

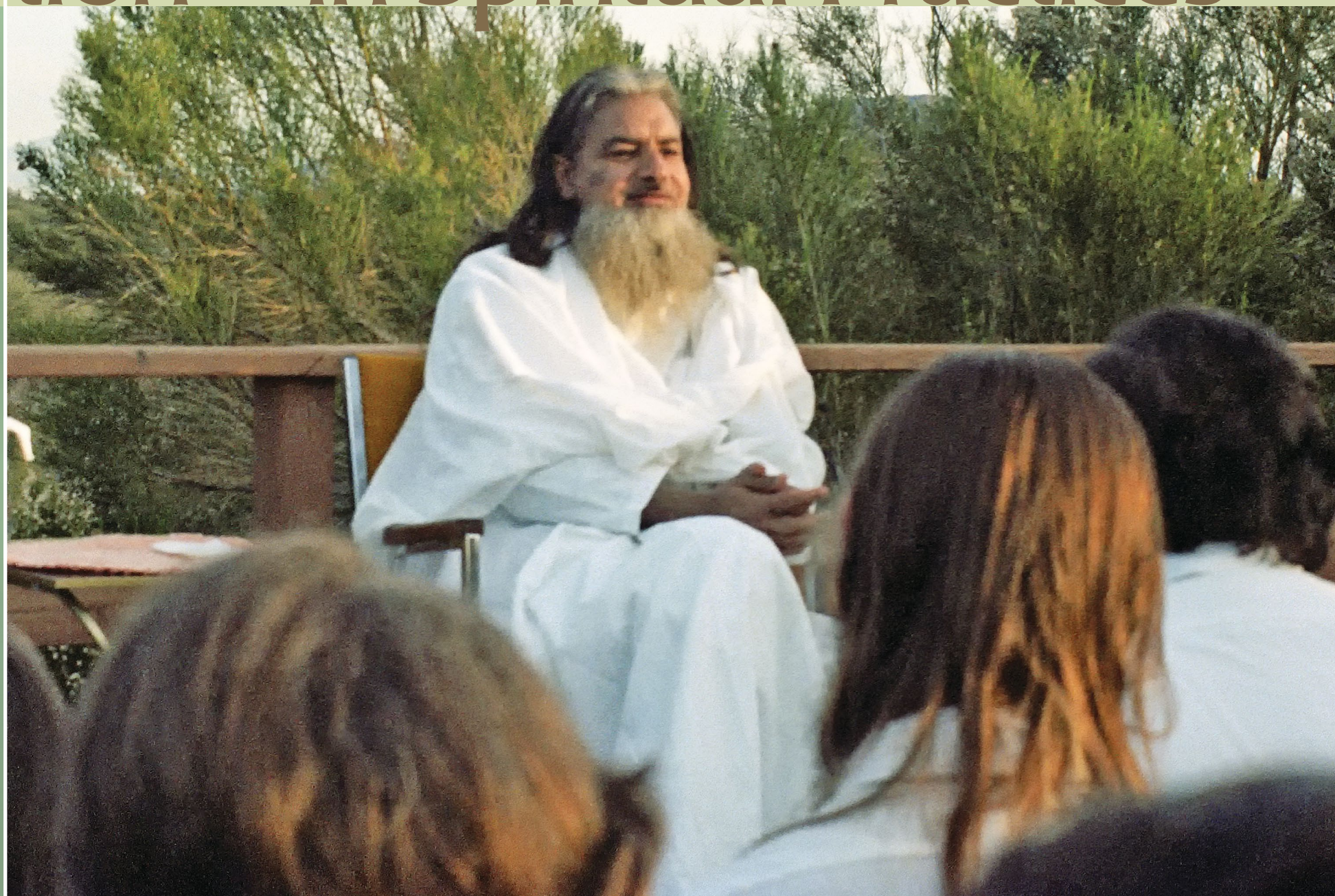
Satsang by Swami Amar Jyoti

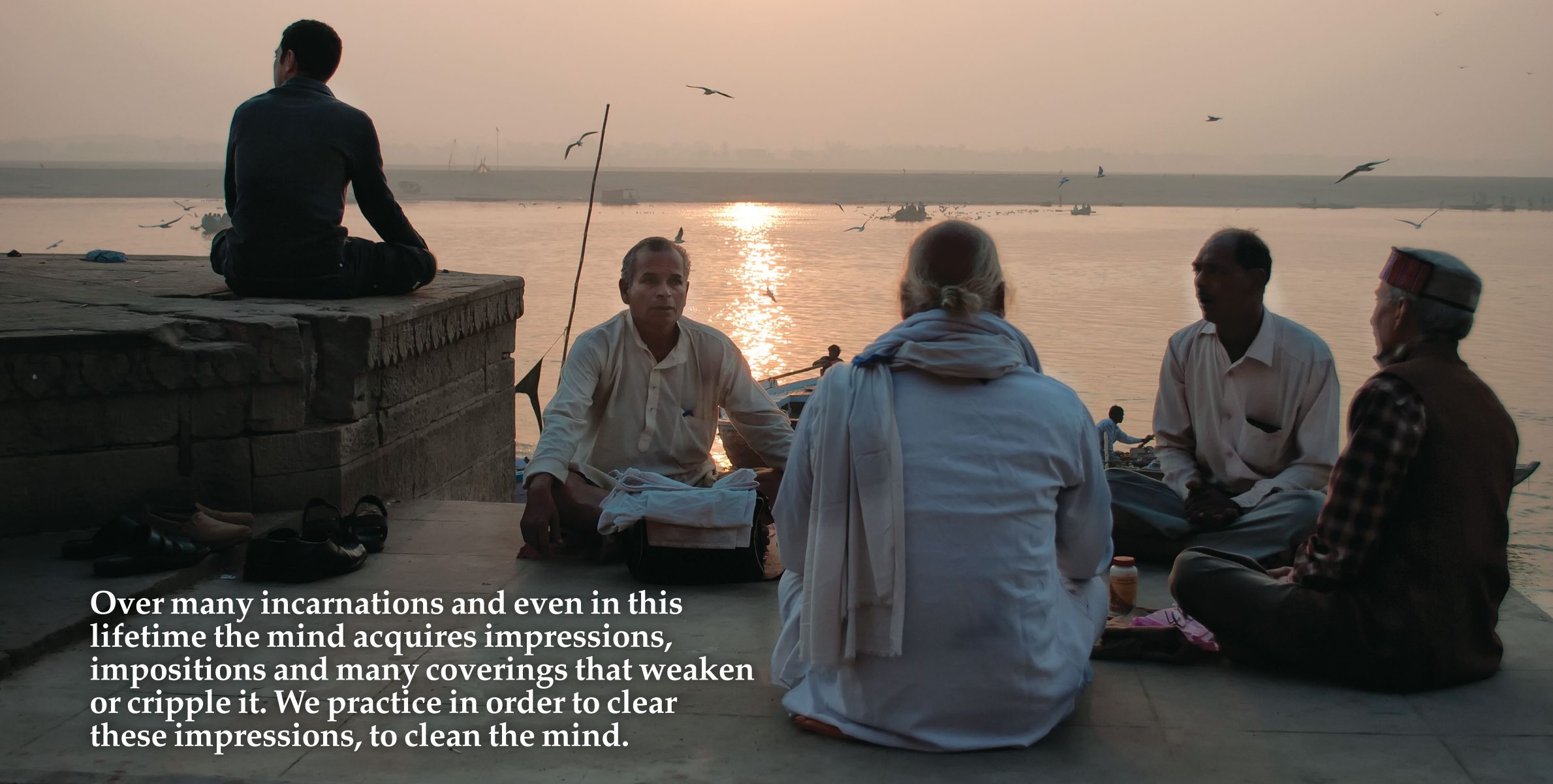
Sadhana

Faith and Devotion in Spiritual Practices

The Light, God, Spirit, Consciousness is already within us in full measure. What covers it up is impurities. Therefore you will find that in every scripture, whether the Bible, the Gita or the Dhammapada, the main stress is on purification of heart and mind.

S*adhana* is a Sanskrit word that means spiritual practices, but it is more than that. It is practices done with faith and devotion. You may do other practices, such as physical exercises, that do not require devotion, but sadhana is never just mechanical. We are devoted and dedicated to the Goal for which we do sadhana. Not only so, we surrender ourselves to that Goal, to God or the Light for which we do sadhana.





Over many incarnations and even in this lifetime the mind acquires impressions, impositions and many coverings that weaken or cripple it. We practice in order to clear these impressions, to clean the mind.

There are many, many ways and practices but the major ones are pranayama (breathing exercises), hatha yoga, mantra recitation and meditation. Whichever path you take, daily practice with devotion is needed until you become *siddha*, which means perfected, Enlightened. There is no single definition of a perfected one. Some may say that to be with Krishna is perfection. A yogi might say that to be fully conscious is perfection. Someone who accomplishes great enterprises or projects might say their life is perfect.

According to the yoga tradition there are four major paths: *karma*—action, *bhakti*—devotion, *gyana*—wisdom, and *raja* yoga or *kundalini* yoga—refined energy. You may undertake any one of these or combine two, three or four together. When you practice all four together it is called integral yoga, which means homogenous, harmonious, where your body, vital, mind and soul are all involved. That may be the path of the coming new age, one that will include every

limb of our lives. Otherwise, on any given path one or more elements are involved. For example: on the path of wisdom, in the beginning the mind will be mostly involved, with a little bit of devotion and karma yoga. On the path of devotion the heart will be more involved; the brain doesn't want to think about it. On the path of action your hands will do work guided by your devotion. On the path of raja yoga you are working primarily with your nervous system, your vitality.

These four paths were devised for different temperaments. Some people are loving by nature, so they are attracted to the path of devotion. Some are yogis by temperament, so they will go on the raja yoga path and work with the nervous system. Some are thinkers, so they are suited to gyana yoga. But on all these paths you have to practice daily, as guided by your master. That is the major part of every path. Without a master you can practice from books or from your own understanding and instinct, but only to the

extent you know. Beyond that you will feel and see that you need someone to guide you, otherwise you cannot proceed.

Inherently God is in everyone, so you know or understand to the extent that you are open unto God. Also you may have read or experienced or acquired some wisdom, but beyond that you do not know. Everyone asserts ego to the point they think they know. But if you want to evolve further you have to be guided and helped by someone who *knows*. This is where faith comes in. As with other kinds of advanced learning, you can learn through books, understanding and experiences, but beyond that if you want to progress you have to find an expert. This is where the need comes for a master or guide.

In worldly pursuits, be it typing, cooking, music or art, you may need a teacher but you do not have to have full faith in him or her. But on the spiritual path that is your only prerequisite: your heart, brain,

nervous system and hands are open only to the point that you have faith. That is because spiritual opening is subjective whereas all other pursuits are objective. Many people do not understand this. In primitive days people were not so rational or reasoning. They had blind faith and did not question as much. Today we are more rational, questioning and reasoning. Subjective opening is opening within and it cannot happen without the help of linking within. This is where faith enters.

If you want to unfold on any path, if you want to grow spiritually, you simply have to have faith in someone who knows more than you. Whether he or she knows perfectly or not is immaterial. This faith cannot be taught or imposed. It has to come from within you, where you find conviction. Otherwise you will be wandering—decades or more may pass but you cannot open up unless someone shows you the way. This is called, in spiritual language, initiation.

Mechanical practice does not yield much. It has to be coupled with faith and devotion. You might have heard some people say, *I have been repeating this mantra, chanting this holy name, meditating five or ten years, but there is not much progress*. It is not the fault of sadhana or practices. The problem is that love, devotion or faith is lacking. Naturally, the practices will not give you much satisfaction or spiritual growth.

There have been some exceptional cases of those who did not need a master in whom they would have unflinching faith. But they were born such high, advanced souls that they could guide themselves. In Buddha's life he had two teachers for a short while, but Buddha was already so great. He was a born Incarnation, a Prophet. He did not have to do much. After two years he went on his own to Bodh Gaya and sat under the Bo tree in meditation for years and became Enlightened. It was the same with Krishna. He studied with his Guru for only sixty-four days and learned everything he wanted. Such high souls, even some who were not Prophets, do sadhana and become Liberated on their own, but they are already great from their previous births. The fallacy or tragedy is when people of lesser caliber try to copy this.

We have all had many births and we carry the credit balance from previous lives. On that level you can nurture yourself, but beyond that only books cannot teach you everything. Even a master cannot teach you everything; ultimately, it has to come from within



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you. That is why practices are necessary. Over many incarnations and even in this lifetime the mind acquires impressions, impositions and many coverings that weaken or cripple it. We practice in order to clear these impressions, to clean the mind. The Light, God, Spirit, Consciousness is already within us in full measure. What covers it up is impurities. Therefore you will find that in every scripture, whether the Bible, the Gita or the Dhammapada, the main stress is on purification of heart and mind.

On the path of devotion, purification refines the heart. When you practice truthfulness and harmlessness the mind gets purified. On the raja yoga path, the nervous system gets purified so that the mind cannot retain untruth, dishonesty or negativity. Without purifying or cleansing our minds and hearts we cannot hope to be blissful, peaceful or wise. Once impurities are gone, the Goal is eternally shining. Practices do not make the Light shine or God appear. Practices do not directly give you peace: many people practice yet still have disturbed minds. Practices simply cleanse your mind and heart, and to the degree that you purify your heart and mind, your inner Light will shine.

There are three impediments that trouble our mind and heart. One is termed dirt, which includes negativities, jealousy, competition, untruth and such. The second is disturbance or tension. The third is covering up, which is synonymous of ignorance. All three impediments are relieved by practices. That is why we stress upon practicing, not because practices will make God appear before you or take you to heaven. If we understand this, we can see why daily practices are very necessary, even twice daily. Yet practices cannot reach us to God's chamber. It requires more than that.

Blessed are they who are pure at heart, for they shall see God. There is an echo of this in every religion. No religion will tell you that untruth will liberate you. Likewise, every religion will tell you that Truth shall free you, that you should be harmless and selfless. This is only possible when your heart is purified. When your

devotion and love increase, your thinking process will become righteous. Therefore our duty in life is for each of us to work upon oneself, to purify our mind and heart. When this is accomplished, God's grace descends automatically.


There is no need to pray to God to send His grace. Why? I have two strong objections to praying to God for grace. It implies that God is not graceful, so I am praying to Him to send grace.

Our experience is that God's grace is always there, uninterruptedly, every moment and in all places. My second objection is that grace will not work if the heart and mind are not sufficiently pure. When the mind and heart are pure, we do not have to ask for grace—it descends automatically. When the clouds scatter, the sun is already shining.

Therefore I do not pray to the Lord to send grace. If I did I would be implying, "I'm lazy, Lord. Please send Your grace; then only I can accomplish something. My whole energy and time I have spent on things in the world. I have no time or energy for praying or meditating upon You." What if God were to say, "Okay, put your efforts first on this path. Do sincere practices, meditate. Observe yourself; see your negativities or impurities. Have you worked on them?" If we go one step forward, God will come ten steps forward. He is more eager to give than we are eager to have, provided we are ready.

There is one more requirement: after you have put all your efforts into daily practices, surrender the results to your Lord. Do not hold on, as if *you* have done it. Because practices alone will not give us what we want. They only purify us; then what we want will come automatically. Therefore sages say that we must surrender the results of our karmas or actions to the Lord. Only then will ego be melted or at least sublimated. Then you will open up totally to your Lord, your Light, your Goal, and receive whatever you consciously or unconsciously wanted.

You choose your own Goal, your own God. Whether it is Krishna, Shiva, Jesus, Buddha, Father in heaven, or Light, Consciousness, Spirit, when you truly love your Lord you cannot be dogmatic. You will not hate anyone. You will not be prejudiced toward anyone. If religion teaches us to be prejudiced and superior, it is better to be an atheist. And if you are truly religious, you will have no prejudice, partiality or favoritism. Dogmatism divides people against people. It is not religion.



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Do not think that by intellectual conviction you are pleasing your Lord. He sees whether you are truly religious in your heart. Religion does not teach us to divide, hate or disunite; it is a harmonizing factor. It should be peace-giving and loving to all, irrespective of differences or nationalities. Once you are truly religious you will not find any differences. You will just love. You will be harmless and truthful. There will be no jealousy, competition or negativities. You will have peace, harmony and freedom automatically.

Ask yourself: am I peaceful? If yes, you are religious. If no, you are not yet. Do you speak untruth at times? Do you hate anyone? Then you are not religious. Are you prejudiced, competitive or selfish? Then you are not religious. Religion is not just intellectual. It has to permeate our being—the body, mind and nervous system. It is not how many times we go to church or

temple to worship that constitutes religion. That is an outer expression only. God knows us not by what we do or say but by what is in our heart.

If we understand this, then we are not obliging God by practicing. We should not say, “I have not much time for these things but I have time for other things.” Or, “When I sit in meditation I get sleepy, my knees begin to pain.” Why does our helplessness come to eloquent exposure only in spiritual practices? When we go to work, do tasks we like, socialize, or go for entertainments, we do not give excuses. This is where the impure heart will resist. The forces of falsehood or resistance will come out when you are seeking the Truth. This is a normal phenomenon.

At one or the other stage in sadhana, the forces of darkness in the mind make us resist seeking the Truth. Why? Because Truth, God, Light will smash our

selfishness. The subconscious mind inherently resists, knowing that once the sun shines the fog will clear. It wants to retain its own selfish motives. This is one of the major blocks. When you begin to purify your heart and mind you come face to face with resistance. It creates doubts, objections and misunderstandings. The mind says, “I doubt it, I don’t understand it.” Brave ones, courageous ones, smash this resistance. “At any cost I want Truth, I want Reality; I want to see the Light.” Such boldness is required—“I will not yield to anything but the Truth, Enlightenment.”

Buddha said, “I will not get up from this seat, come what may, until I become Enlightened.” Now everyone cannot do this, I understand. But within our individual life pattern and capacity, we can at least practice to purify the heart and mind. This much everyone can do. You can pray to Buddha, Jesus, Father in heaven, Divine

Mother, Spirit or Consciousness to purify your heart. See that no resistance exists, for resistance will take you away from your Goal. Resistance creates repulsion. What you need is attraction to the Goal.

The whole cosmos, including our world, is in a constant state of flux. According to vibratory science, there are two forces in nature: attraction and repulsion. These are the negative and positive poles or magnetic forces. According to the Vedas, this attraction-repulsion is called *akarshan* and *sankarshan* in Sanskrit. These forces create and destroy. In between is maintenance or equilibrium, the world as we see it. If you are resisting these forces, you are going against the laws of nature and that will recoil upon you with sufferings and miseries. This is pure science. All our pain, suffering, pathos and misery of any kind, physical and mental, is due to going against the laws of nature. Our resistance, doubts, artificiality, objections, misunderstandings and non-understandings go against the laws of nature. When we do that, sooner or later the law of karma recoils back on us.

The law of karma is infallible, whether we know it or not, whether we act out of ignorance or knowingly, and even if we try to avoid it. Let’s say you hide in a church or temple to save yourself. Your karmas will go right there. The laws of nature are infallible due to two forces: particle and anti-particle. These create a friction, a revolving within each other of negative and positive poles, called *anilom bilom* in Sanskrit: expansion and contraction. If we resist or fight the laws of nature, which are more powerful than you and me, sooner or later—maybe months or years or next birth—karmas will recoil back. Knowing this, sages have told us: Open your heart. Do not resist the Truth. Flow in the tune with nature. Flow in tune with the Lord’s will. 🌸

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