

# THE SPIRITUAL PATH

Compiled from Letters of  
Swami Yatiswarananda

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*Published by:*  
John Manetta  
Beles 28 (Koukaki)  
GR 117 41 Athens, Greece  
Phone: [+30] 210 9234682  
email: [jmanveda@otenet.gr](mailto:jmanveda@otenet.gr)  
website: [www.vedanta.gr](http://www.vedanta.gr)

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## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to share with you this further selection compiled from Letters of Swami Yatiswarananda.

The material belongs to the Swami's period in Europe between 1933-38 and is in the original format of the carbon copies we found in India. Much of this text has been published in *MEDITATION & SPIRITUAL LIFE* (Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore) and also in *THE WAY TO THE DIVINE* (Published by Sarada Sevika Mandali—reprinted 1989). Anyhow, availability of the full text in the form of the present brochure facilitates the sharing of this useful spiritual resource.

On internal evidence, these extracts were 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.

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## Preparing the instrument

In order to do any form of spiritual practice, both the body and the mind must be made fit. Without having fulfilled this great condition, if one tries to undergo any spiritual practices in a violent manner, one cannot avoid great reactions. Even if the right thing is done by the wrong person, and in a wrong manner, troubles are unavoidable.

Have plenty of physical and mental rest, giving both your body and mind as great relaxation as possible, and practice a spirit of self-surrender, to the Divine Will that lies at the back of our individual will.

Spiritual aspirants should try to perfect their body and mind through the performance of the duties of life and graduated ethical culture and spiritual practice. And it is when the instruments are ready, that spiritual practice may be intensified, and not otherwise. So, without thinking too much of the goal, one should rather follow the path. The instrument of God-Vision is first to be made and perfected, and then God-Vision becomes an accomplished fact as a matter of course. When the telescope is ready, the vision of the distant stars and planets becomes an accomplished fact in no time.

Intellect and feeling, and also will, can be combined by rising to the plane of the soul, and not by taking one's stand on the intellect or on any one of the other faculties.

## The right approach

No spiritual practice is to be done by reading of it from books. One may, of course, read books by way of getting information, but we should know which ideas to take up and which ones to leave to themselves. We may read of various practices, but we should not attempt them without knowing first of all which are good for ourselves. We may know of very many approaches and this expands our mental outlook. But we should know which is the right approach for us. During the period of experiments we should proceed slowly, noticing the physical and mental changes that take place in us and adjusting ourselves accordingly.

The right method followed by the wrong person brings about bad results. Hence the aspirant is expected to be properly qualified, but in modern times anyone may get any book, read about some practice, follow it and also come to grief. Instructions always differ with individuals and that which is, as we say, nectar to one, may prove to be poison to another. Each one must follow the law of one's being, and adjust oneself securely to one's mental and physical environment. If the superstructure is built on the right foundation, it stands all right. Otherwise it tumbles down.

### **Inner and outer Guru**

The real Guru, who reveals to us the Truth, is in our own heart, and he is no other than the Divine Himself. His message very often comes through some person, who also is called Guru. So the Divine is sometimes called the Guru of Gurus. We should not expect much from the outer Guru, but should try to be in tune with the inner Guru—the Divine in us—the Soul of our soul and draw knowledge and inspiration from Him. You may look upon your *Ishtam* [the Holy Personality appealing to you most] as the embodiment of the Guru of Gurus.

Both the teacher and the pupil should try to be as much impersonal as possible. This becomes possible if the teacher tries to see the Divine in the student, and the student the Divine in the teacher. One should try to think of the other not as a person, but as the manifestation of the principle ***and oneself also as such***. This is the beginning of practical Vedanta and then the ideal compasses everything and every being later on.

### **Divine Principle**

Personality, whether of the God-man or of any ordinary individual has no reality of its own ultimately, though it has certainly got empirical reality, since we feel it. We should learn to feel the Principle also and feel It to be more real than the personality. Time has come when you should stress this point, but without in any way doing violence to yourself. Try to remember whenever you find it convenient. It does not matter if you forget it at other times. The ideal can be realized only in due course by passing through ups and downs. In the midst of the changes of life try to think of the changeless, the Ever-Present Divine in you. Like the mariner's compass let the mind always turn towards the North Pole at all hours and places. In each personality

there are two—the individual soul and the Universal Spirit.

Try to be in touch with the Universal Spirit. Or, if you are in a personal mood, take the Divine with you, let your Ishtam accompany you on your journey and keep you company, protect you from all harm and bring peace to your soul, wherever you go.

### **Qualified Non-Dualism (Visishtadvaita)**

Try to feel that you are a part of the Infinite and be always in touch with It. Try to recognize the same Divine Principle in all personalities—in the husband and children, in relatives, friends and strangers as well. The more you succeed in associating the Infinite, the Divine Principle, with your personality and all personalities, your emotions will be more and more sublimated and purified and you will be naturally calm, steady and wide-awake.

I shall send you books that will give you the correct idea of the various ways of approach to the Divine. To begin with, it is enough if one looks upon the Divine as the Whole, and the individuals as parts. First, we have to grasp the 'One in the many' and then alone will come the question of the 'One without a second', and the central idea of real Monism.

### **Monism (Advaita)**

Trust you find your talks to your Ishtam really useful. It is nice, that you are able to repeat with fervour: "*He is the One Divine Being, hidden in all beings*". If you feel embarrassed to repeat: "*I am the Light of the Self*",—then drop it for the present. Otherwise you may continue to repeat such passages along with the previous ones. It is good to stress unity a bit.

The bubble is not the ocean, not even the wave. It is the substance of the bubble,—water— that is one with the ocean, that is the same as the ocean. We can take the monistic standpoint only when we can think of the Spirit as distinct from the form. When we cannot do that, we may think only of the Immanent aspect. Meditations on the Immanent prepare us for approaching the One without a second.

You need not give any thoughts to psychic experiences at all. Through the unfoldment of higher consciousness you would have more and more of the experience of the Infinite Presence in your soul and then you would feel also the same presence in others as well. To the extent that we become pure in thought, word and deed, we come to have this realization.

When on page 187 of the *Inspired Talks*<sup>1</sup>, the Swami says, “*Your own will is all that answers prayers*”—he is speaking from the monistic standpoint. The monist, giving up all the limitations of his personality and identifying himself with the Infinite, sees every being as the manifestation of the Self, and the ‘I’, the Infinite Consciousness.

It is not the ‘little you’, but the ‘big you’ that answers the prayers. The microcosm and the macrocosm are not different. So God and the devotee are not separate. God in one form is the worshipped, and He again in another form is the devotee. He, as the devotee, prays, and again He, as the worshipped, responds.

On the relative plane we feel we are different from God. The prayer rises from our little soul, but the response comes from God, from our higher Self, and not from our lower self.

### **Bhakti**

But as long as we are on the relative plane and are conscious of our limited existence and think of ourselves as personalities, our personality is real to us and as such we should worship and pray to the Divine—our higher Self. Really there is no conflict or contradiction, as the standpoints are different.

You should not worry about the Monist’s attitude. Yours should be the attitude of the devotee. To you, religion is, as Swami Vivekananda in one of his lectures says, “*The eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God. Of the highest ideal of devotion he speaks on page 58<sup>2</sup> of the Inspired Talks. [Day and night think of God and think of nothing else as far as possible. The daily necessary thoughts can all be thought through God].*” Again he says on page 177<sup>3</sup>—“*Giving up the desire of pleasure and pain, gain or loss, worship God day and night.*” But as I told you and also wrote to you, the aspirant should proceed slowly and steadily. Before one can begin to run, one must learn to walk. Body and mind are to be properly trained through the performance of the duties of one’s life, through moral culture, prayer and meditation at fixed hours. And then only is it possible for the devotee to worship God day and night through all forms of activities, physical and mental.

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1. Friday, August 2 (para.10).

2. Monday, June 24 (para.14).

3. Wednesday, July 31 (last para).



With our sense of individuality which is real to us now, we should try to pray to the Divine and worship Him as well as we can. And the response comes from the Divine, our higher Self or God, who manifests Himself as Buddha, Christ or Ramakrishna.

### **Harmony of the Paths**

Jñana and Bhakti are to be blended, but different individuals may have these in different proportions.

You will have both Jñana and Bhakti combined—a harmony of the paths of knowledge and devotion, as you have both the elements in your nature. Your Bhakti is to be tempered with Jñana.

### **Ramakrishna and Vivekananda**

Ramakrishna is the silent cloud and Vivekananda is the thundering cloud. One represents the static aspect and the other the dynamic aspect of the same spiritual power. The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* stressed Bhakti too much, but this stress is necessary for most people. You get an idea of the Jñana aspect of Ramakrishna in the second chapter of section 2 of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Vol. I*.<sup>4</sup>

### **Law of growth**

Life consists of a series of rises and falls,—one should not get too much elated during the rise, nor too much depressed during the fall. And at all hours one should try to be in touch with the Divine within and outside. In this lies the secret of the ‘balanced state’, and also of progress towards the Goal.

Again, it is not enough if we have the highest ideal before us. We must also know that as we cannot reach it all of a sudden, we should have ideals that serve as stepping-stones leading towards it. This holds good as regards moral culture and spiritual practice. We have to pass through the lower regions if we want to attain to the summit. This is a point we should never lose sight of.

Since spiritual growth is a slow transformation, no great results can be expected until we follow the path patiently for some good time. By trying to do too much in a fit of enthusiasm, we can only do harm to ourselves and retard our progress. We should never try to

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4. Currently available as *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, published from Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. See page 61: The Master on Jñana Yoga etc.

imitate Ramakrishna in this respect. He could afford to have a tremendous yearning and undergo super-human disciplines as his body and mind were exceptionally fit for spiritual strivings.

### **Conditions for success in Yoga**

The aspirant should always bear in mind these passages of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which Sri Ramakrishna as well would have said:

*Success in Yoga—spiritual practice—is not for him who eats too much or too little, for him who sleeps too much or too little. To him who is temperate in eating and recreation, in his effort for work, and in sleep and wakefulness, Yoga becomes the destroyer of misery.*

### **Work and worship**

At first there is a difference between work and worship. Later, work too becomes worship, and the whole life becomes one of undivided consecration.

Work and worship must go hand in hand. Both of these affect the purification of our mind and help us in the unfoldment of the higher consciousness in us, and so they are to be looked upon as twofold forms of spiritual practice. At first we should try to make our activity as much selfless as possible, offering the fruits of our work to the Divine. Later on, we learn to work as instruments in the hands of the Divine. Learn to work maintaining something of the meditative mood,—that inner balance and poise that comes to one after a good meditation.

### **Inner and outer life**

There should be as good a co-ordination as possible between the intellect, feeling and will. Further, there should be a balance between the outer life and the inner life, between our active life and thought-life. A balance between the inner and outer life is to be attained by everybody, maybe in different proportions.

You have to be true to the 'kindred points of heaven and home', without trying to soar too high and without attempting to avoid facing the realities of life, even if they are unpleasant.

Try to be in tune with the Indwelling Spirit—the real Guru—and be inspired and directed by Him in this play of life.

It is hard for the rich—for those who think they are rich—to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who have wealth may replace the

sense of ownership by that of trusteeship. Inner renunciation is more important than mere outer renunciation.

As Swami Vivekananda says: *“True knowledge [Jñāna] teaches that the world should be renounced, but not on that account abandoned. To live in the world and be out of it, is the truest renunciation.”*

Most people suffer because of the discrepancy between the spiritual aspiration and the grim reality one has to face in the worldly life. This suffering by itself is not an evil. It may be even for one’s good, if it acts as an incentive for finding an inner adjustment by means of which one may gradually feel that one is not really of the world, even if one has to live in the world.

In a sense, we all get what we deserve. We wish for a thing, we get it, and along with it also the good and evil inseparably follow it. We seek some forms of happiness and then, as Swami Vivekananda says, *“The happiness comes putting on the crown of misery.”* We cannot accept the one without the other also.

We wish for the satisfaction of some worldly desire. We may get the object of desire, but also the troubles associated with it. Our present state is the result of our past worldly desires—and of our present desires. Let us learn to be as desireless as possible, to adjust ourselves to the circumstances that we ourselves have brought about, and then rise above them. Let us work out our destiny and learn to depend on the Divine more and more as we work out our Karma. Then the world becomes a training ground. Through it we pass on to the Divine. Even then we may be content to remain in the world outwardly. But really speaking we are no more of it. We are the Lord’s wherever we be.

### **Karma**

Certain forms of Karma are to be worked out through suffering. We should feel somewhat relieved that suffering implies so much less of the burden of Karma. Besides, the helplessness brought about by suffering may be utilized spiritually by practicing self-surrender to the Divine all the more. In pain and pleasure, in life and in death—the Lord is our own. He is the Soul of our soul, the Life of our life.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that diseases are the taxes we have to pay for living in the house of the body. We have to pay these taxes sometimes in good installments. And then for some time there may

be a respite. The Master was often heard to say during his great illness: *“Let the body feel the pain, O my mind, do Thou remain in bliss.”*

Move onwards without trying to run too much. We have got to work out the Karma that has begun to bear fruit already. If we try to escape it, we have to pay for it with compound interest. God-realization is certainly the Goal, but this can be reached not merely through spiritual culture, but also through proper working out of the Karma we have in store. We must know what is proper and necessary or improper and unnecessary. Hence we should be careful both about the inner ideal and outside action. Proceed slowly and steadily, exhausting your Karma, being in tune with the Divine within and also careful about what you do. We must correct ourselves always, both on the thought-plane and also on the plane of action.

#### **Attitude towards the world**

Very often we expect too much from others and when we cannot get it, we feel disappointed. What can poor men do? We have a saying in Sanskrit—*“Having drunk of the wine of ignorance, the whole world has become mad.”* So the mad world will and can behave only in a mad way. But it is a greater madness on our part to expect the mad to act in a sane way. Instead of getting angry, we should be sympathetic towards those who do not know what they do and cannot control themselves out of helplessness, even if they know it.

#### **Holy association**

Sometimes in the course of our spiritual progress we are likely to develop a sort of unhealthy introversion. This is to be avoided among other things by going in for holy association. I mean by coming in close contact with spiritually-minded persons, following more or less the same path and comparing notes with them.

Our individual consciousness is to be brought in touch with the Infinite Divine Consciousness. This is the surest way of resolving the whirlpool in our mind. When Divine contact is hard to achieve, the company of spiritual souls and holy talks with them help us a good deal. Some day all the devotees in Switzerland should know {, those with morbid extroversion seek others' company just for gossiping and killing their time. The true devotees maintain a balance between inner and outer life, and seek the company of the spiritually-minded, discuss spiritual matters and strengthen their faith by learning from

one another. That is why Sri Ramakrishna used to advocate the meeting of devotees, as you find in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

If one can be in tune with the Divine always, no holy company may be necessary. Otherwise, association with fellow-aspirants is very, very necessary for spiritual progress.

### **Holy Personality as Manifestation of the Divine Principle**

Try to have contact with the Indwelling Spirit in you. He is the Soul of our souls and the Real Guru. When you feel the need of holy company, please think of the Lord, and also repeat His name if you so wish. He is the Power behind us all, and without Him we all are nothing. When you come to think of anyone in a personal way and feel it to be so, call up the thought of your Ishtam and merge all thoughts about the person into Him, his form into His form. And in and through Him may you realize the formless also. We all meet in Him who manifests Himself as the Holy Personality and Power and also as all ordinary personalities.

The Universal Principle in His Infinite mercy and compassion manifested Himself as different Holy Personalities,—but all ultimately come to reach and meet in the same Principle—our common Background.

As long as you do not find anyone to talk with about things spiritual, learn to talk with the Lord. It will be a source of great blessing to you, you will see. May He always inspire and guide you. I wish you to come in more and more touch with the Personal-Impersonal aspect of your Ishtam, and be more and more impersonal looking upon yourself, more in terms of the Atman—the Spirit—than in terms of the body and the mind. You may read every day a few meditations like this: *“I am neither mind nor intellect, neither memory,” etc. etc.*

You may pray to the Great Personality who appeals to you, looking upon the Personality as the manifestation of the Divine Principle. You may also take His name, if you want to, when you pray for inspiration and guidance. The more you advance, you will feel Him to be the Indwelling Spirit, the Soul of our souls—the Soul of all that exists. He is, as it were, the channel through which you approach the Divine Principle—the Infinite and the All-Pervading.

**End of**

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