

THIS UNADORNED SELF



No matter what human beings create for ourselves, no matter how hilarious or difficult, in truth we're always standing on a foundation of joy. In that joy we live and move and have our being. Get in contact with this truth and then there comes an ability to say to the Divine: "I agree! I agree!" Feel how that changes everything. Let go of the idea that there's anything wrong. Let this be your powerful practice. Anytime we notice anything other than joy, that is a sign of resistance. Just say, "Divine Grace, here's something else I can let go of. I give it to you, my divine valet! Carry it for me, please."

That means we're free! We're free always! It's so simple! This practice is very clear and very pure and has the effect of opening a doorway between us and infinite joy. I'm then claiming the foundation of my being and I'm claiming: "I agree! I agree!"

I give myself permission to be myself in my true nature, in my true name, in my unadorned self, in that joy in which we all live and have our being. I give myself permission to be blissfully happy, to be blissfully free right in the midst of my daily activity. I agree! We find that blend between working and enjoying rest in the midst of work. There is activity but there's also peace. And there's also stillness and steadiness, and infinite reservoirs of strength and kindness and inspiration right in the middle of the activity. And the reverse is true as well. When it's time to be still, then we're able to be absolutely still with no restlessness and no to-do list and no judgments. Not getting dragged back to the past, not getting pulled forward to the future. Just allowing ourselves to revel in the presence of the stillness. And when that happens, there's a dynamic activity. The dynamic grace of God is always sharing itself with us in the form of intuition, inspiration, healing. There's a pure life energy that comes rising up which we become one with. That is our true nature. That is our unadorned Self.

This essential nature of pure consciousness pervades the entire universe. It inspires the world to dance to its tunes. There's a divine hum, a divine song, a divine angelic choir that's always singing to each one of us. If we allow ourselves to actually feel this divine resonance, door-

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ways will open for us. We are invited to walk through the same doorways that the rishis and seers walked through and then came back to share with us through teachings and scriptures. Unless we walk through the doorway ourselves, we're not actually fully encountering the truth of any scripture. I invite you in your own ways to keep walking through that doorway.

Let us feel our way into the sacred energy of existence. As an entryway into that, you can say to yourself, "I exist." We're coming into contact with pure existence. Not any story, not any words. Just say to yourself again, "I exist." Let the breath reveal to you your own sacred frequency. Breathe into what it feels like to begin to exist as pure existence. Ask your eternal nature to reveal itself to you. Greet it. We have the capacity to expand this sacred frequency. Allow the breath to fill you. Allow it to fill to overflowing your sense of *I exist, I exist*. You can expand to become an ocean of pure existingness, an ocean of pure vitality, an ocean of pure harmony, an ocean of pure laughter, an ocean of pure love and devotion, compassion, gladness, light-heartedness, delight. Within that pure existingness, *I exist*. Breathe!

Celebrate the presence of the Divine right where you are. Breathe into your own *I exist*. It loves us into this particular lifetime. It is with us every step of every way. It laughs with us, wipes away our tears, helps us grow, helps us expand. We're held, we're comforted, we're safe, we're protected the whole entire time we're in embodiment. Connecting with that safety and that security, give yourself permission to be blissfully happy. Expand that energy. Let there be an ocean of divine companionship right there with you. Send it forth to all beings in all planes of existence.

Thank God and God bless us all.

— Sri Swami Nityananda Giri



TRANSFIGURATION



Surely one of the great mysteries of religion in the Western tradition is the event known as the Transfiguration of the one called Yeshua, or Jesus. It so transcends the mind of man, and rightly so, that it is called a miracle. In this world of matter-consciousness, we call anything that transcends matter-consciousness "a miracle."

There are those who dismiss the idea that Moses and Elijah appeared personally at the time of the Transfiguration. Then there are the few of us who feel uplifted by contemplating, by meditating, and by seeking inner guidance regarding this awesome spiritual experience.

Moses and Elijah were there because they were very aware of what would happen to Jesus. They strengthened and inspired him because no one walks alone on the path.

Understanding the aspects of transfiguration will contribute to your own transfiguration. First, you need to know that transfiguration is possible to everyone who aspires to realize the Source and to immerse themselves in the spirit of unconditional love.

All you have to ask is, "Do I want to love unconditionally without reservation?" When I can answer, "Yes, I do," then I am teachable. Teachability is the first requirement on the road to God-realization.

Meditate on the wholeness and integrity of your being. That is part of transfiguration or self-transformation. Yeshua's transfiguration shows what we all have the potential to do.

Listen to what the Christ-spirit has to say, the Krishna-consciousness within you. Then practice the silence. Be still and know. This stillness is not something that you can make the mind do. It is simply your ability to listen to the response to your heartfelt prayer. Ask and you shall receive.

In conclusion, let us remember that transfiguration applies to this planet as well as to individuals.

— Sri Swami Shankarananda Giri



MOVING THROUGH “REALITY”

In our order of worship, we conclude our meditation with, “... Lead us from the unreal to the Real.” It is a radically bold request to ask ourselves to be shown and then to shift from a “false” reality when we may be so very closely and strongly identified with what it is we believe, or even are certain of what is “real.” If we are willing and ready, the very request can carry us into a transformed relationship with what it is and how it is that we know “what we know.” Again, if we are willing, we can shift into a place of truly not knowing, a space that we may find to be very, very disconcerting and uncomfortable. While the purpose of such an inquiry is not to be uncomfortable or comfortable, one question is whether you and I are willing to sit in the fire of such a discomfort of not knowing, if that should arise in our experience, in order to open ourselves and awaken to a possibility that had hitherto been unavailable to us.

It is helpful and important to recognize that this is an ever unfolding process. It will serve us well to steer clear of any notion of achieving a final reality and being done, a view which itself is but another delusive perspective of the really real, born of a false sense of self. Rather, let us come into a deep understanding of and relationship with our journey through each and every relative reality as it comes into our experience. Recognizing each relative reality as relative shifts our experience of and relationship with that reality and allows for a gracious movement through all of life.

Question: If all realities are relative and shifting, how do we know if the choices we make here and now in the “real world” are the right ones? The question arises only in a domain of “right and wrong,” a relative reality of its own. Still, if we are indeed operating in such a realm, which is totally understandable, the dilemma can be eased or even resolved if we will move forward in every action mindfully and consciously, with a pure, loving heart, to the best of our ability at the time. Compassion and love become the steady constant by which we move through all relative realities.

— Achariya Premadas



PEACE IS

We came out dancing on the stage of life, dancing for the joy of being and the delight of exploration in our embodiments. And the stage is the substratum of our existence in this world. That substratum goes by many names, and one of them is Peace. Since God is supreme Peace, and the substratum of our existence is God, then one aspect of the substratum of our existence is Peace.

But, people say, there is no peace in the world. Look at this country and that one. Think of a blank chalkboard in the classroom. A boy comes up to the blackboard and draws images of war—tanks, dashed lines for bullets, bursting stars for explosions, and airplanes dropping bombs. We know that at the end of the class, the teacher will erase the chalkboard and it will be clear and clean once more. That clean slate represents the Reality of Peace, and all the images of sound and fury that appear on that board are but temporary overlays on the unchanging substratum.

In life, when we watch the outer pictures, we may observe images of war, animosity, small private cruelties, and so on. But the substratum is not affected by any of this. Living in this world, we have a choice: We can focus on the outer pictures and become discouraged by wars, unkind words, crimes, global warming, and defensive behavior. *Or*, we can see all these events as drawings on the chalkboard of peace. That does not mean that we become indifferent to upheavals or to the pain of others. Rather, it means that we switch from focusing and lamenting on the outer picture if it is anything less than peace and wholeness, and we create the image in our minds of perfect peace, light, wholeness.

To do this requires nothing less than living in two different worlds at the same time: the one that we observe outwardly which may show chaos and suffering, while at the same time holding firmly to the inner image, thought, projection of this pure expanse of peace and harmony, wholeness and joy. By the law of resonance, we help create the beautiful picture as a reality for the other, for the world, and certainly in ourselves.

— Srimati Shanti Mataji

I LIVE ONLY TO DO THY WILL

I live only to do thy will.
My lips move only in praise of Thee.

O Lord, whoever becometh aware of Thee
Casteth out all else other than Thee.

O Lord, give me a heart
That I may pour it out in thanksgiving.
Give me life
That I may spend it
In working for the salvation of the world.

O Lord, give me understanding
That I stray not from the path.
Give me light
To avoid pitfalls.

O Lord, give me eyes
Which see nothing but Thy glory.
Give me a mind
That finds delight in Thy service.
Give me a soul
Drunk in the wine of Thy wisdom.

— Ascribed to Ansari of Herat
From *In Love with Love*, edited and translated by
Anne and Christopher Fremantle

CHINTAMANI

Let us first understand what meditation is. Meditation is the establishment of the mind on God. Mind, in the course of fulfilling its various duties, becomes identified with relative and finite thoughts, concepts, ideas, desires, hopes and aspirations. It becomes engrossed with the outer environment and is overcome by objectivity. This is natural and necessary. But in its justifiable devotion to our sensory existence, mind must never be allowed to forget God. Nay, even something more positive than that. It must be trained to return to him for its illumination, inspiration, and peace.

This remembrance and return to God within our subjective self is meditation. The presence of the infinite God is of course everywhere. He is within us. He is within each and all of us permanently and forever. We must learn to commune with him within us, within our innermost being, within our cognitive consciousness.

With this knowledge of the nature of meditation, how is it to be practiced? How are we to establish our mind on God within us? There are many methods whereby the mind is guided to God. But the fundamental principle of them all is the conscious identification of mind with the attributes of God enshrined within us. Meditation is the complete engagement of our entire thought upon the reality and attributes of God within us.

Finally, let us understand the secret whereby success is attained in meditation. The secret of success is twofold. One aspect is the true knowledge of God and his attributes, and the other is practice, regular, unfailing daily practice.

Even a little meditation each day produces a considerable result after awhile. The result may not be immediately perceptible and it seldom is. However, when meditation is practiced every day, however little, an appreciable beneficent effect will be attained and felt.

— Sri Swami Premananda Giri

REVELATIONS OF A COSMIC TRAVELER

Let us enter gladly into the sacred presence of the Sermon on the Mount, the summit of inspiration. Jesus, Yeshua, pours forth truth itself, a shining river of light that washes away all pretense, all limitation, all darkness, all fear. Entering into inspiration itself, we, too, may be made new. We, too, may cultivate the consciousness to be one with the outpourings of sacred illumination expressed by Jesus. We may even cultivate the consciousness to touch directly that river of grace, that river of divinity, that river of pure knowingness, pure beingness, which longs to express through each one of us. Will you let yourself be washed clean, made new, lifted up? Will you allow divine light and love and peace and truth to shine through you? Will you allow yourself to receive the sacred presence of inspiration, to be filled with grace, to express the infinite spirit that is always one with you? Say yes, and your every step will lead you higher toward the summit of inspiration.

Letting go of all that binds us, we may allow ourselves to be the completeness, the perfection of heaven. We are invited to realize the Infinite, that we may also realize that all we encounter in this realm is embraced by the Infinite—is one with the Infinite. We are Oneness, journeying through duality back to Oneness. When we realize that, then even this realm, this madly beautiful world, is a blessing, Oneness itself, an expression of infinite grace, light, peace, hope, wonder, awe, magnificence. The whole journey to healing is wholeness itself. The whole journey to creativity is inspiration itself. The whole journey to union is Love itself. Let go of all concepts and suffering, and be free. Let go of the illusion of separateness, and rejoice in serving divinity in all. Let us walk hand in hand, every step of the way to heaven, rejoicing that we are in heaven all along.

— In Joy, Swami Nityananda Giri

QUOTES FROM ANANDAMAYI MA

“Always bear this in mind: Everything is in God’s hands, and you are His tool to be used by Him as He pleases. Try to grasp the significance of ‘all is His’ and you will immediately feel free from all burdens. What will be the result of your surrender to Him? None will seem alien, all will be your very own Self.”



“Joys and sorrows are time-born and cannot last. Therefore, do not be perturbed by these. The greater the difficulties and obstructions, the more intense will be your endeavor to cling to His feet and the more will your prayer increase from within. And when the time is ripe, you will gain mastery over this power.”



“Enquire: ‘Who am I?’ and you will find the answer. Look at a tree: From one seed arises a huge tree; from it comes numerous seeds, each one of which in its turn grows into a tree. No two fruits are alike. Yet it is one life that throbs in every particle of the tree. So, it is the same Atman everywhere.”



“The same inexpressible Truth is experienced in two ways: as Self-luminous Silence, or as the Eternal Play of the One.”



“Divine happiness, even the tiniest particle of a grain of it, never leaves one again; and when one attains to the essence of things and finds one’s Self—this is supreme happiness. When it is found, nothing else remains to be found; the sense of want will not awaken anymore, and the heart’s torment will be stilled forever. Do not be satisfied with fragmentary happiness, which is invariably interrupted by shocks and blows of fate; but become complete, and having attained to perfection, be YOURSELF.”

TEACHINGS OF THE GURUS

“Give yourself the gift of believing that whatever the divine plan is in your life, it is governing and guiding and protecting your every breath. Anytime you feel a connection to anything other than divine love, let yourself feel your breath and feel, *this breath is a gift of God. This breath is the Eternal breathing through me.* Feel the breath going through you. This breath is inspiration, creative spirit, healing. Feel the breath being all that you have been calling for. Feel, *my every breath is loved, nurtured, sanctified.* As we do this, with every breath we’re aligning with the divine will. We’re practicing spiritual willingness and increasing our strength and ability to allow the light and the breath of the Infinite and Eternal to share through us.”

— Sri Swami Nityananda Giri



“Intuition is a divine faculty that allows us to experience directly the light, the Christ, the revelation of our divine birth. Spiritual vision, born of holy communion with the Source, blesses us with the recognition of the Christ in human form. Such revelation causes the heart to rejoice and pour out its blessings on the son of God—and every soul is recognized as the son of God. Is this not cause for rejoicing and proclaiming to the world that which only God within could reveal? May we all be blessed with spiritual vision to recognize the divinity within us and everyone.

— Sri Swami Shankarananda Giri



“Christ has ever abided in me. He has preached through my consciousness to all my rowdy and hypocritical thoughts. With the magic wand of meditative intuition, He has stilled the storms in the sea of my life and of many other lives. I was mentally blind; my will was lame; but I was healed by the awakened Christ in me.

— Swami Yogananda Paramhansa



“God is within you. He is your constant companion. Know Him through service, discipline, devotion, and meditation.”

— Babaji

ORIENTING TO THE DIVINE

Recently I had the good fortune to spend several days in Venice, Italy. On our first night in this foreign wonderland, my husband and I set out on foot for a recommended restaurant, which appeared on the map to be a ten-minute walk from our apartment.

We soon discovered that our map was useless and GPS unavailable. The streets were a maze, dark, and not clearly marked. Countless times, we traveled a meandering alley, sure it was the right path, only to have it end abruptly at a canal or in a courtyard from which there was no exit. Time and again, we retraced our steps and tried another route. A light rain fell. What was supposed to be a romantic and magical stroll soon began to disappoint and provoke anxiety.

The evening was the spiritual path in a nutshell, and it was my choice how to navigate it. Do I embrace the adventure of the unknown, and trust that we will eventually arrive at our destination? Do I allow myself to approach strangers and ask for help, with the expectation that they will point us in the right direction? Do I accept that we may be late to where we are heading, or even end up at a different restaurant altogether—one that may be even more enjoyable than what we are anticipating? Do I revel in every step as part of the divine journey?

Over the next several days, we divined a strategy to navigate Venice. We’d look at a map to determine the general direction of our destination, then orient ourselves with a compass before setting forth. Every now and then we’d check the map to get our bearings, consult the compass again, and readjust course. Not feeling that we had to travel a specific route offered the freedom to relax and enjoy the process of getting from one place to another, trusting that we were exactly where we needed to be at any given time.

In the same way, may we always remember to keep ourselves oriented to the Divine, and to delight in the journey.

— Karuna

JOY OF THE INFINITE

- The evergreen wreath helps us bring that sacred eternal life energy into our hearts, into our energy fields and into our consciousness. This elevates and uplifts us, but it's not just for ourselves that we're doing it. As we focus on the ongoingness of life and love, it blesses and benefits everyone on the planet.
- Hope is the foundation for everything that follows. Once we tune into the steadiness, strength, courage, and faith that come with the light of hope, peace is a next step. If we focus our energy on hope and peace, we will find ourselves lifting into the energy of joy.
- The shepherds are simple people. The glory of the Lord comes to those who are doing their daily work. Just notice, the ones who get the memo are not the leaders—the angels go to the shepherds. The shepherds are the ones who are awake. What this means is, we do not need to think of ourselves as being better or worse than anyone else based upon whatever work it is that the Divine is asking us to do.
- To share peace, words are not needed. What is needed is love.
- Let us ask Divine Grace to help us purify our consciousness, purify our hearts, so that always we're able to see only oneness and are open to the newness that is announcing itself in our lives directly to each of us.
- The change that is coming, the transformation that is being invited for all of us, is to move through the fear. On the other side of the fear is great joy and great peace.
- Energy hygiene: It's a good idea to do this every time you brush your teeth. "Thank you, Divine Grace, for clearing from me anything that does not promote peace, anything that takes me out of the divine current of peace. Thank you for letting it be clear. It is gone from my energy field. It is gone from my body. It is gone from my consciousness." If you need to, repeat that a couple of times until you can feel that you're back in connection with the divine current of peace, which is always available to us.

— *In Joy, Swami Nityananda Giri*

SWAMI SHANKARANANDA'S PEARLS

- That which is called Advent, I have renamed. I have that authority, since God is my authority. I call it the "Divine Adventure."
- The wreath of evergreens represents our oneness, and what reveals our oneness is the light. Our oneness is eternal existence and being, love and bliss, joy and freedom.
- Advent is really about welcoming the light into our hearts—the Christ light, the Krishna light, the Buddha light, the Tao light, the light of God, the light of Allah, the light of all faiths, of all traditions.
- I intend to perform all my actions in the light of God with every breath I take, to the fulfillment of the Christ within me.
- Let us make it our intention that we meditate each day diligently, lovingly, eagerly, to the best of our ability, on the light that we want to share with the world; on the light of which we want to be more fully conscious as we move through the day; on the light by which we want to live; on the light by which we want to see everyone in the light that they are.
- This holy child of God is the child of wholeness, born of wholeness, maintained in wholeness, unfolding in wholeness. When the child realizes its wholeness, it graduates to knowing, "I and my Father are one," because wholeness comes forth from wholeness.
- "Wist ye not your body is the living temple of God?" We need to remove the rubble from our temple, for it is the holy place of worship. You worship within, and by doing so you remove the rubble of destructive and unholy thoughts, negative thoughts, negative emotions, images, memories, and judgments. To clean out all of that, we need light to see what should be removed.
- So what did Jesus say about his own birth that can be valuable to us? "I came to do not my own work but my Father's work. Of mine own self I can do nothing. I can only do what I see the Father within me do. And I am come that ye may have joy and have it more abundantly; that my joy may abide in you and you may abide in it in fullness."

— *In Love, Swami Shankarananda Giri*

GARLAND OF TRUTHS

“Beyond all name and form is God’s benign existence, shining brighter than gold. May you all receive spiritual illumination and gain peace through realization of the ultimate Truth; that is my earnest prayer to God.”

— *Swami Vijnanananda*



“First keep the peace within yourself, and then you can also bring peace to others.”

— *Thomas à Kempis*



“Only those words that are innocent of illusion are God’s words. The one who is totally free of illusion is Brahman. That could be anyone at all.”

— *Jillellamudi Mother*



“The most certain sign of wisdom is cheerfulness.”

— *Michel de Montaigne*



“The two witnesses of what you do are others and yourself. Of these two, you are the only one who really knows exactly what is going on. So work with seeing yourself with compassion but without any self-deception.”

— *Pema Chödrön*



“If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”

— *Sathya Sai Baba*



STORYTIME

A thief quietly entered a home where he knew the owner had a fabulous collection of jewels. The thief located one batch of jewels and began ever so quietly to place them in his sack. In other rooms he found other jewels, which he also lay gently in his sack. When the robber was satisfied that he had all he could find, he slipped out through a window and went tiptoeing off into the night.

Unbeknownst to the thief, the sack had a small hole in the bottom. As he moved across the lawn and down the street, one jewel after another slipped through the hole and fell on the ground.

In the morning, the owner found all his precious jewels missing and immediately called the police. In bright sunlight, the police easily found one jewel after another sparkling on the ground, thus following the thief to his home a few blocks away, where they recovered the rest of the stolen jewels.



We are like the owner of the jewels sleeping at night, and God is carefully holding the jewels in escrow for the day we are ready to reclaim them. And that God, in Its supreme compassion, has left a trail of jewels for us to follow in order to find our way Home.

One of God’s glittering gems is all the beauty in nature. How can we behold a radiant gilded-rose sunrise and not see the splendor of the One who is manifesting Itself there? Or in the perfect and intricate petals of a rose, or in the fragrance of a gardenia, or in a thousand and one glories spread before us in nature.

God’s gems include a human smile...the baby in its pure innocence...the dog in its unconditional, all-forgiving love...the many acts of human kindness enacted thousands of times a day...the unconditional love of a mother for her child...the grace of the teachings of others who have found their way Home...our own deepest memory of our origin.

Following these and countless other trails, there sits the greatest jewel of them all, right on the doorstep of Home: the Hope Diamond of spirit, the Guru, the signpost, the highway, the vehicle, the doorway entering through which we find ourselves in the presence of all the jewels of our own divinity.

— *Love, Srimati Shanti Mataji*

I AM THE LIGHT



— Art by Devarati

SPIRITUAL READINGS

My Spiritual Journey
By the Dalai Lama

This slim volume, subtitled *Personal Reflections, Teachings, and Talks*, was collected by Sofia Stril-Rever over the course of 15 years and published with the Dalai Lama's approval in 2009. This lively compilation, originally published in French and translated into English in 2010, provides many insights about his family and childhood, his spiritual philosophy, his humanitarian work, as well as reflections on religion, society, politics, and ecology.

Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, was born as Lhamo Thondup or "Goddess who accomplishes all wishes" to a family of farmers on July 6, 1935, two years after the previous Dalai Lama had left this world. He describes how he passed the tests of remembering his previous life and was enthroned as the spiritual leader of Tibet when he was five years old. His tales of youthful activities, about which he laughed, are particularly charming.

Though he has been in exile more than half a century, the Dalai Lama describes himself as "a professional laugher," which he ascribes to the cheerful nature of the Tibetans, as well as his philosophy to cultivate a happy state of mind. He defines ignorance as "a mistaken mode of perception that posits belief in the autonomous solidity of the self and phenomena." He is not content to simply devote himself to prayer, believing that religious leaders are morally obligated to contribute as much as possible to solving the world's problems. The origin of these beliefs are evident in the chapters about his political awakening during China's massacre and occupation of Tibet.

The book ends with a poem by the Dalai Lama encouraging everyone to be a source of hope and compassion, and a wonderful prayer by the Indian saint Shantideva that he quoted when he concluded his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

— Ananda

HEALING PSALMS *Commentary on Psalm 91*

There are religions that claim the world is only about 7,000 years old. Baloney. Baloney's been around longer than that. There's a demarcation—either we choose to live spiritually, or we choose to be religious. If you choose to be religious, you're signing your own death warrant, because you are guaranteed your death. If you live spiritually, you are guided to remember your immortality. We are deathless, birthless beings. But we get so caught up in the drama of death, because we don't understand life.

You know what life is? It is the source of everything we could ever desire to experience. It is awesome, magnificent, full of mystery, magic, beauty, grace, vitality, self-renewal and rebirth, expansion, fulfillment, companionship, oneness, interdependence and interaction. It is ever new, ever creative, and it is the spirit within you revealing itself, which comes as the Christ-consciousness and says, "I am come that you may have life." We already have life. All of this needs to be re-explained, correctly; that's why we're here, of course. It's not about right or wrong, it's about being correct.

"I am come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." The "you" is the manifestation of the life that I Am. I Am come into manifestation that you may enjoy manifestation more fully, and not get lost in the enjoyment of it. We become ever more thankful and creative in the expression of the life that we are. Life will never end. Death is the quantum leap. It's the higher physics. Some think it's the lower physics. That way we'll have absolute certainty, for any of those who have any question about immortality or the ongoingness of life. The experience of death invalidates the reality of death. Hear it and rejoice. You're going to have to live forever. Doesn't that make you rejoice?

Why not start living right now? Then life will get better and better, because you are the shaper of your destiny—no one else. You are the creator of your joys and your sorrows. Once you understand that, you choose to create joy and let sorrow go.

— Sri Swami Shankarananda Giri



KEEPING COMPANY WITH THE HOLY

Countless examples exist of great teachers exhorting their disciples to keep company with the holy and with one another, thereby increasing their aspiration, focus, and discipline on the path of Self-realization. Many Indian masters liken it to cold coals thrown on a blazing fire, soon to catch fire themselves.

We know this as satsang, which we practice by attending services, drinking in the wisdom, inspiration, and illumination that Swami shares so freely and joyfully; meditating and studying scripture together; joining together for karma yoga; singing, dancing, and playing together. Participating in satsang brings us joy, strengthens our individual practices, and provides support as we navigate what sometimes seems like white water rafting in a storm.

Of course, as fun and uplifting as satsang is, and as critical for helping to keep our feet firmly established on the path, it is not just for our own pleasure and benefit. Not that we could keep it to ourselves if we tried! Every wave of joy and increased light of illumination radiate from us, becoming accessible to all who are receptive.

Irish singer Luka Bloom sings, "Find a deep well to draw from; give back as you can." We give back through our own state of consciousness as well as selfless service. In *Love Poems from God*, Daniel Ladinsky offers Rumi's own blissful vision of just this:

*I like when the music happens like this:
Something in His eye grabs hold of a tambourine in me,
then I turn and lift a violin in someone else,
and they turn, and this turning continues;
it has reached you now. Isn't that something?*

Indeed, isn't that something divinely, exhilaratingly wondrous? How blessed we are together on this beautiful path of love in service to all!

— Padma

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question: Please share some views on shame.

Answer: We must allow the light to shine so fully in every level of our being that it illumines even those areas we would rather not look at directly. Every one of us, metaphorically, in our consciousness, has a basement. Somewhere in our house there's a boiler and it may be knocking and belching a little smoke. It's doing the work that it needs to do to keep us going, to keep the lights on, to keep the building lit. It might need to be fine tuned.

It actually takes a lot of energy to block up areas of our lives and to keep them hidden away from ourselves and from others. It takes a lot of energy to create those walls and to build them and maintain them. It takes a lot of energy fighting ourselves and feeling divided. Resistance takes a heck of a lot of energy.

As soon as we let go of the resistance, we have this fresh energy, this reinvigoration, this renewal. The light does it all as it shares its healing energy with us. We're not forcing anything. We're simply working consciously with the light. And the light, because it is so gracious, as we invite it, will work more clearly and directly, more powerfully, in a way that allows us to move forward more quickly.

The scripture says love is the fulfillment of the law. What happens if we do not always follow the law, if we find ourselves in a position where we realize, "Oh, I really messed that one up? I really did not say the right thing. I really did not act in a way that was the highest good." If we encounter within ourselves those aspects of ourselves we would rather not admit are there, because they're uncomfortable, because we know that we're not living up to our highest possible expression of love, of divinity, of gladness, what do we do then? What could possibly be productive about shame?

If we're doing something and it doesn't feel as if we're honoring the Law of Oneness, stop immediately and practice self-correction. Correct your own thinking, your own words, your own behavior. Also find a way to practice self-healing. There's always infinite energy and love available to us for self-healing. Always.

(Continued on page 21)

Q & A *(Continued)*

If there are others who have been affected by our behavior we can turn to them and say, "I'm sorry." No excuses, no justifications, because excuses and justifications are often a way of giving an apology and then taking it back. If you're going to give an apology, make it sweet, short, simple. "I'm sorry." It's also possible to ask, "Is there anything I can do to be helpful? Is there anything I can do to help create a way forward in love, in unity?"

Find a way forward. The city of shame is not eternal. What's eternal is the city of peace. And there's a doorway into the city of peace from every other state or experience we ever encounter. From the city of shame there are doorways everywhere to the city of peace. It's possible, having found the city of peace, to be more illumined, to be more uplifted.

Is there a way that I am not aligning what I think and what I say with what I do? Is there a truth of my heart that I am not allowing myself to share? In that way, we might be running off in multiple directions instead of uniting our energy into a single whole, which allows all of our strength, flexibility, awareness, balance, all of our consciousness, all of our energy to move forward in a single direction. Is there a way in which I am splitting myself apart so that I'm not honoring what I know to be true and not living up to the way that love would love to express through me?

If we find that we are falling short, we can ask the Divine to be strong through us, to transform us when we do not know how to let that transformation happen. We can ask the Divine to make wise, joyful, loving choices through us, and to allow the transformation to happen through us in a way that is genuinely possible and available and of service to ourselves and to everyone that we meet.

— Sri Swami Nityananda Giri





Happy Winter to our beloved spiritual community! This recipe is one of our favorites. It is sweet and divine. Best yet, it has no refined sugar. It is rich in Vitamin A, and a good source of dietary fiber, Vitamin B6, magnesium, and iron. With its plentiful cinnamon, it also serves as a great blood sugar regulator. Hope you get to try this dish among your holiday riches of delicious treats!

Serving size: approximately 4–5 oz. per serving, serves three

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. organic sweet potatoes
- 1 tablespoon any nut oil or butter
- 1 teaspoon or more organic ground cinnamon
- A small pinch of any variety of gourmet salt
- A couple of tablespoons of lightly toasted, chopped pecans or walnuts

Directions:

- Poke the sweet potatoes with a fork a few times. Bake whole with skin on at 325 degrees for one hour or until brown sugar juice oozes out of the poked holes.
- Remove the potatoes from the oven and allow them to cool to a reasonable temperature to be handled by hand.
- Peel and discard the potato skins. Mash potatoes well with a masher.
- Add the nut oil, pinch of salt, and cinnamon, and whip them together until smooth.
- Spread the mixture in a baking dish and sprinkle the toasted, chopped nuts on top.
- Return to the oven and bake at 375 degrees until the nuts are lightly brown.
- Serve warm or cold. Enjoy!

Special Tip:

The magic of releasing the sweetness in sweet potatoes is to bake them at a temperature that best helps its natural enzymes turn the tough fiber into sweetness. Using a lower temperature with a longer baking time yields a very sweet and satisfying treat. The best range of temperature to support the enzymes is between 275 and 350 degrees.

Aum, Shanti, Amen!

— Pujari Hriday and Ruci

LIGHT OF THE UPANISHADS



Those who follow the path of the Self, aspiring to realize the Self by purity, faith, and self-enlightenment, attain to the state of supreme illumination in self-effulgent, absolute pure-consciousness. Absolute pure-consciousness is the state of highest perfection. It is immortality and bliss. It is the ultimate destiny of all beings. None ever returns from this state of highest perfection. This is the supreme goal.

— *Prashna Upanishad*



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