This comes in our own voice and although we intuitively know that the message is from HIM, we cannot tell for sure. One day, I prayed to Babaji, explaining to him that even though he sends me messages telepathically, I am not 100% confident that it is coming from him. I prayed to him that since I need to be sure on certain matters, please help me contact someone who can talk to HIM in person. Some weeks later, MG Satchidananda sent me a mail from a person in Malaysia. I will call him David. David wrote to MG Satchidananda expressing his desire to meet with him. He also wrote in the mail that Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar appears to him and guides him spiritually. Through David, I was able to confirm the messages which Babaji sent me.

In January 2008 early on a Thursday morning, I had a dream of Babaji as a young teenager with wet and shiny hair. I prostrated to him and he blessed me by running his hand along my spine. I then felt a tinkling

feeling in my spine behind my throat chakra. I have been yearning to see him and I am truly grateful to have this experience.

In December 2007, while doing Yoga Nidra, I prayed to Babaji to help me master the Yoga Nidra technique. A week or two later, I stumbled on a book written by Dr. Mumford, and the book contain detailed steps of making a CD to use while practicing Yoga Nidra. After reading the book, I found out that the author is also a Kriya Yoga practitioner. Jai Babaji! Your compassion is boundless. Thank you, thank you.

The One in All

The Sea and the Waves

In the previous chapter on surrendering to the Divine, I give the impression that the Divine and I are separate. But in truth, the Divine is in everyone and everything: Just like the waves and the sea is one. Once a wave stops seeing itself as the wave, it will see the reality, that it is the sea and all waves are one. In the book 'Sacred Messages for the Parents of the World' co-authored by Ivonne Delaflor and Phil LaHaye, Babaji telepathically said to Ivonne Delaflor, "Let me make this clear, Babaji is a thought. Yes, with a form, but created by thousands of thought-beliefs in Babaji. I feel so very grateful. Yet, without YOU all, "I" would not exist. Got it?...I live! For I AM life itself. I am as alive as you are. My body is a projection of thought-beliefs in me! One day I trust my children will awaken in the NOW to the realisation that they are the creators of all and everything – this book, these messages, this life!"

Believe in Babaji, but more importantly, believe in the Divine within you. Babaji, Christ, the Buddha, all the present and past Siddhas and us are ONE. Is it very hard to see? Do you now see that the ego is merely thoughts? That is why we cannot describe ourselves other than based on references to the past and future. What is behind the ego (thoughts); the Divine! I can only understand this intellectually. I pray that one day, all of us will realise this truth in our hearts.

Only by understanding the personal self will the false fall away to reveal the Reality. Reality cannot be explained or conceptualize. Science has explained it with electrons and protons but these explanations have not helped the world or the scientists who revealed them. Just let the false fall away bit by bit through awareness and understanding. This is the only way.

Babaji describes himself as I AM. He cannot say further because the Divine is everything. We can identify strongly with our profession and

say I am a doctor but the Divine within knows that this is merely a thought and stops merely at I AM.

We are like water in cups. When the cup is filled from a bucket, we call it birth. When it is emptied into a bucket we call it death. The cup is a 'cup' only because there is water to contain. If there is no water to contain, we have to call it another name for we have to find another purpose for this 'container'. If we see ourselves as the cup, birth and death exist. But if we see ourselves as the water, there is no birth and death, but merely the changing of forms. Also, there is no separation between one cup and another because they contain the same water.

When we take the position that we are outside this world of duality and are merely interacting with this world of duality through our minds and body, we begin to experience bliss and joy. We cultivate this experience through meditation. By observing the bliss that arises when we rest in pure consciousness, we begin to enjoy this world. Once we truly know that we are not caught in this world, we are free.

Once I received an email showing a picture of a young man and the mail mentioned that he is Babaji Nagaraj. Thoughts came flooding in my mind. Is it really true? How could it be true? Then I stopped because I realised that it does not matter whether it is true or not. Babaji is the manifestation of the Divine; the One in All; the I AM. He is the image I hold to represent the Divine. Others can choose the image of a Buddha, the Goddess of Great Compassion, the Christ or any other images to represent the Divinity in all. In some of my dreams, Babaji appears as in the picture depicted in the Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramhansa Yogananda. In other occasions, he appears in other forms in my dream. Intuitively, I felt that the person in my dreams was Babaji; but I cannot be certain.

Finding the Inner-Guru

Rudra Shivananda once advised me to trust in my intuition as it is guided by the Divine. Everyone is.

That got me thinking about the word intuition. I realised that I do not know what the word means. Questions ran through my mind: Is it my thoughts, feelings or some magical combination of both? The more I thought about it, the more confused I got.

I know this as a fact; whenever we have any question about the Divine, the answer will come one way or the other; effortlessly. A few days later, I stumbled on a book by Osho entitled 'Intuition; knowing beyond logic'.

Osho stated that the role of the outer guru is to help one find one's inner guru. Once this is done, the role of the outer guru is done. The inner guru is our intuition. Our intuition is beyond our minds and therefore, it cannot be thought about or explained. Our intuition is a knowing that arises naturally, just like instinct. Knowledge is of the mind but intuition is beyond the mind.

Spiritual insights arise from intuition. When something arises from our intuition, there is an emotional release. Once I was angered by a problem at work. Suddenly, in the middle of my anger, a thought came to me, "your emotional reaction to this problem indicates what you could have done in the past that brought you this problem". I saw the workings of karma and realised that I have a choice; allow the seed to strengthen or to end it then and there. I immediately felt an emotional release. This gave me a glimpse of how intuition arises.

Osho advised that to strengthen our intuition, we should focus our awareness on our emotions. Most of the time, we are so caught up with our thoughts that we ignore our feelings. If one pay attention to one's emotions, one will realise that one's emotions fluctuates throughout the day. One may be feeling joyful one moment and the next moment, one may be feeling sad.

Our feelings were not taught to us. We need not be taught how to feel happy or sad; excited or fearful. As such, our emotions are straight forward. Our thoughts may be filled with doubts but our emotions are very clear. So, it is better to trust our emotions.

Our emotions reflect our thoughts. One causes the other and vice versa. By constantly observing our emotions, we are in a better position to evaluate if a thought came from our intellect or our intuition. By listening to our emotions, we are brought closer to our inner-guru, which speaks to us through our intuition.

Reincarnation

Recently, I had the pleasure of reading a wonderful book by Dr. Brian Weiss, MD titled, “Many Lives, Many Masters”. In the book, Dr Brian, a psychologist, shares his story about how he used hypnotism to try to cure a patient, Catherine, of her chronic fears and phobias. In doing so, he accidentally regressed her into her past lives. It was a shock to Dr Brian as reincarnation was not consistent with his spiritual beliefs at that point. He continued to regress Catherine to her previous lives until she was cured completely of her ailments. In the process, Catherine also shared her experience in between lives and acted as a channel to communicate messages from the ‘Masters’ to Dr. Brian. Dr. Brian’s deceased father communicated with him through Catherine in one of the sessions. Dr. Brian was afraid to share his findings as he thought that it would not be acceptable to do so in his field. However, four years later, he felt that the consequences from sharing these experiences could not be worse than keeping them secret. The book, “Many Lives, Many Masters” was the result of this revelation.

There is many other scientific evidence of reincarnation. A best seller on this subject is “Life after Life” by Raymond Moody, MD. He interviewed numerous patients who went through near death experiences and was surprised by the consistency of their experiences. Research has also been done on children who had past life memories by

psychiatrist Jim B. Tucker as explained in his book 'Life before Life'. The researchers investigated the facts provided by these children by visiting the places the children lived in their previous lives and found that what they said to be true.

Now, for most of us, reincarnation is an accepted belief. We will say, when we die, we will reincarnate and take on another form. This is accepted without argument. However, many of us do not and will not live our life in accordance with this belief. If we did, chasing after wealth and comfort, and satisfying our senses will not be our utmost priority. Instead, overcoming our weaknesses and bad habits would be our priority because we would not want to carry these burdens over to our next life. Work would not be a means to an end but an end itself. We would truly work without expectation of rewards.

If we learn to see this life as a part of a string of many lives, then it would become clear that our purpose in life is to experience life to its fullest and at the same time, learn to perfect ourselves. We learn to forgive instead of torturing ourselves by harbouring anger within our hearts; we learn generosity instead of worrying about protecting our wealth; we learn to trust others instead of fearing them. In this process, we begin to rid ourselves the shackles that bind us to our habitual patterns. We begin to feel lighter and lighter; hence the word 'enlightenment'. Truly, if we master our habits, we become the master to ourselves; then we transcend karma. I do not see any other way to happiness.

The Last Conversation

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.

Yoga and Buddhism

When I say that I am Buddhist, I am saying that I respect and practice the teachings of the Buddha. But, I not am saying that I only read books or attend talks by Buddhist Masters and block off teachings of other Spiritual Masters. No, that will only limit my spiritual growth. Buddhist teachings have brought me inner-peace and Kriya Yoga has deepened my understanding of Buddhism. In this chapter, I hope to show that both Buddhism and Kriya Yoga are not and never was, intended to be religions.

The foundation of Buddhism is based on three simple principles; Anicca (Impermanence), Dukkha (Suffering) and Anatta (No-Self). Yes, from these three principles, millions of books have been written. This is because our beliefs, perceptions and conditionings are as varied as the number of people on this planet. Each one of us has different beliefs and thus, the required approach to help each of us understand the principles can be very different.

Buddhism teaches us that we are not our body, feelings, perceptions and mental formations (thoughts and images). We can easily come to that conclusion with our body. For example, if one's arm is amputated, the Self still exist. Similar rational conclusions can be made with the other aspects for example, our feelings, perceptions and mental formations changes all the time. Therefore, they cannot be the Self. If they are the Self, the Self would vanish each time they go away. However, understanding these concepts INTELLECTUALLY is of no use. We need to rid ourselves of the HABIT of identifying with our Mind-Body personality or our ego.

We all know that changing a habit is very difficult especially this habit of identifying with our Mind-Body personality. It seems almost impossible. Yes, but only almost! We can slowly reduce the power of this habit through awareness. Through awareness, we can realise the three basic principles that underlies the teachings of Buddhism; Impermanence, Suffering and No-Self. We can see all these when we observe our body, feelings, perceptions and mental formations. We will

use our negative thoughts as an example. When negative thoughts arise, our emotions will be negatively affected. If we are aware, we will realise that these thoughts came on their own accord. Some externality stimulated it. We did not choose to think those thoughts. From that, we observe the teachings of No-Self (Anatta). Our awareness of our negative emotions tells us that identification with the thoughts or our ego has brought suffering (Dukkha). We then bring our awareness to our breath, the thoughts and the negative emotions and watch them with love and compassion. We see the opportunity to learn from this event and watch them with a keen intention to understand the Self. These negative thoughts and emotions will slowly fade away as the negative thoughts lose their emotional charge in the light of our awareness. From that, we experience impermanence (Anicca). This is consistent with the Buddhist sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

Now, let us address the apparent inconsistencies between Yoga and Buddhism. Consider the following remarks:

- Buddha Nature
- You are God
- No Self
- Yoga is the cessation of identifying with the fluctuations arising within consciousness
- God is omnipresent

These are different sentences pointing to the same thing. When asked, is there a God? Buddha remained quiet. He did not want to answer because he knew that if he said yes, he would create the confusion that God is a separate entity sitting on his throne somewhere in heaven and directing events. Neither can he say no because our very essence is God. So, he says we have Buddha Nature. That is brilliant! Buddha Nature tells us that we are not our Mind-Body personality (ego) but our habit of identifying with our ego binds us to it. With awareness, we slowly let go of this habit of identifying with our ego and become free.

Does this mean that we will suffer until we achieve enlightenment? No, it does not mean that. We suffer only if we live unconsciously. Every time we choose to be aware, we are choosing happiness and every time we choose to allow our habit of identifying with our egos run free, we choose suffering. So, we can enjoy the journey to enlightenment. Awareness gives us a glimpse of the bliss and joy of enlightenment. We can enjoy it NOW by choosing to be present.

Buddhism and Kriya Yoga help us to transcend our habit of identifying with our ego. You see, I can talk about the principles that come from Buddhism and Kriya Yoga, without mentioning them, and the listener will not be able to tell the difference. When I say, we are not our mind-body personality; we cannot say that it comes from Buddhism or Yoga or anything else. All of us experience this fact when we are aware. Buddhism and Yoga give us the tools to help us overcome our habit. That is all.

A Buddhist friend who also practices yoga told me that her other friends are of the opinion that she is straying away from Buddhism through her practice of Yoga. How can one stray from any teaching? One can only understand a teaching better by looking at it from different perspectives. Take the word 'Love' as an example. All of us can have different definitions of Love – unconditional love, love of a mother, love of a child, love of a spouse and so on. All these carry different meanings. Do we truly understand what 'Love' means? Whatever core religion we practice, we cannot allow it to become another layer of conditioning or set of beliefs that veils the Divinity within; or from the Buddhist perspective, our Buddha Nature. We have walked millions of miles to reach where we are now, we cannot let our ego limit our final step into freedom. Be a child again. Learn from everything and everyone.

Conclusion

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!

OM KRIYA BABAJI NAMA AUM

JAI BABAJI!