Practices are necessary to redesign and re-culture the mind so that you can choose and aspire more consciously. Instead of drifting with the circumstances of your life, you can consciously redesign it.

Why are spiritual practices necessary?
Through practices you become master of your own mind. Then your mind is no longer ruling you. Not that mind is a separate entity; it is your own instrument, your own world. You created your mind with your will and now it is like a computer filled with the data you have put there. You are under the sway of your mental modifications, your choices. You allow yourself to drift into a chain reaction from the choices you have made, the habits you have created, and their results. This feels easy because it is recorded like grooves—the roads and paths you walk with your mind. These grooves in Sanskrit are called sanskars.
Nothing short of Enlightenment will truly satisfy us but we cannot achieve it without practices. Practices are simply to counter-effect the degeneration that we have accumulated during the course of desires and karmas.

According to Raja Yoga, discipline of mind is called samyam. Through a disciplined mind your will becomes conscious action. Practices, saulama, make you siddha, perfected. When you are consciously willing, consciously acting and consciously designing your life, you are a yogi. You could easily call this heaven but you have not achieved it without practices. You have gained control of the mind through practices. You have gained control of the mind through disciplines. Then the mind becomes your partner.

Nothing short of Enlightenment will truly satisfy us but we cannot achieve it without practices. Without practices you would not even think of your True Self; intellect alone cannot do this. Practices make that very craving for Self Realization crop up naturally. Then you will see that Enlightenment is the goal for which all these practices were necessary. Practices are simply to counter-effect the degeneration that we have accumulated during the course of desires and karmas. When practices have served their purpose, when they have freed us from degeneration, misery and sorrow, they are no longer needed. Before that you were occupied with the ego, all the time feeding ego, on ego trips, wallowing in desires and diversions. That feels easy because it is what mind desires, but ultimately ego trips pull you into ditches from which you cry to be saved.

Practices, such as meditation, satang, prayer, mantra repetition, chanting, worship, selfless service and reading spiritual books, clean and purify the mind. They inspire and elevate you to want to achieve a higher yoga, not only releasing your mind but releasing your soul into the Universal Soul. This is called Mahayoga—maha meaning great, yoga meaning union. great union. You are not only binding your mind but joining your individual soul, jiva, with Cosmic Being. You cannot practice to join your individual soul with the Universal; it is simply letting go and surrendering to That. By that time you have achieved sufficient purity and are sufficiently cut off from worldly moorings. It may take decades of practices, which I call “improvisations of the first tune.” When you have finished your improvisations you come to ecstatic play. Then you are spontaneous and creative. You let go unto the Lord. Even if you have finished your improvisations you come to ecstatic play. 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Once we understand that our real enjoyment, our real ecstasy is in union with the Supreme, it will counter-effect our mind-trips. How do we do this? By spiritual practices.

If we do not do yoga, we do bhoga, meaning “mind trips.” In modern life we call this “freedom,” but from the spiritual or yogic point of view we call it bhoga. Bhoga has three meanings: enjoyment, bad luck and karma. These mental modifications and attitudes have put you in bondage and yet you say you have freedom of thought and action. However, in spite of having that “freedom,” many are miserable and suffering. In this Kali Yuga, Iron Age, bhoga has become independence of thought and action, which is just glorified nonsense. It is actually a perversion of the truth, and the results speak for themselves. This so-called independence does not give us ecstasy or emancipation. It is simply “independence of enjoyment.” Once we understand that our real enjoyment, our real ecstasy is in union with the Supreme, it will counter-effect our mind-trips. How do we do this? By spiritual practices.

Self-image and prestige have become the religion of modernity, which is actually quite a degrading factor. Self-image is nothing else but an ego trip, but image has become an eloquent tribute. How else could we make ego look prestigious and respectable? Therefore self-image becomes bondage and degradation until we “yoke” or “bind” the mind again to the higher Self, to Spirit. We cannot do this without having controlled the mind, and we cannot control the mind without practices. Daily study or sustained practice—abhaya— is needed. If you leave gaps of some days or longer, by the time you begin again you have lost that sustained effort. Therefore regularity is very necessary. Whatever the results on a particular day, even if you do not feel much elevated, keep doing. You may ask: “What is the use of mechanical practicing when my mind is thinking wrong actions, which create misery, suffering and loss of peace. When you begin to gather up your mind, the reverse is true. As you clean the mind you bring it into a state of peace. When you begin to gather up your mind, the reverse is true. As you clean the mind you bring it into a state of peace.
The way to Enlightenment is imperceptible, not sensational. It has remained the same since thousands of years. Even Buddha said: “Every one of you is a Buddha. I cannot make you a Buddha. You have to awaken the Buddha within you.”

were searching for even in your unconsciousness. To be your True Self is what you have always been seeking. In the name of independence you thought and acted according to wrong attitudes and your unreal self; therefore you kept missing your True Self. You will eventually realize that you knew this truth all along but you were consciously avoiding it. And this avoidance can carry on for years and births. You replace one bondage with a new experience; it may yield something but slowly it proves to be another bondage. That is why we pray, “Lead us from bondage to freedom.” It is no good just dreaming about Enlightenment; we have to clear the way through practices.

There is no fanciful jump to Enlightenment. The only way is through virtues and practices. This is the classical path, the eternal way, which sages have called Sanatana Dharma. It sustains you and leads you to your goal without being sensational. Whatever comes in between are simply diversions. We occupy ourselves with TV, movies, the internet, telephones, radio, et cetera. We run after whatever attracts our senses and dissipates our energy. There is nothing wrong with trying various methods, but sensationalism can only lead to a point. Whether it is a dream reader, a mind reader, a saline tub or rebirthing—all of these give you something but they do not take you to the Ultimate. Reaching the goal of Enlightenment is by the classical path of meditation, japa (repetition of mantra) and other practices. You cannot change this.

The way to Enlightenment is imperceptible, not sensational. It has remained the same since thousands of years. Even Buddha said: “Every one of you is a Buddha. I cannot make you a Buddha. You have to awaken the Buddha within you.” It has to come from you. We can give blessings, grace, show the way, purify you at times by love and rebukes, even inspire you, but ultimately Enlightenment has to come from within you. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” The Goal is always there. Light is always shining. Buddhahood is within you. You have to awaken by purifying your heart and mind, by following the dharma, by sustained, steady practice and patience. Keep doing till you reach. © 2011 by Truth Consciousness. Teaching from the basis of eternal Truth, the message of Swami Amar Jyoti’s Satsangs (Sanskrit: communion with Truth) is one of deep spiritual unity. His way is not to impose a particular creed but to impart a spiritual way of life. During His work for four decades (1961-2001), He awakened and uplifted countless souls around the world to God Consciousness, disseminating the timeless Truth underlying all traditions and faiths. Swami Amar Jyoti is the author of several books. These and over 700 audio Wisdom Teachings illuminating the classical path for modern times are available. This Satsang is edited from Sincerity in Spiritual Practices (P-56). A catalog of the live recordings of Satsangs and Retreats by Swami Amar Jyoti is available at truthconsciousness.org, or call 520-743-8821 for a free copy by mail. Please see page 68 of this issue for further information. Photo on Page 3: Swami Amar Jyoti at Brainard Lakes, CO, 1983.