

Om Swami

A mystic's viewpoint

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Saturday, 23 August 2014

A Word on Compassion



What is the height of compassion? The innocent, unblemished messiah laid down his life.

"Are you compassionate?"

"Most of the time," they answer.

"Are you forgiving?"

"Yes, most of the time," they reply.

This is the most common response to my two questions no matter whom I ask. To tell you the truth, when we are compassionate or forgiving only some of the time, it means we are doing so at our convenience, it means we still think that there's a choice more reasonable than compassion. True compassion is not based on the cause or the action, it is simply a virtue, a response, an emotion, a feeling, we choose over any other.

I know this is not an ideal world and, in the present day and age, it almost seems that compassion or forgiveness is considered a weakness, but let's take a moment and read the following passages from Bible. Even if you have read it numerous times before, just reread and allow it to sink in.

Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept shouting, "Crucify! Crucify Him!"

A third time he said to them, "Why? What has this man done wrong? I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have Him whipped and then release Him."

But they kept up the pressure, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And their voices won out. So Pilate decided to grant their demand and released the one they were asking for, who had been thrown into prison for rebellion and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:20 - 25)

Two other criminals were also led away to be executed with Him. When as they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." And they divided His clothes and cast lots.

The people stood watching, and even the leaders kept scoffing: "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked Him. (Luke 23:32 - 36)

"Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." This was what Jesus of Nazareth said in response to the excruciating and fatal pain he was inflicted. This was his reply to the injustice done to him. And, what happened next? "And they divided His clothes and cast lots."

Those who had mocked him, those who had put a crown of thorns on his head, those who had nailed him on the cross, Jesus forgave them. But, this was not enough as, blinded by power and greed, they threw a dice to see which soldier would get what part of Christ's clothing.

There, in the same picture, you have the two extremes of our world. On the one hand is the compassion of Christ demonstrating there's no limit to how high you can rise above what you are subjected to, and on the other hand is the greed, ignorance and cruelty of the soldiers showing there's no end to how low one can stoop.

Throughout the history of our race, good people have been ridiculed and mocked, they have been jeered at, spat at, they have been unjustly punished, beaten even killed. Someone asked me once that what purpose did it solve, their sacrifice?

"Well," I said, "because Christ sacrificed his life, more than a billion people lead a life of inspiration today, even 2000 years later. Because Buddha sacrificed his kingdom, more than 500 million derive the benefit even today."

Compassion and forgiveness are simply synonyms of sacrifice. When you forgive, somewhere you sacrifice a part of your own existence, your respect, your dignity, yourself. But, by forgiving you also go beyond the shackles of ego. Besides, sacrifice is not a trade, you don't expect

anything for yourself in return, it is philanthropy, it's an act of charity.

Ask me not what if the other person doesn't deserve your compassion or what if they don't acknowledge it? Because if you still have these questions, you've not let the Passion of Christ sunk into your heart. Allow it. Reread the passages above, do it as many times as you need or till a tear trickles down and you'll know what I mean.

A young man was mugged, beaten and left for dead on a street.

As he lay there bruised, wounded and unconscious, a man passing by, who happened to be a psychiatrist, rushed to the victim and exclaimed, "My goodness, whoever did this really needs help!"

One needs assistance and the other compassion, either way, they both need help. In our example, if the victim is not offered help, he may die and if the culprit is not extended help, he may kill someone else. At any rate, it's a loss to our world.

Upanishads have a term for our world — *Vashudhaiva Kutumbakam* (Mahopanishad VI.71-73), the whole world is one single family. It's one planet, one world, one family. Let's do our part.

Compassion does not require a reason or reward, only a desire, a discipline. Forgiveness doesn't even need discipline but only a big heart, big enough to absorb their mistakes. When your heart is as big as the ocean, their shark like mistakes and tuna like presence in your life will coexist without so much as causing a ripple in your mind.

Peace.

Swami

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Saturday, 16 August 2014

[The Anatomy of a Thought](#)



Thoughts are like waves, they may be inviting but they remain transient and volatile.

A while ago, I wrote briefly on the two types of meditation, namely, concentrative and contemplative ([more here](#)). An important exercise in contemplative meditation is to reflect on the nature of a thought, and one of the most defining moments in a meditator's life is realization of the understanding that thoughts have no essence of their own.

Thoughts are not good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral, they are just thoughts. They take one or the other form based on how we pursue and deploy them. Let's say you are passing through the woods and you come across a dry and thin branch of a tree lying on the ground. You can use it as a walking stick, or as firewood, or to protect yourself, or, hopefully not, even to beat up some poor animal.

What you do with the stick determines whether it is good or bad. On its own, the stick has little meaning. Similarly, the wise don't feel guilty for having unwelcome thoughts. They know they don't have to act on it. And by action, I'm not just referring to physical action but mental too ([here](#)). When we cling to a thought or follow its track, we are performing a mental karma, and, that, in turn, is the seed of all physical actions.

Good meditators, or even mindful people, transcend their thoughts by simply watching them. Most thoughts are random and fickle; they are not worth pursuing. Upon close examination, you will discover that thoughts are highly ephemeral and if you don't hold on to them, they disappear exactly like bubbles in water. Whenever you are bothered by any lingering thought, simply ask yourself three questions and watch it become feeble in no time.

1. From where has this thought originated?
2. Where is it traveling?
3. Where has it disappeared?

As you ponder on these, you will begin to understand the anatomy of a thought; basically, it is

emptiness. They are empty. Thoughts have no definitive point of origin, no set course of travel, and no specific site of disappearance. When you see an object in a mirror, you can classify the sight as beautiful or ugly, desirable or otherwise but what happens when the mirror faces another mirror, when it looks at its own reflection, what will it see? The reflection will keep bouncing off each other infinitely. Similarly, when mind examines itself, it starts to disappear in its own vast existence.

Just like two pieces of wood can be rubbed together to produce fire and the same fire later consumes them both, intellect and concentration support the contemplative meditation but when the fire of insight arises, it consumes both giving way to pristine awareness. This is the ultimate state for a meditator — not only understanding the nature of thoughts and rising above them, but living in complete awareness.

Allow me to share beautiful verses from the Mahamudra instruction of Tilopa (a Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche translation).

Mists rise from the earth and vanish into space.
They go nowhere, nor do they stay.
Likewise, though thoughts arise,
Whenever you see your mind, the clouds of thinking clear.

Space is beyond color or shape.
It doesn't take on color, black or white: it doesn't change.
Likewise, your mind, in essence, is beyond color or shape.
It does not change because you do good or evil.

The darkness of a thousand eons cannot dim
The brilliant radiance that is the essence of the sun.
Likewise, eons of samsara cannot dim
The sheer clarity that is the essence of your mind.

Although you say space is empty,
You can't say that space is "like this".
Likewise, although mind is said to be sheer clarity,
There is nothing there: you can't say "it's like this".

Thus, the nature of mind is inherently like space:
It includes everything you experience.

Stop all physical activity: sit naturally at ease.
Do not talk or speak: let sound be empty, like an echo.

Do not think about anything: look at experience beyond thought.

Your body has no core, hollow like bamboo.

Your mind goes beyond thought, open like space.

Let go of control and rest right there.

Like waves in the ocean disappear in the same sea they had originated from, thoughts emerge from and merge back into the same mind. Some start to surf these waves, but no matter how giant or exhilarating a wave, how beautiful the swell, how tidal the sea, how expert the surfer, the waves will toss him eventually. And this brings me to the moral of the story: there are no calming thoughts really, just like there are no stable waves.

A thought that's appeasing today could well be disturbing tomorrow. For example, you love someone today and their thought brings you joy, tomorrow you may fall out and the same thought will give you grief. A good meditator knows that thoughts, at their best, can only calm the mind temporarily and intermittently. That the real solution lies in going beyond thoughts because like waves are waves and thoughts are thoughts. Some may be less displacing than others but ultimately they are destabilizing.

In the ocean of your mind, when it comes to the waves of thoughts, you have three choices , a, surf and accept the highs and lows, b, watch the waves and put up with the constant sound of the sea, c, move away from the ocean altogether. No one should tell you what to choose, you choose or alternate between these choices based on your own constitution.

Controlling the mind is not taming but curbing it; it's a futile exercise, a vain path. Instead, an aware mind is the most tamed state any mind can have. A mind free of thoughts is the most calm state of a mind. The third best is an absorbed mind. When you await eagerly with the surfboard of your desires to ride the thought waves, be prepared for anything, for surprises, not all of which may be desirable.

Most beautiful music gushes forth naturally from a silent mind like waterfalls do from the Himalayan mountains. You've to see one to hear one, or, you have to hear one to see the other.

Peace.

Swami

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In: [Meditation](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 9 August 2014

[The Worst Disease](#)



What illness dries you, hollows you and weakens you from the core?

What is the worst possible disease you can think of? Maybe the one that is terminal. Or maybe the one that kills slowly while one is living. Perhaps the disorder that impairs one's functioning is the worst. Or maybe a disease is a disease and anything that vitiates your health in anyway is as bad as it can get. But, this is not what I mean by disease in the current context; there's more to it.

And, no, I'm not speaking of the perils of social media, or hyper-connectivity through messaging and all. I'm not alluding to long hours of watching TV, or too much web surfing, or overeating, or being too self-conscious. Not smoking, not drinking, not trying to always keep others happy, no, this is not what it's about. They all affect and are pseudo-diseases but they are nothing compared to the one I'm talking about.

Heart diseases, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, AIDS, depression are terrible ailments gnawing away at the human well-being, but, in my view, there is another disease which is equally, if not more, damaging. This is the mother of all diseases, in fact. Really. It is the seed of depression, of anxiety, of negativity. It is the source of human misery and what's worse is that most people are suffering from it. Far more tragically, and even worse still, they don't even know it.

I call it the disease of Excessive Thinking.

Yes, that's right. Most people think too much, and it's a disease because they don't do so by choice. They are not thinking the things they do as a conscious act. Their thoughts direct them while they but simply glide along the drift of such thoughts. No one says I'm feeling jealous or angry and let me revel in this emotion. Most people are fundamentally good, genuinely loving and they don't want to feel these emotions. Most have their lives in order and they don't want to worry about elements beyond their control. But, they do.

Everything is going well, they are happy, life feels great and just one negative thought, one bad

memory from the past, and before they know, they are feeling bad, negative, guilty, bitter or resentful. The difference between a peaceful and a restless person is their ability to pick and choose their thoughts. Excessive thinking means not just the negative or positive thoughts but the constant chattering of mind. Most people are eternally engrossed in stray and insignificant thoughts. The mind keeps talking and they keep listening.

The difference between a buddha and a *buddhu* (ignorant) is that a buddha has realized that a thought in its own right has no power, no intrinsic value, no essence. Whereas the ignorant mind identifies itself with the thought and with that association comes the suffering. For instance, a thought — I'm a loser — comes out of nowhere and rather than dropping it, you start to contemplate on it, you start to identify yourself with it. Soon, the thought gathers momentum and drags you on its own journey. You begin to believe in the thought, and before long, you actually start to feel what you'd once thought, and then one day, you look in the mirror and you see a loser. It's a mind trick.

Even when people express their opinions to you, they are merely expressing their thoughts; they've little control over what they think. Never let that ruin your peace. And this leads me to the crux of the matter today: The Art of Thinking.

If you examine the lives of the greatest painters, finest musicians, scientists, inventors, writers, poets, they often surprised the world by repeatedly producing magnificent works, one after another. They could do so because they could think in a certain fashion, in a creative manner. It's something you can learn, anyone can learn. You can think positive thoughts, joyous thoughts, motivating thoughts, and for that you need to champion the art of thinking, which, in simple words, is the art of meditation.

With the aid of new-age fertility treatments, a 72-year old woman conceived a child. Nine months later, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl. The happy old couple went home and relatives started pouring in.

"We are so excited," her cousin said. "Can we see the newborn?"

"Umm...let's wait a little", said the mother. "I'll make tea for everyone."

They had high tea, a good hour passed and everyone was eager to see the newborn.

"May we see the baby now?"

"Not yet," the mother said.

The guests were beginning to get intrigued. After waiting for another ten minutes, they insisted on seeing the baby but got the same answer back.

Growing impatient, they said, "Well, when can we see the baby?"

"Only when she cries."

"What's crying got to do with anything? Why do we have to wait until she cries?"

"Because," she explained, "I forgot where I put her."

To see the baby, you don't have to wait till she cries, you just need to be aware where you put her. Likewise, to tend to your mind, you don't have to wait till it's agitated, instead, you simply

need to be mindful. To pacify the baby, we must find out why she's crying, and similarly, to calm the mind, we need to go to the source of our emotions, that is, thoughts. Thoughts make up the mind.

Next week, I'll scribble something on the anatomy of a thought. Once you understand the nature of thought, you will be able to meditate better, and meditation, I may add, is one of the most powerful antidotes to excessive thinking.

[Join me on an Immersive Meditation Retreat](#)

I'll be holding a meditation retreat in India from Feb 8 - 13, 2015. There are only

65 **O** spots left. On a first come, first served basis. For more details or to book your spot, [go here](#). BOOKED OUT.

Peace.
Swami

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In: [Meditation](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 2 August 2014

[What is the Meaning of Life?](#)



What is the meaning of life? Read the story.

Absolutely not surprisingly, my inbox was swamped with comments on my last post. Some liked it completely and many hated it totally while some were in between. A few called me too simple and many simpleton. A number of readers said I was a pessimist and many thought I was being

negative. I found it refreshing and amusing. Amusing because think about this: out of the more than 230 posts on this blog, the one getting most comments was not on loving, living, being happy, meditating but on an abstract theory of genesis.

It goes to show how deeply attached we can be to our beliefs and how very few have the courage to question the answers given by the scriptures. I'm not saying it's good or bad. It's up to you to see how you want to see. You have the right to an opinion (more [here](#)) and the freedom to arrive at your own conclusion. For now, taking the gist of the comments, let's roll:

Does God exist? Are we just carbon molecules and our emotions just neurotransmitters? How are we supposed to live? If there is no purpose or meaning of life, why go through the austerities of tapas or meditation? Why negate sensual pleasures?

Before I offer my view, let me share with you a short story. Buddha, the ever graceful, had just finished a discourse when a seeker approached him.

"Is it true that there is no soul?" he said.

"Yes, it is true that there is no soul," Buddha murmured softly.

His disciples were happy to hear the answer. The Sage knew everything, they thought.

The next day, another visitor posed a similar question.

"I've heard that there exists in everyone an eternal element called soul. Is it true?"

"Yes, my dear, it is true that there exists in everyone an eternal element called soul. Some also call it consciousness."

"But, soul is different from consciousness," he argued.

"Indeed," said Buddha.

His disciples looked at him and each other in complete disbelief. The reply today was the exact opposite of what they'd heard just the day before. Even though confused as ever, they dared not question the master.

Yet another couple of days later, a devotee from afar came to pay homage.

"I believe it is not certain if soul really exists," he said.

"You are right. It is not certain if soul really exists," Buddha replied.

The man left contented but the monks felt extremely otherwise. They urged Ananda, one of Buddha's chief disciples, to question the sage.

"Why, O Venerable One," said Ananda, "did you give three different answers to the same question? It is bothering us."

"My spiritual sons," said Buddha, "they were not ready for my answers. They were not even looking for an answer. They were merely looking for a confirmation to what they thought they already knew."

What happens when someone gives us an answer contradictory to our understanding? Most of us reject it or go back to what we know to make sense of the conflicting view. Very few, the rare few, bare themselves to reflect on the new answers to arrive at a deeper insight.

In response to the numerous comments to my last post: I don't ever recall saying that we are simply a bunch of molecules or an agency of hormones. I'm not a proponent of negating sensual pleasures. I believe in accepting them, experiencing them and understanding them, so you may remain unaffected by them. The purpose of any austerity or penance is self-purification, so we may be more compassionate, loving and humble.

Of course, life can have a meaning; I just don't buy into a universal meaning or purpose applicable to all and sundry. No panacea, no pansophy. What is even the "meaning" of meaning? Not everyone experiences bliss and peace in meditation, in rituals or in pursuit of an inner calling. The meaning of life is the one you deduce from it. Its purpose is the one you assign to it.

A doctor's could be treating patients, a general's could be protecting the borders and a soldier's could be combating the enemy. A painter's could be in art, a musician's could be in melody just like a mother's could be in her child. If Buddha's meaning was in meditation, Einstein's was in Relativity, Steve Job's was in Apple. I see little difference.

Everything I state is only my view and not the universal view. Swami has no absolute answers. Do we not say to children that tooth fairy exists, that Santa exists? Do we not tell them that they are a gift from God rather than saying that they were born out of a sexual act? And later, when they grow up, do we not give them the real answers?

Why? Because you care. You care about what and how much they can handle. Not everyone is ready to hear the truth, let alone practice it. Physical age or bookish knowledge has no correlation to one's readiness. If you are willing to listen, Nature is ceaselessly offering answers to your questions. The appeal of an answer is not dependent on the answer itself but on the mindset of the questioner. Similarly, the meaning of life is not so much about the meaning itself as much as it's about the one on the quest for it.

A German approached Srila Prabhupada — the sweet and simple saint, the founder of ISKCON. "Why am I always sad and depressed?" he said. "Why must I suffer?" "Because," said Prabhupada, "you are a rascal. You did a lot of bad karma in your past life and now you are paying the price."

Many will frown at this seemingly uncompassionate response but this seeker immediately fell at Prabhupada's feet and became his disciple. It worked for him. He said he got the answer he'd been long searching. Go figure.

As for the question, Does God Exist? Of course. What exists other than God? Only God exists. For another time.

"How old are you really?" a man said to Mulla Nasrudin.

"I'm 42 years old."

"How can that be? Four years ago too you'd said you were 42!"

"That's right," replied Mulla. "I always stand by what I say."

Consistency of beliefs is burdensome. How will you experience the beauty and depth of the

ocean without undocking your ship? Give yourself room to learn, to play, to explore, to experience, to be. Come anew. Holding on to a belief may be comforting, compelling, even energizing, but letting go is liberating. It's okay to prefer comfort over liberation if you so wish, it's a question of choice, a matter of temperament. Take your pick.

Peace.
Swami

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In: [Self realization](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 26 July 2014

[How did We Happen?](#)



What is the purpose of human life? Read the story.

I received an interesting email the other day. If you bypass the general tone of the message, you'll find the questions worthy.

Despite my scepticism, I can't help but hope...That maybe you've got some answers which nobody has. So tell me without indulging in cryptic mystic hyperbole if you could(please!) How did we happen? What's the purpose of all this? What happens after we die? Please don't be shy to admit if you don't know the answers...It's ok...I will continue to search...Can u reply fast?

Before I share with you what I wrote back to her, I'm reminded of an anecdote. A Zen monk was sitting under a banyan tree. Coincidentally, he was pondering over exactly the same questions of

birth, death and more. His master's answers couldn't satisfy him, the scriptural thought didn't appeal to him, the teachings of Buddha couldn't douse his curiosity.

Just when he thought there were no answers to his questions, a mighty gust of wind blew and the leaves started fluttering. One of the leaves could cling to the tree no longer and got detached. The wind raised it high up in the air and tossed it around before thumping it on the ground. It was as if caught up in a tornado.

"My life is like the leaf," he realized. "No matter what I want or how much I want to hold on to the tree of life, one day I'll be disconnected. This severance is not the death, but the beginning of another life. And like the leaf, I'll be flung around. The tornado of desires will pitch me around. There is no sense in resistance. I must go with the flow before ending up on the ground. And even then, this is not the death but the start of another life still. As I'll decompose, I'll become part of earth, I'll continue to live in millions of other organisms. The cycle is eternal."

This was his realization, not necessarily mine or yours. Moving on to what I wrote to the reader:

"Even if someone gave you the most accurate answer you might still not accept it because there's often no way of verifying its validity. Everything on our origin, death and afterlife is a theory with one difference at the most — some sound more plausible than others.

There is no heaven or hell. There is no supernatural creator. There is no universal purpose applicable to all individuals. There may even be no individual purpose because the quest for purpose is a craving of the conscious mind. Why does a sense of purpose disappear in sleep, or when one is unconscious, or in an infant? As we grow, a sense of ego, of individuality, makes us feel that life can't be meaningless. This notion of meaning is simply a pointless ramble of the conscious mind.

The brutal truth is that every being, every single entity, if anything, is merely an insignificant, dispensable and disposable aspect of Nature, whose self-fulfilling purpose is to sustain itself.

The theory of evolution is the most sensible response to the question of how did we happen. But, it doesn't give us the complete picture either because it misses out on the basis of evolution — it tries to explain how we happened and not why. Why do we even take birth, or why do we evolve? We do so, because, in my view, Nature recycles.

If you observe closely, everything in Nature is recycled. Absolutely everything. The five elements of earth, water, fire, air, ether, and the innumerable compounds thereof, all entities — living or non-living, animate or inanimate — they are all subject to recycling. Everything, including our body is salvaged by Nature. So does our consciousness as it finds a new home after death. Nature's only goal is survival; and it accomplishes it through the eternal cycle of transformation. That's how and why we happen(ed)."

The other day, I was walking back to my hut at night and a dog was walking in front. Due to the heavy rains, all sorts of creatures had appeared out of nowhere (talk about creation). Inadvertently, the dog stepped on a snail. I sat down and flashed my light on the snail. It had

turned into pulp and was crushed under the weight of its own shell. The dog kept looking at me lovingly, completely oblivious to the life it just took.

I sat there for a wee bit more and tiny insects began gathering up on the dead snail. In no time, bigger insects made way into the equation and started devouring their meal. I carried on observing and it began drizzling. Meanwhile, the struggle here between the insects continued — each wanting more. Soon, the soft showers turned into torrents and the smaller insects ran for their lives.

A few minutes later, the larger ones fled as well under the heavy rain and left in front of me was a gored snail. The dog too had taken shelter under the nearby roof. The rain stopped. I waited bit more and the insects were starting to return.

I looked at the dark sky, at the quiet mountains, at the roaring river. What a magnificent play of nature, I thought. Sunlight during the day had given birth to billions of tiny creatures and a downpour of a few minutes had wiped them off the face of earth. Countless crawl out from the womb of Mother Nature and countless merge back. Every moment. I prayed for the sentient beings and went back to my hut.

I've observed ants, insects, fish, snakes, scorpions, wolves, deer, bears, boar, baboons, monkeys and humans. There's no difference. When it comes to Nature, when it comes to the inexplicable essence I call God, there's absolutely no difference whether a dog steps on a snail or an elephant on a man. Whether a flood destroys a thousand sheep or a tsunami a thousand humans, Nature makes no distinction.

Human sense of superiority or a conceited notion of being special is merely an arrogant view. It shows a lack of understanding, it demonstrates an absence of compassion.

In the words of the celebrated Chinese thinker and philosopher, Wu Hsin:

How many of your questions
Have been answered,
But still
You don't have the answer?

Is it possible that
The answer isn't
Found in more questions?

Is it possible that
The answer isn't
Found in more concepts,
More thoughts?

Is it possible that
The answer is
Revealed in their very absence?

(Roy Melvyn, The Lost Writings of Wu Hsin.)

Somehow you believe that every question ought to have an answer. An absolute answer, at that. It's a vain and a childish view. The books of the wise ones contain no absolute answers. Why is the universe infinite? What will you say when your child asks you why was I born to you, O mother?

Swami can give you the answers but they won't lead you to your truth. Rather than answering your questions, let's question your answers. Your questions are not the problem. Your answers are.

Peace.
Swami

17

In: [Self realization](#), [Spirituality](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 19 July 2014

[How to Raise Children](#)



Practice, don't preach. If you are truth, they'll follow you.

Many parents write to me asking how best to raise their children so they are better prepared in life to handle the challenges of our world. Recently, a parent wrote:

My question is how can we, as parents, teach spirituality to our children without confusing them? I would like to give them this tool of self awareness without it being too overpowering...We feel this world is too confusing for us, children need stronger foundation for their journey ahead...

It is every parent's concern that their children grow into strong and independent youths. Perfectly understandable. Many parents also want their children to be religious and spiritual. That's fine too. But, often parents think that teaching rituals or preaching religion will somehow give their children strength and conviction. That is rarely the case. I'm not against religion for it's an integral part of any culture and relaying religious values is a way of passing on the tradition. But, there's more to life.

The great Persian poet, Sadi, once shared a meaningful incident from his life. Quoting literatim; he wrote:

I used to be a pious child, fervent in prayer and devotion. One night I was keeping vigil with my father, the Holy Koran on my lap. The others in the room began to slumber and soon everyone was fast asleep, so I said to my father, “None of these sleepers opens his eyes or raises his head to say his prayers. You would think they were dead.”

My father replied, “My beloved son, I would rather you too were sleeping like them than slandering.”

The essence couldn't be summed up any better. Far more important than have them cram religious texts or stories, is to help them practice the three most important human values. As follows:

1. Compassion

Just being compassionate towards our loved ones is only one tiny aspect of compassion. True compassion means having a sense of sympathy for all sentient beings, it means to have a feeling of empathy towards everyone around us.

Think of compassion as a response. When we come across those who are less fortunate than us, or those who have harmed us, we have an option to choose how we want to respond.

Compassion is one of those choices.

2. Karma

By karma, I don't mean that we need to teach them good karma or bad karma as such. Most children have a better and clearer sense of karma than their parents because parents often twist the truth to suit their convenience whereas children haven't yet learned such trickery. By karma, in the present context, I am narrowly referring to helping them see that their future depends on their present choices.

If we could help them see that they are responsible for the choices they make in their lives, most children will grow into stronger and more responsible citizens of the world. Many youths and adults, even those who had a decent childhood, take refuge in self-pity and self-denial. Karma means we own up to our choices.

3. Truthfulness

Truthfulness of the conduct, words and actions is the greatest virtue one can practice. It is not easy but it's highly enriching. The greatest reward of truthfulness is peace and inner strength. By truth, I don't mean that you are not entitled to have a private life or that you must state absolutely everything that's on your mind, or that you need to be brutal in your speech. No, it means to be free of falsity as much as possible.

Truth means not deceiving the other person into believing what is untrue. People will have assumptions about you, your life, you don't have to go around clarifying their presumptions. But, when you state something about yourself that you know is not true, that is lying.

The hardest thing about the three virtues is not preaching but practicing them. Your children will look at you and observe you closely to see if you practice compassion, karma and truthfulness. If you do, sooner or later, they'll do too. If you don't, no amount of preaching will cut it. If you meditate, or if you go to the temple and they see you happy and calm, they'll automatically follow you. Children know, they observe, they assimilate, they absorb, they follow.

A father was returning from church with his five-year old.

"The earlier priest was much better. This one always delivers a boring sermon," he remarked.

"Daddy," said the young one, "I thought it was pretty good for the penny we gave today."

Our race suffers the most because we want our children to selectively pick up our behavior, our values and teachings. If truth be told in no uncertain terms, when it comes to raising children, there is absolutely no room for hypocrisy. Practice pretense and you do so at your own peril.

A preacher summed up his years of work in ten short points and named it The Ten Commandments of Raising Children. He would enthusiastically distribute pamphlets to all the parents telling them how they ought to raise their children. A little while later he got married.

After he had been a father for a few years and had two children, he felt the need to change the title of his work to more accurately reflect his understanding. Thus, it now read Ten Suggestions on Raising Children.

A few more years passed and his children were teenagers now. Once again, realizing that the title of his work was not apt, he changed it to Ten Tentative Ideas on Raising Children.

I hope you know where I'm going with this. Nothing teaches like experience. Besides, there are no cookie-cutter methods. There are no absolute teachings. Also, spirituality can't be taught. It can only be practiced, it can only ever be learned.

If I were to dive deep in some ocean of wisdom and fetch you the one most valuable pearl on the

current subject, it would be: Practice what you want them to learn. Be what you want them to be. Do what you want them to do. Don't tell, show. Don't lecture, lead. They are your children, after all. They know you.

Peace.
Swami

[21](#)

In: [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 12 July 2014

[The Guru](#)



Just like the full moon that softly dispels the darkness, a genuine master lights up your soul.

Do you know the difference between the light of the sun versus the moon's? Sun's presence annihilates any darkness whereas moon dissipates it without eliminating it completely. Moon is soothing while sun seething. Like the moon, a guru allows you to exist the way you are, accepting you the way you are, ever exuding the gentle rays, the full light of love, care, wisdom and guidance.

The guru-disciple relationship is like no other for it's free of the usual give-and-take exchanges. It's one of the most intimate and purest relationships because there are no secrets and there's no hidden agenda. It's a bond, a covenant, capable of rapid, profound, and irreversible transformation.

In the present day and age though, while the sanctity of this relationship is as intact as it ever was, there is no dearth of examples where both the guru and the disciple abuse each other's trust

and sentiments. In my vocation, I regularly meet seekers who have been prey to fake gurus. There are also fake disciples though — these get initiated but never really follow the teachings in entirety.

That said, there are many who do follow ardently and practice sincerely yet their doubts and negative tendencies remain. They don't experience any transformation. Why? What are they doing wrong? When a seeker is sincere, when they practice to a T but still fail to walk the spiritual path, the fault is often not with the seeker but the guru. The most common mistake you can make is to accept someone as your guru just because he or she can expound on some scriptures.

Your master must make sense to you, he must practice what he preaches, his teachings must be acceptable to you. Don't feel the pressure to agree when you don't. Never take someone as your guru who curbs your questions or makes you feel stupid. In the presence of a genuine master, you feel important, loved and peaceful. Everything feels alright, life feels worthwhile. This is how you know that you are in the close vicinity of a real master.

You don't have to go in search of a guru. When you tread the path with sincerity and honesty, Nature is left with no option but to manifest a genuine master in your life. If you feel guilty, angry, resentful or restless in a master's presence, it can only mean one of the two things: a. the guru is fake, or, b. you are not ready for him.

Above all, make absolutely no attempts to deliberately feel reverence for any master. Surrender or acceptance can't be forced; either you feel it or you don't or maybe you feel it intermittently. Either way, it's fine. If adoration doesn't come from within, give yourself time or get yourself a new guru. Faith need not be blind.

On a sunny Sunday, at the conclusion of a discourse, many members of the audience approached the master to clear their doubts or just to greet him. "Thank you, Master," one of them said, "I had my doubts at first but now, I stand convinced you are even smarter than Einstein." The preacher beamed with pride and thanked him for the greatest compliment.

Over the next few days as he reflected on the remark, he felt increasingly baffled. What did the man actually mean? he thought. He went through his notes to see what had he said so profound that someone deemed him smarter than Einstein. When no answer came forth, he decided it was best to ask the seeker.

The next Sunday he saw the same person in the audience. He asked him if he remembered his last week's comment. "Absolutely, I do," he said.

"Exactly what did you mean that I am smarter than Einstein?"

"Well, Reverend," the man replied, "they say, Einstein was so smart that only ten people in the entire world could understand him. But Sir, no one can understand you."

If your master is too cryptic, he doesn't know what he's talking about. Truth is always simple, lies are complicated. If you examine the lives of the greatest sages, the realized ones, you'll discover that they preached in a way so even a child could understand. Such simplicity only

comes from experience, from genuineness.

When they don't make sense to you, chances are, they are not talking sense at all. It doesn't mean you have to agree or disagree with the master, but, at least, their words should be within the purview of your comprehension.

Once you find a master who walks the talk, whose presence pierces your heart, whose teachings transform you, whose words make you feel divine, don't let go off him because he, with each unfolding moment, will elevate you even higher. You then experience your own greatness, beauty and magnificence in every thought of yours. The pristine you then shines softly like the full moon amid the night of emotions; both co-existing and complementing each other.

Peace.
Swami

16

In: [Spirituality](#)

Saturday, 5 July 2014

[Dealing with Terminal Illness](#)



All rivers merge in the sea, all small things become a part of a bigger phenomenon, it goes back to its source in Nature.

What to do when one of your loved one is diagnosed with a terminal condition? Do I have any insights? I was asked recently.

It is one of the most agonizing, most painful experiences — to see a loved one wither away in

front of your eyes while you put a brave face and watch helplessly. We are more fragile and more caring than we would ever know. The greater we care about someone the more their pain we feel in our own hearts. Is there any way to be at peace during this difficult time? Allow me to share with you a little story.

In the quiet countryside lived an old physician. He had been seeing patients for more than forty years and was known for his kindness, for making free house calls for the terminally ill. He always took his dog along whenever he visited his patients. The dog would wait outside the patient's house while the doctor went in to see the ill person.

On one occasion, a certain man had less than three months to live. He was scared of death and confessed his fears to the physician.

"What will it be like after I die, doc?" he said. "Will I be alright? What awaits me?"

The doctor stopped scribbling on his pad and put down the pen. He got up, opened the door and looked at his dog. The dog wagged his tail, and as much excitedly as triumphantly leaped towards him.

The physician turned to the patient and said, "Do you see this dog? He didn't have a clue about what all was in this room, on this side of the door. The only thing he knew that I, his master, was here. And, that's all he was looking forward to."

"That's how I see death," he continued. "I don't know what it's going to be like in the other world or this world once I am gone. I don't really know the whats, whys and hows about dying. Like my dog, I'm unsure what all is on the other side of the door. But, I do know that I'll end up by the feet of my master. And, that's all I need to know because that's all that matters to me."

I find this anecdote particularly beautiful. Ultimately, it boils down to living with grace and peace for as long as we have the chance to breathe.

Even if there's no afterlife, even if there's no heaven or hell (personally, I don't believe in heaven or hell except the one on earth), it doesn't really matter because an infinite existence awaits us. All rivers eventually end up in the sea regardless of their course, all the drops of rain either merge into ponds, rivers, lakes, oceans or they are absorbed by the earth. If nothing, they simply evaporate and go back to the source. Either way, from infinitesimal they become infinite.

This is the nature of Nature. Everything must return to its source in its pristine form. All tiny things merge into bigger ones and we too must return to our source one day. It's not about living or dying, it's restoration of our original state. Vedas call it *moksha* meaning the extinguishing of all attachments and freedom from all fetters including that of body, elements and relationships. Death is not the end of life, but the beginning of it. The drop becomes the ocean and eternally transcends scarcity, struggle, fear and pain. An ocean remains unmoved, it does not dry up, it does not wait for the rain or sunshine. It exists beyond those shackles. Death is not sleep but awakening.

I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I, and you are you,
Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.
Speak to me in the easy way which you always used.
Put no difference into your tone.

Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.
Laugh as we always laughed
At the little jokes that we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.
Let it be spoken without an effort,
Without the ghost of a shadow upon it.

Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same as it ever was.
There is absolute and unbroken continuity.

What is this death but a negligible accident?
Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?
I am but waiting for you, for an interval,
Somewhere very near,
Just round the corner.

All is well.
~Henry Scott Holland.

Titled Death is Nothing at All, this is not a just poem but a beautiful sermon, I feel. Let's not make our lives too serious. Let's be merry, play, laugh it out. Nothing is worth clinging onto. Let Nature roll. It is what it is.

A dying man was visited by the local priest. "Do you surrender yourself completely to the will of the Lord and accept him as your savior?"

"I do, Father."

"Do you renounce the devil and his works?"

The man didn't answer.

"I've come to absolve you. Tell me, do you renounce the devil and all his works? Say you hate the devil and detest him thoroughly," the priest spoke with even more rigor.

"Reverend," the patient said, "with the kind of life I lived, I don't know where I'll end up. So, I don't think it's the time to make enemies."

A little bit of humor makes everything divine. Hence, the joke above. In case, you haven't read my earlier posts on death and losing a loved one, you can do so [here](#) and [here](#).

Let's pray for a better world, with each one of us doing our part. Let's be compassionate, loving and giving. It's every bit worth it. Such a life becomes larger than death.

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah |

Sarve bhadrani pashyant, maa kashcid dukha bhagbhavet ||

May all sentient beings be at peace, may all be free from diseases.
May we see nobility everywhere, may no one ever be in suffering.

(Image credit: [Darko Topalski](#))

Peace.

Swami

[16](#)

In: [Life](#), [Self realization](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 28 June 2014

[How to Get Rid of Impure Thoughts](#)



Mind is like a monkey, forever hopping from one place to another. It's not pure-impure or good-bad. It just is. "Is it a sin to have impure thoughts? How can I get rid of such thoughts?" someone wrote to me the other day. Before, I answer this question, allow me to share with you that I don't believe in the notion of sin. There's nothing called sin. I'm not suggesting that everything we do or think is right, but sin means you have done something that has led to estrangement from God, because of which God is now upset with you. I don't think God would be God if He got upset. God's love is unconditional. Sin is a religious concept whereas your true nature, and God too, is beyond any religion, book, or belief system.

If there's no sin, does that mean, everything is acceptable? Not quite. Nature operates on a self-fulfilling prophecy. You plant an apple seed and it'll sprout and grow into an apple tree. Nature is not punishing you or rewarding you for this karma. To judge as good or bad, right or wrong is the human way. The divine way is to simply be aware, to be a witness. There is no sin in having impure thoughts, but acting on impure thoughts can amount to undesirable actions. And, this leads me to our topic today: how to rise above your impure thoughts?

If anyone ever tells you that they can give you a practice, or a way to not have impure thoughts in your mind, they are lying. No power in this world or any other can give you that guarantee. An average human mind goes through 60,000 thoughts in 24 hours, and, it is but natural that some of those thoughts are going to be undesirable. To have an impure thought doesn't make you impure, it doesn't make you a bad person. It's not the thought itself that matters, it's what you do with it.

Everyone experiences thoughts of hatred, jealousy, impropriety. There's nothing destructive about it, because a thought can come from any direction, at any time. One could be thinking about philandering or deceit while praying in a temple and the same person could be thinking of compassion and morality in a brothel. It's possible. Thoughts are involuntary, they come uninvited. There's nothing unusual about having impure thoughts. It's not the thought itself but its pursuit that ultimately impacts your emotional and mental state.

Therefore, it's not realistic to expect that you never have any impure thoughts but it's quite doable to not pursue such thoughts nor act on them. When you get a thought you deem impure, simply shift your attention. Focus your mind elsewhere. Don't go after the thought. Let's say you are thanking God for everything you have in your life including a wonderful family. And, out of nowhere, the thought of a woman surfaces in your consciousness. At that moment, don't chase the thought or feel bad that you thought what you did. Just gently bring your attention back to the present moment, the woman will go away.

If, however, you start to follow the thought-trail and begin contemplating on her, her body, or being with her, the thought will rapidly gather momentum soon overpowering your ability to think straight. A tiny, harmless flake of snow will turn into a juggernaut as it rolls down. It may nudge you to translate your thought into an action you may regret later on.

A disciple fell in love with her master. She felt guilty for feeling those emotions, but guilt could not help her emerge stronger than her ardor. With her heart ruling over her mind, she could contain it no longer.

"I'm sorry, master," she said, "but, I have tremendous feelings for you."

"Don't be sorry," said the master. "If you have tremendous feelings for me, I've enough discipline for both of us."

Think of yourself as the master and your thoughts as the disciple. When they come to you, no one has to be sorry, you just have to be aware and choose a course of action accordingly. Give your thoughts the freedom to approach you, while you keep the strength to direct them. If you repeatedly get the same impure thought, then, we need to get to the bottom of it. It could be because of deprivation. Those who are fulfilled in their lives are lot less likely to experience

constant jealousy or hatred than those who never experienced true love.

If someone's fasting, it's quite natural that they'll get thoughts of food more than any other. So long as they are busy, they may not feel hungry but, the moment they're free, the thought of food will emerge strongly. Similarly, when you give your mind a free moment, most probably, you'll have an impure thought, a negative thought or a depressing thought. It's natural. Why? Because, most people are constantly battling with themselves to not think impurely, to not be negative, to not be jealous and so forth. You are fasting and you are trying to eliminate the thought of food from your mind.

Mindfulness is the key. Accept, don't react, don't pursue, don't feel guilty. Just let it be. You can build mindfulness with meditation, with contemplation, with determination. You never have to be sorry for your feelings or your thoughts. They are not pure or impure, they just are. You just have to watch out what you do with them.

When you simply draw yourself back to the present moment, all thoughts, both good and bad, vanish. There's no battle then. There's nothing to escape in the present moment. This is the simple truth.

Peace.
Swami

[23](#)

In: [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 21 June 2014

[I am Not Happy](#)



Your past is like the hardened clay. You can't reshape it without breaking it. Your present is like the soft clay. Someone emailed me the following question. I get asked this frequently, in fact.

"I need some advice about reducing my inner turmoil. I am in my fifties but feel no peace in life. I'm sick and tired of the rat race, of fighting to survive in a job and to meet the demands of family. I have become a slave to pay my bills."

At first, Buddha's view that everything is suffering seems a little pessimistic but upon deeper examination it's not too far off the truth most experience in their lives. While I meet many happy people, mostly though, I meet stressed out and sad ones. It almost feels that suffering comes on its own but happiness is something you've to work hard towards.

The truth is, happiness is our natural state but, more often than not, most people feel they have to have certain things in their life to be happy, to be at peace. It's not entirely their fault; we are programmed to believe that happiness depends on our success, on bank balance, on others' approval of us, on the volume of our material possessions. There's absolutely no doubt that a degree of material richness can make living a worthwhile experience, but, at the same time, it's absence doesn't mean we can't be at peace, or be happy.

Our world is full of people who go to bed hungry, who can't afford medication, who don't have a roof over their heads, who can't clothe themselves properly. And then there are millions who have all of the above and more, yet they are not happy. They have a family, they have friends, they have some savings (perhaps debt too), they are in good health yet they are restless.

The golden mantra of finding inner peace starts with acceptance. It begins by accepting the responsibility of the choices we've made. They are not necessarily about right-wrong or good-bad, but, each choice we make has an outcome. We can't possibly hope for some God to descend

and undo our past choices, or grant us inner peace, because, everyone is already blessed with it. Only that we cover it with our desires and emotions.

I've realized that there's no struggle in being at peace. The struggle is to be at ease with what you have and who you are — both of which can be hard to accept sometimes. Your past is like the baked clay pot. It's already been through the fire, it's hard, its shape is set. We can't re-mold it. Any attempt to do so will break it. Whereas the present is like the soft clay, you can shape it however you like. How one casts it varies from one person to another.

Let's assume there'll always be bills to pay, there'll always be a family to feed, there'll always be struggle, the world will remain competitive. Let's say, our soft clay is made of bills, struggle, and needs. Agreed. Now what? Should we allow it to rob our inner peace or should we stop kneading (brooding) now and start building it?

Paying bills, feeding a family or the challenges at work are not the real problems. The real issue is our expectations from life. We have a perception of how life ought to be, but it's not turning out that way. The entire struggle is shaping it into what we want it to be like. In fact, no matter what the circumstances, there's no struggle in acceptance. The only struggle is in resistance.

The way to redefine, reshape yourself, your present, and consequently your future, is to first take complete responsibility of your choices and your actions. This will help you to be [comfortable](#) with yourself. The second step is to prioritize between things you have to do and things you want to do. Third is to invest some of your time in what really matters to you, your passion. And, if you don't have any passion, purpose or a constructive pastime, well then, ideally, one of your top priorities should be to discover one.

Mulla Nasrudin joined a passing caravan and befriended two rich people who had horses, camels and gold whereas Mulla only had a donkey and a ragged bag. They stopped for lunch and unpacked their food.

The first one boasted, "I only eat dry fruits. Roasted and salted. For dessert, I only take pitted dates."

"During my travels, I only eat puffed rice mixed with pistachios and cashews with falafel. I alternate between baklava and dates for sweet," said the other.

Nasrudin opened his lunch. He only had a piece of salted bread and a small piece of gur, solid sweet cane sugar.

Holding up his food and looking at it admiringly, he said, "Well, I only eat wheat, ground up and carefully mixed with water, yeast, and salt, and then baked at the proper temperature for the proper time. Oh, and after my meal, I prefer to have fresh and filtered sugarcane juice, boiled and concentrated until it turns into a delicious lump of sweetness."

How you see life makes all the difference between life feeling like a breeze or a brawl. It's neither, if you ask me. Life is simply a colony of countless moments, a painting of myriad strokes. Focus on each moment, each stroke, work on the part and the whole becomes beautiful on its own.

(Image credit: [Michelle Calkins](#))

Peace.
Swami

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In: [Happiness](#), [Self Help](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 14 June 2014

[Making Your Dreams Come True](#)



Why do some people succeed better or quicker than others? Read the story.

Engrossed in his own world, dismayed and troubled, once upon a time, a traveler was passing through the woods. His whole life had been a struggle, he felt. No matter how hard he worked, there seemed no end to the challenges life put him through. His friends, his peers, his siblings, they all had progressed while he remained where he was. He was convinced that they were just more lucky and that he was fated to slog and sweat.

Little did he know that he was passing through a magical terrain in the forest. A giant tree, too magnificent, too beautiful, too hard to resist, stood in the middle — inviting and riveting. The tree was a *kalpataru*, a wish-fulfilling tree. He sat by the root under the dense shade to rest. Soon, he felt thirsty. "How I wish if I could get a glass of cold water," he thought. Poof! And, a glass of cold water emerged out of thin air.

He gulped it down, but now he felt hungry too. Barely had he imagined food when a sumptuous meal appeared right in front of him. He pinched himself in utter disbelief. He thought of a comfy bed and that too materialized in no time. The traveler realized that he had hit a jackpot. It was all happening for real. He wished for a home, servants, garden, land, wealth, and everything continued to manifest in front of him.

It was starting to dawn on him that he was the master of his fate, after all. That, this tree was truly granting his wishes, that, his thoughts were actually coming true. Afraid of losing it all, still in a sense of denial, he thought, "No, this can't be true. I don't deserve all this. I can't possibly be that lucky. This must be a dream."

Poof! Everything disappeared. He looked around and saw the dark woods. A few hours had already passed. It was getting dark; evening had set in as had fear. "I hope there's no lion nearby or I'll be eaten alive," he thought.

A lion appeared and ate him.

This parable is everyone's story. We are all passing through the woods and wondering about what life could have been or should have been. In doing so, we remain imperceptive to the magic our world already is.

You are resting under the mystical tree of life, sometimes completely unaware that it is granting you your wishes, that your dreams are coming true, that Universe is constantly listening to you. The beauty about this listener is that it's non-judgmental. It makes no discrimination between your good desires or bad desires. Once you contemplate on something long enough, it is accepted in the fold of the cosmos and the forces of nature get to work on materializing it in your life.

Assuming your effort is sincere, the intensity of your desire and the purity of your thought are the two primary factors that determine how long it will take before your wish is granted. By the purity of thought, I'm not referring to any skewed stance on morality, I'm simply alluding to the single-mindedness of your pursuit. If you have too many desires going at the same time, it's just too much noise. One thing at a time.

Most importantly, when you don't believe in something, the Universe doesn't believe in it either. If you believe in your own goals, dreams, desires and hopes, the Universe will too. Vedic scriptures persuasively state and logically prove that we are an exact replica of the Universe. We are the microcosm and out there is the macrocosm. Anything you wish to materialize outside, you must first learn to manifest it within — with complete conviction and sincerity.

If you are willing to be patient, persistent and positive, you can accomplish pretty much anything. I have to give you a caveat though: this law of nature doesn't work if you want a specific person in your life to be a certain way. If you want love, you can have it, but it may not necessarily be from the person you wish it from, for example. Why? Because they too are releasing their desires and thoughts in the macrocosm, and if theirs is more intense and persistent, the Universe is bound to listen to them first.

Your fears, thoughts, desires, expectations, dreams, hopes — they stem from a thought. Whatever you cling to ultimately manifests.

Never think you are undeserving of the good in your life, never think you can't make it, because,

if *you* start to think that, well then, you leave Nature with no choice but to believe you. Allow your dreams to materialize; give your hopes a chance over your fears, let your conviction win over your doubts.

You deserve to be happy, you deserve to live, you deserve to be here on this magical path. You deserve to celebrate life. It's not a motivational statement, this is my firm belief. This is Swami's way of life, in fact.

Peace.

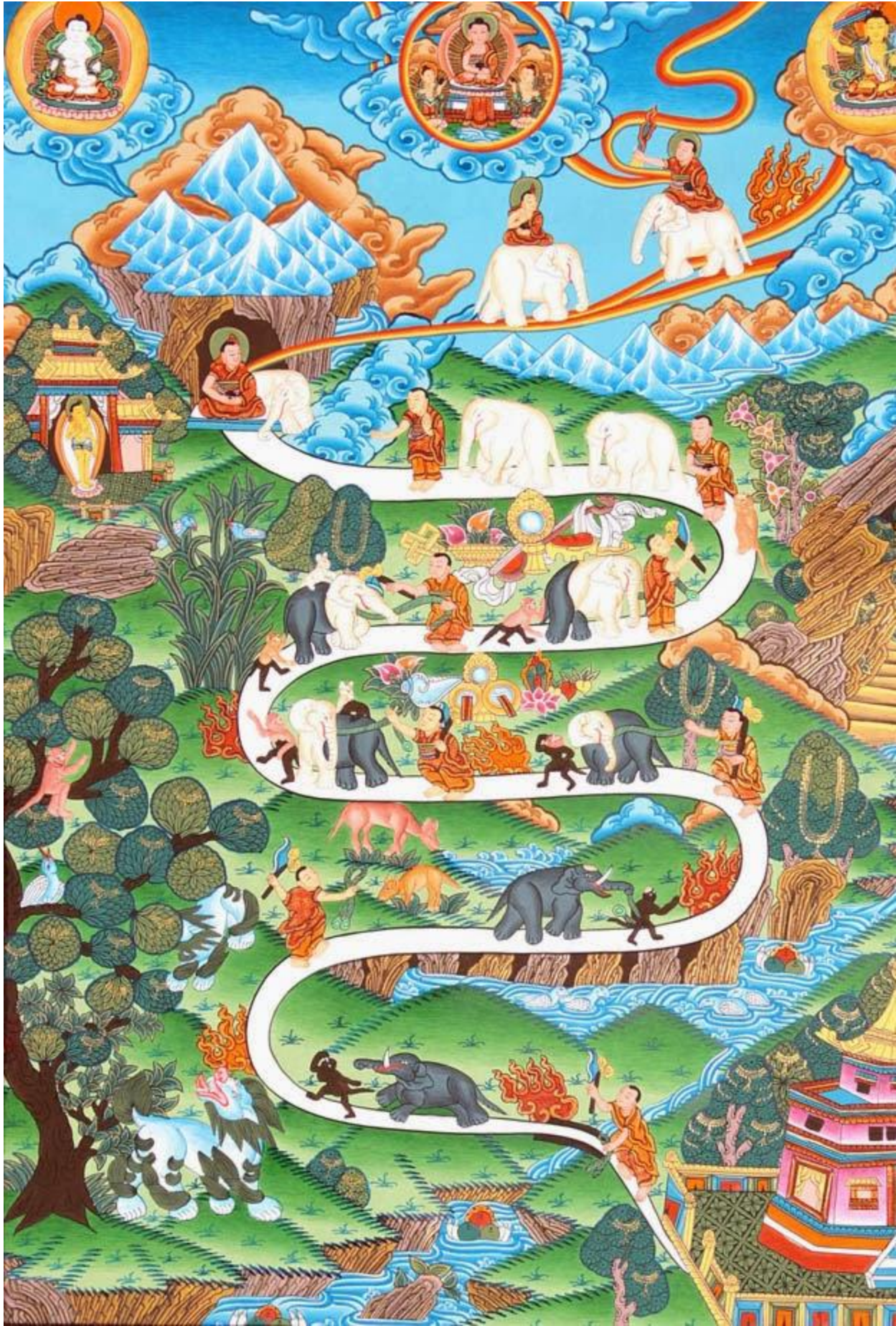
Swami

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In: [Self realization](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 7 June 2014

[Nine Stages of Attaining Bliss](#)



The nine stages of samadhi are beautifully illustrated in this Mahamudra scroll.

The nine stages of mahamudra are identical to the nine states of attention elucidated in my last post. The more I meet aspiring yogis or serious meditators, the more I realize how great the misconceptions are about meditation. What really pains my heart is that, most of the time, the seeker is not at fault. It's the teacher, the guru.

Most aspirants are often being guided by teachers who can't demonstrate anything. These teachers never went into the depths of meditation themselves but simply mastered some theoretical material and are now guiding others based on second-hand knowledge. Today, I'll briefly touch upon the nine stages of tranquility and also answer the question we raised two weeks ago: "How great an effort is required to reach the final state?"

If you carefully examine the picture in the post today, you'll find three key artifacts, namely, a monk, an elephant and a monkey. Additionally, the monk is holding a noose and a goad. The monk represents the meditator treading the windy path of meditation, where, until it's mastered, no two days are alike. Some days you experience good meditation and other times, it's the opposite. The elephant represents dullness and the monkey restlessness. The goad and noose represent vigilance and attentiveness in meditation.

In the first stage, the meditator is like a rocky boat in a turbulent ocean. There's virtually no control on the mind. The concentration at this stage ends up wherever the drift of thoughts take it. The monkey and the elephant constantly disrupt the meditation and the meditator is struggling to tame them.

In the second stage, there's a small white patch on the elephant and monkey. It shows progress. It means the meditator is able to have short periods of quality meditation when the mind is devoid of thoughts. Think of a flag that flutters whenever the wind blows. No wind no fluttering. Similarly, the mind at this stage is stable for a short period before the winds of thoughts start to blow again causing waves in the stillness of consciousness.

The persistent meditator gets to the third stage and this is a significant progress in its own right. Now, they are able to detect their dullness arising in meditation. In the scroll, it is shown by a bigger white patch on the elephant and a noose leashing it. Restlessness or stray thoughts are still a great challenge at this stage.

In the fourth and the fifth stages, while the meditator makes a giant leap by even greater taming of restlessness and dullness, a new challenge presents itself. You'll see a rabbit riding the elephant now. This signifies a state of calmness which makes the meditator go into a sort of torpor or laxity. Often, most meditators who get even a tiny glimpse of this calmness, mistake this as the ultimate state of bliss.

In the sixth stage, the monk can be seen leading both the monkey and the elephant, but the animals are not fully white yet. It means the meditator has mostly tamed them, he's able to lead them, but, there are still subtle elements of excitement or stupor that can distract the meditator.

The elephant is completely white and the monkey sits by the feet of the practitioner in the seventh stage. It shows that the meditator has nearly perfected the art of attention. They

experience lucid awareness during the meditation but the presence of monkey shows there's still a chance of feeling excited or restless. Think of a still pond where dropping even a tiny pebble causes ripples.

In the eighth stage, there's no monkey. Restlessness has completely disappeared for this meditator and a constant state of bliss always leave them calm. But, sometimes in this state of bliss, the lucidity of their awareness is adversely affected. Think of someone under the influence of a mild intoxicant. At this stage, the meditator hasn't yet learned to rise above the bliss.

In the ninth stage, the monk is sitting down with the white elephant. Bliss has become a close companion and it no longer interferes in any worldly activity. All mental and emotional battles cease, the war of thoughts stop and there's virtually no effort in meditation now. The meditator has become the meditation.

The stages beyond show the monk riding the elephant. These indicate other dimensions of existence. The meditator is ever calm, abiding in bliss. Any inner struggle or stress completely disappears. The meditator has gone beyond the meditation. Buddha once said, "The one who knows the reality of one thing knows the reality of everything." It applies to this meditator.

Can anyone reach this state? Yes. What's required? Willingness, persistence, and time; undying willingness, unrelenting persistence and a lot of time. Let me give you a broad guideline: 1500 hours of quality meditation is required to cross each stage.

With discipline and a quality effort, you can bring it down to about 1200 hours and with right initiation and guidance it can be brought down to 800 hours for each stage.

So, who can initiate and who can guide you? How to know the person across the table is not just a smooth talker or even a charlatan but a genuine practitioner? For another time.

Peace.

Swami

[10](#)

In: [Meditation](#)

Saturday, 31 May 2014

[Nine States of Attention](#)



To reach a state of deep absorption requires training the mind. It's staged and measurable. My inbox was inundated with emails after my post last week. Most readers had the same challenges. Most notably, that their mind wanders off while meditating and that they struggle to get it back on the object of meditation. Second most common query was what to meditate on? In my last post, I'd written about doing nothing and being in the present moment. "How to do nothing and be in the present moment?" they asked. Let's take it step by step.

I was planning to cover the nine stages of the Mahamudra meditation today, but after receiving your queries last week, I thought I should first introduce you to the nine stages of mind, also known as the nine states of attention. Yogic scriptures call it *navaakaaraa cittasthiti*, literally for the nine forms of the mental state. Having spent years practicing meditation, I can tell you with utmost conviction that all great meditators, from absolute beginners to the finest yogis go through these stages. No one is born with the skill to meditate. It's what you learn. It's never too early or too late to do so.

For all the meditators who are craving for that ultimate bliss, for an eternally calm mind, I want you to know that to reach a state in meditation where your mind is in complete equipoise and you are not constantly battling with the thoughts, it requires a persistent, disciplined and a great effort. How great, you may ask? Firstly, allow me to share with you the nine states of attention. Think of them as the path of training the mind. What most people desire in meditation is the ninth state. To get there, you need to graduate from each stage.

1. Positioning of attention

Scriptures call it *cittasthaapana*, also means placement of the mind. This is the first stage in the life of a meditator. At this stage, the mind constantly wanders off and doesn't stay on a thought for anymore than a few seconds. Meditation feels more like a battle with the mind at this stage. Basically, a meditator's attempt to channelize the thoughts only result in more restlessness at this stage.

2. Intermittent attention

This stage is called *samsthaapana* and it also means comforting or encouraging attention. The meditator experiences short periods (lasting a few seconds) of good attention during the meditation. These are the times when the mind is not wandering off. After a mental quietude of a few seconds, thoughts come knocking again, but often the meditator remains unaware for several minutes of the stray thoughts. They "forget" that they were meditating.

3. Constant attention

This stage is called *avasthaapana*, which, interestingly, also means to expose. What happens when your body is exposed to hot or cold? You feel it more, right? Similarly, when you expose your mind during meditation, you become more aware and alert. Mindfulness is exposing your mind. The primary difference between this and the earlier stage is the degree of alertness. In this stage, the meditator keeps his vigil on-guard and becomes aware as soon as the mind is distracted.

4. Fixed attention

It's called *upasthaapana*. Literally, it means to be ready, and that's what this stage is all about: getting ready for the real meditation. In this stage, the aspirant is mostly able to hold his attention during the session but is still bothered by periods of restlessness and dullness.

5. Lucid attention

The meditator is able to experience deep tranquility of the mind. This stage is called *damana* in Sanskrit. It means tamed or passionless. The attention of the meditator is tamed at this stage. I must mention a common misconception many meditators have: when you feel peaceful in meditation, sometimes it's purely because you've lost the lucidity, the sharpness of your attention. This is not the same as taming the attention.

6. Pacification of the mind

This stage is called *shamana* and it means extinguished. Thoughts have extinguished in the mind of this meditator, and, the mind is clear of most mental obstacles but this mental exertion sometimes gives birth to subtle feelings of restlessness or excitement. It is predominantly so because at this stage, you've done what mind is not used to at all — to be quiet, to be still. Only the sincere and dedicated practitioners reach this stage.

7. Complete pacification of the mind

It's called *vyupashamana*. Most interestingly, the term *vyupa* means the one who eats out of his own hands. This is one of the finest stages of meditation. In this state, the mind is looking at itself sharply. It's able to recognize dullness, restlessness, thoughts, emotions and all the other distractions. The mind is completely pacified and is not afraid to remain established in tranquility.

8. Intense attention

The mind has attained single-pointed concentration at this stage. It's called *ekotikarana*. The meditator can carry out an uninterrupted session of lucid meditation lasting nearly two hours in the most steady posture. There is practically no dullness or restlessness.

9. Profound absorption

It's called *samaadhaana* and it means perfect tranquil equipoise. The meditator meditates effortlessly and can remain in tranquil equipoise for an average of four hours at a stretch including maintaining the posture.

Beyond the nine states await the ultimate state of super-consciousness, a supramundane dimension of existence. The nine stages of Mahamudra are almost identical to the nine states above. A serious meditator can only benefit from knowing more about them. So, I'll endeavor to cover them next week. The question remains: how great an effort is required? Wait till my next post.

Peace.
Swami

[10](#)

In: [Meditation](#)

Saturday, 24 May 2014

[Six Principles of Meditation](#)



Tilopa gave six short and profound instructions on meditation to his chief disciple. Every meditator should know them.

A disciple once asked his guru, "Why do we pray after completing our meditation?"
"We do it to thank God that it's over," the guru quipped.

Even though it's a joke, this is how meditation can feel at times. For the sincere and disciplined

meditators, meditation is an arduous journey. You are removing the warts of emotions, you are getting rid of the calluses of thoughts, you are removing the layers of desires, you are trying to still your mind. It's not easy. Pacification and complete stabilization of the mind requires great skill and effort.

I've invested a significant portion of my life in experimenting with various forms and styles of meditation. Some focus on extensive visualization, some insist on sounds, many methods involve mandalas, some talk about breath regulation, many talk about watching your thoughts or sensations, but meditation isn't about creating an artificial sensitivity, it is about discovering your most natural state — a state of pristine awareness and clarity. Hence, the system of meditation I prefer the most is Mahamudra because it emphasizes on removing the mental constructs and seeing your mind as is — still, infinite and eternal.

Over the years, I've practiced Mahamudra in both the tantric and non-tantric ways and have found it truly remarkable. Literally, Mahamudra means the great seal. You may interpret it as the seal of stillness, of peace, of bliss, or simply the seal of emptiness. How our world (not the world!) is a projection of our mind is something I would love to expound another day. For now, allow me to share with you the six fundamental principles of meditation with a short note on its origin.

1500 years ago, there lived a great meditator in India. His name was Tilopa. Much like the Buddha, the Gautama, he too renounced his kingdom, and went on to crystallize the essence of meditation for serious practitioners. He called it Mahamudra and orally transmitted this system of meditation to his chief disciple and successor Naropa, another phenomenal scholar. After Naropa had learned Mahamudra, Tilopa gave him six golden prohibitions — a summary of the entire system in six words. The original Sanskrit instruction is no longer extant, but translated in English, his advice is short and worth its weight in gold. According to Tilopa, and I fully concur, here are the six things a good meditator avoids while meditating:

1. Recollection: Don't pursue thoughts of the past.
2. Calculation: Don't pursue thoughts of the present.
3. Imagination: Don't imagine what may happen in the future.
4. Examination: Don't analyze your thoughts.
5. Construction: Don't try to create an experience.
6. Digression: Don't wander; simply stay in the present moment.

The greater effort you put in following the instructions above, the more you'll gain from meditation. If you sit down to meditate and start to analyze or pursue your thoughts, you will not progress in gaining mental stability and calmness. The four primary hurdles of restlessness, laziness, thoughts and images will continue to bother such a meditator. In the past, I've written on the four hurdles of meditation. You can review them [here](#).

Just like waves form in the ocean constantly, thoughts emerge in the mind incessantly. One of the most rewarding outcomes of great meditation is complete cessation of thoughts. It's an extraordinary feeling; I've no words to describe what it's like to stay in that state for hours and hours. If you are serious about meditation, then following Tilopa's six words of advice will help

you make a giant leap.

In a nutshell: while meditating, don't brood, don't resent and don't repent your past. Don't examine what's going on in your present life. Don't imagine any future. Don't analyze any thought. When any thought comes, don't run after it. It'll disappear. Don't crave for any specific experience or else you'll end up mentally constructing that experience thereby polluting your meditation. Don't let your mind wander. Just be here now, in the present moment. Simply maintain your awareness with alertness.

The act of meditation ceases to be a practice and transforms into a peaceful state of mind if you practice it with persistence and discipline.

Mahamudra meditation lists nine stages of progression on the path of a meditator. I'll be happy to touch upon them in my next post.

Peace.

Swami

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In: [Meditation](#), [Mental Transformation](#)

Saturday, 17 May 2014

[What do You Really Want?](#)



Why didn't the nightingale see the snare? Read the story.

Once upon a time a man owned a beautiful garden full of awesome flowers and fruit trees. Melodious and colorful birds tweeted, bees droned and butterflies fluttered about in that garden.

It was a lively place, like a piece of paradise. It had a small pond too housing many kinds of lotuses. The owner cared for his garden more than anything else in the world. In particular, he loved a rare flower, a black Himalayan lotus with a heady scent that flowered in all seasons.

One morning, he was tending to the roses and tulips while a nightingale sang most sweetly. He longed to see the bird more closely and went in the direction of the sound. There he saw the young bird pecking at the black lotus. Its petals had come off and the lotus was mostly destroyed. He was furious and hurled a rock at the bird but the nightingale took a swift flight and escaped unscathed.

Grieved and angered, he vowed to catch and kill the bird. Scattering barley, sesame seeds and jaggery near the pond, he spread a net and waited patiently. Surely, a little while later, the nightingale came flying again and noticed the food. She landed on the mesh and ate to her heart's content but, realized her mistake when it was time to take off; she was stuck.

The man got hold of the bird and clutched it tightly by the neck. "I'll kill you," he said. "Kill me? But, why? The food was lying on the ground. I didn't steal from your granary." "No, not for these grains but because you destroyed my black lotus." "I'm sorry," the nightingale pleaded. "I was only following my food chain. Have mercy. I always thought that the owner of this beautiful garden must be a tender, caring and a loving person. Little did I know..." The man thought about it and a sense of compassion enveloped him.

"Okay, I'll let you go." He loosened his grip. "I want to tell you a secret, my friend," the nightingale said. "My vision is penetrating. There's buried a pot full of gold at the root of the old peepul tree in your garden. It's yours for the taking."

The man dug up the pot filled with gold coins and was ecstatic beyond bear.

"I'm curious," he said to the nightingale perched on the bough. "How come you could see the treasure hidden under the land but couldn't see the wide net clearly spread on the ground?" "I had no use or craving for the gold, but I longed to eat the sesame seeds and jaggery. While flying towards the food, all I could see was the food. My desire had made me blind."

That's pretty much all one needs to know: desires make us blind. A mad pursuit of endless desires makes one oblivious to what's already there to be enjoyed. That's why Buddha called it the root of all suffering and that's why Krishna preached detachment from the outcome of desires. Desires keep you busy, they keep you on your toes, and above all, they make everything you already have appear small and lacking.

You have a house and the desire to have a bigger house will repeatedly make you feel that what you have is not enough. Your partner loves you but the desire to have more or something else from him or her will make you feel incomplete in the present. The desire to earn more, to have more, to be more, to gain more and so on become great barriers to enjoying the present moment.

I'm not suggesting that you can't have desires. Sometimes, the journey of pursuing the object of your desire can be an exhilarating one too. Until you reach the exalted state, it's perfectly fine to have your desires and to pursue them, it's okay to feel elated upon their fulfillment or feel low when they are not met. It's human, it's natural. But, it certainly helps to be conscious of what you are pursuing in life.

It can be a life-changing exercise — to sit down in peace and question the desires you have because once you become aware of your pursuits, you start to see things in a new light. Predominantly because chasing your desires with [awareness](#) does not make you blind, because mindfulness doesn't allow you to lose sight of what you already have. This awareness keeps you positive, it keeps you happy. It allows you to see both the net on the ground and the pot hidden under the soil.

So, do you really want what you really want?

(Image credit: [Ruth Bain](#))

Peace.

Swami

[22](#)

In: [Happiness](#), [Wisdom](#)

Saturday, 10 May 2014

[How to Be at Peace](#)



In the big scheme of things no matter how much you have, it'll still be negligible. Peace is contentment. Most of us have a list of things we want in life. It can include a certain type of livelihood, a different lifestyle, maybe a different car or a bigger house, sometimes even different loved ones.

It's not uncommon to see people wishing if their parents were like someone else's, if their partner was like someone else, if their life was different and so forth. It's not too bad — to wish for something different, for, desires propel most people to act and live a certain way. So, is there a way to be at peace while living in the materialistic world? Yes. How? Let me share with you a little story first.

Once upon a time, a monk was giving a talk on gratitude. He was saying that everyone had something to be grateful for. That, we all had something of value, that, everyone was blessed by God. No sooner did he finish the sermon than he was approached by a beggar.

"I don't agree with you," he said, "I'm homeless and I've no possessions of any value at all. I've nothing that will attract any price in the world. So, not all of us are blessed. Some are penniless and worthless like me. "

The monk gave a compassionate look and said, "What if, I say, there's something you can give and be paid \$100,000 in return?"

"You are joking. I don't have anything worth \$100k, but, if you think I do, I'll gladly give it for even a fraction of that sum."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. For \$100k, I'll give anything."

"Well, I know someone who will buy a pair of eyes for that much. Will you sell?"

"Of course not!"

"How about your kidneys, your legs, or your hands?"

"How can I give parts of my body?"

"But, you just said you have nothing of value. The truth is there are many things you have that are of value, only that you are choosing to not factor them in. You are taking them for granted as if it's your right to have them."

This leads me to the point I wish to make: gratitude. Often, people think that their life ought to be a certain way before they can be grateful. A mistake. Instead, you start being grateful and your life will become a certain way. Try it to believe me. Imagine it's raining pretty hard. Desire is wishing for the rain to stop and gratitude is carrying an umbrella. If peace is the seed of happiness, gratitude is the womb that carries it.

Don't we all have enough to be grateful? Just look around and you'll see there's plenty you have, plenty of grace, blessings, plenty of things — some valuable, some priceless. With every breath we take, the least we can do is to be thankful for everything we have. Rather than allowing the endless wishes to squeeze the breath out of your life, why not see how breathtaking this life is? Why not take a breath and pause and reflect and appreciate life as it is. Gratitude is not a promise of the future but a commitment to the present.

Mulla Nasrudin's girlfriend asked for a solitaire but he refused.

"Why Mulla," she said, "don't you want me to always think of you? Whenever I'll see the ring, it'll remind me of you."

"Of course, dear," said Mulla, "but rather than the diamond, I would rather have you look at your finger without the ring. That will also remind you of me."

There you go. You can think about what all you don't have and be sad or you can look at what you do have and be grateful. Trust me, in the grand scheme of things, presence or absence of a stone, be it a solitaire or any other, makes practically no difference. How can material possessions help you to be at peace, or to be more healthy, or even more connected? I'm not saying money is not important. It is. It can give a basic safety net, but, how much is enough?

Look at the ocean, how gigantic it is. It's no more than the size of your hand on the world map. Our planet is no more than the size of a tennis ball in our galaxy. Our galaxy is no bigger than a mustard seed in the universe. The whole universe is a tiny dot in the infinite creation. Therefore, the meaning of our existence depends on how we value what we have and not on how great our material possessions are — because no matter how much, they'll always be minuscule compared to what surrounds us.

Peace is a choice, an option, a path. Being [grateful](#) is the easiest way to be peaceful.

(Image credit: [Wikia](#))

Peace.

Swami

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In: [Self Help](#), [Wisdom](#)

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