

# GEMS OF VYASA'S TEACHINGS

These brief excerpts from Vyasa's spiritual question and answer sessions with disciples and students are arranged alphabetically by topic.

## *His Most Frequent Citation:*

***The Main Teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita: "Perform all your actions with no expectation for the fruit of them. Perform them as an offering to God, knowing you are only an instrument and not the doer."***

## Abhyasa

Abhyasa means repetition. Usually we need to hear something a hundred times before it sinks in. Then one day it clicks-- it's as if we were hearing it for the first time, and it is exactly what we need to hear. That means the ground was being prepared to receive that teaching. And once it sinks in, we need to put it into practice.

**Sadhana** means regular, consistent practice—we need to do our **yoga**, our **meditation**, our **pranayama** (breathing exercises) everyday, and constantly work on the **defilements**. A little here, a little there, doesn't cut it. Only by constant repetition do we eventually experience the benefits of a practice. We know how easy it is to get distracted, to forget, and it is a slippery slope. "Oh, I'm tired, oh I don't feel like it today." Soon you can't remember why you were getting up so early. So we must always remind ourselves—abhyasa, repetition, constant practice, do your sadhana every day. Keep working until a quality or good habit becomes a part of you. And in your next life it will be part of your make-up—and you will be freed to work on other areas of your development.

## Anger

People are so attached to their anger. If you mention that they have to give up anger, they get furious! One man got so angry when we were talking about getting rid of anger that he got up and left and never came back!

People are attached to anger because it makes you feel powerful. The ego feels wonderful. It's something like an adrenaline rush, or being on a drug. The astral body doesn't care if the stimulation it feels is positive or negative—it just

likes excitement. People are also attached to anger as a source of energy—they will tell you they can get so much done when they're angry, and they argue therefore that it can be productive. In fact, for the same reason in so-called Peace Activism there is often times emphasis on being angry at the opposition.

But in reality, anger is not a constructive force—it is destructive. When people try to do “good” using anger as their fuel, they are in reality polluting the psychic environment with heavy, violent energy and are contributing to the problems they want to solve. Violence will never be overcome by more violence. And with every fit of anger you are harming your liver. It is said that for every fit of anger it takes the astral body 6 months to heal.

We need to replace the negative energy source of anger with the positive energy of love.

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The positive element of anger, if you want to call it that, is that unlike some other defilements, it is very easy to observe in ourselves. We know immediately if we are feeling irritated, annoyed, enraged, etc. So although it is very difficult to control anger at first, it is easy to observe and begin working on it. The best ways to overcome it are **patience** and **discrimination**. Use your reasoning. Is there any benefit I get from allowing myself to be ruled by this emotion? I am harming my liver, I am burning the people around me with negative energy, I am polluting the psychic environment—and most of the time we get angry for no reason! For stupid things. It is easy to observe if you watch interactions between other people, big fights because the cup is in one place, and not another—it looks so ridiculous from the outside, and it is ridiculous, but when we are in the middle of it we take it so seriously. But usually later we regret things we say and do in anger; so many times I hear, How could I have done or said such a thing over nothing? So the benefits we gain from observing our anger and taking steps to control it will immediately be felt.

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Practical methods we can use to start working on anger are, as an emergency measure, when you're in a situation and you feel it get a hold of you, leave if at all possible. Go outside, cool down, and when you are calm, you can come back and try to deal with the situation. It is also very helpful to do some heavy physical exercise—discharge the energy from your body.

In general, this is the progression we should follow in controlling anger: we should first try to control our actions—try not to act under its influence. Then work on controlling words—to not speak harshly to people, or yell. Then facial expressions—because sometimes you don't say anything but it registers in the body, and the face. And lastly we try to control the thoughts—as soon as you get an angry thought, divert the mind, put it on something else, and then after the emotion has passed, you can bring your intellect, your reasoning into play—is this really worth getting upset about? Most times you will see it is not, and then it will be easy to dismiss from your mind.

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There are gross and subtle forms of anger. Sometimes a cold anger can be worse than the explosive kind; a person may speak very sweetly, very quietly, but they are sticking little daggers into the person they are angry at, and inside there is a big explosion. This pollutes the psychic atmosphere horribly—it's like walking around surrounded by thick, dark, poison clouds.

So you may have conquered some of the outward manifestations of anger but still have a long way to go.

And then you may not even get really angry anymore, but you feel irritation, impatience—these are all subtler forms of anger that need to be cleaned up.

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We have said that anger is never a useful emotion. But there is the story of a cobra who was terrorizing a village. People were afraid to go out of their houses because they never knew when this cobra would attack! It was really a trying situation so they asked a holy man to come to the village and help them. So the sannyasin went to the cobra, and said, What are you doing? You're terrorizing these people and making a horrible karma for yourself so you better stop it. And the cobra said, OK, you're right, I'll stop. So, the cobra stopped biting the people, and instead he would come out to the street to sit in the sun and be friendly, but the people started beating him, and chasing him, until he was nearly dead!

So the cobra dragged itself to the sage and said, "Look, you told me I was doing something wrong, so I stopped, and now I'm trying to be friendly with the people and they are beating me and soon I'll be dead!" The sage said, "You Dumb! I told you not to bite anyone-- but I never said you couldn't hiss!"

The moral of the story is—we should never let ourselves be overtaken and used by anger—but on some occasions, it is OK to make a *display* of anger—as long as there is really love behind it.

### Ashram Life

All your actions, once you live in an ashram or a spiritual community, should be related to your spiritual practices. It is true—it is a great luxury to be able to withdraw from the world. But it comes with a price—the person who has such an opportunity has paid dearly for it in previous lifetimes. And there comes a point in your evolution when you have to withdraw from the world to prepare yourself for service at a higher level.

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Learn by observing, more than by asking questions, although that is OK too. But notice how people who have been in the ashram for a while behave, notice how the Guru interacts with them. In that way you will learn a lot.

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There are two types of people who come to an ashram or a spiritual community. One is someone who has already worked in previous lifetimes on their spiritual development, and has come prepared to take up the third ashrama right away.

In the Vedic manner of life, there are four ashramas, or stages: the student, the householder, the forest dweller or renunciate, and the sannyasin. In the first stage you are preparing for life, and training for a profession. In the second, you take on the duties of family life—it is your dharma to raise a family, to contribute to society by raising children, working, and supporting the poor and the sannyasins. Then, the third stage comes when the kids are grown, and you say to your wife, or your husband, “Alright dear, I have fulfilled my duties to society, I am ready to go to the forest and concentrate on my spiritual work. You want to come with me or stay and take care of the grandkids?” Then, one or both of them goes off to the forest, settles down with a spiritual preceptor, and devotes all their time and energy to intense spiritual practices and purification. Then, after a certain number of years, if a couple is together they separate, and become sannyasins—that means, wanderer, a person who moves from place to place sharing his spiritual wisdom, and giving his blessings. The sannyasin takes a vow not to remain in one place more than three days, to prevent any attachments from forming.

Some people come already having learned what they needed to as students and householders, and they want to enter an ashram at a young age.

Then the other type of person usually has emotional difficulties which make them unable to function in the world, so they come to an ashram because it is a place where they feel safe, and supported. And because yoga has so many methods of working with the emotions, they get what they need to continue their process of evolution.

As said, every one of us has to pass through every ashrama, or stage of life. We are all destined to go to the desert or forest at some point, in order to prepare to serve the world in a higher way. The only question is whether you recognize that need—to evolve—to clean yourself up and prepare to serve God and your fellow beings—or put it off, and say, “No, I’m going to have fun a little while more doing my little thing.” But sooner or later, everyone is going to have to do it, whether by choice or kicking and screaming, because Life has a way of forcing us to do things that we are not willing to do. It may take a few lifetimes, it may take a million—it is up to us.

### Brahmacharya

Yoga does not advocate denial, rejection, or torture of the body. On the contrary: in order to progress spiritually, the vehicle must be strong and healthy. That is why yogis place such emphasis on proper diet, proper exercise, proper relaxation, and so forth.

However, the body must be under your control. We must not be slaves to our senses and desires.

Brahmacharya is commonly translated as “celibacy”, but it really means control of the senses. We can practice in little things at first, giving up a food we like too much, for example. In general we should not try to tackle the hardest things first.

One of the elements which contributes to society’s desperate condition to day is the total lack of brahmacharya—it is something we are just not taught. Everything is self-indulgence—indulge the senses and you will be happy. The exact opposite is true. A Brahmachari enjoys his senses much more than the ordinary man actually because they are exquisitely refined. The difference is, he is in control—he will go so far, and no further.

The practice of brahmacharya is closely linked with the third niyama, Tapas, or austerities. The difference is in brahmacharya, you practice restraint; in Tapas, you take on a challenging restriction of condition.

Both are keys in building character. They build willpower. If you have willpower developed, you can do anything.

### Christmas

The more powerful the cosmic event, the more subtle its effects on our being will be—so it is best to prepare in quiet, in solitude, with no external shows.

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The most important lesson to grasp at Christmastime is the message of renewal—of the re-birth that takes place within. No matter how hard the past year has been, no matter how many times we have tried and failed—life is ever new, we can always move on, and do better-- as long as we are alive on this physical plane, we can improve. And it is our duty to improve, to keep working at perfecting ourselves, until we can manifest in ourselves the Christ Consciousness—which is why Christ came to this planet and made his sacrifice.

Always remember that. Remember the saying of Paramahansa Yogananda: “A saint is a sinner who never gave up.”

Christ showed us the way. And what is his message? **Love.**

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We have our retreats mid-year, and at this time [Christmas Eve through the New Year] in order to reflect on the progress we have done and what we want to work on for this year. You should always set your goals at three levels: short term, medium, and long term. We make our resolutions based on these. The ultimate goal—if you accept it—is to help in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Ask yourself if you believe in this ideal, if you accept it, --honestly, deeply, be truthful with yourself—and if you don’t that is fine, but if you do, ask yourself how you can prepare for it—what strengths or qualities you need to develop, what weaknesses need to be overcome. This is the greatest gift you can give to the rest of humankind—to work on yourself. For every millimeter one of us moves up, that is less ballast that the rest of the planet has to carry. And, once you have cleaned up your own act, then you can be of real service to others. Until that

point, we are not really helping, because the good we do with one hand, we undo with another. So don't worry about not giving Christmas presents.

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In our culture Christmas has become completely materialistic, which is why we separate ourselves at this time. That is why some of us have chosen not to give, nor to receive, Christmas presents. Now is a time to go within yourself, and try to prepare the cradle of your heart, the altar of your soul, to receive the Christ Consciousness. Every year we can try to feel it—even for just one moment—but try to retain that feeling during the year.

The more intense the inner celebration is, the less external events are needed.

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(At the opening prayer of Agni Hotra, one Christmas morning)

Thank you God, for sending us your beloved Son, whom we crucify anew every day, whenever we are ungrateful, cruel, angry, thoughtless, and violent to one another.

### Cooperation

Take the example of your hand. The thumb is the most important finger, because it can move in the opposite direction. Now, does the thumb declare its independence from the other fingers, because it considers itself so much better and more important? Does it refuse to work with them out of feelings of superiority? Imagine what would happen! No—all the fingers work in cooperation. Does your hand boast because it does so many wonderful things? No! it doesn't do anything independently. You are the master. It is precisely the same situation for us. We all feel we are this important finger—and all you see around is chaos, unhappiness. We should learn from the example of our own bodies. And collectively, the same holds true—mankind are the hands and feet of the Lord. We, in reality, do nothing—no thing of our own accord.

Imagine if we would cooperate like the cells in our body. Each one does its special function, but operates in complete harmony with the others. If this process were interrupted, we would die.

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Humility yields cooperation, synthesis. **Egoism** yields separateness, competition, analysis. Synthesis is life, analysis is death. Good intentions can take us to synthesis and cooperation.

### Depression

Whenever we are depressed, or fretful, or disappointed, or upset—we are, in reality, criticizing God. We think we know better than God. The ego is like that—it always wants to be on top. We want to tell God what to do. Instead, we should be grateful. We are able to breathe. We can walk. We have a human life. We have a mind, reasoning capacity. But we forget about all these gifts, why? Because we don't have what we want.

So we must start to overcome this negative state by being grateful. Instead of concentrating on what we don't have, think about all you do have. Mothers all over the world are watching their children die of starvation because they have no food to give them. Every day people die in floods, earthquakes. Yet we sit in our comfortable houses and complain." I don't like this, this one looked at me nastily." If we have been spared all this, it is for a reason—we should be grateful for the tremendous opportunities we have, and make use of them. Otherwise it will be very difficult for us in the next life. Not everyone has the opportunity to receive these teachings, and with that knowledge comes a great responsibility.

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We love to play the victim role. That way we get other people to feel sorry for us. But this is just evading responsibility.

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Beware of falling into despondency. We all have little ups and downs—that is normal. But beware of letting it get too much a hold on you. If you feel yourself really going down, and staying down for a long time, it is dangerous because you will be attracting negative entities and vibrations towards you who want to keep you lower, because they feed off of those energies, and it can be very difficult to pull oneself up then. People can spend years in such a state and lose valuable time. So be very aware. If you feel it coming, put mind on something else. Put your mind on something positive. Pick up an inspiring book, do your practice, do a project which is constructive or creative—but determine, firmly, I am not going to let this take over. Watch a funny movie if you need to, do whatever it takes. That's the work of the spiritual path—I am going to be master, I am not going to let my emotions rule me.

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By going over our shortcomings again and again in our minds we are putting grooves in our brain, and reinforcing the problem. Seeing what we need to do clearly is enough—don't waste time feeling guilty, or on regrets. Make up your mind you are going to correct yourself in future, and deal with the situation as it comes. Don't waste your energy on negative emotions—it is much better to use that energy constructively, in changing yourself. And it doesn't matter if you fail, keep trying.

## Detachment/Vairagya (Dispassion)

You will have peace when there are no more external desires, because there will be no more movement towards something—you will just be there, waiting in silence, to know what the Lord wants you to do. So be active, yes—we are the hands and feet of God on this planet. While we are on this plane, it is our duty to act. That is what Krishna says to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, to help him overcome his despondency. He tells him You must act—but without attachment to the fruit of the results, because that attachment is binding.

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People are so attached to the idea of passion. They give workshops these days, How to Be Passionate in your career, etc. In yoga passion is not a positive thing. We should not act based on emotions and attachment, but based on dharma—responsibility—what we know is right.

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Some people develop dispassion without having developed a strong ideal. And they feel as if they are dead while living—total indifference, neither here nor there. So it is very important to develop a strong relationship with God.

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Detachment is real love. Many people cannot imagine love without attachment. They think that if you achieve detachment you are like a stone. And it is true—sometimes, for a while, you have to become like a stone. But that is only the beginning—when we have attachments that are so hard, it feels like we are dying when we cut them. But then, after a while, the real love starts to come out. There is no possessiveness—there is no ego investment—it is not conditional, no seeking for a return. It just gives. That pure feeling cannot be experienced as long as there is attachment. Attachment is not love.

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For me, there are only two types of love. **Love** with attachment, and love without attachment.

## Devotion

Devotion is a product of extreme love and loyalty. It is difficult to acquire because it is intangible and we are so immersed in our senses. That's why meditation is so important. Be quiet! Withdraw your senses.

Swami Nada Brahmananda , when he used to play the tablas, would not blink, would not breathe—he was in a state of deep meditation. That's devotion—when you can be very active, but totally still inside, centered, focused completely on God. That's devotion.



**Love for God** starts with gratitude—but not the conditional kind—if you give me this, Lord, I'll be grateful. Devotion is real trust, faith in God, communion with Him excluding all the rest [distractions]—single-mindedly feeling: I love God, this is what I'm going to do.

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**Sadhana** must be Regular—and must be a time of total devotion to God.

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Bhakti Yoga is the Yoga of Love. Yug means “yoke”, to tie: Christ taught the Yoga of Love, which is why he could say, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Bhaktas [Devotees] base their practice on meditation—communion with God as the Beloved. When you've gone far along enough on the path of Bhakti Yoga, and you have glimpses-- moments when you can truly have communion with God and hear Him talking to you-- then things really start unfolding. But until then, you have to go through the practice of **surrendering**, not knowing what the next step is, but trusting that God loves you and that anything that happens will be for the best.

### Discipline

The word disciple comes from discipline. The main job of a guru is to teach the student discipline.

Most of the time when people first come here, their lives are usually completely out of control. So I give them a very simple practice: start making your bed every morning. Simple. Everything else can be chaos, but at least—your bed is nice, well-made. You would be surprised what a feeling of accomplishment this gives. Then, once that is well-established and they are ready for more, the next step is to keep one corner of the bedroom clean. And soon the whole bedroom is orderly; then a corner of the apartment, and on it goes. These are all the first steps of discipline, and with these practices, you are able to start getting control over your life, because you realize you are capable of exerting will-power. These practices-- and punctuality, be on time to all your appointments-- are the major first steps.

Cleanliness and punctuality lead to discipline. Discipline develops self-respect. With self-respect comes security, and this sense of security in yourself is so important, because it means you can be anywhere—in any environment, even on the street—and you feel safe. This eventually leads to the faculty of **discrimination**—being able to tell the unreal from the real, and the use of the yamas and niyamas—knowing what is in line with dharma—righteousness, or duty, the universal laws-- and what is not. And that actually leads to total security because if you are in harmony with the universal laws you will be free from all suffering. But the first step is discipline.

### Discrimination/Viveka

Buddhi means “awakened”, is the faculty of discrimination. It is the part of the mind also called “the true intellect,” as distinguished from manas, or “the lower mind”, so-called because it just takes in impressions from the senses, but cannot make any decisions. Discrimination in spiritual terms is completely different from the worldly sense of the word. In spiritual terms, discrimination is the faculty of discerning the unreal from the real, the real being spiritual, and the unreal being material. This is because the material has no inherent existence—it is transient, impermanent, intransecendental. All material things will eventually disintegrate. This wall which looks so solid is actually mostly space...but the spiritual realm is eternal, it has always been and will always be. And that state of being is what we should aspire to—because that is who and what we truly are—Pure Spirit.

As long as we think, “I am this body, or I am this mind”, we are bound to suffer, because sooner or later we must leave this body, and the mind which makes us mistake the unreal for the real causes us tremendous suffering when we lose the objects of our attachment. You may find the perfect person, but sooner or later, one of you has to die, and there will be suffering. But if we have discrimination then we will not invest so much attention, so much energy, in things which have no inherent existence or value. All this is a dream, which one day you will wake up from. This is what we came to this planet for—to realize our true, spiritual nature. Every time we forget what we are, and what we are here for, we suffer.

You can only really see creation as unreal when you have seen the three planes [physical, astral, and causal] and realize they are all basically the same. None of them is real—the Spirit is the only reality, and it dwells inside. Then you won’t be tempted or fooled anymore. But you can still enjoy life, in all its beauty—in fact you enjoy everything much more. It’s exactly like going to the movies. You go to the show, and it’s such a beautiful, wonderful story. You really enjoy it. But when it’s over—do you cry? Well, some people cry at movies but that shows a certain character. But you aren’t desolate if one of the characters dies. Or if you are in the desert, and you see a mirage of a lush, beautiful oasis with clear running water—you may admire it, say how wonderful it looks—but you aren’t going to run after the illusory water to try to quench your thirst. It is the same thing once you have attained enlightenment. You can enjoy this wonderful creation—because that is what God intends for us. God didn’t place us here to suffer—we are here to enjoy creation. But in order to do that, you must understand how the cosmos works.

### The Ego

The Ego is a false persona we put on, constructed from the positive qualities we see in others which we arrogate to ourselves. We want to make other people believe that we are so good, so smart, or whatever. The ego knows it is not real so it is perpetually fearful. So, we are always on the look out to put others

down, to show that we are on top. The ego wants to be God—that is its nature. How do we know we are working from the ego? Whenever we get upset, or fret and fume, it is the ego; whenever we want to be the best, be the first one to say or do something, it is the ego. Sometimes we kid ourselves: "I don't want to be the best, I just want certain people to like me or look up to me. Or, I don't want to be in charge, I just want my way sometimes." Nonsense. Power is power. Everyone wants to be on top. Unless we learn true **humility**, and look on all those things as garbage—because that is exactly what they are—the only One whose opinion matters, or Who you should care about pleasing, is God—you are in the grip of the ego.

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That's why any negative emotion is essentially ingratitude to God. We think we know better than God. That is why **humility** is needed—it is the only thing which can knock down the ego.

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We are all lying all the time, because the ego is fundamentally false. This makes us fearful of being discovered, so we spin more lies. The persona is a false image the ego projects to make others believe it has qualities which in fact it does not possess. We imitate the qualities we admire in others and arrogate them to ourselves—this is how children learn—by imitation. So it is a fundamental part of human nature. But we must learn to outwit the ego, and master it, instead of being its slave, and be able to continue our process of development. No one knows who or what he truly is until he begins work on himself in a spiritual school. And when we constantly lie in this way pretending to be what we are not, which is what society is practically based on-- the effect on our soul is devastating—it feels it is being buried alive. So we develop low self-esteem, and self-hatred sets in, which is projected as anger to everyone around us.

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The more materialistic a society is, the worse this situation is. Everything caters to the senses, the soul is practically non-existent. We see how desperate young people are, they get into drugs, etc. because in many cases they are highly sensitive souls, and cannot take the low rate of vibration of our society. And then they sometimes even choose to leave their bodies early, because the soul sees it can't do anything more in this incarnation.

The way to help young people out of this feeling of foundationlessness, of no self-worth, is to give them unconditional **love**.

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Arrogance and fear go together, because we look down on those who are more destitute than we, and look up in fear to those who are above us—our whole society has come to be based on fear and arrogance.

Everything on the physical plane these days is becoming based on **fear**—it is satanic because fear moves us farther and farther from God, who is **Love**.

Fear and arrogance reinforce each other, because when we are arrogant we cut ourselves off from other people, from our resources, and we feel alone—we dry up inside, which reinforces fear.

Therefore the remedies to all our ego problems are number one, **humility**, and then **love**, and courage—because to break this cycle, you just have to take risks—try to be loving, and be prepared to be beaten up, be brave enough to look like a fool make mistakes. It is OK to be stupid! In fact you may even want to watch out for opportunities to risk looking stupid—because that will help you to develop humility and **compassion**, when you see other people in the same situation. This will help combat arrogance. You may fall—but that is OK. In this way you will become more real, more loving, and stronger.

## Emotions

“E-motion” is “energy in motion.” Emotions can lead us to words and actions we regret. Emotions are poor advisors. The emotions should be subject to the mind, and the mind should be subject to the soul or Atman. If we govern the emotions, rather than the emotions governing us, then we know we are in a good place.

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The mind has to rule over even *slight* emotions. Buddhi [the discriminating part of the mind, which distinguishes the real from the unreal, also called “true intellect”] has to rule to diffuse the elements that cause the feeling of anger. It takes **will-power** to use intellect and discriminate away negative emotions. We need to develop the **virtues** in order to use buddhi.

As long as we continue to respond to external stimuli like robots, then we still have a long way to go. As Swami Sivananda says, the highest form of yoga is to bear insult, bear injury. When we can do that—when people can call you names, say you are the worst kind of person, try to hurt you, and inside you feel only compassion—then we are practicing true yoga, then we are truly being spiritual. People think being spiritual means burning candles and wearing white and talking about angels, etc.—no. Watch how your ego reacts when someone puts you down. That’s when you see how spiritual you are. As long as we react inside we are still in process.

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The first stage in overcoming a negative emotion is to control the external manifestations. On a very gross level, say, not to hit a person in anger. The next level is to control our speech, to not say hurtful words. But we can do these two and still be seething inside, so all that negative energy is filling the psychic environment, poisoning all the beings on the planet. But, it is a necessary and important step. It is not hypocrisy.

People are so afraid of being “hypocrites” and of “repressing their true feelings”. As long as we are conscious of what we are doing and our intention is pure—to improve ourselves—it is not repression or hypocrisy to smile and speak nicely to someone even though we feel like hitting them over the head. Psychology today says that repression is very harmful. If you hold back from fear, or because you want people to think you are a nice person, yes, that is harmful and causes problems. But if you are doing a spiritual practice, it is positive and beneficial to everyone. It is the exact same action, but the intention determines whether it is spiritual, cowardly, or hypocritical. Also, if there were not some amount of repression, everyone would go around killing each other. What is ideal is to channel our negative energy into something constructive.

### The Power of Example

In yoga, there is no preaching. The best way to teach is always through example. In most cases it wouldn't help to preach anyway—most people are so taken with the world, the spiritual world is something that never even occurs to them. But, when they see a person who is doing serious spiritual work on himself—how he does not get upset, or frustrated, or worried when everyone else is in turmoil—then that will resonate with them—because the soul has that desire—to express its true nature-- no matter how deeply buried it may be. So the person's example, and just his vibration will be extremely beneficial —and without his saying a word, people will feel uplifted, peaceful, and happy in his presence. Someday they may ask, How did you get those qualities? I want them too. And if the question is asked, you can tell them as much as you want. It is your duty in fact to share what you have been given freely, but only if it is asked—never impose it. That is always the ego and will do more harm than good.

### Fasting

There are levels of fasting. First is the physical fast, to purify the body. Virtually every religious tradition incorporates fasting as a means to purify the body and prepare oneself for deeper spiritual work. Whenever you are sick, it is almost always better not to eat, and give the body a chance to rest. We use so much energy in digesting food—energy which the body needs to heal itself.

Then there is the verbal fast. This is useful for curing a very common affliction: verbal diarrhea. We spend so much energy in talking, talking, talking about Nonsense! Such a waste of precious time and energy. And most of the time of course we are feeding negative emotions, feeding our ego, showing how much I know, what exciting things I did, keeping up with the Jones's, and so on. At the very least, we are living our lives in a state of dissipation. What is the opposite of concentration? Dissipation. We need to reign all that energy in, and use it for our spiritual development. This is mouna, silence. Start with half an hour every day, or even 15 minutes, and gradually build up to several hours one day a week, and then one day of complete silence. Then you can progress to taking some days of silent retreat. You will find it is immensely helpful in bringing inner calm, peace. That is how they use their vacation time in India—they use it to go to ashrams, to

do spiritual practices, and recharge themselves for life in the world. Or, that is how it used to be.

And finally we have mental fasting. We can fast from impressions—turn off the TV, stop reading the newspapers, for a certain period of time, shorter or longer depending on the demands of our lives.

Fasting from thoughts is helpful in curing another condition, verbal constipation.

And finally, there is a spiritual fast—when the only thoughts you accept are those that come from God—of doing God's will, and always keeping the mind on God. Imagine, when you are in that state, what your life becomes—constant joy.

## Fear

Fear is an undesirable motivating force. It taints whatever so-called good action would come from it. People ask isn't fear useful, in the case of survival, for instance. I categorically assert No—fear is never useful. Nothing positive comes from fear. It is one of the most destructive negative emotions because it undermines one's very foundations. Take the example of crossing the street. If a car is coming, do you step into the road? No. Is it because of fear? No, it's because you know if you step into a street when a car is coming, you will get hurt. It's common sense. In the same way, in life situations, we do not need fear. Emotions are poor advisors, and fear is one of the worst.

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Love and fear cannot go together. As long as you have fear you cannot completely love. The way to overcome this is to take risks. Everyone is scared to love because they are scared of suffering. Don't prefer so-called security to life. Pain is part of life. If you reject suffering, you reject life. Only in death is there no change. Life is always changing, and we must be open to it. Love can only come from within—it can never come from without. Yogis suffer too—only they are not attached to suffering. They know soon it will pass and they will be happy again.

\*

Sometimes the Guru, like a parent, makes a show of disapproval in order to bring the student back into line. This shows that the student is still rather immature—that is how parents discipline a young child. A mature person should correct himself based on the sense of responsibility, of what is right, not out of fear.

\*

Society constantly reinforces fear—the medical, insurance, and pharmaceutical industries all depend on it. Competition also creates fear. I'm going to be the loser, people are going to look down on me—we create so many ghosts, and people spend their lives miserable, worrying, for nothing! Worrying, fear, and guilt never help Anything. When you're faced with a difficult situation, you can either do something about it, or you can't. Worrying will not help. A much

better use of your energies is figuring out what you can do with the resources that you have. And you will be of much more help to other people also.

\*

Yoga teaches us that God is Love. There is no reason ever to fear God. God loves you unconditionally, no matter what you do, and only wants the best for you—more than you do for yourself.

The Guru loves you unconditionally. We separate ourselves by projecting monsters, but God and the Guru are always there, just waiting for us with open arms and total love.

\*

The root of all fear is the fear of death. We should understand what death is therefore very clearly, to lose all fear of it. Before you go to sleep at night, you take off your clothes, right? In the morning, you wake up, put on fresh clothes, and go to work. That is exactly what death and life are. In death, we go to sleep, and put off this body, which is worn out and wrinkled, and in the morning—next life—we put on a fresh body, and go to work!

### Feelings

Feelings are different from emotions. Emotions are essentially superficial responses to external stimuli. Feelings on the other hand are inherent—they are actually states of being, and are subtle, they do not depend on anything external—they flow spontaneously from the soul. They are powerful, far more than emotions, which are by nature transient. Most of us do not experience feelings, only emotions. Be sure you can distinguish between them in yourself. Usually feelings are not expressed, because to do so would weaken and cheapen them. The more powerful and subtle a feeling is, the more it should be kept inside—then the pure energy will transmit itself.

### Flexibility

Stiffness of the body reflects inhibitions, rigidity in the mind and the emotions. We know our bodies are crystallizations of energy—the body is the last manifested, and the densest of the five koshas, or sheaths. Any imbalances in the causal, astral, or pranic bodies is reflected in the physical body. So by working on releasing restrictions in the physical body, we are helping to release them in our subtle bodies. That is why our hatha yoga should be like brushing our teeth. We need to keep the nadis free from stagnant energy.

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It is good to make plans, but we should not be rigid about them. Our duty is to act, so we should spend the time and energy to create our goals—but God is the One who decides, who knows what is best for us. So if you have a plan, and obstacles keep appearing—it is probably not meant to be. So then you pray, honestly, for guidance, and say, “My Lord, I thought this is what you wanted me to

do, but let it be your will, and not mine—now I think this is what you want me to do, and I will try that.” You can even ask for a sign. And if your intention is pure, and you pay attention, you will be sure to get some indication. Now, we should beware of imagination and wishful thinking. The truth is God *is* speaking to all of us all the time, but it takes a high degree of purity to perceive it and to interpret it correctly. If you have doubts, you ask me.

### Free Will

God gave man free will. God and the spiritual world will never impose love, or the good, or righteousness, on us. It is up to us to make ourselves open and to choose God. There comes a time when you say, “My Lord, thank you very much for giving me free will—you can have it back. I want only to do your will, not mine.”

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We have free will—yet, we are only the instruments of God, and not the doers. In reality, man chooses only what forces he aligns himself with—positive or negative. He is really only a channel—and when he is still not highly evolved, he is just a robot. He responds mechanically to external stimuli—he is governed by whatever force is with him at the moment. But when he begins his spiritual development, he consciously puts himself in the service of certain forces. That means he has become capable of rising above his own lower self—he has expanded the sphere of his interest beyond himself. But then he is still very subject to the psychic environment of his home, and then of his town, and then of his country, and then of the planet—so it is not until man has become powerful enough to pull himself above all these influences, that he can access the Cosmic Mind, or Cosmic Consciousness—and then he can actually start to affect things. To become a “doer.” But then he has truly passed beyond the level of human being and nature, to the divine nature.

But for now, it is enough for us to concentrate on consciously controlling our emotions and desires—not being slaves to them. And one of our most powerful weapons is prayer, and of course, sadhana, to keep our level of vibration high.

### Freedom

The commonly accepted notion of freedom is being able to do whatever you want. And this is false. Freedom is being able to do what you need to do, not what you want to do. Because as long as your actions are guided by your wants—that is, your desires—you are in fact a slave to your own lower nature. And that is the road to misery.

This misunderstanding of what freedom is, is the cause of tremendous suffering. Everyone in this society is concerned with “rights” based on this idea. No one thinks in terms of responsibilities—so everyone is out for himself, there is



no sense of cooperation, taking care of one another. And we see all the problems that creates.

## God

God is Love, and Love is God.

\*

God cannot be understood; God can only be experienced. As long as ego and mind are active, there is a barrier between the Self and God. Meditation takes you beyond the mind. You will have to give up your mind and ego to get to the point of being one with God.

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It is more comfortable to relate to God as a Being, because we are human Beings. Ideally we would relate to God without a gender. But what is important is to have that sense of respect and love for a higher being, so that the ego or persona can not be supreme. That is why in the beginning I advise aspirants to take on an anthropomorphic form of God, and not to relate to God as “an energy”—because the ego very easily grabs hold of that. Pride, arrogance, will constantly undermine our spiritual progress. So we need to put an element on top of the ego.

God is inside you, that is why you are free. But don’t say, “I am God,”—recognize it is the Spirit within you which is God. God is everywhere, in every thing, in every body.

\*

There is the story of a sage who once wandered into a temple, stopped in front of the altar, made his obeisance, then lay down to sleep with his feet pointing towards the altar. A priest in the temple was outraged, and went over and woke him up, saying “You So-and-So! How dare you sleep with your feet pointing towards God!” and the sage replied, humbly, “Oh, I am so sorry, will you please show me how I can sleep with my feet pointing to where God is *not*?”

## Greed and Giving

We feel we never have enough because of greed, which stems from previous lives and unfortunately is activated in this life at birth—most times, babies are born in an uncaring environment, and their psychological, mental, and emotional needs are not met by the parents; babies can only communicate by crying, which irritates the parents, so there is tension. Then society stimulates us with competition, etc., and greed, which is caused by insecurity, also feeds insecurity because when you take you are taking away from someone else—then, you feel fearful that they will take it away from you, so there is again constant tension.

When you receive, you lose, because you are dependant on something outside. When you give, it's because you have abundance—so you feel full. We can never be satisfied by receiving from outside because our true need is an internal one. Being one with God is the only thing that will satisfy us.

### Guilt

Don't waste your energies on guilt. Apologize, make amends if possible, try to rectify the situation, and then decide firmly that you are not going to make the same mistake again. You will—don't worry, just keep trying, a million times if you have to. Guilt is just a tremendous waste of energy, and worse still, it can be used to feed the ego. We love to play the victim role, "I'm such a terrible person," so people will feel sorry for us and tell us how great we are.

Yogis take responsibility for their actions. Be clear with yourself—evaluate whether your actions were correct or not, if they were correct—using the yamas and niyamas as a guide—then no problem, no matter if people understand you or not. But if your actions were not correct, see where you made the error and take steps not to do it again.

### The Guru

A teacher has to be able to address the student wherever they are. You have to provide as much as you can to everybody.

A teacher cannot be concerned with what people on the outside may think, because they have no scope to evaluate the actions of the Guru. All I know is, "This is my responsibility to this soul, and I will do it, no matter what."

\*

To the question: "Is Guru God?" "Yes. ---because in reality everyone is God."

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One of the most difficult things for a liberated being is seeming like a normal person.

\*

A person becomes a guru when a student accepts him as such. One doesn't grab a person by the hair and say, "You're going to be my student and I'm going to be your Guru!" Nothing is imposed.

\*

A guru always hopes and expects that his student will surpass him. That means he has been honest in giving all he has.

## The Guru-Disciple Relationship

The Guru-disciple relationship is more difficult in the West because there is this strong tradition of “critical thinking.” Everyone wants an explanation, wants proof. In the East the Guru gives the chela or spiritual aspirant a practice and says, “Now do it,” and the student does the practice, and then realizes why his teacher gave it to him, through his own personal experience. But in the West, we have a situation where a person with no life experience, who has not yet acquired any wisdom, puts the burden of proof on the teacher—because if any doubt can be raised, it shows how intelligent we are. There is no respect, and so much time and energy is wasted in discussions which do not take us anywhere. Not that yoga encourages belief based on dogma—no, question, by all means, but be prepared to test the truth of something by your own experience. As Lord Buddha said, “Do not believe any book, no matter how sacred; do not believe any man, no matter how holy he may be; do not even believe what I am saying to you—believe only your own experience.” We must at least be open to accepting as valid hypotheses what the teacher tells us, in order to try it and see for ourselves. All the sages and the saints, through all times and places, cannot be lying to us. It cannot be a big conspiracy. No—they have walked the path themselves, and leave us guideposts for our journey—they are constantly encouraging us, saying, “Come on, I did it, and so can you! This is what I did.” And in this way, by our own practice, we develop faith based on experience.

\*

Western society is consumerist—we’re used to shopping around. That same character we carry with us into the spiritual life—we go to this teacher, now to that one—there is no depth. In the East it’s different because there are less choices!

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The Guru’s responsibility is to challenge the student—first, to make him see his own animal nature, and that is difficult. It is not a pleasant task for the Guru, but it must be done. And that causes tension in the beginning, because people don’t like to see it in themselves. Yet we all have the lower nature. A lot of people cannot take it, and they leave.

Then, the next stage is to challenge the ego—and that is really difficult. We all know how the ego hides, how sneaky and subtle it is. We cannot see the ego at work in ourselves—we can see it very clearly in others, but not in ourselves. It takes someone outside us to hold up a mirror and show us what we really are. And it is not pleasant. There is really horrible stuff in there, from this life and even many lives past, sometimes thousands of lives. But it is almost impossible to see it in oneself. It’s like trying to tickle yourself. Nothing happens. But someone else comes along and tickles you and you jump through the roof. It’s the same thing.

And once you really start working hard on the ego, it is the same sensation as dying, and gives a feeling similar to depression—you don’t know what to live for, what to work for; this period can last for months, years, or even a lifetime,

depending on how deeply ingrained the patterns or samskaras are. If you read the lives of most saints, they have passed through this also, and many call it “The dark night of the soul.” You just have to go through it. Prayer can help. You come out of the experience only by the grace of God, and that teaches you that you are not in control. Only God is. And you become indifferent to all things of the world, and know that the only important activity or goal in life is to be close to God.

But this suffering is different from worldly suffering in that it has a purpose. In the world you suffer, and you don’t know why, and you are at the mercy of life. On the spiritual path, you are taking the bull by the horns, so to speak. It is a conscious choice.

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Tradition stresses the importance of having a living Guru—it is necessary for virtually everyone to have someone who can point out these things.

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The spiritual path is often compared to a razor’s edge. It is very easy to fall off the path just when you have started to make some real progress. And that is why there must be trust and love between Guru and disciple, because the road is rough and dangerous. It’s like rock climbers—one misstep, and everyone can fall.

\*

Many weird things happen in this relationship because the Guru has to break up so many structural patterns of the student which he is attached to, in order to be able to open up—so from an outside, materialistic perspective it can look terrible. A student says something and the Guru comes down hard on him and people say, “What’s the big deal? What’s wrong with him? The man was only making a joke.” But that student needs something in that particular moment which only the Guru knows. There is a story of a guru and a group of disciples, who were sitting around a camp fire one night. All of a sudden, the Guru took a brand from the fire and pressed it against the arm of his closest disciple who was sitting next to him, and would not let him go until his arm was terribly burned. All the disciples were of course horrified, “What are you doing?” Then the Guru explained. “Because of past karma, this man was supposed to be burned to death tonight. But because he has more work to do in this lifetime, I have taken on some of his karma, and he has paid some by his arm being burned. Because of these actions, he can continue to work in this life.” So we see from the outside, the internal, spiritual side cannot be seen. So it is always best to withhold judgement, and just tend to our own work.

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The uncomfortable experiences help us learn that discomfort is OK—because it brings something good for you. It is the preparation for going into unknown spaces.

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If a student has any doubts, loyalty is not complete.

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Loyalty to God or Guru means always remembering Him.

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The only way to try to make ourselves proof against dis-loyalty [such as Peter's betrayal of Christ] is to practice in little, everyday situations. But of course, at our level it is not necessary to put our minds on such high trials, we have plenty to deal with on our small scale.

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A Guru's primary duty is to teach the student discipline. That is the root of the word disciple—discipline. Because once the student has that—he is free, to go and walk his path without the support of the Guru, because the Guru knows he can stand on his own two feet. Of course, the relationship between them is eternal—the bond never dies.

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The main job of a guru is to awaken love in the disciple. Because in learning to love the Guru, we develop trust, and that trust helps us to surrender. And this love and surrender to the Guru is a preparation for loving and surrendering to God. Because it is difficult for us to conceive of loving or surrendering to something we cannot see. Whereas the Guru, since he has a human form, is familiar to us. We need to use our senses on this physical plane, because we are rather dull, ah? So we need to touch fire and feel pain because it burns, that is how we learn. Similarly with the Guru we have someone to tell us when we are going wrong, or when we are on the right track. And the Guru's love for the student is unconditional. The Guru asks for nothing. On the contrary, he considers himself the servant of all.

In the beginning you cling to the Guru, and to God, until you have learned enough and become strong enough to stand on your own. And then you no longer need to cling to the Guru. You walk on together.

\*

The Guru-disciple relationship is essentially a love relationship. Because of that love there is confidence, there is trust, and you can do anything the Guru tells you. In this way he helps you learn how to deal with all your problems—the Guru is one who tells you, you have to work on This. He keeps working with you on a few essential issues, and once you have learned the method, he lets you go. He sends you away.

\*

It is not necessary to always be in the physical presence of the Guru. As in the case with a householder—they cannot physically live with the Guru, but they attend what functions they can. Or other people live in cities far away, again, they come once a year, twice a year, some of them come once a month—it all depends on each one's circumstance and how much they can do. But what matters most is the subtle connection.

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The Guru loves everyone the same, all the time; what can make it appear as if there is a preference is the disciple's receptiveness to the Guru. If there is no resistance, only surrender, it makes it possible for more things to manifest.

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The way a disciple can be of most use to the Guru is to attain self-realization.

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While the Guru is with the students, life is magical; just being in his presence gives that quality to life. When he is gone—he is still with his disciples, but evidently, it is not equivalent.

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When you have a young tree, a sapling, how do you protect it? You build a fence around it, until it is mature and strong enough to stand by itself. It is the same with the Guru and student. In the beginning the aspirant must be sheltered. Almost all traditions recommend a period of withdrawal from the world at the beginning, because it is so easy to be weakened and pulled out by external influences, especially by friends and family who have no clue what the spiritual life is about. Catholic nuns do that: for the first year, only one visit from the family is allowed, and that is very short, about 15 minutes, and takes place with a grille between them. Aside from that, no phone calls, no visits. In the same way, for a time it is necessary to stop reading newspapers, not go to movies, not see television—to stop this constant bombardment on all our senses with fear and materialism.

Then, later, when the student has become stronger, he may go back to the world, because he will not fall prey to its temptations—he will be in the world, but not of it, and that's when he can be of immense help to people, by showing them, with his example, that it is possible.

### *On Vyasa's own relationship to His Guru*

From my Master I learned total humility, and with humility came total surrender, and from surrender came total joy.

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Just because a student does not see the teacher often, does not mean the connection is not there. He is everything to me—He is my source.

Happiness, Joy, Bliss

Never think that some activity or anything you do is going to give you joy. No. Joy is grace, it just comes as a grace from God.

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We often mistake excitement for happiness. But then our life is like a roller coaster—big highs, and deep valleys, and we are like a yo-yo, always swinging from one extreme to the other. And the astral body loves that. It thrives on emotion, intense vibrations, it doesn't care if they are positive or negative, it doesn't discriminate—that is the faculty of buddhi, the true intellect. And so eventually we get depressed, and go to psychologists, and take pills to try to regain balance. What is needed is even-mindedness—not get caught up in emotion. E-Motion, energy in motion.

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True happiness can only come when there is peace. It does not depend on anything—nothing external triggers it. It is an overflowing of the soul. Nothing extraordinary may be happening outside—things, seen from an external, materialistic perspective, might even seem very challenging—yet you feel this joy. Look at the saints' lives. From the outside it seems as though they must have suffered a lot—but they were happy. Look at St. Martin de Porres, St. Therese—they weren't depressed. They were happy, joyful. Joy is an expression of the soul, because it is a quality of our true nature—Sat-Chit-Ananda, Being, Consciousness, Bliss. So when we do our sadhana regularly; when we observe the five principles, proper breathing, proper diet, proper rest—that is so important, getting enough rest, going to bed early—proper exercise, meditation and positive thinking—and when we are working on cleaning up our defilements in our daily interactions—we will get glimpses of this joy, as a sign that we are on the right path, and as an encouragement to keep working. Because it is not easy, but it is extremely beautiful, and is worth all the effort. In fact all our efforts are really nothing compared with the benefit we receive, and of course that benefit is passed to others.

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Happiness is when all of a sudden, for no reason, you start crying. The happiness you feel inside is too much, and it overflows.

Joy is when you see creation coming alive for you—you start understanding everything.

Bliss is when you understand that even creation is an illusion; the only thing that exists is God.

The only way to experience happiness is to act in harmony with the Law.

### Householder's Life

It is more difficult to walk the path as a householder, but it is possible, and there is even the possibility of advancing farther than those who are not, precisely because there are so many more obstacles. But we have examples like Lahiri

Mahasaya, the guru of the guru of Paramahansa Yogananda, who come to show us that it can be done.

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We must try never to deal with our children when we are angry. But sometimes it is necessary with children to make a display of anger—and that is OK, as long as there is love behind it. And that is an example many Gurus give us. You can be firm. You should explain what the consequences of an action will be, and if the conditions you lay down are not respected, you impose the consequences. In that way, the parent is teaching the child the Law of Karma, which is a great service in preparing for Life. The Law of Karma is inflexible—it does not say, “Oh, Johnny is such a nice boy, I will not bring him the consequences of his action.” Show me a spoiled child and I will show you an unhappy adult.

We must try hard not to be angry around children. It can be terrifying—completely overwhelming-- for a small child to see a big child—the grown-up—having a temper tantrum. You can effect a child for life. Leave the house if you need to and come back—you can just step outside—but yes it is important to be firm. They will feel it if there is love in your actions—even if consciously they react and rebel-- and they will not be harmed. Children who grow up ruling their parents are miserable adults and mess themselves up badly, because they think they have everything coming to them and they are in for a big surprise. They have never had to learn how to handle their negative emotions, or to curb their selfishness, so it creates big problems. But then they break their heads, and life teaches them—the hard way. And then they come back to you crying. So it is better to be clear with them from the beginning.

Once they reach a certain age—you are done—they are souls, they have free will, and they have a direct relationship with God. They have karma and dharma. The parents can only do so much. You have to respect them and let them be who they are—but it is your responsibility to give them the tools to handle life.

It is a big responsibility for which most people are not prepared. There are not good parenting classes offered in schools. The traditional knowledge of caring for babies, and diet, and so forth that used to be handed down from mother to daughter is very much lost today, so in almost every case parents have to reinvent the wheel.

That’s why it is important, if possible, to plan the conception, and for the parents to have a strong spiritual discipline themselves—this will help tremendously to face the responsibilities of parenting with less difficulty.

When you have children it is not easy to maintain a regular sadhana. They need something and you have to drop everything and do it—they are totally dependant on you. That is why it is especially important to try to go to bed early so you can wake up before everyone else—say at 4 or 4:30—to be able to do your practice.

If you’re intention is honest, you can be sure that you will be able to do what you need to. You have to make your sadhana your number one priority—



and remember that it is really God—not you—who truly provides for and cares for your children. You have to fulfill your responsibilities, yes, but you are not ultimately the one in control—God is.

And if your spiritual calling is strong enough to do what Christ called us to do—Leave father, mother, brother, sister, child, and follow me—and if your intention is honest, not to escape, but to serve God and your fellow human beings—then, you can be sure, He will take much better care of your family than you ever could.

### Humility

Of all the virtues to develop, Humility is the most important. If you can develop humility that'll take you to God.

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Take the example of a nut. You see a car—a Rolls Royce, beautiful, fancy, big shiny cab—no one notices the little nut on the tire. But if that nut doesn't do its job—crash, the whole beautiful car will go to pieces. We are that little nut. We should never feel we are not important—every single being, every tiny ant, every person, has a special role to play in creation—creation could not go on if any one of us weren't here, doing our part. So we should do what we need to do, humbly, in whatever circumstances God places us.

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Take a wave in the ocean. It swells—it feels it is mighty and magnificent, it is so high and powerful and important—then what? Slam! It's gone. And it realizes, Oh, I'm just part of the ocean. That is just what we do. It's true—we are part of this vastness that is God and creation, but as soon as we start to think we are so important, as soon as we believe that we are separate from the ocean and can function by ourselves—slam!

### Karma

The Law of Karma is: Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction. Karma is not a punishment—that is a popular misconception today in the West, because of the influence of Christianity. The purpose of the Law of Karma is to teach. You do something good, something good will happen to you. You do something “bad” something “bad” will happen to you—of course we know in reality there is no “good” and no “bad”, it all depends how you see it—we know that God is Love, and therefore everything that happens in the universe is perfect—it serves some purpose, and will be for the better, even if we cannot understand it with our limited perception.

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We are all instruments of one another's Karma, and that is why we should never take anything personally. We get so upset, “She did this to me, He said that to me...” and we love to play the victim role. Nonsense! Anything that happens to you—bad or good—is the result of your Karma. It cannot be otherwise.

So, whenever someone does or says something nasty to you, you should think, “Thank you very much, you are helping me to pay some Karma.” And it feels good to pay off our debts, right? It’s a little less we owe.

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The Law of Karma will keep coming down on us until we have learned our lesson—its purpose is to teach. So if we fret, and whine, it means we have not really understood the lesson we are being given, so it will come again, in a harder form—the screws will tighten a little bit more. Because unfortunately, we are hard-headed—which is why we are on this physical plane. We hit something hard—and it hurts—so we learn—hopefully!—not to do it again. And this is how karma works. If we want not to generate any more karma with a particular issue—because in reality we are all generating karma all the time—the proper way is to accept everything that happens to us as our own responsibility, and take it happily. Also, when we view others as instruments of karma, it takes the sting out of it—we won’t waste so much energy on personal, petty, negative emotions.

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Yogis always take responsibility for their actions. They never try to pass the blame onto someone else—because they know everything that happens to them is because of past actions. And there is no sense racking our brains trying to figure out the possible causes of such and such an event—the karma which generated it may have been several lifetimes back—it doesn’t matter—all that matters is how you deal with it Now.

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All karma—positive or negative—binds. Karma is actually the reason why we reincarnate—because it is an inexorable law that we must receive the fruits—positive or negative—of all our actions: unless we perform our action without attachment. That is the beauty of the main teaching of the Bhagavad Gita: “Perform all your actions without any expectation for the fruit of them. Perform them as an act of worship to God, knowing you are just the instrument, and not the doer.” This shows us the way to freedom. We don’t want to come back to this place! At least, if we do, it should be because we Choose to come back, to be of service to others—but not because we are bound to receive the fruits of our karma.

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The Law of Karma is closely intertwined with **reincarnation**. The Law of Karma—like all cosmic, or universal, or natural, or spiritual Laws—is incontrovertible. Cosmic laws never relax or get misapplied. Unlike human justice—which is often flawed—the cosmic laws are perfect. Otherwise, nothing would make sense. Sometimes things seem so unfair. Why is one child born a musical prodigy, and he has a brother who has no musical talent? They have the same parents, they were raised in the same environment; it is because in previous incarnations, the prodigy has worked very hard on perfecting his musical abilities. It would be truly unfair, and life would not make sense, if we all had just

one chance—this lifetime—and then death, and that was the end of the story. But in reality, whatever virtues and abilities we work very hard at will remain with us after we die, and we will carry them into future lives. We begin each new life where we left off in the last.

So when we see something very horrible happening, say a flood in which thousands of people die, there are one of two cosmic laws operating: either the Law of Karma, or the Law of Sacrifice. It may be that, because of previous karma a soul has to learn a lesson that can only come with that horrible suffering. Or it may be that a soul has offered itself to help humankind, and is sacrificing itself by dying in that flood. Therefore, we can never judge. And we must always have compassion, and do everything within our means to help those who are suffering. But at least we have this knowledge—of reincarnation and the law of Karma-- to help us understand how life works, and the perfection of God's universe.

### Karma Yoga/Selfless Service

Karma Yoga is the Yoga of Action. Karma means action; Yoga has many meanings, including union, and skill in action. So, karma Yoga is the path to union with God through skillful action. The Bhagavad Gita describes the perfect action as: Action in inaction, and inaction in action; that means, the perfect action, which does not accrue karma but actually brings liberation. The way to achieve this is described in the main teaching of the Bhagavad Gita: Perform all your actions without any expectation for the fruit of them. Perform them as an act of worship to God, knowing you are just the instrument and not the doer. Action in inaction: in stillness, meditation, no external movement, the yogi is performing the highest action—union with God. Inaction in action: but when he must act, he is only being an instrument in the hands of God—he takes no credit, and feels no attachment towards his action, and therefore is not bound by it.

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The purpose of our existence is to serve. Until we have realized this, not intellectually but deep in our being—that the reason we are on this planet is to serve our fellow beings and God—we are still under the sway of the ego. Work is a necessary condition of living on earth. You cannot get anything without work. You cannot eat; you would have no shelter or clothing without work. God said this to Adam when he ate of the Apple: “You shall earn your bread with the sweat of your brow.” In the astral plane, you just think of a thing and it appears; no effort, no work. On the physical plane, the material is dense, and it takes a lot of effort to live. So we might as well get used to the idea!

Even after we have evolved past the stage of human being, we are destined to evolve through the angelical hierarchies—angel, archangel, thrones, virtues, powers, etc. And at each higher level, there is a greater scope of service to be done. But at those stages in reality you don't look on it as work—it gives great joy. But still—it is not as if you do your work and then you're done. As long as you have a body—even such a subtle body—there is work to be done. And then, when you have evolved beyond serving on this planet—even at subtle

levels—you go on to other planets; and then you progress beyond this galaxy, and so on into other universes! Sounds far out.

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There are many levels of service. There are people who do good things—they give a lot of money to build a library, and have their name engraved on it. Then there are, say, the Sisters of Charity, who do real service, they work very hard in very difficult conditions, serving people in the world. Then there is another level, where it is necessary to withdraw from the world for a time, to perfect oneself. This was the case say, of the Fathers of the Desert. They are still serving the world—but at a subtle level. And we know, the more subtle the force, the more far-reaching its effects. Just look at how far sound travels in earth. Then consider in water. Then how much further sound travels in air. And then how many millions of miles into space they can send certain frequencies. Once one has completed that phase of seclusion, one may come back to the world and do tremendous service—that was the case of Mother Teresa. She was completely focused, completely dedicated.

## Love

The secret is to learn to do our actions with the energy of pure love. Normally what we call “love” in the world is a good business deal: I love you if you love me. If you don’t love me I don’t love you. We do things “for” the other person but in reality we are seeking recognition, appreciation, etc. That is not love, really. That is selfishness, self-servingness. Love is a state of being—it is not conditional. It is only giving, all the time. It is abundance.

We always give the example of the sun. The sun is always there, giving its light—it does not say, Oh, that John is a so-and-so, I’m not going to shine on him today. Or that person is a criminal. No. It just shines, because that is its nature. God is Love. And that is what we are, that is our real nature. Anything else—the business contract—is from the ego, trying to ensure its survival. When you give, you have **abundance**. When you receive, it is because you don’t have—you are poor.

So the secret is to act from pure love, not greed (self-seeking), or anger, in any of its forms. It is difficult because society stimulates greed, selfishness, and competition—parigraha—not love, so we almost don’t know how to make offerings of love without need and greed.

Before we can truly love, we must first develop **respect**. That is why respect is the first spiritual quality we try to develop in the School of Life. If we have respect for a person, we will not be chasing after him trying to be near him in body—we think that love is two bodies touching each other—no. Love is internal—outside, no action. But internally—sending the person light. That is a pure, selfless offering. The souls speak to each other. And the soul *demand*s purity. And then the souls become one, because there is true love. What exactly does becoming one mean? In reality we are all one, but we don’t know it because

of ignorance, the ego makes us feel separate. But when there is love, the Oneness becomes a living reality. Easy? No. But we should aspire to that state.

It is also important not to impose “gifts” of love on a person that are actually unwanted, whether it be material objects or doing things for them--again, this is selfish giving, without tact. It is very difficult to know what a person truly wants—we don’t even know ourselves, how much less another person. You cannot fool the soul—the energy of such an offering will be tainted.

We think we are being so loving by doing, doing, doing—no, go inside. Real love is internal, not at all physical. You can’t expect any appreciation. Send light to the person you love—train the mind to concentrate. How do we develop this love? Ultimately by surrender to God.

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Many people say they don’t know how to love. Love is something that cannot be given to you. It is inside. Love only gives, it doesn’t take. It is inside you, so it has to come from inside out—it cannot be the other way. You can start practicing to love with the things around you. You can pick a tree, and say, I’m going to love this tree. And talk to it, hug it, talk to it as if it were your best friend, and soon you’ll see—that tree will start to be different for you—you will love it. Animals too—they love unconditionally. It is easy to feel love with plants and animals because they never are in bad moods, they don’t say nasty things to you. People are more difficult. But if you do this practice, little by little you will feel the love start coming out, and then you will know you have it to give—and you won’t need it anymore, because you will have—you will experience abundance.

And that is what we have to remember—it is possible to love Everyone, and Everything in creation. We need to constantly work at expanding our love—not just loving our family, but then our neighbors, and then our country, and then people in all countries, and then the animals—stop eating them, become a vegetarian—and so on, until Nothing is excluded from our love. This is how we eventually come to the state of divine love—where we love everyone alike, no differences, whether you are my mother, you are not my mother, you are my child, you are not my child—no, How can I make an difference? we are all one! That is what the sannyasins in India do. They leave their families, and don’t see them anymore so all humankind becomes their family. Jesus and Gandhi said it and did it—love your enemy. Yes it is possible—love is the Only thing that overcomes hate. It is very difficult, but we must always try—remember the highest form of yoga according to Swami Sivananda—Bear insult, bear injury.

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It has been said that in the ancient past, blood ties—the family—were the most important relationship. That was the era of feuds, and so forth. Then, around the time that Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet, the romantic relationship—the

bond between a man and a woman—was seen to be the most significant. You would leave your family if need be to be with the person you loved. Now, we see another shift, where even this union is breaking down. There are as many if not more divorces these days than marriages. From the outside, it looks like a terrible thing—the breakdown of the family, and of male and female love—but in reality, it is just the next phase in our evolution. We are inevitably moving towards universal love—a time when we love everyone the same, they don't need to be our blood family, or our partner—just because we are all human, we love each other. We see more and more intentional communities nowadays.

Mystical tradition stresses that it is not your blood family who are your brothers. It is the like-minded people, the members of your spiritual fraternity, who are your family. What did Christ say? “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” This is what he meant.

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Love is the gateway to everything. Love is the essence of everything. God is love. Why could Christ heal people? because of his love. Whatever we do to another, we do to ourselves.

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People ask about the existence of Soul mates. And there is a theory that in the beginning of creation it there were souls which became split into two, and that those two are always seeking each other, and if they find each other, their love will be sublime and their joy one of the highest that can be felt in the physical plane.

What is important to remember is that even if we meet the perfect person, if we are incomplete ourselves, it will spoil the relationship because we will be needy of the other person, and that is not fair—we would be a drag for the other person. Only when we are complete in ourselves, self-sufficient, can we give to another being—and only then can we truly bring something of worth to a love relationship. But that is something that can only exist between two realized beings, so we should not even think about it now. That satisfaction would be the highest that can be experienced on the human plane, but until we get there, it is best not to put our energies on it. We have a lot of work to do, and a lot better ways to spend our energy.

And, even if we did attain that, still—the only complete satisfaction, the only perfect love, to be experienced is between the soul and God. Nothing external will ever satisfy the soul's desire for Union, for Oneness.

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The greatest love that can be experienced on the human plane is that between Guru and disciple.

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### *Love of God*

You can safely give all your love to God. Start by choosing a form of God you can relate to. It may be the Virgin Mary, or Lord Krishna, or Jesus, or Buddha—it doesn't matter. Choose a form of God you feel comfortable with, and

then, talk to God as if He were with you. Tell him everything, it doesn't matter how small or stupid. Tell him about all your problems. God has no problems! He will never say anything nasty to you! At first it may feel weird or uncomfortable, but keep trying and soon you will feel a relationship start forming. And you can play little games. Like tell God, Please, give me some sign today that you heard my prayer, and if you pay attention, you can be sure some sign will be given. Now, we shouldn't become victims of our imagination running around thinking God is talking with us—and be sure not to talk about it with anyone, because that means the ego is at work, and is the fastest way to lose anything of real value that could be gained from the experiment. Keep it to yourself, do it in a balanced way, but you will see that it works. And little by little, you start building up a trust, and a confidence, because you know that God and the spiritual world are paying attention, to you, and listening to you.

And at some point you will feel so embarrassed, because you will know you are nothing, and yet God pays attention to you. You feel so worthless, and then—that leads you to feel humble. And then you feel grateful, and you love God. You realize all He does for you, all His protection and then you will never want to complain about anything again.

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The love of God is to know no difference between good and evil, like Adam and Eve before the Fall. That is because you know the universe is just a manifestation of love.

The Garden of Eden represents the Astral Plane. There everything was just for their enjoyment. In the astral plane all you need to do is think of something and Poof! it appears—there is no need to work, as on the physical plane. But they wanted to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, why? Because the serpent told them that then they would become like God. And that is the ego—the Ego wants to be God. So they had to come to the physical plane, where God told Adam he would have to Earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. And here we are.

The way to feel that true love of God is to undo the original sin—wanting to be like God. Give up the ego, which wants to be on top.

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Loyalty means remembering God. By not being conscious of God's presence throughout the day, we are unconsciously hiding from God, thinking He is not seeing what we are doing.

That is why the Muslims have this practice—which is so beneficial—of praying five times a day. That means that whatever else is going on—no matter what important business transaction you may be engaged in, you may be a mother cooking and your children are screaming—it doesn't matter. When the time comes, you stop and pray—five times a day. That is really the minimum we need to pull our minds out of the trap we all get pulled into of daily life and remember—Ah, yes, God, the spiritual world—that is what is important, that is why I am here, and what I am working for.

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Everyone knows the feeling of being in love. How everything seems wonderful. Anything can happen, people can beat you up, treat you like trash—doesn't matter, nothing bothers you. Everyone is happy being around someone who's in love. Wouldn't it be wonderful to feel that way all the time? That's how saints, and enlightened beings feel. They are always happy because they are in love with God. And they see God everywhere. So they are all the time in love. And when you are in that state, it's as if you are hearing God saying inside you, I love you, I love you, I love you, all the time—and you feel so happy. It doesn't depend on anything external.

I've had students who tell me they don't know why, they just start crying—nothing happened—there's just this incredible feeling of love and joy, and they feel they can't take it—they start sobbing. Those are the little glimpses, You're on the right path, keep doing what you're doing.

### Mantra

The mind must be active. We learn from the Vedas that the mind is made from Rajo-Guna—[see glossary of yoga terms] so activity is its nature. There is the story of a man who was given a genie. Genies are wonderful beings—they have extraordinary powers and can grant all your wishes. But the genie had to be kept busy all the time, or he would become destructive. So the man told the genie to climb up and down a high ladder, and he had him doing that all day, and this way, he was able to keep the genie in his service so he could make use of his gifts as needed. Or take for example a wild horse. How do you train a horse? You tie him to a post, and let him run around and around until he is worn out, then you can approach him, give him a carrot, and then you jump into the saddle! Mantra is the post, mantra is the ladder. The mind must be kept occupied—an idle mind is the devil's workshop—but keep it active with something useful, something divine. Otherwise we constantly dwell on nonsense—“she said this to me, he looked at me this way”, and stir up negative emotions.

Once you have repeated a mantra enough times, it will automatically start playing in your head. You know how sometimes you have a melody stuck in your head? It's more or less the same, but since it is a mantra it will be a spiritual background for all your thoughts—it will help you keep your contact with the spiritual world, and especially if it is a name of God, will help you remain in the presence of God all day—and that is the aim of our spiritual practices, to establish contact with the spiritual world.

What happens when you keep the mind always on God? You become like God. No one thinks about that—even supposedly very spiritual people. We are here to become divine. Difficult? Yes. The angels just adore God incessantly, and that is also something you never hear about—that it is our duty—it is in fact our



inevitable future—to evolve to become angels, and then archangels, and then up through the angelical hierarchies, thrones, dominions, cherubim, seraphim, etc. This life is a preparation to reach that state of constantly praising and glorifying God.

### Materialism vs. Spirituality

Most of us live like half-beings—imagine a person with one leg, one arm, one eye—yet that is exactly how we are when we have no consciousness of our own spiritual nature. But it is Worse than being half there physically, because spirituality is the more important part of us!

### Meditation—Beginning Stages

When you first start to meditate, it is OK to let the thoughts run through your mind. But just sit still, without doing anything, for five minutes at first, then ten, then fifteen...gradually building up, but the most important thing is regularity in your practice. No matter what, don't miss. Then gradually start watching your thoughts, as if they belonged to someone else—not getting involved. It helps to be aware of your breathing—that will automatically calm you down...

### The Mind

The mind is like a lake. If you take a stick, and insert it straight into clear water, it will appear bent, because of the effect of refraction when the light strikes the water. In the same way, the only desire of the soul is to become one with God. The light shining into the water is the pure impulse of Spirit; when it passes through the mind it becomes fragmented, due to the principle of maya or illusion, so we think “I want this man,” or “I want this woman,” or “I want a new car,” thinking these things will make us happy. But no material thing—and this includes not only things or money but also fame, people's admiration, etc.—can ever make us happy, because our one true desire is spiritual, and unless we can feel this closeness with God, we will never be satisfied.

The mind and the **ego** work hand in hand. The mind loves distraction, and the ego loves to create confusion. So the mind will keep you running here and there, and the ego will create big dramas and problems with everyone around you. We must learn to control the mind, and submit the ego.

We must learn to quiet the mind. Where Peace is, God is. When you invite a friend to your home, do you go and turn the TV on full volume? No. We would think that was extremely rude. But that is exactly how we treat God. God is speaking to every one of us constantly, but there is so much noise and garbage in our minds that we cannot hear Him. So we must learn to quiet the mind.

## The Path

There is no established path that anyone can follow, say from a book. Because each person has an unthreaded path that must be followed. That is why the spiritual path is always new—it is different for everybody. We cannot know ahead of time what it is going to be like. It cannot be explained. It is like trying to explain what sweet is to a person who has never tasted it. You can try until you're blue in the face, or you can hand someone some sugar and say, "Taste this." Yoga is an experiential path. No one else can do the work for you. Not the Guru—no one. We must be open to uncertainty. No one likes uncertainty because it brings up feelings of fear—fear is generally caused by the unknown. But if we do the practices, and realize their fruit, we will develop faith—faith based on experience. And that will give us courage to go a little further, and a little further. And then we will develop trust—in the Guru, in yoga, in ourselves—and this faith gradually turns into love, and with love we can surrender to God. Because with true surrender we know that whatever happens is God's will, and we know that God loves us. So anything that happens will always be for the better.

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One of the most common detractions or accusations made to those who are starting on the spiritual path is, Well you are just being selfish. Not at all. If those people knew what sacrifice was involved in really trying to improve yourself, to overcome our limitations, they would not say that. Let them try it! And see how easy it is. No, very few try because it is very difficult work.

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Some of our negative tendencies have been with us for many lives—maybe hundreds, or even thousands of lives, in addition to all the experiences and habits we acquire in this life. So it can really feel like trying to take off your skin, or losing a limb—it really feels like losing a part of your self—like you are dying. And that is true. But as we hear in the prayer of St. Francis, In dying we are born to eternal life, Christ said the same thing, He who loses his life for my sake shall gain it. Or, take the example of washing clothes. When you put a really dirty rag in the wash, the water comes out really dirty. And the more you scrub, the more dirt comes out. It is not pleasant working on these things! But you have to do it, and in the process, you are becoming cleaner, lighter, purer, although in the midst of it, it often does not feel that way.

Another example is filling a water bottle. If you did have eyesight, or if you were in the dark, and were trying to fill a bottle with water, you would not know the bottle was full until it overflowed. Meanwhile you would keep filling and filling. That is what grace and the spiritual work is like. You don't know where you are—how close you may be. Your only job is to keep working, keep working, not giving up, and one day, it will happen. That is God's grace. Now, it may happen to some people even without that effort, and that is God's will—God can do anything, but our job is to mind our own business and do what we need to do to keep growing.

We must keep building up our pure energy so that we can sustain others who are struggling.

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We can always improve. There is no end to growing—as long as you have a body, there is something to learn. There is no such thing as perfection on the physical plane. This plane is composed of the opposites—light and dark, cold and hot, etc. So we have the positive and the negative, no doubt about it, everyone does. You will always be able to find some fault in every one, no matter how highly evolved that person may be.

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Sometimes we feel so frustrated, because we have been working for so long on a defilement, but it is still with us. What we do not understand, is that it is God's will that we still have that defilement. It is still serving some purpose. When it is time, he will remove it from us. We can pray, we can work, but ultimately it is only by His grace that we become free.

We get impatient, and feel limited, and anxious, because we still see our existence in terms of this one life. You have many lives ahead of you. Death just marks a transition from one stage of life to the next. It is our ego which pushes so hard and wants to see results. But are we working for our own self-improvement, to become better people? No. We are working in order to serve God and our fellow beings. If it takes a million lifetimes, it takes a million lifetimes—that is God's will. Our only responsibility is to do the best we can, to put our best effort. God will decide the rest.

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When people become very highly evolved, it is not so much faults they have, or defilements, but rather imperfections. For example, a spiritual teacher may feel impatient because he sees that a student has all the potentials, all the capacities, but is not growing as he should. It is not wrong, it is not selfish, but it is an imperfection.

### Patience

In order to practice **humility** we need to practice Patience. Patience is the opposite of anger, which is closely linked to pride, and is very easy to observe in ourselves. We know whenever we are feeling impatient, or annoyed, or upset; and that is self-importance. So by working on becoming patient, we will also be working towards acquiring humility.

### Powers

You may not use powers unless ordained to do so, for someone else's benefit. Generally, it is best not to use them at all. It is easy—well, I will not say easy—but it is possible to develop powers by psychic training. Anyone can do it if

he has the tools and the will power. But they are a trap. You cannot progress very far spiritually if your interest is in having powers—you cannot become as powerful as one who has developed the virtues. That is a safety mechanism in the universe. Misuse of powers means your spiritual destruction, and once you start to use them it is very difficult to control.

Yogis avoid entrapment by them by their own process of growth, detachment, and discrimination. In the same way that we once went to bars, and now don't miss it at all—but on the contrary, feel repulsed by the thought of them—yogis have lost all attraction to name, fame, ego, and powers—because they know those things have no real value. They know the only thing worth pursuing, the only thing worth doing, is to serve God and their fellow men.

### Prayer

A lot of people try to make good business deals with God, and that is especially taught in churches, unfortunately—but it serves a purpose, in that at least it fosters a relationship with God. But when you get to a higher level, it is OK to ask God for immaterial qualities which will help our spiritual development, as long as we have no expectations. God knows better than us what we need—He knows whether we still need a defilement for our development. God will grant your prayers—it may come in a different way, that you never could have expected, or maybe you won't even know—or he may give you something else, which will help you in a way you may never understand. But you can be sure, if your request is sincere, God will give you His grace.

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Sometimes we know we need to overcome a defilement, and we think we want to, but if we look deeply within ourselves, we find—we really don't want to! In that case, you can pray to God, and be honest with Him, and say, Look, my Lord, You know, and I know, that I don't really want to overcome this yet. But I know I need to come closer to You, so Please, if it is Your will, help me to want to want to overcome it.

Meditation on St. Francis' Prayer, "Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace"

Let's think for a moment how during the day we have been, or were not, or could still be, an instrument of peace.

### Reincarnation

Reincarnation is one of the most liberating teachings of yoga. So many people have left the church because they just could not take the pressure of being told this is the only life—we have just one shot, to make or lose it. People feel desperate because they know they are not saints, so they say, May as well have a good time, and then they get themselves in trouble—because they abandon the basic prescriptions of their religion, which are there to help people lead a basically organized and virtuous life—and then they come to yoga!

We are living in Kali Yuga. There are four Yugas—Satya, Treta, Dwapara, and Kali. We are at the lowest point in human development—although for the last few hundred years, we have been ascending into Dwapara Yoga, as there is a period of thousand years' overlap. But, the Church began when Kali Yuga was at its deepest. Christ Came to be a light in the darkness of Kali Yuga. So the church knew that if they told people about reincarnation, people would just be lax and lazy—why try to hard to be a good person when I have so many lives? I'll work in future lives and enjoy this one. So, the teaching of reincarnation was suppressed.

But we can see from the Gospels that Christ and his disciples knew about it. Why else would they have asked Christ if he was John the Baptist? The church's teaching was appropriate for that era. But now, moving into the age of Aquarius, there is an awakening taking place, and people are prepared for the higher, or esoteric teachings.

Reincarnation teaches us to make the most of this life because only the spiritual and subtle qualities we acquire will go with us—everything material will be left behind. So if we work hard to develop the quality of humility, for instance, in this lifetime, it will be our “second nature” next lifetime. So we should do as much work in this lifetime—advance as much as possible—in each lifetime, in order to hasten our process of evolution.

### Religion vs. Mysticism

Religion serves an important purpose, in providing guidelines for people to live good lives. It teaches self-restraint; love of God, and theoretically love of neighbor. All the important principles are there. Unfortunately dogma and mechanical ritual come to play a large part, and the consciousness of the purpose behind the teachings and rituals becomes lost too easily. That is why wars are fought over who is right; people try to convert others and kill them to save their souls.

Mysticism is not based on dogma, or rituals, and conversion is not a part of it. Every religion has its mystical strain—in Christianity, you have the fathers of the desert, and many saints; in Islam, the Sufis; in Judaism, the Cabbala, and so on. The goal in mysticism is union with God. Love is the essential element. The focus is on practical methods to achieve heightened states of being where such communion is possible. In mysticism, all differences amongst religions are dissolved.

### Responsibility

These days everyone is concerned about their rights. No one thinks about responsibility. Each one tries to get ahead—the more capable you are, the more you can step over other people to get what you want. In reality, as usual, the approach should be the exact opposite. The more capable and gifted an individual is, the more responsibility he has towards the others who do not have

those capacities. He should shoulder a greater burden—we are given these gifts for a reason, and it is not to use them in a self-serving manner, but put them to use in serving God and our fellow beings. The fastest way to lose a gift is to use it for selfish, ego-serving ends. Look how many wonderful artists lost their talents because of the dissolute lives they led. It is simply karma.

For anyone to move up in the School of Life or the Church, they must demonstrate that they have fully assimilated this principle. The more you evolve, the greater your responsibility is.

This condition is common to mankind as a whole. By virtue of our extraordinary capacities—our gifts of reasoning, intellect, and linguistic abilities—we have been placed over the rest of creation on this planet in order to be stewards—to manage all the resources properly so that all beings are taken care of and provided for. But what do we do? We pollute the earth, the rivers, the air, cut down trees, slaughter animals to satisfy our palates, kill each other to take wealth, because of greed. There is no sense of responsibility. And we will of course lose our privileges in creation if we don't amend our actions—natural disasters will wipe most of us off the face of the earth, and the few remaining will be the ones who have the understanding of how to treat the earth, and how to be the co-creators and stewards, and they will replenish the earth.

## Sacrifice

The root of the word “sacrifice” means “to make sacred.” Sacrifice is not at all the same as suffering. Sacrifice brings joy. It is a conscious act of giving up some of one's self for the benefit of another. This brings us closer to union, to love. Christ, by his example, showed us the way of sacrifice—it is in giving that we receive, because when you give, it means you have. You do not need. You live in a state of abundance. No one can steal anything from you. You become free from fear, and all negative emotions which separate us from each other. You feel the whole world is yours, because God wants you to enjoy this creation. It is a completely different state of being.

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Oftentimes people associate the idea of sacrifice with suffering out of ignorance. They ask, how can you get up so early? How can you not go to movies? Why do you torture yourself like that? Poor thing. But they don't know that you say exactly the same thing about them, inside. How can you take yourself to bars and movies? How can you ruin your health by staying up so late, and waking up angry the next day? Why do you torture yourself like that? Poor thing.!

Until one has the experience of giving something up, in exchange for something higher, one will never understand the joy of sacrifice. When you were a child you used to play with dolls. Are you suffering now because you don't have a dolly? No—you outgrew it. In the same way, slowly, we move away first from the very heavy things that held us down—addictions to smoking, alcohol, or drugs; then subtler things—negative friendships—and then from all sorts of attachments.

It isn't self-torture—although sometimes in the beginning, yes, you may need to use a little force—but soon you feel so happy to be rid of that weight which was holding you back. We need to do the same thing with every one of our attachments, until the very last one is: to give up the desire to be one with God. Yes even that attachment or desire has eventually to be given up—because if you want something, it means it is outside of you—the desire actually separates. But we don't need to worry about that at our level.

## Sadhana

If you had clairvoyant vision you would see how when someone is angry dark flames shoot out of their bodies, and they are surrounded by black smoke. It is so terrible, if you saw it you would swear you would never get angry again. And of course you would... but it is important for us to remember why we do our sadhana, why we sacrifice our time to come here, to be together, to pray together, to sing and meditate. We should all ask ourselves, am I doing this out of a feeling of obligation, because it is just another duty to fulfill? Or am I doing it mechanically, yeah, it's Saturday, I will go to satsang. Are our mind and hearts really present? What is important is the energy we put into our practices, not the mechanical practices themselves. Mechanical practices do not have much effect. But if we come together consciously, enthusiastically, knowing this is our opportunity to contribute to bringing peace to the world, to help clean up the psychic environment—then we are really making a contribution, and our thoughts and feelings will spread all over the universe. Each one of us is Extremely important, and can have a significant effect on the world. But it is not important that we see the effect. In fact we probably never will, and it is better that way. But each of us should know that the effect is significant.

## Samadhi

The mind is a wonderful tool. It is the best instrument that God has given us. The intellect and reasoning capacities are what raises man above the animals and entitles him to the position of stewardship over the planet. But just as the body is only a vehicle, so is the mind. It is like a bus that takes you to a destination. When you get to your destination, do you pick up the bus and carry it along with you? No; it was very useful, you can feel grateful for the service it has given you, but you leave it behind. So too we will reach a point where we go beyond the mind, and will not need it anymore—there will be no need for thought, we will just be a channel for Spirit. That is the difference between samprajnata samadhi and asamprajnata samadhi. Samprajna means “with seed,” or “with wisdom.” Asamprajna means “without seed.” So in Samprajnata samadhi one has become very wise; the mind is still functioning—the seeds of karmas and the vrittis are still there, dormant, but even then capable of sprouting. It is only in asamprajnata samadhi that those seeds can be burnt—which is kind of fun,

actually. Then there is no more need for the mind. There is direct perception, and the divine energy flows through you, and your actions become perfect—impeccable.

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You should always remember—samadhi is an attainable goal. You have the tools. All you need to do is use them. **Pranayam** is the key.

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Asamprajnata samadhi occurs when you've taken the leap—no more mind, no more seed, total bliss. That's **moksha**, or **liberation**. You don't need more births. You have earned the right to work on other planes of existence—you may return to the planet, but not as ordinary people do—you choose to come of your own free will, as a liberated being, to help those who are still struggling. You always remain conscious of who you are—whether in the state called “**death**”, or the state called “**life**”—you remain conscious of yourself the same. You may go on to work on other planets, or you may stay in the etheric, and work from the astral. It is so beautiful. But you can't attain it when you're dead—you attain asamprajnata samadhi in this life.

**Raja Yoga** is a science, you can follow it systematically and attain samadhi, and we should always remember, this is the goal of our practice.

### Secluded Yogis

Many people have a very negative attitude towards the idea of yogis living in caves, far away from people. They say, what good are they? Meditating all day when the world needs so much help. They only care about themselves. No. There are different stages of unfoldment and service in the spiritual path. There is a period when it is necessary to withdraw from the world, and do intense sadhana, to purify yourself in order to render great service to the world. We can see someone like Mother Theresa, for example—she came with that already. She could be in the world, in the most terrible circumstances, which would make anyone else run away in despair, and be totally calm, totally efficient, totally focused on serving—because her mind was always on God. She was able to do the work of many people because she was spiritually prepared. So that is one stage—where you go to a mountain, do intense sadhana, and come back into the world to serve. But then there is another stage, where you go up the mountain never to return. The human being is a transition between the animal and the divine. When someone has almost reached the point of divinity, this is his calling. He is not a burden on society—no one sees him, he does not need to eat or what little food he needs he provides for himself. He spends all his time in meditation, and in doing so he is a dynamo of positive energy for the planet. He is constantly absorbing negative energy that all of us emit, and that threatens the planet with catastrophes—earthquakes, wars, etc.—and transforming it into pure energy which will heal and help the planet to evolve. So the service these beings do for



the planet is incalculably more valuable than all the “good works “ we might do. And no one recognizes them, no one even knows they are there—it is a completely selfless work of love. It is because of these beings that the planet earth still exists.

And that is something very important we have to remember—every inch we can climb, every ounce of negativity we can let go, is that much less ballast that the rest of the world has to carry. So any work we do on ourselves, benefits the rest. That you can be sure of. And realization is worth a lifetime of good works.

### Sex

Sex is the closest you can come to God in another person.

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Sex is like exactly like being drunk—it's feels incredible for a few minutes, and then it wears off, and life goes on with all its ordinariness—same problems, with yourself and with the person you are in a relationship with.

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Sex is the closest you can get to God in another person, but that closeness to God is nothing compared to achieving union with God in yourself.

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When you attain enlightenment it's like a thousand orgasms all at once—it is. [Context was, even in terms of sheer pleasure worldly experiences cannot compare.]

### Silence

People *love* to talk! 99% of what people say is Nonsense, or worse-- just feeding their egos. At least in a spiritual school, some restriction is placed—there are certain things that are not allowed to be spoken about, and that is true both outside the community, and within hierarchies in the school. So that begins to teach discipline. And some people cannot hold their tongues, and that is an indication to the Guru that they are not ready for certain teachings.

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Most of the time, be within, and silent.

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Only in silence can the voice of God be heard.

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What matters most is the inner silence—you can be physically silent but inside is all noise and turmoil. But it is an important first step.

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Start the practice of mouna with an hour a day. You can make a little tag, that says Mona, so people will know what are doing, and will not feel offended, or disturb you. Then increase to a few hours one day a week, then one day a week, then take periods of silent retreat.

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I spend time talking with people because they need it, although I would prefer to be in silence. We should always be aware of what the other person needs, and try to give it to them, balancing also our own needs for spiritual practice—but it should be a balance, not one or the other.

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Silence allows the subtle connections with other people to be felt. Every time we go out, we lose some of the inner treasure. Every time something is expressed, a little bit of it dies—that is inevitable, because it goes into the gross physical world.

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The less we talk, the more powerful our words will be. That is one of the secret powers of the Initiates.

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If we want to share something beautiful with someone we love, the best way is in silence.

### Spiritual Antennae

When you have a radio, you turn the dial to a specific position, and depending where you turn you can hear either beautiful classical music, static, or hellish noise, heavy metal. We are like radio antennae. Depending on our level of vibration, we will attract heavenly entities, or negative entities. We are all in constant contact with every being in our environment and all the invisible entities all around us, at an energetic level. In the physical plane, opposites attract. In the spiritual world, it is the opposite—like attracts like. So if we have noble thoughts, pure feelings, positive thinking, we will be in contact with helpful entities which are constantly looking for the opportunity to find a human being who is open, so they can pour their positive energies through them and do good in the world. But the opposite is also true—you cannot have positive without negative, it is a law of creation. There are negative entities also on the lookout for someone who's rate of vibration is low—who is angry, or jealous, or depressed—and then they rush in and lend their energy to that state, and that is often when a violent crime is committed—the person was pushed over the edge by these entities—and afterwards they feel as if it was not they themselves who acted—it felt as if they lost their mind. And every time we think an angry thought, we are putting negative energy into the psychic environment, and we are contributing to the commission of such crimes. It is true. We will have a karma to pay. None of us can elude our responsibility. That is why it is extremely important every time you feel your vibration is getting low, immediately react, and try to raise it. We are given so many tools to use—say your mantra, pray, read an inspiring book, but do something. Say No, I am not going to give into this negative feeling, or this negative thought. Put your energies into something constructive. The human being has intellect, it has free will, and we must not be slaves of our emotions or our mind. It is our duty to be happy, and to bring positive energy into the psychic environment, not contribute to its pollution.

## Thinking

We think too much. Most of the time, we should think only when we have a problem to solve, and then—quiet. It is ideal to keep the mind in silence unless we need to learn something new or solve a problem, but this is very difficult, so the next best is repeating your mantra, or putting your mind on God—remembering Him, but at least positive thinking—entertaining only positive thoughts.

## Surrender to God

Surrender to God doesn't mean you just sit around all day waiting for whatever happens. We must be active on this physical plane. That is what we are here for, as Lord Krishna said to Arjuna when he was despondent, and did not want to do his dharma.

Human beings have been endowed with free will. Surrender to God means, you say My Lord, thank you very much for my life and my freedom, I give it back to you. Use me in whatever way suits you. I'm giving it back. And then you become so happy—because there are no worries anymore. You know that whatever happens, it is God's will, and because you know that God is Love, and his will is perfect, no matter happens, it is going to be for the best. Not necessarily from a Material point of view, but it will be for your spiritual benefit, and that is the most important. You may lose your job, your house, and have to be homeless—it doesn't matter, because you know God is taking care of your soul. Even if you have to lose your body—what is this life, this span of 80, 90, or at most 150 years, compared to eternity? It's is just this! [snaps fingers] nothing! Compared to the vastness of our existence. We are Immortal, Eternal beings. You cannot cease to exist. So you lose all **fear of death**, and all fear of life too.

Do we aim to avoid suffering because we don't like pain? No! It's because once you don't suffer anymore, it means you understand. You know the world, as God's creation, is perfect. You marvel at it, you are in awe of it—and then you are in harmony with God. Every thought, every word, every action, becomes the praising of God. Once we have attained that high level of vibration, we become like the angels. The seraphs and the cherubim don't do anything else, they just adore and glorify God constantly.

## Vegetarianism

In the past, human beings thought nothing of killing one another. Now we look upon that behavior with horror. In the future, people will feel exactly the same way about killing animals to eat them.

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One of Christ's missions was to end the practice of animal sacrifice. This is one reason the Pharisees opposed him—because it meant a substantial loss of their income—and killed him.

## Developing the Virtues/Overcoming Defilements

If you focus on developing the virtues, that will pretty much take care of the ego. So you don't have to be shooting the ego all the time—in fact, that approach can actually reinforce the **ego** by pouring a lot of energy into it. Play with the ego—be like a little kid playing Good guys and Bad Guys. Ha ha, you got me this time, but next time, I'm going to get you! Of all the virtues to develop, **Humility** is the most important. If you can develop humility that'll take you to God.

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The best way to overcome a defilement is to develop the opposite virtue. A good way to start is to make a list of your strengths and weaknesses—maybe we could fill a book, and that is fine, we all have so many negative traits not only from this lifetime, but from hundreds, maybe thousands of incarnations. We all have remnants of the animal nature, plus we have picked up influences from our environment. So start by making a list, and then put them in order, from the worst, really tough ones that always get you in trouble, to the more minor ones that are not so harmful. Then start working on them, one by one, from the bottom up. We always want to start at the top, and tackle the most difficult thing first—but in that way, we set ourselves up for failure. So it is always better to start with little things, unimportant things, and build up. In this way, you will gain small victories, and that gives you the confidence that you can do what you set your mind to do. And that is will power. And with will power, you can do anything. So it is always better to take these things step-by-step.

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Sometimes, if a defilement has a very strong hold on us, we must wean ourselves off it a little bit at a time. So, we indulge in it once, and then refrain the next time. And then we indulge in it again, but refrain from it twice. And then we refrain three times, And so on—in this way, it eventually becomes easy to give it up.

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It is not helpful to dwell on a defilement. If you can see it clearly, and know what you have to do to work on it, then just work on it when it arises in life. Life is full of challenges, we don't need to add more. The opportunity will come to work on it, you can be sure. By going it over and over again in your mind, you are just reinforcing the pattern—the samsakara—of that quality in your brain. Don't put your mind on the past or future, just be in the present and work in the moment with what is presented to you.

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### *Others are merely mirrors of ourselves*

If you see a fault in another person it means you have that same fault inside you, no matter how deeply buried, but it is there. It is the same for positive qualities. If that were not the case, we would not be bothered by that trait. So the

first step in dealing with the situation is to recognize that we have the same defilement within ourselves, and that we have an excellent opportunity to work on it. Every time that person does something which annoys you, you have to remind yourself—I must overcome this negative quality in myself. That will help you to feel compassion. If you keep working on it in this way, little by little, your reaction becomes less strong, until one day you will no longer react, and then you will know you have overcome it. And you will be able to help other people overcome that same obstacle, because you know how it is. So, the higher you go, the less you look down on others.

Favorite sayings of Vyasa:

“An ounce of practice is worth one thousand tons of theory.” Sri Swami Sivananda

“A saint is a sinner who never gave up.” Sri Paramahansa Yogananda

Peruvian sayings:

“A closed mouth admits no flies.”

“It is difficult to wake a person who is pretending to be asleep.”

“Protect me from calm waters—in a storm I can handle myself.”