

SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS

**Compiled from Letters of
Swami Yatiswarananda**

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to share with you this selection of SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS compiled from Letters of Swami Yatiswarananda which, besides other hints, addresses a number of difficulties, sooner or later encountered by spiritual aspirants during their spiritual struggle.

The material—in fact a very brief but comprehensive summary of ideas contained in the various READINGS generated by the Swami in Europe between 1933-40—is in the original format of the carbon copies we found during our 1993 research in India. We now learn that the text was incorporated in *MEDITATION & SPIRITUAL LIFE*. Anyhow, availability in the form of the present brochure facilitates the sharing of this useful spiritual resource.

On internal evidence, much or all of this compilation appears to have been addressed to European students.

PUBLISHER



Swami Yatiswarananda
in Central Europe 1933-1940

Swami Yatiswarananda (1889-1966), a senior monk and former Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission, was a well-known spiritual figure in the Neo-Vedanta Movement. He joined the Order in 1911. Beside seven years of pioneering work in spreading Vedanta in Europe and ten years of teaching Vedanta in USA (1933-49)— he was editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* at Mayavati (1921-24), then he served as President of the Ramakrishna: Bombay Ashrama (1924-26), Madras Math (1926-33) and Bangalore Ashrama (1951-66). An initiated disciple of Swami Brahmananda (the great direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna), he was widely respected for his high spiritual attainments, Yogic insight and mature wisdom. He advocated and lived a well-harmonized spiritual life with meditation as the keynote and love and service as the main melody.

SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS

Compiled from Letters of
Swami Yatiswarananda

*The Lord is coming to me in the form of devotees
and may I be able to see Him in you all
and serve Him through you all—
This is my constant prayer.*

Spiritual Practices

I am very glad to learn that you are finding joy and peace in your spiritual practices. Please be always regular in your meditations and readings, as also in the fulfillment of the duties of life. You will find greater and greater illumination and happiness in consciously living for the higher ideal and being more and more wide-awake in a spiritual sense.

It is a rare privilege to have yearnings for Divine realization and particularly to get the opportunity to follow the path in a clear and definite way. We should all feel thankful to the Divine for this blessing and pray to and meditate on Him out of the gratitude of our heart, thereby trying to be in tune with Him in the very depth of our being.

Please set apart some time for the study of the holy literature every day. Clear and deep thinking on what you read will help you, and not only intellectually, but also spiritually.

It is not always possible for us to have a ready-made good mental atmosphere. So we should try to create a nice atmosphere about ourselves through right thinking, right feeling and right activity. And then, wherever we go, we carry that atmosphere with us, and remain greatly uninfluenced by the evil influences of the world.

During Japam along with the repetition of the Holy Name, the devotee should also think either of the form of the Ishtam or of the formless form, associated with the sound-symbol. The centre of consciousness is part of an Infinite Consciousness that pervades our entire being, nay, the whole universe, and exists even beyond it without any limitations. First the sound and thought go together and then sound gets merged in the Divine Idea and consciousness. As you go on with the practice you will realize more and more what it means.

There are more approaches than one to the Divine. We too, accept Christ, but as you know, having read the Life of Sri Ramakrishna, we regard Him as one of the manifestations of the Divine. The whole universe, including ourselves are manifestations—ordinary, imperfect manifestations. The Christs, Buddhas, Ramakrishnas—we regard as perfect, special manifestations of the Divine. The Divine—the Absolute—in His aspect of manifestation is the Eternal-Logos, the Eternal Word of the Vedas and the Bible. This idea is common to both the Easterners and the Westerners. And the perfect manifestations are meant for showing the Light and Truth to the imperfect manifestations. The Logos or Word is one impersonal fact. In its grosser manifestations it becomes personal or human. These manifestations may be many, but that which manifests itself is one. We may accept all the greatest manifestations, or some one or more of them. But all of us must be true to the One and Eternal that incarnates itself from time to time for the good of the world.

If a Holy Personality as distinct from the Principle behind the personality appeals to you, you may worship and meditate on Him—but this should be a stepping-stone leading to the realization of the Principle.

In due course the Absolute—the Impersonal Being you are trying to meditate on, will reveal to you that He again is manifest as the personality—that He, the Transcendent is also the Immanent. And He is to be recognized in the perfect manifestations as also in all imperfect manifestations. In this matter there is no question of Eastern or Western—as the Divine transcends all limitations.

It is very difficult to get the company of spiritually-minded people. So we should try to keep the company of the Holy Personality. When the sense of personality becomes strong in us the impersonal is beyond our reach. Can you learn how to talk to your Ishtam? You will find it a great help. We are all general manifestations, while the Divine Personality is a special manifestation. We may love and talk to the Divine Personality, and even to the Personal-Impersonal that manifests itself as the Holy Personality and also as our small personalities.

Please draw up a regular routine noting the time for meditation, studies, writing, work and household duties and also for rest.

When we think of the Holy Personality—first comes the form, then His noble feeling and ideas and finally His spiritual consciousness. In

Him we first see the link between the individual and universal consciousness, and then we realize the same link in ourselves, though in a less striking way. Again, at the beginning, we stress the individual and recognize the Universal which permeates it. Later on, we put greater stress on the Universal and regard the individual as the manifestation of the Universal. Finally, both the Universal and the individual get merged into the Transcendental which is spoken of as the One without a Second.

After some time, contact with the Divine—the Infinite, Existence, Knowledge and Bliss—the Impersonal who manifests Himself as the Personal—is to be made your central thought. We have to feel the ‘touch’ of the Divine within our soul, and also to try to see Him—or rather, feel His presence in all beings—without, however, creating any moral confusion. We should value the good since it manifests the Divine more, and should avoid the evil, as it hides the face of Truth.

During Japam you should try to think also on the Divine, having at the same time the feeling that the Holy vibrations and thoughts are making your body and mind pure and calm, thereby enabling you to feel the Presence of the Divine in you and outside you more and more definitely.

Meditation on pure Consciousness is the best, next to it is meditation on Divine attributes, and next to it is meditation on the Holy form, of course calling up the Holy attributes also.

By trying to look at the body from inside, and thinking of the spirit animating it, our sense of personality is positively minimized, in case both thought and feeling go together.

This process of looking from within please try to apply also in the case of the forms which appear in the mind and create troubles. The outward form—ours as well as of others—is associated with desires and passions which seem to disappear the moment we come to have the inward view. Face plays a great part in our body-consciousness. We may look at the face from within. It becomes easier for us to see the Divine in each form by approaching it in a spirit of veneration.

First we have to develop the personality and then we must dissolve it, as it were, into the Impersonal. Out of this Impersonal will

then arise a pure personality, always conscious and dependent on its Origin. It is this that becomes a true instrument of the Divine.

Changes of mood

It is always a source of great joy to come in touch with the Divine in us, our true Self and Being. Having come back to one's real home in the Divine, the devotee is at first unable to contain the joy. But for further growth and higher experiences it is essential to control even the feelings of joy and blessedness to a great extent, to surrender oneself heart and soul to the Divine, and to feel the Divine contact both within and outside. Of course the centre of one's consciousness and being is within oneself, but there comes a time when the barrier between inside and outside seems to be disappearing, and we feel a Divine Presence, in which there is neither inside nor outside, and in which all things, including our personality, have their existence and being.

You have now got to make your new experiences normal and natural. And this can be done by controlling the noblest feelings to a great extent and making the Divine Presence and Joy permeate your whole life and personality.

Please see that you perform the duties of your life with scrupulous care and nothing is neglected even for the sake of enjoying the inner bliss. You should by no means develop abnormal religious psychology. It is our ideal to make even super-consciousness natural to us, to be wide-awake, calm, controlled and active in a higher sense.

There are rises and falls even in the movement of spiritual growth and consciousness. And we must be prepared for both, and should remain unaffected as much as possible by both elation and depression. What I mean is that we should have a life of inner balance and harmony, always remaining on a higher plane of consciousness. When our soul is in tune with the Infinite, we find even a greater joy in controlling our joy.

Please have infinite faith in the Divine—our true Self—the Self of all.

Through the blessings of our Lord, you have known the way, and have also got the glimpse. Without wavering, now please follow the path and realize the Truth fully, proceeding step by step, slowly and steadily. There are many difficulties and pitfalls on the way. Without worrying about small slips and falls, the aspirant should march on-

wards, making the Divine the centre of one's being. To such devoted souls, failures are the pillars of success. They pass through many a trial and come out of it victoriously in the end.

You may feel depressed at times. This is unavoidable. On such an occasion, please try to establish the inner contact with the Divine, and the lower mood will be replaced by the higher mood.

You should always try your best to maintain the inner contact with the Divine. There may be natural rise and fall in the mood, but if we try to remain in tune with the Infinite, something of the higher mood always remains with us. Even if at times it appears to disappear, please do not feel upset. Calmly and quietly raise yourself to the higher plane of consciousness and re-establish the contact, and then everything will be all right.

Sometimes owing to our past impressions coming up to the conscious plane from the domain of the subconscious or unconscious where they lie hidden, there may be mental and even physiological disturbances. This is very troublesome and annoying. But we should not get unbalanced. We must take things as they come, having the attitude of the witness, try to see the Divine in them—realize the Eternal Medium in which all sensations, all vibrations, all thoughts, have their play. And then the Divine becomes real in the primary sense and forms appear to be shadows and lose their attraction and charm. When this is done, mental and physiological harmony will be regained. If you find that the brain gets clouded, pray to the Divine and meditate on Him, try to feel that the real soul in us is like a Divine spark that is part of the Infinite Ocean of Light, and the higher mood will again return.

Everyone of us has got to pass through ups and downs, rises and falls. Let these changes bring home to us the necessity of rising higher and higher until we reach that state when we go beyond the 'Gunas' and attain to the Transcendental.

Having got the glimpse of the Light, let us think of it even when we pass through dense darkness. The memory of the light does not leave us when we do not see its reflection at all. This is a great help to the aspirant who has got even just a little glimpse.

We all have to pass through ups and downs, rises and falls, and should try to hold on to the Divine under all circumstances. Japam is a great help during the mood of depression. One finds great relief in

repeating the Holy Name audibly to oneself. You may hum it to yourself and also try to think of the Divine when you feel an inner void and restlessness. When the bliss of realization is not available we have to be satisfied with the joy of thinking of Him—the Beloved—the Soul of our soul.

When we are in a ‘personal’ mood and long for coming in contact with human personalities, the Divine Personality gives us a great support. The bubble finds a great support from the wave, when the Ocean which is more real than both, appears to be more or less an abstraction. Through the touch of the wave it again becomes conscious of its connection with the Ocean.

You should not under any account be sorry or depressed for the change of mood—it is natural. Now through steady practice you have to make the experience your own. We have to bring the Super-conscious into our conscious state, to realize the ONE in the many, to manifest Divine Knowledge, Purity and Unity, on the mental and physical planes. This is a question of time, if we follow the spiritual path steadily.

Please try to be regular in your spiritual practices, as well as in your readings and duties, and gradually a remarkable change will come over you.

Different counsels

Please take some regular physical exercise every day. If you can go out for regular walks, well and good. Otherwise you may have some indoor exercise, suited to you. Swami Brahmananda told me many a time that physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual development must proceed all together. We have found this instruction very helpful. As long as we have a body, and have to make use of it as an instrument, we must know how to take care of it.

Through practice, one may be able to continue something of the meditation mood and maintain something of an expansive consciousness even during walks, being at the same time wide-awake and alert, so as not to meet with any accident on the way. We should not be like the astronomer who was walking looking at the sky and fell into a well.

It is not a pleasure to mix with all kinds of people, but at times it cannot be helped. So we need a new balance of mind, and the maintenance of the higher mood in the midst of the manifold activities of

life. During spiritual practices we may be able to realize a higher form of consciousness, but unless we succeed in continuing it, at least something of it, at other times also, our case is like the man who got plenty of money in a dream, but could not buy any food with it in the waking state.

Bad atmosphere affects us naturally. We cannot help it always. But we should try to remain unaffected—as much as possible. We should so attempt to strengthen ourselves that we may stand on our own strength. This becomes possible to the extent we try to be on a higher plane of consciousness and remain in touch with the Infinite, of which we are parts and from which we are inseparable.

The dividing line between light and darkness on the phenomenal plane is very thin. In our mind, there is, as it were, a switch. When turned to the right it gives light, when turned to the left, it makes everything dark. So the devotee should take particular care in turning the switch in the right way, even in a bad atmosphere where the mind automatically is in the opposite direction.

We should certainly have a feeling for the Impersonal. But we should *also* have feelings for the individuals *through* the Divine, as everything reflects His glory. Behind our human connections there is the Divine connection, behind all human relationship there is the Divine relationship. So our feeling for all *should not be allowed to die*, it should be transmuted. It is the Divine glory then, that shines through all human feelings and sentiments. This idea is generally expressed in the Upanishads:

It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that he is loved, but for one's own sake (the Self) that he is loved.

It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that she is loved, but for one's own sake (the Self) that she is loved.

It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that they are loved, but for one's own sake (the Self) that they are loved.

It is not for the sake of all, my dear, that it is loved, but for one's own sake (the Self) that it is loved. — (Brih.Up. 2.4.5)

During the period of transition and transformation one may pass through a little indifference for the time being. But if one holds the ideal clearly before oneself, and scrupulously follows the duties that are to be fulfilled, one gets back the essentials of the old feelings in a transmuted form, in which attachment is eliminated, but not the love for the Divine and love for others *through* the Divine.

One should steer clear between two dangers. One is to love with human feelings and falsely call it the Divine. And the other is to be indifferent to even the right feelings, and be negligent of one's duties. Both are harmful to spiritual growth.

We should always avoid living on mere abstractions. The money we get in a dream is of no use for buying food in the waking state. Thoughts, however grand they may be by themselves, unless they can be related to life, have no spiritual value. We must hold on to something definite.

It is impossible to satisfy all people. If some disagree with us, many will be with us. Anyway, we have to do what we think to be right, considering all points. Sometimes I go so far as to say that if we can please everybody, then there must be something wrong with us.

In order to be of service to others—the Divine in manifold forms—let us try to reflect the glory of the Divine by our life. Then silence becomes more eloquent than eloquence itself, and if speaking be necessary, it too will prove effective and helpful.

I have realized more than ever, that the first thing we should do is not talking but trying to live the life and make a passage in the world of thought for the flow of the spiritual current that manifested through Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. They fertilized the mental soil of India with their intensive spiritual thoughts which were already there to some extent. The mental soil of America was also prepared, though on a small scale, by Swami Vivekananda and his brother-disciples. What the Great Ones did on a big scale elsewhere, we small ones must do in our own limited way in Europe. This is the immediate task before me and you all—the devotees of the Lord. Side by side with this, we should of course begin a little work also, as we are doing,—at least trying to do.

Self-surrender

We have to try to be of service to others. Furthermore, we have to practice self-surrender to the Divine in us and outside us. At present our personality is a combination of the lower or false self and the higher and true Self. As we grow spiritually, the lower self is more and more eliminated, and the higher one more and more manifest. That which is real in us can never be lost. Through the loss of the lower self, we gain the higher Self more and more.

Let us wish strongly for spiritual progress and Divine realization in a general way—but leave the details to the Divine. As we do not always see things clearly, we cannot but think in certain ways and even make plans. But all these are to be ultimately left to the Divine. We should gradually learn to be in tune with the Divine and to follow the Divine will. There comes a time when we wish only what is in accord with the Divine will and act accordingly.

We hear the inner voice truly to the extent we are able to be in tune with the Divine in us, to merge our will into the Divine will.

To the extent the Infinite is stressed more and more, and our finite self is realized as a manifestation of the Infinite, the Divine, the Divine will assert itself and we hear the voice. But there is the great danger of taking our own voice to be the Divine voice. So whatever we feel to be the Divine voice should be put to the test carefully, and verified not merely through reason, but also by repeatedly hearing it. The inner voice does not contradict reason, but transcends it. One having a pure passionless mind alone can hear the voice correctly. In these days it has become the fashion to hear the 'inner voice', and most of these cases are of a questionable nature.

Everything is the play of the Divine. He comes to us in different forms. It is He who comes as the teacher in order to give instruction, and He again comes as the pupil in order to receive instruction. Let us try to be in tune with the Divine and witness the Divine play, and even become His playmate. All this becomes possible only if we are able to establish our union with him in the very depths of our being. May the inner Teacher—the Divine in us—the Teacher of all teachers ever inspire us and guide us all.

We are feeling a great inner freedom through the spirit of renunciation. It is the right attitude which should accompany the outside act, that unburdens the soul. And in this, non-attachment to the things of the world is the most important factor. One who is poor should not wish for more than is necessary. One who is rich should supplant the sense of possession by that of trusteeship, and make the best use of what the Divine keeps under one's charge. This is true of material, as of intellectual and spiritual resources. One should however, exercise great discrimination even in making gifts, whatever their nature may be. One should clearly know to whom to give, how much to give, and also when to give. The devotee gets the right direction at the right time.

The Three States of Spiritual Consciousness

The progress of the soul is always through ups and downs, through light and shade, through rises and falls in the higher mood. When we pass through the lower mood, we have to continue our spiritual practices and studies through an effort of the will, even if we feel dry at heart. When holy company is not available, we have to keep the company of the Lord, trying to maintain the contact by means of Japam. Meditation on a Holy personality like Buddha, Christ or Ramakrishna, thinking of the form, attributes or spiritual consciousness associated with that personality proves to be a great help when one passes through the dull days. As the mind is not able to maintain the Divine contact on the plane of the impersonal, it is to be kept in touch with the Divine through the personal and even through the Holy Form. When we pass through the dark days, we come to stress our form and personality more than at other times. And so we should hold on to the Holy form and Holy personality, in which we can see the Divinity more manifest than in ourselves.

Whenever the physical world becomes more real than the spiritual world, our body has already become more real than our soul in our consciousness. As a matter of fact, there is first of all a fall in our consciousness, and then we become more conscious than before of the physical body and then of the material world.

With an effort of the will we should try to rise to the higher centre of consciousness. Thinking of the Holy luminous form in that centre and dwelling on the attributes along with Japam is a great help in this hour of need. Even if we do not succeed in awakening the higher consciousness, we stand midway between the higher and lower forms of consciousness, entertaining the strong desire to rise. And this itself is a great gain. We have got to keep on doing this, even though it means a great tension, and then the old higher consciousness comes back to us. We do not even feel the tension very much, if we are regular in our spiritual practices.

The aspirant should always try to be in touch with the Divine in some form or other. When we identify ourselves with the body, we should think of the Holy Form of the Divine Personality and look upon the Divine as Master or Father or Mother or Teacher. When we consider ourselves as individual souls, we have to look upon ourselves as parts of the Divine who is the Whole. If at some blessed moments we are able to think of ourselves as Spiritual Consciousness as

such, we rise above all sense of body and personality and get lost in Divine Consciousness like the salt doll of Sri Ramakrishna's parable, which wanted to fathom the depth of the ocean, but got himself completely lost in it.

The Holy Name, particularly the mystic symbol, is a great manifestation of God—the All-Pervading Being. Taking hold of this manifestation through Japam, the aspirant comes in touch with Him.

The entire phenomenon including the plane of thought, the plane of sound and also the plane of gross matter is a manifestation of the Divine. As we advance, we develop the capacity to recognize the Divine Presence in all forms of expression. Taking any of these, as you find so strikingly in Sri Ramakrishna, the aspirant can come to the Divine; in this case he passes from one link to another—from the gross manifestation to the subtle, and so on, until the ultimate Reality is reached.

Sometimes without trying to untie the 'Gordian Knot', please cut it boldly. If the higher mood and consciousness awake, then you will find that the knot which seems to be real from a lower form of consciousness—is only an appearance, and truly speaking there is no knot to be cut even. But again when the lower consciousness returns, the knot is there too—the knot is real and its cutting is real too. In one state of consciousness it seems to be real, in another it ceases to be, yet in a third it is recognized just as an appearance without a substance and we need not take it seriously. After having known the illusory nature of the mirage, one is not tempted by it, even when one sees it. One knows the Maya to be Maya. May the Divine Mother not delude us with Her Maya.

We should try to remain in one of these three spiritual moods:

1. Dwelling on the unity, merging the individuality in it—at least trying to.
2. Identifying oneself with the Infinite, and then feeling the personality as its manifestation only.
3. Thinking of oneself as an individual and then feeling the Presence of the Immanent, All-pervading Principle, the Soul of our Soul, on whom the soul is fully dependent.

As long as the ego persists, let it be connected with the Infinite Divine as in 2 or 3. Let it never be allowed to be more real than the Infinite Self.

*O Lord, while I identify myself with the body, I am Thy servant.
When I consider myself as an individual soul, I am Thy part.
And when I look upon myself as the Spirit, I am one with Thee.*

In order to strengthen the sense of unity, you may repeat some of the monistic meditations. Usually please try to soar step by step: 1. From the Holy Form with the noblest attributes, pass on to 2. the Formless with attributes. From that move to 3. the Pure Being, without form and without attributes.

And when you come back, do this in the reverse order, and you will find that the soul always gets the support and connection even when the body-consciousness becomes strong.

There are two kinds of reasoning—analytic and synthetic. In the analytic reasoning we follow the process of involution—in which we move from the effect to the cause. In synthetic reasoning we proceed from the cause to the effect.

In analytic reasoning we proceed saying “*Not this, not this*”. We follow the process of elimination or negation of the phenomenal until the Absolute is reached. As Sri Ramakrishna puts it: “*The Absolute is not soul (not the finite individual soul). Again it is not the world either. The Absolute is the only Reality. All else is unreal.*” This is the Non-Dualistic (Advaitic) standpoint.

In synthetic reasoning the attitude is one of all-inclusiveness, of affirmation. Brahman manifests itself as soul and the world, which, as it were, form Its body,—and hence all three are to be taken into consideration. “*We see that the kernel belongs to the same substance as that to which the shell and the seeds belong.*”¹ This is the central idea of what is called ‘Qualified Non-Dualism’ (Visishtadvaita).

Sri Ramakrishna’s experience is this: Truth as such is beyond all reasoning, beyond both dualism and non-dualism. Having attained to the terrace, he knows that the terrace is different from the staircase and other approaches, all leading ultimately to the terrace.

Our True Self

The secret of successful ethical and spiritual culture is to look upon yourself as a spiritual being, pure by nature and self-luminous

1. Cf. *Gospel of SRK* 733n.

in its essence. Through meditations we have to drive this idea into the very depth of our consciousness, and then the pure and self-luminous nature of the Self is manifest even in body and mind, as we find in a Ramakrishna to a wonderful extent.

Let those who want to weep over their sins do it by all means. Let us, on the other hand, think of the Divine, the Ever-Pure, the Atman, the Brahman—the eternal Self and assert its glory within us. Let us always try to remember—even when the mind is clouded, and inclined towards evil—these wonderful words of Swami Vivekananda:

The soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you—teach yourself, teach everyone his real nature. Call upon the sleeping soul to see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when the sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

Brahman who is Immanent is also Transcendent. Think of Him as the Living Presence in you and everyone. He is the Infinite Existence and Consciousness of which all individualized existence and consciousness are but manifestations.

We are inseparable from this Infinite—He is the origin of all our finite consciousness—He is the Soul of our soul. If the higher consciousness becomes a little awakened in us, we can love Him even more intensely and intimately than we can love any person and even ourselves. Retaining our individuality—regaining our pure individualized consciousness—let us come in touch with him in the depth of our being, awaken that inner intuition—that pure Self-conscious Love—which makes the worshippers lose themselves in the Worshipped.

Until one attains to the absolute purity of a Ramakrishna, the phenomenon of evil does not cease to exist. On the higher plane of relative morality, one may forget all about the evil, but it may make its appearance as it gets the opportunity owing to mental dullness and lack of watchfulness which comes to one when thrown on the lower plane.

Moral and spiritual evolution always progresses through ups and downs, rises and falls. And so, at one time we are in wonderfully spiritual moods (Sattva) and then at another time we experience awful restlessness or dullness (Rajas or Tamas).

Dullness is to be overcome by healthy activity and the active mood by one of balance, poise and illumination. And this is the way to go beyond the 'Gunas', of which I have spoken in the Introduction to the '*DIVINE LIFE*'.² Change of mood is quite natural. But it is our ultimate task to conquer this nature and go beyond it. Conquering this second nature, we must realize our primary, unchangeable absolute nature—our true Self—the Infinite, Existence—Knowledge—Bliss Absolute.

Our true Self is the Divine,—call Him Lord, Brahman, Atman, whatever you please. When we forget this true Self and identify ourselves with the body and the mind, or in other words, with the false self—the personality as distinct from the Principle—we become the plaything of Nature called Prakriti or Maya. In such a state of consciousness we make the objective phenomenon to be as real as we do the subjective phenomenon of our personality, and are constantly swayed by opposite currents of thoughts and feeling. The egocentric individual is really like a playball in the hands of a capricious, arbitrary force. But he can rise above this insecure state by being in tune with the Infinite, the Divine—his true Self. Striving his utmost, an individual's struggle and effort without the conscious dependence on the Divine may or may not succeed, but all attempts at higher life made by the aspirant by establishing contact with the Divine—his true Self— and depending on Divine Will and Grace are crowned with success sooner or later. It is always unsafe to depend on the little ego, but always safe to depend on the Divine Will and Power. A devotee should always go in for 'cosmocentric' struggle instead of the ego-centric one. The true higher Self is the friend of oneself, while the false lower self—the ego—is the enemy of oneself.

Spiritual struggles

Our human personality consists both of good and evil. The evil is to be eliminated step by step and the good fostered. In the course of the evolution of the soul, both the dormant good and evil come up. The aspirant should face the reality and should try to control lower manifestations and stimulate the higher expressions of life. Let us ourselves profit even from our mistakes, and instead of brooding over them too much, let us strengthen ourselves and avoid their re-

2. Page.24ff. The collection of passages from the Upanishads, Gita, etc., for daily study and reflection, first published from Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1935.

currence by all means in our power. Let the slip make us humble and more and more dependent on the Divine, who is the real source of our strength and support. When we turn to Him, we become conscious of our Divine nature and feel purity and sublimity. When we draw ourselves away from Him, we become more ego-centric and fall away from the higher path. Instead of taking our stand on the ego, let us surrender to the Divine and make Him the centre of our consciousness. And then ethical and spiritual life becomes easy. We should have more of prayer, Japam and meditation, when the lower tendencies come up. And we should be more calm than at other times.

Everyone in the East or in the West has to pass through struggles. In the East the spiritual and ethical culture has been maintained in an unbroken way. This helps some aspirants, no doubt, but there are many who do not profit by it at all.

During the course of the soul's progress, instinctive goodness passes through conscious goodness with struggles and then to natural goodness without any conflict. So conscious struggle is a state in our evolution and does not necessarily mean a set-back. This however does not justify all forms of backsliding.

Partial success in our moral or spiritual life should give us an incentive towards greater and greater success, but it should never make us think that perfection has been attained. It means that although we have made some progress in purifying ourselves by controlling our lower natures and tendencies, much of the impurities and evil tendencies are still here and are to be controlled and finally eliminated.

All along the period of our ethical struggle and spiritual practice, we must have an abiding faith in our potentialities, in our capacity to move nearer and nearer to our goal. But we should never take the potential to be actual, unless it has been fully realized in life, unless it has brought about a complete transformation in our thoughts and activities.

We should always bear in mind, that with the money we get in a dream it is not possible for us to buy food and appease our hunger in the actual, empirical world.

The strength of a chain is to be judged by the strength of its weakest link, and so our capacity to stand evil company or association is

to be judged by the response we make towards it during our weakest moments. We should therefore be on our guard, trying to protect ourselves, as much as possible, from the evil influences, and should also put forth every effort to strengthen the weakest links in our character through right thinking and conduct, through self-analysis, prayer and meditation.

We must also try to intensify our faith in the Divine, who, as Sri Ramakrishna very aptly says, comes towards us ten steps, if we try to move towards Him one step. The mother allows the child busy with its play to go on with the play, but she has to rush to a child who is tired of play, who has begun to cry for the mother, and has also begun to crawl towards her. Such is the case with reference to His devotees who want to approach Him in their weak, human ways.

We sow wind and have to reap it as whirlwind. All the suppressed whirlwinds will come up. All the bad pictures lying hidden in the mind will get developed sooner or later. We have got to 'face the brute', see things as they are, and then see the Divine in all things. In Him, is all this play of Maya going on, hiding Him altogether from view. We have got to see through this Maya. Our spiritual practices, which also include the performance of duties, develop a sort of mental X-ray by virtue of which we are able to see the phenomenal nature of things and also the Reality appearing as the phenomenon.

It is a hard long struggle, which appears to be never-ending. The more we advance, the subtler and stronger becomes this struggle. And in the course of the merciless self-analysis we have to pass through, most awful things are revealed—things to which we ordinarily give big, high-sounding names.

All our so-called selfless relationships and human feelings and sentiments are more or less based on self. Even our love for God, devotion for God-men and affection for fellow-devotees are to a great extent based on selfish considerations. But at the root of all these, there is always a Divine element which is mixed up with much of non-Divine things. The gold is to be separated from the dross. This is the task of spiritual life.

By noticing the different elements in our sentiments and also the reactions of those sentiments on the mind and the centres of consciousness, we can very often find out their true quality and value. Feelings associated with the higher centres become noble and elevating, while, if they become connected with the lower centres,

which naturally implies lower thought-planes, they may be debased into passion of the worst kind. Hence we must always be on our guard during our association with people. And men and women, as you know, are not always what they seem. The more we study ourselves and others with greater scrutiny, we realize this fact, sometimes to our sorrow.

Really speaking, we have no security on the plane of mere sentiments, however essential they may be for the evolution of our soul. Our feelings must be based on Divine Consciousness and also connected with It. Then alone do we get real stability and become free from fear. Of course, we can attain to this ideal only by proceeding step by step, by passing through many a failure and defeat.

The Lord's Grace is on us, though we do not deserve it. May He protect and guide us all in the midst of all our strivings and struggles and take us nearer and nearer to Him.

Simply by giving up this world physically, we cannot become pure in thought, word and deed all of a sudden. First we avoid the deed and then the word, though the second is more difficult than the first. The greatest difficulty lies in attaining purity in thought. This is the case as long as we remain on the plane of relative morality—in which both good and evil are realities—when we try to avoid the evil and bring in the good. Owing to the old tendencies and impressions in us, the evil wants to come in and sometimes succeeds in coming in. With an effort of the will we have got to replace it by the good thoughts. This tug-of-war is inevitable in every case. Only as we advance, the struggle becomes subtler and subtler, because, after rising above the plane of gross or crude forms of good and evil, we have to deal with their subtler forms.

During all these struggles both on the gross and subtle planes, we should try to dwell on the Holy Thought as much as possible and thus drive away the unholy one. But sometimes the imaginations grows morbid and the unholy pictures become very vivid, in spite of ourselves. In such a case while repeating the Holy Word, and trying to think of the Holy Thought, we should take the position of a 'witness', a spectator towards the evil thoughts, and detach ourselves from their entanglement.

During moments of forgetfulness we identify ourselves with the evil thoughts and feel affected both mentally and physically, though not actually doing the bad. But as we become more and more watch-

ful and practice non-identification, we keep them at a distance even when they make their appearance before us.

Under certain circumstances it is not possible to prevent the rising of the thought, but through practice one can look upon it as one would do in the case of a mirage, the unreal nature of which one has already found out. The phenomenon cannot be stopped, but it may be seen just as phenomenon, as something having the semblance of reality, but truly unreal in its nature.

And in order to realize the unreality of the phenomenon of names and forms, we must try to see the Divine, to think of the Divine at least, lying at its back. As we succeed in recognizing the Divine Principle at the back of all physical forms, we are able to remain really unaffected by them. In the course of the struggle one cannot help feeling more or less affected by them; one should not brood over the lapse, but try to think of the Divine as much as possible. Even if one is defeated, one should say with Swami Vivekananda:

*Unending battle—
That verily is his sacred worship.
Constant defeat, let that not unnerve thee,
Shattered be little self, hope, name and fame.
Set up a pyre of them, and make thy heart a burning ground.
And let the Mother (Shyama-Kali) dance there.*

I am glad you are realizing more and more the immensity of the spiritual struggle. Simply by remaining in a nice mood for some time we do not solve our spiritual problem. It is like having a pleasant dream. It is very good to have such an elevating dream. But through it we must realize the super-conscious state that transcends the waking, the dream and the dreamless sleep. Let us always remember Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the 'Woodcutter and the Holy Man', and move onward and onward, till we reach the ultimate Goal.

**End of
SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS
Compiled from Letters of
Swami Yatiswarananda**