

Candles of Celebration 2

Enjoying our Spiritual Journey

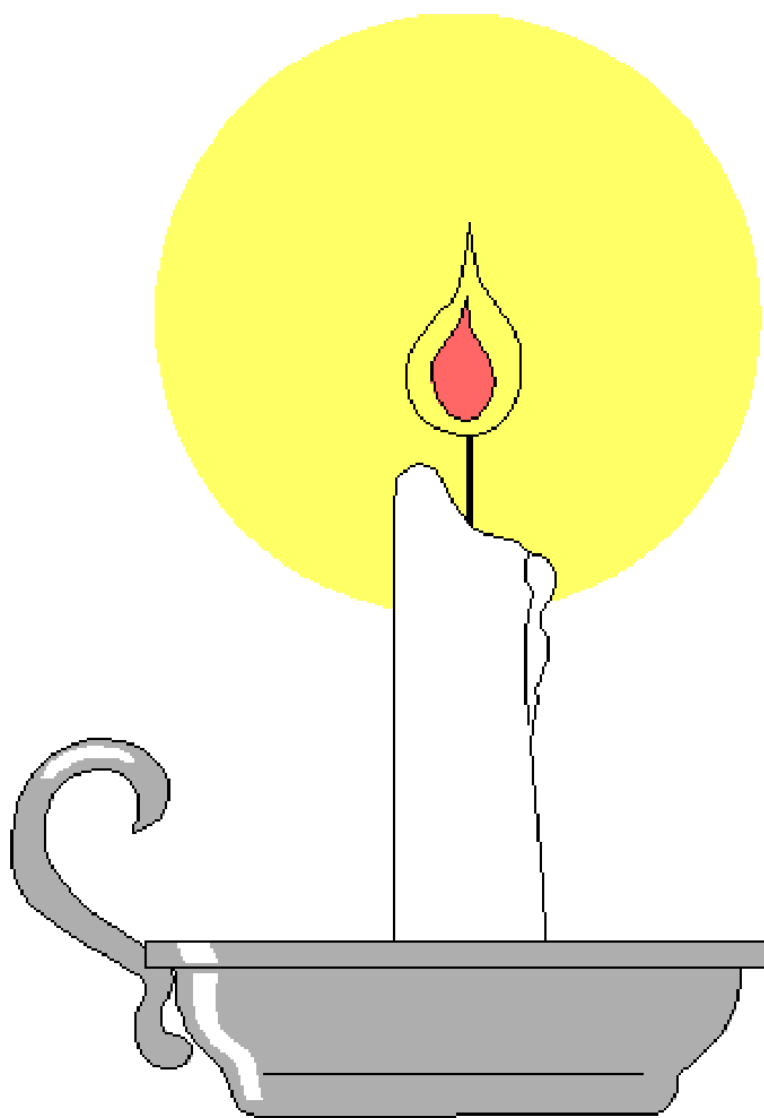


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Yoga

The Science of Kriya Yoga

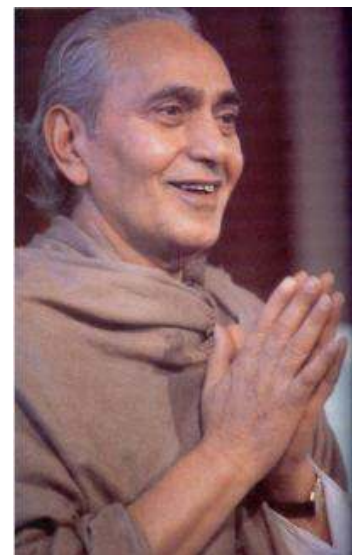


In this article, I am putting together information on the science of Kriya Yoga from Paramhansa Yogananda's book, 'Autobiography of a Yogi' and from the lectures given by Yogiraj Gurunath Siddhanath.

Yogananda summarised in his book, "Kriya Yoga is a simple, psycho-physiological method by which the human blood is decarbonised and

recharged with oxygen. The atoms of this extra oxygen are transmuted into life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centres. By stopping the accumulation of venous blood, the yogi is able to lessen or prevent the decay of tissues; the advanced yogi transmutes his cells into pure energy". A friend commented that after he started practicing Kriya Yoga, he felt more energised and do not need to sleep as much. Sorry to burst your bubble if you enjoy sleeping!

When introducing Kriya Yoga, Yogananda emphasised on the technique. This reminds me of Swami Rama's statement that Yoga is not a religion because it does not offer any belief systems; it provides us with methods/techniques. This is good news because it will not contradict whatever religious beliefs that we have. If anything, it will enable us to understand them better.



Yogananda further explained, "The Kriya Yogi mentally directs his life energy to revolve, upward and downward around the six spinal centres...which correspond to the twelve astral signs of the zodiac, the symbolic Cosmic Man. One-half minute of revolution of energy around the sensitive spinal cord of

man [by using a certain pranayama technique] effects subtle progress in his evolution; that half-minute of Kriya equals one year of natural spiritual unfoldment”.

“The scripture avers that man requires *a million years* of normal, disease-less evolution to perfect his human brain sufficiently to express cosmic consciousness...One thousand Kriya practiced in eight hours gives the Yogi, in one day, the equivalent of one thousand years of natural evolution”.

However, Yogananda cautioned us to gradually increase our Kriyas, “The body of the average man is like a fifty-watt lamp, which cannot accommodate the billion watts of power roused by an excessive practice of Kriya. Through gradual and regular increase of the simple and foolproof methods of Kriya, the man’s



body becomes astrally transformed day by day, and is finally fitted to express the infinite potentials of cosmic energy; the first materially active expression of spirit”.

Yogiraj Gurunath Siddhanath defines Kriya Yoga as the science of life force (prana) control. It draws light and energy into our body, and the shield of surya, the light from the sun, will protect us from harm. The practice will enable us to spontaneously and effortlessly shatter hatred with the light of love generated from our practice of Kriya Yoga. Incidentally,

while I was writing this article, a friend, Puspavathy, sent me an email to tell me about an incident which clearly demonstrates this. She wrote:

“As I progress daily on my Kriya yoga practice, I am becoming increasingly sensitive to the emotional feelings of others, especially with people who are close to me such as friends and family. I could feel their sadness, jealousy, their disappointment and etc....

This is one of the incidences that happened a few weeks ago. As I was casually speaking to my close friend, I felt much of her negative force in the form of disappointments in her life. I enquired and she said that she had been very disturbed lately with her studies and was not sure where she was heading in life.

As usual after my meditation I usually thank BABAJI for his blessings. But this time, I mentioned about my friend's problem and asked for His blessings. Then I thought of her and sent her love and peace. The next morning, my friend came to my office and told me that she saw me in a vision. I was shocked...She informed me that she was in the verge of sleeping and suddenly my smiling face appeared. Then she felt a warm energy engulfing her. She felt peace and serenity..."

The above story clearly demonstrates the love that Kriya Yoga generates within us. This story is also consistent with Yogiraj's explanation of how we progress along the path of Kriya Yoga as outlined below.

Yogiraj explained that initially, the practice of Kriya Yoga will soothe our nerves and calm our mind. We will begin to live more and more in consciousness and less and less in our physical body. As we continue on with the practice, we become more aware of our emotions and as we progress further, we will become more aware of our mental processes. We become less conscious of our body and more conscious of our intellect. Eventually, we will become conscious of our intuition. Our intuition is the 'transit system' from the finite soul to the infinite God; the finite consciousness to the infinite consciousness; the true nature of our being.

After watching the video by Yogiraj regarding the subject in the preceding paragraph, a good friend said to me, "I was pleasantly surprise how accurate Yogiraj's description of the experience that we will go through when we practice Kriya Yoga. It is unbelievably accurate". That is why Swami Rama described Yoga as an exact science; it provides you with a method and gives you an accurate description of the results.

Yogiraj concluded, "The practice of Kriya Yoga will give us inner peace and as we continue to practice, the inner peace flowers into bliss and eventually, the bliss flowers into the likeness of our own divinity".

In his video, the 'Secrets of Kriya Yoga', Yogiraj explained how Kriya Yoga accelerates our spiritual evolution. He explained that our karmic records are stored in our chakras located along the Sushumna Nadi; the energy channel located in our spine. When we move the Kriya Breath up and down our Sushumna Nadi through the force of our intention, the Kriya Breath rubs against the karmic records and nullifies the negative karma. It also transforms our bodily and emotional diseases into positive life energy.

A friend shared with me that he was at first sceptical about Kriya Yoga's ability to affect spiritual evolution. He was trained in the path of Buddhism and prefers meditation and observing the ego. However, he persisted with his Kriya Yoga practices. As he practiced, he found that he tends to recall his karmic tendencies or habitual thinking patterns during his practice sessions. Because he was filled with prana during those times, he could clearly see that those karmic tendencies were bringing him unnecessary suffering and as a result, he could easily let go of them. We tend to be less conscious when we are tired and our energy level is low. We need prana to sustain our awareness and Kriya Yoga fills us with it.

Rudra Shivananda gave an encouraging example of what happens as our karma is purified. Lets say Mr. X has a karmic seed in him to suffer a very serious illness when he is older. Because he practices Kriya Yoga, that karmic seed may be purified and he suffers an illness now that is less serious. Because he is young and strong now, he is in a better position to recover from the illness quickly. Some practitioners may think that Kriya Yoga is creating problems for them and give up. That is a loss they have to suffer due to their karma or more specifically, their habitual way of thinking. However, a practitioner who understands this fact will rejoice as they purify their karma, knowing that it is better to face them now than later.

Based on my own experience and the stories told to me by my spiritual brothers and sisters (see my third book 'Candles of Celebration'), I know that we are never alone when we face our challenges. Behind the clouds of our ego, there is always the smiling face of the Divine. It is like what Yogananda's sister said to him as they sat on the roof of their home gazing out into the star-filled night. She was in tears as she described how she saw the dark sky as a blanket

covering the face of the Divine and the stars are holes in the blanket which the bright light of the Divine shines through to her.

Technique by Swami Rama to Test and Improve Memory



Patanjali taught that we must take our memory under our control. When we do so, we will not forget anything. We will stop reciting the mantra, “I am sorry, I forgot!” Swami Rama explained that we forget because of our lack of interest. If we are interested in something, we will not forget. The following technique is based on his video on the Patanjali Yoga Sutras¹:

1. Lie down in Savasana, the Corpse Pose. Palms are faced upwards and placed about 1 foot away from the body. The legs are spread shoulder length apart. Be comfortable.
2. Play the perfect role of a dead body. Do not move and draw your awareness away from the external world.
3. Relax yourself from head to toe and back from toe to head with the help of your awareness and breath.
4. Start counting 1,2,3....and so on as far as you can until your mind slips and get distracted. When a Yogi practice this technique, he will count from 1 to 1,000 and then from 1,000 back to 1 again. However, Swami Rama advised us to start with 100. Swami Rama affirms that the day we can get to 1,000 and back, we will have our memory under our control.

¹ Please visit www.kriyayogamalaysia.org and select the ‘Recommended’ menu button. The link to the video is under the ‘Practices’ heading.

Powerful New 3-Minute Exercise Improves Memory and Brain Power

My good friend Dr. Subassh sent me this article written by Paul Fassa in the 'Mind Power News' website. He wrote, "Very simple exercise-----usually used to punish children so they will have better brains! Actually we did not realise in our younger days that this harsh punishment was for our good. Yes, the ear alone can be used in acupuncture for a variety of illness". He should know as he is a specialist in acupuncture treatments.

Later, I was pleased to find out from another friend, Kesh, that this is actually a spiritual practice. She commented, "The 3-minute exercise is called "Thoppukarnam" in Tamil and Sanskrit. It is done by everybody in the Hindu Temples in front of the Lord Ganesha (Elephant God as He is called in English). It's like asking the Lord to pardon us for our mistakes and ask HIM to give us intelligence not to repeat the same. A quick washing away of bad karma is also the benefit of this 'Thoppukarnam'. This exercise was known to have been given by Lord Shiva. It is one of the oldest Kriya known to Gods and men alike....".

Below is the full article.

An unusual exercise to improve mental health and acuity has been going viral on the internet lately. It was featured in a Los Angeles CBS News report that has an MD, a Yale neurobiologist, an occupational therapist, educators, and parents endorsing it.

It is a simple routine, and it has created positive results for learning disabled and autistic children as well as older Alzheimer's victims.

And it's useful for any kind of brain fog or dullness, even emotional instability. It can improve memory and focus, and it's even made some a little smarter. It seems to work for everyone regardless of mental condition.

With your feet pointing straight ahead, spread them apart about shoulder width. Grab your right earlobe with the thumb and finger of your left hand. Cross over your left arm and do the same using your right hand on the left earlobe. Then squat as fully as you can, breathing in. That's a little counter intuitive, but that's what you do. Breathe in as you squat.

Then breathe out as you stand. So the breathing needs to be synchronized with the squats. Continue this motion repetitively while holding both earlobes for three minutes. That may be too much at first, so start with one minute. One can go up to five minutes, but three is good enough. This can be done by anyone at any age and should be done on a daily basis until the fog lifts!

Los Angeles physician Dr. Eric Robins says that the brain cells and neurons are energized with this simple exercise. He prescribes it to his patients and has had excellent results. One example of his is a youngster doing poorly in school. After being introduced to the exercise, that child went on to become an A student.

According to Yale neurobiologist Dr. Eugenius Ang, the earlobes grabbed are acupuncture points that stimulate neural pathways in the brain. The brain's hemispheres are in opposite sides of the earlobes. Using opposite hands for pinching the earlobes may have something to do with the way our subtle energies are arranged.

Ang showed that the results from EEG (electroencephalography) readings after doing this exercise indicate the right and left hemispheres of the brain had become synchronized. EEG readings measure the neuron firings in the brain via electrodes on the scalp, and are used to determine brain wave normalcies and abnormalities.

As Dr. Ang states, "... in modern terms, the brain is actually lateralized. This is an ideal hemispheric arrangement, which is unusual these days. It is something that pricey brain technology CDs attempt to do by producing subliminal sounds to the brain attached to audible sounds through a headset". Dr. Ang also does this exercise daily.

The exercise was introduced by pranic healing Master Koa Chok Sui's book SuperBrain Yoga and taught by him personally on lecture tours. Of course, there are many other aspects of pranic healing that Master Sui taught.

Prana is another word for Chi, the subtle life force energy that surrounds and permeates the body. It is the stuff of acupuncture and Qi (Chi) Gong. In addition to the subtle energy aspects of prana or Chi, it seems that combining a mildly aerobic exercise also helps flood the brain cells with oxygen.

At any rate, it's an easy and inexpensive way to improve memory, mental clarity and focus, as well as assist those with debilitating mental disorders. There are those who call it quackery. But you'd be smart to do it daily!

The Creative Powers of Truthfulness

At the worldly level, we can see the benefits of truthfulness. If we are known to always tell the truth, our friends will not doubt our words and agreements can be concluded easily. If we are known to lie all the time, our friends will not even bother to listen to us. I observed that people who often tell lies are often



unconvincing and they are often not able to articulate their thoughts clearly. Perhaps the negative karma of telling lies has the effect of taking away the power of influence from their speech.

A friend told me about a contractor who is known by his clients to be honest and truthful. One day, he supplied two equipments to the renovation site of a client. The client was not at the location, so he left the

equipments at the site. However, some other contractor stole one of the equipment due to a lack of security at the site. When the client called the contractor to check why he only delivered one equipment, he explained to the client that he delivered both equipments there. Because of their long and honest relationship, the client did not doubt his words and agreed to pay him for both equipments.

When one tells the truth all the time, not only will others trust him, the universe has no choice but to comply with what one says. In his book, the 'Autobiography of a Yogi', Paramhansa Yogananda told a story which illustrates this point. Once, Yogananda's sister pleaded to him to help her gain weight. Yogananda knew that because he has never lied for as far as he can remember, what he says will become a fact. He told the sister that after a certain period of time, she will gain the weight that she desired. Needless to say, she gained the precise weight she desired after the period mentioned by him.

In another story, Yogananda sat for an examination paper and later found out that he was supposed to answer one question in Part A and another question in Part B but he mistakenly answered two questions in Part A instead. Therefore, his maximum mark would fall short of the minimum passing mark. When he explained his predicament to Sri Yukteswar, his Master replied, "The sun and the moon would sooner change places than for you to fail your exam". Later, to his delight, Yogananda found out that the minimum passing mark for the paper was reduced to the maximum mark that Yogananda could have obtained. He eventually passed the paper. When he thanked Sri Yukteswar, his Master explained to him that the universe merely found it more convenient for him to pass his examination than to shift the sun and the moon!

In his book, 'Living with the Himalayan Masters', Swami Rama told a beautiful story about how truthfulness will always prevail. In the story, a station master approached Swami Rama and his Master as they got off a train and asked them for a spiritual practice. His master advised the station master, "From this day on, don't lie. Practice this rule faithfully for the next three months". Unfortunately, in the same week, a supervisor from the head office conducted an audit on him. The supervisor asked him probing questions about corruption at the station and he answered honestly. He not only got himself into trouble, he also implicated the other employees at the station. The other employees later ganged up and lied that the station master was the only one taking bribes.

The station master was brought in front of a judge. When the judge asked him if he needs a lawyer, he responded that he did not need one and only wants to tell the truth. He then explained to the judge about the practice given to him by Swami Rama's master.

The judge adjourned the case and brought the station master into his chambers. The judge questioned him about the master and found out that the master mentioned by the station master was actually his guru. He acquitted the station master and said, "You are on the right path. Stick to it. I wish I could do the same".

During the ordeal, the station master's wife and children left him and he lost his job. However, he persevered on his practice. Exactly three months after

meeting Swami Rama and his master, the man received a telegram informing him that his father had a plot of land which was taken by the government and the government now wants to pay him a huge compensation for the land. He did not even know about this land. He gave the money to his wife and children. When they expressed the desire to go back to him, he responded, “No, until now I have only seen what happens by not lying for three months. Now I want to find out what will happen if I do not lie for the rest of my life”.

When Buddhist Monks are invited to bless a new home, they will usually chant the ‘Ratana Sutra’. It is the discourse given by the Buddha during his visit to the epidemic-stricken township of Vesali, to bless the victims and protect them from famine, sickness and other kinds of misfortune which plagued the city at the time. He ended every verse with the statement, “On account of this truth, may there be happiness!” Here is one example of the verses:

He is incapable of hiding whatever evil he does, whether deed, word or thought; for it has been said that such an act is impossible for one who has seen the Path. On account of this truth, may there be happiness!

The Buddha protected the people of Vesali by sharing spiritual truths and using the creative force of truthfulness to bring abundance and healing to the city. After he gave the discourse, the city was freed from the suffering that engulfed it.

The Buddha once converted a serial murderer named Angulimala into a loving monk who is incapable of harming even an insect. Long after he became a monk, Angulimala, came upon

house where he heard the cries of a mother undergoing a protracted labour. Not knowing how to help, he rushed to the Buddha for help. The Buddha told Angulimala to recite the following prayer to the expectant mother, “Sister, from the time of my being born in the Noble Birth (self-realisation), I do not know of myself having purposely



a

deprived any living creature of life. By this truth may you be safe, may there be safety for the child in your womb”. Angulimala did so and the mother delivered the baby without further difficulties. This truth told by Angulimala is so powerful that even now, Buddhist monks chant this to bless expectant mothers so that they are protected from problems during delivery.

When one realise the benefits of being truthful, one will naturally refrain from lying. As an additional precaution, one will refrain from engaging in deeds which would later require one to lie. One would even avoid those people, things or situations that may tempt one into situations which would cause one to lie. Therefore, the virtue of truthfulness can prevent us from many vices!

Telling the truth becomes imperative when we recognise that the practice will eventually give our words creative power. Our prayer will become powerful, especially when we pray for the well-being of others. Even our enemies will be converted to our friends when we pray for them. When we understand this and see its benefits, telling the truth becomes natural and effortless.

Sometimes it is easier to lie than to tell the truth but we must keep in mind that if we lie, we are actually surrendering the creative force that being truthful grants us. That is a big sacrifice indeed.

By the truth shared in this article, may you, the reader, have happiness and the causes of happiness. May you be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Yoga and the Mind

Sujata brought her 3-month old baby daughter to her beloved Master at his ashram for blessings.

The Master was delighted to see Sujata and her baby daughter. With a booming voice, he said, "Sujata! I am so glad to see you!"

"Guruji, I have been looking forward to visit you for months... I brought my daughter for you blessings".

The Master smiled and had a cheeky look, "What do you wish for me to bless her with".

Sujata was taken by surprise. She did not expect that question. She was just expecting the Master to place his hands on the baby and grant his blessing. The Master sensing that Sujata is thinking hard about the question, closed his eyes and started to meditate.

The first thing that came to Sujata's mind was wealth. But can wealth bring happiness? No, it will just fill her baby with so much distraction that she will be too occupied to seek God. She will be suffering and will not even be aware of it. Sujata herself is happy with just a comfortable middle-class life. More wealth will not add to her happiness.

What about intelligence, power and fame? Again she saw that these will not bring happiness. Power and fame will only attract false friends to her daughter and some of them will even plot her downfall. Everyone will want to meet with her and she will not have time to herself. She will not be able to go wherever and whenever she pleases.

Many things crossed Sujata's mind but she could not see anything that can guarantee lasting happiness. She began to feel frustrated but suddenly, Osho's teachings came to the forefront of her mind: '*One can enter Yoga only when one is totally frustrated with one's own mind*'. These words did not carry any meaning to her when she first heard it but now it became clear.

Osho's teaching all came back to her as if he was seated in front of her and talking to her:

“We live in a deep illusion -- the illusion of hope, of future, of tomorrow. As man is, man cannot exist without self-deceptions. Nietzsche says somewhere that man cannot live with the truth: he needs dreams, he needs illusions, he needs lies to exist!

The present is almost always a hell. You can prolong it only because of the hope that you have projected into the future. You can live today because of the tomorrow. You are hoping something is going to happen tomorrow -- some doors of paradise will open tomorrow. They never open today, and when tomorrow comes, it will not come as a tomorrow. It will come as today, but by the time your mind has moved again. You go on moving ahead of you: this is what dreaming means. You are not one with the real, that which is nearby, that which is here and now, you are somewhere else -- moving ahead, jumping ahead.

And that tomorrow, that future, you have named it in so many ways. People call it heaven, some people call it moksha, but it is always in the future. Somebody is thinking in terms of wealth, but that wealth is going to be in the future. And somebody is thinking in terms of paradise, and that paradise is going to be after you are dead -- far away into the future. You waste your present for that which is not: this is what dreaming means. You cannot be here and now. That seems to be arduous, to be just in the moment.

You can be in the past because again that is dreaming -- memories, remembrance of things which are no more or you can be in the future, which is a projection, which is again creating something out of the past. The future is nothing but past projected again -- more colourful, more beautiful, more pleasant, but it is the past which has been refined.

This mind cannot enter on the path of yoga because yoga means a methodology to reveal the truth. Yoga is a method to come to a non-dreaming mind. Yoga is the science to be in the here and now. Yoga means now you are ready not to move into the future. Yoga means

you are ready now not to hope, not to jump ahead of your being. Yoga means to encounter the reality as it is.

So one can enter yoga, or the path of yoga, only when he is totally frustrated with his own mind as it is. If you are still hoping that you can gain something through your mind, yoga is not for you. A total frustration is needed -- the revelation that this mind which projects is futile, the mind that hopes is nonsense, it leads nowhere. It simply closes your eyes; it intoxicates you; it never allows reality to be revealed to you. It protects you against reality.

Become totally hopeless -- no future, no hope. This is difficult. One needs courage to face the real. But such a moment comes to everyone, some time or other. A moment comes to every human being when he feels total hopelessness. Absolute meaninglessness happens to him. When he becomes aware that whatsoever he is doing is useless, wheresoever he is going, he is going nowhere, all life is meaningless -- suddenly hopes drop, future drops, and for the first time you are in tune with the present; for the first time you are face to face with reality.

Yoga is an inward turning. It is a total about-turn. When you are not moving into the future, not moving toward the past, then you start moving within yourself -- because your being is here and now, it is not in the future. You are present here and now, you can enter this reality. But then mind has to be here.

Start understanding your desires. Through understanding, many of them simply disappear because they are simply stupid. They have not led you anywhere except into more and more frustration. They have opened doors for hell and nothing else -- more anguish, more anxiety, more pain and agony. Just look at them; they will disappear. First, desires which have led you into frustration will disappear, and then you will attain to a more keen perspective. Then you will see that desires which you thought will lead you into pleasure, have not really led you into pleasure -- because whatsoever seems to be pleasant finally, eventually, turns sour and bitter.

So pleasure seems to be a trick of desire: to trick you into pain. First the painful will drop, and then you will be able to see that the pleasure is illusory, unreal, a dream. Ninety-nine point nine per cent of desires will disappear through understanding, and then the final happens. It happens simultaneously: a hundred per cent of desires disappear, and the original mind arises in a single moment, not as cause and effect, but simultaneous, together”.

Sujata thought to herself, “Is the mind something bad?” Again, the distant memory Osho’s words came back to her:

“You needed a mind to survive, and every society tries to force every child because all children, as born, are wild. They have to be tamed, they have to be framed. They come frameless. It will be difficult for them to survive and live in a world where much struggle goes on, where survival is a continuous problem. They have to become efficient in certain ways to protect themselves. They have to be armoured, protected, sealed against the inimical forces in the world. They have to be taught to behave like others; they have to be taught to be imitative. The mechanical mind is created through imitation. The original mind is created by dropping imitation.

There is no way to avoid the mind, but there is a way to come out of it. It has to be accepted as a necessary evil of being born in a society, of being born out of parents. It is a necessary evil to be tolerated. Of course, make it as loose as possible, that's all. Make it as liquid as possible, that's all. A good society is the society which gives you a mind, and yet keeps you alert that one day this mind has to be dropped -- This is not any ultimate value; it has to be gone through but gone beyond also. It has to be transcended. A mind has to be given, but there is no need to give an identity with the mind. If the identity remains a little relaxed, when people are grown up they will be able to come out of it more easily, with less pain, less agony, less effort”.

Sujata shook herself out from her reverie. She saw that she was looking for mental projections of the future and that is why she could not find the right

answer. She asked herself, what will be lasting? What will not end with death? What always exist when one is conscious of the present moment? Then the answer came to her....

The Master opened his eyes, “Have you decided?”

Sujata laughed, “Guruji, you turn everything into a lesson! Yes, I have decided. I wish that whenever my little Sanchita faces a problem, she will always have friends or mentors to give her wise counsel”.

The Master smiled, “Hmmm...why do you wish for that?”

“Nothing is more valuable than wisdom and awareness. Problems give us the opportunity to gain wisdom. With wisdom, we are more able to remain aware of the present moment because it enables us to remain calm. This awareness in turn allows us to observe ourselves and others to gain further wisdom or insights. Wisdom and awareness moves in a cycle and reinforces each other until we achieve self-realisation. That is why I wish that she will always have wise counsel so that her wisdom continues to grow and she becomes more and more conscious of the present moment. The wisdom and awareness that she gains will stay with her even after death”.

Sujata paused and continued, “I don’t want Sanchita to chase after wealth, power, fame or any other illusory goals which she thinks can bring her happiness. *We get caught up with the imaginary future happiness at the expense of our happiness in the present moment.* This is a habit shared by humanity from which very few have transcended. I think most of us know that these things will not guarantee happiness but we cannot see any other option...” Sujata giggled and then sighed, “I, for one, am still caught up with that habit”.

A realisation sudden dawned on Sujata and a wide smile crossed her face, “Guruji, all the spiritual techniques you taught me....they were meant to help me find happiness NOW! All this talk about enlightenment and self-realisation is just to appeal to my habit of looking forward to an imaginary future happiness!”

The Master laughed heartily, “Well said! Well said!”

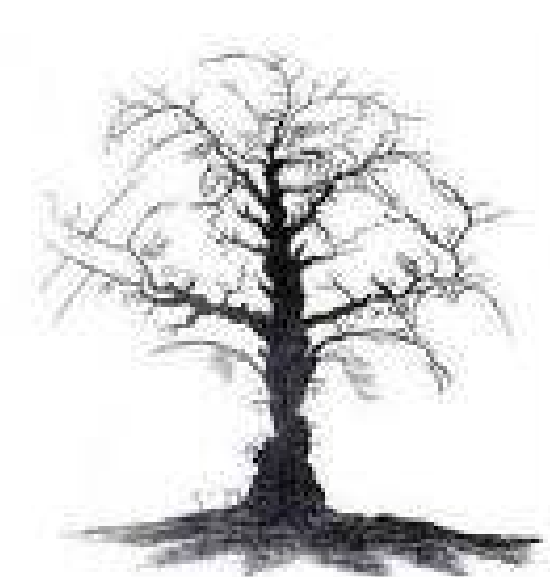
He smiled and touched the baby's cheeks lovingly, "You know Sujata, your wish has already been fulfilled the day she was born".

Sujata's eyes narrowed, "What do you mean?"

"She has you as her mother...There is no one more fitted to give her wise counsel".

The Ego

The Best Kept Secrets of Maya



See the Hidden Faces?

that the seeker will look.

The best kept secret is the one that is openly known but not understood and used. Maya has kept this secret from us by making it appear to be common knowledge; so common that it appears unimportant. It is a good strategy. When it becomes common, no one is interested to delve deeper into it to see its worth. If the secret is kept hidden, then it becomes attractive and many will search high and low for it. The best hiding place is the most unlikely place

The first secret is this; *we are all beings of habit*. In psychology, habit is defined as 'routines of behaviour that are repeated regularly and tend to occur subconsciously. Habitual behaviour often goes unnoticed in persons exhibiting it, because a person does not need to engage in self-analysis when undertaking routine tasks. Habituation is an extremely simple form of learning, in which an organism, after a period of exposure to a stimulus, stops responding to that stimulus in varied manners. Habits are sometimes compulsory'.

We all know that we are beings of habit but we do not use this understanding to improve ourselves. If we truly understand it, we will see the easy answer to all our problems. All the self-improvement books are only giving us new habits to inculcate. If we want to make changes in our life, we just need to break out of the habitual patterns that bind us to suffering².

² Changing our habitual patterns is the main foundation of my e-book 'Filling our Life with Celebration'. I have outlined various positive habits in the book and I will not repeat them here. The book can be downloaded from our website www.kriyayogamalaysia.org.

From a spiritual perspective, our karma is our habitual patterns. When we act out of habit, we are not acting wisely and this allows our karma to unravel itself. If we are able to break out of our habitual pattern, we can change our karma. We can just look back at our past problems and see how our habitual patterns contributed to it. Some people get into fights all the time and see the world as cruel and evil. They do not see how their habitual thinking and emotional patterns contributed to those fights. If they do not transcend the habitual pattern, they have to bring it to their next incarnation and so on until they finally overcome them and burn that karmic pattern forever.

It is bad enough that we do not use this secret; we even allow the world to use this secret against us. Watch a movie and you will notice that every scene is kept within 5 seconds. Our mind is conditioned to have short attention spans. Modern technology speeds everything up to the point that speed is expected of us. Everyone is moving at a frantic pace. It is a habitual pattern that is very contagious. The result is a build up of stress, irritability and anger within humanity. These negative energies then manifest themselves as natural disasters.

The Masters say that to have peace, we must remain still. To be still, we must first learn to *slow down*. For instance, if we are in the habit of walking quickly, we can learn to walk slowly. A good benchmark is to walk at a pace that is sufficiently slow to enable us to feel the pressure against the soles of our feet as we walk. Feel the pressure on the sole of one foot as the pressure moves from the heel to the front toes and then to the other foot.

We can allow ourselves more time to drive to or from work. No matter how much we rush, we cannot reach our destination that much faster. My wife often comments that it is sad to see many of the drivers rushing to get to their destination even in the weekends. Old habits die hard. Because we were rushing throughout the weekday, we bring that habit into our weekends. We spend loads of money buying objects to help us relax without realising that relaxation comes from the mind. If the mind is not able to relax, the body will remain tense.

At work, there is nothing that can kill our joy of working more than the habit of rushing through our work out of habit. Because our mind is conditioned to

have short attention spans, we skip from one task to another and give it a wonderful name so that it becomes a virtue. We call it the ability to multi-task!

At the beginning, we do not enjoy our spiritual practices because we are going against our old habit patterns. Sleeping in for an extra hour is a hard habit to break. However, as we continue to go against our old habits and see the benefits that we gain from the new habits, it becomes effortless. We brush our teeth every night before going to bed without a thought to it because it is a good habit that we have developed.

When we want to make changes, the initial effort would be difficult but we should remember that once we get going, it becomes easy and effortless. When we try to push an immobile vehicle, the initial push is the hardest. After that, it becomes easy. However, Maya often wins because the initial effort is made to appear greater than the benefit derived from the good habit. We then give up before the new action or attitude becomes a habit. An action needs to be repeated for about one or two weeks because it replaces the old habit. If it is not sustained, we revert back to our old habits. Therefore, *inertia* is Maya's way of keeping us bound to our old ways. This is the secret that Maya has kept hidden from us. It is not obvious because it is so simple!

Our spiritual practices give us more energy and peace of mind but we often do not see it because once we step into our daily life, we begin to waste the additional energy by rushing around. We then argue that it is not worth our effort to spend time on our spiritual practices and our magical excuse is that we have no time. Maya wins!

Some habitual patterns are shared by humanity as a whole and trying to change it appears to be unusual. For instance, all unrealised human beings harbor anger and hatred towards their enemies. In another chapter, "Accepting Difficult People" we explored why it is important to pray for the happiness of the people who make life difficult for us. This appears to be irrational but once we develop the habit, we will transmute most of the anger in our life into loving kindness and we will have greater peace and happiness.

Before we go on to the second secret, we need to remember that Maya is not a separate being. So we do not need to be afraid or be angry at Maya. Maya is the collective knowledge, beliefs, perception and experience of humanity as a

whole. It is like a giant mental magnet that pulls you to conform to its belief system. If we do what society does, we are normal. If not, we are crazy. Maya makes it difficult for us to change.

Swami Rama's Master once contrived a test for him. He asked one disciple to praise Swami Rama and another to insult him. When he was praised, Swami Rama felt good and remained silent. When he was insulted, he got angry and complained to the Master, "That is not fair. I did not do anything. Why is he insulting me?"

The Master replied, "He is not being unfair. You are being a fool! You are a fool because you do not trust your opinion of yourself. You allow the opinion of others to affect you. I asked them to praise and insult you." Swami Rama never forgot this lesson.

If we do not trust in our own opinions of what is right and allow the opinion of others to affect us, we will always be pulled by the magnetic Maya. Once we transcend our attraction to praise, and aversion to blame or insults, we would be free from the magnetic pull of Maya. We take back the power to determine our own destiny.

Here is another well kept secret of Maya; *Negative thoughts and emotions cannot sustain themselves in the light of our awareness*. Unlike the first secret, it is not well kept because it is commonly known. It is so because Maya place in



us the habit of seeking so many distractions, we do not have time to be aware. This secret can be easily tested by observing any negative emotion the next time it arises. We will easily experience the truth of it³.

A friend shared with me his experience on this subject. He said, "I was looking at the video of Anandamayima, the Divine Mother. I have read that all her disciples feel rejuvenated after meeting her. I think that is

because the Divine Mother takes on the negativities of her followers when

³ A related article is 'Using the Breath to Neutralise Negative Emotions' in the e-book "Filling our Life with Celebration".

they are in her presence. As I watched her video, I asked her, 'Mother, how is it possible for you to take on the negativities of everyone you meet and not feel burdened by them'. The answer came to me intuitively. Because she is in total awareness all the time, all the negativities get absorbed and purified by the Divinity within her instantaneously. Then I realised that we can do this for ourselves *and our loved ones* by training and strengthening our awareness".

His last statement intrigued me. I asked him, "What do you mean when you say that we can do this for our loved ones?"

He replied, "Recently, my wife had a problem with her family. I listened emphatically as she shared with me her problems. I could feel her emotions. I actually felt like I was sharing the emotional burden, which I gladly continued to do. As I listened to her, I maintained my awareness on the emotions that were rising and falling within me and watched them disappear eventually. Our conversation cleared her thoughts. I did not say much but I think the awareness that I maintained throughout the conversation helped to ease her suffering".

I sensed the truth of what he said and felt grateful to him for sharing this insight with me. When helping others, our presence is sometimes more important than our words.



With these 2 secrets alone, we have the key to improve ourselves. From a spiritual perspective, self-improvement does not mean that we add to the knowledge we already have. We improve ourselves by removing or letting go of our limiting beliefs, perceptions, experience and knowledge. By doing so, we lighten our load and

become lighter. We become more at peace with ourselves.

To apply these 2 secrets, we must acknowledge our problems. If we are finding fault with others all the time, we must acknowledge our fault-finding attitude. If we continue to put the blame on others, we will not be able to apply these

secrets that can set us free. The Divine will help us only if we seek His guidance. If we do not have the courage to admit that we have a problem, He will not interfere with the false perception of we have of ourselves. Admitting our weaknesses is what humility truly is. It is the kind of humility that allows us to grow and progress on our selected path towards self-realisation.

Desire; the substance of the Three Bodies that Encage the Soul

Sri Yukteswar passed away on 21 March 1936. A few months later, on 19 June 1936, he appeared to Yogananda in his physical form. Filled with utmost joy, Yogananda rushed to hug his beloved Master. It was as if his Master never died. He could detect the same faint, fragrant natural smell which had been



characteristic of his Master's body before.

After an emotional reunion, the Master explained to Yogananda about the three bodies that encage the soul. He said to Yogananda, "You have read in the scriptures that God encased the human soul successively in three bodies; the idea or causal body; the subtle astral body, the seat of man's mental and emotional natures; and the gross physical body. On earth a man is equipped with his physical senses. An astral being works with his

consciousness and feelings and a body made of lifetrans. A causal-bodied being remains in the realms of ideas...

When man's desire to live is severely shaken by disease or other causes, death arrives; the heavy overcoat of the flesh is temporarily shed. The soul, however, remains encased in the astral and causal bodies. *The adhesive force by which all three bodies are held together is desire. The power of unfulfilled desires is the root of all man's slavery...*

Physical desires are rooted in egotism and sense pleasures. The compulsion or temptation of sensory experience is more powerful than the desire-force connected with astral attachments or causal perceptions...

Astral desires [of beings reborn in the astral realm⁴] centre around enjoyment in terms of vibration. Astral beings enjoy the ethereal music of the spheres and are entranced by the sight of all creation as exhaustless expression of changing light. The astral beings also smell, taste, and touch light. Astral desires are thus

⁴ The famous American psychic, Sylvia Browne, calls the astral realm 'the Other Side'. She is able to communicate with beings from the astral realm and relay their messages to loved ones remaining on earth.

connected with an astral being's power to precipitate all objects and experiences as forms of light or as condensed thoughts or dreams.

Causal desires are fulfilled by perception only. The nearly-free beings that are encased only in the causal body, see the whole universe as realisations of the dream-ideas of God; They can materialise anything and everything in sheer thought. Causal beings therefore consider the enjoyment of physical sensations and astral delights as gross and suffocating to the soul's fine sensibilities. Causal beings work out their desires by materialising them instantly. Those who find themselves covered only by the delicate veil of the causal body can bring universes into manifestation even as the Creator....

A soul, being invisible by nature, can be distinguished only by the presence of its body or bodies. *The mere presence of a body signifies that its existence is made possible by unfulfilled desires...*

When the gross physical receptacle is destroyed by the hammer of death, the other two coverings- astral and causal- still remain to prevent the soul from consciously joining the Omnipresent Life. When desirelessness is attained *through wisdom*, its power disintegrates the two remaining vessels. The tiny human soul emerges, free at last. It is one with the Measureless Amplitude...

In the wakeful state on earth, a human being is conscious, more or less, of his three vehicles. When he is sensuously intent on tasting, smelling, touching, listening, or seeing, he is working principally through his physical body. Visualising or willing, he is working mainly through his astral body. His causal medium finds expression when man is thinking or diving deep in introspection or meditation; the cosmical thoughts of genius come to the man who habitually contacts his causal body...

A man identifies himself about sixteen hours daily with his physical vehicle. Then he sleeps; if he dreams, he remains in his astral body, effortlessly creating any object even as do the astral beings. If man's sleep be deep and dreamless, for several hours he is able to transfer his consciousness, or sense of 'I-ness', to the causal body; such sleep is revivifying. When a dreamer is contacting his astral and not his causal body, his sleep is not fully refreshing..."

Since we are physical beings, we need to focus on transcending our desires relating to the physical senses and burn them permanently in the fire of our wisdom. Sri Yukteswar said to Yogananda, “The physical karma or desires of man must be worked out before his permanent stay in the astral worlds becomes possible. Two kinds of beings live in the astral spheres. Those who still have earthly karma to dispose of and who must therefore reinhabit a gross physical body in order to pay their karmic debts, could be classified, after physical death, as temporary visitors to the astral world rather than as permanent residents...After the astral rest, such a man returns to the material plane for further lessons, gradually accustoming himself, through repeated journeys, to the world of subtle astral texture.

Normal or long-established residents of the astral universe, on the other hand, are those who, freed forever from all material longings, need return no more to the gross vibrations of earth. Such beings, have only astral and causal karma to work out...”

How do we transcend desire? We should heed Osho’s advice that one should not suppress one’s desires. Suppression will only cause the desire to increase within us. If one enjoys burgers but tries to suppress that desire, pretty soon, one will be dreaming about burgers day and night. However, this does not give us the license to over-indulge! There needs to be a balance.

The answer is wisdom. We need to understand what desire is and how it arises. There are many things which we desire. We may desire physical comfort and things that are pleasing to our senses; beautiful objects, pleasant sounds, fragrant smells etc. We may also desire mental pleasures such as respect and praises from others, power, fame etc. Wanting revenge and justice is also a form of desire.



These desires are the chains that bind us to this physical realm and pull us back over and over again after death until we finally transcend them⁵.

Swami Rama warned that for those advanced on the spiritual path, the greatest challenge is the desire for respect and fame. One may have transcended the desire for sense pleasures but the desire for respect and fame still lingers in the subconscious mind. Fortunately, the Divine will often send someone to remind us of this by showing us disrespect. Once while Osho was giving a talk, someone stood up and shouted, “Bullshit! Bullshit! This is all Bullshit!”. Osho’s talks were often designed to shake the listeners’ belief system and obviously, this person was shaken hard. Osho just smiled and said to the crowd, “Anyone else want me to stop talking?” When everyone remained silent, he turned to the angry person and said, “You see, that is the problem. Only the two of us would like me to stop talking. The rest want me to continue talking. What can I do?” Osho placed himself on the same side of the person who just attacked him!

The next time we have a strong desire for something, we can observe our thought process. We will see that desire easily overwhelms us because it focuses our mind on all the positive aspects of the sense object and blinds us to the negative aspects. This is how we can learn from our own experience and use our wisdom to view the desired object with a more balanced approach. We should also question the negative aspects of the object. If the object is something valuable, we should recognise that it would disturb our peace of mind because we will have to worry about protecting it from those who might want to steal it from us. Here is a related story:

When Alexander the Great arrived in Taxila in northern India, he sent a messenger to fetch an Indian Sage, Dandamis, a great Sanyasi of Taxila. Upon meeting Dandamis, the messenger said, “Hail to thee, O teacher of Brahmins! The son of the mighty God Zeus, being Alexander who is the Sovereign Lord of all men, asks you to go to him, and if you comply, he will reward you with great gifts, but if you refuse, he will cut off your head!”

⁵ Please see also the chapter ‘Craving for More’ in the e-book ‘We are here to Celebrate’ which can be downloaded from www.kriyayogamalaysia.org under the ‘Free e-books’ menu item.

Alexander offered two items that he thought Dandamis desired; wealth and his life.

Dandamis replied, "I am also the son of Zeus, if Alexander be such. I want nothing that is Alexander's, for I am content with what I have, while I see that he wanders with his men over sea and land for no advantage, and is never coming to an end of his wanderings...Know this, that what Alexander offers and the gifts he promises are things to me utterly useless; the things I prize and find of real use and worth are these leaves which are my house, these blooming plants which supply me with daily food, and the water which is my drink; while all other possessions which are amassed with anxious care are wont to prove ruinous to those who gather them, and cause only sorrow and vexation, with which every poor mortal is fully fraught. As for me, I lie upon the forest leaves, and having nothing which requires guarding, close my eyes in tranquil slumber; whereas had I anything to guard, that would banish sleep. The earth supplies me with everything, even as a mother child with milk. I go wherever I please, and there are no cares with which I am forced to cumber myself".

One may be tempted to conclude from the above story that money is evil, but that is not the point. Money is just money and it is the thoughts of men that make it good or evil. Sri Yukteswar had to attend court battles in order to protect his property but he did so not because of attachment to his property. He needed his property to serve others, and to not depend on the charity of others in order to carry out his work. If he thought that humanity did not need his help, I believe that he would have abandoned everything for a solitary life in the Himalayas.

Similarly, all of us have certain karmic effects that have been put in motion and we need to work out those karmic debts. For example, if one has children, one has the responsibility to provide for their needs and ensure that they grow up to contribute positively to the world. It is not appropriate to abandon one's family to become a monk or sanyasin.

We could also observe those who already have the object we desire and see if they are happier than us because of it. Let us take the example of the US President, Barrack Obama. He is now the most powerful person in the world. Is

he happier than us because of the position? He may enjoy the envy of others but he is constantly distracted with no time for himself. He is raised by praises from one group of people at one moment and dragged down by the condemnation from another group at another instance. His life is like a perpetual rollercoaster ride. If one defines that as happiness, then one can go ahead and pursue it but I think most of us will have the wisdom to see that it is not happiness.

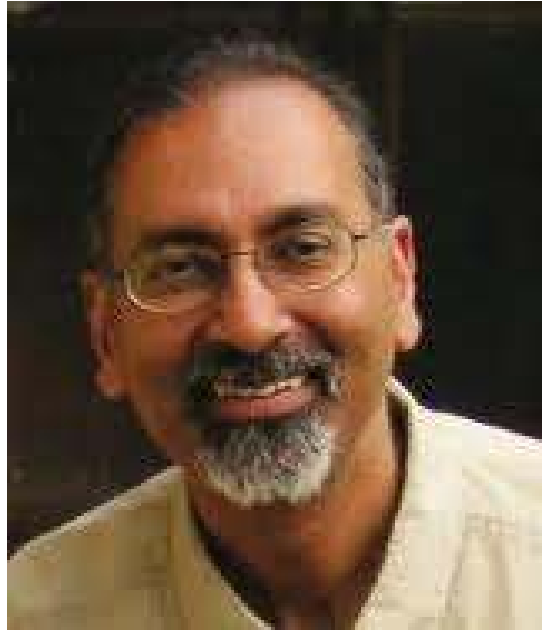
Below are the pictures of Obama before and after presidency. Decide for yourself if the presidency is bringing him happiness:



We could also observe the easy and natural happiness of those who have transcended greed. In his beautiful autobiography, 'Living with the Himalayan Masters', Swami Rama wrote about the absence of greed amongst the villagers in the Himalayas. Their houses do not have locks

because locks are unnecessary. If someone drops his purse, after one week, the purse would still be there because the villagers know that it is inappropriate to take the things belonging to others. They live happily without fear, worry, craving, anger or envy. Perhaps, they could be described as living in heaven.

As Rudra Shivananda pointed out, if we analyse our negative emotions, we can easily see that they arise from desire. *All other negative emotions stems from desire.* When we get what we desire, fear arises because we begin to worry about losing the object. When an obstacle stands in the way of the object of our desire, anger and hatred towards the obstacle arises. When someone steals the object of our desire, we generate anger and hatred towards the thief. If some else already owns the object that we desire but do not own, there is envy and jealousy. Therefore, desire is like a stick and all the other negative emotions are like objects balanced and stacked on that stick. If we can knock down the stick, all the other negative emotions will tumble down naturally. All we need to do is to observe how desire arises within us and the effects of desire on our life. The greater our understanding of desire, the more it loses its grip and eventually, we will achieve freedom. It is that simple!



The Biggest Misconception about Self-Realisation

What is self-realisation? To answer this question, one must first ask the question; what is the ego. The ego comprise of everything that is taught to us as we grew up. All our knowledge, beliefs, habits and perceptions are put there by others. Very little of it is gained through our own experience⁶.

We react to circumstances based on our knowledge, beliefs, habits and perceptions...our ego. As long as we react based on these, our ego is the master. For example, if one is a Christian and one believes that God will be angry if one walks into a Hindu temple, one will not be able to visit a Hindu temple, even if it is the most beautiful temple in the world and one greatly desires to visit it. Our belief system is our master that limits our choices.

Here is the list of common beliefs shared by society today;

- A swami is wiser than any householder.
- The wealthy are happier than the poor.
- The wealthy deserves more respect than the poor.
- A Spiritual Head with a rank recognised by society is more spiritually advanced than an ordinary swami or monk.
- Siddhis or psychic powers are measures of a person's spiritual progress.
- A Master is a person who can demonstrate miracles.
- Spiritual people cannot succeed in this dog eat dog world.
- A true spiritual being cannot be rich.
- Success means triumph over others.

⁶ Read more about this in the chapter 'Going back to the Divine' in the e-book 'Candles of Celebration' (www.kriyayogamalaysia.org)

- A teacher whose teachings are consistent with our current beliefs is wise. If not, he is confused and should be rejected.
- Karma can be washed away. (Swami Rama's master instructed him not to drink from or bathe in the water of Ganges with any idea that by doing so, his sins would be washed off. He said, "One has to reap the fruits of his karma. The law of karma is inevitable and is accepted by all the great philosophies of the world: 'As you sow, so shall you reap'. Learn to perform your duties skilfully without aversion and do not believe that anything can wash off your bad karma. Taking a bath in a river and making pilgrimages from one shrine to another will not free you from the bondage of karma. Such belief is only superstition and has no logic").

And the mother of them all.....

Self-realisation can be explained and understood.

Swami Rama's master once said to him, "What have you learned and who taught you? Explain it to me! Our mother is our first teacher, then our father, then our brothers and sisters. Later we learn from the children with whom we play, from teachers at school, and from the writers of books. No matter what you have learned, you have not learnt a single thing independently of others. So far all that you learned is a contribution from others. And from whom have they learned? They have also learned from others....Your ideas are the ideas of others."

Now can you see what the mind and the ego is? Do you see how you act and think the way you do?

If we understand what the mind comprises of, we will clearly see that ***the mind can never understand what self-realisation is***. The mind is made up of knowledge and thoughts put into it by others. The mind contains only concepts and can never understand anything that it does not already contain for example, one can never understand French if one has never learnt it. Similarly, *self-realisation is not a concept but an experience*. It is just like how the taste of some exotic fruit can never be explained but needs to be experienced.

Therefore, the mind can never understand what self-realisation is. Maya laughs

at all of us when we seek high and low to understand what self-realisation is. Maya laughs even more when we ask a Master what self-realisation is because it can never be explained in words; just like how the colour purple cannot be described in words. We need only to see it to understand what the colour purple is.

The list is long but I am just giving some examples of the beliefs we may have in common. Can you see how these beliefs can determine how we react to our external circumstances? Can you see how the mind can be one's master if one does not make the effort to understand and train it? If we recognise these beliefs and perceptions as merely concepts, they are less likely to imprison us and we will be able to act with clarity and wisdom. Transcending our beliefs, perceptions and habits is a long and tedious process but is highly rewarding. With every belief, perception and habit that we remove from the ego, we become freer and lighter. If we persevere, we will finally reach the door steps of self-realisation.

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

Seeing the Divinity within Others

Paramhansa Yogananda said that when he wants to change a person, he will speak to the Divinity within him and inevitably he will cause a shift within them. The renowned healer and author of the book, 'Beyond the Himalayas', said that sometimes when healing others, he would whisper softly into the patients' ear, "Father, you do not suffer from this illness. Do not let this person suffer from it". These simple words brought healing to many of his patients.



The ego of others is an illusion of Maya. The Divinity within all beings is the true reality. The habit of seeing the identity of others is a habit we have developed over many lifetimes. It is time that we inculcate the habit of seeing their true Divine Self.

Many times, I have thanked the Divine Mother for taking the form of my daughter and my wife, to bring joy into my life. Once, while watching my daughter play, I sent a silent prayer to the Divine Mother, "Mother, thank-you for taking such a sweet and lovely form to be with me". She was about 5 or 6 years old at that time. Suddenly, she just turned to hug me and told me that she loved me. Surprised, I laughed and asked her what that was for. She just smiled and shrugged.

During meditation sessions with our family or friends, we could send a silent prayer to the Divine within everyone to reveal Her presence within us. Let the Divine know that our days are spent separated from Her. In the moments of silence, we hunger for Her presence and wish to feel Her existence. The prayer will always be answered but it is important that we do not have any preconceived expectation about how She will make Her presence felt.

It is easy to see the Divinity within our loved ones but what about the others who are difficult. It is even more important to look pass their ego into their Divine Self and recognize that everything happens for a reason. They are there to teach us patience. Many of the articles I write are inspired by the 'difficult'

people and situations in my life. I pray for enlightenment and the Divine is sending me the help in the form of difficult persons and difficult situations.

If someone is mean to us, we can mentally speak directly to the Divinity within him. We could silently pray, "Divine Father, please be kind to me through this person. I see only You". We are like a child laughing and telling the Divine, "Father, I know it is you wearing that scary mask. You can take it off now!" And oh yes, remember to send the difficult person love by praying that he have happiness and be free from suffering. This is the best way to thank him for teaching us patience and waking us up from our long slumber. It is always easier to play the role of the hero than the villain!

Destiny and Character

In Chinese Astrology, destiny (or karma) is said to determine one's character. On the other hand, one's character is the condition which allows one's destiny to unfold. The question is; which comes first? If a person gambles away all his wealth; is that due to his destiny or his character of always wanting to make easy money?

I heard about a lady who refuses to leave her husband even though he was physically abusive to her and their children. She is a professional and is not even financially dependent on her husband. After every fight, she will always find some excuse to justify her husband's behaviour. Yes, her karma led her to marry such a man but must she allow her karma to force her to imprison herself in such an abusive marriage? Her karmic tendency of being a victim is dictating her destiny and binds her to continuous suffering.

That is why all forms of astrology put a lot of emphasis on understanding one's character and perception of the world. *Understanding leads to freedom.* If we understand what our habitual patterns are, then we can make the effort to rid ourselves of these patterns. We can watch our thinking processes and see how these thoughts lead us towards our negative habits. A person who is always



chasing after the quick buck should observe his own thoughts and see how he justifies taking excessive risk and he should consider the implications of things going wrong.

We repeat our habitual patterns day in and day out because we do not see it as a problem. Because of that, we do not scrutinise our behaviours. We just react based on these patterns. In other words, we become the victims of our karma. We must understand that our destiny and character goes

hand in hand. *If we can change our character, we can change our destiny.*

The first step is to recognise our habitual tendencies that can be harmful to us. The second step is to have the courage to admit to ourselves that we need to change. The third step is to watch our thoughts and see how we push ourselves towards a particular habit. Finally, we use our wisdom to argue against those thoughts to weaken their hold on us.

The first step is always the hardest. Because those habitual tendencies may have been brought from our previous life, we may be so comfortable with them that we cannot see the problem. A person who sees the world as a bad place and that everyone is out to get him, will not be able to see that as a problem even though that habitual tendency is bringing him a lot of mental suffering. He just cannot recognise the problem because it is too close to him. The lady in the example above cannot see that her habitual tendency of being a victim is a problem. She will most likely say, “it’s just my karma,” and allow the problem to persist.

We must understand that upon death, we leave everything behind...except for our habitual tendencies, be they good or bad. If the lady in the above example does not overcome her ‘victim mentality’ in this life, she will have to deal with it in her future reincarnations until she finally overcomes that habit.

Sometimes, we are just not aware of our negative habitual tendencies until a wise and courageous friend brings our attention to them. Unfortunately, most of our friends will not tell us for fear of hurting our feelings.

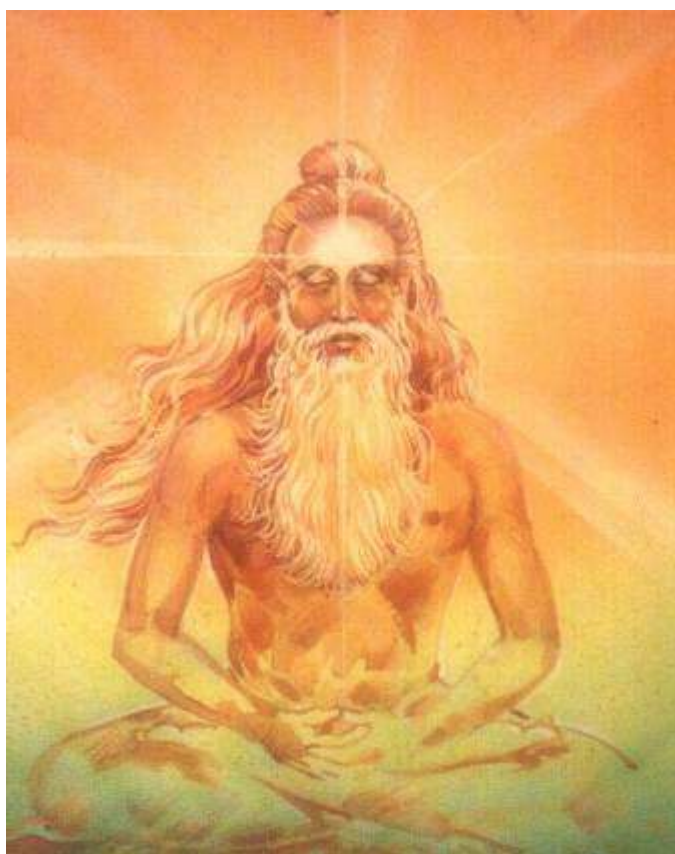
Another way of understanding ourselves is to read about the life of wise beings such as Paramhansa Yogananda, Swami Rama, Swami Vivikenanda, Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa. We can use their life and way of thinking as mirrors to reflect our shortcomings.

The greatest tool for understanding ourselves is our awareness. As we strengthen our awareness with our spiritual practices, we will become more and more conscious of our thoughts. We can observe which thoughts bring positive emotions and which of them bring negative emotions. Our emotions can be a useful spotlight to draw our attention to the negative habitual tendencies that we have. For instance, if we tend to think that everyone is selfish and out to cheat us, we will become fearful and angry. Unless we are fine with being fearful and angry all the time, we should make the effort to

change our perception of others. *Our karma is meant to be transcended*. It is not there just to make us suffer for the fun of it.

Watching our thoughts by itself can weaken its hold on us because every time we shine our awareness of our thoughts, we tend to break our train of thoughts. One thought tends to lead to another similar thought and towards the end, we have a bundle of thoughts that push us to react to an external circumstance in a way that we later regret. When we are angry at another person, we will bombard ourselves with the thoughts of all the negative qualities of the person and towards the end, we will be filled with so much anger that our body becomes tense and aggravated. That person is somewhere far away not doing anything to us but we are acting as if he is right in front of us trying to make us angry!

But if we catch ourselves and start to watch our thoughts, we will break the train of thoughts before they do any damage to us.



According to Patanjali, we can calm our mind with our breath. Our breath and our emotions are so interlinked that they become one. When we are angry, we *must* have short and shallow breath. At times, we may even stop breathing as our chest muscles become constricted. When we are relaxed and calm, we will breathe slowly and deeply. Osho said 'Yoga found this basic thing -- that breathing is deeper than thinking. If you change breathing, you change thinking. And once you know the key, that breathing has the key,

you can create any climate that you want: it is up to you. The way you breathe it depends on it'.

This gives us a quick-fix that we can use whenever we are overwhelmed by a negative emotion. Below is a technique taught by Osho:

“Whenever you feel the mind is not tranquil -- tense, worried, chattering, anxiety, constantly dreaming -- do one thing: first exhale deeply. Always start by exhaling. Exhale deeply: as much as you can, throw the air out. With the throwing of the air the mood will be thrown out, because breathing is everything.

And then expel the breath as far as possible. Take the belly in and retain for few seconds -- don't inhale. Let the air be out, and you don't inhale for few seconds. Then allow the body to inhale. Inhale deeply -- as much as you can. Again stop for few seconds. The same should be the gap as you retain the breath out -- if you retain for three seconds, retain the breath in three seconds. Throw it out; retain for three seconds. Take in; retain for three seconds. But it has to be thrown out completely. Exhale totally and inhale totally, and make a rhythm. Retain, in; retain, out. Retain, in; retain, out. Immediately you will feel a change coming into your whole being. The mood is gone. A new climate has entered into you.

What happens? Why is it so? For many reasons: one, when you start creating this rhythm, your mind is completely diverted. You cannot be angry, because a new thing has started, and mind cannot have two things together. Your mind is now filled with exhaling, inhaling, retaining, creating a rhythm. You are completely absorbed in it; the cooperation with anger is broken: one thing.

This exhaling, inhaling, cleanses the whole body. When you exhale out and retain for three seconds or five seconds -- as much as you want, as much as you can -- what happens inside? The whole body throws all that is poisonous into the blood. Air is out and the body gets a gap. In that gap all the poisons are thrown out. They come to the heart, they accumulate there -- poisonous gases, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, they all gather together there.

You don't give a chance for them to gather together. You go on breathing in and out. There is no gap, no pause. In that pause, a gap is

created, an emptiness. In that emptiness, everything flows and fills it. Then you take a deep inhalation and then you retain. All those poisonous gases become mixed with the breathing; then you again exhale and throw them out. Again pause. Let the poisons gather. And this is a way of throwing things out”.

Once we are sufficiently calm, we can use our wisdom to strike at the underlying thoughts behind our negative habitual tendencies. If we are angry at someone, we can start to think of his positive qualities. He may even have contributed in some way to our well being. We must also consider if we just have the habit of being angry and at that point in time, it was just convenient for us to direct our anger at that particular person.

Awareness is our shield and wisdom is our sword to fight against our negative habitual tendencies. The reward that comes with victory is priceless. If we can overcome our negative habits, we can change our destiny!



Stages of Enlightenment

Johnny sighed as he posed his good friend Richard a question, “What is enlightenment? We cannot go anywhere unless we know what or where our destination is”.

Johnny and Richard are childhood friends. They have always kept in touch and are now in their forties.

Richard leaned back on the sofa and formed a tent with his fingers while he contemplated the question posed to him. After a few moments he replied, “I like the way Osho separated the process of enlightenment into three stages”.

Richard smiled as Johnny gave him a look of surprise, “Enlightenment has stages?”



“Well yes, from Osho’s perspective. The first stage is when we get a glimpse of it. Our thoughts, which comprise our memories, mental chatter and mental movies, come to our mind so quickly that, together with the emotions they generate, appear to have an existence of their own. It is just like a swarm of locust appearing to be a giant from afar. That is what the ego or ‘maya’ is”.

Richard continued, “But there will come a time when there is a momentary gap of no-mind; when the mind is totally silent and we are in reality. It is the gap between our thoughts. The gap is very brief but it is long enough for us to get a glimpse of its beauty. From that point onwards, a seed has been planted. We have seen the bliss that is not conditional upon external circumstances; a happiness that comes from within”.

Johnny could understand what Richard meant. He had noticed that gap a few times; sometimes it happens when he is mesmerised by something beautiful

and once, when something so disappointing happened that he just gave up striving to control his fate. At that point, he felt totally at peace but he could not understand why. Now he does.

Johnny said, “Yes, that makes a lot of sense. What is the second stage?”

“After experiencing the first stage, we start to see where we are heading. Through effort, we start to increase that gap for hours or even days. But the key word is effort. Effort is still needed to maintain that gap of no-mind; the silence between our thoughts. Most people do it through meditation but some may experience it while dancing, gardening or any other activity that can keep them absorbed. But when we let go of the effort, the gap disappears and again, we get caught up with our thoughts, conditioning and habitual patterns. They may not be as strong as before but still, we are caught up with them one way or the other”.

Johnny smiled, “That does not seem too difficult. I don’t mean the part of maintaining the gap of no-mind for days but rather, our ability to maintain the gap of no-mind through effort. It now appears to be something achievable rather than something mystical,” Johnny paused and sighed, “but I am still a long way from maintaining the gap even for an hour”.

Richard nodded in agreement, “Our ability to maintain the gap will depend on our effort and also to some extent, our surrounding circumstances”.

Johnny said, “I can already guess what the third stage is”.

“Yes, I am sure you guessed correctly. It is the stage where the mental silence is *natural and effortless*. We no longer identify ourselves with our mind, emotions and body. The mind becomes a tool and only works when we want it to. When it is not needed, it stays silent”.

Johnny drummed on the table, “That is the clearest explanation about enlightenment I have ever heard”.



“Yes, Osho has a way of making things simple. The beauty of this is that we gain more and more inner-peace and happiness as we progress on our chosen spiritual path. The happiness that we gain from it is untainted unlike happiness... if you can call it happiness....that comes from fulfilling our desires. The

delight that comes from fulfilling our desires is always tainted with fear and anger. When we are striving to fulfil a desire, we have the fear of not achieving the object we desire and we get angry at any obstacle that blocks us from reaching the desired object. When we have achieved it, we are still not free from negative emotions; we worry about losing it and get suspicious and angry at those who want to take it from us, especially if the object is a position of power”.

Johnny frowned, “You just killed off my passion for life,” and then laughed.

Richard shook his head in amusement, “No....I am giving you clarity. I am giving you another way to have happiness. You can still choose to enjoy the best of both worlds but ultimately, all your desires will drop away on their own effortlessly as you spend more and more time with the happiness that comes from within”.

Johnny smiled, “I have a huge reservoir of desires!”

“So do I but shall we just enjoy the spiritual journey?”

Johnny nodded in agreement, his face gleaming with the delight of a new understanding.

The Heart Sutra

The Buddha was staying in Rajagraha at Vulture Peak along with a great community of monks and bodhisattvas⁷.

At that time, a bodhisattva named Avalokitsevara, was meditating on the profound perfection of wisdom. Through the Buddha's inspiration, the venerable Sariputra, a senior disciple of the Buddha asked the bodhisattva, "In what way should a noble son who wishes to engage in the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom train?"

Avalokitsevara responded, "Sariputra, any noble sons or daughters who wish to practice the perfection of wisdom should see insightfully and repeatedly that the five aggregates⁸ are empty of inherent nature. Form is empty, emptiness is form. Body is nothing more than emptiness, emptiness is nothing more than body. Likewise, sensation, thoughts, conditioning, and consciousness are empty. In this way, Sariputra, all things are empty; they are without defining characteristics; they are not born, they do not cease, they are not defiled, they are not undefiled. They do not increase and they do not decrease."

Our form exist because of the existence of the cosmic intelligence or Divinity behind all things. Without it, we will not have our body. Medical science can explain the function of each organ but will never be able to explain how they function. There is an underlying intelligence that coordinates all the functions of our body without the need for our conscious intervention. We cannot even consciously go against this intelligence; try holding your breath. The mere existence of our body is proof of the Divine. Without the Divine, there can be no form. Nothing can exist.

The five aggregates, makes up the ego. We are always caught up with one of or a combination of these five aggregates; form, sensation, thoughts, conditioning, and consciousness.

⁷ Under the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, bodhisattvas are those beings who have taken the vow to help all beings to achieve enlightenment before they themselves becomes enlightened.

⁸ The Five Aggregates are form, sensations, thoughts, conditioning and consciousness.

Our body and consciousness are the basis for the other aggregates to function. Our body creates a separation between you and me. However, the separation is merely conceptual and through our practice, we gradually realise the oneness of all beings.

Most of the time, we are caught up with our thoughts. Our thoughts are our mental chatter and mental movies. Our thoughts draw us away from our present reality. One may be sitting in Malaysia and remembering a trip he had a few months ago to Thailand. When he is caught up with the memory, he is stuck in the past and as far as he is concerned, he is present in Thailand. Only his body is in Malaysia. When he is thinking of the future, again he is magically drawn to another place; away from his present reality. Most of the time, we are living in the past and the future. We rarely stay in our present reality. That is how we get caught up with our ego. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we are rarely present. We are always off somewhere in our dream world.

At times, a sensation may bring our attention to our present reality. It may be a beautiful scenery or a lovely music. Our consciousness may not be caught up by our thoughts but it gets bound to our sensations instead. Consciousness implies that we are conscious of something. When we are thinking about the past and future, we are conscious of our thoughts. When we focus on something with our senses, we are conscious of our sensations. Our consciousness is so occupied by our thoughts and our senses, that our ego becomes alive and existential. Our thoughts and the sensations we experience are not something that exist inherently. They are merely movements of energy. If we picture a green ball, we will say that the ball does not exist. However, we do not say the same thing about the ego even though the green ball and the ego is not very different.

Our conditioning is our habits. It is our perception of what is right or wrong, good or evil, sinful or virtuous and so on. We often react to external circumstances based on our habits or conditioning. Rarely do we act out of wisdom. That is why we often regret our words and actions later on when we are calmer. These habits and conditioning were taught to us. We picked them up as we grew up. Being racist is a conditioning. Seeing other humans as mostly kind and compassionate is a conditioning. Seeing the world as a dog eat dog

world is a conditioning. Our habits and conditioning influence our decisions and actions more that we care to admit.

As we progress with our meditation, we begin to see how our consciousness shifts between our body, thoughts and sensations. We begin to see and understand our habitual tendencies and conditioning. As we go deeper within ourselves, we eventually reach a point that we are not conscious of anything. There are no thoughts or sensations. When we are not conscious of anything, consciousness disappears. At that point the ego disappears and then....

"Therefore, Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no thoughts, no conditioning, and no consciousness. There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind. There is no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no texture, no mental formations. There is no eye-element and so on up to no mind-element and also up to no element of mental awareness. There is no ignorance and no end to ignorance. There is no old age and death, and no end to old age and death. There is no suffering, no cause of suffering, no end to suffering and no path to follow. There is no attainment of wisdom, and no wisdom to attain".

Enlightenment exists because the ego exists. When the ego disappears, enlightenment becomes irrelevant and accordingly, all the various paths become irrelevant. As the Buddha puts it, once one crosses a river on a raft, one will abandon the raft by the river. The raft is no longer needed. Emptiness can be experience now. All we need to do is allow our mind to move within...

"Therefore, Sariputra, the bodhisattvas abide relying on the perfection of wisdom. Having no defilements in their minds, they have no fear, and passing completely beyond error, they reach nirvana. Likewise, all the past, present and future Buddhas attain complete awakening in dependence upon the perfection of wisdom".

"Therefore, one should know that the mantra of the perfection of wisdom - the mantra of great knowledge, the precious mantra, the unexcelled mantra, the unequalled mantra, the mantra that quells all suffering - is true and cannot be doubted. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is proclaimed:

"tadyatha - gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha! "

Which means - Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone fully beyond. Awakened!
Rejoice!

Thereupon, the Buddha exclaimed, "Excellent! Excellent! Excellent! Noble child, it is just so. One should practice the profound perfection of wisdom in the manner that you have revealed - the Tathagatas rejoice!"

Walking the Spiritual Path

Spiritual Independence: Separating the Teacher from the Teaching

A friend shared with me his nightmare. He dreamt of an evil person laughing and saying that he has planted many false masters all over the world. There are so many scandals involving spiritual leaders that I am not surprised that he had that nightmare.

It can be disappointing when a spiritual teacher we trust gets involved in a scandal. When that happens, it is tempting to say that the spiritual path is



garbage and abandon it altogether. If one does that, one does not have spiritual independence because one is not able to separate the teacher from the teaching.

Paramhansa Yogananda met his first disciple, Pratap, when he was challenged by his brother, Ananta, to take a trip from Calcutta to Bridaban and return, without any money. Pratap had a dream of Lord Krishna the night before telling him that he will meet his Guru the next day and gave him a vision of Yogananda. True to the vision, he met Yogananda the next day and brought him touring in Bridaban. He was later accepted as a disciple by the Master. After initiating Pratap into Kriya Yoga, he said, “Kriya is your chitamani (the gem with power to grant desires)...Be faithful in your practice; you will approach the Guru of all gurus”.

Even if the teacher makes a grave mistake in his life, it does not mean that the teachings he gave was wrong or a waste of one’s time. A teacher is also human and may make errors in judgment. Even the Jhanavatar, Sri Yukteswar, in his humility, said to Yogananda when they first met, “If ever you find me falling from a state of God-realisation, please promise to put my head on your lap and help to bring me back to the Cosmic Beloved we both worship”. If a Great Being like Sri Yukteswar is concerned about straying from the path, what more normal human beings who have just glimpsed the truth and are helping others

as teachers. Everyone makes mistakes and we cannot expect it to be otherwise. No one should be burdened with the expectation of being flawless.

So, whenever we hear about scandals involving spiritual leaders, may we not be disheartened. May we persevere in our practice and live the life of a householder yogi as an example to our children. Osho said that the role of a Guru is to help us find the Guru within and once that is done, his job is finished. Maybe, just maybe, the Divine may have to send us an insincere Guru to lead us to our inner-guru. By being insincere, the Guru has also done his job of helping us find our Inner-Guru!

Many Paths, Single Destination

Rita was resting on the bed beside her 3-year old daughter, Angel. The child was fast asleep and the soft glow of the table lamp allowed Rita to gaze lovingly at her serene and beautiful face. She thanked the Divine for giving her such a lovely daughter; she thanked the Divine for taking the form of her beautiful daughter.

Like every mother, she wished that Angel always have a happy and peaceful life. She knows that she needs to teach Angel how to lay the foundations for a happy life; the causes of happiness. She knows that Angel will need to find her own spiritual path; the path that suits her best. She cannot determine it for her but can only guide and advise her. She is wise enough to know that it is not right to force her beliefs on her. All religions use different words to describe the one same destination.

Rita contemplated her spiritual progress so far. She was not spiritual when she was younger. When she first started work, she had big dreams of climbing the corporate ladder and making it to the top of the organisation. She was very proud of her job and the organisation she worked in then.

She read many motivational and self-improvement books. Rita smiled. She realised that those motivational books had spiritual elements in them as well, as they taught her to do the right things and put in her best effort. She recalled the words of the author of one of the motivational books she read, Zig Ziglar, who said, “You can get whatever you want in life if you help enough people to get what they want”. That sounded very spiritual to her.

The motivational and self-improvement books helped her but she felt like something was missing. She felt that to make deeper changes she needed something that cuts straight into the ego.

When she visited a friend, there was a book on Tibetan Buddhism on the table. She flipped through it and she was hooked. The book talked about compassion and loving kindness and provided meditational techniques on how to develop those qualities. Tibetan Buddhism taught her that seeing herself as the most important person in the world is the cause of her suffering. She could see the

truth in this. She observed other people and noticed that those who are genuinely happy and loved by others are those who are selfless and considerate. They naturally make others feel liked and loved because they think more about the well-being of others.

She heard that Theravadan Buddhism emphasised a lot on meditation and self-understanding. She read many books by Thai Buddhist Masters and learnt the meditation techniques taught in those books. She attended spiritual talks by Buddhist monks. The Buddha taught that there is no Self and everything is impermanent. Being ignorant of this reality brings suffering.

The spiritual masters taught her that she is not her body and mind. She could understand this intellectually but somehow, she felt that she has not 'experienced' this truth. She could think through the concepts, for example, if one had amputated an arm, is one now different. One is not different because one has lost an arm. If parts of the body are not oneself, how can the sum-total of those parts be oneself? She could rationalise this truth in this manner but yet, she did not feel any change in her. Thinking was not enough.

One day, she stumbled on the 'Autobiography of a Yogi' by Paramhansa Yogananda. She read the book from cover to cover and was determined to learn Kriya Yoga. But where can she find a teacher to teach her? She decided to put the problem to Babaji. She closed her eyes and prayed, "Babaji, Yogananda said in his book that anyone who sincerely calls out to you will receive your blessings. Please help me find a teacher to teach me Kriya Yoga". Within a few days, a friend told her about a kriya yoga initiation seminar which she subsequently attended". Babaji not only found her a teacher, He made it convenient for her as the seminar was held near where she lived.

During the seminar, she shared with the teacher her problem about intellectually understanding that she is not the Self but, not in a deep enough manner that could change her. She complained about how her thoughts troubled her and she could not do anything about it. The teacher just smiled and said, "You will soon".

Eventually she did, it just happened during one of her meditation sessions. It just became clear to her that she does not control her body and mind. She

does not control her thoughts. She does not exist. She cannot die because thoughts cannot die. She experienced the truth.

Rita sighed. She knew that she has just touched the tip of the iceberg. She does not feel pressured about the path that she must continue to travel but instead, felt excited about the prospects of experiencing new insights. The Divine gives her new insights everyday, making her feel lighter and lighter as she lets go of her conditioning and habitual way of thinking. She recalled how Yogananda describes the Divine as ever-renewing joy. She is pleased to know that one can never get bored with the Divine.

Rita could clearly see how different people will need different teachers and spiritual paths that suit their current state of spiritual evolution. As the saying goes, 'when the student is ready, the teacher will appear'. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that the student will always have the right teachers at the right time to guide him/her.

She smiled, kissed Angel on the forehead and whispered softly, "May you find your own path to happiness. I cannot carry you but will always be there to pick you up when you stumble, my love".

Siddhis- Obstacle common to all Spiritual Seekers

A Malaysian newspaper recently carried an article about a Spiritual Master who is able to take participants on a tour to heavenly realms and meet deities and deceased loved ones....for a fee. Assuming that the Spiritual Master is able to do that, would you try it? And if he was able to show you these heavenly realms, would you take him as your Guru? The most important question is; would his teachings be consistent with what you truly want?

The desire for spiritual powers or Siddhis is a common obstacle among spiritual seekers. It is an obstacle that can cause us to divert from our path thus stalling our progress towards self-realisation. It is rooted in our desire for fame and respect. Because we do not have these powers, we assume that those who have them deserve our devotion and respect. We assume that they are spiritually advanced, even though they may be as much a slave to their past conditioning and negative thoughts and emotions as we are. It is like how we think the wealthy deserve respect without questioning how they achieved their wealth. We think to ourselves that once we are able to demonstrate these spiritual powers, we will gain fame and respect.

Even highly evolved spiritual beings like Swami Rama and Paramhansa Yogananda were not spared from this desire.

In his book, 'Living with the Himalayan Masters', Swami Rama told a story that he once met a swami who could shoot fire from his mouth for several feet. Swami Rama thought to himself that this man must definitely be more spiritually advanced than his master. Even the fire-thrower swami said to him, "You are wasting your time and energy staying with your master. Follow me and I will give you some real wisdom. I will show you how to produce fire".

Swami Rama then went to his Master and told him, "I have found someone more advanced than you, I have decided to become his disciple".

The Master replied, "I am delighted. Go ahead, I want you to be happy. What does he do?" Swami Rama told him and his Master requested to meet this fire-thrower swami.

They walked for two days to meet the swami. When they arrived, Swami Rama was shocked to see the fire-thrower swami bowing down to his Master.

Swami Rama asked his Master, “Do you know him?”

His Master explained, “Of course. He left our monastery some time ago. Now I know where he has been hiding”.

At his Master’s request, Swami Rama asked the fire-thrower swami how long it took him to develop this ability. He proudly replied that it took him twenty years of practice to master the ability.

The Master then said to Swami Rama, “A match will produce fire in a second; if you wish to spend twenty years to produce fire from your mouth, you are a fool. My child, that is not wisdom”.

Swami Rama wrote, “I realised that all such siddhis are but mere signs on the path. These powers have nothing to do with spirituality. I later found out, after experiencing and examining them, that these psychic powers have little value. To the contrary, they can create serious obstacles on the path. Sometimes psychic powers develop: you start telling the fortunes of others, you start knowing things. These are all distractions. Do not allow them to obstruct your



path. Too many people, including swamis, have wasted time and energy on such distractions. Anyone who wants to develop siddhis can do so and can demonstrate certain supernatural feats; but enlightenment is an entirely different matter”.

Only once did his Master display his power to Swami Rama and that was out of necessity. They were walking in the Himalayas when a huge avalanche happened. They were directly in its path and there was no way of escaping. Swami Rama panicked and prepared himself for death but the Master just calmly put up his hand and the avalanche froze! It was only after

they have crossed the path of the avalanche that it began to rush down the mountain again.

Paramhansa Yogananda's brother, Sri Sanada Lal Ghosh, wrote about his life with Yogananda in his book 'Mejda'. He wrote that in his early years, Yogananda often went to the Nimtala cremation grounds to meditate. It is where their mother's body was cremated after her death. A short while after Yogananda started meditating there, Sanada noted that a matted-haired ascetic, dressed in a dark red cloth, often came home with Yogananda and they would go directly to his attic room. Sanada was afraid of him because his eyes were always red and on his forehead was a long mark of deep vermilion.

One day, when the two of them had left the house, Sanada stole up to the meditation room. He gasped when he saw a human skull and two human bones placed crosswise, resting on a wooden stand. The skull has a vermilion mark like the sadhu's. He ran downstairs and told their father about it.

Their father later spoke quietly with Yogananda and explained to him the harm that could come from tantric practices. Thereafter, Yogananda gave up the practice and the sadhu never came to the house again.



The famous American Psychic, Sylvia Browne, was born with psychic powers. She is able to communicate with astral beings and to foretell the future. She explained that she is able to use her powers to help others but when she tries to use it for herself, she goes blank. She explained that she must still face life's challenges and make mistakes. She is also still a slave to her negative thoughts and emotions. Despite her psychic powers, she is still a slave to her mind because she is not yet self-

realised. However, she has gained much wisdom through years of helping others with their grief.

These examples show how easily we can be tempted by spiritual powers. It is a distraction which confuses us to think that we can only have happiness once we achieve these spiritual powers. We mistakenly believe that the developments of spiritual powers are milestones on our spiritual path. That is incorrect. Real progress is the mastery over our mind⁹. When we overcome the desire for something, that is one milestone. When we gain mastery over our anger, that is another milestone. The development of spiritual powers has little to do with the mastery over our mind and emotions.

One may argue that one is able to help others with the spiritual powers. That is true but think how much more benefit we can bring to humanity as a whole when we achieve self-realisation. When one person achieves self-realisation, there is an upward shift in the consciousness of humanity as a whole due to the oneness of all beings. When we use our spiritual powers to help others, we may help a few hundred people or maybe a few thousand. When we achieve self-realisation, we help the entire universe. In addition, one's assistance to others by using one's psychic power would only provide a relief for their current problem. Who will help them with their future problems which would inevitably arise?

The desire for spiritual power is one of the many desires which we need to transcend in order to let go of our attachment to our physical body. When we develop these powers, let us remind ourselves that these are merely distractions which we should not get attached to. May we stay focused on our path towards self-realisation.

⁹ Please see also the article "Spiritual Progress" in the e-book "Candles of Celebration" which can be downloaded from www.kriyayogamalaysia.org

Living Meaningfully

To be at Peace, Let go of your Expectations

The Buddha taught that our desires are the causes of our suffering. Our expectations are the manifestation of our suffering. As I look into my own suffering, I find that the causes of my suffering often come back to my *expectations* of how things or other people should be.

If we were to live without electricity or running water, we would be miserable. But our ancestors lived in a time when they do not have such facilities and yet, they could find happiness. We are happy with our car...until our neighbour buys a bigger car. A friend once complaint to me that there is so much pressure in her life because her friends kept upgrading their lifestyle; and she could not keep up. My jaws dropped when I heard it. How could the lifestyle of her friends affect her own comfort? If her friends have more money, how does that benefit or harm her? They are not going to give her their money and their wealth does not reduce her wealth in any way.

Perhaps teenagers are more vulnerable to the suffering caused by expectations or desires. They may be happy with what they have one day and feel inadequate the next day because their friends bought something better. My friend has a swimming pool at his house and his children were happy with it until they attended a classmate's birthday party. Her swimming pool was bigger! So, his children started complaining that their swimming pool is too small. Suddenly, he felt that he should get a bigger house. He is no longer contented. With just a snap of his finger, his mind brought him suffering.

Osho said that we cannot be happy if our mind is our master. We can only find happiness when we take the power away from our mind and make it into a tool we use to live in this world. The Dalai Lama said that granted, external circumstances may bring us suffering but in the majority of cases, it is our mind that bring us suffering.

In fact, our mind can make our suffering worse or prolong it. When we lose a loved one, it is okay to grief but we should also celebrate the joy and happiness

that we had with them. If they have suffered through an illness, we can be happy that they are no longer suffering physically.

To find happiness, we need to learn to let go of our expectations. The motivational gurus will probably laugh at me for making this statement. They will say, “No, no, no, you need to set passionate goals, only then you will feel motivated and happy”. Does this mean that we cannot be happy until we reach our goal? When we reach the goal, we will only set new ones and defer our happiness further. When then can we be happy? Feeling proud about the material things that we have accumulated do not equate to happiness. We may have a false feeling of security and even that is not happiness. I am not saying that we should not have career goals or goals for our loved ones. By all means, keep them, but we need to let go of those expectations that bring us unnecessary suffering.

In my book, ‘We are Here to Celebrate’ I wrote that unreasonable expectations of our children can pollute the love that we have for them. We want them to



be the top student in their school or at least ace all their subjects. We ignore or become blind to whatever strengths they have and this makes them feel unloved and inadequate. It is like wanting a duckling to run fast but not being able to see its ability to swim. Similarly, our expectations of our spouse, friends, parents, job etc can

take away the joy that we could have had with them.

The question then is how do we let go of our expectations? Sogyal Rinpoche breaks the mind into two aspects; the ‘appearance of the mind’ and the ‘nature of the mind’. We are caught in the ‘appearance of the mind’ when we are absorbed in our thoughts and other sense distractions. We are so caught up that we confuse the ‘appearance of the mind’ to a living entity; it becomes the ego. The ‘nature of the mind’ is the silent witness that observes the external phenomena. We experience the nature of the mind when we meditate. In between our thoughts there are brief gaps of silence. When we observe those gaps, we are actually resting in the nature of the mind. As we

rest there, the gap becomes wider and wider and we become enveloped in peace and bliss.

When we are caught up in distractions or the ‘appearance of the mind’, it is difficult to see how our expectations are bringing us suffering. We may not be aware that we are having expectations or worse still, we are not aware that we are suffering. My friend in the story above is not aware that his children’s expectation has become his own and he is not aware of his discontentment as the result. He is just too focused on his new goal of getting a bigger house so that his children can feel proud. Sogyal Rinpoche said, “We want happiness but we run away from the causes of happiness as if we are running away from the devil. We do not want suffering but yet we run after the causes of suffering”. Such is the sorry state that we are in.

But when we sit and rest in the nature of the mind we may be able to see those expectations that are downright unnecessary for our happiness. When we shine the light of wisdom and awareness on those expectations and see that they are bringing us suffering, we start to let go of those expectations effortlessly. That is how we let go of our expectations. That is why all spiritual masters say that we need to walk the spiritual paths ourselves. No one can carry us towards self-realisation. We have a million expectations within us. We gathered them ourselves and now, it is our responsibility to let go of them ourselves.

This is also the reason why we need to balance our spiritual efforts between reading and practice. Reading can sometimes point out certain expectations but we still need to practice in order to finally let them go.

In Kriya Yoga, we are taught a technique to move prana (life-force or ‘chi’) through the Sushumna Nadi, the main energy channel in our spine. When we do so, the prana passes through our chakras and this purify certain karmas that are retained there. As we purify our karma, certain memories related to the karma may arise. This gives us the opportunity to observe them and let go of the negative thoughts and expectations that brought about that karma. When we do so, we are freed from that karmic tendency because the negative thoughts and expectations will no longer have a strong hold on us. We no longer ‘react’ to them and are able to act with wisdom.

Similarly, when we meditate, these thoughts or memories may arise. Do not push them away but observe them because only through these memories are we able to understand ourselves. We need to understand the expectations that bring us suffering in order to let go of them. There is no other way. As we practice and our awareness becomes stronger, we will be able to pick up on our expectations as and when they arise. At that point, we can move into the witness state and let go of the expectation there and then. As we do so, our periods of inner peace and ease will become longer and longer. Happiness is inevitable.

Accepting Difficult People

This article is based on the video by Ajahn Brahm titled “Dealing with Difficult People”. There is a link to this video in the ‘recommended’ menu of our website, www.kriyayogamalaysia.org.

Initially, the title of this article was ‘Dealing with Difficult People’. However, I felt uncomfortable with this because the title creates the impression that the problem lies entirely with the other person without any fault on our part. This is not true and that is why I changed the title to ‘Accepting Difficult People’.

Whenever we are faced with a difficult person, there are two aspects to it. The first aspect is the problem presented by the other person. The second aspect is our *reaction* towards the other person. We cannot control the first aspect. There will always be difficult people in our life and we cannot avoid them forever. But, we can control the second aspect; our *reaction* towards the difficult person.

To explain this second aspect, it would be useful to consider Swami Rama’s definition of a ‘Seer’. He explained that a Seer is a person who sees reality as it



is without ego-involvement. He sees something clearly because he is not affected by it. For example, when a normal person sees a car he desires, craving would arise within him. Because he is not able to afford the car, he will feel discontented with what he already has. He sees only the

positive things about the car and not the problems that it would bring, such as the higher maintenance cost and the risk of theft. If the car is desirable to him, it would be desirable to others as well.

On the other hand, a Seer sees the car clearly. He sees both the positive and negative points of owning that car. He appreciates the beauty of the car, and stops there. No desire or discontentment arises within him.

When a Seer meets with a difficult person, there is no aversion. Swami Rama advised that to attain the state of a Seer, One must be determined not to be affected by sense objects. One is determined not to be attracted to or be adverse to anything. There is equanimity. However, determination needs discipline and wisdom. *We must see that nothing is entirely good or bad.*

The great Indian Sage, Shantideva, taught that we should appreciate our enemies because they allow us to practice patience. We can only learn through suffering. Suffering inspires us to search for self-realisation. The Tibetan Buddhist believe that above the human realm, is the gods' realm where the consciousness of the beings there are more advanced. There is no suffering in that realm. However, given a choice, the Tibetan Buddhists prefers to be reborn in the human realm because in the gods' realm, life is too beautiful. Because there is no suffering, one born there would not strive for enlightenment. One would just waste time enjoying one's life there and move from one activity to another.

What I want to emphasise about the previous paragraph is the Tibetan Buddhist's view of the importance of suffering to lead one to seek enlightenment. It does not matter whether the gods' realm really exist. If we can at least see that these difficult people can also bring some benefit to us, we will not begrudge them so much.

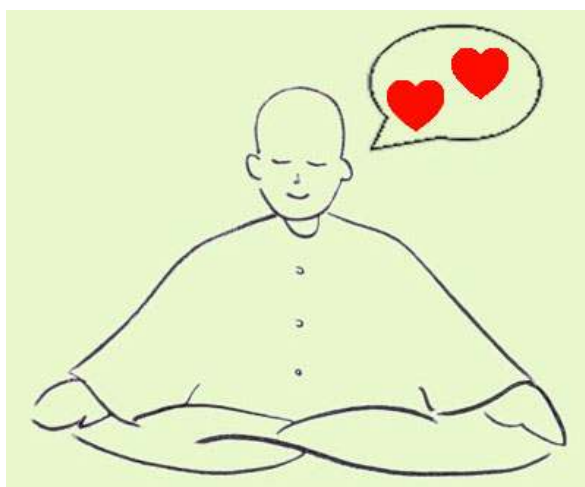
We are not Seers. So, the difficult people will inevitably cause some negative emotions within us. These people may be important to us. They may be our spouse, parent, boss etc. We cannot just run away and avoid them. But, whenever they cause a negative emotion to arise within us, we can surrender that negative emotion to the Divine. We do this by resting in the gap between thoughts and observing the emotion. We have discussed this technique in the chapter 'Practicing Awareness' in my book 'We are Here to Celebrate' which can be downloaded from the website. So, I will not go into it here. Whenever, we observe the negative emotion, we are effectively surrendering that emotion to the Divinity within us. The light of our awareness will engulf that emotion and it will fade. The Divine will then lead us to the solution of our problem with wise insights that arise from within us. The Divine is always there for us and always knows the appropriate medicine to give us.

Ajahn Brahm was once invited to give a talk at a Mental Institution. He said that people suffering from insanity alternates between periods of sanity and insanity. He advised the doctors and nurses there to focus their attention on those periods when the patients are sane instead of when they are insane. Later, a doctor told him that what he advised them to do is actually a new breakthrough that the medical fraternity has just discovered. By focusing on the periods when the patients are sane, they found that those periods of sanity becomes longer and longer. Medical science has just discovered the wisdom the Buddha taught thousands of years ago.

To understand how this works, we must understand that our thoughts are energy. Whenever we have negative thoughts of a person, we are sending negative energy towards the other person. He will pick it up at the sub-conscious level and begin to harbour negative thoughts of us; thus sending negative energy towards us in a vicious cycle. This is the other side of the coin of the popular 'Law of Attraction'.

What we can do is be thankful to them because they are helping us to learn patience. We can also develop compassion for them. If they are grouchy or have a negative frame of mind, we can learn to see that they do not want to be such but cannot help being so. Over a long period of time, they have been conditioned to be the way they are. They are that way not to spike us. They are that way because they cannot help it.

We can also see that the person is being difficult to us because of some past



karmic connection. If we do not want that cycle to continue, we must be determined not to react in a negative manner. Instead, we should pray for them. I need to emphasise this because it is a very powerful technique. *We must pray for those who make our life difficult.* We should send them loving kindness by thinking about them and praying, "May X be

happy and may X be free from suffering". When we do that, our attitude towards the person gradually changes from anger and hatred, to compassion

and kindness. In the Chakra Self-Healing Seminar, Rudra Shivananda teaches a technique that involves developing love for those we hate. The Chakra Self-Healing techniques were taught to Rudra by the Mahavatar Babaji. Many students shared with him that the practice resulted in significant positive changes to the attitudes of the difficult persons in their life. The rule is simple; when we change ourselves, our world will change as well.

Finally, if we need to talk to the difficult person in order to help that person, Ajahn Brahm advised us to use the 'Sandwich Technique'. First praise the positive traits of the person and then tell him about his negative habit. After that, praise him again. This is a practical wisdom and is not meant to be manipulative. When we praise another, we are focusing on his positive traits. Whatever anger that is within us will fade away when we start thinking about his positive traits. We will then be approaching the other person with a positive frame of mind and will not be radiating any negative energy. The person will not become defensive and there will be a better chance that he will make the effort to change.

If we love everyone, we will not have any enemy.

Life is not a Race

From young, we have been conditioned to compete. We are praised when we



win and reprimanded when we lose. In most school systems, we are ranked by the marks we scored, to see what position we are in our class. Our media conditions us to compete; they heap praises on the winners and the losers are not covered at all. When they are covered, the words used are often hurtful.

It is no wonder why we constantly treat our life as a race, either consciously or unconsciously. Even when we drive to work, we often view it as a race. If someone cuts in front of us and we see that he is beating us to the queue, we will inevitably get angry. That is the reason why we hate the rush hour. So, the next time we are caught in the rush hour, it is useful to remind ourselves that life is not a race. Let us enjoy our drive to work. Our mode of transport is significantly more comfortable than those used by our ancestors; so, why can't we be grateful?

It is bad enough that we constantly race and compare ourselves with others, but

we add on to the problem by racing with ourselves. At work, we rush through our task as if there is a lion behind our backs. This not only adds unnecessary stress to our work-life but it deprives us from the joy of working. We do not allow ourselves to make mistakes because in our mind, we are competing with an imaginary perfect being that is flawless. Even superman cannot compete with him/her. We do this even when we are on a holiday!

This is a disease but we do not see it as such because it is common. The problem is, when we start to step away from the race, we no longer act like how most people do. To the 'common people', we are sick and require help. We need someone to speak to motivate us and pump the so call 'passion' back into our life. Do you think that the peaceful ascetics living in the Himalayas and jungles in silent meditation lack passion in their life? They do not lack passion. Their passion for the Divine is limitless.

We all live in a world of contradictions. The material world teaches us to strive to be first. No one remembers the person who came in second. They say, "Do the best and beat the rest". To do so, we have to wish that something wrong happens to the rest so that we can beat them. This contradicts what our spiritual teachers tell us to do. They tell us to love and serve others. They tell us to help ease the suffering of others. Who are we to listen to? Are we to act like a fighter one day and a servant of mankind another day?

The Spiritual Masters have a solution to this. They tell us to work and put in our best efforts without any expectations of the rewards that we think we deserve. Before we reject this as being an unrealistic expectation, we need to look beyond this material world. Experts in quantum physics states that the universe looks more like a giant 'thought' than clumps of matter. Everything is pure and intelligent energy. This cosmic intelligence is the ultimate justice. Understanding this and the law of karma, we can be comforted to know that we can never be 'underpaid' for whatever we do. We cannot be deprived of what we have earned.

Similarly, nothing that belongs to us can be taken away from us. If Mr. X is robbed, he can choose to be angry at the robber and hold on to that anger many years after the event; or he could choose to let go of the anger, knowing that whatever that had been taken away from him, without his consent, will be returned to him one way or another. If we can learn to see pass the illusions created by Maya, we can naturally and effortlessly let go of the mental sufferings of the Ego.

Because the whole world is like a huge race, it is filled with a lot of anger and ill-will. We cannot change this but we can change ourselves. This is what Michael Jackson bid us to do in his song, 'The Man in the Mirror'. He sang, "If

you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and make that change”.

Forgiveness

Paramhansa Yogananda told a story about Trailanga Swami in his book, the Autobiography of a Yogi'. The swami was well known in India for his miracles.



One day, a man tested him by offering him poisoned milk. As soon as the Swami finished drinking the milk, the man fell to the ground in pain. He cried out, "Swamiji, please forgive my wicked test. My stomach is burning!" The swami reprimanded the man, "Had I not realised that God is in my stomach, I would have died!" The Swami then healed the man of the karmic consequence of his evil action.

Yogananda explained that a man with Trailanga Swami's realisation is able to manifest the karmic consequence of an action immediately. Had the man not

suffered immediately, he would not have been able to connect his actions with the consequence of his action when the karmic seed eventually ripen. He may have died from it.

In most cases, we cannot connect our actions with their consequences because of the time gap between them. Even if the time gap is small, it is still difficult to connect the two and even if we can, most of us will dismiss it as a coincidence.

When I was young, I could see the karmic consequences of my actions. I used to go fishing with my uncle when I was young. I enjoyed it but later, when I saw the fishes struggling, I felt very guilty and sorry. Later I fell very ill and could somehow see the connection with the fishing incident. Other events happened in a similar manner which helped me inculcate a strong conviction in the law of karma.

The law of karma is not meant to scare us into doing something good. Understanding it can free us from unnecessary mental suffering. It helps us to

naturally and effortlessly forgive others for hurting us because we know that the justice meted out by the Divine is infallible. My friend Peter shared his story with me, “I lent money to a colleague to help him because he told me that his mother was sick. Later, I found out that he lied to me. He had the habit of borrowing money and not paying it back. Obviously, money was more important to him than a friendship based on trust. I asked him a few times but he refused to repay the loan. I could have arranged for the Human Resource Department to deduct his salary but I just decided to write-off the debt because I know that the money will come back to me some way or another”. Had Peter held on to the hurt of being lied to, he would have harboured unnecessary anger in his heart. That anger will continue to build and eventually, his loved ones may have to suffer his foul mood. Fortunately, Peter was wise enough to prevent that from happening. He was able to see pass the veil of ignorance created by the ego.

The law of karma is not meant to punish but to show us the road to Divinity. It is not meant to scare but to help us inculcate love within us. Without anger and hatred, our life will be filled with love. So, let us not be fooled by this illusory play of the ego. Let us live in reality and maintain our inner calm and peace. Sometimes, the Divine needs to put on the mask of our enemy in order to lead us out of a greater misery.

Associating with the Wise

The Mangala Sutra, one of the popular Buddhist text, tells the story that once upon a time the Buddha was dwelling near Sāvatti in the Jetavana monastery built by Anāthapindika (a wealthy merchant of Sāvatti). Then a certain deity at midnight, having illuminated the whole Jeta-grove with surpassing splendour, came to the presence of the Buddha. Having worshipped the Buddha, he respectfully stood at one side; and asked, “Many gods and men have pondered and wished for blessings. Please tell us what the supreme blessings are”.



The Buddha responded, “Not to associate with fools, but to associate with the wise and to honour those worthy of honour, this is the supreme blessing”. The Buddha then continued with other examples but the focus of this article is on this first verse.

This is perhaps the most practical means of ensuring that we do not stray from our spiritual path. If we just quit smoking, it is best that we avoid those who smoke. Similarly, if we want to live a simple life, it is best that we avoid those who chase after material wealth.

Recently, my friend told me a story which gave me the idea for this article. He said to me, “I was with a couple of friends who earn high salaries. They just received their bonuses and were talking about buying new cars. The conversation made me feel small and inferior”. Why should he feel inferior? If he truly believes that living a simple life is the road to a peaceful existence, he should feel compassion for his friends and try to help them instead.

This advise from the Buddha takes on an added meaning when we recognise that our ego comprise of our accumulated thoughts, memories and conditioning. If one’s friends are mostly dishonest, one will accumulate

thoughts of dishonesty and be conditioned accordingly. Eventually, one will be convinced of the 'benefits' of being dishonest.

Therefore, if we were to choose what blessing to grant our children, let us bless them that they always meet and be guided by wise friends and mentors.

The Illusion of Intelligence

This article is based on a true story.

Everyday, a man cycles around a port to collect scrap metal to sell. He earns just enough to live from day to day.



Would this man be considered intelligent?

Because he had been doing this for many years, he established a good relationship with the port officers and they gave him the sole right to collect the scrap metal at the port. When the metal prices skyrocketed, he

exported the scrap metal collected to China and became a millionaire.

Now, would this man be considered intelligent? Was he anymore intelligent after he became rich then he was when he was poor? Could we argue that his intelligence was not recognised, and that is why no one wanted to give him a job?

This story clearly shows that what constitute intelligence is a conditioning impressed upon us by the society. It is not the truth but an illusion shared by humanity. We must realise this so that we do not make the mistake of assuming that we are smarter than those who have less qualifications than us. Similarly, we cannot assume that we are more spiritual than others if we have read more scriptures. Between knowledge and experience of spiritual truths, it is the experience that will bring us happiness. Knowledge merely points the way for us to experience spiritual truths.

Speech by Steve Jobs

Message from the Editor: I am including this speech here because there are some spiritual lessons in it. I have highlighted them in italics.

On June 12, 2005, Jobs delivered a commencement address at the Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. In his 15-minute commencement "storytelling" in front of Stanford's Batch 2005, Jobs admitted that "this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation," before proceeding with his "three stories" about how he kept on moving forward. Below is the full transcript of Jobs' speech as published on the Stanford University website:

I am honored to be with you today at your commencement from one of the finest universities in the world. I never graduated from college. Truth be told, this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation. Today I want to tell you three stories from my life. That's it. No big deal. Just three stories.

The first story is about connecting the dots.

I dropped out of Reed College after the first 6 months, but then stayed around as a drop-in for another 18 months or so before I really quit. So why did I drop out?

It started before I was born. My biological mother was a young, unwed college graduate student, and she decided to put me up for adoption. She felt very strongly that I should be adopted by college graduates, so everything was all set for me to be adopted at birth by a lawyer and his wife. Except that when I popped out they decided at the last minute that they really wanted a girl. So my parents, who were on a waiting list, got a call in the middle of the night asking: "We have an unexpected baby boy; do you want him?" They said: "Of course." My biological mother later found out that my mother had never graduated from college and that my father had never graduated from high school.

She refused to sign the final adoption papers. She only relented a few months later when my parents promised that I would some day go to college.

And 17 years later I did go to college. But I naively chose a college that was almost as expensive as Stanford, and all of my working-class parents' savings were being spent on my college tuition. After six months, I couldn't see the value in it. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and no idea how college was going to help me figure it out. And here I was spending all of the money my parents had saved their entire life. So I decided to drop out and trust that it would all work out OK. It was pretty scary at the time, but looking back it was one of the best decisions I ever made. The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn't interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked interesting.

It wasn't all romantic. I didn't have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms, I returned coke bottles for the 5¢ deposits to buy food with, and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple. I loved it. And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on. Let me give you one example:

Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed. Because I had dropped out and didn't have to take the normal classes, I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about serif and san serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can't capture, and I found it fascinating.

None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life.

But ten years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography. If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them. If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. Of course it was

impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backwards ten years later.

Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

My second story is about love and loss.

I was lucky — I found what I loved to do early in life. Woz and I started Apple in my parents' garage when I was 20. We worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a \$2 billion company with over 4,000 employees. We had just released our finest creation — the Macintosh — a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? Well, as Apple grew we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our Board of Directors sided with him. So at 30 I was out. And very publicly out. What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating.

I really didn't know what to do for a few months. I felt that I had let the previous generation of entrepreneurs down - that I had dropped the baton as it was being passed to me. I met with David Packard and Bob Noyce and tried to apologize for screwing up so badly. I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the valley. But something slowly began to dawn on me — I still loved what I did. *The turn of events at Apple had not changed that one bit. I had been rejected, but I was still in love.* And so I decided to start over.

I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

During the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife. Pixar went on to create the worlds first computer animated feature film, Toy Story, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world. In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance. And Laurene and I have a wonderful family together.

I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it. Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.

And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.

My third story is about death.

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: "If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right." It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" And whenever the answer has been "No" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7:30 in the morning, and it clearly showed a tumour on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than three to six months. My doctor advised me to go home and get my affairs in order, which is doctor's code for prepare to die. It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It means to say your goodbyes.

I lived with that diagnosis all day. Later that evening I had a biopsy, where they stuck an endoscope down my throat, through my stomach and into my intestines, put a needle into my pancreas and got a few cells from the tumour. I was sedated, but my wife, who was there, told me that when they viewed the cells under a microscope the doctors started crying because it turned out to be a very rare form of pancreatic cancer that is curable with surgery. I had the surgery and I'm fine now.

This was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more decades. Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful but purely intellectual concept:

No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most importantly, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

When I was young, there was an amazing publication called The Whole Earth Catalogue, which was one of the bibles of my generation. It was created by a fellow named Stewart Brand not far from here in Menlo Park, and he brought it to life with his poetic touch. This was in the late 1960's, before personal computers and desktop publishing, so it was all made with typewriters, scissors, and Polaroid cameras. It was sort of like Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along: it was idealistic, and overflowing with neat tools and great notions.

Stewart and his team put out several issues of The Whole Earth Catalogue, and then when it had run its course, they put out a final issue. It was the mid-1970s, and I was your age. On the back cover of their final issue was a photograph of an early morning country road, the kind you might find yourself hitchhiking on if you were so adventurous. Beneath it were the words: "Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish." It was their farewell message as they signed off. Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish. And I have always wished that for myself. And now, as you graduate to begin anew, I wish that for you.

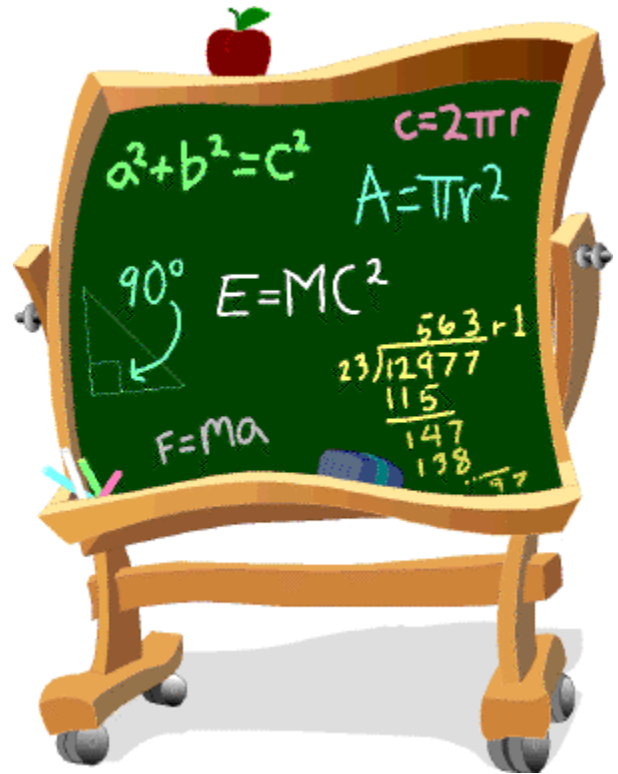
Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish. Thank you all very much.

Message from the editor: The most important spiritual lesson behind the speech is this – Suffering is the shadow of the Divine's hand reaching down to comfort us. Something that is seemingly bad may turn out to be a blessing.

The Beautiful Lessons we Discover in Life

As we go through life, we inevitably learn a few lessons which make us laugh at ourselves for not recognising them earlier. We had to learn them the hard way...through experience; but it is truly worth it. Here are a few of those lessons:

1. The richest person is one who desires little and already has more than he desires. Ajahn Brahm joked that he is disappointed with Forbes for not listing any monk as the richest man in the world. A person is rich if he already has everything that he desires. A millionaire will not feel rich if he is still craving for things that his wealth cannot buy him. Wealth is a concept and is determined more by one's mental attitude rather than one's possession. Wealth cannot bring happiness unless one is contented.
2. The most important things in life cannot be bought. Money cannot buy unconditional love and respect from your loved ones. It is your unconditional love for them that gives you that. I have talked to many friends who came from poor families and there is one consistent theme: They often remember the sacrifices their parents made for them and not the things they lacked. A friend shared with me that he could still remember the school bag which his father bought for him even though they were having difficulty putting food on the table. He is now a father and he could feel the love that his father had for him when he decided to buy him the bag despite their difficulties.



Money cannot buy us or our loved ones wisdom. Actually, it is better to put it the other way round: We do not need to be rich to be wise. Without wisdom, we will never find happiness.

3. Living a simple life leads to inner-peace. The more toys we have, the more distracted we become. Take the example of a person who owns a few properties as investments. He has to worry about renting out and maintaining those properties. Putting his savings into fixed deposits may earn lower returns but is far less complicated. This is not a financial advice on how to invest; it is merely an advice on inner peace.
4. We chase after things that we think can bring us happiness that we forget how to be happy. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we know this but somehow, we refuse to acknowledge it because...
5. We concern ourselves so much with what others think of us that we blind ourselves to what we truly want out of life. Many go into professions that their parents want them to be in and not what they enjoy. We chase after 'status symbols' in order to gain respect from others. By doing so, we continuously live our lives based on the standards and expectations set by others and not by those that we determine ourselves.

Our expectations of our children are reflective of what we think others deem as honourable. When I was young, every parent wanted their children to be doctors because they make a lot of money and command a lot of respect. Is it a coincidence that most parents had that expectation or is it an expectation shared by society as a whole at the time?

We often compare ourselves to others and make ourselves feel inadequate. If we do not stop comparing ourselves to others, we will never become the person we are meant to be. No benefit will come from comparing ourselves with others. If we compare our weaknesses, we feel inferior but if we compare our strengths, we fill ourselves with pride. One who seeks for inner-peace should just stop comparing oneself with others.

All of us try to live up to the expectations of others and therefore, it appears to be the right thing to do; but at the expense of our current happiness. Our happiness is pushed forward into the realm of imagination. That is, we imagine that we will be happy and blissful... *later*; even though we know that '*later*' will never come. There will always be something to chase after. The biggest driving force that makes us chase for material objects is the seductive child of desire; envy.....

6. We are envious of others because we do not see that everything comes with a sacrifice. A friend shared with me that he once asked his multi-millionaire relative, who is already over 80 years old, if he is happy with how he lived his life. He said that his biggest regret is that he did not spend enough time with his children. He was concerned that he may have spoilt them by giving them everything they want to compensate for his absence during their growing up years. He may have left them with a lot of money but he deprived them of wisdom and true happiness.

My friend added, "It saddens me to think that his children may be looking forward to his death because of the inheritance that they will receive".

We want to be the top in our field because of the fame, power and wealth that comes with it. A person at the top may be respected but he may also have many who are jealous of him and therefore, wish him ill-will. When he falls, he may have to face the bitter lesson of how many fine weather friends he has, that is, those that will be in his friends only in the good times.

7. When we learn to thank God for what we have, we will realise that we already have everything that we want. If we develop the habit of thanking God every morning before getting out of bed for the ten things we already have, we will soon realise that we already have everything that matters to our happiness. All of us already have everything that is truly important to us.

8. Most arguments are unnecessary. We get into petty arguments because we want to convince the other person of our point of view. We do not stop to question ourselves if it really matters whether or not the person shares our point of view. Our opinions make up part of our ego and when another person rejects them, we feel like our entire being is being rejected. That is clearly not the case.

We are not our opinions. Our opinions change all the time. We may hold strongly to one opinion one day and completely reject it the next day but we are still the same person. If we adopt the habit of 'agreeing to disagree', our life would be far more peaceful.

9. Our negative emotions *seem* to have more power than they really do. A negative emotion is like a small dog with a loud and deep bark. It is barking in the dark and we cannot see it. We are terrified because we think that it is huge and dangerous. It is only when we shine a light at it that we realise that it is just a cute and harmless puppy.



Our negative emotions are merely sensations in our body. A pinch hurts more than the sensations brought about by the negative emotions. But many of us give it so much power that sometimes we blame our actions on the negative actions. We may say, "I was so angry that I could not help myself!" When we give our negative emotions the power to control our actions, we become helpless to the force of our karma. We get into countless fights and arguments because our anger tells us to. What a waste of valuable energy!

When we shine the light of awareness on our negative emotions, we will realise that it is just a small and harmless little puppy. That is when we regain our power over our negative emotions.

10. Our sufferings often turn out to be blessings when we look back at them. Read the article on Steve Jobs. We can relate it to our own life and see the blessings that came from those seemingly bad events. Steve Jobs calls it 'connecting the dots'.

When Steve Jobs was removed from Apple, the company he founded, he was devastated. He was shattered because Apple had become part of his ego. The 'ego' or 'I' was the accumulation of his thoughts, knowledge and experiences. But later, he realised that being the CEO of Apple was merely a concept of himself. It was part of his ego but not him. He has not changed at all. The love for whatever he does was still driving him. He moved on to form Pixar, the creator of Toy Story. Apple subsequently bought Pixar and he was back as the head of Apple.

What is the difference between a person who can change negative events into blessings and those who can't? The answer is wisdom. With wisdom, one can see pass the false mental suffering created by the ego and move on with one's life. Had Steve Jobs clung on to his lost identity, he would have just given up on life.

And yes, the super-rich can have wisdom too!

11. The above points lead to this one conclusion: Our state of mind determines our happiness. All spiritual practices are meant to train our mind. We learn to strengthen our concentration and awareness so that we can understand the ego or the 'I'. When we are able to watch our habitual thoughts and reactions to external stimuli, we begin to understand the true causes of our suffering; an untrained mind which breeds desires.

Pride fans the Fire of Desires

Arathi is seated in front of her beloved Master. She often seeks his wise counsel whenever something bothers her. She never asks her master to solve her problems.... It is his wisdom that is precious to her.

The Master is more than 70 years old but his eyes remain bright and intelligent; like those of a new born baby.

Arathi said, "Master, last week I attended my high school reunion dinner. The few days before the dinner were horrible. I felt embarrassed because I have not achieved much in my life and I worried over what I will tell my old high school friends. I knew some of them have done very well. They live in big houses and drive expensive cars".

She paused to see if the Master has anything to say. He just smiled to encourage her to go on.

She continued, "I did not enjoy the reunion dinner at all. Everyone was talking about their achievements, their assets and the holidays they have taken all over the world. I just kept quiet and stayed in the shadows".

The Master responded slowly and softly, "Pride fans the fire of desires.....You can see that now, can't you? Pride makes you seek for more that you need. It makes you go into debt so that you can buy a big house....bigger than what you truly want and need. It makes you buy big cars at a price that does not really justify the additional benefits compared to cheaper cars. It misleads and confuses you. It pushes you off the path that leads you to happiness.

Pride makes you jealous of others. Instead of feeling compassion and love for them, it fills you with ill-will towards them. They will soon sense that ill-will and avoid you. You think that they are looking down at you but really, it is your ill-will that is pushing them away".

The Master paused for a moment as if to read her thoughts and continued, "It makes you think that you have not given enough to your loved ones. It makes you feel so guilty that you are not able to see that the most important thing

that you can give them is your wisdom, love and time. It is these things that they will remember and that will guide them after you have passed on.”

Arathi remembered that after the reunion dinner, she opened her heart to her daughter. She told her that she felt guilty for not being able to give her what her friends have given to their children. Her daughter just hugged her and said, “You have given me more than I could ever want. You are my best friend and the best mother in the world. Don’t be silly, OK?”

Arathi shared this with the Master. The Master’s eyes filled with tears. He smiled and said, “You are blessed with a wise child. Be thankful for what you have”.

The Master lowered his voice and continued, “Arathi my child, do not let pride be your master. See the harm that it is bringing you. Master your emotions for the sake of your own happiness”. The Master’s eyes radiated loving kindness and compassion towards her.

Everything suddenly became clear to her. She felt like a huge burden has been lifted from her. She felt a relief in her heart. She used to think that pride is not as harmful as other negative tendencies such as anger or lusts. She now sees that pride is the worst among them all. It is like poisoned honey.

“How do I overcome my pride?” she asked.



“Understand it. See the problems it brings you. Truly understand it. You do not take drugs because you see the problems that it will bring. With the scale of wisdom, you can clearly see that the suffering that it brings is greater than the short term high that it gives

you. Use the same strategy with pride. You have already experienced the pain and confusion that pride brings. Learn to use the law of duality against Maya.

Pride can disguise itself as passion. It misleads you to think that it is helping you by driving you towards your goals. All it really does is to make your life miserable.

Do you still want to allow pride to be your master?"

Arathi replied solemnly, "No Master, I don't".

The Master said, "Then stay focused on the path that brings you happiness. Pretending or wishing to be somebody you are not is burdensome and deprives you of inner-peace. It is alright to be a 'nobody'. Other people's opinion of you is worthless. It neither adds to nor takes away the happiness that you already have.

The next time pride shows its face, remind yourself of what truly matters to your happiness. Pride cannot sustain itself in the light of your awareness and wisdom".

With a bright smile of understanding, Arathi prostrated and touched her Master's feet to show her gratitude for his magical advice which has created a shift within her. She felt lighter and at peace with herself. She finally understood what contentment means.

Responsibility is the Child of Desire

In my article, 'Siddhis: a Common Obstacle among Spiritual Seekers', a friend sent me a comment in the form of questions. Within those questions, are wonderful lessons as you will see below:

*What is self-realisation? Can someone tell me? It must be something more than realising that the self is deathless and is a spark of the divine. It is something we realise not only intellectually but also experience. During meditation, we sometimes lose the feeling of the 'I'. Does self-realisation mean that at all times, we should be in that state? If so, **why are we given responsibilities and trapped by Maya?** Or are we supposed to carry on living balancing our worldly responsibilities with the realisation that everything is temporary? Is that self-realisation? I am confused. I am not interested in siddhis. Can anyone out there let me experience what great yogis and gurus experienced, please?*

Why are we given responsibilities and trapped by Maya?

Our responsibilities are the karmic effects of getting what we desire. We are born in this physical realm because we are attracted to the mental and physical pleasures which our body provides. Our physical body is necessary for us to work out all the desires we have in connection with this realm and once we are done, we begin to work out our desires relating to higher realms¹⁰. In order to maintain this body, we need to eat and protect it from harm. Within our society, we have an agreement that we are each given certain responsibilities. If everyone carries out his/her responsibilities, the world will work fine. However, if more people than not, choose to ignore their responsibilities, the world will fall into chaos.

Therefore, in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna taught Arjuna, "Work and meditation are one. Nothing is ever gained from mere renouncement. He who sits suppressing all his senses, yet in his idle heart thinking on them, plays the inept and guilty hypocrite: But he who, with strong body serving mind, gives up his

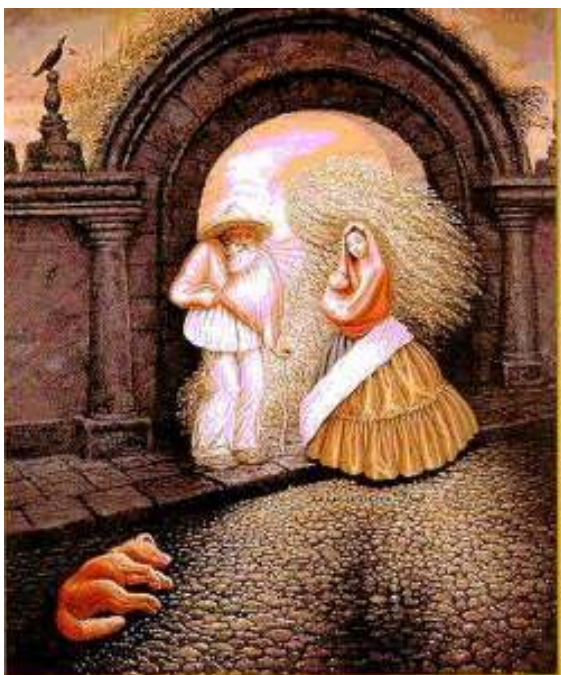
¹⁰ See the article 'Desire; the substance of the Three Bodies that Encage the Soul'

mortal powers to worthy work, not seeking gain, Arjuna! Such a person is honorable. Do your allotted task!”

Which is better for spiritual evolution – becoming a householder practitioner or to escape into seclusion and carry out a solitary practice? This is addressed directly in the Bhagavad Gita. Lord Krishna obviously favours the life of the householder yogi for those who has not transcended their desires. He said, “If knowing thy duty and thy tasks, thou do not carry out the task, that will be sin!” However, Lord Krishna is at the same time not advocating a life that is totally absorbed in materialism. He is advocating a balance between carrying out one’s duty and putting time into one’s practice.

If we analyse our responsibilities, we can trace them back to our desires. When we desire a close knit family, we need to carry certain responsibilities in respect of our family. If we neglect those responsibilities, we will also forsake the experience of a close and happy family.

Similarly, our desire for power and a high-paying position in our occupation will entail greater responsibilities. We will need to deal with problems everyday. We will need to guide and motivate our staff and keep them happy. We will have no one to motivate and keep us happy! Such is the karmic effect of fulfilling our desire for power and wealth. We chose to fulfil that desire and as such, we need to accept the responsibilities that come with it.



That is the nature of this world. Everything comes with a price. We pay the price to fulfil our desires. There is nothing wrong with that. This is what spiritual evolution is about. Eventually, we will realise one important truth: **Our desires are often distorted mental pictures of a future happiness.**

We often have a distorted picture of the happiness the desired object will bring us because at the height of our desire, we are only able to see the positive

aspects of the object and we are blind to the negative aspects. We also erroneously believe that the perceived joy that we will gain from the object will never diminish. When we desire a big house we picture the comfort we can get from the bigger space, the new things we can fit into the house etc. It is only after we own the house that we start to complain about the additional cost and work that comes with maintaining the house. We begin to suffer the financial burden that comes with the big house. Had we only use our wisdom before we purchase the house, we would not have been driven so strongly by our desire. We must make the same mistake over and over again until the day when we finally transcend all our desires.

The life of a renunciate or sannyasi is only for those who have transcended all desires. They do not suppress any desire. If they do, they will need to come back again and work out that desire. They truly understand that nothing of this world can bring them the happiness that can match the bliss of god-realisation. They have experience everything that the world has to offer and desire nothing more. They have a bigger responsibility of serving humanity as a whole but they do not see it as a responsibility because they can see through the veil of Maya and see the oneness of all beings. They see that the ego is merely thoughts, beliefs, habits and concepts¹¹.

Similarly, to understand what self-realisation is, we just need to observe and understand what the ego is.

Those who live the life that closely resembles that of a renunciate are those who lead a simple and happy life. They own very little but yet are able to live in the world happily because they have worked out most of their desires in their previous lives. They truly understand that happiness comes from within and not from the external objects. They see that all negative emotions arise from desire and true happiness is achieved when their desires are few.

¹¹ See the article 'the computer' in the e-book 'Candles of Celebration' which can be downloaded from www.kriyayogamalaysia.org

A Letter to God

Anonymous

This is one of the kindest things you may ever see...It is not known who replied, but there is a beautiful soul working in the dead letter office of the US postal service.

Our 14 year old dog, Abbey, died last month. The day after she died, my 4 year old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to heaven, God would recognize her. I told her that I thought we could so she dictated these words:

Dear God,

Will you please take care of my dog? She died yesterday and is with you in heaven. I miss her very much. I am happy that you let me have her as my dog even though she got sick. I hope you will play with her. She likes to play with balls and to swim. I am sending a picture of her so when you see her, You will know that she is my dog. I really miss her.

Love, Meredith



We put the letter in an envelope with a picture of Abbey and Meredith and addressed it to God/Heaven. We put our return address on it. Then Meredith pasted several stamps on the front of the envelope because she said it would

take lots of stamps to get the letter all the way to heaven. That afternoon she dropped it into the letter box at the post office. A few days later, she asked if God had gotten the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had.

Yesterday, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch addressed, 'To Meredith' in an unfamiliar hand. Meredith opened it. Inside was a book by Mr. Rogers called, 'When a Pet Dies..' Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God in its opened envelope. On the opposite page was the picture of Abbey & Meredith and this note:

Dear Meredith,

Abbey arrived safely in heaven. Having the picture was a big help. I recognized Abbey right away. Abbey isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me just like it stays in your heart. Abbey loved being your dog. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep your picture in, so I am sending it back to you in this little book for you to keep and have something to remember Abbey by. Thank you for the beautiful letter and thank your mother for helping you write it and sending it to me. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you. I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much. By the way, I'm easy to find, I am wherever there is love.

Love,

God

A Balanced Life

“I am only interested if you know any yoga technique that can bring me more wealth,” said Zhang with conviction.

Ravi and Zhang laughed. This is not the first time that Ravi heard this. It seems that everyone wish to be rich. But the billionaires, when they get old, often wish that they have a more balanced life. Ravi has read many stories of children fighting over the wealth of their billionaire parent and wishing that their parent would pass on earlier so that they could inherit their wealth. Ravi recalled that a billionaire friend once said to him that his biggest regret is that he neglected his children and now, they lack the wisdom and skill to stand on their own. Perhaps Bill Gates predicted this happening to his children and he publicly declared that he will give away all his wealth and will leave only a small fraction of it to his children. That move may have been done for the sake of his children.

“Zhang, you are familiar with the Chinese fortune telling tool called “Bazi” right?”

“Yes.....?”

“Would you consider a chart that is filled with many ‘wealth stars’ a good chart?”

時 Hour	日 Day	月 Month	年 Year	
劫財 RW 庚 Geng Yang Metal	日元 DM 辛 Xin Yin Metal	偏財 IW 乙 Yi Yin Wood	食神 EG 癸 Gui Yin Water	天干 Heavenly Stems
子 Zi Rat Yang Water	亥 Hai Pig Yin Water	丑 Chou Ox Yin Earth	亥 Hai Pig Yin Water	地支 Earthly Branches

“No. The foundation of Bazi is the principle of ‘Ying’ and ‘Yang’; the two extremes of black and white which balance off each other. A Bazi with too many wealth stars would mean that other aspects of the person’s life such as his family relationship, health, friendships or other areas would be negative”.

Ravi nodded, “So if a person’s Bazi has too many ‘Wealth Stars’, am I right to assume that the Bazi advisor will probably provide the person with remedies which would reduce the effect of the ‘Wealth Stars’?”

Zhang contemplated that question for a moment, “You are probably right but I am not sure”.

Ravi smiled, "That's OK. It is not important. Tell me Zhang, do you want to be rich or happy?"

Zhang looked puzzled, "Aren't they the same thing?"

"Do you need to be rich to be happy?"

"No"

"Is a rich person always a happy person?"

"No"

"Then they are not the same thing"

Ravi and Zhang laughed.

Ravi continued, "The understanding that a balanced life is more important to our happiness than wealth, can bring us contentment. If we have enough to eat and a place to stay, that would mean that we already have enough wealth to be happy. Most of us already have more than that."

Zhang nodded. That made sense to him. He already earns a high income and yet, he seeks more wealth.

Ravi smiled, "A practitioner of Yoga seeks to achieve self-realisation but on his way towards that goal, he learns to be happier. Everyday, he gains more and more control over his mind and emotions. He becomes more capable to act with wisdom instead of reacting based on his past conditioning. This means that he has greater control over his destiny."

Zhang straightened up from his seat and gave Ravi a big smile, "Alright, tell me about this Yoga thingy that you are practicing".

A Story of Determination

Monique van der Vorst was born on 20 November 1984 in Gouda. At the tender age of 13, due to a failed operation, her left leg was paralysed and her right knee stopped working properly, resulting in her being bound to a wheelchair.

Fast forward to year 2000, Monique participated in her first attachable handcycle race. She surprised everyone by winning the race as a debutant. In 2001, she proceeded to become the European Champion on the Road Race and Time Trial and she won the European Handcycling Competition (EHC) for the first time.

In 2002 she won the World Championship on the road race in Germany and won a silver medal on the time trial. She became a National Champion and won the European Competition again.



She did not stop there. In 2003 she had many national and international victories. She won the EHC for the third consecutive time. In 2004 she became World Champion for the second time in Switzerland and won the EHC title for the fourth time. In 2005, Monique crowned her success with a new World Record on the marathon. In 2006, Monique became World Champion on the

road again in Switzerland. She took the silver medal at the time trial. In addition, she won many great events, like the Tour of Australia.

In 2007, fate handed her another blow: She met with a car accident. She was hospitalised and suffered a whiplash. She needed six months to recuperate and get back on track but she did not have that luxury of time; it was too late for the World Championships in Bordeaux. She was still suffering from her whiplash, but she had to participate at this event to keep her nomination for the Paralympics' Games in Beijing 2008. She finished third in the time trial, just enough for her to keep her nomination!

In 2008 she was on a roll again. She won the Marathon of Miami with a new Personal Record!

But life handed her another challenge.

During training, Monique and her training partner Chris Peterson were hit by a car. Monique was knocked unconscious and had to be transported to the hospital by helicopter. Monique suffered a heavy concussion, a whiplash and a spinal cord injury. Despite this, Monique remained positive and felt very happy that she survived!

Monique had to undergo a heavy recuperation program as she was unconscious for a long period. She never stopped fighting back. She said, "Whatever that doesn't kill me, can only make me stronger".

In 2009 she went back to racing and took two National Titles! She participated in a seven-day race in Alaska and won all eight stages. She also won the European Championships in Holten and the 1/2 Ironman competition in Antwerpen. To top it all, she was chosen as the disabled athlete of the year at the National Sports Gala.

In 2010, she got involved in an accident and was hospitalised for a long period. But this time, it was a blessing. She suddenly felt some twinkling in her paralysed legs; something she has not felt for 12 years. Later she could move her legs. She worked hard in the hospital and rehab centre. Eventually she began walking again after being in a wheelchair for almost 13 years! What a miracle!

This is the impressive story of the only 26-year-old Monique van der Vorst. At this young age she won two Silver Medals at the Paralympic Games in Beijing, the World Championship three times, the European Champion six times and held eight National road race titles and two on time trial. Monique won the overall ranking for the EHC for five consecutive years. She won almost every race in which she participated in, nationally and internationally. She won the World Championships Ironman in 2009 with a new record.

On top of her achievements, Monique plays an important role in inspiring many disabled people around her. She taught them to focus on their abilities, not their disabilities; and be optimistic in life. She gave demonstrations of handcycling in rehabilitation centres to demonstrate the importance of sports, even when suffering a physical disability. As recognition for her sports and social achievements, the mayor of Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel, her hometown, awarded her the city medal of honour.

She has this advice for all of us, “If you don’t like something, change it, if you can’t change it, change your attitude, but don’t complain...”

Her life shows that the greatest armour that we can have against negative events is a strong mind. With a strong mind, we will be able to ‘focus on our abilities instead of our disabilities’. We will be contented and grateful for what we have instead of being a slave to our cravings. When we are faced with situations that make us angry, we may become angry but we will not become an angry person. That is because an emotion can never take over a strong mind which is filled with awareness.

An astrologer once said, “Knowing something but not doing anything about it is as good as not knowing it”. Let us do more than that. Let us persevere in our spiritual practice and strengthen our mind so that we are prepared for all eventualities. Anything that does not kill us will only make us stronger.

Our weaknesses are also our strengths

We are often overly concerned about our weaknesses and get disappointed with ourselves because we fail to see that this world is a world of duality. Every object or experience is like coins with two sides. Everything that is seemingly good has a negative aspect and everything that is seemingly bad, has a positive side.



Let us first look at our strengths. I have a friend who is very good negotiator. We will call him Chan. No one can get a better price than him. When his company was setting up a branch overseas, he was tasked with the job of negotiating the price for the renovation works at the new office. He managed to negotiate a price that was so low that everyone acknowledged that no one else could do a better job. Everyone celebrated.

When the job was completed, Chan visited the office and was shocked by the shoddy paint job. When he questioned the contractor, they explained that the contract sum was so low that they could only paint a single coat on the wall. In addition, some jobs were not done and Chan could not hold them to it because they were not clearly mentioned in the quotation provided by them. They were willing to forgo the retention sum on the contract and refused to follow up on the job. Chan had no choice but to finally agree on a variation order and increase the contract sum.

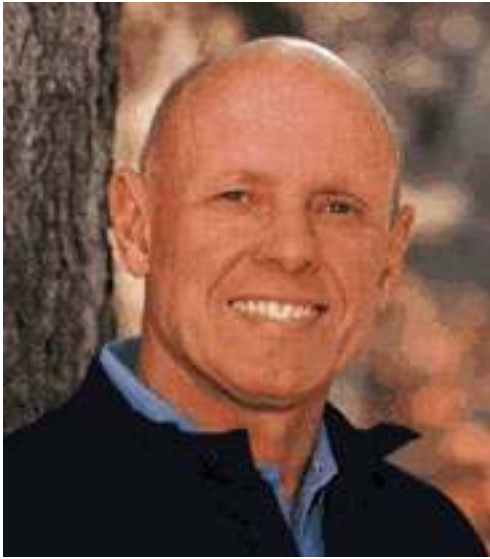
Another person who is *apparently* weak in negotiations may have gotten the job done faster and at a lower price. I have observed that the law of the universe ensures that an honest person always meet with honest folks. A person who always tries to get one up on others will often meet with those who will do the same thing to him. It appears that our personality radiates some form of energy that attracts like energy to us. So, a person who is not a great negotiator may be able to establish long term relationships with many suppliers that benefits his company in the long run.

I have often heard that in this dog eat dog world, it is difficult to be honest. A salesman will say that sometimes they have to lie to close a sale. Being honest and straight-forward then becomes a weakness. The honest person will then feel bad about his personality instead of seeing it as a virtue which he can be proud off. But if we look deeper, we will see that an honest person will, over the long run, gather customers who trust him and he will eventually establish a customer base that is unshakable. He is less likely to lose them to other competitors purely on price. We are often willing to pay a premium for someone whom we trust and know will not cheat us. We will also be more than happy to recommend them to our friends because by doing so, everyone wins!

Introverts often look at extroverts and see their quiet nature as a weakness. However, introverts are often more careful with what they say and as such, are less likely to offend others. They can often relate better to how others feel and are better to provide advice and solutions to others. They think deeply and are often creative problem-solvers. Sure, they may not be the life of the party but they tend to have close friends; they value quality instead of quantity.

No one attribute can be clearly classified as a strength or weakness. It depends on the circumstance. Sometimes, being assertive is good and sometimes it just gets us into a lot of trouble. If we learn to see that, we can learn to be at peace with ourselves. We can stop hitting ourselves over the head over our apparent weaknesses if we can see that they can also be our greatest strengths. Similarly, we should not be overly proud of our strengths, because they can also be our greatest weaknesses.

The Emotional Bank Account



In his book, 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People', Stephen R. Covey introduced the concept of 'emotional bank accounts' ("EBA"). We hold EBA with our loved ones and everyone we interact with. When we show kindness, compassion and love to others, we add to the EBA we keep with them. When we react negatively to them out of anger or any other negative emotions, we make withdrawals on those EBA.

The problem is, we often get back from work feeling tired and irritable and we tend to be impatient with our loved ones. We do not add to their EBA but make withdrawals instead. This results in the EBA becoming 'overdrawn' and our loved ones end up feeling unloved, unappreciated and in the extreme case, hatred towards us.

On the other hand, if we make the effort to add to the EBA everyday, the EBA will have a healthy balance and our occasional 'withdrawals' will be easily forgiven. Therefore, it is important to make daily deposits into the EBA to such a point where they become habitual and effortless; for example, if we make it a point to hug our loved ones everyday, the act will become a habit. It may not seem important but it is still a daily deposit into the EBA.

Research has shown that children who are shown love by their parents will not feel inadequate when they are occasionally scolded or punished for their mistakes because as a whole, they still feel loved and cared for. Their EBA are always in the positive. However, children who are frequently scolded and not shown love often enough will often grow up withdrawn and aggressive. Their EBA are constantly in the negative and they are fearful of further withdrawals from their EBA. Therefore, they build a protective wall around them and become fearful of the world.

Buying a big house will result in huge withdrawals from our bank accounts with the high purchase price, mortgage payments, cost of maintenance and other

regular expenses. The big house becomes a burden on our bank accounts. A fault-finding mind has a similar effect on our EBA with others as a big house has on our bank accounts. A fault-finding mind always looks at the weaknesses and mistakes of others and ignores their strengths and the things they do correctly. A person with a fault-finding mind will not recognise that he is making himself miserable. He gets angry at others because it is his habit to do so and his victims were just unfortunate to be around when his fault-finding mind was looking for someone to direct his anger towards.

All of us have a fault-finding mind. It is just a question of degree. If our fault-finding mind is so severe that we are angry all the time and we become blinded to the strengths of others, then it is time to admit to ourselves that we have a problem. The good news is that the willingness to admit it to ourselves that we have a problem, is in itself, already a solution. Once we recognise the problem, we will naturally start to watch ourselves and correct our thoughts with discipline, self-awareness and wisdom.

Going Within

The Divine, the Greatest Therapist

We were given negative emotions not as a punishment but as a red flag or a signal to tell us when something is not right. Negative emotions are like signboards which point the way to Divinity. It is not to be avoided but to be



cherished. Unfortunately, most of us try our best to avoid or place a carpet over our negative emotions by distracting ourselves. We try to earn more money so that we can purchase more and more distractions.

When we are faced with negative emotions, it is best that we seek the help of our greatest therapist or counsellor, the Divine. We do so by spending time alone in

meditation. When we rest in the silence that is present between our thoughts, we are surrendering our problems to the Divine¹². We must have the courage to face our emotions and overcome the temptation to distract ourselves.

When the Divine talks to us, it is in the form of insights that are not subject to misinterpretation. When we talk to a human counsellor, he may give us an advice but we may misinterpret that advice because our conditioning forms a shade over our eyes. If the shade is green in colour, everything that we see is green. For example, he may say that one should love one's children more. One may interpret it to mean that one should buy more gifts for them to make them happy. Is that what the counsellor meant?

With the Divine, there is no such interpretation. The advice that comes to mind through our intuition is crystal clear. What we hear is what the Divine wants us to know.

¹² Please read our article 'The Gap between Thought'.

The other problem is that we are conditioned to have a fixated view about how a holy person should appear. Once, the great Trailanga Swami honoured Lahiri Mahasaya in public. A disciple asked the swami, “Sir, why do you, a swami and a renunciate, show such respect to a householder?” Trailanga Swami replied, “My son, Lahiri Mahasaya is like a divine kitten, remaining wherever the Cosmic Mother has placed him. While dutifully playing the part of a worldly man, he has received that perfect self-realisation for which I have renounced even my loincloth!”

What I want to emphasise is not the swami’s answer but the disciple’s question. It clearly shows our conditioned view that a holy man should be a swami or a monk. We think that a householder cannot be holy. We know that is not true but we cannot help but to cling to that view.

The participants who attend Rudra Shivananda’s seminars sometimes do not know what to make of him. He exudes wisdom.... but he is not a swami. They get confused and do not know how to approach him. Many do not know that when he was younger, he wanted to be a monk but in the last minute before he was ordained, Babaji appeared to him in a vision and asked him to get married and lead a householder life. At that time, he did not yet know who Babaji was, but the Buddha he recognised, Guru Rinpoche appeared to him and asked him to follow the advice of Babaji. Only later on in his life did he stumble on a poster of Babaji and recognised him as the Saint who appeared to him a few years before. Obviously, Babaji wanted Rudra to live the life of a householder to show us that one do not need to renounce the world to achieve self-realisation. Only an inner-renunciation is necessary. Renouncing the desires of the ego is the all that is necessary.

We must all persist in our practice so that we can strengthen our ability to hear our Greatest Counsellor, the Guru within. He is always there for us and is never too busy or tired to listen and provide us with guidance.

Inner-Peace: The Guiding Light

The 70-year old Indian Master was seated in the lotus posture on a raised platform in front of his students. His snow white hair and beard gave him a regal appearance. His face was radiant and his eyes were bright and intelligent. The night was cool and silent except for the sound of the forest surrounding the ashram. The fragrance of sandalwood incense added to the sanctity of the night.

In a subdued tone, one of the student said, "Recently, a close friend tried to kill herself because her husband left her. A week before that, I attended a wedding and everyone was celebrating. Seeing these two extremes makes me wonder what life is all about. Why are we here? How should we live our lives? What is the point of being human when there is so much suffering and confusion? Why does life grant us joy, only to take it away the very next moment?"

The Master gazed compassionately at the student. He felt the sorrow and confusion she felt.

"Why are we here?" the Master paused for a moment and then continued, "We are here because we are attracted to this physical world. Our desire for the pleasures that our senses can provide brought us here. So, I say to you, experience life to the fullest. Go after whatever that you think can bring you happiness. If you like to experience wealth and power, go for it."

"If the world wants to grant you fame, accept it and experience it. Swami Rama was once offered the position of Shankaracharya and his master told him to accept it. He went through the experience and did not enjoy the constant distractions despite the comforts the position offered him. Later, he renounced the position and ran away to the Himalayas".

"Your physical body allows you the opportunity to experience all the desires that still remain in your consciousness. Those desires led you to take on your physical form in the first place".

Subra was shocked. How could the Master teach them to chase after wealth, power and fame? That is contrary to what the scriptures teach.

The Master's eyes met Subra's and he smiled at him.

The Master continued, "Go ahead and experience whatever life has to offer you. Eventually, you will feel that whatever joy that this world can offer is unsatisfactory. At that point, you will let go of your desires effortlessly and there will be no suppression. You will then be a person who truly renounces the world".

"Why are the joys of the world not satisfying? Firstly, the natural law of impermanence ensures it. Nothing is permanent. Whatever that you have gained will eventually be lost. Nothing lasts forever. Even if the object that you desired can last a long time, your desire for it will also be impermanent. Eventually, you will lose interest in it and begin to look for other objects of interest".

Subra remembered the joy he felt when he bought his new car a few months ago. But the joy has left him. In fact, he is already feeling dissatisfied with it.

The Master continued, "Secondly, the law of duality ensures that nothing can give us only happiness without any associated suffering. If you buy expensive jewellery, you will feel good wearing it but you will also worry about someone robbing you. If you left it at home and went out, you will not be at peace because you will worry about someone breaking into your home and stealing your prized possession. You have to incur more money to install the state of the art security system to prevent a break-in".



"Eventually, you will question - Is there something more to life? At that point, you will come to the realisation that inner-peace is the greatest joy. Inner-peace will guide your every decision. Before deciding on anything, you will consider if it adds to your inner-peace or reduce it. If an option adds to your inner-peace, you will

accept it. If not, you will easily reject it without suppressing any desire. You will easily reject everything that could stimulate negative thoughts and emotions. Your only desire is for inner-peace".

Subra thought about the time when he had dinner with some of his old friends. They were always talking about expensive cars and luxury items. It made him feel conflicted because he wants to live a simple life but the conversation with his friends made him crave for the luxury items. The conversation with them left him feeling tired and dissatisfied. He felt the need to reassess the kind of friends he wants to spend more time with.

Subra asked, "Guruji, wouldn't having more money add to my inner-peace because it gives me a sense of financial security?"

The Master replied, "We all need to earn a living but the problem with us is that there is no end to our craving. You say that once you saved up 'X' amount, you will slow down and focus on your spiritual practices but once you reached that amount, you cannot stop because you will be forgoing the income that you could make if you do slow down. So you continue to run on the treadmill until it is too late to make a significant change in your life. But, like I said, if you want to experience wealth, go for it. Do not suppress that desire because of what I tell you. Experience for yourself if what I said is true and then you will naturally let go of the desire".

Another student asked, "Guruji, we come to you with all our problems. Wouldn't that disturb your inner-peace?"

"The desire to help others could disturb your inner-peace if you allow pride and fame to get in the way. If you desire to be known and respected because of your service to others, then your inner-peace will be disturbed when others talk badly about you or do not express gratitude for your help. I am of service to you without any expectations from you or anyone else. I am serving the Divine through you. How can my inner-peace be disturbed in any way?"

The Master paused, chanted a strong 'OM' and then closed his eyes to allow his consciousness to be with the Divine. His students followed and they were enveloped in peace and joy.

Freedom from Boredom and Loneliness

Recently Ravi had a conversation with James, a top executive of a global



organisation. Somehow, they got to the topic of being alone and he told Ravi that he hated to be alone. When he is alone, he feels lonely and bored.

Ravi tried to recall the last time he felt bored or lonely and realised that he has not felt that way for a very long time. He recognised this as a gift that comes naturally to those who

meditate and engage in spiritual practices. It is a blessing from the Divine.

Ravi said, “Boredom and loneliness arise because of inertia. When we are active all the time, the mind just refuses to slow down. It is like trying to stop a moving car. But if we overcome the initial period of restlessness, we will soon appreciate the serenity of being alone. The next time you feel bored; resist the temptation to find some distraction. Just be still for a while and after 20 minutes of so, you will begin to enjoy the peacefulness and calm.

We do not notice it but when we fill our life with activity, there is a build up of stress in our body and mind. That is why people who are active all the time are often irritable and can blow up over minor matters. Human beings just cannot tolerate too much activity. We need time to be alone so that we can release the tension in our body and mind.

Only when we are alone in silence, are we truly with the Divine. By being aware of the silent moments between the thoughts that arise from our subconscious mind, we access our intuitive capacity and create a bridge to the Divinity within. That is why all the Masters ask us to meditate. Meditation is not an activity. It is not ‘doing’ but ‘being’. Only when we are alone with the Divine can our prayers be heard”.

James was not convinced, “Well, I am just not used to it. I think it is a waste of time sitting around doing nothing. I need to be productive or at least spend my time doing something fun so that I do not waste it. Time is precious and it is best used solving our day to day problems”.

Ravi smiled. The comment is very common. The pace of modern life is so fast that we do not allow ourselves time to rest. Taking time out to be alone is seen as being plain lazy. Ravi was like that once but the Divine has shown him that by doing less, he achieves more. Deepak Chopra calls it the ‘Law of Least Effort’. While most people use a lot of energy resisting the present moment, struggling to change circumstances, and forcing outcomes, the ‘Law of Least Effort’ is about redirecting one’s energy so that one’s life flow with effortless ease. One does not waste one’s valuable life energy in endeavours that create unnecessary friction.

Ravi said “Anthony Robbins is one of your favourite Self-Improvement Guru right?”

“Y...e....s...?” responded James warily.

“You were the one who told me this story. What did he do when his financial advisor cheated him and he was near bankruptcy?”

James grinned as it became clear to him where Ravi was getting to, “He went into a retreat to spend time alone.”

Ravi just smiled.

James laughed out loud, “Sometimes we can look at something without seeing it”.

Ravi smiled and nodded, “There is something more harmful than boredom and loneliness”.

James narrowed his eyes and tilted his head, “And what is that?”

“The fear of boredom and loneliness”

James nodded in total agreement. He has friends who married the wrong people or stayed married in an abusive marriage because of the fear of loneliness. James could not understand them but he can see why now. The

fear of boredom makes us spend too much money on distractions and fill ourselves with intoxicants in the name of fun.



Ravi continued, “This fear is like hearing a loud growl in the dark and thinking that it is a fierce dog but when one shines a light towards the sound, it is just a cute little puppy which has an uncanny ability to imitate a large dog.”

James laughed, “You make it all sound like life is just a big joke.”

Ravi joined in the laughter, “It is; that is why they said that the Buddha laughed when he achieved enlightenment.”

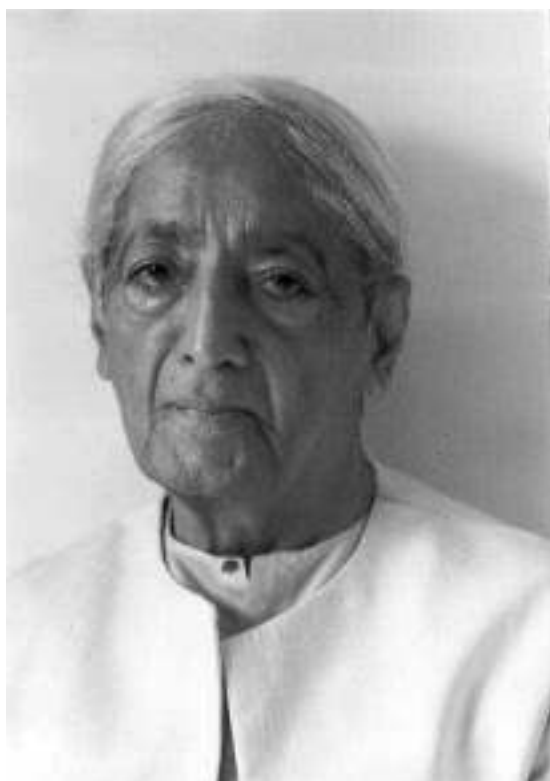
Repentance is Retrospective Awareness

Repentance is retrospective awareness; this concept was taught by Osho and it is a very useful one to help us understand the power of meditation.

When we are overwhelmed by a negative emotion and we are *not being aware* at that moment, we will react based on our habits and past conditioning. We will act in a way that is 'out of character' and later cannot understand why we reacted that way. But we can think back *with awareness* and see for ourselves how the lack of awareness brought trouble for us. We look back with awareness; that is the meaning of repentance; retrospective awareness.

Osho taught that there are three moments when awareness can arise; first is awareness after an act, the second is during the act and the third is before the act. Awareness before the act is the most powerful as far as controlling our life is concerned, for example, when anger is arising, we can become aware of our anger and angry thoughts, thus allowing them to fade away before they cause us to act negatively out of habit.

Krishnamurti view the ego as 'thoughts'. He said, "Can one face it and



understand it so completely that one is left with no conflict in life? To do that is to die to everything that thought has built up. Thought has built one's vanity, thought has said, 'I must achieve, become somebody, struggle, compete'. That is what thought has put together, which is one's existence. One's gods, churches, gurus, rituals, all that is the activity of thought, a movement of memory, experience, knowledge stored up in the brain, a material process. And when thought dominates one's life, as it does, then thought denies love. Love is not a remembrance. Love is not an

experience. Love is not desire or pleasure".

Similarly, Osho said, “Just imagine for a single moment that all thoughts have ceased...then who are you? If all thoughts cease for a single moment, then who are you? No answer will be coming. You cannot say, "I am a Catholic," "I am a Protestant," "I am a Hindu," "I am a Mohammedan" -- you cannot say that. All thoughts have ceased. So the Koran has disappeared, the Bible, the Gita...all words have ceased! You cannot even utter your name. All language has disappeared so you cannot say to which country you belong, to which race. When thoughts cease, who are you? An utter emptiness, nothingness, nothingness”.

“Buddha does not use the words atma, 'self', atta. He uses just the opposite word: 'no-self', anatma, anatta. He says when mind ceases, there is no self left - - you have become universal, you have overflowed the boundaries of the ego, you are a pure space, uncontaminated by anything. You are just a mirror reflecting nothing. *We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world*”.

That is a wonderful way of viewing it; Maya is one's thoughts. If we are aware of our thoughts, we become aware of our ego; then we begin to take control of our mind and the direction of our life. Our destiny determines our character but equally important is the fact that our character determines our destiny. Awareness allows us to take control of our character and thus, control our destiny.

Awareness during the act occurs when our *lack of awareness* allowed our negative emotions and thoughts to cause us to react negatively based on our habits; but during the act, we suddenly become aware and stop the act. This is useful but some damage would have been done.

Awareness after the act is repentance. Osho taught that this form of awareness is useful as it builds the foundation for us to strengthen our awareness to the point where we can be *aware before the act*. We can act on a *known problem*. If we have a character flaw but are unaware of it, we will not be able to take action to improve. Therefore, the purpose of repentance is to allow us to learn from our past and strengthen our awareness. It is not meant for us to feel guilty for our sins.

During our meditation, a memory of a negative event may arise. We can use it to repent for our past mistakes. We can listen with awareness as we replay in our mind the negative thoughts that arose during the event. Once we understand those thoughts, they will not have such a strong hold on us the next time they come around. We will be more capable of maintaining our awareness before our negative emotions and thoughts cause us to do something we would later regret. Only when we have awareness before we act, do we really have a choice as to how we respond to a given situation. If we are unaware, we just react out of habit; we just play out our karma. This is the purpose and power of repentance.

Enlightenment is Inevitable

The path to enlightenment consists of discipline or virtue, Samadhi and wisdom. If we look deeply into these three factors, we can clearly see that enlightenment is inevitable for everyone, even those that we see as 'evil'; though it may take longer for them.

Discipline or virtue is the foundation for all spiritual practices. All religions and spiritual lineages must first teach discipline. Without discipline, there can be no inner-peace. One who lies will always have to worry about being caught. He has to make up one lie after another to cover-up the previous lie. He has to remember the lies he told someone or he will be found out if he tells a different lie to the same person. Because he is dishonest, he sees the world as dishonest. He will not be at peace with the world.

One who has hurt others will worry about vengeance. The more persons he hurt, the more worrisome he gets. Everywhere he goes, he has to look over his shoulders. He will be in constant stress and pretty soon, he will be afraid of leaving his home. His home will become his prison.

The result of non-virtuous conduct is a disturbed mind. We will not be able to meditate and progress on our spiritual path. That is why discipline is the foundation of all spiritual practices. One must put in much effort to discipline oneself in order to have peace of mind until eventually discipline becomes effortless. When discipline is effortless, it is called letting go.

Samadhi can be broadly defined as going within ourselves. It is a meditative state. When we are caught up with the world, our consciousness is projected outwards to the sense objects. When we are looking at a flower, our consciousness is projected outwards towards the flower. In Samadhi, our consciousness is brought inwards. As our meditation becomes deeper, we become unconscious of our senses. Visions may appear and we become conscious of the subtle mental objects but as we go even deeper, the visions also drop away. In that silence, there is bliss.

There was once a saint in India who had a peculiar way of teaching others. One day, she was seen looking around outside her hut for something. A passer-by asked her, “Madam, what are you looking for?”

“I have lost my needle. Can you please help me find it?”

The passer-by consented. After a while, the other villagers also joined in the search for the needle. Eventually, one of the villagers asked the saint, “Around where did you lose the needle? That can help us narrow the search”

The saint responded, “I lost it in my hut”

The villagers were shocked. One of them asked, “Then why are you looking out here?”

“Because it is bright out here and it is dark inside my hut. It is better to look where it is brighter”.

The villagers shook their heads and laughed, “You must be crazy!” and started walking away.

The saint called out, “Wait! That is what all of you have been doing. You search for happiness in the external world because it appears to be so attractive. It looks brighter! You continue to search even though happiness continues to elude you. It never occurred to you to look within. That is the only place happiness can be found!”

The Masters say that the happiness that we find within ourselves far surpasses whatever joy that we can find in the external world. Once we discover that inner-peace and bliss, we naturally let go of our external desires. At that point, discipline becomes effortless. We do not need to hold ourselves back from anything because we have permanently quenched our thirst. We are no longer thirsty. We truly have freedom because we are no longer compelled by our desires. We can finally stop saying, “I cannot help being the way I am,” or “I don’t know why I did that. It just wasn’t me!”

When we go within, we gain an intuitive wisdom that touches us so deeply that we are changed by it. It is different from the knowledge that we gain from

others. That knowledge may motivate us to change but does not by itself bring a lasting change in us. Once we gain the intuitive wisdom that comes from Samadhi, the words of the Masters become very clear and simple. Even the meaning of enlightenment becomes clearer and less mystical. The path becomes clearly lit and we begin to see where we are heading.

When demolishing an abandoned building, the experts will place explosives on the main pillars which support the buildings. If they place the explosives on the wrong pillars, the building will not collapse or even worse, it will tip over and damage the adjacent buildings. Intuitive wisdom has the power of placing the explosives on the supporting pillars of all our worldly problems. It is powerful because it comes from within. Intuitive wisdom uses our past experiences and habitual thinking patterns to help us see our follies. There is nothing more powerful than that.

How then can a person who does not put in effort to be virtuous reach enlightenment? A person who chases after wealth will eventually discover that his wealth cannot bring him the happiness he desires. He may have physical comfort to some degree but his wealth cannot protect him from mental suffering. It cannot protect him from the physical discomfort that comes from illness. He constantly worries about losing his wealth. A person who chases after fame will find that he does not have time for himself. He cannot go for a stroll in the shopping mall because everyone else will not leave him alone. The more famous he is, the less time he has for himself.

When we indulge in alcoholic drinks, we will suffer a hang-over the next day. All the joys of the world leave some kind of hang-over. There is always a feeling of emptiness after going through something exciting. Fulfilling one craving leads to another craving and so on. During these moments of emptiness, one may start to question what this world is all about. One may stumble on a brief period when the mind becomes quiet; the gaps between one's thoughts; and experience a moment of peace, albeit brief. One will start looking within and hence, the process of letting go begins.

Therefore, rejoice! Rejoice because everyone will eventually reach enlightenment. The Divine has put in place natural laws to ensure that this is so. Enlightenment is just a matter of time.

Enjoying the Gap between Thoughts

Enjoying the gap between thoughts; that is what meditation is all about. The word 'enjoy' needs to be emphasised. Meditation is something we do because it is enjoyable and not something carried out as a means to an end. It is not something done out of obligation to gain favour from the Divine. It is meant to be enjoyed.

The periods before and after our meditation sessions are as important as the meditation sessions themselves. Before we start our meditation sessions, it is useful to do activities which can calm our mind. If we have been at work the whole day, our mind would be very active. Our train of thoughts would be like prayers beads strung tightly together. One thought trigger another and so on and the gap between thoughts would be hardly noticeable. It is like a rolling ball. We need to allow a period of time for the ball to slow down to a stop.

Doing *relaxing* yoga postures is one good alternative. The postures should be done in a relaxing manner so that they feel comfortable; like how we stretch when we wake up in the morning. It would be counter-productive if the postures are painful. Reading spiritual books and listening to mantras or meditation music can also be effective.

During our meditation sessions, it may be helpful to choose an object to focus our mind. The most popular and easy to use meditation object is the breath. In the beginning, we observe the natural flow of our breath. As we observe our breath, we also bring our attention to our thoughts. Our mental chatter cannot sustain itself forever. Eventually, there will always be gaps between our mental chatter. When we fall into that gap, it is a pleasant feeling because we are truly present; we are not taken back to the past by our memories or projected into the future by our hopes and worries. In that gap, the ego temporarily disappears¹³. In that gap, we are resting our head on the lap of the Divine.

When we are troubled by some unpleasant feeling, some of us may choose to distract ourselves by indulging in intoxicants or other 'fun' activities. This only

¹³ I have discussed about the ego in my previous book 'We are Here to Celebrate'.

gives temporary relief. When the distraction is over, we will feel worse than we originally did.

We may try to think positively and 'think' ourselves out of feeling down. We may look for a friend to talk to. Both methods attempt to use the mind to solve the problem which the mind created in the first place!

Based on my personal experience, it is more effective to enjoy the peace that comes from resting in the gap between our thoughts. Unpleasant feelings can sometimes be very stubborn. Even while we are resting in the gap, the unpleasant feeling can still be felt as a heavy feeling in our heart. But if we continue to rest in the gap and observe the feeling, we will realise that the feeling is no big deal. It is just a feeling that is less painful than an ant bite. When we realise this, the feeling will just fall away. That is how we take control of our emotions so that they do not take control of our life.

However, after resting in the gap for a while, our mind may get bored and the mental chatter may come back or we may start day dreaming again. This may happen more frequently at the beginning of our meditation session. That is fine. Eventually, the mental chatter will die down again and we will be resting in the gap between our thoughts again. When we observe our thoughts, they immediately quiet down. When we observe the gap between our thoughts, it tends to get longer. This is wonderful. The Divine must have made it this way to make it easier for us to have inner-peace.

Once we discover that meditation is the best solution to our problems, we will never go back to distractions. Meditation is free. If we turn to meditation as the solution to our daily problems, we will have more spending money!

After our meditation sessions, it is important to observe the benefits that we gain from it so that we are motivated to come back to it. We will find that we are more energetic and calm. We will find that we are more likely to act with wisdom instead of reacting based on our habitual patterns. When we see this clearly, our meditations will become a fun activity that we naturally turn to when we are free.

Conversely, if we have indulged ourselves in distractions, we will feel tired and irritable. We do not take drugs because the repercussions would be serious.

Indulging in the sense pleasures is not as serious but they do have negative repercussions. They affect our mental well-being and our health. That is why meditation is the best solution to all our problems.

Remove Craving from your Meditation



In his book, 'Simply this Moment', Ajahn Brahm, a well-known Buddhist Monk residing in Australia, shared his experience with meditation when he was a young monk. He said, "As a young monk, I always tried very hard to watch the breath. When I first came to Perth, I wasn't as skilled as I am now with breath meditation: I would watch the breath for forty-five minutes with great difficulty; it was just too hard to keep the attention on the breath. But then I developed the 'letting go' meditation, saying to myself 'just let go'. As soon as I did 'letting go meditation' the breath appeared very easily and I could watch it for the next half-hour or so if I wanted to. It really struck me that by trying to focus on the breath I had difficulty, but if I just let go and didn't care what came up in my mind, the breath was right there. The breath was easy to hold in the mind's eye and I was still. It showed me that it's often hard to watch the breath if you try too much. When you are trying, that's craving – craving to be or to do something – and that leads to suffering. You can't get success in meditation that way".

"When we're letting go, contented, and silent, the breath arises within the silence, as if the breath is just there. We don't have to force the mind onto it,

we don't have to control it, we don't have to worry about where we are going to watch the breath – at the nose, at the stomach – we don't have to worry about what we should do with the breath. The breath just comes by itself when it's ready and we're just sitting there watching it. The whole process of meditation is to try and do less and less. Just allow the mind to open up”.

Attachment or craving or desire is so much a part of our life that we often bring that habit into our meditation practices. When we meditate, we want to feel peaceful immediately. We want to be able to concentrate on the meditation object without wavering. We want to see beautiful visions. We want to develop spiritual powers. This habit brings tension into our meditation and becomes an obstacle. When we desire, we put our ego at the fore front. Our ego blocks us from going deeper within ourselves.

A person may not crave for wealth but he may crave for spiritual powers and experiences. That craving keeps him bound to his ego because he still needs the thought of separation to feel that he has achieved something. This is called Spiritual Ego.

When we meditate, we just allow ourselves to be happy with our state of mind, no matter how it is. If the mind is restless, let it be. We can use it as an opportunity to understand ourselves better. We can take it as an opportunity to see that we do not control our thoughts. Everything that is in our mind, that we take to be the ego, is conditioned into us by the external world. In the book, Ajahn Brahm shared this experience, “I remember once, on a meditation path in a monastery in Thailand. I was watching my thoughts and getting some separation from them. As I watched the thoughts without getting too involved in them, they appeared to me to be so stupid, because I could trace how every thought that came up was conditioned. They were all conditioned; I was just repeating what I had been taught in the past. There wasn't even one original thought. The thoughts weren't really coming from me. I could see the same words coming from my own biological father, or from people who had impressed me. I was just repeating the words like a parrot. When we see that with mindfulness, the inner conversation is seen for what it is, just the echoes of the past. We believe in something that has no substance, something that isn't real and which has no truth to it. I just couldn't believe in it anymore and

then a wonderful thing happened. When I didn't believe in the thinking, it just stopped and I had one of my most beautiful meditations".

We give our mind all the time it needs to become peaceful and silent. When silence comes to us, see 'silence' as a good friend who has just dropped by to visit us. Allow it to stay as long as it likes. We want it stay for a long time but if it needs to move away for a while, let it do so. We know that it is a good friend and will soon be back again.

There is no such thing as a good or bad meditation. Our mind is the way it is due to the experiences it went through before we start our meditation practice. This is a form of karma. If we just got off a roller-coaster ride, we cannot expect our mind to become silent after sitting down in meditation for five minutes. We need to allow the karmic results to die down. We just need to move aside and let things be.