

Categories of Indian Thought

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NĀMARŪPA *Categories of Indian Thought*, established in 2003, honors the many systems of knowledge, practical and theoretical, that have originated in India. Passed down through the ages, these systems have left tracks, paths already traveled that can guide us back to the Self—the source of all names NĀMA and forms RŪPA. The publishers have created this journal out of a love for the knowledge that it reflects, and desire that its content be clear and inspirational, without any particular agenda or sectarian bias.

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NĀMARŪPA uses diacritical marks, as per the chart, for the transliteration of all Saṁskṛta words. Many of the articles do contain these marks, but it is not a universal occurrence in the magazine. In those cases where authors have elected not to use diacritics, Saṁskṛta words remain in their romanized form.

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KRISHNA FOR TODAY

KESHAV VENKATRAGHAVAN

When you paint a canvas...it is a journey... it is a process. You plan your content; what you are going to draw, how you are going to draw it, will tell a lot about who you are. It is finding oneself.

KRISHNA HAS BEEN REPRESENTED visually for thousands of years—in literature, sculpture, painting, dance and other folk arts. Indian art uses symbols to communicate complex philosophy and abstract ideas contained in our epics. For me, it was a treasure waiting to be discovered in a long and exciting journey. It culminated in Krishna.

Krishna represents *Ananda*—Infinite Joy, Eternal Peace, Everlasting Ecstasy, Unbounded Compassion, Unlimited Love, Unfathomable Knowledge.

Indian thought treats the whole Universe as one big family—*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*. And Joy is a natural aspiration for all of us. Hence, universal. As these ideas speak the eternal truth, they are relevant today, more than ever before. It is a beacon, offering solace to the troubled soul.

This is an attempt to visually interpret the infinite qualities that Krishna represents and to give the viewer a pleasant experience—*Krishna Anubhava*—through Indian Art.

According to the Indian treatise on painting, *Chitrastotra*, the purpose of art is spiritual. A painter should be conversant with dance, sculpture, music and architecture to mature into a complete artist.

At this confluence of art and divinity began the journey of *Krishna for Today*. It seeks to decipher and understand what our wise men of yore wanted to convey.

Krishna for Today aims to show Krishna

in a new light, without in any way disrespecting customs and traditions. For more than a decade, it has been my endeavour to present Krishna in various avatars, showing his various facets (often called *Leela* or sport) through my drawings and paintings. These were shared in social media and now extended to a website.

Krishna for Today is an exploration into realms of divinity.

About us. About the world. And our relationship with the Supreme.

I hope you experience the divine through these works of art.

My parents were very liberal. I had a bit of a problem with money. I couldn't buy materials to paint, not even paper! So my father used to get notebooks which were half complete, etc; I would draw on the backs of calendars and regularly with chalk on the floor. My parents helped—whatever they could do to help, they did. And they never said no. Despite being from an orthodox family, my father's thinking was liberal and he had a broad outlook. My parents and my wife encouraged and facilitated my work. Without family support it wouldn't have been possible.

www.krishnafortoday.com

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January 2020

A sampling of Keshav's daily *Krishna for Today* paintings are featured in this issue of NĀMARŪPA.



LIVING WITH REALITY

DR. ROBERT SVOBODA

Talk given at the Nāmarūpa Living with Reality virtual retreat in the Spring of 2020, transcribed and edited.

LIVING WITH REALITY:
For me the living part is not too difficult, because all of us who are here participating today are alive. We are certainly a lot more alive than the corona virus, because the virus, strictly speaking, is not alive. It's parasitical in the extreme; it's nothing but a little packet of genetic material. This virus is an RNA virus—slightly different from a DNA virus — but it's just genetic material that's wandering around looking for cells to penetrate and use as factories to create more of itself. That's its reality. That's the reality of the virus.

How it impacts us helps to generate our reality. At the moment, the reality that all of us are living with is the reality of this nonliving thing that is having a tremendous effect on a few other species like bats and felines, but chiefly on humans. This virus, even though it's not alive, is directly influencing the reality of many other things like you and me that are alive. So that's a good place to start—a place where we experience the hopefully accurate perception of our own reality.

And our reality today is the reality of the intersection between the human species and this virus. There's no question that the virus is real. The question is, to what degree is it real? Of course, this is a question that we have to ask ourselves about everything. Some things are fairly easy to discount. At the moment, I would say that would extend to the vast majority of the pronouncements made by our current president. It's possible, of course, that he meant it as a joke, but to suggest to people that they inject disinfectant is rather ludicrous, as it is far from what would be a desirable reality, except that we know that there are people who would take that pronouncement at face value, who would take it literally and

go off and try to do that. This is sadly what happens when fake news intersects with real reality.

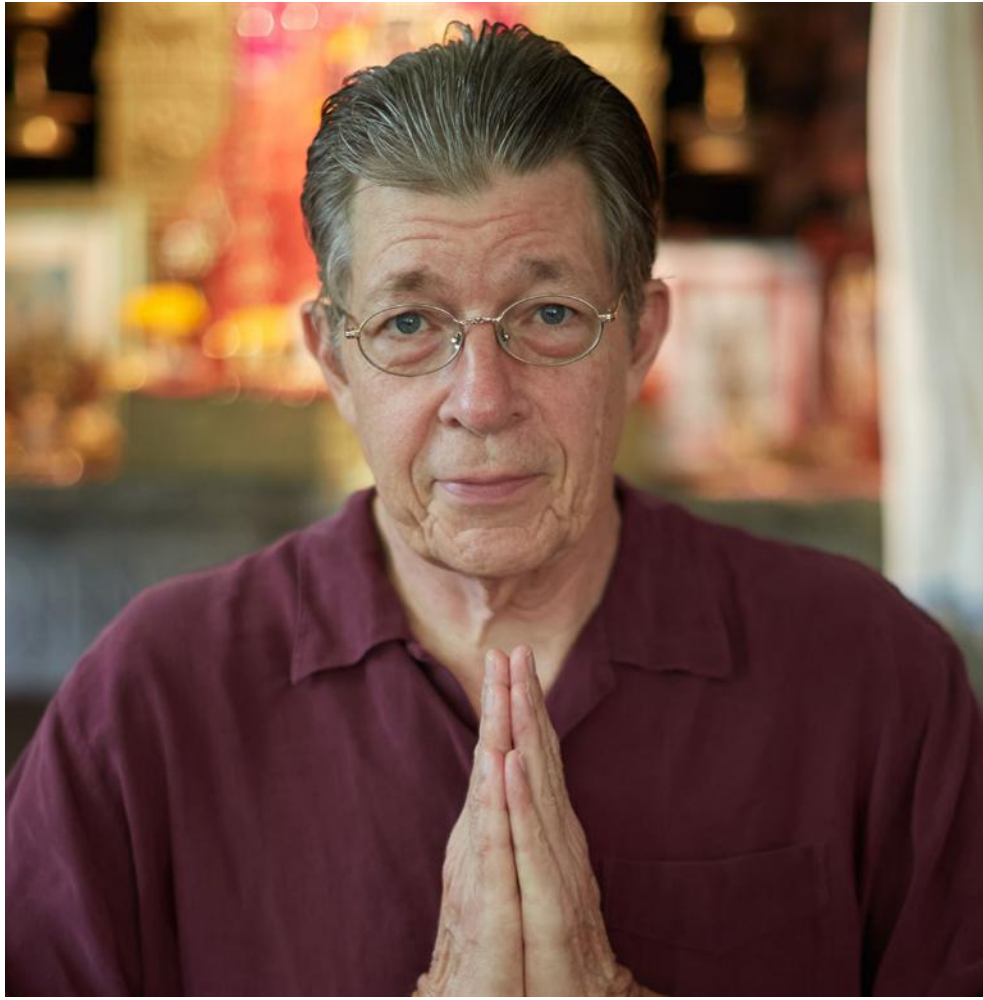
Now, a big challenge in the world in which you and I live is that there is ultimately only one reality and that is the reality of the Supreme Consciousness. That Reality has no limitations, no qualities, no characteristics. No nothing, in fact, except Itself. Sometimes it's described as *sat-chid-ananda*, *sat* meaning *true* or *real*, *chit* in this context meaning *awareness* and *ananda* meaning *joy*, here the joy of being aware of its reality and its existence. Sometimes it is instead referred to as *satyam ritam brihat*, *satyam* again meaning *true* and *ritam* meaning *harmonious*. *Ritam* and *rhythm* sound almost the same and mean roughly the same thing. *Brihat* means *immeasurably vast*, *gigantic*. *Satyam ritam brihat* means that the Supreme Reality is real, is gigantic and is harmonious. It is thanks to the Supreme Reality that we enjoy balance, resonance, and harmony in our universe. Even though there's plenty of opportunity to experience disharmony in our world, the Supreme Reality promotes harmony.

The second law of thermodynamics, the law of negative entropy, states that the universe always moves from more order to less order. Order was generated at the time of the organization of the universe but, ever since, things have been moving in the direction of greater and greater disorder. We can't even talk about the Supreme Reality being ordered, because it's a singularity. It is completely more subtle than the subtlest manifested "thing" in the entire universe. The very fact that the singularity is so perfect suggests that the manifestation is going to have to be imperfect, and not merely because if it were perfect, it would never have manifested. If you mine gold ore and

you put it through all sorts of processes to get out the gold, in addition to obtaining the gold you will also obtain a giant amount of waste. So the very fact that there is a real reality in the universe puts the rest of the universe into a sort of shadow, into a profound depth of darkness. This permits the great light of Consciousness to create a starkly enhanced difference between those two realities—even though they are but one reality. This emphasis on both the relative reality of the difference and the absolute reality of the unity is the reason why, when it comes to *advaita*, I adhere to the Shuddadvaita approach of Vallabacharya.

IT'S ALWAYS NICE TO HAVE A TEXT when exploring an Indian *vidya*. You go to your text, take a line or two or three from it and discourse upon it; you unpack it, explicate it. Here is a simple piece of text from the Vedic literature: *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*. Each of these words is very meaningful because in the Vedas no energy was wasted; every utterance was designed to reflect reality pithily but accurately. There is no fake news in the Vedas. When used properly, the Vedas create an environment that assists people to directly perceive reality and, that done, to hopefully find a way to live in a healthy relationship with that reality. The fact of being embodied means that if the Supreme Reality has no qualities and you and I have qualities, as long as we are living, we are not identical with that Supreme Reality and we have to find a way to manifest it as much as possible, but not be overwhelmed by it, not be destroyed by it.

To be overwhelmed by the Supreme Reality is to fail to do the job for which we human beings were evolved: to act as a mirror for that reality. The



individual who introduced me to this concept was the great Jnaneshvar Maharaj, the most beloved and well-known saint of Maharashtra who was born 745 years ago and lived until about the age of 21. His commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*—officially titled the *Bhavarthadeepika*, but usually referred to as the *Jnaneshvari*—is a truly great book. In another book of his called the *Amritanubhava* which means both *The Nectar of Experience* and *The Experience of Nectar*, Jnaneshvar says that in the same way that a human being can only see his or her face in a mirror, the Supreme Reality that has no qualities, no attributes, no characteristics, cannot perceive itself. There's nowhere outside itself from which it can look in on itself; to do that it had to create an outside of itself. That's the manifested universe, which even though it is part of itself

has to believe that it is not part of itself in order to act as a good mirror. So each one of us has to evolve ourselves individually to act as a good mirror for that reality. In order to act as a good mirror, we have to maintain sufficient separateness during the period that we are alive. So we are trying, each one of us individually, to live as best as we can. I hope we're trying to do that. We should start doing so if we're not yet doing so.

Living as best we can is finding the best balance between having our energy be identified with us as individuals and having our energy being identified with the Supreme Reality, which has no individuation other than itself.

THE FIRST WORD IN *EKAM SAT VIPRA bahudha vadanti* is *eka* and *eka* means *one*. *Ekam sat*; *sat* means *true*, *real*. The ultimate *sat*, the ultimate

truth, the Ultimate Reality is in that individual tiny, itsy-bitsy, minuscule dimensionless point that is the singularity; that is the real *sat*. And that's why they can say it is only one. There's one singularity; from that singularity, the entire universe emerged in the Big Bang.

There is one and only one *sat*. However, *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*. *Vadanti* is a third-person plural verb form, present tense: *they speak*. And what do they speak? They're speaking about truth. And what do they say about it? Bahudha. *Bahudha* means *in many ways*. So, when individual, manifested embodied beings speak about truth, they will speak about it in many ways. You cannot, as an embodied being, speak truth; as an embodied being you cannot actually convey the real truthiness of truth because you're an embodied being, and the

actual truth has no qualities whatsoever. No matter how astute your words are—especially these words what we call *vaikhari*, externalized words, but also the words you speak to yourself and that are charged with emotion, called *madhyama* and even the words down at the naval that are *pashyanti*, that are visual speech, and even intention, *paraa*—you can say something that is close to the truth. With *paraa* you can come very, very, very close to the truth—but you cannot speak the truth. You cannot speak the truth because you are trying to describe that truth to itself while being separate from that truth. You can come very close. You can mirror it very accurately, but you're still a mirror and the image in a mirror is never exactly the same thing as what the mirror is imaging. It is only an image. We can, at best, create an image of truth.

As for the word *vipra*, a *vipra* is *someone who is very knowledgeable, very wise*. The only people we really want to have talking about truth are the people who are knowledgeable or wise. There are several words in Sanskrit that mean knowledgeable or wise—the word *nishnata* for example, and the word *pandita*, which we have adopted into English as *pundit*. This word *vipra* is however a particularly interesting word. Remember that in the Vedas no words are random. Each word has been carefully chosen so as to provide as precise a reflection of reality as is possible. *Vipra* comes from the root *vip*, a root which means *to tremble, shake, shiver, vibrate, quiver, or be stirred*. The word *vipra* literally means *to be stirred or incited internally—to be inspired*. When we talk about a *vipra*, we're not referring to someone who has only book learning; instead we're speaking about someone who has had some manner of direct experience, what is called in Sanskrit *pratyaksha*—*in front of the eyes*—someone who has had direct experience of reality and only after that experience tries to describe reality. Until you have direct experience of reality, there's no use in your trying to describe it because

you'll just be taking a mirror and putting it in front of another mirror. Then you will see images of mirrors receding infinitely in both directions.

If you're only talking without having personal experience, you're just employing words to create images that are reflecting one another and, of course, that's the world in which we're living. We're living in a world in which screens are reflecting and being reflected and those screens are reflecting the reflections of those reflections. It's extending in all directions everywhere, but it's not connected to reality because it is superficial. It is not getting down to the deep, to the *bridaya*, to the *brid*, to the *heart* of where that reality actually is.

That's why in the Vedas it says don't waste your time listening to anybody talk about reality who's not a *vipra*, who's not been stirred from within. And how are you stirred from within? By your prana. Only when your prana is circulating properly and only when that prana is aligning, first of all, with the prana of the environment around you and, second of all, with the prana of the astral environment of the devatas, like Ganesha, who are around you—once your prana is aligned with all of these manifestations of reality, then you can say, yes, I am positioning myself in a way where I can have some experience of reality. That doesn't mean your experience will be of the totality of reality, because as a human being, as a manifested being, that's not possible. If you have an excellent experience of reality, you either dissolve back into that reality totally or you bring back an image of a teeny tiny piece of that reality.

People asked Ramakrishna Paramahansa what it was like to go into samadhi and he said a doll made out of salt wanted to experience the ocean, so it walked into the ocean and was dissolved. The end.

We are dolls made out of salt. We can get some connection to the ocean, but that ocean is going to wear us away, dissolve us away and eventually we'll be dissolved back into that ocean. That's the way things need to happen, the way that waves move in an ocean.

I like being in the water, I like being in the ocean, but you have to be very careful of waves, because even though a wave is very much not a permanent thing, it can still kill you. For that moment that it exists, it is very real. It's just that it's not permanently real. For the moment that you and I exist, we're real; it's just that we're not permanently real. While we're alive, we have to find a good way to live with the reality. The problem, of course, is that there are many different ways to perceive reality and we have to try to find ways that we can perceive reality that are going to assist us to know how to live properly with reality.

IN THE MODERN WORLD, SCIENTISTS are very enthusiastic about perceiving things in the material world. They're very focused on the material world. They're convinced that the only things that are real are the things that exist in the material world and they spend a lot of time developing instruments that enhance the ability of our sense organs to perceive things in the material world. Which is great except that there is a problem. That problem is that our perceptions of the material world are very imprecise if you have a universe like we do.

The universe is composed of vibrations. Some things have very dense vibration. Some things have very, very refined vibrations. We are in the physical world; this is very dense vibration. But even in our physical world, we have some very powerful (and very dense) vibrations which we call the electromagnetic spectrum. The electromagnetic spectrum is effectively infinite in both directions from zero vibrations per second we go to higher and higher vibrations that culminate in gamma rays. The vibrations that chiefly affect us extend from sub-sound to the ultraviolet.

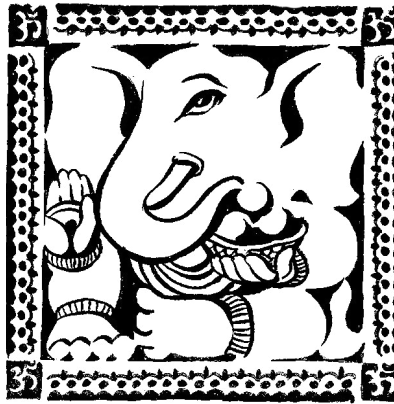
Some vibrations we can hear. One cycle per second is one hertz (Hz), and we humans can hear from about 20 Hz to about 20,000 Hz. That covers three orders of magnitude (one order of magnitude is 1 to the power of 10). We can hear three or-

ders of magnitude of vibration. 20 Hz is so low you can barely hear it and 20,000 Hz is so high you can barely hear it. For us that is a gigantic span of vibration, much larger than the relative size of the visible spectrum which is 405–790 THz., which is significantly less than three orders of magnitude.

Now, the electromagnetic spectrum itself is commonly thought to cover 24 orders of magnitude, which is 21 orders of magnitude greater than the portion of that spectrum that we can hear. Twenty-one orders of magnitude is one sextillion = one billion trillion. We are sampling with our ears one sextillionth of the electromagnetic spectrum. If we want to be more conservative we can remove from the spectrum all the X-rays and gamma rays which are lethal to us and consider only that portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that is meaningful to us without being damaging, that portion that is still a colossal fifteen orders of magnitude (one quadrillion). We can hear about one trillionth of that portion of the spectrum, and see even less.

Note that we use our ears to sample the lower extremes of the electromagnetic spectrum and our eyes to sample the upper extremes of the portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that is not lethal to us. We use two very different senses to experiencing only tiny, tiny portions of what is available to be experienced. And our other senses are similar. Our organisms are not designed to tell us what's actually going on out in the world; they are designed to tell us what we need to know. By us, I mean all sentient beings that have sense organs, vertebrates and insects alike. Each of us takes in tiny, tiny amounts of information from the outside world and from that information creates a perception that we think is real. It's a good start to understanding what is real and what is not real to understand that fundamentally we as human beings project more reality onto our perception than it actually possesses. We're much more attached to those concocted realities than we should be.

LOOK INTO THE *TATTVAS*—PRINCIPLES—of the Sankhya Yoga philosophy—these include *purusha*, *prakriti*, *mahat*, *ahankara*, *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*—and you will find that the five *mahabhutas* emerge from *tamas*: *prithvi*, *apah*, *tejas*, *vayu*, *akasha*—earth, water, fire, air, space. Those five *mahabhutas* have emerged from the five *tanmatras*. *Tan* is actually *tat*, which means *that*, and *matra* means *a portion*. Here *tamas* means everything that has been manifested, everything that has been projected out from *sat-chid-ananda*. Five portions of *tamas* become the five subtle elements, then evolve into the five dense elements. All of life has co-evolved with the manifested universe that hosts our planet. We have



co-evolved sense organs that grab hold of *tanmatra*—tiny, tiny portions of what there is to perceive—and have created pathways via which we can interact with our environment. It is fundamental to embodied life that all living beings interact with their environments. Life itself, in the face of this manifestation, has found a way to select slices of reality and create sense organs that assist us to generate images of reality out of those slices. So when it comes to living with reality, we have to understand that what we can take in from the outside is real, but it's a teeny, itty-bitsy amount of reality. If we want to actually have some better idea about what reality is, we have to go elsewhere than our sense organs.

WHERE SHOULD WE GO? WE CAN try going to *sattva* because *sat* means *real* and *tva* means *possessing of*. *Sattva* means *that thing that is characterized by reality*. Not identical to reality, but at least possessing some reality. Remember that the three *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, come from *ahankara*. *A* is the first Sanskrit letter, *ha* the last Sanskrit letter. So *aham* covers everything in the manifested universe. In the context of the individual, *ahankara* means *the thing that creates I-ness, the thing that creates identity*. Each individual is ultimately a manifestation of that Supreme Reality but each individual has an identity. Individual identity is very, very minimal in the case of bacteria and very substantial in the case of humans, especially very egoistic, narcissistic humans.

Vimalananda used to talk about identity all the time, not in the context of things like identity politics but rather that human beings are always trying to create identities for themselves. Very few people have one consistent identity for everything in their experience. If you have one consistent identity, then it will be easy for you to experience equipoise or equanimity, whether you interact with a sage or a dog or an eater of dogs, because your one personality will be coherent. Most people don't have coherent personalities. Most people have one personality for their parents and another personality for their children and one personality for the boss and another personality for their subordinates, one personality when they go out bar hopping, another personality when they go to the temple, the mosque, or the church.

Most people are able to shift from one personality to another without it being obvious that they're doing that and without other people figuring out that they're wildly different in one situation than in another situation. George Gurdjieff used to talk about this quite a lot and if you like reading books, take a look at *In Search of the Miraculous* by P.D. Ouspensky, which is an account of Ouspensky's study

with Gurdjieff in Russia during the First World War and the Russian Revolution. That was a time when people's identities were being transformed dramatically. Consider Nicholas II: born a prince, he became tsar and identified himself with his title, making decisions on the basis of his conception of himself as monarch. Then in 1917 he went from being the most powerful man in Russia to being the least powerful man in Russia. Nothing changed for him in his capacity as a human being, but everything changed dramatically in the context of his role in life; he shifted from one identity to another identity with minimal transition time, a day or two at most. It was almost instantaneous: one moment he was tsar and the next moment he had to abdicate.

Most of us don't have that sort of experience. Many people are the same sort of person from childhood through adolescence into adulthood and then old age. Others are one variety of child, another type of adolescent, a different kind of adult and finally an elder of yet another sort. Such people will experience reality in different ways according to their current perspective—their *drishti* or *darshana*. In Sanskrit we use the word *darshana* to mean both *philosophy* and *sight*. How you see the world is how you see reality.

How you see reality will determine how you live with reality. So it's important to try to see reality as accurately as possible, which is where *sattva* comes in.

AHAMKARA HAS THREE POWERS, THE three maha gunas, one of which is *tamas*, the power of inertia. Inertia is of two types: dynamic and static. Static inertia means that something that is not moving will tend to continue not to move. That's why I can hold a cup in my hand and not worry that it's going to start dancing a little jig in my hand or jumping over and trying to walk back to the kitchen. The opposite is dynamic inertia, which means that something in motion tends to remain in motion until something

else interrupts its progress or friction slows it down or it is otherwise interfered with. What is immobile tends to remain immobile and what is mobile tends to remain mobile: this is *tamas*. *Tamas* does not promote change.

Rajas means *activity*. The Sanskrit word for *dust* is *rajas*; the Sanskrit word for *menstrual blood* is *rajas*. Menstrual blood is very active, it can create a child; dust is always moving. *Rajas* is therefore extremely active, always ready for something new; that's its chief quality. *Tamas* avoids change, *rajas* embraces change, *sattva* tries to figure out when to change and when not to change. These are the three actions that *ahamkara* can perform. Why would *ahamkara* want to perform these actions? Because *ahamkara* is always trying to figure out what it should be identifying with, always asking the question "Who am I?"

"Who am I?" is the question that *ahamkara* is asking all the time, whether you're aware of it or not. *Ahamkara* is always wondering: Am I my body? To what extent am I my body? Am I my prana? Am I my thoughts? Am I my karmas? How do I connect all these things together?

IN THE TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD WE have the description of the five *koshas*; *kosha* means *sheath*. The five *koshas* are the five levels of existence; these are five realities and they are all part of the one reality of the human being. At the same time they're five different aspects of that reality. When we talk about living with reality, we have to examine the different levels and layers and aspects of reality and this is one way to do that. *Annamaya kosha* is the physical body, made out of food, nourished by food, put out of balance by improper food, brought back into balance by proper food. *Anna* means *food*.

More subtle than the *annamaya kosha* and therefore having a strong influence on the *annamaya kosha* is the *pranamaya kosha*. *Prana* means the *life force*, the thing thanks to which the body is actually alive. The *pranamaya kosha* is created out of *prana*, nour-

ished by *prana*, thrown out of balance by improper circulation of *prana* and put back into balance by proper circulation of *prana*.

The third of the sheaths is the *manomaya kosha*—*manas* means *mind* and mind is more subtle than *prana*.

How can mind be more subtle than *prana* if *prana* is the force that creates life in the organism? That can happen because *prana* creates life by bringing both life and consciousness into matter. Matter emerges when consciousness interferes with itself and becomes very, very knotted up, very dense. *Prana* is consciousness that actively manifests in matter and the *manomaya kosha* is like a reflection of that consciousness on a yet subtler level, a level from which mind can either assist *prana* to move properly or interfere with the proper movement of *prana*.

The *manomaya kosha* is created out of all of our thoughts, emotions and impressions, cultural aspects, the archetypal world and other such stuff. It's nourished by those things, it's thrown out of balance by those things, and it's brought back into balance by those things.

More subtle than the *manomaya kosha* is the *vijnanamaya kosha*. The *vijnanamaya kosha* is also known as the *buddhi* or the *viveka*, the *mahat*. It is the ability to discern. Again, in the yoga *sankhya* philosophy, when *ahamkara* splits into *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*, with *tamas*, it becomes the five *tanmatras* and the five *mahabhutas*, the five elements. *Sattva* evolves into *manas*—the thinking mind, the five senses of perception and the five senses of action. The job of *manas* is to manage the sense organs.

Why do we have sense organs? We have sense organs because the *prana* has activated the five elements, has activated all of the matter that is turning us into individuals. And it has created sense organs because *jivo jivasya jivanam*—*life lives off other life*. For us to stay alive we have always to be stealing *prana* from other living creatures. We have sense organs that we may steal *prana* effectively and not have our own *prana* stolen. The only job of the



Narasimha Lakshmi ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

sense organs, or rather the only job that the sense organs should have, is to identify where food is and to identify dangers that might turn us into food. These two basic, natural, physiological tasks form the basis for what is often called in yoga *raga* and *dvesha*. These are *kleshas*, things that create misery in us. Why? Because *raga*, meaning *passion*, arises in you when you identify something desirable that you want to move in the direction of. Originally it was food, and occasionally, in season, a mate, but now it's also a new house or a new car or a new mate or whatever. Passion moves us in the direction of what we crave. Similarly, what started off as, "Let me avoid all of the predators in the neighborhood" has become generalized *dvesha*, *aversion*—multiple things we're trying to avoid, including those people who have different languages, different religions, different skin colors; those horrible "other" people over there. They must be very dangerous; they're surely conspiring against us, they're trying to destroy us. Therefore we must avoid them and, if possible, let us kill them. We won't have to avoid them then since they will be dead.

It is not the job description of the mind to have thoughts like that. The job of the mind is instead simply to be able to take in the information from the sense organs which, remember, are giving us only a teeny, tiny, itty-bitsy fragment of the amount of possible knowledge, to try to take that in and arrange that data in a meaningful way in order to come out with a representation of reality that it can send to the vijñanamaya kosha, to mahat or buddhi, so that via viveka we can answer the question, "What do I do?"

If viveka, buddhi, is working properly it will say, You should do this, or that. You should stand up or you should sit down. You should move ahead, or possibly backwards. You should wait for more information, whatever it may be. Armed with this information it is then the job of the mind to get the organs of action to act accordingly. That's what the mind should do.

We of course get into trouble when our minds start to try to do more things than they are engineered to do. A troublesome mind will corrupt the influence of the vijñanamaya kosha—of buddhi and viveka. It will take intelligent advice and corrupt it because its drishti, its darshana, its perspective, will not allow it to pay attention to reality. The job of sattva is to try to give us the best possible perspective on reality. There's one big problem with that. When you take in information with your sense organs, your sense organs are mostly sattva, but the thing that you are taking the information from has become your sense object and objects by definition are made out of tamas. Therefore whenever your organ of sight goes out to look at a thing, it is treating it as a thing made of tamas. It is projecting tamas onto it by saying it's an object, and by taking in that reflection, it is creating more tamas on the inside. Why? Because you are taking in a snapshot of what that object is at that moment. You're taking in, moreover, a snapshot of only a teeny, itty-bitsy, tiny amount of what that object is, sufficient for you to be able to get some perspective on it that may be useful to you. But, of course, that perspective tends to be colored by your own worldview. You will think about whether it's aesthetic or not, how useful it might be, is somebody going to try to steal it. You'll have a bunch of different thoughts about it, even though those thoughts may not be assisting you to make use of it in the best way.

AS IF THAT WERE INSUFFICIENT TO give us difficulties in perceiving reality, much less trying to live with it, there's another reality that you have to consider and that is that we as human beings are taking in approximately 11 million bits of information per second and our ability to manipulate data is only about 50 bits per second. So 11 million down to 50. 11 million is seven orders of magnitude; 50 is almost two orders of magnitude. We're reducing 11 million to 50; we're reducing it

by about 220,000 times, by more than five orders of magnitude—by a whole lot. We're taking in all of this information through the sense organs and the information is only a tiny sample of what we have available to us to sample and we're then reducing that tiny sample by another 220,000 times to come up with those 50 bits of information that we're then going to plug in to our sense organs to give us an image of what the world is like.

That's why it's so difficult to live with reality. I'm holding a cup in my hand. The very fact that I'm holding on to the cup means that I am of the opinion that the cup is solid and that I can hold on to it. I am getting that impression not according to the actual solidity of the cup because the cup is not solid in the way that we think of it as being solid. We think of its reality as being solid but it is not solid. Why is it not solid? It is not solid because nothing in our world is solid. An atom has approximately the same relative structure as the solar system, which means 99.999999999999 percent of it is empty space. Theoretically it would be very easy for our hands to pass through the cup without the nuclei of the various atoms ever running into one another. Why does that not happen? That does not happen because the forces of the electrons in our fingers and the forces of the electrons in the material that makes up the cup resist each other so much that we interpret it as being solid. We interpret liquids in a different way; gases in a different way. It all has to do with force fields, and only very marginally with actual matter. We're completely confused in so many ways, and we're trying to live with reality.

This is why Vimalananda said that living with real reality is really important. It's not that we can rely on our sense organs to give us what is really real, but we can take in what we can from our sense organs, then get the sense organs to be controlled, to move inward, instead of projecting our attention—remember wherever your attention goes, your prana will go—instead of projecting our prana externally, to bring the prana back

internally so we can focus it, make it coherent, and then try as best we can to use it to sense where reality is.

This doesn't mean in any way that the physical body is not real; it is real. Our perception of it is different from what its reality is, so we can't say that our perception is real, but our perception is all we have so we try to make our perception as accurate as possible.

An important way to do that is to make sure that you eat good food and you don't accumulate a lot of toxins in your organism. That's more difficult to do nowadays because there's so much pollution of all kinds. You have to find a way to adjust for all these things so that you can get the sense organs to give you as clear a perception as possible and you can test that with your intuition to find out whether in fact your perception is accurate or not.

When we talk about living with reality, we're talking about trying as best we can, with very imperfect sense organs that are compressing the data they bring in dramatically, to end up with images of what reality is. We're basing everything we do on certain images of reality. One aspect of living with reality is to make sure that we remember that, in fact, we are creating images of reality: What we're perceiving with our senses is not real. There is a reality out there but we need to perceive it in a much more subtle way in order to be able to actually get more knowledge about it.

One of Vimalananda's favorite sayings was, "It's always better to live with reality because, if you don't, you can be sure that reality will come and live with you." He would say this often, casting the same sentiment in differing forms according to the point he was trying to make. Sometimes he would talk about it in context of the planet Saturn because, as both he and my *jyotisha* mentor Mantriji always said, the only important *graha*, the only important planet in astrology, is Saturn, because Saturn represents every limitation in your reality. One really important aspect of living with reality is to understand your limitations, to understand what you can and can-

not do, to understand the limitations of your personal dharma, what you are obligated to do during this lifetime, the reason why you were born into this life. You must understand that you have certain duties to perform, and you must also understand that those duties are probably going to interfere to some degree with your quest for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

THAT MOTTO SHOULD BE "LIFE, liberty and the pursuit of duty". The great heroes of great cultures like India have always focused on duty, not personal gratification. Vimalananda also liked to say, "Life is Duty, not Beauty". A successful life is not, "Let's enjoy as much as we possibly can and pamper the sense organs". It's rather, "Let's discover our duty and then move ahead on the path that it blazes for us". One fundamental requirement of trying to find out how to best live with reality is to try to understand your own personal dharma, to understand what you were put here to do. Once you know what you need to do, you will gain an idea of what you will need to accomplish that goal, and on that basis you will be able to procure the appropriate tools for the job. Those tools are called, in the collective, *artha*. *Artha* can mean money; *artha* can mean any kind of object. Once you know what you need to do, you'll need certain objects to do it with.

Dharma, artha, kama. Only once you are performing your duty and you have procured what you need to perform that duty can you start to think about what you would really like to do in life. Rather than plan what you'd like to do first, you plan instead to first do what you're responsible for getting done and only thereafter think about what you would like to do. Finally, after doing your duty and addressing your deeply-held desires, you move in the direction of *moksha*, which means you realize that, in fact, achieving your "heart's" desires really didn't satisfy you that much, the objects you accumulated were really not

that fascinating, and even performing your duty was really trivial, ultimately; all these things may have been significant for you, but not for the Supreme Reality. *Moham kshayati iti mokshah*, taught Vimalananda: *moksha* is the destruction of the delusion that anything can be more important than awareness of the Supreme Reality. Therefore we hope that by the time you get to the age when you are going to depart from this life you will have relinquished all of these secondary things that you have been busy with, because it is at the end of your life that you will confront the real reality of life, which is the reality of death.

FOR VIMALANANDA, ONE GIANT ASPECT of living with reality was to always remember that you're going to die. He taught that everyone should prepare for death because death can come at any moment. This is fundamental to living with reality, something that every human needs to be aware of. Everybody needs to appreciate the fact that no matter how well they are or how many life extension practices they are performing or how many supplements they're taking, the reality is that at some point none of these things are going to work anymore, and that will be the end of them.

This is the basis of all of the Indian vidyas. For example, in ayurveda, we have four prognoses. A prognosis is a projection as to how things are going to go with the patient and the disease. The first is *sukha sadhya*. *Sukha* means easy; *sadya* in this context means curable. *Sukha sadhya* is the prognosis for mild, acute conditions that are easy to conquer. In such an illness not much has to be done to return the person to a state of wellness. Moreover, if the disease is easy to cure then it is important not to treat it boldly, lest the treatment itself perturb the individual more than the disease did. You should apply simple measures only when the prognosis is *sukha sadhya*. The common cold is *sukha sadhya* because it does not kill its victims. If you treat a cold it will last for a week, and with-

out treatment it probably will last for seven days. Colds come and go and they just aren't a big deal.

The next prognosis is *kricchra sadhya*. *Kricchra* means *with difficulty*. You can treat such a disease, you can cure it, but you will only be able to do so with difficulty, meaning serious dietary limitations, strong purifications, powerful medicines, and repeated interventions, including possibly surgery and other radical treatments. It may take quite a while to cure a disease that is *kricchra sadhya*, which implies an extended period of restricting yourself. This applies to epidemics as well, of course, during which personal limitations may have to continue for months, as is proving to be the case with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Happily, for most people Covid-19 is *sukha sadhya*. Many people who have the virus don't even notice that they have it, which is good for the virus because then it spreads in all directions without attracting attention, which is what the virus wants. The virus is not really interested in making people sick. Why should it do that? A virus just wants to travel from host to host, continuously replicating itself. That's its agenda. Causing disease is an unintended side-effect of this agenda. Unfortunately, Covid-19 is for some people *kricchra sadhya*. Such people can survive the disease, but only with intensive intervention, maybe in intensive care on a respirator.

The third type of disease is *yapya*. *Yapya* describes a disease that you can't cure but you can manage. As long as you take treatment, you'll be okay; when you stop taking treatment, then you die. Insulin-dependent diabetes is a good example of a disease that is *yapya*. Without insulin you'll definitely die, but with insulin, there's a good likelihood that you will live. You will have to take insulin for your entire life, and serious complications may ensue anyway. But at least you'll survive.

The fourth type of prognosis is *asadhya*, which means *incurable*, and often unmanageable. *Asadhya* is the worst kind of disease. It will cause you to pro-

gressively deteriorate, then die. That's also a reality. For a small percentage of people Covid-19 is *asadhya*, usually in people who are aged and who have pre-existing medical conditions. Sometimes death comes suddenly with Covid-19; sometimes it is after prolonged suffering. Rarely is it easy. Though everybody is going to die, it is always preferable to die calmly.

THOUGH THESE CATEGORIES OF prognosis refer to disease, we can also extend them to other aspects of reality. We have all had the experience that certain situations in which we find ourselves are easy to deal with—*sukha sadhya*. We have a method to deal with them, we know how to employ the method, the method is neither very expensive in time or money or effort nor is it very detrimental to us or anyone else, and we are able to implement the method. All these criteria should be met to judge a situation as being *sukha sadhya*.

Other situations are *kricchra sadhya*. In such instances I cannot just sit back and watch everything set itself right. Instead I must make purposeful, meaningful, consistent effort. I have to have a plan and be ready to change the plan whenever conditions change, and will likely need advice and assistance in order to implement the plan successfully. But if I do all this and persist then I will solve the problem and will be able to stop having to worry about it.

Some areas in life though are going to be either *yapya* or *asadhya*. Some things are *asadhya* from the beginning, others can progress from being *yapya* to *asadhya*. If I am lucky I will only have to deal with these facets of living every day to prevent them from becoming seriously disturbed; that's *yapya*. If I neglect them, they can become *asadhya*. For example, I personally have not such good teeth, partly because I ate way too many sweets when I was young but apparently also because I had measles when my permanent teeth were coming in. According to my doctor at that time, measles damaged my tooth buds.

So my teeth are not good, and since I don't want them to get any worse, I have to make sure that I floss two to three times a day, brush at least twice a day, apply various substances to my gums, and get my teeth cleaned every three or four months. I have to be very proactive if I want to retain my remaining teeth. If I slack off, then I will have to have more implants and crowns done which will be expensive and painful. This reality is my personal reality. Do I want to live in this reality? I do not. But whether I want to or not, here I am, in this reality, and if I want to continue to enjoy having at least some teeth remain in my head, then I have no alternative but to address this reality meaningfully.

A BIG ASPECT OF LIVING WITH REALITY IS to be able to discern—to employ the *vijnanamaya kosha*—to be able to identify in which aspects of life you don't have to put too much effort, in which aspects you have to put extra effort, in which aspects you have to put effort on an ongoing basis, and how much effort. You will have to plan: "When do I have to do it? Let me organize it so I don't have to think about it all the time. Let me figure out the right effort and the right times to apply that effort and then I'll be able to do it and not have to think about it too much."

There will be certain areas in life where no amount of effort will do any good and you have to acknowledge that. That's also part of your reality. Not just your death, but the death of loved ones, or the death of your ability to do something that you've always been able to do, whatever that might be. There will always be things that will trip you up, obstruct you, things that you can't blame on anybody else, that you can't wriggle out from under.

This, of course, is where Saturn comes in, because Saturn forces you to experience everything that you wanted very much to escape from but could not avoid. Saturn insists on rubbing your nose in those realities, on forcing you to move ahead even when you know that moving ahead will be painful. Reality is a very real

thing. I have found that when you try to avoid living with reality, or you sort of dance around it, hoping that you'll be able to avoid it, very often reality will come to live with you at the LCM—the least convenient moment. Then you have to figure out what to do under less than optimal conditions. If you wait to figure out what to do until it's the least convenient moment, until it's a crisis, then it's going to be much more difficult, which is why Patanjali went out of his way to say, *Heyam duhkham anagatam: Evade that duhkha that has not yet arrived.* In the word *duhkha*, *kha* means *space* and *duh* means *unpleasant, disordered*. *Duh* in Sanskrit and *dis* in English mean the same thing. In English we have disorder, dissatisfy, disturb, disgruntle, disappoint, all words whose Sanskrit equivalents begin with *duh*. So *duhkha* means *bad space*; it means space that is not harmonious, not equanimous or equable. That space could be in the room here or inside us, inside a blood vessel, or the respiratory tract, anywhere.

There will always be bad space, which is why Buddha said, *Sarvam duhkham duhkham sarvam*. He didn't mean that there is always misery because often *duhkha* is translated as misery. What he meant is that things are always unsatisfactory. Why are they unsatisfactory? Because we were hoping they would be one way and instead they ended up being another way. But this is what living with reality is all about. We keep hoping that things are going to be as we project they ought to be according to our perception—our *drishti*, our *darshana*—but instead we keep being reminded by our karma that things are, in fact, not the way we want them to be but rather the way that they actually are.

ACCORDING TO VIMALANANDA, ONE of the biggest aspects of living with reality is to remember that in Kali Yuga the thing that is most real for the average person is the name of God, whatever that name may be. If you are Jewish, maybe that will be Hashem; if you are Muslim, maybe

it will be Allah; if you are Christian, maybe it will be the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Mother of God.

If you follow the *sanatana dharma*—and I don't mean the political sanatana dharma but the real sanatana dharma, the dharma that is truly *eternal, sanatana*—then you have many gods and goddesses to choose from. The term *trayastrimsati koti* is mentioned in the Vedic literature, which can be interpreted either to mean “330 million” or “33 supreme”, depending on whether you translate the word *koti* as meaning *supreme* or *ten million*. To say that 33 supreme deities exist in India is probably accurate, though Vimalananda used to say that there were 330 million devatas in India when the country's population was 330 million because every individual is (deep inside) a devata. By this calculation India now hosts more than 1.35 billion devatas, and counting.

But even 33 supreme deities is a lot, because any one individual can sincerely worship only one. “Sincere worship” means to worship with full faith, and faith involves prana. When you have faith in something your prana is directly connected to that thing. And so if we're looking for something to keep us properly aligned with reality, we should consider directly connecting to that Supreme Reality via a mantra, via a name of God, any name that is meaningful to you as a name of God, any name that takes you to that place where you can feel yourself to be in the presence of the Supreme. Any name that can do that will assist you to maintain an appropriate alignment with reality.

TODAY IS SATURDAY. SATURDAY IS the day of Hanuman. Jaya Hanuman! It was only about 18-ish days ago that we had Hanuman Jayanti. So Hanumanji is now still a small baby monkey but is developing very quickly. One very simple song that I've learned is:

Jai Hanuman — Victory to Hanuman
Ati Balavan — Extraordinarily Powerful

Rama Nama Rasiyare — He gets his juice from the name of Rama.

Prabhu Mana Basiyare — Please O Lord come and sit in my mind. Jaya Hanuman!

And if that's too complicated for you try this one: Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram, which you can sing to so many tunes.

But wait, maybe even that's too complicated. One helpful attitude in the sanatana dharma is that you should do what you are able to do, however simple or complicated that may be. If you are capable of it, then recite the entire Veda. If you can't do that, then recite one *shakha*—one *portion*—of the Veda. If you can't do even that, then recite one *shloka*, one *verse*. And if you can't do even that, then you recite just one word: Rama.

*Sri Rama Rama Rameti,
Rame Rame Manorame;
Sahasranama tattulyam,
Rama Nama Varanane*

The *Vishnu Sahasranama* is a hymn that contains one thousand names of Vishnu. It takes about forty-five minutes to recite. This verse informs us that if reciting the entire hymn is too much for you—if the Sanskrit is overwhelming, or you just don't have the time—then repeat the single name of Rama, for it is equivalent to the entire thousand names of Vishnu. To recite *Rama* a thousand times, which you can do more easily and more quickly than reciting the entire *Sahasranama*, will give you the equivalent effect. Moreover, you can recite Rama in any rhythm and to any tune, and if you recite *Rama* and you remember Hanuman, then Hanuman remembers you, because Hanuman is always listening for the name of Rama. Rama Rama Rama You can use any kind of rhythm, any kind of melody. That's the beauty of Rama.

Jaya Hanuman! Thank you very much. Om Namah Sivaya! 🙏

Robert Svoboda offers a wealth of knowledge relating to Indian sacred lore at www.drsvoboda.com

STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

EDDIE STERN Talk given at the Nāmarūpa Living with Reality
virtual retreat in the Spring of 2020, transcribed and edited.

*Gannaanaam Tvaa Ganna-Patim
Havaamahe
Kavim Kaviinaam-Upama
Shravastamam |
Jyesstha-Raajam Brahmannaam
Brahmannaspata
Aa Nah Shrnnvan-Uutibhih
Sida Saadanam*

Maha Ganapataye Namah

*Prano Devi Saraswathi Vajebhir
Vajinivathi Dhi Nam Avitriyavathu
Vag Devyai Namah*

*Om Akhanda Manadalakaram
Vyaptam yena Charaacharam
Tadpadam Darshitam Yena
Tasmai Sri Guruve Namah*

OM Shantih Shantih Shantih

GOOD AFTERNOON FROM NEW YORK City and hello from the hallway of our apartment building where I teach most of our yoga classes from right now. I thought I would follow up a little bit on Dr. Robert's presentation—he is an extremely hard act to follow. I will talk a little bit about the three changing states of consciousness from the perspective of the Mandukya Upanishad.

The whole topic of *vedanta* is something that Robert Moses knows a tremendous amount about and so does Robert Svoboda. Whatever parts I get wrong or things I miss, they can fill in later in their talks and in the question and answer period.

One thing that I thought I would mention also since the title that we put down for the talks—I hadn't actually given a talk topic to Robert even though he asked me for one—was about the nervous system East and West. We've covered that a lot in the past already so I thought I'd just move on to this other topic because it was relevant to following up Dr. Robert's talk.

Right now with the coronavirus, in regards to the nervous system both East and West, there are some things that occur that are sort of blanket statements. Part of the way we have evolved over many millions of years is to perceive threat for the sake of survival. Even as single-celled organisms, we would move away from danger and move towards safety and nourishment. We would move away instinctively, or according to the programming of the cell, away from things that would cut short our survival and always move towards the things which would encourage our survival, which is perhaps one of the reasons we developed into multicellular beings. In every single cell in our body—we have 37.2 trillion cells—we have this instinct to survive. The survival instinct is built into every cell of our body which means that we instinctively will move away from danger and move toward safety. That has developed in our nervous system as our threat perception so that we are able to perceive when something is going to threaten our survival.

When our threat perception begins to become heightened, we will then have other emotional responses to it. For example, the sensation of perception of threat will lead the fight-or-flight aspect of our sympathetic nervous system to kick in. That will happen very quickly and very automatically at a preconscious level. When that happens, we process an emotional reaction along with it, which is fear, that we then begin to process and think about on a conscious level. Then, physiologically, it will manifest in our body in different ways. Our palms will get sweaty; our body temperature will heat up. The heart rate will increase; our blood pressure might go up. The blood will begin to move away from the visceral organs of the thoracic cavity and move towards the arms and legs to get us ready to flee. If that continues for a longer pe-



riod of time, that fear, when it doesn't subside, can turn into panic when we really feel on this conscious level that my safety, my life, is being threatened. Then that panic will lead to irrational behavior. The irrational behavior then will serve as a feedback loop not only for continuing to keep us in a state of panic and stress and fear, but also to be contagious to the people around us as well. So, as we could see with all of this coronavirus, in America, when the stress was initiated, it very quickly turned into fear and then the fear was stoked through the media and by messaging and that fear led to the irrational panic-buying of toilet paper, stocking up on supplies, hoarding masks, causing a shortage in hospitals and all other types of things like that.

We can trace all this behavior back to dysregulation of the nervous system. A lot of what we want to do within yoga, within pranayama, within meditation, is begin to regulate our nervous system in such a way that we respond in an appropriate manner to external events, to be able to perceive them for what they are, to read the danger level appropriately, and that means to be discriminating about where we find our information and who we listen to and what news sources we're grabbing information from. All these types of things were covered amazingly by Dr. Robert in the previous talk in terms of what kind of a bandwidth we have that allows information into the mind that we then respond or react to.

I'd like to continue along in that vein, moving to a little more of a discussion about how all these things are happening on a conscious or waking

level and then also how they're happening on a dreaming level, when we're not awake, but we're asleep and dreaming. Then onto what happens to them when we move to a deep sleep level, what that state is like.

THE TOPIC NOW IS GOING TO BE the three states of consciousness. The word state is not a super fantastic or accurate or descriptive word to use but it's a word that is used a lot, so I'll continue to use it too. It would be better to say the changing states and not to think that there are three separate things that exist independently, but rather that they are permutations of each other. We're going to go through these three states and we're also going to cover the three sub-states which are less talked about. Let's begin here with the Mandukya Upanishad which is the first upanishad that really elaborated on these three changing states. It is in the mid-range of the upanishadic period. The very early ancient Upanishads are Taittiriya, Katha and Chandogya Upanishad and the Mandukya comes in a little bit of a later period, before the Common Era, probably somewhere in the area of 400 to 200 years before the Common Era.

In this Upanishad, we see the first real detailed explanation of the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states or changing states and the concept of *turiya* which is not a state but is the underlying substratum of all that moves and all that changes. Within itself, it could be another word for Supreme Reality or the reflective being of the Supreme Reality that Dr. Robert was talking about earlier.

THE UPANISHAD BEGINS:

OM! THIS IMPERISHABLE WORD IS the whole of this visible universe. Its explanation is as follows: What has become, what is becoming, what will become—verily, all this is OM. And what is beyond these three states of the world—that too, verily, is OM. (1:1)

Here, the word OM is used as the

visible manifestation of the Supreme Reality. The Supreme Reality, otherwise known as Brahman or Consciousness, is beyond name, beyond form, beyond perception. It has no time, space, or location. Therefore, it can't be spoken of or even imagined or verbalized. Therefore if we're going to talk about it, we need something to use that we can talk about so we can come to an approximate estimation or an approximate way of conversing, conveying, thinking, elaborating on it. So, here in this Upanishad, that is given as the word OM. OM is *pratyaksha*. It is the visible manifestation of all that is. As well, it's a sound form. It's a visible manifestation as a vibration, as a sound vibration.

In the *Yoga Sutra* when Patanjali speaks about *purusha*, he defines *purusha* as a special type of being that is untouched by all the types of ways that we suffer called *kleshas* and is untouched by karma, or action—which we are completely bound with—and therefore completely untouched by the effects of karma, which is what our entire life is. That particular special type of *purusha* is signified, as well, by the sound of OM. We'll see in different places, in different types of texts, that OM is equated with either a Supreme Being, Supreme Reality, Supreme Consciousness, or something like that.

The second verse says

ALL THIS, VERILY, IS BRAHMAN. THE Self is Brahman. This Self has four quarters. (1:2)

Brahman is the not visible part of all that is. There's a visible part, signified by OM. Then, there's an invisible part that was woven into all of it. That is Brahman and our inner self is nondifferent from this Brahman. Even though this Brahman is everything that there is, it can also be divided up into four parts or four quarters. The reason that it's divided up into four quarters is for the sake of investigation, so we can have a conversation about these types of things.

One of the oldest conversations,

since the time when human beings began to question themselves and the universe is: Who am I? What am I doing here? What do I do next? What is my purpose? What is the meaning of all of this? What is the meaning of the universe? Where is the universe? All of these types of questions have been going on for a long time.

In the Upanishads, the way that these topics are broached is to say well, we can't exactly describe what all this is, but we're going to do our best to do that. In order to do so, we're going to have to use language and language is limited. But one of the things limited language can contain within it is the idea or the feeling of something expansive. So, again going back to *Yoga Sutra*, when Patanjali speaks about the five different states of mind and that some of those states are helpful and some are not helpful, the third one he mentions is imagination, *vikalpa*. He says that *vikalpa* is imagining something which maybe doesn't exist in a literal sense, but you use words in order to describe it. One of the examples given in the commentaries is that *vikalpa* or imagination can be very helpful in particular ways and one of those ways is to describe things that can't be described. For example, Brahman or the Absolute or Reality can't be described but yet we can use analogies and metaphors to try to do so in order to come to a greater sense of understanding. So that's what happens in a lot of these Upanishads.

One of the things that also occurs and that we find happening in *sankhya* and all of the tattvas and the five elements and the tanmatras is how awareness and identity and intelligence and the creation of the elements begin to overlap within themselves to create patterns. So earth, water, fire, air, and space don't just spontaneously come and exist in and of themselves. They're actually all made up of each other. Space, for example, is said to be intricately born from prana, or from mind as well in different sources. Air is made partly of space and also has a little bit of all the other elements within it

as well. Then fire is primarily made of fire but has a quarter of each of the other elements and so on and so forth. So when you look at each of the elements, they're primarily one of them—earth, water, fire, air, or ether—but that's only about half of their substance. The other half is going to be made up equally of all the other elements. So all of the other elements overlap with each other to create patterns that will then take form. We are also made up of an innumerable number of patterns that have been overlapping and expressing themselves as our identity or our perceived identity, including thinking that we're this body. Within those patterns, we think we're separate from other patterns. From a larger perspective, a yogic perspective, basically what we are is a bundle of overlapping patterns that are expressing themselves as a whole.

Those patterns could be *samskara*, meaning *memory*. They could be karma, the actions that we have performed and that we're reaping the benefits or reactions of now. It can be a bunch of other things as well—the ideas that society holds at the time that we're born, etcetera, etcetera. But basically what we are is a bundle of patterns, a bundle of overlapping karmas, actions and memories that are perceiving themselves to be separate and acting accordingly and thinking that we are separate from the other patterns that we see around us—the other people, the animals, the planet, etc. Part of the journey of unity consciousness is to begin to experience that we, ourselves, the world around us, and all the people in it are an extended pattern or integrated into the pattern of the whole which everyone is part of. Anything that you can see, anything which is manifest, has interacted with elements to perform this assumed separate shape or object, but we are an extension of those objects as well. We are all part of this oneness of patterning at the same time. That's the basic idea here, especially within the waking state.

THE FIRST QUARTER IS VAISVANARA, its field is the waking state. Its consciousness is outward-turned, and is seven-limbed and nineteen-mouthed. It enjoys gross objects. (1:3)

In our waking state, which we are all basically in now, we are enjoying the outward world of gross objects, meaning they have substance and form. We're perceiving this through the seven limbs and the nineteen mouths. We'll go on to see what all of those things are.

According to the Upanishad, the whole becomes differentiated somehow. There's some movement within it which causes the whole to become differentiated. One of the ways this is described is that the Consciousness is infinite and being infinite it has an infinite number of ways to become aware or to become self-conscious. One of the ways that it becomes aware is through using the mirror of the mind in human beings like us. At a more substratum level, one of the ways that Consciousness becomes aware is as a ripple of awareness which causes movement so that *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* begin to move out from equilibrium and start to pattern with each other. Whether or not that's a satisfactory explanation is another conversation. One of the traditional ways that this movement or creation has been spoken of is that there are an infinite number of ways that creation can occur; there are an infinite number of universes. One of the ways Consciousness can move into awareness is through this ripple. One of the things that becomes differentiated within this ripple is mind. From the whole comes the mind. From within mind is prana which the mind uses in order to begin to make use of the elements for the sake of self knowing.

In this particular Upanishad, they're saying that from the whole came this differentiation, which was called cosmic mind. And cosmic mind had inherent within it prana, which is the vitality that then makes use of space and then air, then fire, then water, then earth, to begin to create the manifest world for the sake of self knowing.

Remember that all this is primarily happening for our experience and on a waking level. These are the seven limbs: mind, prana, earth, water, fire, air, and space. They're not all separate vis a vis each other. Nothing is an independent entity here. Everything is a pattern of each other. The idea of separation, of independence, of distinctive form, is only apparent. Actually it's all the same stuff.

NOW, ONTO THE NINETEEN CHANNELS. The individual cognizes through the four functions of mind. Mind operates through the five pranas. The five pranas activate the sense organs and the sense organs compel the organs of action to act. This is our waking state. There is an individual sense of being and it's using the four functions of mind to perceive the world and act within it. The mind is operating through the five pranas and the five pranas are using the sense organs and the sense organs impel the organs of action, our limbs, to do something.

What is the individual here? The individual is *ahamkara*. Consciousness is using *ahamkara* to do all of these things as well. Another way you could say it is that Consciousness uses the mind and the mind uses the brain and the brain uses the body to perceive the world.

Let's look at all these things. Number one, we have the four functions of mind. This is from a vedantic perspective; yoga uses these things differently. There is *manas* which is where we sense, we measure, we process information. You could use Dr. Daniel Siegel's prescription of S.I.F.T., which is Sensation, Information, Feelings, and Thoughts. All of that is occurring in the field of the mind. The mind just measures stuff and processes incoming information. The *buddhi*, or the intellect, is discriminating and decides what to do with the incoming information. The *chitta* is the storehouse of all of the impressions from the information coming in. When information comes in through the sense organs, *chitta* stores it as *samskara*, as memo-



Puri Sri Jagannatha -Gajendra moksha Besha ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

ry, constituting ahamkara, the I-sense. The ahamkara is literally the owner of the I.

For example, if I say I am Eddie, I am a teacher. I like eating spicy food. I like going to India. I like doing yoga. I like my friend Robert Moses. If I say any of these things the last part of the sentence—Eddie, yoga, spicy food, India, Robert Moses. All of these are basically add-ons; they're changeable. The 'am' part of that sentence is a verb; it's active. It's always going to be corresponding with something that is going to be changing. But the I doesn't change; the I is not an add-on; the I is always consistent. It's always a sense of being. The owner of the I-sense, before any add-ons or change is attached to it, is occurring with the sense of ahamkara. It's not a negative thing. It's just a sense of being, the sense of existing. So these are the four functions of mind—*manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta*, *ahamkara*—according to this Upanishad. Again, in yoga it's a little bit different.

Then we have the five *pranas*. The five *pranas* are part of these nineteen channels. *Prana*, which is going to be our inhale, is bringing in nourishment; *apana* which is associated with the exhale is removing the waste of the breath that we don't need—CO₂—as well as elimination of feces and urine, childbirth; *vyana* is, when we take in nourishment, we need to distribute it through the whole body—*vyana vayu* does that; *samana vayu* is the assimilation of nourishment that has been brought in; and *udana* is the expression of all these things together, how we live in the world.

So we have the four functions of mind that allow us to perceive the world, what we think of as reality, but it's not really, it's just a sliver of it. And then the five *pranas* are the things that allow us to balance all of that incoming information so we can form either a positive or a negative relationship with it. That's going to be determined by the type of nourishment you bring in, how much waste we're getting rid of, if we're distributing things through our body well, if we're assimilating incoming nourishment, if we're assimila-

ting experiences, and if we're able to express ourselves clearly. All of these *pranas*—it's not just breathing, but it's the whole way that we have balance and harmony within our organism that allows us to have balance and harmony with the world that we think to be outside of us.

These are largely the operations of the nervous system because the nervous system is coordinating the activities of our entire cellular body of 37.2 trillion cells and coordinating that activity with our external environment. It's organizing and coordinating the internal activity and organizing the communication with the outer environment. If any of the *pranas* gets thrown off—if we're eating food, but it's not nourishing or we're eating it and we can't digest it, then *prana* gets thrown off. If we are constipated and we're not getting rid of waste, then *apana* gets thrown off and that throws off the rest of the body. If we're eating good food but we can't assimilate it, then we're not getting nourishment and that begins to throw us off. These things all happen with things like food, but the same thing can happen with breath. It can happen with relationships that we find ourselves in, relationships that are not nourishing for us. But yet we stay in them and that throws off things on an emotional level for us. We might have work relationships which are angry or abusive or filled with conflict and there's so much of it that we can't assimilate and can't begin to rise above or manage the situations we find ourselves in.

The inability to assimilate because there's too much stuff coming at us is going to throw off our *pranas* and our relationship with the rest of the world as well. Stress will occur at the level of these five *pranas* in the nervous system from a Western point of view and it will also be fixed within this level too. Things like eating good food, getting enough sleep, doing a little bit of yoga, or meditation, or exercise, and having positive relationships, these basic things are going to help to balance all of our *pranas* and the opposite of them is going to im-

balance the *pranas*—eating really bad food, eating food which isn't good for us, not sleeping enough, never exercising, hanging out with people who really aren't good for us, and putting ourselves into stress overload situations all the time, that will throw off all of our *pranas*. So the habits that we see within the yoga practices, all of the habits that are encouraged in most of the yoga texts, are basically addressing these five *pranas* which are, in fact, operations of our nervous system.

Next we have the five organs of knowledge: the eyes, the nose, the tongue, the skin, and the ears. We're going to see, smell, taste, touch, and hear through them. They're bringing in information. And again, this information is very limited bandwidth and therefore, very unreliable, generally speaking. However, since it is the bandwidth which is very specific to our human experience, it will be reliable for some things, but not for all things. We have to know how to use the sense organs to begin to support an inward journey which might be more reliable than getting lost in only what we're perceiving through the organs of sense. For example, now we're here on a yoga and philosophy workshop for the entire weekend. We're using our sense organs to take in information about things that are going to encourage us to think about our highest self, our highest purpose, the best ways we can live our lives and relate with others. We're using our sense organs now to pull in information which is going to be helpful for us to transcend the binding relationship many of us have with our sense organs.

Next we have our five organs of action: the mouth, the hands, the feet, the genitals, and the anus. This is how we are interacting with the world and balancing our existence with the world that we live in. We need to take food in through the mouth. We need to let go waste through the anus. We need to create new people through the genitals so they can work out their karma, and we need to walk around on our feet and get stuff done with our hands. These are the organs of action.

The organs of action, the organs of knowledge, the *pranas* and the four types of mind—all of this is relegated to our waking state. Basically our body is a house with ten doors: five entry doors—these are the sense organs—and five exit doors, the organs of action, through which we act in the world.

Now one of the things that we want to do with the sense organs in an inward journey is become aware of what is behind sense organs. This is how we use the organs of sense, which are normally not trustworthy and unreliable, to begin to go inward, for lack of a better word. If you question, “Who is it now who is hearing?” “Who is it that listening right now?” And if you feel that you’re sitting down on a chair or against the wall, or your hand is resting on a pillow, “Who is the one who’s touching?” “Who is one who’s feeling?” And if you’re looking at your computer screen, you can ask yourself, “Who is seeing?” Every time you ask a question about who it is which is hearing or touching or seeing or tasting or smelling, then you become a little bit awake to the perceiver, to that Consciousness which is resting behind all of the changing states, all of the changing forms. It’s not terribly difficult to begin to become awake to the perceiver; all we need are little touch points and the sense organs act as those touch points. Now let’s move on to the second quarter and this is the dream state.

THE SECOND QUARTER IS TAIJASA. ITS field is the dream state. Its consciousness is inward-turned. It is seven-limbed and nineteen-mouthed. It enjoys subtle objects. (1:4)

The dream state is exactly the same as the waking state. There are still seven limbs and nineteen mouths of Consciousness being used, but the Consciousness, rather than being outward-turned, its inward-turned. What is the enjoyment during the dream state? It’s not objects which are gross; it is objects which are subtle. That means that, even though they appear

to have form, they don’t really. In a dream state, we think the things that happen to us are real, whether it’s strong emotions such as love, or fear, or frustration, or anger. We will feel them as real in our dream as we do when we’re awake. Yet when we move from the dream into the waking, we realize the things that we had been experiencing on the subtle plane were not really as real as we thought they were. We take this level that we’re in now, the waking state, to be the most real. But when we wake up to the perceiver, we wake up from this waking state that we’re in now into a state of being where we think all that I thought was real while I was awake is as much of a dream as the dream I had when I was asleep and dreaming.

All of the same things are still happening: the mind, *prana*, the five elements as well as the four actions of the mind, the five *pranas*, and the organs of action and organs of knowledge. These are all occurring and operating in the dream state.

THE THIRD QUARTER IS PRAJNA, where one asleep neither desires anything nor beholds any dream: that is deep sleep. In this field of dreamless sleep, one becomes undivided, an undifferentiated mass of consciousness, consisting of bliss and feeding on bliss.

His mouth is consciousness. (1:5)

The next state is the Deep Sleep State. This is called *prajna* which means *wisdom* or *intuition*. In *Yoga Sutra* this is a *vritti*, or activity of mind, which is absent of any content. In this field of dreamless sleep one becomes undivided. Now, in the waking state, we are divided; we separate things off. In the dreaming state, we also separate things off from ourselves. We feel, if we are attacked in a dream, that we’re really being attacked. If we have success in a dream, we feel that it’s really our success. But in the dreamless sleep, one becomes undivided. “An undifferentiated mass of Consciousness consisting of bliss and feeding on bliss. His mouth is consciousness.” What this means is that in the Deep Sleep State

we come as close as we can come to Pure Consciousness, more than we do in any of these other changing states. In the waking state, we’re quite far away from it except for when we become awake to the perceiver and we meditate on the senses. In the dream state we are still so far, for lack of a better word, from Pure Consciousness except when we can wake up within our dreams. But in the deep sleep with an absence of content, an absence of desire, we don’t see ourselves as separate from anything. We are very close to Pure Consciousness, which is bliss.

The one who experiences these states is the Lord of All, the Omniscient, the Indwelling Controller, the Source of All. This is the beginning and end of all beings. (1:6)

All beings come out from this source; all beings resolve back into this source when it’s time for them to resolve. This is the perceiver, this is pure Consciousness. That level is known as the fourth quarter, neither inward-turned nor outward-turned Consciousness, nor the two together. It’s not an undifferentiated mass of Consciousness because, as a mass of Consciousness, it’s still a thing. It’s neither knowing nor unknowing. Here we see something which is a presentation of philosophy, which is basically saying it’s neither this nor that; it cannot be described. We’re going to use words now to tell you that it cannot be described and here are the things that it cannot be described as. When you meditate on these, automatically the logical discursive mind will begin to quiet or disappear because there’s nothing for it to hold on to.

Invisible, ineffable, intangible, devoid of characteristics, inconceivable, indefinable, its sole essence being the consciousness of its own Self; the coming to rest of all relative existence; utterly quiet; peaceful; blissful: without a second: this is the Atman, the Self; this is to be realized. (1:7)

In *turiya*, Consciousness remains as

its own self alone. In the other states Consciousness begins to form a relationship with deep sleep, with dreaming, and with waking and it takes on the form of those things and identifies with it. Consciousness will self identify with being awake, or dreaming, or being in deep sleep. Therefore it's going to be separate from itself and experience suffering. But when it rests in itself only as its own self, then suffering is gone as well as the illusory nature of change.

"The coming to rest of all relative existence; utterly quiet; peaceful; blissful: without a second: this is the Atman, the Self; this is to be realized."

All of these mantras that we've been going through here are traditionally things that you memorize. Remember that all of this was part of the oral tradition. An oral tradition means there's a speaker and there's a listener. When we're listening, our job is to remember what's being said and then repeat it back. That's how mantra instruction is given. There's repetition back and forth between the guru and the *sisya*. After a while, you automatically internalize the mantras, you repeat them, you meditate on the meaning, and then you start to get your own internal understanding of what it is that you've been meditating on. All of these things aren't supposed to be things that we just read in a book and understand. They are things that were supposed to memorize, meditate on, and then have *pratyaksha*, own direct experience of them.

This identical Atman, or Self, in the realm of sound is the syllable OM, the above described four quarters of the Self being identical with the components of the syllable, and the components of the syllable being identical with the four quarters of the Self. The components of the syllable are A, U, M. (1:8)

This is called *Akara*, *Ukara*, and *Makara*. Now we come back to OM and how OM is a representation of these changing states. When you chant the

sound of OM together, you can't distinguish the *akara*, *ukara*, and *makara*. The sound of OM is a combination of these three sounds basically at the same time. Only when we begin to split OM apart, do we examine all of the components of it. Basically what we're doing now is we're examining the components of something which is actually one thing.

[OM] is something which exists by its own right...that which exists not because it has reference to anything else but because it is something by itself. We do not create OM by a chanting of it, but we only produce a vibration sympathetic with the vibration that is already there by its own right and which is called OM.

OM is a cosmic vibration. It is not a chant made by us, created by us, or initiated by us. Why do we chant OM? To establish a connection between ourselves and that which exists by its own right, and which manifests itself as a sound-vibration in the form of OM. —Swami Krishnananda

When we chant the sound of OM, we are creating a vibration within ourselves which is aligning us with a vibration that already exists as the entire manifest universe and as all of our changing states. When we become perfectly in alignment with this vibration, when we match up our vibration with the vibration of what is, then we are in tune with the universe. That's what the chanting of OM is for.

We have the four quarters, which are *akara*, *ukara*, and *makara*. *Akara* is the waking state, *ukara* is the dream state and *makara* is the deep sleep state and the silence which comes after the chanting of OM is *turiya*. It can't be voiced. It can't be expressed. *Turiya* is a whole other larger topic; we'll not address that for now.

MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI TAUGHT three additional states, which I quite like. The next one, after *turiya*, is *bhagavad chetana* where we see all beings as Consciousness. In *turiya*, they sometimes say, you perceive your

self as pure Consciousness, but in *bhagavad chetana*, you see all beings as divine.

After that comes *turiyatata*, which is Cosmic Consciousness where the perceiver becomes awake in all of the three states, the perceiver is awake in deep sleep, the perceiver is awake in dreaming, the perceiver is awake in the waking state. That is *turiyatata*. Next is *brahman*, which is Unity Consciousness, where we experience only oneness with everything. There is no individual left anymore. The one who thinks he is the individual has disappeared and only being remains. That is *brahman* or Unity Consciousness. You don't really see these states spoken about in other places. I haven't been able to find a source for them. I've asked other people if they know where the source is and they haven't known. It remains an enigma.

Let's quickly go through the four states according to Alan Watts before we finish. According to Alan Watts, the states that we go through are, number one, the world around us. We're shaped by the culture that we're born into, the country we're born into. Whatever happens to be happening at the time we're born, whether we're born in the time of coronavirus, or born in the time of World War II or born in the time of relative peace—which I'm not too sure when that's happened—we will be shaped by that.

Second, we are also shaped by the world that we choose. For example, we all have turning points in our lives where we move from a world that our parents have chosen for us to a world that we decide is the one that we want to inhabit. That will be an external change. For me, it was not going to university or college, depending on what part of the world you live in and how you call it. At that time, in the 1980s, if you didn't go to college, you had no chance of getting a job. I probably still have no chance of getting a job. Thank God I can teach yoga. That was a big concern of my parents but that was the world that they had chosen for me. It didn't speak to me. And the world I chose was the world

of learning yoga and going to India. That was my second state where I chose consciously a world that I wanted to live in.

And then, the world that I chose to live in, I had external ideas about it that over time and even especially now are becoming more shaped not by what I'm superimposing on it or what is being superimposed by the yoga world on me, but on what I want to make of yoga and what it means to me, how it speaks to me and how I want to express that. Now I'm at the stage of my life where the yoga world inside me is becoming mine and not the world that I chose. That was still being dictated by other people's dialogues.

Then the last world Watts spoke about is the world you can change. The world you can change is basically your own perception of reality, your own perception of yourself, the world, your identity, and all these changing states. He has nice lectures on this. You can hear them on YouTube.

To sum up, Alan Watts said, "You are something the whole universe is doing in the same way a wave is something that the whole ocean is doing". I'm particularly fond of that quote. Even though we have these four different states that we are going to cycle through as individuals, the ultimate realization is that the whole universe is doing us, we are not doing any of this. We think we're doing all of this, but we're not. It's actually the universe doing us. In the same way that an ocean wave is not an independent ego-driven being that decides, "I want to be the best wave that there ever was. I'm going to be an unparalleled wave. When I rise high, I'm going to stay up there forever and no one's going to be able to touch me or do anything about it!" No wave says that. A wave is just a response of the entire ocean, swelling and doing what it does.

When we can feel that we are something that the whole universe is doing, then a lot of the stress that we have about our lives begins to diminish.

The same thing can be done within your yoga practice too. When you do an asana, when you remain in an asana, in *sthiram*, in *steadiness*, and in *sukha*, in an expanded space, you let the asana have its effect on you. Don't try to do the asana so well and so perfectly that you're the one doing it, that you're the one imposing your will on the asana, that you're imposing your will on the body. Do the form, breathe, rest there, and see what the form of the asana has to teach you. Then you can feel the yoga is doing you rather than you trying to do yoga. That will give you a completely different experience of practice, unless of course you're already doing that.



TO SUM UP.

BRAHMAN IS THE ultimate reality, beyond space, time, name and form and this is what we have been talking about in this Mandukya Upanishad. Brahman manifests through *maya* as the multi-creation, thus the universe is illusory, constantly changing. Space begins when we have a body—we perceive the space around us to find ourselves in accordance with things when we have a body. Time begins when we start thinking because when we start thinking, we start creating memory and then past and future are set apart from each other. Causation begins when we apply limitations. When we feel we are without limitations, then

we're not bound by cause and effect. We can simply be free and the expression of whatever we do. Otherwise, we're stuck with worrying about outcomes.

The world disappears when there is no thought such as in deep sleep and in transcendental Consciousness. Human beings are divine and their real nature is brahman which is infinite, pure, and eternal. All of the pairs of opposites: good and bad, success and failure, shame, blame, victory and defeat, hot and cold, etc. are the *dwandas*, the pairs of opposites that we exist in, that actually are defining our limitations. What these pairs of opposites are is an incomplete knowing of who we truly are. Right now we are in the field of *avidya*. Avidya

means not a full knowing of who you truly are. We know partially or a little bit who we are but we don't know the whole ball game. That's why *avidya* is often defined as ignorance. We're not ignorant of everything. We're just ignorant of this one essential thing. Avidya will disappear when the pure knowledge of being awakens within us, or when we remove all the things that are covering that pure light. The way to recognize this and to actualize the things in the Upanishad are through the four paths of yoga, which can be *karma-yoga*, *jnana-yoga*, *bhakti-yoga* or *raja-yoga*, also known as *ashtanga-yoga*—not the Ashtanga yoga of Pattabhi Jois, but the all-in-all general *ashtanga-yoga*. We'll conclude with how Dr. Robert began his talk. *Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*. Truth is universal and can't be limited by race, religion, or personal choice; it is expressed in many, many different ways.

OM—listen to the silence at the end of the OM and let your thinking subside with that silence—OM.

OM Shanti Shanti Shantih

Sri Gurubhyo Namah Hari Om Tat Sat ❧

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NARASIMHA ALLSOP

INTERVIEW by SATYA MOSES



SATYA MOSES: COULD YOU TELL US something about your personal artistic history? Were you already an artist before you first traveled to India? How did that initial visit change how you understood and practiced art?

NARA ALLSOP: I HAD DONE A LITTLE studying and enjoyed contemporary art of all kinds. I painted but had many blocks and little confidence. Also, I would say my world was pretty safe and small. India ended that. There was more beauty back then, not the snarling traffic and omnipresent motorcycles snagging up the ancient lanes of Benares and Vrindavan. There was more music, incense and chai, many more images of the Gods smiling down from posters and shop pujas. There was charm. Sadly, things have really changed and I am not sure it's so easy to fall in love with the India of today. A rich visual environment engulfed you, traditional dress was also everywhere.

Anyway, a strange thing happened as soon as I set foot outside of what was then Bombay airport. A lady who was begging approached me and when I looked into her eyes, my consciousness left my body and entered hers. I was then her looking at me and she was me looking at her. Inexplicable. This small experience began to open me to a broader sense of things. After this event, I had the unfortunate experience of being pretty badly assaulted in Goa. The experience devastated me and I went into shock. It took months to recover and, as others who have been through a serious trauma know, you are different afterward. You kind of mourn the loss of innocence. There was, in fact, an extraordinary silver lining. During the long days of recuperation, when I

was too distressed to go anywhere or do anything, I began to have visionary encounters with specifically Hindu Deities. I became transfixed by these cosmic entities. They felt very familiar, alive and accessible through the agency of their form as seen in traditional painting, statuary and, very definitely, poster art. I began to feel art had an important function in introducing people to the sacred.

SM: How do you conceptualize the reality of the deities you depict?

NA: The Deity is there as a guide and a source of blessings. Often, we take a mantra but do not do the work of visualizing the correspondent Deity in the various chakras. This is a shame as it really enhances the practice and develops sensitivity to subtle energy. The Deity is us in transcendental form, a potent body of light radiating compassion, bliss and power. The Deity helps us align with the essence of Deity-mind which is vast, lucid and free. Always imagine the Deity emanates love and light which assists us in the alchemical work of refining our coarse feelings into sublime ones that do us and others much good. It requires an adventurous attitude to work with a Deity; it's a love affair full of ups and downs!

For me, also, the Guru and the Deity are one. For example, if you have the very good fortune to take Neem Karoli Baba as your Guru, then automatically you are brought into relationship with Hanuman as they are so intertwined. Yogi Ramsuratkumar is a Deity to me and all Deities are part and parcel of Him as my Ishta Devata. In short, I conceptualize them as the personification of wisdom and as a reality beyond

the grasp of conceptualization! As the Prajna Paramitra mantra says "Beyond the beyond and even beyond that, ah bliss".

SM: What does *darshan* mean to you?

NA: We are aiming for internal Darshan. The Deity reveals herself as a Being of Light within the heart. The loving response to that opens us to a more and more wondrous Darshan, eventually we lose ourselves in that Presence. External Darshans are good for getting us inspired to do the inner work. We look into the eyes of the empowered object and soften so as to receive grace. Of course it does not have to be a Deity as such. One of the most powerful Darshans I ever had was at the Samadhi shrine of Anandamayi Ma in Kankhal near Haridwar. Her light engulfed me. Life is paradoxical; the next time I visited Her Samadhi, the Pujari was crashing around metal buckets which reverberated stunningly off all the white marble surfaces! I felt little except irritation. That was another kind of Darshan. So anyway Darshans for me are to put yourself into the company of something or someone who is tangibly sacred.

SM: Your style employs visual ideas from all over the Indian subcontinent, from the sculpted gopurams of South India's great temples to Pahari miniatures to Nepalese iconographic painting. How did you arrive at your current style of artistic expression? Tell us about your influences and mentors.

NA: First I want to say that probably I would not be painting at all but for the encouragement of my Guru, the fabulous and challenging Mr. Lee Lozo-



wick. Lee had a total love for and commitment to the sacred art of all cultures but particularly India and Tibet.

This is what happened. One night I had a dream in which a message appeared; it said in bold typeface "Paint Buddhas". Just that, nothing visionary, only a headline. I was a student of Lee and he asked us to write him any unusual dreams, so I did. At that point I had some obedience. Lee wrote back and asked me to learn Tibetan thangka painting. I had Keith Dowman's book *Masters of Enchantment* which was full of Robert Beer's gorgeous paintings of Mahasiddhas and also a lovely poster of Padmapani. I revered his work and had poured over it for many hours. By great good fortune, Robert's phone number was on the back of the poster. Pre-Internet days of course. I called and amazingly got through to him. I told Robert I wanted to learn thangka painting and he said "Forget it!". However, because I was desperate and because he is kind, eventually Robert invited me to visit. His talent was vast, his line meticulous, his painting sublime. He has a four-armed white Chenrezig that blows my mind to this day. I was awkward, shy and only an ok, if that, artist. Robert had to draw me out and encourage me. After about five years, I started to do some good work.

For about seven years I painted Buddhist Deities, but always the mystic connection had been to the Hindu form. Just labels, but still, that was my inner experience. Particularly, after reading *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, Kali loomed large. Then in 1997 on a trip with Lee to visit Yogi Ramsuratkumar in Tiruvannamalai, I was exposed to Vijayanagara-era art in the great Arunachaleswara Shiva temple. The sculpture so impacted me, I found it incomparable and wanted to paint in an equivalent style. I took a long trip visiting scores of famous and almost forgotten temples all over Tamil Nadu. I was absorbed in the iconography and mood. I met sculptors here and there, one of whom passed on a book of iconometry which I learned from. After that trip, my style developed culminating in the painting of

Ucchista Ganapati (see pp. 26-27), which took close to three years to complete. After that I wanted a break and was drawn to simpler North Indian styles.

I long had a love of the wall painting traditions of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. They were no less powerful than the sophisticated visionary art of South India and had an appealing vigor. At this time, on a trip to visit my good friend Siddhartha in Gujarat, I had the opportunity to meet the artist and writer Amit Ambalal who Siddhartha had a family connection to. Amit, as well as being a gifted contemporary artist, had a very extensive knowledge of the art of the Vallabhacharya tradition of Krishna worship. I had his book *Krishna as Shrinathji* which anyone would love! I had been to Nathdwara, where Shrinathji resides, a few times and been very touched by the lively art and pujas. Amit told me that if I kept doing the same work, it was ok but I would be like the baker making the same bread every day. I was inspired by him to do some different work. Still Deities though! Somehow the works of Shyamdas had escaped me and I had no knowledge of his writing on the Pushti Marg. Lee, however, had encouraged his students to study Father James Reddington's translation of Vallabhacharya's commentary on the Love Games of Shri Krishna and the notion of sweetness, *Ras*, sunk in. That is what I decided I needed, in art and life, sweetness. That is the mood you see in so much Pushtimarg, Pahari and Kishangarh painting. So all of that is influencing what I am doing now. Also I want to mention the writings on Indian art of Shri Aurobindo. His expert dismantling of Western notions of art and good taste superimposed on Indian art and thought is helpful, especially now as we hopefully truly challenge prejudicial views. Art history is full of them!

SM: What does yoga mean to you? How do your artistic and yogic practices intersect?

NA: Swami Sivananda used to say that the purpose of yoga is to keep the body strong for meditation. I like the simplicity of this definition! Yoga is a tool to help us relax into a capacity to open up into what is already there, our essential non-dual awareness. However that awareness is super subtle and can't be caught in any kind of framework. That is the downside of the path as the path is an event we encounter within the problem itself, dualistic thinking (the mechanism that has us applying labels to everyone and everything and then reacting to those self-created labels in an endless cycle of thought and emotion).

There is nothing wrong with having a flexible, healthy body and the radiant sense of well-being that a yoga lifestyle can give us, but identification with all of that, or anything really, thoroughly ensures that we miss the point of yoga entirely. Art included! Anyways as all your readers already know, *Yoga* means *Union*. In Union there is no me, only vast open spacious light beyond the comprehension of the thinking mechanism. It's a very tall order to approach and yet simultaneously it is already true of us. What to do?

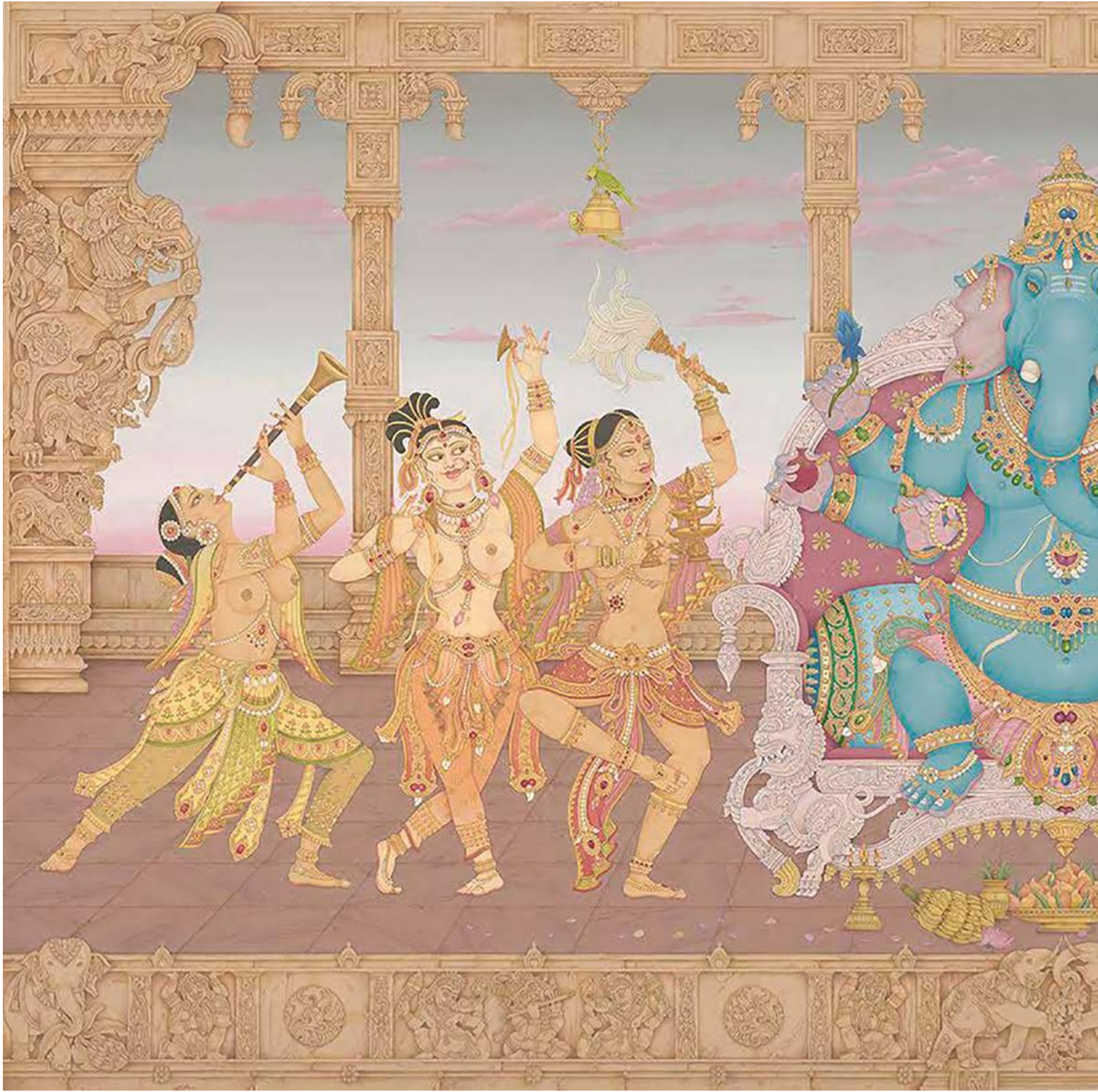
Yoga without Union is, at best, a preparation for Yoga with Union, that is if we are dedicated, relaxed and have at least something of a relationship with humility. The latter is like gold and I can only claim to have a whisper of a relationship to it after thirty years of practice...

Our egos blow it, naturally, and then we have to re-dedicate, re-relax and re-humble. This is how it is for everyone and no one is exempt. Yoga is assiduously cutting a path through the wild and thick jungle of our absurdly disordered minds to arrive at an opening that the sunlight of peace can actually reach. Then we have to stay there rather than dart back into the jungle of thought and desire.

My art is essentially a practice of Bhakti yoga. The aim is to link myself and the viewer to the inspiring and sublime energy of Divine Beings. That requires sensitivity and lots of it! We learn it ourselves through thousands of hours on the meditation cushion or couch!



Hanuman Lifting Mount Dronagiri ©Nara Allsop



Uchista Ganapati ©Nara Allsop.



SM: Is there a place for innovation in traditional art? And is there a place for observance of tradition in contemporary art?

NA: Everything here depends on the artist's level of skill in relation to the tradition they seek to innovate within. Often it can be a flashy superimposition and the tradition remains untouched. Innovation, to my mind, happens when skilled artists, who are already fluid in a traditional form, begin to expand their own unique capacity for expression through the growth of skill and understanding of mood.

I personally am not moved by thangkass with Hello Kitty included or by Hanuman with headphones. Ganesh with a birthday cake? No, not my favorite, but you know live and let live! I do like the work of some of the modern tantric painters, but if I am honest, probably more from an interior design point of view!

Generally we in the West take on the burden of a kind of artist identification system with its need for original expression at all costs. Why?

I mainly feel uncomfortable talking to artists outside of my field as they seem to feel I am enslaved to an outmoded system that stifles expression. Whereas I feel that all that need to rigorously express one's vision is a headache. Quiet innovation can occur in the most subtle ways, like finding a color palette unique to you. A shade of turquoise only you know how to mix for example. Rather than Deities with extra heads wearing baseball caps and contemporary piercings.

Occasionally I have felt the pressure to do some work with a more modern expression but every time I try, the Muse deserts me!

SM: Nowadays many of us have become hyper aware of the idea of "cultural appropriation". Do you feel that this idea has any relevance to you? How can Westerners who feel alienated or disconnected from our own religious and mystic traditions but feel an affinity for, say, Indic traditions, best and most respectfully engage with those traditions

to which we are not tied by direct cultural inheritance?

NA: The question of cultural appropriation is important if we wish to raise our level of awareness. It is a wonderful thing to witness at this time that Black and Brown people are becoming more sophisticated in revealing to white people how their prejudice operates; we are cornered by the truth of that if we listen. The recent phrase "white fragility", for example, helps us to look at our mechanisms of avoidance. As Westerners with a love of Indian culture, we may assume that we are free of common bias—and indeed that may be somewhat true—only to find out that the toxic idea of superiority lurks beneath our yoga facade. See it, feel the remorse and be deepened.

If you come to India and move in an entirely white crowd that assumes that it knows more about devotion and Advaita than your Indian taxi driver, I would suggest that cultural appropriation has occurred. To feel deeply into a culture and learn from it, to drink from the nectar of its wisdom, take a slow approach. It isn't just the saffron clad that we can learn from.

So the idea, which is in fact a reality, is relevant to us all. For myself, I believe that it is possible to actually serve the host culture if you bring clarity and integrity to your work or worship. We all have to start somewhere and awkward collisions are inevitable. Keep refining. If you study and practice an Indian art form or wisdom tradition for years and interact with the culture sincerely, you are honoring that tradition not desecrating it. Traditional forms of Indian art are in desperate need of propagation and protection from disappearing altogether. This is why Indian Masters of traditional dance, singing or yoga are happy, mostly, to take on Western students. You are helping and can become a kind of ambassador for the form. Always credit your sources; if your spiritual wisdom is in fact just a rehash of Nisargadatta Maharaj or, more commonly, Ramana Maharshi, say so! Then you are sharing and people can go to the source having received your blessings!

The Shyam Dases, Krishna Dases and Robert Beers of this world are authentically servants of the Indic wisdom heart-mind, helping profoundly to keep invaluable and esoteric traditions alive. If we want, and indeed if it is fated to be so, we also can serve something that transcends common cultural appropriation.

SM: What makes something sacred? Have you had a personal experience which really drove home for you the reality of divinity?

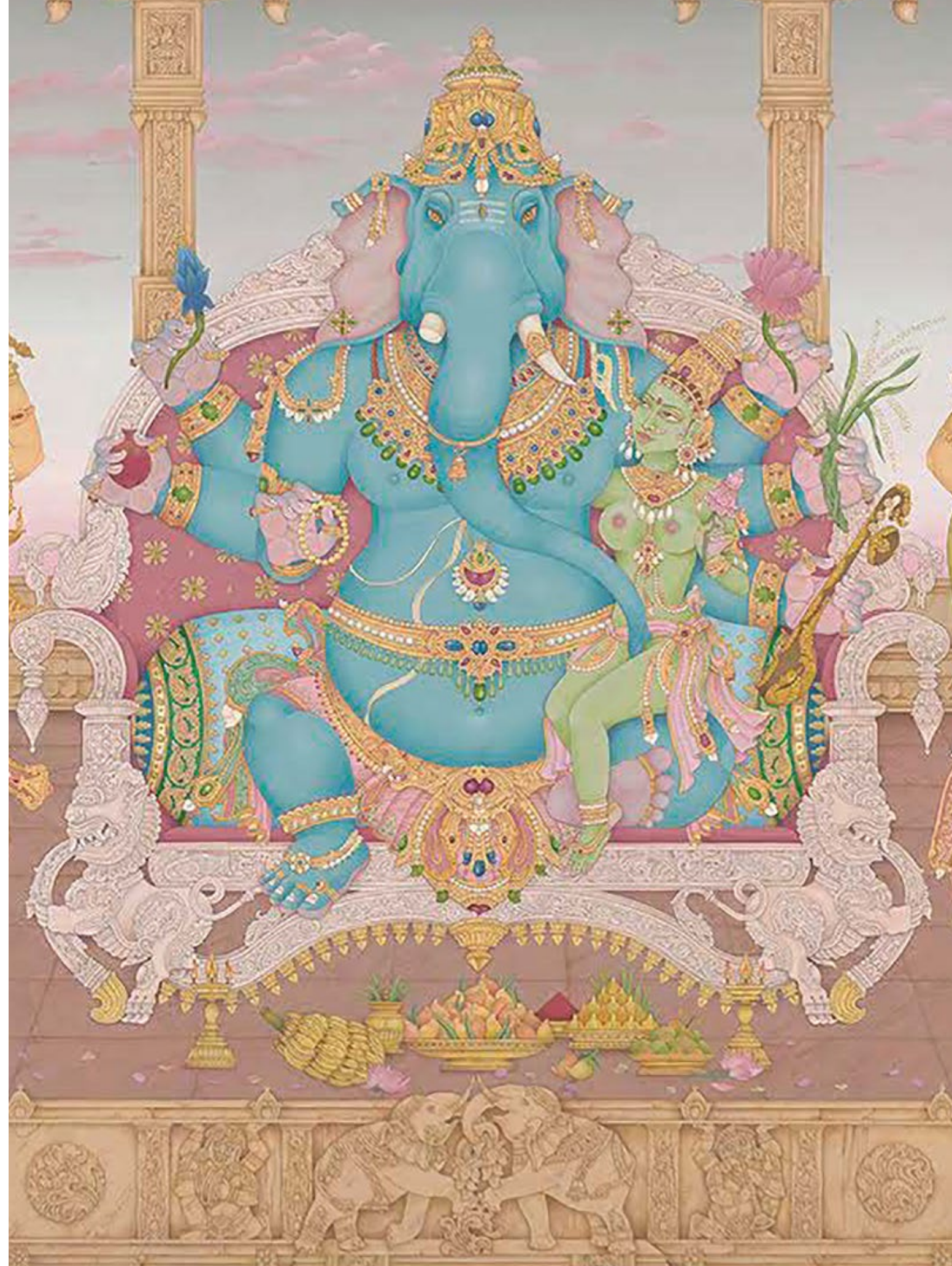
NA: In 1997 my Guru Lee Lozowick took me as part of a group to visit Yogi Ramsuratkumar, the beggar saint of Tiruvannamalai. Sitting in his presence, consciousness exploded and I witnessed thousands of forms of Ganesha emanating from him, flooding the room with light. That indeed drove home the reality of divinity. It is easy for us to forget how great the state of a true Guru is.

That moment has reverberated throughout my life since it occurred, 22 years ago. I have had my share of spiritual experiences. They come and they go. I have known what it is to foolishly grip on to them and despair wildly at their ephemeral nature. The Real does not change; it is constant and over the course of our spiritual efforts, we notice that it has always been there. Slowly we melt into it if we keep our faith, meaning interest, alive.

Everything is sacred, the rocks beneath our feet as much as the stone Deities in temples. Yet being as we are, ordinary stones do not draw our attention so a form is provided and yet that form has a mysterious something that magnetizes attention.

What we love becomes sacred. What a culture loves becomes sacred and carries the power of that love and shares it with the sensitive perceiver. 🙏

Narasimha Allsop trained in Thangka painting under the tutelage of Master Iconographer Robert Beer. His devotional heart resides with the Hindu Pantheon which he continues to paint from a Hermitage in the hills of Arizona. His prints are available from Narasimhadeityart.com



VAISHNAVA ART

How the form of Krishna is perceived in the Material World

STEVEN ROSEN - SATYARAJA DASA

Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does, the better. —André Gide

WHEN ONE THINKS OF GOD, ONE naturally thinks of limitless spirit, without restrictions or parameters. Consequently, according to this line of thinking, God must be formless. And in the Western religious tradition, it is generally taught that God is, in fact, without form, or that, if He has any form at all, it cannot be perceived by living beings. (See Exodus 24.10, Exodus 33.20, John 1.18). In India, such ideas are often endorsed as well, as in, for instance, the Svetashvatara Upanishad (Adhyaya 4, Text 20): *na samdrise tisthati rupam asya na cak-susa pasyati kascanainam—His form cannot be seen, for no one can perceive Him with the naked eye.*

That being said, of course, an alternate tradition of personal theism exists in these texts as well: In the Bible, for example, see Exodus 33.11 and Deuteronomy 34.10. For upanishadic texts, see the Isopanishad and others espousing personalistic teachings that go back to the Rgveda (1.22.20). In the end, both the Bible and the Vedic traditions have *saguna* (personalistic) and *nirguna* (impersonalistic) components, but for the sake of our argument, we have initiated our analysis with the rampant impersonalistic side of these traditions.

Still, sages from time immemorial have provided vivid descriptions of the Absolute in extremely personal terms and their perceptions have been recorded in scripture and in personal writings for the benefit of all. The Vaishnava tradition, for example, offers us visual particulars about Krishna and Vishnu and their many incarnations.

How does the notion of God's formally with His stated formlessness? Well, for one, God must be complete by definition, and completeness would indicate that He is both formless and "full of form" as well. In addi-

tion, Vaishnavas often speak of God's "spiritual form". He has form, they say, but, inconceivably, it is not beleaguered by the limitations of material form.

Most of the confusion arises from one particular assumption: that spirit must be formless. This idea arises because matter—the opposite of spirit—is virtually defined by form. Moreover, say the Vaishnava sages, spirit is by nature eternal (*sat*), full of knowledge (*cit*), and blissful (*ananda*), whereas matter, again perceived as spirit's opposite, is temporary, without knowledge, and unable to experience bliss. When matter is infused with spirit, as when a human being is alive, we are allowed a hint of the spiritual qualities mentioned above, and when a person dies, those qualities dissipate.

But rather than go off on this philosophical tangent, let us consider the following related truth as articulated in the Vaishnava tradition: The opposite of material form is not "no form," but, instead, it is spiritual form. In other words, what if spirit is not formless, as many assume, but instead partakes of another type of form altogether—a transcendent form that defies the limitations we normally associate with the world of three dimensions?

THIS IS HOW VAISHNAVAS THINK of Vishnu, or Krishna. The particulars of such transcendent forms, moreover, are passed down in disciplic succession, so that masters who have themselves seen these images reveal them to their disciples, establishing what the Supreme looks like for those who sincerely want to know. Usually, these descriptions coincide with that of the scriptures, and the teachers also compile texts for their disciples to study.

Now, exactly when the transition occurred from literary description to concrete images, or icons, which then, in turn, facilitated the painting of Krishna's form—this is a matter for scholarly research. The tradition itself, while upholding the eternality of Krishna's visage, would—at least from an historical point of view—point to Vajranabha, Krishna's great grandson, as being among the first to share with the world exactly what Krishna looks like.

It is said that just under 5,000 years ago, Vajranabha constructed the first visual images of Krishna (though there are some extraordinary exceptions and instances of Vishnu murtis and other incarnations that manifested in prior ages). Tradition further tells us that he never actually saw Krishna, but that his Deities were carved according to the firsthand version of Uttara, the mother of Maharaja Parikshit. She shared with Vajranabha certain details of form and dimension, as did other elder babas in the Vrindavan area (all of whom knew Krishna personally), including Uddhava, Krishna's cousin, who was almost identical to him in appearance.

Hundreds of Deities graced the Braj area because of Vajranabha's desire to spread the worship of his Lord, but three were most important: Madan Mohan, Govindadev, and Gopinath. Perfect though these icons were, none of them, Uttara later told Vajranabha, fully captured Krishna's visual attributes. Madana Mohan closely matched Krishna in terms of the lower half of the body, from the navel down to the feet. Govinda captured the facial features, and Gopinath caught hold of the thoracic area, from the upper waist to the shoulders. Thus, Braj tradition today states that to get a complete vision of Krishna,

one must visit and offer devotion to all three Deities in a single day. (Govinda and Gopinath are currently in Jaipur, while Madan Mohan is in Karoli; both are provinces in Rajasthan.)

The Story of Vajranabha and the three main Deities of Braj is popularly retold today in Shrivatsa Goswami's book, *Celebrating Krishna* (Vrindavan, U.P.: Sri Chaitanya Prema Samsthana, 2001, pp. 22-3) and in Bhakti Chaitanya Swami's *Vrindavan: The Playground of God* (Kolkata, India: Touchstone Media, 2010, pp. 14, 30, and 42). Originally, the narrative is pieced together using segments found in the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata-mahatmya* of the *Skanda Purana*, and local Braj tradition. Although the story as cited here is its most common version, it is also told in an alternate way, with Madan Mohan representing the feet, Govinda, the mid-range of the body, and Gopinath, the face. This less popular reading would more accurately correlate with Gaudiya Vaishnava siddhanta, since it has the deities correspond to their theological station—*Sambandha* (relationship), *Abhideya* (activities that nourish the relationship), and *Prayojana* (the ultimate goal)—in proper order.

But this is just a tangent.

ANOTHER EARLY DEPICTION OF Krishna is traceable to Sri Radha herself, Krishna's divine female counterpart who serves as his consort. Gaudiya Vaishnava mahant Rupa Goswami (1489–1564) tells us that she wears a locket around her neck containing Krishna's picture (*Sri-Sri Radha-Krishna-ganoddesa-dipika*, Part 2, Text 201). Incidentally, Krishna, too, wears a locket on his chest containing a picture of Sri Radha (*Sri-Sri Radha-Krishna-ganoddesa-dipika*, Part 2, Text 128), and one might easily wonder where this picture comes from. In fact, although Radha is often envisioned as the ultimate artist, expert in the 64 arts enumerated in the Vaishnava tradition, the *Brahma-sambhita* (37) adds that her immediate expansions, the Gopikas, are the ones who often display her artistic ability

for Krishna's pleasure. The primary example is Vishakha, who is said to be Sri Radha's "other self". It is she who is specifically known for her artwork, among other things, and she is famous for having drawn a picture of Krishna that is mentioned in early Gaudiya texts. Perhaps she is responsible for the picture in Radharani's locket. Indeed, the tradition acknowledges Vishakha's drawing as perhaps the first illustration of Krishna ever produced on the earthly plane.

In Rupa Goswami's *Vidagdha Madhava* (Part 2, Act 1, Scene 1, Text 17), for example, we find Purnamasi, the elder go-between in Braj who facilitates the intimate exchanges of Radha and Krishna, saying, "Please ask the skillful artist Vishakha to draw, for the pleasure of her friend's [Radha's] lotus eyes, a picture of Nanda's son [Krishna]." Then again in Act 2, we find Radha herself saying, "I am disturbed with overwhelming desire...Alas, I cannot bear the thought that I might never again see the alluring face of Krishna, which is as brilliant as the moon, and whose beauty bewilders all the inhabitants of the three worlds." [Full of longing, she adds,] "Be merciful unto me, please—I beg you to show me his picture again." To which Vishakha responds, "O friend, there is no paper here on which to draw a picture." And so Radhika concludes with an anxious heart, "Then I will simply meditate on him, and in this way bring his image before my eyes."

Vishakha's drawing is again mentioned in Srila Rupa's *Ujjvala Nilamani* (Chapter 15): "After seeing a picture of Krishna drawn by Vishakha, Sri Radha uttered the following words, 'As brilliant as sapphire and decorated with a peacock feather, the boy in this drawing emerged in the real world and gazed at me with his dancing eyebrows. His glance made me fall madly in love with Him, and I found myself laughing like a crazy person.'" According to the *Bhagavata Purana* (10.62.18-19), Chitrlekha, too, would often compose drawings of Krishna, Balarama, and other contemporaries in the Vrishni dynasty.

IT IS FROM THESE EARLY IMAGES—and the numerous scriptural texts and subsequent outpourings of Vaishnava sages—that we have come to know what Krishna and his various manifestations look like. Everything, from bodily hue to preferred clothing, is visualized with great detail and passed down in esoteric lineages.

Indeed, the color of various divine forms has become central: We read that Rama is emerald green (as opposed to blue)-complexioned (See Tulsidas, *Ramcharitmanas* 2.116.8), and that Krishna, of course, is *ghanasyama*—he is "dark" (*syama*) like beautiful monsoon clouds (*ghana*). The compound ghana-syama as a name for Krishna is found in the earliest of Vaishnava texts, like the *Vishnu Purana* (5.18.39), and also later, in the *Harivamsa*, where he is described as the very form (*murtimat*) of the rainy season, i.e., the dark rain-cloud (*ambuda-syama*).

The *Brahma-sambhita* beautifully summarizes the abundant details regarding Krishna's form and color as articulated in the Vaishnava tradition: *I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, who is adept in playing on His flute, with blooming eyes like lotus petals and head decked with peacock's feather, with the figure of beauty tinged with the hue of blue clouds (asita-ambuda), and His unique loveliness charming millions of Cupids.* (5.30) Or further: *I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, who is Syamasundara, Krishna Himself, with inconceivable and innumerable attributes, whom the pure devotees see in their heart of hearts with the eye of devotion tinged with the salve of love.* (5.38)

However, it should be noted that both his form and color are indicators of a larger spiritual perception that only advancement in bhakti can afford. In his commentary on the *Brahma-sambhita* verse cited above (5.38), Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati makes this clear: *The Syamasundara form of Krishna is His inconceivable, simultaneous personal and impersonal self-contradictory form. True devotees see that form in their purified hearts under the influence*

of devotional trance. The form *Syama* is not the blue color visible in the mundane world but is the transcendental variegated color affording eternal bliss, and is not visible to the mortal eye.

DESPITE THIS FACT, DEVOTIONAL artists cannot help but use known colors, issuing forth from our standard spectrum of light. They necessarily make use of chromatics available to their vision. It is a limited palette, no doubt, but it is the only one we have. In light of this, one might legitimately ask, “Are they actually depicting God with their artwork?” Yes and no. While God’s presence is no doubt fully invoked, they are also pointing in a particular direction. When this is done under the guidance of self-realized souls, the tradition tells us, their depictions are non-different from the Supreme, embodying the Lord’s essence. Thus, the work of such artists is purifying, both for the artists themselves and for all onlookers who gaze at their creations. On the other hand, in a sense, they depict what might be called a facsimile of transcendence, indicating for the mass of people what the Lord looks like to self-realized souls. Vaishnavas call this *Dig-darshani*, i.e., “showing a particular direction,” or “pointing the way.”

In Indian logic, this calls to mind both *arundhati-darshana-nyaya* and *shakha-chandra-nyaya*. Let me explain. In order to see arundhati (a small star), one first points to a bigger star in the same constellation, thus allowing a person to locate the star they are actually looking for. Shakha-chandra-nyaya—pointing to the branches of a tree to show the moon in between them—indicates something similar. It enables one to locate the moon by seeing it in relation to clearly visible branches. One might say, “If you look at this branch and now this other branch, and now look in between them, you will find the moon.” Needless to say, the moon is not really in between those particular branches, but it can be located by the branches’ specific placement. In a similar way, Vaishnava artists depicting divinity

can show those who view their works what Krishna looks like in the mind’s eye of those who have seen Him.

The key to understanding the Deity (icon) or a painting of the divine as actually being non-different from Krishna and at the same time being a pointer in a particular direction comes from realization and learning how to see with the eyes of love. In Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswamin’s seventeenth-century work, the *Chaitanya-charitamrita* (1.5.21), we read about the *prema-netra*, or the *eyes of love*, and how one can only perceive God through the lens of bhakti, or transcendent devotion. In the words of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada:

Then how is it possible to see Him? Sevonmukhe hi jihvadau: If we train our senses, if we purify our senses, those purified senses will help us see God. It is just as if we had cataracts on our eyes. Because our eyes are suffering from cataracts, we cannot see. But this does not mean that there is nothing to be seen—only that we cannot see. Similarly, now we cannot conceive of the form of God, but if our cataracts are removed, we can see Him. Brahma-samhita says, premanjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena santah sadaiva hrdayesu vilokayanti [Bs. 5.38]: The devotees whose eyes are anointed with the love-of-God ointment see God, Krishna, within their hearts twenty-four hours a day. So, it is required that we purify our senses. Then we’ll be able to understand what the form of God is, what the name of God is, what the qualities of God are, what the abode of God is, and what the paraphernalia of God are, and we’ll be able to see God in everything. — The Journey of Self-Discovery (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1990, “Making Friends with the Mind,” p. 147.)

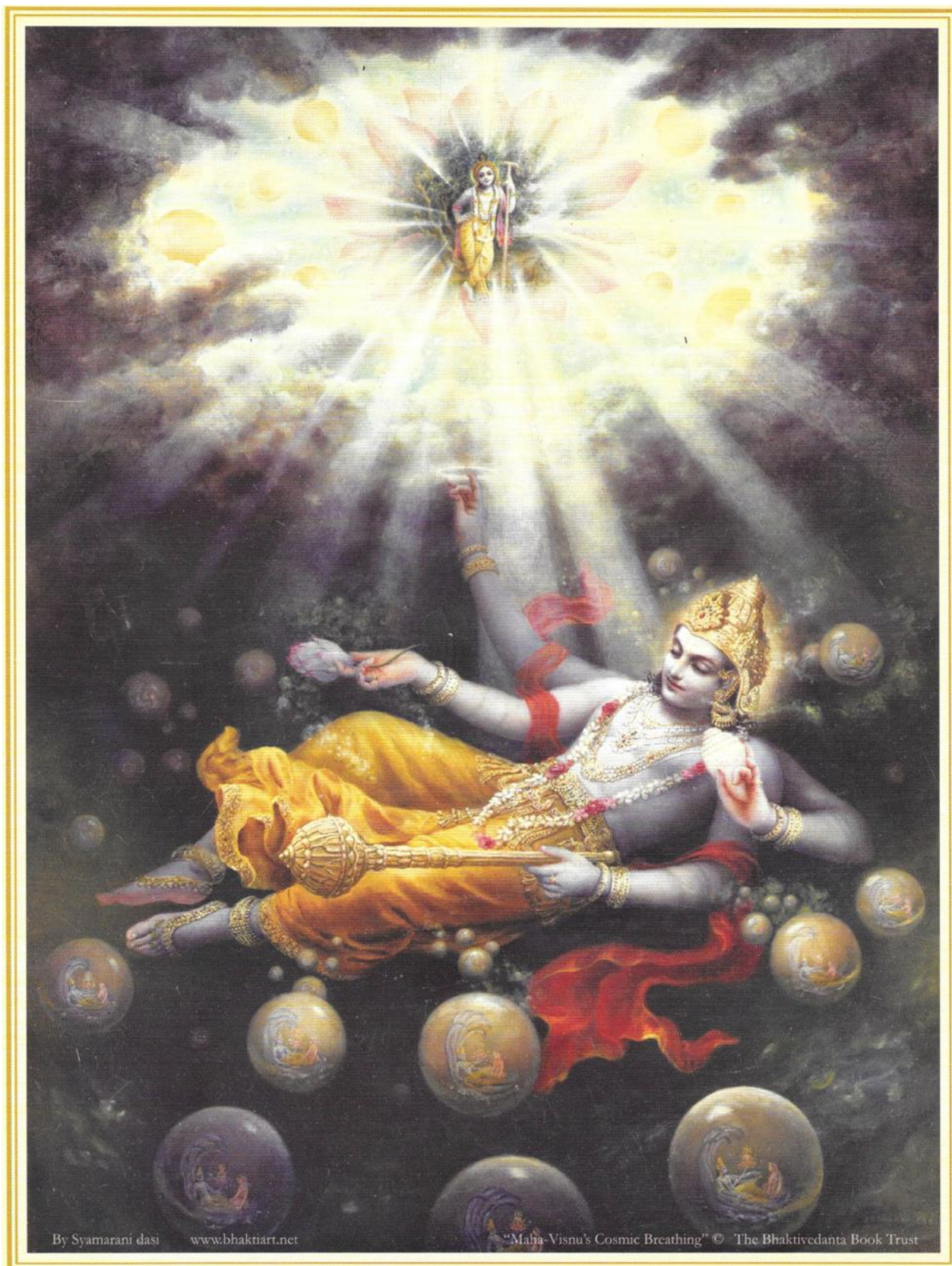
What does all of this have to do with Vaishnava art? In short, it explains how we come to see God, not merely by looking at spiritual paintings and such, but by purifying our consciousness. The above philosophy is really telling us how “the blue color visible in the mundane world” becomes ful-

ly spiritualized, depicting Krishna in all his completeness, without any lack whatsoever. Is it possible? The Vaishnava sages affirm that it is. And, apparently, whether we are talking about the artist or the viewer of the art, there are ways, it seems, for this vital transformation to take place. It all relates to the *prema-netra*, discussed above.

If the Vaishnava painter, for example, is guided by bhakti scriptures and self-realized souls, or if the artist herself is self-realized, the “blue of this world” at the tip of her paintbrush goes through a sort of alchemy, enabling her work to purify anyone who views it: By looking at her work, the viewer is seeing Krishna himself.

Of course, by the same token, if the viewer’s eyes are beautified by bhakti, the painter’s qualifications become irrelevant. As it is sometimes said, “The taste of the wine depends on the taster, not on the winemaker.” There is a similar idea in the viewing of Vaishnava art: the transcendental *rasika*, the connoisseur, the spiritual aesthete—this is the one who really sees Krishna, regardless of what is actually being looked at. If the viewer’s eyes are tinged with the requisite love, Krishna will appear in the midst of the artwork, for such a person sees Krishna everywhere. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1533) is the perfect example. He appeared in Bengal, India, some 500 years ago as the combined form of Radha and Krishna in the guise of Their own devotee. Indeed, as the perfect devotee, when he looked at Lord Jagannath—a form of Krishna who, from an external point of view, does not even remotely resemble Him—Sri Chaitanya saw Krishna in His familiar cowherd form, with His alluring stance, incomparable lotus eyes, and raven black hair. Because Mahaprabhu viewed the Lord with bhakti, the threefold-bending flautist appeared before him in full regalia as the highest of all divinities. May all viewers of Vaishnava art be so blessed! ❧

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By Syamarani dasi

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EVERYTHING AROUND US IS TEMPORARY

JADURANI DAS

IT WAS A FRIDAY, THE LAST DAY OF the workweek in early September, 1966. I was on my summer job as a secretary-clerk to help pay for my upcoming semester's college expenses; my lunch break was almost over. As I hurried past The New York Public Library on 5th Avenue and 42nd Street, I was engulfed in the large crowd swarming across the metropolis.

Young secretaries in high heels laughed together as they strolled along. Somber businessmen in pin-stripes strode purposefully as their leather briefcases swayed by their sides. A young couple argued vehemently as they walked through a red light, groups of teenagers darted artfully across the busy intersection amidst speeding cars and trucks, and no one looked twice at the old woman mumbling to herself.

This was life in the big city, which, on that day, disturbed me to no end. I had been dissatisfied for several weeks, not knowing why. I had been trying to ignore the vague but penetrating questions drifting in and out of my mind, but on that Friday they shouted out at me: Where are we all really going? Where are we really coming from? What does it all mean? What is the point of it all?

A FEW DAYS LATER I WAS SITTING AT my parents' home in the Bronx, leafing through the pages of *Life* magazine. The photos somehow no longer looked like photos of living people, but of clones or robots. Struggling with a sense of the world's futility and falsity, I turned to my mother and

asked, "Do I have to become like these adults? Do I have to dress up and wear lipstick, go to work and then, after all is said and done, die, and that's it?"

"Of course not, dear," my mother calmly answered, not even slightly distracted from watching her TV program.

I felt like a misfit. Question after question surfaced. "Was I alive before I was in my mother's womb?" "Do I have a form only now, or did I have an identity before this birth?" Thoughts like these plagued me throughout the next day and increased when I went home to relax in front of the TV.

As I watched a panel discussion between a group of psychologists, anthropologists, clergymen, and philosophy professors on the subject of death and dying, I was dismayed when they admitted, directly or indirectly, that they had no clear idea what happens after death.

Later that evening, I asked my mother, "Mom, if I wasn't born from you, would I still exist?"

"Well... uh, I don't know," she stuttered. "I guess so." It occurred to me that she had no answers, and that few people do. I wondered, "Where can I find the answers to these questions?"

BY MID-SEPTEMBER MY SUMMER job was over and I returned to school. I was nineteen years old and just beginning my sophomore year at City College of New York. I planned to major in art and history.

Like many of my fellow students and friends, I was politically conscious to a certain degree. I wanted

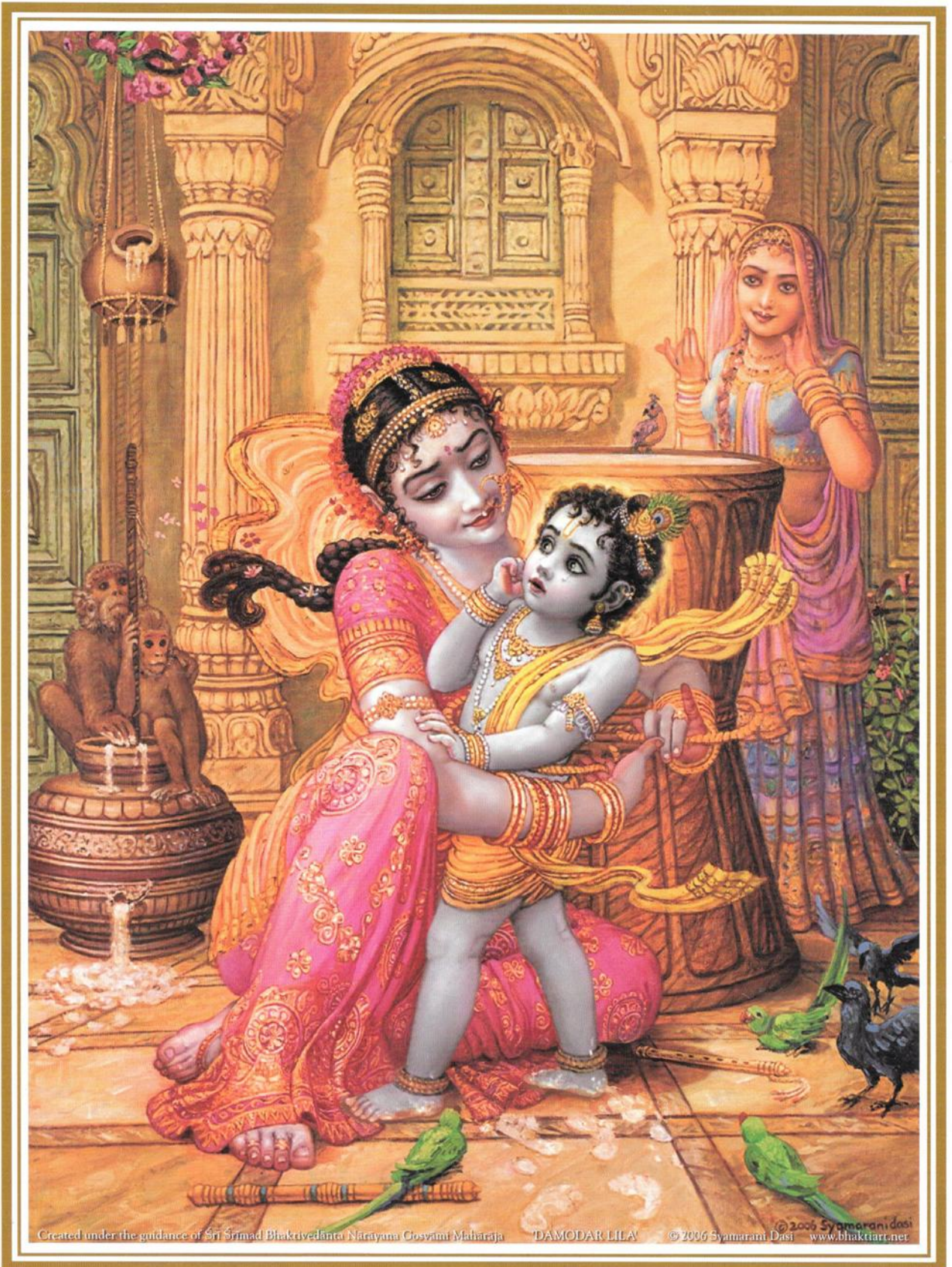
to change the world and redefine the political and social realities of the day. My dream was of a world free from oppression, so I joined a left-wing political group and picketed against the Vietnam War.

Though I was part of the 1960s youth culture, I also felt estranged from it. I felt like I was watching a TV show in which I played a fictitious part. In a sense, it was like I wasn't really there.

Yet, I took certain things very seriously. My friends and I strove to reach a kind of utopian reality through the use of mind-expanding drugs like LSD and marijuana; we hoped this would somehow change the world. My aim was to achieve a sense of oneness with the universe.

Even though each LSD trip ended in depression, I always experienced a few beautiful moments when the world appeared astonishingly colorful and profound, with ever-changing visions that seemed to indicate a higher reality. I came to believe that my new, animated, imaginary perceptions of the world were an ultimate truth in themselves, and that I was the orchestrator of that reality. I came to believe that I was not my body, but instead some kind of all-pervading IT, the supreme creator and controller of everything around me. I alternated between being God almighty and a depressed girl from the Bronx.

I had a few outfits in my closet that I thought would help me look more like God, and I wore them on appropriate occasions. My favorite was a 1920s-style long, beige dress and black cape, and I also liked wearing



Damodar Lila by Syamarani dasi ©2006 Syamarani dasi

my well-worn jeans with either an olive green or maroon turtleneck—these were colors and styles considered ‘transcendental’ by my peers.

SUCH WAS THE COURSE OF MY LIFE until one Thursday afternoon in mid-October. Intending to buy a large quantity of LSD, I withdrew the few hundred dollars saved from my summer job. My plan was to sell most of the acid to make my money back with profit, and I would keep some for my own use. The previous time I did this I was cheated, ending up with plain sugar cubes instead of LSD. To recoup my loss, I’d played a similar ruse on my own customers.

I didn’t want this to happen again, so I took care to ensure that this new dealer was ‘the real deal’. I’d met him at a party, and he seemed honest. I arranged to meet him outside an apartment on the Lower East Side. When I arrived, he said he didn’t want to attract attention. He told me to give him the money and wait outside while he went upstairs to get the LSD. I waited for what felt like hours, until finally someone in a neighboring apartment told me he’d seen that man going down the back fire escape.

I was devastated! My whole summer pay check was gone; my entire two months at a job I hated was wasted! I was burning alive in my anger towards a man I didn’t know, and I certainly couldn’t go to the police. “Isn’t there anyone out there who can help me?” I shouted in a whisper.

My plea seemed to reflect a greater urgency—my life wasn’t developing into the utopian ideal I had hoped for. I bought a new pair of knee-high black leather boots to cheer myself up, but this didn’t help.

A few days later I decided to visit my boyfriend, who lived in the East Village. Boarding the IRT train, I made the journey downtown once again. On my way, I remembered the recent drug deal turned bad and my life in general, causing me to ask myself, “If I’m all-knowing, why am I so gullible?”

Tossed back and forth on the subway seat, I stared at my own reflec-

tion in the grimy window, trying, as it were, to see my soul in the glass. All I saw was blackness as the train entered a tunnel and shot along the darkened tracks. I silently called out, “Who am I really? If I’m the cause of everything, if I’m in some sense God, why can’t I control anything? Why can’t I just mentally transport myself downtown rather than taking this disgusting train?”

Emerging from the subway system, I walked to 9th street, heading towards Tompkins Square Park. It was a large park, stretching several blocks; it was in the middle of the East Village and was the centerpiece of its eclectic neighborhood. It was a famous playground and personal backyard of sorts for hippies and counterculture intellectuals—to smoke marijuana, discuss left-wing politics, play music, and get to know each other. It was a place where I, too, had spent many an evening looking for happiness.

On this particular occasion, I had no intention of casually socializing with anyone. My depression weighed on me so heavily that I hurried through the park, anxious to reach my boyfriend’s house.

I heard guitars twanging, bongo drums beating their African rhythms, and transistor radios blasting the sounds of the famous mid-sixties rock bands—the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, Jefferson Airplane, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez, among others. I regularly sheltered in this conglomerate of sounds, but that day I simply wanted peace from my own mind.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, A VERY DIFFERENT sound attracted my attention. It was soft and hypnotic, exotic in some sense, and yet hauntingly familiar. Something buried deep inside me responded to it: “That old sound is emerging again.” I had no idea what I meant.

I had to find the source of the music. It wasn’t difficult, for halfway into the park, a large crowd had formed around some central spectacle. Gathering to listen were elderly European men dressed in old-fashioned suits

and European women in fancy kerchiefs and heavy sweaters.

Throngs of children also joined the crowd, and stray dogs, too; everyone seemed focused on this sound and where it was coming from. I was inwardly pulled in the direction of the crowd, not realizing that what I was about to see and hear would change my life forever.

I gently pushed through the gathering for a better view, and then I saw him. He was dressed in pale peach-colored robes, playing a bongo drum, and chanting what sounded like an ancient hymn.

He sat crossed legged on an oriental rug under a huge oak tree. His eyes were closed and his demeanor was peaceful yet intense. He seemed completely absorbed in his chanting, as if experiencing a different reality. He appeared ageless, timeless, and yet right here in our midst. In stark contrast to the people gathered around him, he looked like an effulgent jewel. Here, perhaps, was the person who knew the answers to my deepest questions.

Four to five rows of singing and dancing hippies and European refugees encircled him, and there was an inner group of about fifteen young American men who were clearly his followers. One of them was wearing Indian robes, very much like his, and the others wore Western street clothes.

They all danced barefoot in a small circle on the oriental rug. A few played finger cymbals and others played bells or tambourines. The rhythmic drone of a tambura, combined with the deep tones of a hand-pumped organ, created a sound that seemed reminiscent of a primeval era long forgotten. It was as if a voice called me from deep in my soul, beckoning me in ways that were new and refreshing, and yet as ancient as time itself. I was mesmerized.

Their leader, the one who had initially caught my eye, looked so mystical that I could only compare him to what I thought of as ancient India—a genie flying in on a magic carpet. Imagining him to be coming from another planet, I listened intently as his mysterious chant filled the air:



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*Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rāma, Hare
Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare*

As the chanting came to an end, that central Buddha-like figure stood up. He was not tall—a little over five feet, perhaps—but his poise, stature, and demeanor exuded authority and dignity.

At the same time, he was completely unassuming as he stood humbly before the crowd, his hands folded like a student standing at his desk. With kindness emanating from his eyes, he thanked us all for participating. He explained that because the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra was coming from the depths of the soul, there was no need to understand its language. It was universal; all nationalities could benefit equally.

I couldn't imagine the whereabouts of the soul's depths, but that saintly person's voice was so sonorous and commanding that it sounded as if it had surely come from there. "There is no cost," he continued. "No one will tax you for chanting or stop you from it. There is no loss, and the gain is sublime." He completed his short speech by saying that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa would make us happy, unconditionally.

One of his followers distributed flyers to the crowd. I recognized the words as a take-off on LSD guru Timothy Leary's decree to tune in to the need for another reality through LSD, turn on to it, and drop out of mainstream society. But this flyer was promising something more profound.

A few minutes later, the chanters packed up their drums and cymbals, rolled up their rug, and started to walk out of the park. I wanted to follow them, but the crowds blocked my view and I could not see which exit they took.

Bewildered, I simply gazed at the oak tree. I felt stranded. At that moment, an onlooker tapped me on the shoulder. "Hi. Would you like to visit the temple to meet Swamiji?"

THE TAP AND INVITATION SEEMED to be an arrangement of the same force that drew me to the chanters. Totally forgetting about my boy-

friend, I left the park with this stranger who, speaking little, brought me to a small storefront at 26 Second Avenue. I noted the hand-painted sign above the front window, "Matchless Gifts", which looked suitably psychedelic, and my guide announced that this was the temple.

Through the window I saw four young men in the center of the narrow 10 by 50 foot temple room, dancing and singing that same chant I had heard in the park. Their hands were raised in the air as they danced, their faces gazing upward. I was determined to know what this was all about.

The storefront had been transformed into what I imagined an Indian temple would look like, with just a few simple pieces of furniture. A wooden platform at the front of the room was covered with a dark velvet cloth, the lectern upon it flanked by flower vases and ornate plaster candlesticks. A large metal gong hung from the side of the platform, and dark purple curtains covered the wall and windows behind it. Oriental rugs lined the long floor, decorative Indian silk cloths hung on the walls, and Indian poster prints further ornamented the silk cloths.

I was attracted to the Indian prints: a cloud-complexioned youth dancing joyously on a large, multi-hooded serpent; that same youth feeding ball-shaped sweets to a calf; that same bluish youth sitting on a rock; and that youth, a little older, standing by a beautiful, golden-complexioned young lady, a cow standing between them.

I also noted some prints of modern Indian ladies with clay pots on their heads and a print of Lord Jesus as well. I stared at a large circular painting just above a grand sitting place that looked like the seat of honor; it depicted that same blue boy and a golden girl who appeared intoxicated by being together.

Another picture caught my eye. This one showed a six-armed personality; two of His arms holding a bow and arrow, two holding a flute, and two holding a staff and bowl. I be-

came so curious to understand these colorful images.

I was so enamored by the pictures, dancers, music, and the room itself that I didn't notice when my guide had left. I decided that my 'inner self'—whatever that meant—would take that guide's place, showing me all I needed to know. Trusting the supreme 'It', I resolved to be a passive witness, to let whatever was destined to happen happen.

Two young men standing near me began speaking to each other. Their voices sounded friendly, so I listened as one told the other, "Swamiji just said that when god-brothers quarrel, it's just like clouds passing by; it's not at all significant." I wondered what that meant. After all, there was so much fighting in the world, between countries, races, and even within my own family. Was the torment not inescapable?

Another young man came in from the side door and invited me upstairs to meet "the Swami". I followed him to the courtyard and then to the building behind the temple. We climbed a dim fluorescent-lit stairway to the second floor and entered the apartment on the right.

I noticed a heavenly incense fragrance and several men and women sitting on the floor chanting with rosary-like beads in their hands. Although their words were indistinct, the mystical drone once again evoked remembrance of some primeval place.

THE SWAMI, THAT SAME GLOWING personality I'd seen in the park, sat in their midst, looking simultaneously ascetic and aristocratic. He bowed his head on the ground, which to my mind confirmed my belief that everything, including the floor, is God. As the chanting continued around him, he stood up and, followed by a few others, walked into the next room—the 'greeting room'. His name, I was told, was Swamiji, or, more formally, Om Viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Swami Mahārāja. He would later become known all over the world by the honorific title Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I watched as he interacted with each of the guests. If someone folded their palms in respect, he returned the same gesture; if someone offered to shake his hand, he extended his hand to them; if someone waved good-bye, he waved in return.

When he finally turned his attention to me, it was electric. His radiant eyes pierced through me, as if in attempt to cut my speculative misconceptions. I felt he could see my very soul and that he already knew me thoroughly, but I fought the feeling and looked away. I told myself, “You’re making all this up. This person is your own creation”. I had taken LSD earlier that day, which would account for my exaggerated sense of self.

He looked squarely into my eyes and spoke calmly: “This is not a concocted process, or something that we have made up. This process is very old, simple, and sublime.” He sat back comfortably and slowly looked around the room. “We are eternal,” he continued, “and everything around us is temporary.” Though he spoke softly, his words penetrated my being. I found myself anxiously waiting to hear what he would say next. Rather than expound on other philosophical truths, however, he politely asked me, “Do you live near here?”

I was nervous, not knowing exactly how to reply in a way that would demonstrate how ‘enlightened’ I was. I deliberately drew out my words in a strange, affected way. Trying to imply that I, as the ultimate divine being, lived everywhere, I answered, “Yeeeeeess, I live veeeeeery near.” Again, it was more the LSD talking than me.

“Good,” he said, smiling. “Then you will be able to attend the morning program at 7:00 a.m.”

I immediately realized my blunder. I lived in the Bronx, an hour and a half subway ride away! The idea of waking up at 5:00 in the morning and taking five trains was untenable, especially considering how late I usually went to bed. Besides that, it would be scary to ride the subway that early; there were many drug dealers, thugs, drunkards, and others who made traveling alone

dangerous. Still, the conviction in the Swami’s voice made me want to try. How could I say no?

At that point, I asked him a totally unrelated question, “Do I have to come down from LSD?” He looked at me quizzically. Remembering the trance-like state of the dancers in the park and in the temple, I said, “Is there a way I can stay high on it forever?”

“No. It is material and therefore temporary. Only Kṛṣṇa consciousness can give lasting pleasure; it is spiritual and therefore eternal.”

Somehow I believed him. I knew that my LSD days were over.

It was getting late, so I said good-night, went downstairs, and looked for my new boots. They were gone. After a quick look around the storefront, I accepted that they’d been stolen. Perhaps someone was trying to tell me something? The boots were leather, a product of animal violence, not compatible with spiritual consciousness. I left barefoot, relieved of more than just my leather boots.

WHEN I FINALLY REACHED MY boyfriend Mike’s house, I enthusiastically told him about the Swami and the transcendental mantra I’d just heard. He could not relate at all; he simply wasn’t ready for it. Frustrated and wanting to recapture the mood of the temple, I sat down and tried to memorize the mantra from the flyer I’d been given: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare / Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Mike thought I was in a stupor and left the room.

The next morning, I returned to the temple for the 7:00 a.m. program, where sixty or so followers and guests sang Sanskrit chants along with the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The Swami began his lecture with a simple translation of the mantra: “O energy of God, O God, I am suffering in this world due to serving Your illusory material energy. Please pick me up and engage me in the service of Your spiritual energy, so I can be happy. O Lord, I have come to this world to enjoy, but I find

that I cannot, so please appoint me in Your service.”

Using the cloth-covered scripture on his lectern for reference, he confidently explained that we are not these physical bodies. We are atomic spirit souls within the body, he said, and it is only due to the presence of the soul that the body is active. He gave the analogy of a glove moving only because of the hand inside it. As the body appears alive only because the soul is present within, so death occurs when the soul leaves the body.

I congratulated my intuition. This saintly person was able to provide answers to my heart’s questions.

In a resonant voice filled with what seemed like a sense of urgency, he revealed that we, lost souls in this world, are wandering and transmigrating through 8,400,000 species of life, throughout innumerable universes. We are suffering in different bodies and bodily conditions due to our past activities. When, in the course of such wandering, we become fortunate, God—Kṛṣṇa—arranges that we connect with His representatives, His pure devotees. Then, by the grace of those pure devotees, we may attain direct service to Kṛṣṇa and intimate association with Him.

Although there were so many new ideas that I could catch only fragments of each, the concepts intrigued me. The idea that I was not this small shell of a body was not new to me, but I’d come to think I was the whole cosmos. I was relieved to learn that, far from being the unlimited Godhead, I am a minute eternal soul, His beloved part and parcel, one in quality with Him.

My mind shot to my young school years, when I’d been taught that our universe is the only one, and that, of the nine planets existing within our solar system, this Earth is the only one that maintains life. It now struck me as absurd to consider that our universe is hanging in a void, with no other venue for life in all its forms. There must be many places to accommodate the countless souls who are wandering from body to body. But why were we wandering in the first place?

My new teacher tended to explain that our wandering in this world was a result of our sins. I had a hard time with that word, probably because of its Christian hellfire-and-brimstone connotations, but I couldn't think of a better one.

I thought of lots of words I could more easily resonate with, especially because I'd engaged in numerous activities described by those words—dishonesty, indecency, immorality, corruption, and lack of ethics—but I knew of no single word that summed it all up. I acquiesced, “Okay, let it be.”

I was hearing that we souls had performed harmful acts, we had hurt others in our past lives and in this one, by our body, mind, and words. The concept of having been sinful in previous lives, thus causing reactions in this life, was at first difficult to accommodate; even the idea of past lives in general was hard to imagine.

Still, the teaching of reincarnation did seem to answer my question about existing prior to being my mother's daughter. If I were to accept the explanation of this saintly guru about the reasons for the world's pains and pleasures, it would also mean that nothing happens by chance, not even the fact that I had been born into my family in the Bronx. It was a lot to take in, but it was fascinating and illuminating. I kept wanting to hear more.

DURING THE QUESTION AND ANSWER period at the end of the class, a young, very tall and lean man stood up and asked, “Isn't this world a dream? When we become self-realized, don't we merge with the 'All' and lose our individual identity?” I'd had the same question.

“Yes, this world is a dream,” this clearly enlightened personality said, “but when I wake up from my dream, I am still here. Although I am not the person I thought I was in the dream, I have not lost my identity. I am still here, still a person.”

He explained that only in ignorance do we perceive ourselves as lost; if by receiving transcendental knowledge we come to our real position of eter-

nal servitorship to the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, we will know that we can never truly be lost. A person who has lost all his money may feel completely lost, but in reality he is not lost; only his money is lost. It is his attachment to the money that causes him to think that he himself is lost.

Recalling the money that I'd recently lost to the unscrupulous drug dealer, my subsequent despondency and dishonest dealings with others, I began adjusting to this new and soothing way of thinking.

He went on to explain that the concept of becoming one with the Supreme Lord is another symptom of being lost in false ego, in a misconceived identity. We erroneously believe that we ourselves are the Supreme when in fact we are merely His servants.

I would very soon learn that the word “merely” did not actually mean “merely”; it meant “great.” It is our greatness to realize this, he told us. The late President John F. Kennedy is accepted as great because of his service to the mission of his great country, America, and now we see memorials, airports, streets, parks, schools, bridges, buildings, and so on dedicated to him. Similarly, Jesus Christ is worshiped as great due to his service to God, the great. One becomes great by service to the Great. One after another, Śrīla Prabhupāda saw my misconceptions and corrected them.

Later that morning, as I was leaving the temple, I noticed the large sign in the front window:

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I decided to keep coming back. ❖

Jadurani Dasi (Syamarani dasi) is a master painter of Bhakti Art and one of the most stalwart teachers of bhakti-yoga in current times. She is among the first disciples of Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the world-renowned founder-acharya of ISKCON (the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness), and she is also a prominent student of Srila Prabhupada's close associate, Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Goswami Maharaja. Under their expert spiritual guidance, she has created nearly 300 works of devotional art and is recognized as one of the most influential artists to emerge out of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement and its subsequent school of art.



Radha Alone by Syamarani dasi ©Syamarani dasi



Created by Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Goswami Maharaja

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MAINTAINING SANITY

DR. ROBERT SVOBODA

Talk given at the Nāmarūpa Living with Reality virtual retreat in the Spring of 2020, transcribed and edited.

TODAY'S TOPIC IS MAINTAINING SANITY. Here is a question from yesterday's Q&A:

"I have been aware during the pandemic that when I focus less on the outside world and more on my immediate family, I feel much happier and more productive. When I connect to what's going on elsewhere, I fall easily into a sense of despair and fear. I'm trying to find some middle ground through my metta practice, but it's really challenging.

"I'm also aware in my sadhana that I seem to be carrying a large invisible weight that I'm ignoring in my daily reality. I'm not sure how to carry this load better since my functionality as a parent seems to depend in part on ignoring it.

"Thanks so much for sharing your time and wisdom with us."

And thank you for your question.

TO RESTATE: WHEN FOCUSING LESS on the outside world and more on the immediate family the questioner feels happier and is more productive but, when trying to connect with what is going on elsewhere, easily falls into a sense of despair and fear.

For the moment let's put aside the "large invisible weight", which may indeed be real and may also—especially given the currently profound influence of Rahu—be not so real at all.

The first thing is that focusing on one's immediate family being productive and happy is how humans were evolved. We evolved not to take care of our personal nuclear families, since humans really didn't live in nuclear families until very recently. It was

instead the extended family, complemented by everyone else who belonged to the clan. If you're not yet familiar with Dunbar's number, take a look. British anthropologist Robin Dunbar did some research comparing other primates with humans with regard to brain size and average social group size. He discovered that for any primate species, there is a limiting number of individuals that members of that species can have in their immediate, closest possible social group—individuals whom they actually know and interact with and feel they have a genuine relationship with.

In humans, Dunbar suggested, that number is approximately a hundred and fifty. This is of course an average, and other researchers have proposed numbers up to two hundred fifty, but for now let's take one hundred fifty as standard, particularly since a *paco* (shaman) of my acquaintance who is a member of the Q'ero tribe of Peru lives in an extended family of about that size.

This number is physiological, it is a reflection of how many people your brain can connect together as part of your social reality, not your "social network", but the people who interact with you in an ongoing, meaningful, practical way in the physical world.

Note that I am not denying that virtual relationships can be real. They certainly can be. But while virtual reality is real, it is a different kind of reality than the "real" reality of actually being in the same location, breathing the same air, eating the same food, doing the same things, etc. That's ob-

viously much more grounded in the earth element which creates stability; stability really is an important factor, especially nowadays.

It is utterly natural and very appropriate that an individual should feel much more grounded and real and healthy when interacting with the members of his or her family. Please note that "family" does not necessarily mean blood family; instead it means whoever you have taken as part of your own personal real honest-to-goodness family, the people who are integral parts of your world.

When we consider what's happening in the rest of the world, there's bound to be despair, grief and the like; but it is not as immediate as what happens to our families. For human beings, the rest of the world is real, but to a lesser degree than the reality that is generated by that group of roughly a hundred and fifty people that is our "village". And of those? Dunbar mentioned two more numbers: five-ish people who are involved in maybe 40% of our socializing and ten more people who are involved in another 20%. Of what remains, in my estimation, between thirty and forty other people, take up about 30% of our social time leaving 10% for the other hundred. The bottom line is that we devote about two-thirds of our social lives to fifteen people (more or less). That's just the way it is.

For your own edification you may want to invest a little time discovering for yourself who those fifteen closest-to-you people are, the ones you interact with the most, the ones you trust



Guruvayoor Kesavan ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

the most, the ones you rely on the most and who most rely on you. Unconsciously and subconsciously you know who they are, but it's good to know them consciously as well, that you may appreciate them for all that they do for you.

ONE VERY IMPORTANT TASK THAT they perform—other people help out with this as well, but chiefly it is those closest to you—is to assist you to maintain your sanity. It has been said by Jordan Peterson, author of *12 Rules for Life*, that we outsource the problem of our sanity. He said this in the context of other people, i.e. that by their reactions other people help us maintain an awareness of how to behave in society. But the truth of this statement goes beyond what its author envisioned.

We also outsource our sanity to our sense organs. We're always sensing solidity and gravity via the sense of touch, for example. All five senses are always generating information about our surroundings, always reminding us that we are alive here in this five-element world. These constant reminders are crucial to our sanity. This is why, in my opinion, it's a complete hallucination to think it will ever be possible to export a human personality into a machine somewhere and expect that it will be a living, functional personality. It could perhaps be a cluster of recorded behaviors, but not a living personality because it will not be a living organism. It will no longer be getting perpetually reminded where it is and what it exists in the context of, it will not perpetually be having its sanity maintained.

I think it is very important never to forget that we outsource the management of our sanity and that, if we are lucky enough to have good relations with our family members, we outsource quite a bit of it to them and they outsource quite a bit of it to us. That's an important part of what it means to be a family member—that we have one another's collective backs, we support one another, we are there to provide support in a crisis so that

no one need feel isolated. Humans are hyper-social animals and for us to feel isolated is one of the most fundamental causes of serious disease.

BACK TO THE QUESTION: "I FEEL happy and more productive when I focus less on the outside world and more on my immediate family and when I connect to what's going on elsewhere, I easily fall into a sense of despair and fear." It is easy nowadays to connect to what is going on elsewhere—or rather, to connect to our image of what's going on elsewhere. Unless we actually are elsewhere we really can't know what's going on elsewhere. India is a good example of "elsewhere". I lived in India for ten years, and over the past forty-seven years I've spent a total of at least twenty years there. On this basis I can assure you that until you actually go to India yourself you have no idea what it's like; if you have been there, then you have some idea of what it's like. If you live there you have even more of an idea, but nobody really knows what is going on there, not even people who were born there, because it's not one place. It's many, many, many places.

When you're connecting to what's happening in other parts of the world, whether it's good or whether it's bad, you're connecting to a sample. We're taking tiny, tiny samples and we're trying to evaluate on the basis of those tiny samples. The first thing to remember whenever you're dealing with something that is not in your immediate neighborhood is that you are working with very limited information. It is an amount of information that can give you a glimpse of what's going on, but for you to try to draw conclusions from that sample—that everything is under control or everything is going to hell—your conclusions are likely to be inaccurate.

It is unfortunate that people are dying. It is unfortunate that people are sick. We may not be able to save these people, but what we can do is to send *metta*, just as the questioner does. We can send *metta* to everyone. What I encourage the questioner to remember is that the grief and fear

he is feeling is not directly connected to reality because the tiny amount of information coming through his senses has already been filtered. A person living there would have access to more information, would have a better idea, but still would never know precisely what the situation is. At this time Mother Nature herself is saying loudly and clearly that everybody needs to be focusing on where they are right now, focusing on their immediate reality—the reality of where they are—and not to project out globally. Yes, we can pay attention to what's going on elsewhere, but Nature herself is telling us not to try to connect your awareness to the entire world right now. Instead, Mother Nature is handling that. She wants you instead to do everything you can to make your relationships with your family members healthy. That's why she has returned everyone home now, because this is what you need to be doing right now.

Doing this properly will assist you to maintain your sanity. Trying to connect too much to what's going on elsewhere will not benefit your sanity, because everybody elsewhere needs to be figuring out what's going on there themselves.

THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS WE can be thankful for. I often repeat something my mother was fond of saying, something that's really good advice: "There's always something to be thankful for, and things can always be worse." The pandemic for example could be much worse. If the Covid-19 death rate was as bad as for MERS, which is also a coronavirus and whose death rate is around 30%, that would be truly catastrophic. Or, if we lacked the ability to act, if we didn't have the medical and surgical interventions that we have, the death rate would be much higher. I'm pretty sure nobody can even imagine what it would be like to have six percent of the world population die, which is more or less what happened during the Spanish flu. Even if only 10% of the world population got the disease—that's 780 million people, and even if only 5% of those patients died, we are

still talking about 39 million people. Thirty-nine million corpses are simply inconceivable today; people everywhere would be going insane. Thank you Nature! Thank you for being so generous with us.

Or suppose we were going through this pandemic fifteen years ago when everybody had dial-up Internet and little flip phones; we wouldn't be able to communicate so easily because we wouldn't be so able to connect. We wouldn't even be able to worry about what was happening in other places because we wouldn't know; we'd know a tenth or hundredth of what's going on now. Things can always be worse, so we really do need to be thankful. Let us be thankful that we are in safe places, with food, with our loved ones. These may be loved ones that we can rely on for mutual support or maybe they are loved ones that we have troubled relationships with that we can work on right now. There's so much to be thankful for. Gracias. Gracias.

THE "LARGE INVISIBLE WEIGHT" the questioner referred to is something that Nature is trying to make the entire planet aware of. That large invisible weight is made up of all the immense damage that the human species is responsible for, a big part of which is degradation of the environment.

Humans have actively tortured the entire planet in so many ways. Consider the slaughtering of farm animals for food. Humans account for about 36 % of the biomass of all mammals on Earth today. Domesticated livestock, mostly cows and pigs, account for 60 %, and wild mammals for only 4 %. Only 4 %!

And that's just one form of torture that we have been inflicting on Nature. Many people are not able to be aware of this consciously at all, but things are going to come up from people's unconscious and subconscious—they are coming up. Because now you can't distract yourself by moving around so much. Now things that you've been able to avoid by distracting yourself you can't as easily avoid because

there are fewer distractions. Things are coming up that you have to deal with, and that's rarely a pleasant thing.

When you consider all the things in yourself that are coming up that you have to deal with, that you've been able to avoid dealing with by being busy externally and now have to face, and when you consider that three, or even two billion people—two thousand million people—are also suddenly having to deal with stuff that they've been avoiding, then it is a pivotal moment.

Part of that pivot is to carefully evaluate how much you can open yourself to the external world—physical, astral or spiritual. You can certainly go insane if you try to go so far into spirit that the sanity of your body becomes corrupted. *Mens sana in corpore sano* is what you should be aiming for: *A sound mind in a sound body*.

To understand better what that implies let us turn to the definition of health in the *Sushruta Samhita*.

SUSHRUTA WROTE THE BOOK ON Ayurvedic surgery; surgery has been a part of ayurveda for at least 2500 years. Sushruta invented plastic surgery; in the modern world, the first ever plastic surgery operation was performed in Germany in the early 19th century after Sushruta's book had been translated into German. Even today textbooks on surgery still describe that operation. It's called a pedicle graft.

But Sushruta's treatise covers more than just surgery. He also considers what it means for a person to be healthy, because surgery is a wonderful thing—if it is necessary and if it is done well—but surgery alone cannot cure the patient. What it can do is remove something that is obstructing the patient's movement in the direction of good health.

The *Charaka Samhita*, the most famous text on ayurveda, states clearly that since the beginning of time no doctor has ever healed a patient. The patient is healed by life itself, by Nature. Doctors can only participate in the process; a good doctor can pro-

mote life by facilitating a cure, and a quack doctor can make the disease worse and promote death. This is why you always want to work with doctors who know what they are doing. I like the Hindi proverb: *neem hakeem, khatra jaan—in the hands of an incompetent doctor your life is in danger*.

If you want to be a sane doctor, you have to study well, remember what you've studied, then gain experience. The *Charaka Samhita* stands first among the *Brihat Trayi*, the Big Three of ayurvedic texts. *Charaka* means a wanderer. Those who wander, especially in a forest, will find all kinds of plants, all sorts of animals interacting with various plants, maybe eating them as food, maybe consuming them as medicine.

Since nowadays most of us wander in the forest of human beings rather than in a forest of trees, what students of medicine most need to know nowadays is how to interact meaningfully with human beings. My distinguished co-author Hart de Fouw likes to say, "For physicians and astrologers, the laboratory is the world"—we have to always be alert, finding out what's going on, gaining knowledge, experimenting so that we can best help our clients. The *Charaka Samhita* suggests wandering as an effective way to learn.

The meaning of the name *Sushruta*, the ayurvedic surgeon, is *listened well*. You want your surgeon to be experienced, but also to have paid attention in class. You want somebody who actually attended that lecture on appendicitis because if you require an appendectomy you want somebody who has been exposed to the perspectives of many surgeons, not just one. When you open someone up you can't always know what you're going to find; sometimes you may discover a very unusual presentation or a very unusual pathology. You may only get one of these in your career, and if you have never even heard of it before you may not know what to do with it. And that may be the end of the patient. Sushruta listened well, he took in all the information that he could about the experiences of other surgeons and included that data in his text.

Along with experience and learning—which is basically hearing about other people’s experience—we also have to remember, which is where Vagbhata comes in. *Vagbhata* means *Mister Language Expert*, and his book *Ashtanga Hridayam* is a condensation of *Charaka* and *Sushruta* done in beautiful poetry. A little prose does appear here and there, but mostly it is easy-to-memorize poetry that acts as a mnemonic; when you remember that verse, it helps you to remember all the other information that you have been taught about it. This applies both to treatment and to health in general.

The following verse is from Sushruta, and it goes this way:

*Sama dosha sama agnischa sama
dhatu mala kriyaaha*
*Prasanna atma indriya manaha
swastha iti abhidheeyate*

There are three main words in ayurveda for health. *Arogya* means *lack of disease*. This is the sole concept of health in modern medicine. “If you’re sick we’ll treat you. If you’re not sick then we can do nothing for you because you have no pathology that we can work with.” *Arogya*, lack of disease, is important but it is not a complete description of health.

Ayurveda teaches that you never want to wait until the pathology develops. Instead, you should work with the patient while the imbalances are developing, not wait until they’re developed and manifested. The rule is to bring the organism back into balance while the imbalances are not yet evident.

The second word is for health is *svasthya*, which comes from the word *healthy*, which in Sanskrit is *svastha*. *Sva* means *self* and *stha* means *to be established in*, so *svastha* means *to be established in yourself*.

The third word for health is *sukha*, which means *good space*. *Sukha* means the space inside you is good, the space outside you is good—all the different spaces that are part of your reality are harmonious, including the spirit. Only then can you really say that you’re truly healthy.

For *svasthya*, Sushruta says that there are two main factors to consider: the mind and the body. For the body to be healthy, it has to be *sama*; it has to be balanced. *Sama* means *same*. All of your physiological processes have to be harmoniously integrated, harmoniously working with one another and functioning and then you can say your body is healthy. That also applies, indirectly, to your mind because of how your mind and body interact. But Sushruta says that another factor is more important for your mind, your sense organs and your *atma*. When he says *atma* here he doesn’t mean the *paramatma*, the Supreme Soul; instead he means the *jivatma*, your personal soul. Let’s not argue here about whether the soul really “exists” or not—the Buddhists say it doesn’t, most Hindus say it does. Whether that soul is permanent or not, everyone possesses a “spirit” that is beyond both body and mind, beyond the chatter of the rational thinking process; something that connects you to that reality that’s bigger than all of us.

Modern medicine focuses on the physical existence, pays secondary attention to the mind, and disregards the soul entirely. But human beings cannot be healthy if they ignore the spirit, and because care of the soul is being neglected it is not surprising that people are becoming increasingly unhealthy, when what they need to do to promote their health is to gain and maintain harmony at all levels.

WHEN YOUR PHYSIOLOGY IS BALANCED and your personal soul, your thinking mind and your sense organs are *prasanna*—*prasanna atma indriya manaha*—then you can really say that you are healthy. *Prasanna* is a Sanskrit word that means *gratified* or *satisfied*, that sense that you have when you are not craving anything, when you’ve had enough to eat, enough to drink, to see, to taste, to smell. You’ve even had enough of touch and hearing. Your sense organs are not overloaded, they’re not exhausted, they’re just not craving. They have enjoyed a judicious amount of sense objects

to connect to which makes them feel good, makes them feel like they need nothing from the outside. A lack of craving makes the spirit, the mind and the senses healthy, because for them what is unhealthy is craving. Craving itself is innate, and some craving is natural, like the cravings for water, food, air, sleep, shelter. But the fact that these cravings are natural makes it easy for us to conclude wrongly that craving itself is natural.

So long as we’re getting, on an ongoing basis, sufficient water, food, and air then we will not need to bother to crave them. Instead there will be an expectation on the part of all parts of our organism that they will be delivered those essentials regularly. A significant part of having your organism be balanced and of having your spirit, your mind, and your sense organs feel satiated is that they should feel confident that they are being taken care of. They should in particular feel confident that *prana* will be delivered to them on time all the time, and that they will receive extra *prana* when they really need it.

SO SANITY COMES DOWN TO PRANA. It comes down to *prana* because it’s *prana* that brings consciousness into the organism. Therefore, the very first place to begin maintaining your sanity is making sure that you’re doing everything you can to have *prana* enter your organism well, circulate well, and be nice and stable there. This means that it’s essential for you to breathe well, to breathe calmly, slowly, regularly and to have a healthy relationship with the air outside, which you can do, no doubt, if the air is decent air. Right at the moment, we can enjoy the air because there’s so much less pollution. We can enjoy much cleaner air than many of us have enjoyed for a long time. Now we can take in that nicer air and we can be thankful for the blessing of decent air. Oh great goddess, thank you for improving the air! Please assist us to enjoy even better air! We are appreciative; we’re being grateful, and being grateful is a very important part of remaining sane.

One of the first pairs of Sanskrit words I learned when I was in the

ayurvedic college were the words for grateful and ungrateful. The word for grateful is *krtajna*. *Krta* means *done*, *accomplished*; *jna* means *wisdom*, *knowledge*. *Krtajna* means that you understand, appreciate and acknowledge what has been done for you. The opposite of *krtajna* is *krtaghna*. The two words sound almost the same, except that *ghna* means *to kill*. Here is a basic principle of the *karma nyaya*, the law of karma: When you acknowledge what someone has done for you, you're acknowledging that karmic debt, that *rnanubhanda*, that alignment that is causing the two of you to be interacting in one place at one time. You are facilitating the working out of that person's karmas and that person is facilitating the working out of your karmas.

Whether this will be pleasant or unpleasant depends very much on the nature of those karmas, but that is a different matter from the fact that people keep meeting one another because people share karmas that they need to work out with one another; that's what *rnanubhanda* is.

So *krtajna* means that I acknowledge the karmic relationship that exists between you and me and that when you do something nice for me, I am grateful for it. I appreciate it and it is accordingly my desire, automatically and without any calculation, to do something good for you, because what we're trying to do, implicitly or explicitly, is to balance our karmic accounts so that we will not be obligated to continue all this back and forth business. We can instead relate in a much more genuine way that's not based on this commerce, this karmic give and take.

Krtaghna is what happens if someone does something for you and you do not feel grateful. By being an ingrate, you are disconnecting yourself from that positive karmic give and take; you are taking things without giving anything back. I love that word *ingrate*, which was first used 350 years ago. Once it meant *unfriendly*, and it comes from the Latin *ingratus*—unpleasant, disagreeable—which literally means *in (not) + gratus (pleasing, beloved, dear, agreeable)*.

So ingrates are not just ungrateful, they are unfriendly, disagreeable, unpleasing. Love plays no part in their reality. And, sadly, when it comes to the relationship that humans have with our natural environments, we are ingrates. We have not been giving back to the environment as much as we've been taking; instead we take and take and take, and we complain. We've been extremely ungrateful and the results of that ingratitude are returning to us at this very moment.

Let us abandon the ingrate persona and start the process of returning to right relationship with our world by being grateful for the air that we breathe, grateful for the water that is provided to us, grateful for the gravity that keeps us stable and safe on the ground. There's so much to be grateful for, so much to be thankful for, starting with this: We're alive, we're moving.

THERE IS A LOT FOR US TO ACKNOWLEDGE. We're must acknowledge that everything is not great in the world, not great with the human species, not great in general. Can we as individuals fix this? No, we can't. But what we can do is to encourage things to move in a better direction, even if only by a tiny amount. And as Vimalananda always used to say, charity begins at home. There are all kinds of problems everywhere, he would say. There's no lack of problems; we will never run out of problems. There will always be poor people, sick people, needy people. They all need help, and you may be able to help some of them, but start by working with the people in your own space. Do what you can that is appropriate for you to do to help them to move in the right direction. The best way to help them move in the right direction is to make sure that you're the best person you can be. Once you've put yourself in order and done what you can for your family members, then use what time and energy you have remaining to make yourself available to other people who can make use of what you are able to offer them.

But don't start thinking of yourself as being generous just because you occasionally display some generosity. It's

very easy for concepts like "I'm very generous, I'm helping everyone" to become part of your self-definition, because then it becomes self-aggrandizement. Then it's not genuine, because it's gone from being "Here's a fellow human that I can help" to "Here I am helping out". Then it goes from genuine giving to becoming give and take, which is karmic: "I" am assisting you because it enables "me" to reinforce my good opinion of "myself". Then it's all about me.

And anyway the best generosity is often not at all dramatic. Sometimes just a gesture means a lot. I like to stroll about, and now that people are not able to wander around so much, lots of other people are going out for a walk too, and are interacting with one another. Many of these are people I've seen but never spoken to because it is a busy world and until recently most people didn't take the time to talk. Now everybody has time, and people who would never have thought about being friendly with strangers are now saying, maybe we need to get to know one another better. Maybe we need to appreciate what people like the hospital staff, the garbage men, the utility workers, the delivery people, and so many others are doing for us. Maybe we need to appreciate all of the people who function to actually keep the fabric of society together. That sense of generosity is an extraordinarily important part of being genuinely sane.

WORRYING ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING in the outside world is not an important component of sanity. Doing what you can do, acknowledging that you're not in control of everything, and making sure that you are submitting yourself to the will of the Supreme Reality while at the same time requesting the Supreme Reality to assist things to move in the right direction is, in my opinion, the positive and sane way of doing things.

This, of course, requires you to have faith in the Supreme Reality. Stability of awareness is based in stability of body and stability of mind, and an important part of stability of mind

and body is not only that you are receiving prana but that all of your cells, human as well as microbiome, as well as your sense organs and your mind—all are confident that they will continue to receive prana. When they have faith that prana will come to them they don't have to be fearful, anxious, agitated. And if they are not fearful, anxious, agitated, then automatically all parts of you are going to be more in harmony. If they are fearful, anxious, agitated, you will have less prana in your organism and more *vata*. Vata and prana both come from *vayu*, the air element, but prana is deep and regular and nourishing, and vata is eccentric, superficial, and destabilizing. Grief and fear create vata; vata enhances grief and fear.

We must be compassionate to others, and we need to grieve when we lose a family member, but we also need to sit with that grief, to feel it fully, and then to let go of it and permit it to depart just as that loved one did. It's not healthy to identify with your grief, nor is it healthy to identify with your compassion. You should be able to feel compassion without telling yourself you are a compassionate person. You can instead identify yourself as a person who is open to the cosmic force of compassion moving through you, moving out in all directions to assist those in need. You can't assist anyone any more than a doctor can cure anyone. It is the Supreme Reality that assists people through that faculty of compassion that is present everywhere in the universe at all times. Nature is compassionate even when it appears otherwise. Animals slaughter one another all the time, that's how nature is organized, how the law of karma works. It may seem brutal, but it is the reality of karma. Only humans are deliberately sadistic, because only humans identify themselves with their brutality.

You need faith to be able to feel compassion, and you either have faith or you don't. You can't purchase faith, or have it donated to you, or have it fall on your head. How then do we get faith? Consider that there are two

main words in Sanskrit for faith. One is *vishvasa*, the other is *shraddha*. *Vishvasa* literally means *a special way of breathing*—not just the movement of gas in and out of your lungs, but an openness to the prana of the universe, the *qi* of the cosmos. *Vishvasa* means allowing the life force to flow into and out of you without your doubts and anxieties and other intense emotions getting in its way. *Shraddha* comes from the root *hrt*, which emerged in English as the word *heart*. The heart takes the incoming prana and sends it out to all the parts of the body, all the way to the periphery. The heart does the job of circulating the prana, while the lungs and large intestine do the job of taking it in. A lot of prana comes to us from our food, but the intake of that prana into the system is delayed, whereas we get prana immediately through the air.

So if you have good air but crappy food that's a problem, or if you have crappy food but good air that's a problem. Most people nowadays, though, have bad air, bad food and bad habits, yielding all manner of imbalances. Their bodies are not sama, they're not harmonious anymore, and they are always craving things because their prana can't get into all parts of their bodies to reassure them and tell them, "Do not worry. You are alive you're going to remain alive. You can move forward, remain calm." They literally cannot remain calm, because no parts of their organism are calm; if you want to be sane, sanity requires a certain degree of calm.

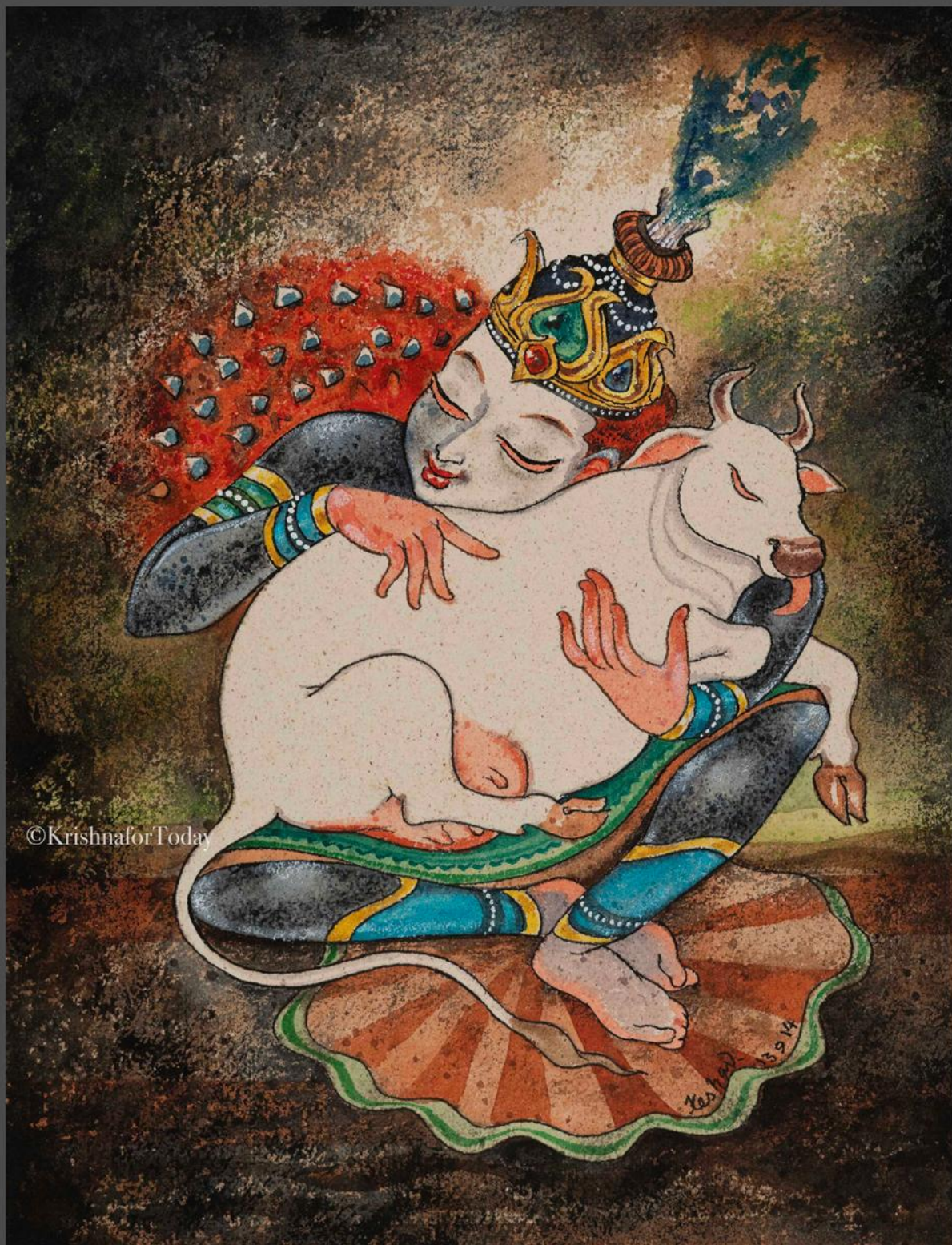
IN AYURVEDA, THREE PRINCIPLES form the foundation of a healthy mental structure. The first is *dhi* or *buddhi* which means the ability to discern, to determine what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior in any situation. The first portion of the definition of ayurveda in the *Charaka Samhita* is *hitahitam sukham dukham*, meaning *ayurveda is the science of understanding what will promote (hita) or inhibit (ahita) good space (sukha) and bad space (dukhka) in an individual. Good space* means that all spaces of the or-

ganism—physical, pranic, mental and causal—enjoy good movement of the air element within that space, and when space is *bad*, it impedes the free, healthy movement of prana therein. The air element's job is to move things around, and the space element creates a location in which things can move about.

So the promotion of good or bad space means the promotion of good or bad prana. If the prana is good, then the internal fires of the organism will be healthy. That fire element is in charge of discernment, because the fire is always transforming one thing into another, and what does discernment mean? It means to take one situation and to extract from it information that allows us to perform an appropriate action in some other situation. The fire element does actual transmutation, converting this thing into that thing and that thing into this.

Good discernment permits you to understand what you should be doing and what you shouldn't be doing, how you should be working and how you should not be working, in any situation. For example, right now, in my opinion at least, discernment involves understanding that we need to focus on our immediate families. We need to be compassionate for everybody else, but our major focus right now needs to be the immediate family because we are now "sheltering in place". But we should be able to understand that Mother Nature is telling us that, even after she frees us from our detention, we need to allot as much time as necessary to interact with the people in our Dunbar number group so that those relationships will be maintained in a healthy, non-craving, kind of way.

There will always be people who will crave your attention in an unhealthy way; those people always have to be managed. I'm saying this from personal experience. Some people never grow up; they remain dependent, needy children until their dying day even if they make it to 90 or 100. If you have such a person in your "clan" you need to acknowledge that reality, and figure out how much attention to give them, then give them that much. Just as with a needy child, you have to be patient with them but you can't spoil them.



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Such a relationship may never nourish you because of all the demands that are being put on you from that needy person, but if that person is a family member, you will have to maintain that relationship somehow, preferably in a way that disturbs you minimally.

For example, I can't say that I really like to brush my teeth. I do it because I want to preserve my teeth, as my teeth are part of my bodily family and are useful to me. Not all your family members may be useful to you, but they are still family members, and are still maintaining your sanity, in one way or another. Using your faculty of discernment you have to find a way to position yourself so that the problems coming to you are minimized and the appropriate things going towards them are enhanced, for your karmic benefit if not also for theirs.

The faculty of buddhi, the first principle of sanity, is ruled by the element of Fire.

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE IS *DHRTI*. *Dhrti* means *stability*, stability of prana, stability of food. It means generating whatever kind of stability you need in order to be stable. Stability of prana, of course, has to come first because if your prana is not stable, then no part of you is going to be stable. And if the rest of you is stable, then somehow the prana is going to be more stable. So this is why ayurveda talks so much about *charya*, *behavior*—*ritucharya* and *dinacharya* in particular: having a daily routine and a seasonal routine. Monthly and weekly routines are also good, which is why limb number two in Patanjali's eight-limbed yoga is *niyama*. Vimalananda emphasized *niyama*. *Niyamas* are actions you should perform because they promote stability. *Yamas* are actions you should not perform because they will create more unfortunate karmas for you, karmas that will come back to bite you at inconvenient moments. Stop doing that! Let those karmic reactions come to you, but do not react. Remain calm, and observe *niyama*. And what is one of the most important of Patanjali's five *niyamas*?

Santosha. *Santosha* means being satisfied with what you've got, which is precisely what Sushruta is saying as well. *Prasanna* and *santosha* are very similar in meaning.

Sadly, I have met people who are never satisfied, who've never been satisfied, and who will never be satisfied, and I can understand why. When you're a very, very small child and you are mistreated, you will tend to become a very, very unsatisfied adult. Once in Peru, in the context of some shamanic work, I met a woman from the Netherlands who had been born during the Hunger Winter, the winter of 1944-45, when, after D-Day, Allied armies were headed towards Germany and the Nazis basically took all the food from the Netherlands and left the people there to starve. It was a really brutal winter and people wasted away. It was terrible, especially if you were a growing child then. This woman I met was a "hungry ghost", though her hunger for food had morphed into a hunger for other sense objects. I remember there being moments when I saw her possessed by, taken over by, her craving, her desire. At such moments she was no longer herself; she had become the hunger, because of this tremendous damage that had been inflicted upon her at a tender age, damage that she'd never been able to heal from.

Most small children in the world are not literally starving now, but most of them are being damaged, though not deliberately, through our screens. Children are growing up now with screens, exposed to them from early on in their young lives. I have personally watched a one-year-old pick up an iPad, take herself directly to YouTube, find the video that she wanted, and start watching it. Why is this bad, you will ask? There are many reasons that this is not good; one noteworthy reason is that these devices do not provide continuity. What they provide instead is discontinuity—attention goes here, attention goes there, attention goes here, attention goes there.

Infants require ongoing healthy continuity from the very beginning if

they are to grow up with the ability to concentrate. Healthy continuity assists kids to become aware of their *dharma*, their path through life, and helps them focus on following that dharma as they move forward. As Mr. Robert Moses described yesterday, even when he was released blindfolded in an unfamiliar forest in the middle of the night he was able to get back to the campsite simply by following the sound of a drum because he let his "inner tracker" take over, he allowed himself to be taken over by the continuity of awareness that is available to all of us provided that we know how to tap into it.

I venture to say that he was able to do this because, from a young age, he had developed some continuity. This allowed him to open into that space where he could connect to that drum acting as his beacon of awareness and move along guided by it. But if you do not learn how to maintain continuity of awareness when you are young, it's going to be very difficult for you when you are older and something or other is always trying to capture your attention. Then it's going to be very difficult for you to maintain that continuity of awareness and return to safety when you're trying to negotiate the perilous forest of the modern world. Like discernment, stability is a critical component of sanity. We need not only to be able to know what is appropriate and what inappropriate, what is good and bad, right and wrong; we also need to be able to remember that discernment in the next moment, and then the next, and the next. We need to be able to identify it, maintain it in awareness long enough that we can get into the flow and then have that very appropriate energy and *shakti* that we've tapped into move us in the direction in which we need to go. If you can't do this you may never be able to be satisfied with anything in your life, much less be able to negotiate the woods at night without light.

Therefore, if you have not been terribly damaged as a child, you should be grateful to Nature that you possess the capability to be satisfied. You may

have trouble being satisfied, and if you do then please start by being a little satisfied, then work up to being a little more satisfied, then a little more and a little more and a little more. Then you can extend your satisfaction, which will enhance your health.

Dhriti is therefore all about maintaining continuity.

THE THIRD ASPECT OF AWARENESS that is critical to sanity is *smṛiti* or *smara*. *Smṛiti* means *memory*. Shiva is called Smarahara. Hara in this case means he who takes away. Shiva takes away your memory. That's how he kills you. He makes you forget that you are this body. He disconnects from you the awareness that you are associated with your body by suddenly making you aware of something else, which causes you to completely forget that you had a body. Maybe you remember this afterwards, but then it's too late: you're dead. This is why he's called Smarahara.

Smarahara also means the Conqueror of Eros, Destroyer of Lust. *Smara* or *smṛiti* means memory in general, and also means strong desire—particularly sexual, but any kind of desire. Why does it mean desire? Because it's unlikely—possible, but unlikely—that you will experience a strong desire for something you have not already experienced. Strong desires often arise due to lack of *santosha*, satisfaction. Then your cravings drag you through life, as they did the “hungry ghost” woman, always making you feel that you're missing something, always making you look outside yourself for something that you imagine will satisfy you or complete you. Lord Shiva blesses you when he kills you because at least for that moment he disconnects you from all your *raga*, all your hungers and thirsts that are manipulating you.

Sanity requires reliable memory, *smṛiti*, because of all that we need to remember, like your name, address, phone number, place of work, and all the other essential details of our lives. But memory is not limited to what we can consciously recall. Good muscle memory may not be essential to sanity per se but it is crucial to “practical

sanity,” the ability to perform actions that don't demand conscious attention. Though thanks to the pandemic, I am at the moment not driving much, I have driven quite a bit during my life, on many continents. If every time I sat at the wheel I had to consciously go through the entire process of motions involved in driving, that would be exhausting and infuriating. I learned on a standard transmission vehicle—which I think everyone should do—and while I was learning I would always be thinking, okay, now I put my foot on the accelerator and now I take it off; now I put on the brake, depress the clutch and shift gears, then slowly release the clutch, then slowly release the brake. I had to repeat this mentally to myself, repeatedly, until it became muscle memory. Now I don't have to think about it, which is good because it is very tedious, and sometimes dangerous, to forget what to do when you are driving a standard on a mountain road.

But it's not just memory in the head or in the muscles. It's neurological, endocrine, and even microbiome memory too. There's all manner of memory maintaining stability by remembering things all through your organism. Each of your cells remembers its identity: This is my home, this is my job, this is how I help out. Each cell remembers this all day long, and if any cell stops remembering what it's supposed to do, which could happen if it fears for its life, and decides instead to preserve its life at all costs, then you have cancer.

So good memory is essential—except that you don't want to be overwhelmed by memory. Then you can't do anything other than remember; then you have PTSD or something equally disabling. And then there's the question of false memory, and also the problem that every time—not occasionally, but every time—you remember something, you remember it slightly differently. The reality is that even when you created the memory you did not remember all the details of the situation perfectly and completely. Instead you remembered what

seemed to be important at that moment. Every time you bring up that memory you reinforcing those aspects of it that seem important at that time and you de-emphasize those things that seem rather less important.

Every time you bring up a memory you change it. Unimportant memories should be recalled as best you can. With important memories, make a serious effort to have the right alignment and attitude towards that memory that you may recall it accurately. You may think, “Now that I can take videos with my phone I'll remember everything really well.” However, while the video may allow you to remember the superficial part of that event, it may ironically impede you from remembering the more important parts, like what was going on beneath that surface.

Vimalananda used to say that life is nothing but memory. It may be a bitter memory, it may be a sweet memory, but life itself, the reason why we're able to be alive as human beings, is the totality of all the memories of all the different sheaths of our being, of all the different players inside the organism. The totality of that memory creates an identity, an identity is constantly changing. Based on our memories we create one identity to use with one individual or group of individuals in our lives and other identities to use with others. To be sane requires all these identities to be adequately harmonious, to play nicely with one another. This requires an ability to accurately discern.

SOMETIMES, EVEN WITH THE BEST focus and intention, discernment does not work properly. India has two great epics: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is all about sincere people, many of them experts in their fields, trying and often failing to do the right thing. And sometimes, once they realize they've made a mistake and try to fix it they make another mistake, an even bigger one. So it's not just you and me; this imperfection is characteristic of the human species. Each one of us does what we can, but we acknowledge

that there are some things that we are not going to be able to properly discern. We need to be able to acknowledge when we've made a mistake and then immediately try to fix it somehow, whatever that entails. Vimalanada regularly said, "You're a human being. You're going to make mistakes. Always try to make different mistakes so that you do not repeat the same mistakes each time." This is really valuable advice, because the more you repeat a mistake, the deeper will be the neurological rut you're creating that will be available for you to fall into so that you will continue to make that same mistake. This is what happens to people who are easily swayed by politicians who tell them, "Everybody else is lying to you. I'm telling you the truth." The more lies, the more the belief. Belief in something is good, so long as you have used your discernment to make sure you're actually believing in something that is worth believing in.

Someone was telling me today about a movie she had watched about some conspiracy theory and I reflected on how these global conspiracy theories change but still remain the same. Ten or twenty years ago black helicopters from the UN were going to take over the entire United States suddenly and subject us to a world government. The UN? The UN can only rarely get itself sufficiently organized to conduct often-ineffective peacekeeping operations in third-world countries—and it's going to suddenly and utterly take over a giant complex country like this one? I am indeed thankful to Edward Snowden for showing us what the NSA has been doing, and to other courageous whistle-blowers who have informed us of all the crimes that the CIA and other agencies have been committing for decades. But to assume that there's a massive, well-organized, global conspiracy being flawlessly executed by thousands of human beings who are all so disciplined that none of them ever dreams of "doing a Snowden" and letting everyone else in on the plot—that's going a little too far for me. For me, it assumes way too much cleverness and efficiency on the part of the plotters, based on a pre-

sumption that all the human beings involved will be able indefinitely to keep the whole scheme quiet.

WE HUMAN BEINGS ARE ALWAYS trying to discover "the truth", always trying to figure out what we can believe in. What can we have faith in when we can't perceive reality perfectly? Everyone has a blind spot. We can definitely have faith in the belief that the basis of everything is the Supreme Reality. When you rely on the Supreme Reality, when you say to that Reality, *I know that I'm working from a limited amount of input, from which my brain is generating an image of what is. I will commit to doing my best to move in the right direction, whatever that direction may be, but I am relying on you to make sure that I move the right direction*—if this is the basis of your existence, then your blind spot will be minimal, and probably manageable. If not, then there will definitely be areas of life in which your blind spot will balloon to a dangerous size. A small blind spot may damage you and others, but it is better than having a blind spot so big that you can see nothing but blind spot.

That blind spot can manifest via any combination of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Contrary to the opinion of many practitioners of yoga, *tamas* is a good thing; it promotes stability. *Rajas* is also a good thing; it promotes change. We need to be stable without being stuck, and we need to be able to change without being destabilized by it. We need *sattva* to keep *rajas* and *tamas* in balance, but too much *sattva* can also be problematical. An excess of *sattva* can create overconfidence, vanity. Just look at the devatas, so smug in their conceit of belonging to a superior astral race that they are only roused from their complacency when confronted by the asuras. On an individual basis each of them keeps reinforcing this opinion of self-greatness until their good karmas expire and they fall from heaven down to Earth to start the process of creating heaven-worthy karmas again—but who knows how long that will take?

Three *gunas* are recognized because each of them is essential to the workings of the cosmos, not because one *guna* is good and the other two *gunas* are bad. In ayurveda we say that *sattva* is the natural condition of the mind and *rajas* and *tamas* are its *doshas*. But even this statement doesn't imply that *rajas* and *tamas* are bad. Instead it explains that in excess *rajas* and/or *tamas* will unbalance your mind. *Sattva*, the balancing principle, can also unhinge you, though. An excess of *sattva* will prevent you from identifying and dealing with the *tamas* and *rajas* that are within you. Meaningful change is impossible without the action of *rajas* and *tamas*—*rajas* to free you from your set habits and *tamas* to create new patterns—but meaningful change is also impossible when *rajas* and *tamas* exist in excess. A surfeit of *rajas* prevents you from creating stable new patterns, and disproportionate *tamas* will render patterns resistant to dismantling.

One passage in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* discusses the types of enjoyment that humans can experience. Enjoyment guided by *sattva* involves pain first and pleasure afterward. First you do the work, then you take a break and enjoy your lunch in peace. The enjoyment of *rajas* is pleasure first, pain afterwards. You relax until almost lunchtime, then work like the devil to meet your deadline, which cuts into your lunch hour. Pleasure first, then pain. Why is satisfaction at the end better than at the beginning? Because your memory tends to connect you to peak events and to the last thing that happens to you in a situation. If satisfaction happens at the end, you are more likely to retain the memory of that satisfaction rather than of the effort that preceded it because the satisfaction happened last. Even if most of the day is difficult but it ends well, you will tend to remember the end. This is how humans work, it is natural to us. Almost every film that succeeds ends with some sort of denouement. Everybody may have problems all throughout the movie, but if you walk out feeling good at the end, you are much more likely to feel good about the whole movie than if you walked out uneasy.

Tamas promotes pain in the be-

ginning, pain in the middle, pain at the end. Tamas makes life miserable because tamas promotes unhealthy habits that you either can't escape or (worse) have no desire to escape. These could be drugs or other intoxicants, alcohol, bad food, deleterious activities, corrupt thoughts, anything. Tamas provides you what you believe to be pleasure but what is in fact pain. But since you're convinced it's pleasure you won't let it go and aren't willing to try anything else.

You have to be willing to let go of the things that you believe to be pleasure, especially if you can't really tell the difference between what is good for you, what is appropriate for you and what is bad or inappropriate for you. This is why it is a good thing to regularly fast. Fast from food once every week or two, fast from devices for a day or half a day once a week, fast from going out and being really active in the world (the pandemic is doing this for us now). Disconnect yourself from all that you normally do and you will be able to perceive more clearly what habits you have created, identify which of them are useful and which are not so beneficial. Then you can accentuate the positive ones and eliminate those that affect you detrimentally.

THE WORD SANITY, INTERESTINGLY enough, is very similar to *sanus*, the Latin word for *health*, and though experts don't agree on the origin of the word *sanus*, some believe that it comes from a root meaning *well-structured, well put together*. This would reflect Sushruta's definition of *svasthya* (health). If you want to be sane, you want to be *sva stha, established in the self*. Please note that that self is a very negotiable thing, one that is not really the same in the East and in the West. When I say "the West" I mean everyone who is westernized, everyone who has been educated and who thinks in a postmodern way, no matter what their location or ethnicity, as opposed to people from the East—India, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam in particular but other cultures and countries as well—who are not yet westernized.

To be regarded as a healthy individ-

ual in the West and among westernized peoples you have to individuate yourself away from everybody. You have to separate your identity from, and make sure that you are independent of, your mother, father, siblings, grandparents, children, and from everybody else who has contributed to your construction. You have to declare to the world that you are a unique individual whose individuality is beholden to no one, and if you do happen to be so strongly connected to one or more of your relatives or friends, even your spouse, you may well be considered to be co-dependent, or suffering from some similar pathology.

In the traditional East, it's exactly the opposite. If you differentiate away completely from your family members and your Dunbar group, if you are not sharing portions of your "self" with your loved ones, then you are regarded as suffering from a pathology of self. Please note that I am not arguing that family and personal dynamics in the East are inherently better than in the West; not at all. There are plenty of unhealthy families in the East, many of which refuse to permit their members to display any individuality whatsoever and from which individuation is essential for the good of all concerned. However, I do believe that the traditional Eastern concept of self is fundamentally a healthier concept than is the concept of individuating yourself away from every other human being, if for no other reason that such a process can create tremendous loneliness. The intensity of the Covid pandemic is worsening the ongoing pandemic of chronic isolation that in itself discourages sanity because we as humans are always requiring the assistance of others to maintain our sanity.

If you have no one who can serve to assist you to maintain your sanity, you are going to find it extremely difficult to actually maintain that sanity. You will find it easy to become possessed by something that offers you the illusion of sanity: a religion, a guru, an ism, an ethereal being. Conspiracy theories are especially popular nowadays because they are presented to people in a form that is easy enough

to understand but not so simple as to be easy to immediately discount. It is always reassuring to find someone to blame for your problems, whether that someone might be reptilian beings or other space aliens; corrupt, depraved politicians; or the blacks or reds or yellows or whites or some other perilous race in general. Once you can find someone to blame, you immediately gain membership in a group. You're not alone anymore. Now you're part of the group that really knows the truth. This makes you feel more sane, and also explains why *satsanga* is superior. One of the first sayings we were taught in the ayurvedic college was *Satsangati kim na karoti pumsam: What can satsanga not do for human beings?* Satsanga creates a temporary community whose purpose is to try to perceive reality accurately, to try to move in the direction of *sat*. Sometimes this will be easier, sometimes less easy, but at all times participation in a group that is genuinely seeking truth will actively promote your personal sanity.

That's assuming of course that you're doing all the things you need to do to facilitate sanity, which include establishing a healthy relationship with and having faith in the Supreme Reality, eating food that is right for you, doing regular healthy exercise—mental, physical, and spiritual—and maintaining *samata* (equanimity).

In conclusion, I'd like to thank the Supreme Reality for being supreme, and for being real, and I would like to reiterate that the most important thing for anyone to do is to repeat God's name. Today is Sunday and in honor of Sunday let us bring to mind Rama, born in the Ikshvaku Vamsa, the Solar Race. Rama's distant ancestor was the sun himself, Lord Surya, and so offering obeisance to Rama is yet another way of saluting the sun.

Om Sri Rama Jaya Rama
Jaya Jaya Rama
Om Sri Rama Jaya Rama
Jaya Jaya Rama.

Bhagavan Ramachandra ki jai! ❖

OBSTACLES IN YOGA

EDDIE STERN

Talk given at the Nāmarūpa Living with Reality virtual retreat in the Spring of 2020, transcribed and edited.

*Om Akhanda Manadalakaram
Vyaptam yena Charaacharam
Tadpadam Darshitam Yena
Tasmai Sri Guruve Namah*

Sri Gurubhyo Namah Hari OM

GOOD AFTERNOON EVERYBODY and good evening to those who might be in evening-like places. I thought I would give a little talk, as best I could, on the obstacles in yoga and how the different practices help us to face those obstacles. I know there's a lot of information coming at you during this entire weekend so as best I can I'll keep it all in the same kind of vein.

Things that we'll look at today are the purpose of asanas, what the mind is, what the obstructions to the mind are, and how they can be removed. All of this is covered in *Yoga Sutras*, chapters 1 and 2, and that's basically what we'll be focusing on.

FIRST, WE HAVE A DEFINITION OF yoga: *yogaschittavrittinirodhah*—*Yoga is the selective elimination of the fluctuations in the field of the mind.*

This is basically an equation: yoga equals the *nirodhah* of the *vrittis* in *chitta*. *Nirodhah* basically means *to stop* or *to still* or *to eliminate*; a *vritti* is an *activity* and *chitta* is *the entire field where activities are occurring*. If a calm ocean is like a field (*chitta*), then a wave arising from it would be a *vritti*, would be an activity. We have lots of different types of activities that are occurring. Patanjali identifies five of them and they have many subcategories as well. *Nirodhah* as

an elimination or stilling doesn't mean that, first out of the gate, we're trying to get rid of all of the activities. What we're trying to do is eliminate all of the activities that are not helpful to us in the obtaining of a calm, clear, focused mind. In order to do that, there are certain *vrittis* that we're going to hold on to and others that we're going to eliminate; we'll go through what some of those are.

Just as an obvious example, when you're doing any type of yogic practice, for example, say you meditate and in your meditation you're using a mantra—a mantra is a particular type of *vritti* that you are using as an anchor for your awareness so that you stay with that one particular *vritti* of the mantra and you don't go with all the other *vrittis* like "When is this going to be over?" or "What should I have for dinner?" or "I forgot to send an email to my mother." or whatever any of the *vrittis* are that might arise. You're going to save all those for when you're going to deal with them but for the time being you just want to be with that one *vritti*.

THE DEFINITION OF YOGA TO BEGIN with is that it is an elimination of all *vrittis* that are not helpful to *samadhi*, the deepest states of concentration. Asanas are said to be the first stage of learning how to deal with *vritti*. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is a much later formulation of yoga. Hatha yoga comes along thousands of years after the first types of yoga were suggested and offered in the Vedas and in the Upanishads.

You can think of yoga and philosophy in general in India, in the en-

tire Hindu tradition, as being an ongoing dialogue that's been occurring for the past several thousands of years—5,000, maybe 10,000, years—and within that dialogue there's a lot of development and there are a lot of advances and hatha yoga has come out from that tradition. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, it says:

*Hathasya prathamam gatvad
asanam provam ucyate*

*Kuryat tadasanam sthairyam
arogyam cangalaghavam*

Among the *hathas* (or the determinations or intentions that bring us to practice yoga), *asana* is said to be the first thing that we do. And by the practice of *asana*, we are going to obtain steadiness which means our nervous system will become calm and balanced. We'll gain health, which means our immune system will be strengthened and functioning and responding properly to the environment. And we'll get lightness of limb, which means that our physical body as well as our mind will be light so that we can manipulate the limbs of our body as we choose. We see all the traditional asanas—*paschimottanasana*, *mayurasana*, *padmasana*—mentioned in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

In the discussion of the benefits of asanas—steadiness, health and lightness of limbs—there is also this idea that they're related to the nervous system, immune system and to the mind for the lightness of them all.



Patanjali Maharishi ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

Asanas are said to steady the mind as well. We see that in *cangalaghavam*—lightness of limbs. At the same time we want to develop a lightness of mind or a lightness of being, you could say.

YAJNAVALKYA SAID:

*Tritiya kalasto ravih svayam
samharate prabham
tritiyangasthito yogi na
vikaram manasa tatha*

As the sun in the third quarter of the day pulls back its brightness, so the yogi practicing the third stage of yoga will not have agitation of mind.

Imagine a sun in the middle of the day in India, burning extremely bright. You can't go outside without getting burned in that heat. You can't even do any work. All you do sit around and digest the food from your lunch. There's a tremendous amount of *tamas* that comes during that time, after lunch in the heat of the day in India. You can barely think sometimes when it gets so hot. And then, in the third quarter of the day, towards dusk, the sun begins to set and begins to withdraw his rays. At that time the temperature begins to cool down, your energy starts to come back up. It's a beautiful time in India where you want to walk outside and hear the evening-time birds and be able to enjoy the day. Yajnavalkya likened this time of the day to the stage of asanas, whereby the practice of asanas gives the same feeling in the body and mind as does this third quarter of the day when the sun begins to cool its rays and the agitation of the mind begins to lessen. In the heat of the day, the heat of the moment, the mind is very agitated or the opposite, very tamasic. But in this third stage, the stage of asanas, if we do them in such a way where we're steadying our mind while we're doing them, of course, the agitation will begin to diminish.

In particular, what is it that is being steady? We hear all the time that yoga is going to steady the mind, etc,

etc. The text is very particular about what it is that is being steadied. Some will say *ahamkara* which is *the sense of I-ness*, but what is *ahamkara* made up of? It's made up of *kama*—desire, *krodha*—anger, *lobha*—greed, *moha*—delusion, *mada*—pride, and *matsarya*—envy. These are identifications. The word *asmita* means when *purusha* mistakes itself for *buddhi*, for the faculty of identification and of the intellect. When those two are mixed up together, that's when we have *ahamkara* which is called *asmita* in *Yoga Sutras*. There is a confusion of identity and that confusion of identity is projected out into the world. So we desire things and certain things make us angry and if we see things that other people have, we get greedy for them. We have delusion and thinking that we know stuff like, for example, the lecture I'm giving right now. We have pride at times thinking that we know more than other people or our accomplishments are worthy of praise. And then for people who are doing better than us, we have envy. So all of these—*kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*—which are called the six poisons relate to things in the world which appear to be outside of us.

Thinking that the world is outside of us, of course, is the first of the illusions that we are given to. As soon as we believe that there's a world outside of us that we are separate from, then all of these poisons naturally arise. So the thing that we're trying to steady are these six poisons and they're said to surround the spiritual heart. As we begin to weaken them, then love and compassion and kindness and self-acceptance begin to flower forth from the heart and they begin to overtake these six poisons.

WHAT DOES PATANJALI MEAN BY practice? We have to practice something in order to begin to get the benefits in order to start to weaken either the five *kleshas* or the six poisons. We have to do something; we have to apply some effort.

What Patanjali defines as practice is *abhyasa vairagya abhyam tan nirodhah*.

We know that the goal of practice is *nirodhah*, the elimination of all the types of thought forms that are not supportive of *samadhi* or focus. There are basically only two things we need to do. Number one, we need to do *abhyasa*, which is a *practice*, any type. And number two is *vairagya* which means *non-attachment* to when our mind goes away from our chosen point of focus.

The description of *abhyasa* is *tatra sthitau yatno'bhyaasah*. *Abhyasa*, or practice, is the *yatnah*, the *effort*, of keeping your mind *sthitau*, which means *steady* or *placed*, *tatra*, *there*—wherever you want it to be. Practice is the effort of keeping your mind stabilized, placed exactly where you want it to be. When it's not there, it goes somewhere else, you recognize that and you have the control of mind to bring it back to where you want it to be, and that is *vairagya*.

Now, along the way to practice, there are going to be particular obstacles that present themselves. So *tatra sthitau yatno'bhyaasah* makes it sound like practice is not that difficult. It's only simply the effort of keeping your mind where you want it to be. In fact, to get *nirodhah*, to get this stilling of the mind, I only need to do two things. I only need to do *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. How hard can this be? I just have to do those two things and I only have to keep my mind in that one place. What's the big deal?

We know that there are many big deals that create obstacles in our minds and a lot of small deals as well. Patanjali goes on to say later in chapter one that there are some predictable obstacles that are going to present themselves and if we are aware of these predictable obstacles when they arise, we're going to know what to do with them.

The obstacles are: *vyadhi styana samsaya pramada alasyavirati bhrantidarshana alabdhabhumikatva anavasthitatvani citta vikshepa te antarayah*. These are sickness, mental laziness, doubt, carelessness, sloth, non-abstention from addictions, con-

fusion of philosophies, inability to obtain stages in practice which means inability to progress in your practice, and a failure to maintain levels of practice once you have gotten there.

These are *vikshepas*; they're chitta vikshepas, which are just distractions. But if you dwell on them, they become *antarayas*, which are *obstacles*. They become a little bit more fixed. That means that any of the things on this list, if we begin to dwell on them and identify them as "This is who we are", they become obstacles. I doubt and I become very beholden to what I doubt, because the doubt that I have is part of my identity, it's defining my narrative. If I'm a lazy person and I like being lazy and I identify with that, that will then become an obstacle. If I give in to all of my addictions because I have no other strategies for dealing with them and I continue to do that again and again, that will become an obstacle.

Dr. Robert quoted Vimalananda that it's okay to make mistakes; you just don't want to keep making the same mistakes over and over again. It's okay to make mistakes, but just keep making new ones. 'Cause if you make the same mistakes again and again and again, that will become a new *samskara* for you, a new memory, a new imprint. Then you will be stuck with that predictable way that you're going to make a mistake every time the situation arises.

All of these are Patanjali's suggestions of things to look out for, that, if you give in to them, are going to solidify and become more problematic for you. If you try to transcend or move past these nine things, then they won't become obstacles. They're just going to be momentary distractions that you've identified in advance and now you can move on from. Again, that's hard to do but given encouragement, we can.

Failure to maintain your level of practice. I think many of us have experienced where sometimes we decide we're going to practice something and we do it for one or two days or two or three weeks or a month or two and

things are going well and then all of a sudden something gets in our way and we miss a couple of days and then that couple of days turns into a week and before you know it a bunch of time has gone by and you haven't been doing the practices you said you wanted to do. So in small ways we can see that all of these things, at one time or another, will come into our lives.

Those are the predictable obstacles. A distraction becomes an obstacle when you dwell on it and when you identify with it. A chitta vikshepa, a distraction of mind, becomes an *antaraya*, an obstacle.

WHAT INDICATORS DO THE DISTRACTIONS exhibit? When distractions are coming up, there are certain things which we're going to see at the same time. Patanjali describes these in the next verse. He says these are *dukhadaurmanasyangamejayatvasvasaprasvasa viksepasahabhuvah*.

We will have physical or mental pain. We'll have sadness or dejection; we'll have shaking of the limbs which could be anxiety, stress, or restlessness, and interruption of the breath. These accompany the distractions. When you notice that your breathing's not even, when you notice that your body doesn't feel strong and stable—maybe there's even a little shaking of your limbs—this could be a result of anxiety, stress, or restlessness. If you feel a little bit dejected or you have physical or mental pain, these are indicators of a distraction. They're indicators that something's going on that you need to take a look at because if you don't take a look at it, you're going to assume that it's okay for it to be there and then it will really become an obstacle. These are the four things that we look at to see if we exhibit any of these distractions and if we don't have any of those things, then we can say that okay our mind right now is positioned for actually doing *abhyasa*, for doing practice.

Now most of these can be remedied through *ishvara pranidhana*, which is surrender to the Lord, if you believe in God, and surrender to the unknown

or to nature, if you happen to be atheistic. The idea of *ishvara pranidhana* is a new thing within yoga in comparison to how Patanjali is using the *sankhya* philosophy. Sankhya is atheistic. No god is mentioned in *sankhya*, only the two eternal principles of *purusha* and *prakriti*. *Purusha* doesn't create anything and it doesn't act and it doesn't cause anything else to act so therefore it can't be a creator god. And *prakriti* does everything from within herself. She is the infinite potential of nature. Patanjali introduces *ishvara pranidhana* as a special type of *purusha*. Through the surrender to the Lord or to the unknown—the surrender of the results of all of the outcomes of your efforts—all of these distractions can basically be remedied so *Ishvara* is the panacea for all ills.

WITHIN THAT IS ALSO THE suggestion that if we practice surrender to the Lord, in that practice we begin to focus our mind in one direction.

*Tat pratishedhartham
ekatattva abhyasah.*

*For the stoppage of all of these
distractions, concentration on a
single principle should be made.*

This could be either doing one practice or holding onto a single principle that you're applying to all the different practices that you do. For example, a single principle could be that you hold the belief or value system that consciousness has taken the form of everything in the manifest universe. Everything that we see changing is illusory. Underneath it or driving it is a coherent principle which is transcendent of thought or ideology or separation. It can't be named. It can't be formed. Nothing can be done with it. It just is pure being. If you practice all of the things you do with this idea that you're trying to form a relationship with pure consciousness, then that will be the thing that your practice begins to move you towards.

Tat pratishedhartham ekatattva

abhyasah. Ekatattva—the single principle that you’re practicing could either be that you choose to do one practice to completely focus your mind in a chosen direction or you practice with this underlying idea that everything that you’re doing is for the sake of liberation. That is one of the ways where all practices can become an offering to Ishvara, where everything you do, you do for the sake of liberation. You’re not doing it for the sake of types of outcomes other than knowledge of who you are. Any of the other outcomes you leave aside. All offerings of the practice are made to Ishvara and then your mind stays focused on Ishvara as the purpose of your practice.

Generally speaking, what Patanjali is suggesting as we move into the next verses is: Focus on the positive, focus on lifestyle changes through *yama* and *niyama* and examine our thoughts and emotions through *swadhyaya*. When we begin to do these things, we encourage our innate ability to begin to focus in one direction and in *ekattva*. This is a key part of the yoga practice. Without that *ekattva*, our mind will go in too many different directions, we’ll be drawn by a diverse number of practices and we’ll try them all for short periods of time, but they won’t reap results. We only begin to reap the results when we focus on that one principle and devote ourselves to it. Quite often focusing on one principle comes in the guise of focusing on one particular practice. All of these things are just entryways into knowing who we are but we can’t go through all the gates. We have to go through one gate at a time.

LET’S GO BACK TO THE VRITTIS FOR a moment. The vrittis are thought patterns and they’re going to be *klish-ta* or *aklishta*. That means they’re going to be harmful, which is where the word *klish-ta* is from, or non-harmful. They’re going to be helpful or not helpful.

All of the five vrittis that Patanjali speaks about can be *klish-ta* or *aklishta* in different types of ways. For exam-

ple, the vritti of imagination can be helpful when you’re trying to describe *brahman* as *satchidananda* which is, for lack of a better word, reality. You couldn’t really describe *brahman* because *brahman* is indescribable, but when you use the words truth, consciousness, and bliss, or you say *brahman* is the uncaused bliss or *brahman* is pure being without any limitation, these are ways that we use imagination to describe something that can’t be described. Imagination can still be helpful for moving our minds in the direction of *brahman*. But then there can be other types of imagination that are not helpful. Say we imagine ourselves to be enlightened, or imagine ourselves to be more advanced than we really are, or imagine ourselves to be much worse than we really are. Imagination, or *vikalpa*, in and of itself is not *klish-ta* or *aklishta*. It can be either depending on how it’s being used and how we’re using it.

THE NEXT THING THAT COMES along after we talk about *ekattva* is the preparation for meditation. How are we going to prepare our mind in order to be perceptive of what truth is? To be perceptive of who we are and who we are not? To begin to unmix this mixing of *purusha* with *buddhi*, where *asmita* and false identification come into play.

First we address the distractions of the mind. After we go through the distractions of the mind and we’ve begun to prepare ourselves through *ekattva*, then a meditative mind is possible. Meditation will not automatically remove the distractions, but it will help with them.

Just to recap: Vrittis are thought patterns. They are observable in the field of consciousness. We can use them in a way which is helpful, or we can be ruled by them in a way which is not helpful. The six poisons also are types of vrittis. These are unhelpful thought patterns which we feel bound by at times. Then there are other thought patterns such as the thought pattern of practicing an *asana*, or taking a conscious breath, or practicing

meditation, that are going to work in opposition to the thought patterns that keep us stuck.

Distractions such as sickness and laziness are to be expected. We should assume that we are going to become distracted during our lives, during our days when it comes to doing the practice. That’s normal. If we let the obstacles upset us, then they’re problematic. If we do not let them upset us and we work around them, or we allow them to be until we’re ready to work around them, until they dissolve on their own, then they won’t be problematic.

There are several strategies we can use to reduce and remove the distractions and bring about a mental fitness for meditation. They include breath awareness, sensation awareness, inner luminosity, stable mind, and contemplating the stream of mind. This is all from chapter one of *Yoga Sutras*.

Harmful vritti with imagination is when we imagine things that do not exist. There is a New Yorker comic, “Of course I care about how you imagined I thought you perceived I wanted you to feel.” This is a jumbling of the use of imagination and how it can be harmful (and funny) at the same time.

PATANJALI SAYS THERE ARE FOUR attitudes we can take with people and there are five suggestions for focus. All of these will help create a meditative mind through which we can perceive ourselves and perceive reality. The four ways that we can relate with others are:

*maitri karuna mudita upeksanam
sukha dukha punya apunya visayanam
bhavanatah cittaprasadanam*

The mind becomes clear and bright by feelings of friendliness towards the happy, compassion towards the sorrowful, sympathetic joy towards the virtuous, and equanimity towards the unvirtuous. These are the four types of people whom we are going to encounter in the world. Some people are going to be very happy. Some people are going to be sad. Some people are

going to be doing great things. Some people are going to be doing not great things. For those who are happy, sometimes we feel jealous of them. We wish that we were that happy. To counter that, we should feel feelings of friendliness towards them. Friendliness, in chapter three of the *vibhuti pada*, is considered to be one of the greatest super powers that we can have. When it comes to super powers or attainments, friendliness is the best one to have.

Sometimes we want to move away from those who are sad because their sorrow and their suffering is too great for us to handle. But towards those, we should practice compassion and feel that their pain is our own. Towards the virtuous who do amazing things that sometimes we wish we could do, we can imagine that their joys and successes are ours as well. We feel the same joy for them in their success as we would feel in our own success. In that way for everyone's successes in the world, we feel sympathetic joy within us, that we share in the joy that they are feeling.

Towards the unvirtuous—people are doing terrible things—quite often we get righteously indignant and angry and we wish ill will on them. This is not a good frame of mind to have; this will not help chitta vritti nirodhah. Patanjali doesn't recommend here that we ignore them or that we allow our bad thoughts to develop. What he suggests is that we have total equanimity of mind, that we don't form a judgment, we don't form an opinion. We remain unmoved, completely unshaken by the activities of the unvirtuous. Why? Because there's probably nothing we can do about them. And if there's nothing we can do about them, there's no point being upset by that. I think probably right now we have a very good opportunity to practice that on a daily basis with some of the leaders of America.

So these are the suggestions: maitri—friendliness, karuna—compassion, mudita—sympathetic joy, and upeksha—equanimity of mind towards those who are happy, sorrowful or suffering,

those who are virtuous and those who are unvirtuous. This is the relationship with four types of people. Why relationships with others? Because people throw us off all the time. One of the main ways that we get thrown off, that our mind gets shaken, is through our relationships with people.

IN RELATION TO BREATH in our nervous system, Patanjali says, *prachardana vidharanabhyam va pranasya*. This means that we can also attain to nirodhah, or stillness of mind, by exhaling and holding the breath out, restraining the breath. This is an interesting type of pranayama. It's not even really called a pranayama. Simply, all you do is inhale a long comfortable breath, you exhale a long breath and then you let the breath remain out until it's ready to come back in on its own. It's quite a nice practice. I do this on a daily basis. I really enjoy it.

Through the lengthening of your exhale, you're down regulating the stress response in the sympathetic nervous system. By holding the breath out and pausing, you're allowing the relaxation response of the parasympathetic nervous system to upregulate and the mind gets very calm. You hold the breath out until you feel the impulse to breathe again. When you feel that impulse, you allow the breath to flow back in. It's not a restraining of the breath like in pranayama where you decide, here's the fixed measure of breath that I'm going to breathe along with. Sometimes we cause a little bit of strain by trying to fit our breath into those particular patterns unless you proceed very slowly and carefully, so there's no strain as you go along. If there's any straining of the breath in pranayama, you're going to actually exacerbate the stress response in the nervous system. The exhaling of the breath and then pausing and then just waiting until your nervous system tells you to breathe again allows the parasympathetic nervous system to upregulate. At the same time, it brings you to a very natural relationship with your breathing, so you can

feel where the impulse for the breath arises from and that's very calming for the mind.

NOW ON TO MEDITATING ON THE subtleties of sensory experience. *Vishayavati va pravrittirutpanna manasah sthitinibandhini*. The development of higher objective perceptions, called *visayavati*, stabilizes the mind. This is the meditation on the *tanmatras* which are preceding the *mahabhutas*, the five elements. The meditation on the potential of experience through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch is the meditation on higher objective perceptions. Who is the perceiver of these things? What is perception and who is perceiving them? This will stabilize the mind because otherwise we're lost in the actual experience. When we get lost in the experience, then we get lost in suffering, but when we pull back and we ask who is the one who is having this experience, then we automatically take one step deeper in and we can recognize suffering as a transitory phenomenon. The meditation on these higher principles brings us to that state.

Visoka va jyotismati. I love this verse. This is where you meditate on that which is sorrowless and effulgent. Effulgent means self-luminous, shining on its own without being brightened by anything else. The *jyotismati* and *visoka*—the absence of sorrow—are a very big topic in the *Yoga Sūtras* and the commentary on this is extremely long. But, to sum it up, that which is sorrowless and effulgent could be an idea of the divine. It could be meditation on purusha. It could be meditation on a deity. It could be meditation on a saint who appears to you to have no sorrow and to be a shining light of humanity or of animal life. It could be meditating on the cave within your own heart where the light of awareness is said to shine as well. You can meditate on your heart as being self-luminous, always shining and without any sorrow, because it's filled with brightness and self-effulgent, or you can meditate

on someone else who inspires that in you. You look to them and that is how you see them, so they inspire that back in you. Or it could be on an idea of god as well. This is *visoka va jyotismati*.

Meditating on the mind itself is *vitaraḡavisayaṡva cittam*. We're meditating on the chitta as *vitaraḡa*, without *raga*—without desires—*visayam*. Contemplating chitta as free from desires. What does that mean? That means to meditate on the field of your own mind and to understand the basis of chitta as actually not having any desires connected to it. Desire arises in the mind the same way that a wave arises from the ocean. It is an activity, but it is not the mind itself. You recognize desires as an activity, but not as the actuality of the substance of the mind.

At the end of chapter two of the *Gita*, Krishna talks about the sage as being one into whom all desires can enter, but the sage is unmoved by them just as all rivers will enter into the ocean but the ocean's volume will not change. It just absorbs the water into it. So what this verse says is that desires don't necessarily stop but the sage is not moved by desires because the sage doesn't identify with them or even see them as a problem. They see that they are not the substance of being; they're not the substance of mind. They're a natural activity that occurs as a result of being a person, as a result of interacting with the world. They're going to come but you don't have to act on them and you don't have to be worried about them.

Or you can meditate on the stream of mind during sleep. *Svapna nidra jnana alambana va*. *Svapna* is *dream* and *nidra* is *the sleep state*. We can meditate on the knowledge that we get in dreamless sleep or in our dreams. How do you meditate on knowledge from dreamless sleep? This is to meditate upon or imagine or recall what it's like to be in a deep sleep with no thoughts. Rarely do we use that as an object of meditation. The reason why it's an absolutely valid object of meditation

is because we have these three states of consciousness that are changing states. They are waking—the state we're in now—dreaming, and deep sleep. All of the meditations we've covered so far have to do with the waking state—How do we contemplate while we're awake in relation to the world around us? What Patanjali is saying here is really interesting. That this isn't the only way that we can meditate. We can also contemplate our true nature, get ideas about it, from meditating on what it's like to not have any thoughts because there's no content in the mind, which happens during dreamless sleep and the deep sleep state. You can meditate on that. What does deep sleep feel like? Where am I when I am in deep sleep? Was anyone perceiving anything? And what does the perceiver perceive when there's no content? That's a really interesting meditation. So is the meditation on your dreams themselves because dreams can give us some idea about what's happening in our subconscious mind. Whether they're happy dreams or sad dreams or conflicting dreams or maybe we don't have many dreams, but meditating on dreams will give us insight into the state of our mind as well. In most dreaming, as it's said, we are trying to assimilate into our subconscious mind the things that are occurring during the waking state that we haven't assimilated or worked out while we've been awake.

If none of those meditations are appealing to you, then *yathabhimatadhyanaḡva*. This verse is tremendously interesting. If all of those don't work for you, from *maitrikarunamudita* all the way to meditating on dreamless sleep, then you can contemplate on any verified practice, whatever you like that's going to help you with *nirodhaḡ*—contemplate on that. The reason Patanjali is able to say this is because the *Yoga Sutras* are a compilation of different practices that were existing all the way up until the time that he put the *Yoga Sutras* together. So he's saying

here, "I might have left some stuff out. There might be some stuff that I don't know about." There might be some stuff that you've come up with that hasn't been shared with the world yet. If that works and brings you to *nirodhaḡ*, then go ahead and do those. How do you know if they work? Well, the proof is in the pudding. If you attain *samadhi* by them, then they're valid means of knowledge.

GOING BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED: *Yogascittavrittinirodhaḡ*—*Yoga is the selective elimination of the fluctuations or thought patterns in the field of the mind*.

We're going to choose to eliminate those thought patterns that are not helpful to us and we are going to choose to stick to those that are helpful. We're going to decide which ones are helpful based on some of the teachings from the sages and the gurus that have been passed down. The first principle that we have to remember is *ekatattvabhyaḡsaḡ*, the choosing of one principle. That's going to be of paramount importance to us. Then the next thing will be the choices that we can practice, whether it's *maitrikarunamuditoḡpekḡsa* or any of the five different ways we can meditate on the mind. These are going to help with our thought patterns as well as the *kriya yoga* of *tapas*, *svadhyaya* and *ishvaraḡpranidhana*.

After we have attained to a level of *chitta vritti nirodhaḡ* and the word *yoga* in this definition is being used synonymously with *samadhi*, which is a deep state of concentration, then *tada drashtuḡ svaruḡpe avasthanaḡm*—*the seer abides its own form*. That means that consciousness self-identifies as consciousness and not as other stuff.

The process of *yoga*, the *chitta vritti nirodhaḡ*, is the process of distinguishing what is changing from what is not changing. When those two things have been completely understood through something called *viveka khyati*—the final discrimination between what changes or is made up of nature

and what is not made up of nature and doesn't change. Then *tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam* the *drashtuh*, the *seer*, or pure consciousness or being, remains in itself as being, as consciousness, and doesn't get mixed up in the changing forms of nature. This is the culmination of yoga: We abide in ourself as our self alone and not as other things. But if we're not doing that, then *vritti sarupyam itaratra*—consciousness mixes with prakriti, with nature, and conforms with the vrittis. Consciousness will take on the shape of all of the different vrittis that will become either obstacles or distractions or the six poisons or any of the different things that we listed as the obstacles to pure self knowing. These are categorized so we can recognize them and understand how to deal with them, to understand what is not us and what is us.

Again, these are the six poisons of desire, anger, greed, delusion, laziness, and jealousy. Those are the first six of the vrittis. Then we have the five different forms of mind that Patanjali speaks about including right perception, wrong perception, imagination, sleep, and memory. Then we also have nine distractions: *Vyadhistyanasamsayapramadalasyaviratibhrrantidarsanalabdhabhumikatvanavasthitatvani cit-taviksepaste'ntarayah*. If we're not conforming with who we truly are then we're conforming with the vrittis. And what are the vrittis? All of that list that Patanjali gave us. We know what they are, and when we know what they are, then we can recognize them when they come up and then hopefully de-

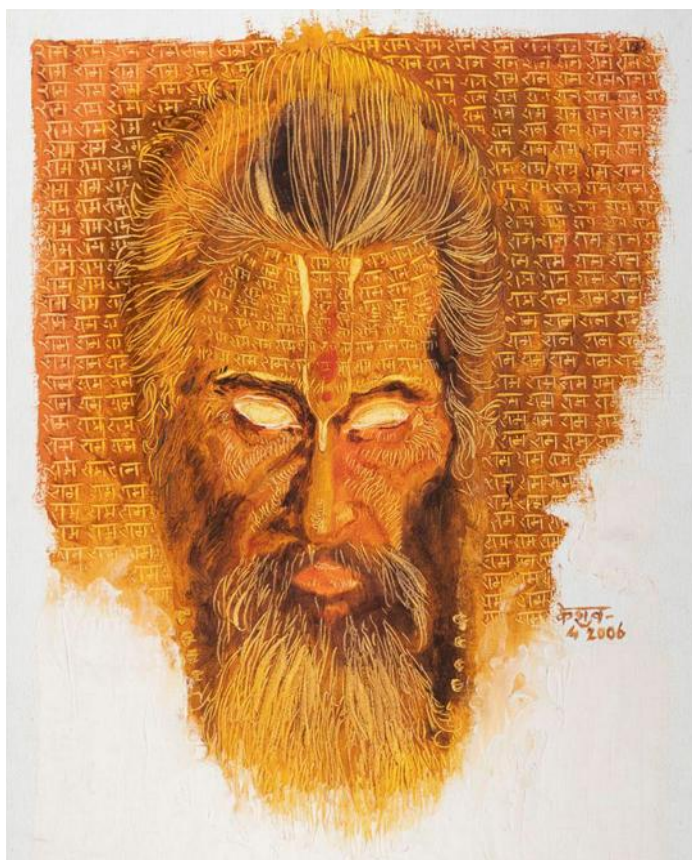
velop the tools and strategies to deal with them in the best way possible.

WHAT IS THE BEST TOOL ACCORDING to Patanjali to accomplish this? There are two of them. The first is kriya yoga, which are the practices of *tapas* which are disciplines and *swadhyaya* which are mantras as well as self-evaluation and *ishvara pranidhana* which is surrender to the Lord or, if you don't believe in God, surrender to

own hearts the *visoka va jyotishmati*. This is the *jnanadiptih*—the sorrowless, self-effulgent state is the light of knowledge. And how do we do this? By *vivekakhyaateh*, through the discrimination between the seer which is consciousness and the seen which is nature and all of the patterns of nature that we get lost in. Through yoga, we use patterns in a way which is going to create harmonious patterns. We avoid patterns which are not harmonious, which are convoluted and cloudy, which cause confusion. The patterns that we want to use to lead to *viveka khyati* are the patterns that are going to be harmonious and lead us closer towards recognizing ourselves as consciousness and move us away from the harmful patterns, which are the ones that we get stuck in quite often. So patterns are important. We can use them in positive ways. But if we take the patterns to be real, then we get lost in them. The patterns also are illusory, even the good ones.

These are the two things that we have. *Abhyasa* and *vairagya* are the only two things we need to work with in yoga to get *nirodah*, the stillness of mind. *Abhyasa* is *Never give up*. We always have to keep practicing. And *Vairagya* is *Always let go*. Don't be attached to the things that you think

are going to get you there or the patterns that you're stuck with or patterns of judgment or criticism. Whatever the pattern might be, *vairagya* is letting go of those patterns, even the pattern of thinking that this is the practice which is the best one and this practice is going to get me towards *nirodah*. Even that idea needs to be let go of eventually. So, *Abhyasa*—Never give up—*Vairagya*—Always let go. ❧



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nature or divinity or to the unknown. This is the first of the ways to accomplish the conformity with self. The second way is *yoganganusthanadasudhiksaye jnanadiptiravivekakhyaateh*. Through the limbs of yoga, the yoga *anga*—*anusthanad*—the disciplined and dedicated practice of them, we can *ashuddhikshyaye*, remove the impurities which are the thought patterns that are harmful. This will lead to *jnanadiptih*, the light of knowledge that is going to awaken within our

INNER PEACE CONFERENCE - DAY 1

Talks given at the Inner Peace Conference online May 8th & 9th, 2020, transcribed and edited.

Welcome address: *Suzanne M. Culhane, Wessel Paternotte*

Speakers: *Radhanath Swami, NaRon Tillman, Judy Lief, Rick Hanson, Jana Long, Tiokasin Ghosthorse, Maarten von Huijstee*

Moderator: *Eddie Stern*

EDDIE STERN: GOOD MORNING, Everybody. As is customary in the Hindu tradition, we will begin with a very short invocation to Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, to Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom, learning, eloquence and articulation, and to the guru through whom we gained all the knowledge that we have.

*Gannaanaam Tvaa Ganna-Patim
Havaamahe*

*Kavim Kaviinaam-Upama
Shravastamam |
Jyesttha-Raajam Brahmannaam
Brahmannaspata
Aa Nah Shrnnavan-Uutibhih
Siida Saadanam*

Maha Ganapataye Namah

*Prano Devi Saraswathi Vajebhir
Vajinivathi Dhi Nam Avitriyavathu
Vag Devyai Namah*

*Om Akhanda Manadalakaram
Vyaptam yena Charaacharam
Tadpadam Darshitam Yena
Tasmai Sri Guruve Namah*

OM Shanti Shanti Shantih

Thank you all so very much for joining us. We have two amazing days planned of talks from spectacular speakers and leaders in the world of peace and spirit and meditation. We would like to begin this morning with Mother Suzanne M. Culhane, who is an Episcopal priest, a stewardship specialist, a recovery warrior and a passionate yogi.

As a canon for stewardship in the

Episcopal Diocese of Long Island, she supports 131 parishes and seven mission organizations in funding God's mission of peace and unity. With expertise in counseling religious and social service organizations, she teaches organizational development and leadership capacity building across the country. She seeks to live a life grounded in prayer and meditation, and enjoys praising God with diverse forms of worship.

Suzanne's discipleship includes decades of study of classical ballet, ashtanga yoga and tantra yoga, and she is currently enrolled in Rod Stryker's ParaYoga Master Training Program. She's a native New Yorker and frequently meets the divine on the streets of Brooklyn and in the mountains of Colorado. We are absolutely delighted that she is here to open this conference for us with words of inspiration and divinity. So Mother Suzanne, I give it to you.

MOTHER SUZANNE M. CULHANE: Good morning, all. Thank you very much, Eddie. I am quite honored to offer this opening. Please join me in silence as we bring ourselves into the presence of the divine.

Lord of all life, source of all wisdom, prince of peace, we gather in homage to your holy name. For we trust that we meet you in silence and in stillness. We know that divine truth is revealed in community. With the great sages and saints, our spiritual ancestors, companion students and teachers of all lineages, all traditions, we gather at your high altar. We bow and kneel

before you in gratitude. We offer our bodies and minds today as channels of your grace, for we know that you are the source of true understanding and guidance.

Speak your words of wisdom to us, for your language transcends all cultures and lands, gives voice to the voiceless, and speaks intimately to our hearts. We humbly ask your blessing on this *sangha*, that we may be a united body of transformation and positive social action for all corners of the earth, from Amsterdam to New York, across the virtual sphere and far beyond it.

Grant us your peace, that disease and oppression and division may rule no more. Help us to plant the seeds for peace on earth, where freedom and health will reign, where we may meet and honor one another in harmony, just as you have created us to be. Inspire us to pursue compassion, and remove all obstacles to inner peace and global peace. Above all, breathe your spirit upon us, and bind us to service and witness in your holy name, we pray. Amen, alleluia.

ES: THANK YOU SO MUCH, MOTHER Culhane, for that beautiful opening and blessing.

I would now like to introduce Wessel Paternotte, who is the co-creator of Delight Yoga in Amsterdam, as well as the visionary behind the Inner Peace Conferences. And he is a dear, dear friend, and we are all gathered today because of the vision that he had, along with his partner Maarten who will speak later today. And so Wessel, thank you so much for the vision of

the Inner Peace Conference that you brought to the world and that we are all able to delight in right now. I give it to you now for some opening words of guidance.

WESSEL PATERNOTTE: THANK YOU. Thank you, Eddie. Thank you, everybody. Thank you, brothers and sisters for joining us for this first Inner Peace Conference online. We organized the first Inner Peace Conference about four years ago, my partner Maarten and I. We spoke often about how can we contribute to having more peace on earth, and we concluded that the best way to do that is to find inner peace and to share that with a lot of people. We started to organize this conference in beautiful churches in Amsterdam. These churches were, of course, designed to receive universal wisdom. And we gathered there the best teachers that we could find to teach their practices of inner peace.

It's kind of a crazy idea, but it's worked out wonderfully to have people practicing in these different churches simultaneously, yoga, meditation and other contemplative practices. And it was beautiful to see everybody dive deep into this experience of peace. And it was also very beautiful to see this also becoming a collective experience, where everybody was joined in this experience of peace and love and connection.

One of the people that was definitely feeling the love was Eddie Stern. And he was teaching there, and I remember very clearly one moment we were bicycling from one church to the other. And he was delighted with what he saw, and he enthusiastically said, "We should do one in New York." And that was how the seed was planted. We started planning it years ago, and we looked at different churches in New York. We stumbled upon the beautiful St. Bartholomew's Church. Sadly, we cannot organize the conference there today. But I'm very happy and delighted to see everybody here today on this first online Inner Peace Conference.

So thank you everybody for joining. Thank you, all the teachers, for shar-

ing your wisdom with us. And thank you, Eddie, for organizing this together with us, and thank you for your trust and faith in doing this together in peace and love and wisdom for all. Thank you.

ES: Thank you very much, Wessel. We're so thrilled that we can all be here remotely together. We will now begin with our first speaker. It's like a dream come true that Radhanath Swami accepted our invitation to come speak at the Inner Peace Conference. He is an inspiration not just to me, but to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people around the world.

Radhanath Swami Maharaj's life is a testament to living a life of peace. He was part of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago in the 1960s, and spent his youth wandering through many countries and cultures yearning for an experience of truth. After finally meeting a spiritual teacher in India, he's spent about the last fifty years internalizing that spiritual practice in his heart and sharing it from his heart with everyone whose path he crosses.

Rooted in his study of the ancient *bhakti* tradition, India's mystical devotional tradition, Radhanath Swami's message is as profound as it is simple. By cultivating a rich inner life of self awareness and a genuine practice of service, we can become instruments of compassion and agents of sustainable change in the world. And in fact, his life is really a testament to that sustainable change. With the Annamrita feeding program that feeds about 1.2 million children every day in India, the Bhaktivedanta Hospital which is serving people from very under served and poor and disadvantaged communities in Mumbai, the amazing Govardhan Ecovillage, his New York Times best-selling books, and the solace that he brings to his devotees in his temple and around the world, we could not ask for a better opening speaker and a more pure-hearted servant of peace and of God than Radhanath Swami. So I turn the Zoom video over to Maharaj, and again, I thank you so much for being with us today.

RADHANATH SWAMI:

*Om ajnana timirandhasya
Jnananjana shalakaya
Cakshur unmilitam yena
Tasmai shri gurave namah*

Salutations to that Guru who applies
the collyrium of knowledge
with a sharp needle
to open the eyes blinded
due to ignorance

*nama om vishnu-padaya
krishna-preshthaya bhu-tal
srimate bhaktivedanta-svamin
iti namine*

*namas te saraswate deve
gaura-vani-pracarine
nirvishesha-shunyavadi-
pashchatya-desha-tarine
sri-krishna-chaitanya
prabhu-nityananda
sri-advaita gadadhara
srivasadi-gaura-bhakta-vrinda
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama,
Rama Rama, Hare Hare*

I am truly grateful and deeply honored to have this opportunity to be in this auspicious assembly of people, spiritual leaders and seekers from all over the world. My special gratitude to Eddie Stern for being such a dear, lifelong friend and well-wisher, and for including me.

Peace is not just an external condition of particular circumstances in the world around us. True peace is a state of the heart and the mind. It's a consciousness that is experiencing a reality within ourselves that is true peace. According to how we connect to that peace within ourselves, we could be instruments of that peace wherever we are, whoever we're with, and in whatever situation we may be.

This world is always changing. That is one thing that is unchanging, the truth that this world is always changing. By the power of time, nothing is stagnant. Whether we can perceive it

with our senses or not, everything is under the influence of higher powers that control us.

To some extent, for a small amount of time, we do have the ability to control some things. But in a larger perspective, we're always being controlled by powers beyond our own mind and senses. In this condition, how to find peace?

According to the Vedic literatures, there's birth and then inevitable old age, disease and death for the physical body. And the mind is changing much faster than this body. The beginning of the search, or let us say the quest, for real peace is that journey within ourselves. In essence, this is the principle of all the great spiritual paths in all the great religions throughout history. The essence of spirituality or religion is not a sectarian affiliation or a crutch to feel oneself superior to others. It is a path to awaken the true potential that's within each and every one of us.

The Bible tells, "What profited the person if they gain the whole world but they lose their eternal soul?" The *Bhagavad Gita* describes *na jayate mriyate kadacin*, that the soul is without birth, without death. The soul is by nature *sat chit ananda*, eternal, full of knowledge, and full of happiness. To find that happiness within ourselves is actual wealth. Unfortunately, although all the different fields of occupations and activities are, to a large extent or smaller extent, required in this world, the sadness is that the culture of compassion, the culture of what is real wealth, is so much forgotten.

True wealth is happiness. The highest of all happiness, the deepest of all pleasures, is to love and to be loved. Everyone—whoever we are—we're all looking for this happiness. We're looking for the joy of love. Things can give some pleasure to the mind and to the body, but things can never give true fulfillment to the heart. Only love can do that. That is the essential principle of life, the pursuit of love.

Often, we're distracted in so many ways; we forget the very crying of our own hearts for that truth. When we

understand and experience, to whatever extent, the nature of our own true self, then we can appreciate and respect that that same life—living, seeking pleasure—is within everyone's heart.

The idea of yoga or religion is to recognize harmony—the harmony of our body, which is a sacred vehicle that God has given us, in which we could do wonderful things for ourselves, for nature and for other living beings.—to live in harmony with the body, the mind, with the true self, with the living force, with the spirit within us. When we make that harmonious connection, then we naturally realize our harmony with God, our harmony with all living beings, and our harmony with nature. Mother Nature.

In this state of harmony, when we experience that joy, then we don't need to exploit. We don't need to be arrogant or greedy to find happiness. Then we awaken to the truth that our real happiness is in feeling God's love, and in sharing that love. And in that love, the mystery of compassion is revealed to us—that in uplifting others, that is truly the joy of the soul.

But we cannot really uplift others unless we're uplifted ourselves. And that is why it's so important for balance in our lives. The tendency for many of us, living in a world where there are so many pressures and so many stresses and so many changes, is we lose our balance. Sometimes situations come that give us an opportunity to put our focus on what is truly meaningful, what is truly purposeful in our quest in life. And in that state, we can learn.

Today, the world has been very much struck down by this coronavirus. And many people that we know, that we love, have departed from this world. Others are sick. Others are afraid, confused, and many are very isolated. In this sadness, there's also an opportunity: an opportunity to grow individually and collectively so that we can have a more meaningful purpose in our lives in actually reconnecting with God's love and being an instrument of that compassion.

Interestingly, the coronavirus is attacking without any type of physical discrimination. Whether one is old or young, whatever the color of one's skin, whatever one's nationality, whatever one's social status, whatever one's religion or no religion, this coronavirus is attacking. In order to respond really effectively, in a holistic way, we also need to create solutions that are without discrimination of whether one is male or female, or whether one is of one social status or another, nationality, religion, whatever one's race. The problem needs to be addressed in a holistic way, similar to the way the problem is affecting us.

Simplicity—simplicity of mind, of heart and of life—is such a virtue. Simplicity in the sense that we don't have selfish ulterior motives. Simplicity in the sense that even the simplest, most basic things in life can give us joy. We don't need endless complications. And I know people who have some of the most complicated occupations. CEOs of international corporations, doctors on call 24 hours a day. But they're truly simple, because they have simple, well-wishing hearts.

It's a time when we can reflect. I'd like to briefly cite a particular event that is described in the eleventh canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. It's spoken by Krishna to his very dear friend Uddhava. He's explaining how, if our hearts are open, if we're really on a quest for higher truths, if we're seeking out the company of people who enlighten and inspire us, then even the simplest experiences in life can spiritually transform us, can emotionally uplift us.

He talks about a person who was living in the forest. A great king named Yadu saw this person in the forest and asked, "Please explain to me how you can be the way you are. You don't have proper clothes. You don't have a home. You don't have any of the things that people are striving for to get happiness in this world. But yet you're the happiest-looking person I've ever seen." And the person living in the forest explained what he had learned from different gurus. He described twenty-four gurus. One of them is the



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moon. The moon is always changing; it's waxing, it's waning, sometimes it's a quarter moon, half moon. But actually, the moon is always a full moon. It's only our perception of the moon that changes.

And similarly, when we come in contact with the living force that is seeing through our eyes and hearing through our ears and tasting through our tongue and loving through our hearts, when we come in contact with that consciousness, we understand it is forever. It's full of happiness. It's full of God's love. From the appearance perspective, like the moon, sometimes we're little babies and sometimes we're children and sometimes we're middle-aged and sometimes we're really getting old; then inevitably, like the moonless night, we don't appear to be alive. But actually, our life is always full. What we could learn from the moon!

Then the forest dweller turned toward the sun. The sun is shining for everyone. The sun does not discriminate who to give its light to. We have the choice whether we come into the sunlight or not, but the sun is radiating unconditionally. The sun will take water from the ocean, evaporate it, create clouds and then bring that water for the wellbeing of others who need it.

In a similar way whatever we have—our abilities, our intelligence, our resources, our influence—its true value is in how we utilize it for the wellbeing of other people. And when I say other people, I mean that all living beings are other people.

When we understand the sacredness of life itself, we can recognize, appreciate, and love the inherent sacredness wherever there's life. Then to serve, *seva*, becomes the true joy of life. And the enthusiasm to acquire, whether knowledge or wealth or resources or strength—whatever it may be—the pursuit is to fulfill not our greed but our love, so that we can share it with our loved ones. As we make spiritual progress, we recognize humanity and all beings as loved ones.

The forest dweller described what

he learned from the trees. The tree is always giving, in whatever situation. In the summertime, the tree will stand in the burning heat of the sun and give you and me shade to be refreshed. When it's very hot and we're very thirsty, the tree will provide fruit to refresh us. Even if we break the tree, the tree will give those limbs for us to build a house so that we can have shelter. This idea of the humility, the tolerance and the giving-ness of a tree we cannot imitate, but it's something we could learn from. The joy of life is in giving, because giving is an expression of love.

Giving should be situated and built on a foundation of the truth that we all are part of God, we all are children of God. And to help each other, to really help each other physically, emotionally and socially and spiritually, is the culture of true spirituality and the greatest need in the world.

Another type of tree is the redwood tree. The redwood tree is the tallest tree on the planet. How does it keep growing through earthquakes and windstorms and snowstorms? Under the ground, the roots of the redwood trees, they search for each other. When they meet, they embrace. They form a permanent bond. Every tree in the redwood forest is directly or indirectly giving support to every other at the level of their roots. And therefore they keep growing under any situation. Such a lesson.

Whether it's a sunny and nice day, or whether there's a pandemic or an earthquake, whatever the situation, and so many situations come and go in our lives, we need each other. Personal relationships, the basis, the roots or the hearts of our respect and affection for one another, is so much a need of the world. It has always been. Sometimes in times of crisis, for those who open their hearts and their minds, it becomes more apparent.

There's such a need for us to be united with all of our diversity. When we understand the unity we all have on this spiritual level of God's love, of the eternal life force of the soul, then the diversity in the world becomes beauti-

ful. Even the challenging situations of diversity become opportunities.

My beloved guru Srila Prabhupada would tell us the Vedic literatures have essentially one purpose. And, in this sense, all the spiritual scriptures throughout history have one essential purpose: *Sarve sukhino bhavantu*—to actually come to a state of consciousness where our greatest wish, our deepest fulfillment, is in building our life around a principle. *Sarve sukhino bhavantu*—*Let all beings be happy*.

We're all searching for happiness in every situation.

At this particular time, with so many people throughout the world in quarantine or lockdown, in isolation, I've heard from so many different people giving their experiences. Some, they're driving each other crazy in this situation and others are restoring relationships that have been so much forgotten.

In the pursuit of career, in the pursuit of studies, sometimes we become very consumed and distracted. But when we take a step back, when there's a reset button pressed in our lives, then we have an opportunity to reevaluate, to take inventory of our values and how we spend our time.

Balance. We have family and friends and loved ones. We need to give quality attention to our personal relationships. We have our spiritual obligations, our duties to God, to living a life with character and with integrity, and to cultivate those values within ourselves. We also have our responsibilities to our occupation, to our physical bodies and our health, and to society. If we neglect any of these, everything else goes off balance. We need to give special time every day to cultivate our inner awareness, our loving relationship with the supreme. In our tradition, we chant the names of God. There's meditation. There's prayer. There's puja or ceremony. There's yoga. Whatever the particular process is, its true purpose is to awaken our spiritual potential so that we can be instruments of God's compassion.

Then we have our family members and our loved ones. So often, without even knowing it, we don't appreci-

ate them. We don't respect them. We don't acknowledge their value in our lives and their value to the world. To give quality time to actually understand that whatever, whoever is in my life is God's gift to me, and whatever I have in my life, it's been put in my care for a higher purpose. It is so important with our family members, our friends and our loving associates, to actually give quality time, to go deeper and deeper into those relationships. And the relationships go deepest when the center that is the very basis of it is our united spirit of serving God in one another.

There's a saying, "The family that prays together, stays together." To extend on that, a family that dines together, shines together. And a family that dances together, advances together. How important are our personal relationships!

This is a time now when we can really focus on that, tune into it, and give some time for our spiritual practice every day in such a way that we make quality time for God within our hearts. Then, with the inspiration, with the compass of our aspirations in the right direction, through good association, through loving relationships and through spiritual practice, we can perform our occupation, our social activities, with character. We can perform them with integrity. We can perform them, ultimately, with compassion.

I'm so grateful to have this opportunity, and I'm so grateful that this beautiful sangha is taking place, where spiritual teachers from so many great traditions and so many seekers can actually find true unity in diversity—the unity in our shared spirit of wanting to make a contribution of love and compassion individually and collectively in our lives. I thank you so very, very much.

ES: THANK YOU SO MUCH Maharaj, for that supremely beautiful and inspiring talk. It's such a pleasure and joy to have you opening the conference, so thank you again and again.

Our next speaker, Pastor NaRon Tillman, is a rare combination of deep Christian faith, traditional pastoring and transformational yoga and mindfulness teaching in severely under served areas of New York. Faith, practice, and open-mindedness form the bedrock of his church, and his community work takes him from boardrooms and investor meetings to at-risk schools, shelters, senior centers and more.

He's a graduate of Drake Business School, where he received a diploma in businesses systems. Pastor Tillman helps churches develop financial independence, self-sustained revenue. He's an advocate for change. He's also the New York leader of the Urban Yogis, which is a yoga and meditation training program based within the LIFE Camp program in Queens, which is basically a gun violence reduction organization that has been doing tremendous work in Queens for the past twenty years.

Pastor Tillman is a very dear friend of mine. He and I met on the streets of Far Rockaway during Hurricane Sandy. It was in the early days right after Hurricane Sandy when it was an absolute nightmare in Far Rockaway, which is where Pastor Tillman is from. I had a truck filled with bread, and he had a car filled with water. And we randomly met on a completely blown-out street. And he said to me, "What's a white guy like you doing in a place like this?" And I said, "I'm looking to give some people some food." And he said, "Come with me." And we have been traveling together ever since then. So Pastor, it's a delight to have you here, and I now give the stage to you.

NARON TILLMAN: THANK YOU, Eddie. Thank you, all of you guys who have put this conference together. We are excited with anticipation about how we can help people to navigate and find inner peace. As Eddie told you all, I grew up in Far Rockaway, Queens, New York, where the violence and the crime rate were really, really high. I grew up during

the crack era, which compounded a lot of emotional anger inside of me, where there was no inner peace, no harmony. There was no thought of peace or thought of harmony.

But as I began to grow and develop and I found my purpose in life, I was led to find peace. It's a weird journey, because it started on the streets and it ended up with me being a traditional pastor or preacher in a pulpit. I was always overwhelmed; I was always overwhelmed with fear, fear of losing God's favor, fear of my neighborhood and my conditions, fear of being broke again. So I had all of these built-in fears that were chipping away at my mindset.

I was in the middle of preaching. I was already preaching, was already helping out other people, but I still didn't really have peace within myself. It's really difficult when you are summoned to help someone else and you don't really have the tools to help yourself. One of the first scriptures that really, really put me on the path of finding inner peace was where Jesus says, "Think not on tomorrow, what you shall eat, what you shall drink, where you shall live." So, in other words, Don't let your mind go to tomorrow. Because as you're thinking about tomorrow, fears start to come up. Someone who's thinking about what they're already going through right now, they start to get anxious.

And I'm like, "Well, how can we live by not thinking about tomorrow?" All my life I was told to plan for a rainy day, set something aside, think about these other things. Now for the first time I'm being challenged not to think about tomorrow, but be in the present. At that time I didn't know what it meant to be in the present. It wasn't until after I met Eddie Stern that I found out how to navigate and to get in the present moment, to be mindful of my present moment, to be mindful of my environment, to be mindful of the things that were around me.

In that scripture, found in the book of Matthew, spoken by Jesus Christ, he gave us an example and he pointed

us to earth. Again, I didn't understand the connectivity between me being a human and culture or creation or the trees or the birds. Because in my neighborhood, no one really told us that we were interconnected and harmoniously created with all of these creatures and that we needed one another in order to build a harmonious life, in order to find the peace that we also seek.

Jesus said, "Look at the fowls in the air. Doesn't God feed them, and they never toil? Look at the flowers in the field. He clothes them and arrays them with such beauty. And he does this all for you. Would he not give you what you have need of?"

Now, growing up in an area where you were worried about what you were going to eat, worried if you were going to make it home, this brought me comfort. Because I knew that there was somebody bigger than me that really, really cared about my everyday wellbeing. My peace started once I really started to realize that I didn't have to make something happen for myself. Not necessarily, be lazy. Not necessarily, don't do the things necessary in order to feed our families. But not to worry about those things because the scriptures also teach me that my steps were ordered. I didn't meet Eddie by chance. I'm not here by chance. There is a designed plan for me.

In that designed plan, there will be people that I will interact with. At first, it started denominational. When you get entangled with religion, you only see those that think like you. Is there really peace in that? I had to really start to look within myself and say, "Is there peace with just going around with people that always agree with you? Can you really find harmony when you're just culturally connected with people that understand your background? Can you really find your purpose in life by just connecting with people that will tell you you're right when you're wrong, or give you pats on the back when they need to chastise you?"

As I started to expand my mind through looking at business and com-

merce, building businesses myself, I started to get into yoga. Yoga put me into a position where I was uncomfortable. Being in a room where probably 90% of the time I'm the only Black male in the room made me feel uncomfortable. But I went anyway, because I understood the benefits of going through a practice. As I began to go through the practice, I found the next level where I started to understand the importance of meditation. In our culture, in our Christian context, we often talk about the Holy Spirit. Now, in my upbringing, we look to the Holy Spirit to fall down on us. You go into a church and people will be crying out for the Spirit to fall and the Spirit to lead us, and the Spirit to guide us from outward in. It wasn't until I really understood the nuances of settling down and being quiet and still, that I understood that the Spirit that we sought was not something that would fall on me; the Spirit I sought was already in me.

Once I really started to understand that, it took my work to whole other level—my work with spirituality and my work with other people. Because I realized that it wasn't about me. And for the first time I had peace within myself.

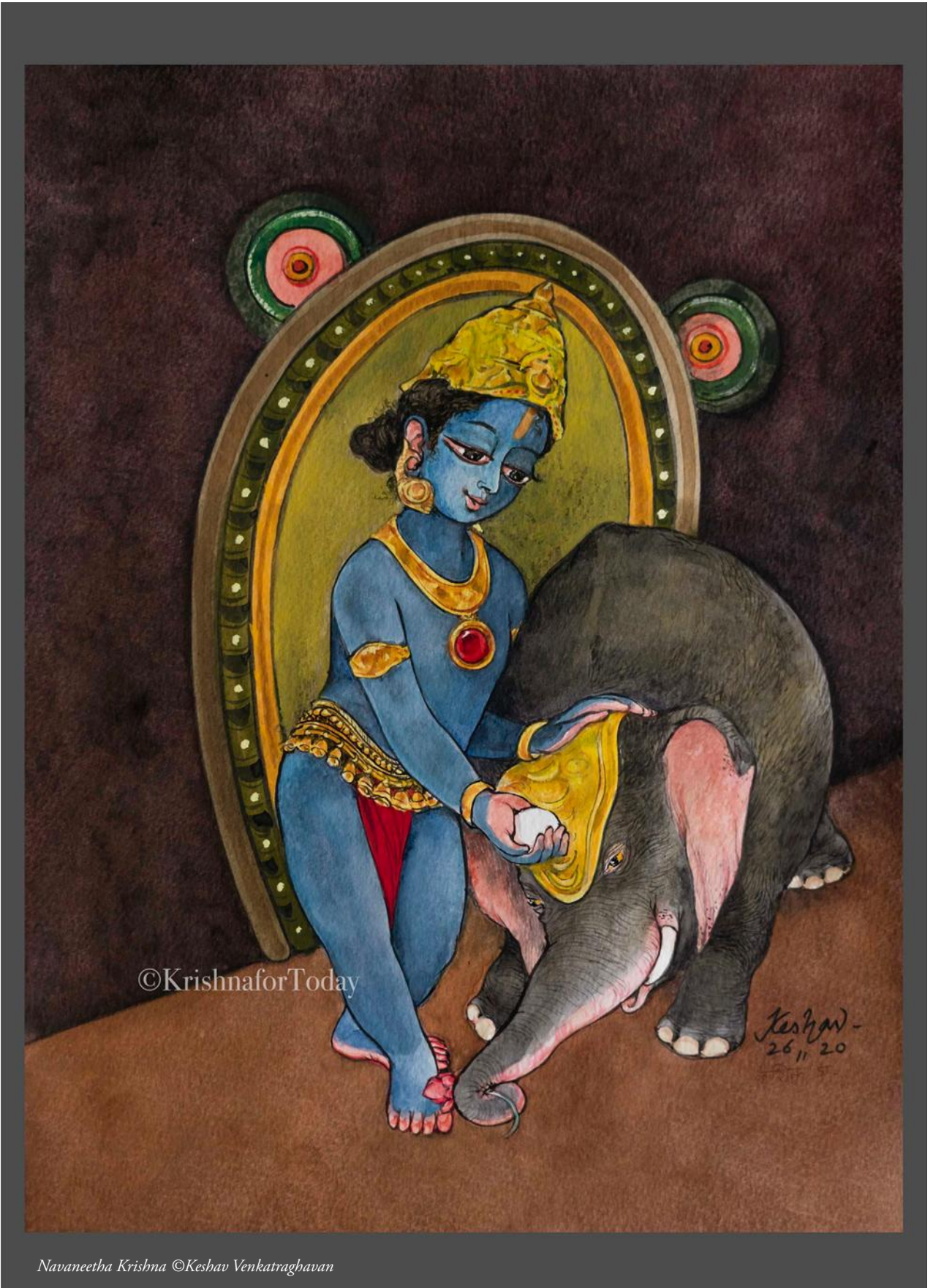
Someone may be listening to this and may be wrestling with some stuff. I want to tell you this. You cannot share something that you don't have. We often talk of peace, but if you don't have peace, then you can't give peace. If you're looking for someone on the outside to give you peace, then you'll never find it. If you're looking for a practice to give you peace, then you'll never find it. You have to come to the realization that the peace that you seek after, the peace that you endeavor to have, the peace that you endeavor to be connected to, is already somewhere within you. I can't give it to you. Eddie can't give it to you. None of these other wonderful, great minds that are coming up today can give it to you. We can point you toward peace. But what you'll find out ultimately is that the peace that you seek is within.

How do we now develop and unpack the fact that once we have peace, we have a responsibility? Because for me, I was like, "Well, why can't I have it to myself? It works for me. I don't need to deal with other people." I'm a bit of an introvert. I don't really want to shake hands or be around. Now we've got to do elbows and distancing. That's kind of more my speed. But how can I share this peace, and how can we package it in a way that will be helpful to other people? I began to really search within myself and look at the systems and things that I've learned.

I always read the scripture, but it never really illuminated itself to me until I was going through this set of circumstances. I was having service at the Brooklyn Yoga Club, when Eddie allowed us to build our church out of the Brooklyn Yoga Club in Clinton Hill. Here we were, a bunch of Christians meeting in the basement at the Yoga Club. We had to take off our shoes; it was a cultural dynamic. We were coming in and people were going out. We were blending two communities. You can imagine that at times it was uncomfortable. 'Cause a lot of people who were with me never practiced yoga, had never been to that particular type of setting. In normal circumstances, they would probably just walk by the door. But now we were in this place where we're fellowshiping with people that may or may not believe in the same things that we believe in.

There was the scripture that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, and it says, "Look out not for the affairs of your own, but look on the affairs of others." And it was at that time when Eddie so graciously opened up his doors to us that I realized that here it is, a person doing what the scriptures have advised us to do for so long.

Can you imagine if we were at peace with ourselves and we did not just selfishly look after our own affairs. There would have been no war. Can you imagine if we were at peace with ourselves and did not just selfishly look after our own affairs, how there



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would be no violence in the streets in the midst of separation, in pandemic. When we should be social distancing and finding harmony, we are finding ways to be violent, because there's no peace within ourselves. And there's no peace within ourselves because we're not looking after the affairs of other people.

I echo the sentiment and the value that the presenter before me brought: You cannot harmonize within yourself and just your family. In this hour, we have to learn how to harmonize with one another. Meditation allows us to look within ourselves and to identify our flaws. Sometimes, when we come out of meditation, we feel a little bit worse than we did when we came into it. Because we think that we have it all together, but as we're looking within ourselves, we start to see the flaws and the chinks in our armor. And we realize that "there are some things that I really need to start working on."

Now we have two things that we can do. One, we can either begin to work on those things, or we can ignore them. Nine times out of ten, we ignore them and we leave them on our mat until we pick it up the next day. Then we go into our yoga, and we start to find arrogance in the fact that we can get through certain moves. We look over and see someone else struggling through their moves. They're not finding their balance. And we say, "Ah, look at me, I can stand on my head. I can balance myself, I can move around, and you can't do it."

Instead of lending a helping hand, which is what we are summoned to do, we start to look down on other people that are next to us, or we start to judge ourselves according to someone else's flaws. But when we start to acknowledge the fact that we are all flawed, that I'm still that little boy who grew up in Far Rockaway who didn't know that I would ever be on such a platform as this, that it's my job not to take what God has blessed me with and hoard it for myself; it's my job to share my sentiments with someone else. It's my job to share my experiences. That's why I go into the

inner schools. I do it myself. I can say, "Someone else go," but I feel it is my responsibility to go and look at some young man and say, "I used to do the same things that you did, but I tell you that there is a way out." It might not be yoga for them, and it might not be religion for them, might not be whatever things we want somebody else to do. The path that someone else has to go on is their path. It's my job to shine a light that the path exists.

So as we're coming together in this great congregation with these great minds, you're all going to hear these same things echoed. You're going to hear that peace starts within. You're going to hear that we have to value ourselves and our practice. You're going to hear that you have to begin to start to share, begin to covenant relationship with other people. You're going to hear of harmony and talks of righteousness, as we all have been summoned to do. Because this is what we do for a living, most of us. This is our vocation. This is our passion. So we're going to say it. But something has happened in these settings where these things become more talk and after we close our computers, we don't really pick up the practices and live them. And as we are teaching, and as we are teaching others, let us not misconstrue the void that may be in us. Let us not overlook the void that may be in us. Let us not overlook the fact that we tell others to practice when we sometimes don't practice. Let us not overlook that we tell others to be encouraged when sometimes we honestly are not encouraged. Let us not overlook the fact that sometimes we tell everybody else that everything's going to be all right, and when we get into our own practice, we don't really know if everything's going to be all right.

The thing I've tried most in these last few years of my life is to be honest with myself. To be honest with myself when I'm not feeling good, to be honest with myself when I'm on the mat and I really don't want to get through a practice, to be honest with myself when I'm praying, and to be

honest with God that I'm praying to. "Why am I here?" "Why did you put this on me?" "Why are you allowing me to go through this?" "Why am I restless?" "Why can't I sleep?" "Why am I taking Ambien?" "Why am I taking pills to find peace?" "Why am I self-medicating with alcohol or drugs or opioids?" Why am I doing these things that we never really talk about in these settings, because we want the glamour, but there's people that are listening that are really, really hurting. People who don't really have harmony. Family members are not calling, no one is checking in on you, you're not checking in on anyone else, then you go to the Wal-Mart and you're fighting over tissue, you pull out a gun, bam. And now everyone wants to stop and pause and say, "Oh, Kumbaya" when we're not really talking relevantly about situations.

So this is what I do in my practice. One, I identify my weaknesses, because my weaknesses are always glaring to me. And then after I can identify my weaknesses, I start to say, Is this something that I can deal with? Are there tools that are available to me that I can use in my practice to really focus in on it? Is this something that is in my DNA, that I'm going to die with, that I just have to learn how to live with and suppress? Or learn how to live with, and become buddies with? Or is this something that I'm tucking away and hiding somewhere in my body, that I don't want to deal with, that will rise up at a time that is most inconvenient?—because our flaws never rise up at a time of convenience—that'll rise up at a time when it's most inconvenient, cause me to be embarrassed, cause me to embarrass my practice?

So I need to work on me. Then I can be a good steward to work on someone else. And as I begin to work on other people, I've learned in my twenty years of ministry how not to highlight others' flaws. Because when they come to me, they're coming vulnerable. They're coming empty. And when they leave me, they should not feel depleted and dehydrated and

hungered. When they leave from me, they should feel inspired. When they leave from me, they should feel like they can make it. When they leave, they should be able to go read Eddie's book, *Yoga and Science*, and find out different nuances. When they leave, they should feel optimistic, even when it seems all grim. Because I'm reminded that the Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. It does not say that I would not seem to have wants. It does not say that I would not be in the valley of wants. But yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death—and this is where some of us are right now—fear no evil. Why? Because he's with me. He's not with me on the outside externally, where I have to look around and look to someone else to help me to find him. He's within me. And his goodness, and his mercy shall follow me. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

These are the things that keep me going when it seems as if all hope is gone, when it seems as if my value is low, when it seems as if I can't make it. These are the things that I remember.

I remember walking into Bowery, for the first time. I drove all the way from Queens and I got on the yoga mat for the first time with Eddie. I thought I was doing yoga before and then I met Eddie Stern and I realized I never did yoga before in my life. I drove there and I parked my car in the lot that was across the street. And I'm running up the steps, and I'm so excited to do a practice. Eddie says, "Do this five times." And I did it five times. "Do this three times." I did this three times. He said, "Pastor, you're done." I thought, What in the world? I drove all the way out here to do sun salutations? My shoulders are burning. I'm like, I'm ready for the good stuff. Where's the stuff that I saw on YouTube? 'Cause I did my research before I went.

But I found out that it was brick by brick, five, three at a time. Seven or eight years later, I come now to practice four to five times a week, an hour and a half a day within each practice. It was those small chunks that brought

me confidence. If Eddie would've took me through an hour and a half practice, I would've never come back because I would've been falling over and looking at Mike D. with his feet around his neck rolling back and forth and saying, "I can't do this." But he met me where I was.

And that's the teacher that I aspire to be. The kind that can meet people where they are, give them small chunks, bite-sized chunks that they can deal with in the moment. Not all the Bible. Not all the yoga moves. Not all the nuances of meditation. Don't have to necessarily talk about the hypostatic nature of Christ and all of those things that may confuse a person. I have knowledge of them, but what I do is say to them, "My job is to look out for your affairs. As I look out for your affairs, we'll draw a common bond. Don't have to come to my church on Sunday. My job is to look out for you."

The first state that you really realize, when you're in what I'm going to call a state of chaos, what we call in the Christian faith, "sin," what science calls "negative bias," what I've coined, because of our upbringing, "compounding negative bias." So if you take the fact that negative bias exists in the brain, and we lean towards the negative, compound that with when you're living in a housing project and everybody around you is negative. Then you turn on the news, and everything there is negative. So you have to go in layers to find peace. Your first level of peace may not be one where you find fearlessness. Your first level of peace may be just having calm for a minute and a half, quiet for some time. Your next level of peace may be where you start to be able to identify that "I can turn off. Everything can be chaotic around me and I don't have to engage or be entangled." We move from faith to faith, or we move from levels of peace to levels of peace.

In this modern day of the microwave peace, we just want to press the button, read two books and become teachers. But that's not the way that it happens. It takes time for us to as-

similate that "I used to be this, this year, and now I'm here. I used to be this that year, and now I'm here." And anyone who's close to me knows that every year I study something different, whether it's finance, whether it's some variation of yoga, whether it's some variation of theology. I study something different because I want to find a level of peace in something that I was uncomfortable with before.

I understand that peace is an onion, and we'll never really get to the core of it, because after we learn how to be peaceful, then our bodies start to ache and we've got to go to the doctor, and then we start to be afraid about dying and all that other stuff that happens.

ES: We'll take a question for you, Pastor, "What can you do when you want to harmonize with others but they don't want to harmonize with you?"

NT: Because this is a peace conference, I won't say what I would say. It depends on the setting. Because sometimes in business, we have people that we don't like and don't like us. But we don't have to feel because someone doesn't like us that we have to give off that same energy, right? If it's a work setting and I have to get along, I'll get along. If it's a social setting and I don't have to get along, I won't get along. I'll just stay in my corner. But what I won't allow to happen to me is that someone walks into the room and disrupts my peace.

When I was younger, the bully would come into the room, and when the bully came in the room everybody'd go like, "Oh man, here he comes. Wonder who he's going to pick on now." And we all would cower. And as we started to cower, he saw the fear in our eyes, and then he knew that "I can pick on you, because you aren't going to fight back." But I learned at an early age that I couldn't go home if I didn't fight back, 'cause then the beating my mother would give me was worse than the one that they would give me. So I learned how to at least fight back or not to identify fear within my eyes. So I never allow anyone's

presence to disrupt my peace. I never allow anyone's presence to disrupt my peace, and I also know when to leave. You learn when to leave.

I have four minutes but I'm only going to use one and a half. There's a song that I sing to myself, and I've never sung at any of Eddie's conferences or anything. So I'm just going to sing a little bit of it. And this song is helpful for me. In my tradition, I usually sing before I pray. Singing gets me into a state of calm. And I don't put it on my resume, but I was in music for singing and writing. And then I pray, and then I'm quiet. I just learned how to be quiet. I usually talk to God so much that I start to forget how to listen. Thanks to you guys, I've learned how to listen. But the song that usually touches my heart the most, says, (SINGS)

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.

Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God. Praise God, praise God, praise God. Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God. Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God.

Thank you for allowing me to share. I pray that this day is a blessing to all.

ES: Pastor, thank you so much. That was beautiful and awesome in every way. Crazy inspiring. Beautiful singing. One of my favorite songs as well.

NT: Thank you. Thank you.

ES: You're welcome, Pastor. Thank you so much for joining us today.

ES: Our next speaker is Judy Lief. Judy is a new friend who I met through Dena Merriam, who started the Global Peace Initiative of Women, who's one of our partners for the Inner Peace Conference. Judy is a Buddhist teacher, an author and practitioner. She spent about 35 years applying the deepest principles of Buddhism to relieve suffering to every aspect of her life. From spiritual care to the dying, to solving global problems, Judy seeds

the teachings of the dharma into her everyday life.

Additionally in her teaching, Judy concentrates on how the insights and meditative techniques coming from the Buddhist tradition can be used in everyday life and in solving global problems. For many years, she's been offering workshops to provide people with the contemplative tools that can transform the way they face death and care for the dying. She's the author of *Teachings of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Making Friends With Death: A Buddhist Guide to Encountering Mortality*, and she continues to write books and articles for periodicals. In addition, she's a lecturer on pilgrimage to Asian countries such as Tibet, India and Bhutan.

She is extremely well-known and loved in her field, and we're so thrilled that you're with us today, Judy.

JUDY LIEF: THANK YOU, EDDIE. It's so wonderful to have a chance to meet you. It's an honor to be here with all of you esteemed speakers and all of the people that I can't see but I assume are there in the audience. I'll try to visualize you in this Zoom world in your little boxes. I probably couldn't have participated if it had gone as planned in the city of New York. I had a conflict. But because of the Zoom world, here I am.

Being invited to be a participant brought me to really reflect on inner peace, particularly in this era of the pandemic, the Covid era. I was thinking, how can there be inner peace in such a chaotic, un-peaceful world? And can you have inner peace that opens out but does not close down?

I started thinking about it within my tradition of Buddhism. One of the principal ways of cultivating some kind of more peaceful mind, which is considered to be so essential for living a good life and for being of benefit, is a practice which is called just being peaceful. It's a fundamental training, how to practice being peaceful. This is done by working with what is within us that is restless, that is un-peaceful, that is arising as emotional dramas

moment to moment, and fears, and finding peace within that whole array of moment to moment experiences.

Sometimes I think we need to set up special situations. People go into retreat, or people simplify their lives and take time out from the pressures and busy-ness of life to find yourself, to have the space or the luxury of simply being alone with your state of mind, with your emotional patterns, with your physical sensations, and settling into a more peaceful state. But that can be misleading as well. It's easier to be in a state of peace when you're not in the thick of interactions with other people, and with the challenges of ordinary daily life.

I was in a conference a couple days ago. People were talking about different ways they're reacting to the Covid virus, to the shelter-at-home, to the sense of frustration of leadership, frustration of not being able to have physical contact with those they love, and the pain of people suffering alone because of the nature of this pandemic. Many people who had been practicing meditation, practicing in a very spiritual tradition, for quite some time, were finding that when it gets right down to it and you bring your practice from your mat or from your cushion into the world, the world comes crashing in, and you find anger, and find frustration, and fear and all that. So where is the peace?

Looking at inner peace I think, what kind of peace is it that is a reliable thread that doesn't flicker in and out depending on your circumstances—if your circumstances line up just right, then you can feel peaceful and as soon as your circumstances take a turn, out the window goes the peace. The reactivity comes storming back in. There was a question about the dynamic and more static sense of peace. My sense is it's dynamic, coming back into balance over and over again as we encounter different situations in our lives.

Sometimes you can achieve peace by, you could say, shutting down. You could say, "Okay, this makes me un-peaceful, so I'm just not going to

relate. This person is difficult, I'm just not going to relate. I'm going to hold my peace." And you could say, "Don't bother me. I'm meditating. I'm being peaceful. Don't bother me. And if you do, you're going to piss me off, because I just maintained this quality of peace, and now I've got to hang onto it and protect it." So, there's a positive sense—you can protect quality of peace—but there's something a little fishy about your peace and those forces outside you that you can blame for disrupting it. Maybe this "inner peace" is not the best phrase. It's not an inner possession from my perspective. From my perspective, there's a sense of a stream of peacefulness that's part of our human heritage or the heritage of all beings, that we can align with. But it's not our peace. This kind of peace cannot be disrupted, cannot be swayed by the external circumstances we talk about. Can you have a situation where you could be busy, you could actually be willing to listen to horrid news shows? You don't have to say, "Okay, I have to defend my little mound of peace from this scary, upsetting world."

I've just been thinking as well, as has come up in the other inspiring talks, you could have everything and have no peace. You could have nothing, and basically be at ease. Sometimes this is talked about, or could be talked about as, Can you make friends with yourself, and can this state of peace include your foibles? Include your vulnerabilities? Include the areas of your being that could cause you worry or trouble? Or your flaws?

As a Buddhist, I run into this. If people think Buddhists are like Teflon people—they never feel upset; they never feel like losers; nothing fazes them; they can deal with everything—it starts to merge into a sense of striving and perfectionism that you should not feel strong emotions, you should not be upset by anything. Your heart shouldn't be torn apart by so many things that you see.

Much of the time, I try to encourage people to invite in their flaws and their hesitations, their fears and mis-

takes, so that they can be fully open and accepting of the people around them. There's a great danger in trying to create as your possession a particular state of mind. True peace is not manufactured, even by the most clever or profound teachings or practices. If it has to be manufactured, then it has to be protected and maintained. Then it, by definition, is engaged in a struggle and defensiveness of whatever might threaten that situation.

We are working and changing all the time, but when you do a meditative practice or a spiritual practice and you begin to have a greater sense of inner strength, inner flexibility, of responsiveness, or a sense of greater accommodation of the extremes of experience—you can call it "big mind". Big mind can hold our own world of thoughts, sensations and emotions, can hold the sufferings and pain within us and within all beings. A big mind can attain so much.

Then, the test is in our interaction. I think that spiritual awakening and spiritual sense of peace is very much an activity that can arise when we're challenged. From a manufactured situation, we sometimes need to step back. We need to create retreats. We need to go into deep practice. But then we need to come back out of that. And that's where so often the true learning happens, when we are not in a situation that is ideal, when we're not with people that are necessarily wonderful, when we're not necessarily in a job situation where things are just flowing along duckily. When we are interrupted, then we see where our attachments lie. We could be attached to maintaining a sense of, we're spiritual people, we can deal with everything, or attachment to not being bothered. I just want to deal with my thing, what I like to do, practice and study; just leave me alone and let me do my spiritual hobby, whatever you want to call it.

Oddly enough, there's a discussion of, everybody wants to be more peaceful, everyone wants to be more happy. And the more we strive to be so, the less it seems to work. We try one

thing, we try another thing, we try another thing, endlessly, on and on and on. Buddhist teachings have a lot of jokes from my perspective, or humor, in the sense that, okay, you keep trying to find it. The Reverend talked about looking around to try to find God outside, and not realizing that it's within you already. I could mention the Buddhist thing of trying to find peace doing this practice, doing this study, noticing your various restless qualities and taming the mind, trying to draw in from distractedness and lost quality. But the breakthrough is at the point of giving up, the point of relaxing, the point of dropping the notion that there's something out there to attain that's going to work. There is nothing out there to attain that's going to work. There doesn't need to be something out there to attain that's going to work. It doesn't exist. So the sense of, "Maybe that's okay."

There's so much distrust, inner distrust that we actually already have within our nature an awakened quality, a compassionate heart. It's a fundamental teaching that all beings are Buddha; all beings, fundamentally in their deepest core, are fully awake beings, worthy of love and able to love. But to actually believe that is very, very difficult. Because we keep thinking, "That can't possibly be true, because I get up in the morning and I feel in a bad mood." Or, "I get up in the morning and I should've done this and I didn't do it." We think of all the reasons why we are inadequate. So many people feel inadequate on many levels, let alone in the sense of something that sounds so grandiose as inner peace. Inner peace

Nobody wants to be hurt. Nobody wants to make mistakes. Nobody wants to be alone and unloved. But if we have to get rid of all that in order to have true peace, we'll just keep struggling forever and ever as far as I can tell. Within that, can there be peace? Within our flawed inner world, our flawed outer world, what does peace actually mean?

It's hard to talk about something like inner peace, 'cause it's not held

within language. It is beyond language. It's not graspable by our words, even by our brilliant, profound words held in the best scripture. Those are all, as someone pointed out as well, those are pointers. They're pointers to something; they're mirrors. They say, "Can something mirror to you your innermost nature?" That is the role of teachers. In that beautiful story from the Hindu tradition, it comes through the trees and the sun and the moon and the natural world, the mandala of interconnectedness.

I've been particularly thinking about boundaries. You could say there's inner peace and outer chaos. Sometimes it seems the opposite. Inner chaos and maybe there's some outer peace. The practice that I find the most potent in some ways is that meeting point. You do your practice in the morning, you go out into the world, and boom, you hit a boundary. Boom. Your practice hits the world. And then it can go one way or another.

Where does that peace fall away, and why does it fall away? Then comes a question, stepping back, what is it you try to maintain? Is inner peace something that can be maintained, or does that maintaining actually undercut the thing itself? It's sort of like trying to preserve a flower. You can have an artificial flower, and it lasts, except that you have to dust it or something every so often. But a real flower, you can't keep it. It just dies and dries up. Or relationship. You can't hold it. When you hold it, you kill it.

That's been interesting, for me. Something so important, the most fundamentally important in some ways—inner harmony, inner peace, inner loving, basic goodness, inner nature—we want it so much, and we want to hold it so much, and in holding it, we destroy it.

It's almost like in the martial arts, you can't directly go for something. You have to relax. You have to relax and receive, not create and manufacture. That takes great confidence and great trust. I think a lot of what is so important is to give people that trust. They can relax. They can accept. They

can always come back. We get lost and are always coming back—point of return. Each time there's that coming back, that point of return, which is what more deeply matters, we develop spiritual and emotional strength.

ES: Judy, would you like to take any questions?

JL: Oh, I'd love to take a question.

ES: "How can we, highly sensitive people, stay at peace with aggressive people while constantly being bothered, people who do not go away when we set our boundaries in a normal way, but still act aggressively towards us?"

JL: If we have an aggressive person in our lives, how can we maintain any peace?

ES: And maintain some boundaries in a normal way.

JL: From my perspective, that's connected with a certain quality of kindness to ourselves, and self-knowledge. As has come up many times, the spiritual practice is a dynamic, lifelong thing. And one of the things that is important to learn is when we need to step back. It came up as well with the Reverend. There are times we have to remove ourselves from the situation that we're not ready to deal with. We get a clear message. Other times, we're always deciding, "Am I being cowardly or am I being realistic? Am I being phony, or am I being real in this moment?"

Of course, with this virus, if we're stuck in a small apartment with a person like that—oh no!—then you have to find some way of letting the person's own issues, their own insecurity and violence, be theirs. I'm a sensitive person, and sometimes it's a drag 'cause we tend to take on what comes at us very directly into the body in kind of an empathic distress.

Working with that quality of, it's not your problem. It's not your problem a person's being that way, unless

it's going to be harming you. So if you can step away, you step away and work on that. Because in life, you're going to have to deal with harmful and aggressive people because they're there. Certainly we're going to have to deal with annoying people, because there are many of those as well. So how to interact in a way that spreads peace rather than feeds the aggression? What feeds the aggression is buying into it, and kind of tossing it back, you could say. Which happens so easily.

ES: Thank you very much, Judy. If you'd like to say any closing words, we'd invite you to say those, and then we'll carry on. I'd like to say one thing, that Veet, one of our partners in the conference, just told me that your last name, Lief, is the Dutch word for love.

JL: I've heard that, yes.

In terms of any final things, I think my main thing is that there's room for the strong emotions—for sorrow, for love, for anger, for frustration. There has to be room for them within a space of real peace. Peace doesn't mean subduing all the emotions and smoothing everything out. To me that is an important aspect of how I view peace. It's an inviting of the reality of worldly energies, though within in a very vast, expanded sense of space, which to me, holds true peace. That's all I had to say.

ES: Beautiful. Thank you so much, Judy, for joining us. It was an absolute pleasure to have you here with us.

Our next speaker is Dr. Rick Hanson, who has tons and tons of accolades to his name. He is a psychologist and a neuroscientist, a *summa cum laude* graduate of UCLA. He's the founder of the Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom. He's spoken at NASA, at Google, Oxford, Stanford, Harvard, so many universities. He's a meditation teacher, and he's taught all over the world. His work has been featured on the BBC, CBS, NPR, and on so many other different media outlets.

He has a newsletter called *Just One Thing* with 150,000 subscribers, which you can also subscribe to. He has an online Foundations of Wellbeing program in positive neuroplasticity that anyone with financial need can do for free. His books are wonderful and amazing. *The Buddhist Brain* and *Hardwiring Happiness* are two of my favorites. His newest book is called *Neurodharma*, which came out on May 5th. You can go online and order that book. It's an amazing book.

One of the things which is so phenomenal about Rick's work is how he can help people to experience and understand that our mind and our body are one thing. And that by doing something to your body, it happens to your mind; and by doing to your mind, it happens to your body. He can help guide us in ways that you can begin to feel that viscerally, and then wire that into your everyday present-moment awareness.

Rick, we are thrilled to have you here. Congratulations again on the release of your book.

RICK HANSON: THANK YOU VERY much, Eddie. Thank you to the organizers of this Inner Peace Conference. My respectful bows to the teachers on this panel. It's really an honor to be part of this. My respectful bows to all those who are participating in this conference. I think that we practice for others, of course, as well as for ourselves. One of the things to take into account as we practice, as we take a breath, as we be a little more mindful, as we be a little more patient, as we keep on going in ways that are skillful for others and ourselves too, is that we practice alongside so many other beings. Even though we're doing this, as it were, virtually, we can tap into what is called *intersubjectivity* among developmental psychologists, I include myself in their number. It's that capacity to have a felt sense of the being behind the eyes in the other person, that there are others who are with us who, like us, suffer and hope and dream and enjoy and sorrow, and can even, as my great teacher Neil

Young put it, keep on rocking in the free world.

What I'd like to do with you is a practice in four steps. It'll be experiential. But I'd like to frame it first in terms of what's called positive neuroplasticity. When things are really hard, in other words, when the world is most challenging, and also when the world is least helpful, such as at this current time, what we most need to do is to draw on strengths of various kinds inside, and develop these and use them well. Strengths like courage or grit, determination—scruffy determination, one of my favorites—compassion—compassion for others, compassion for ourselves, gratitude, insight, wisdom, the capacity to drop into meditative concentration. All kinds of strengths of various sorts.

How do we develop these strengths? Because that's what we draw upon to be truly resilient while preserving some kind of wellbeing in the core of ourselves. We develop these strengths neurologically in two very simple, straightforward steps. But we routinely forget the second one. The first step is to experience whatever we want to grow. To get that experience occurring along with, in terms of the body-mind integrated process that Eddie was speaking to a moment ago, the underlying pattern of neural activation. Those neurons and synapses, there are about 85 billion of them inside our heads along with another 100 billion or so support cells, connected in a network with typically several thousand connections each, giving us right now—right now!—several hundred trillion—wow!—little microprocessors sparkling away. As the neuroscientist Charles Sherrington put it, "The brain is like an enchanted loom, continually weaving the fabric of our consciousness."

Apart from whatever may lie meaningfully beyond or distinct from ordinary reality, the big-bang universe that we're in, which includes a lot of extraordinary stuff; apart from whatever that may be, and it's the view of some that it's not at all, it's the view of others, including me, that there really

is a transcendental process or matter entwined with ordinary natural reality; but other than that, this moment of hearing, this moment of wanting, this moment of craving, this moment of freedom from craving, this moment of inner peace, this moment of inner agitation, is being constructed, conditioned and constrained continually by the living body, primarily in the nervous system, and especially its headquarters, our own brain. So it's really important to pay attention not just to being experientially subjectively mindful of the body, but to recognize with insight and wisdom that we are continuously, actually, objectively, body full of mind.

We're having an experience—let's suppose that we're feeling some compassion, or we're feeling some clarity about how we want to act, and these are the two strengths that I want to talk about integrating here, compassion and clarity together. We're experiencing it. We've gotten those neurons firing together. Then in the second step of positive neuroplasticity, the second step of lasting cultivation, genuine *bhavana* in Sanskrit and Pali, we need to help the experience we're having actually sink in. Actually leave a lasting physical trace of neural structure or function, without which the experience might have been pleasant or useful at the time, but it was truly impermanent. It left no value behind in terms of any development, any healing, any learning, any movement, any conversion from state to trait.

That second step of internalization, of genuine learning can be accomplished very simply, 'cause the brain is so fast. If we just stay with an experience for a breath or two or longer, we're going to keep those neurons firing together, so they're going to tend to be wiring as well. The more we experience something in the body, the more it's going to tend to leave traces behind in terms of social, emotional, motivational, even spiritual learning. The more that we focus on what is enjoyable about the experience, what is rewarding about it, the more it's going to tend to leave lasting traces behind.

There are other methods we can use, or other mental factors that we can draw upon, such as being aware of why an experience is actually personally relevant, why it would be salient, worth paying attention to. There are other factors that will increase the conversion from states to traits. And I talk about them a lot, and I have tons of freely offered information about that. But really, the essence is simple. It's two steps: Have it, enjoy it. By enjoying it, I mean, very, very broadly, take it into yourself.

Now, some of what we take in may not be enjoyable in the moment. It might be a moment of healthy remorse, realizing, "Wow, I've landed really hard on another person. I need to not do that the next time." We need to let that sink in. We may also internalize notions that are more neutral but really useful. In my 20s I realized that growing up I'd been a nerd, but not a wimp. That was a useful idea for me. That too is something—to develop conviction in, or, in a healthy sense, a kind of faith in, useful ideas. Including, for example, the idea that someone's alcoholism is not our own fault, for example.

We internalize. We move from state to trait. Now I'd like to apply this general approach to cultivating and developing traits of compassion for those who are easy to feel compassion for; second, the trait of compassion for someone who might be harder to feel compassion for, oneself; third, the trait of having compassion for, or the capacity for compassion for, those who are difficult; and then fourth, a sense of clarity amidst that compassion about what one sees and how one will act. That's what I'm really going to aim for here.

I'll do this experientially for you. It's a little ambitious. If we're truly going to have inner peace and outer peace, we need to be ambitious. I invite you to do a bit of an experiential practice with me here.

We have the ability to evoke, call forth, open into, various useful experiences, states of being. Then as we experience them, we can engage the sec-

ond step of learning, internalization, to help those experiences become lasting traits inside us. Then as we move from state to trait, those traits become easier to access. And over time we develop trait compassion, trait gratitude, trait wisdom.

Let's begin. I suggest, if you like, that you bring to mind someone that's easy for you to feel compassion for, a felt sense of their burdens, their difficulties. Could be a friend, a partner, could be a group of people, a pet, an aging parent, a frontline health care worker. With that empathy, that felt sense of, "Wow, some of what they're dealing with..." there's a benevolence. There's a supportiveness; there's a wish that they not suffer, along with, often, the wish to help if one can. In fact, in this first of four steps, we're meditating on compassion for a friend. There might be other feelings alongside the compassion, such as friendliness or love, maybe a sense of injustice that's landed on that person. We might like them as well as have compassion for them. You might want to put a hand on your heart, or touch your heart; this might strengthen the experience.

Then, in the second step of this practice, which you can come back to again and again, and these steps might also be familiar to you—see if you can be aware of some of your own burdens. Your own stresses, pain, loss, worry, stuff you're dealing with. In our common humanity, it's normal to feel these things. Along with this sense of the suffering, the difficulty, there can be a supportiveness, a tenderness for oneself, much as we might feel that for another person. You might have simply a sense of wishing yourself well, perhaps a feeling of wanting to help yourself in some ways. Keeping it simple, focusing on the feelings of caring and respect and supportiveness for yourself.

Compassion, in effect, is bitter-sweet. There is both the bitter of the sense of the suffering, and the sweet of the caring, the support, rippling out maybe in waves, maybe with a sense of it being lived through you, even, tapping into something trans-person-

al, perhaps. Both together, the bitter and the sweet. But it's important to not get swallowed up by the bitter, and to keep renewing, calling upon the lovingness, the compassion, the support, including for yourself. We're dealing with a lot these days, and it's okay to acknowledge it. Perhaps with soft thoughts like, "May I not suffer. May I feel less anxious. May I also be grateful. May I be at peace with this pain."

Then, in the third step of this ambitious practice, call to mind what could be called the difficult person. Frankly, some translations will refer to this traditionally as the enemy, the adversary—someone who is challenging for me in this time, in our politicized time, or with people we're living with or dealing with around us. Find someone who is challenging for you. Without waiving your rights at all, see if you can have some sense of how they are burdened too. They are scared too. They are stressed too.

Compassion is independent of judgment or affection. We can have compassion for those we oppose fiercely. Being aware, keeping it simple, disengaging from complicated stories or movies—just them; there's a being over there, vulnerable like me, doesn't want to die, like me, feels pain, feels pleasure. Can you feel compassion for this person? You might be aware of the ways in which that compassion for this person can actually relieve some of the upset you might feel related to them. If you like, you can bring soft thoughts to bear about them, maybe something really quite specific. "May you not suffer." "May there be less pain in your body." "May you be more in touch with wellbeing." Keep it simple. "May you not suffer."

It's okay if it's hard. It might be useful to pick someone who's just a little difficult or challenging for you, and then extend outward. There can be the sense that the compassion and related feelings of kindness or good wishes, of peacefulness radiating out from you, are unconditional. They're not dependent upon others. It's a little bit like a WiFi base station of warm-hearted-

KRISHNA FOR TODAY



Tiruppavai 11 - Meghashyama ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

ness radiating in all directions, omitting none, the seen and the unseen, in all directions, through which others move. Your compassion, your lovingness, your strong heart is independent of who they are or what they've done. They're moving through the field of your radiant caring, spreading in all directions.

In fact, your compassion is not about them, even though it is about them. Fundamentally, it's offered freely, omitting none. And this compassion that is free can be an easing of one's own suffering. There can be a sense of liberation from the particularities of what other people do or who they are as you rest, mainly, in this wellspring of caring, compassion, kindness living through you as you, no matter who they are.

Then, the fourth step, the most challenging of all perhaps, the most ambitious, is to stay in touch with—with regard to this particular difficult person, and you could do this with others—to stay in touch with this open heart, the strong heart, while finding a clarity. A clarity about the way it is, all of it. The complexities of it with you and this other person or these groups of people. Clarity about what you see. Without righteousness, and still with clarity. And a calm knowing of what you're going to do with regard to this challenging person, or, more generally, challenging situations or settings.

Compassionate clarity. See if you can find a sense of this. Heart is open, not poisoned by ill will, not poisoned by hatred. Resentments, anger, outrage may arise. It's okay. It's perfectly normal. It's part of what's passing through the sky of mind. Meanwhile, in the core, in the center, there's a calm, compassionate clarity, a simplicity of clarity about what you'll do, which might be nothing. It might be simply letting it be, or realizing there's nothing you can particularly, usefully, do. Or, in your clarity, you might only know what the next step is. And that's all you really need to know—the next step. Perhaps reaching out to others, allies, resources, advisors maybe, friends.

There might be a compassionate clarity about actions you're going to take, such as supporting different political groups, or sending an email that's simple and clear. In this compassionate clarity, there might be anger amidst it. But it's not anger in the driver's seat. It's a passenger, maybe, in the back. Calm, compassionate clarity. You can do this with another difficult person if you like, or challenging situation. Really anchor in yourself. Really receive into yourself this feeling of a grounded, unconditionally kind, fair way of being that is clear about what you see, what you value, and what you will do. The feeling of this can sink in.

As I finish here over the next few minutes, I myself, who have been doing this with you, with a person who I find really quite difficult in my life, I find it useful to bring to mind people who are models for me of this way of being, who seem like exemplars of embodying in their way of being and in the feeling you get around them of this kind of calm, courageous, compassionate action.

For me, Thich Nhat Hanh stands out. There are certainly others. I think of a teaching from the Buddha as best we know that one is not necessarily wise who can just recite the scriptures. One is truly wise who is peaceable, friendly and fearless. I just love that combination: peaceable, friendly and fearless. There may be anxiety. We are human animals. It's natural to have anxiety arising around the edges. But in the core of one's being, one is not cowed or bowed, and one can step forward, resting in and finding refuge in, sinking roots into, this sense of calm, compassionate clarity—the sweet spot. With repetition, in that second necessary step of any kind of lasting learning, any kind of movement from passing states to lasting, beneficial traits, we can let it land again and again. We can open our bodies. We can have a receptive intimacy with our experience in the moment to receive into ourselves the feeling of this sweet spot of calm, compassionate clarity. And then we increasingly live from there out into the world.

As more and more people have this capacity, including all of us involved in this marvelous conference, and going forward, rippling out more and more, seen and unseen, I think that is a major thing that will be helpful to us going forward in this century that is both full of challenges and full of wonderful opportunities. I want to thank you all for the opportunity to be here with you, and to thank my benefactors, Eddie et al, who have enabled this to happen, people I respect greatly on this panel. And all of you. I really wish you the best. May we all be safe, healthy, happy and live with ease. Thank you very much.

ES: Thank you so very much, Rick. That was just wonderful, and very effective as well. It's a delight to have you with us, and thank you for leading that meditation. It was absolutely apt. Folks, definitely check out Rick's new book, *Neurodharma*. We look forward to doing more with you in the future, Rick.

RH: Definitely.

ES: I'm going to invite our next speaker up, Jana Long. I met Jana through both my friend, psychologist Dr. Gail Parker, and also Dena Merriam from the Global Peace Initiative of Women. Jana is the director of the Power of One Yoga Center, which is just an amazing name for a yoga school, I love that. She has so many interesting facets of her training, including being an astrologer and being certified by Duke Integrative Medicine in therapeutic application of yoga for seniors. She has several different levels of yoga certifications, having studied with the Bihar School of Yoga and Sivananda Yoga. Also, she's skilled in Ayurveda and in so many other types of things.

One of the things that struck me most when Jana and I were speaking before this conference was how she related to me that, when she began her journey into yoga and was studying Vedanta and the different yoga philosophies and aspects of Hinduism in yoga, she didn't see herself in those

teachings. Yoga was profound to her, but from the culture and background she came from, she didn't see herself in those particular traditions, if I'm using your words properly. I found that to be really interesting.

What Jana related to me was that she went to Ghana, West Africa, which is where she's from, to learn the traditional healing and spiritual practices of the Akan people, and study the yoga and spiritual traditions of West Africa, and then combine that and assimilate that into how she perceived, valued and taught yoga. She went on to become the executive director and the co-founder of the Black Yoga Teachers Alliance.

It's an absolute delight to have you here today. Thank you very much, Jana, for being with us. The floor is all yours.

JANA LONG: THANK YOU EDDIE. I DON'T know if what I have to say will take up the whole thirty minutes, so I'm happy to take any questions if there's time leftover. First, I'd like to extend my greetings to all the other presenters. Thank you for what you shared this morning. I've been taking notes, so thank you very much. For the participants out there, first of all, thank you for being part of the Inner Peace Conference.

I'd just like to ask you all to take a deep breath with me, 'cause I need one. If we could just settle into our bodies and soften our bodies out. Let your buttocks soften against whatever you're sitting upon, and take a deep breath in. Let the exhalation relax you. I'd like to ask you to relax your attention, as opposed to paying attention. Just relax your attention and hear what I'm saying.

Music sustains me. Music supports me in times of difficulty. Music is something I use to support my inner peace. It helps me to cope with life's challenges. I often turn to the jazz idiom as the primary genre of music. I was raised on jazz; it's in my blood. It brings me a lot of peace. I see the artists of jazz and blues as gurus and griots. I learn time and time again when

I listen to their music—their lyrics often are like *sutras* that are the songs they've created for our contemplation and consumption.

Since this Covid-19 pandemic emerged and we've been mandated to stay at home, I've been going through my vinyl record collection and selecting music to listen to. I still have a turntable. When Eddie first invited me to be part of the Inner Peace Conference, I had a totally different presentation in mind. I thought we would be gathering at St. Bart's Church, and I was going to do one of my signature workshops. But then the event switched to being online with the overarching themes of discovering peace within loving relationships and conscious living. And Eddie actually sent an email to me—and I'm reading directly from it—it said, "It might be valuable to have you speak on the topic of loving relationships, in particular such ideas as deepening our relationships with self and others, establishing bonds of understanding and connection through dialogue, appreciating a diversity of values, ideas, traditions and religions, and expanding perceptions through storytelling, sharing and listening."

Honestly, if these topics had been suggested to me before Covid-19 emerged, I might have been able to address them with some degree of substance and clarity. But the pandemic has created a lot of shifts in my consciousness, and I'm sure many of you out there who are listening are going through the same thing. And some of those shifts for me are around the concepts of love.

As a contemplative person, I'm willing to allow whatever is arising in me to bubble up, to look at it even when it's scary, even when it's what I don't want to see. I don't have to judge it, I just notice and watch, and I'm aware, and I observe my own thoughts. I'm in this process—this coronavirus moving around the world and all that it's revealing about who we are, how we are, our ways of thinking and being, really has me asking myself that question again about love. I'll do my best to tell

this story about what's shifting for me.

Eddie's suggestion about loving relationships brought me to an album that I have in my collection by Billie Holiday. It's her *Lady in Satin* album. It was released in 1958 and it was the last album that came out during her lifetime. I first heard this album in 1958. I was a precocious six-year old attending first grade at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Cincinnati, Ohio. At the time I lived with my maternal grandmother and my great grandfather. He used to walk me to school and pick me up from school every day.

When the school year ended, my mother, who had left Cincinnati in search of a better lifestyle, a better way of living, came to Cincinnati, got me and brought me to Washington D.C. for the summer. She had just landed a job at Howard University. Most days, when she came home after work, one of her favorite albums to play was *Lady in Satin*. I heard it so much as a child that I guess through osmosis, I learned the words to the songs. When I pulled out my *Lady in Satin* album, I immediately went to one of my favorite songs. It's cut three, side one. Billie sings, "You don't know what love is".

Now, I'm not going to pretend that at six years old I had any idea what Billie Holiday was singing about when she crooned, "You don't know what love is". But I will say this, at six years old I felt something about what she was singing, from her jazz phrasing and the interpretation. What I felt was she was singing about something she didn't have or couldn't get. Most kids know what that feels like. It was love lost, not found, never found. Love given, not received. Love as fulfillment, love as sacrifice. Now, of course, I've come to understand all of these nuances in various aspects in the lyrics of this song as an adult and as I've moved through my own life, because this song has lived with me for 60 years. Billie's voice, scratched with pain and living a life of hard knocks, sings, "You don't know what love is until you've learned the meaning of the blues, until you've lost the love you had to lose, you don't know what love is."

Collectively, we are learning the meaning of the blues. Many of us, thousands of people in a short amount of time, have lost loved ones and are in the process of grieving, grieving in a way that they can't gather and celebrate those lives lost—grieving without closure. Then there are others of us, we are losing places that we loved and things that we did. It's uncomfortable.

Many people, like Billie, are accustomed to living the blues on a day to day basis. But those who know little about the blues are venting their anger and lashing out, because they don't know how to deal with the discomfort of it. The blues ain't easy. The blues is not easy. Loss of freedom to come and go as we please brings on the blues. Mandates to stay at home bring on the blues. The blues arise when we think about what we've taken for granted now that we don't have it anymore. Procrastination is rooted in the blues and the assumption that there will be tomorrow.

I used to say I saw an infection before Covid-19 coronavirus. There was an infection that was already spreading amongst us. It was an infection of incivility and crassness. We began to normalize that. It started from the top down, and it spread amongst us. This doctrine of separateness—that's what I call it—has been more or less promoted to us en masse. Well, children were separated at the border, let us not forget about that, from their families and this idea of tribalism, more tribalism, and "these people" and "those people".

Coronavirus is like a genie that came out of the bottle. As the saying goes, be careful what you ask for, because the coronavirus gets the last laugh right now. We thought we could pick and choose our togetherness. Some, not others. Those people, but not them over there. Coronavirus, Covid-19, came out and said, "Nobody can get together." We got what we asked for. Ask, and ye shall receive.

Now that we're here in our spaces, individualized, not being able to connect with each other—something I

really miss, even my beloved family members I haven't seen, like many of you. I haven't seen them face to face since February. All connections are virtual now. The physical distance, it's hard as a human being not to be able to reach out and touch another person. As I contemplated that and I lived with that, I thought about this song called *Trying Times* by Roberta Flack. It came out in 1971 on her debut album that's called *First Take*. 1971 is a special year for me, because that's the year yoga came into my life. That's when I began to explore and investigate this practice called yoga.

I put on Roberta Flack *First Take* to listen to *Trying Times*. I turned up the volume. She says in the first line, "Trying times is what the world is talking about. We got confusion all over the land". As I listened to this album, I was listening to the song, my television was on, but I put it on mute so that I could listen to the music. The visuals on the screen were of people in Michigan and California and Georgia, and even here in Maryland where I live, protesting, wanting to get out, crazy, can't stay at home. To mask or not to mask, that is the question. I saw a scroll, "President advises injections of disinfectant to kill the virus". Health care workers needing PPE. On and on and on. Redefining what is an essential worker, the people who are going out every day to be of service to us, who work lower-wage jobs that barely sustain them. And if they get sick, they have no health care.

Then Roberta says, "Maybe folks wouldn't have to suffer if there was more love for your brother. But these are trying times." There was that word again, "love." So here I am. I'm at home alone. As I said, all contact is virtual. The only people I see on a regular basis are the postal delivery person and the sanitation workers. I run to my door, and when they're at least six feet or more away I run out and I wave and I say hello and thank you, 'cause I'm hungry for that contact.

Before the pandemic, I thought I was down with love. I thought I had love together. I'd gone to the ashram in

India and got my contemplation on. That was an experience that reshaped me in many ways. One of the teachers I had there talked about love, how love often, he explained, in the West has become somewhat of a disposable word. We use it like "Hello", "Goodbye". "Hello, I love you." "Goodbye, I love you." Do we really think about what that really means, to love?

I thought when I left India that I'd sort of settled into being a one-way vessel of love, just love would pour out of me without any need for reciprocity. It was a one-way street. But since this pandemic, what shifted for me is that, I have to confess, I don't think I love human beings unconditionally. Maybe I never did. This is what I'm grappling with. Perhaps it's been there all along and I just didn't want to acknowledge that I didn't love human beings unconditionally, because I'm a yoga teacher and I'm trying to live from a loving place, and express and experience myself as loving. And it hurts me to confess out loud and in the presence of other human beings, that I do not love you unconditionally. It makes me feel like a dismal person. I have to almost choke down saying that. But as I witness from my direct experience and the indirect information that I'm getting from various forms of media, it makes me wonder if, as a species—Are we even ready for love?

There's been a video running on TV of just still another young, unarmed black man shot down by someone in a truck who looked like he was on a big game safari hunt. And the update is that yesterday, that man and his son were arrested. The shooting happened in February. They were arrested yesterday. Whether they will come to trial, and if they have a trial by a jury of their peers, well, we'll see what happens.

We humans certainly don't make it easy to love or to be loved. Of course, there are people in my life I do have unconditional love for. And I have a big circle of friends and acquaintances, and I have loving feelings for them. But I'm trying to be—from what I've

heard from the other teachers here this morning, I want to have a bigger basket of love. And I'm finding it really difficult right now. I have conditions for my human love. This may sound harsh, but I don't know if it's even necessary to love humankind. Are we worth it? When I ask myself that question, I don't have an answer. It's something that I'm sitting with. And that's what I mean: Sometimes things bubble up. They're not pleasant to deal with. But I'm sitting with it. And I'm not judging myself for it. I'm just looking at it.

Our popular media promotes this idea since this virus that we're all in it together. Are we? Are we in this together? Or is this just another slogan that soon will appear on a Covid-19 T-shirt for sale? We are all experiencing the pandemic, but our suffering plays out in different ways. Some people are at home, like me. I'm waiting for a vaccine, 'cause I'm in the vulnerable group. Some folks are anxious and wanting to connect socially—social media, emails and online and video calls, it's just blowing up. It's a mad frenzy going on. The angst is palpable. Coronavirus is asking us to be still, to be still. Just for a moment, to be still, to breathe. You have a chance to relax, just for a moment. Can you do that?

The good news is, I'm not completely back at square one on the love thing. In my attempts to understand the roots of love, and that's how I'm phrasing it: What's the root of love? I recently was looking at, I think it was Netflix, there was a documentary about the singer Sam Cooke. Sam is mostly known for his ballad *A Change Is Gonna Come*. But that's not my favorite song. The song that inspires me by Sam Cooke, the song that is supporting me through this contemplation of love, is a song that he sang on his 1964 album *Live at The Copa*. And it's called *The Best Things in Life Are Free*. He didn't write this song. I think it was in a 1927 musical. I don't remember the name of the songwriters. But the musical was called *Good News*. The words of the song go, "The moon

belongs to everyone, the best things in life are free. The stars belong to everyone, they gleam there for you and for me. The flowers in spring, the robins that sing, the moonbeams that shine, they're yours, their mine. And love can come to everyone. The best things in life are free."

When I relate to that song, I feel peace, I feel hope. Because it's opened me to a first realization that there's more to love than people. Perhaps my focus has been misplaced. There are other living things for which I can say I have unconditional love, like plants, the foliage and the fauna, those things that sacrifice their lives so that other life forms can survive. The love I have for them is deep and true. I have unconditional love for the true source, this planet that we live upon. This planet, our home, our mother, that we have wreaked havoc on out of our avarice and over-consumption, makes me feel pain when I see her surface penetrated and dug into and drilled into. We've raped and debased her, and we've lost our connection to what is real and true. We now value the artificial.

I have deep respect for Covid-19 for locking me down so that I can sort out what is really important. The air is fresher. It's quiet. I hear birds singing, rather than trying to squawk over the din of traffic noise. Animals whose habitats we've encroached upon are coming out more freely. I see less road kill whenever I'm out foraging for food. As human activity decreases, the activity of the natural world increases.

This pandemic has increased my gratitude. I'm enjoying basking in nature, working in my garden, doing my due diligence to be responsible and respectful of our mother, this home we call earth, and the life, this special experience of life on earth. I see more clearly now that it is only when we can love and respect our mother, this earth, that we will be able to love and respect each other. I believe that's the root of love. This is the foundation of the wisdom teachings and traditions of indigenous people all over the world.

I would just ask you to take time every day, sit with yourself, just sit and breathe two to three minutes, three to five minutes. It doesn't have to be a long time. Relax and explore your inner world. You never know what may emerge. When the pandemic is over and we're able to come out again, who will you be? Who will you be?

I want to extend my gratitude for everyone who registered. And thank you for inviting me to participate in the Inner Peace Conference. Thank you to all those who have supported the conference. And just as a reminder, I would ask you to please be good to yourself. Be kind to yourself. Thank you.

ES: Jana, thank you so much. I think there's thunderous applause from everyone's computer in their houses. That was a really honest and beautiful talk. I think that you said what you had to say wasn't going to take thirty minutes, but we could keep listening to you and listening to you. They're deeply profound truths that you were sharing. Thank you for bringing up Ahmaud Arbury who was senselessly killed in February, another tragic name to be added to the senseless and horrific racist violence of our country.

Thank you for your love of the mother earth and I love your use of music as well in your spiritual journey. Thank you so much for joining us, and we look forward to doing more with you, Jana.

JL: Thank you very much.

ES: Our final speaker for the day is Tiokasin Ghosthorse. I think of Tiokasin as one of the treasures of New York. He is a member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation of South Dakota, and has a long history with indigenous activism and advocacy. He is the host and producer of *First Voices Radio* for the last 27 years, and was selected for many different awards and nominations. He received a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize from the International Institute of Peace Studies and Global Philosophy. He was awarded

New York City's Peacemaker of the Year in 2013. He's a master musician, a teacher of magical ancient and modern sounds. He performs worldwide, and has performed at Cathedral of St. John the Divine, at Lincoln Center, Madison Square Garden, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Apollo Theater, the United Nations, and many, many other venues. He's on the board of several different charitable organizations.

One thing also that I'd like to say about Tiokasin. He's another gentleman who I've met through Dena Merriam, through the Global Peace Initiative of Women. One of the things that so struck me the first time I heard him speak was this reminder that language and the way we use language frames how we perceive the world around us. As a white person growing up in New York in the area I grew up in, the type of language I learned taught me to perceive the world through the lens of that language I was using, which is very often filled with pronouns such as "I" and "Mine."

What I heard from Tiokasin about language and about the Lakota language was so profound that it had a lasting effect on how I perceived how I used language and how we all use language as well. I won't say anything more about that, because he's the one who can say that. But I would like to read one quote, Tiokasin, if I may. And this is from your website, but it's completely apt.

"We have to stop with the idea of creating peace on earth, and begin with creating peace with Mother Earth. We've tried the first alternative for thousands of years, but look where that has led us. Now is the time of the original ways, the Native ways. After all, it is coming this way, that we all must make peace with Mother Earth. There is no more altering the Native way."

It's a beautiful quotation. And with that, I turn the microphone over to you. Thank you so much for joining us today, and we eagerly look forward to listening to you now.

TIOKASIN GHOSTHORSE: THANK YOU. Hi everybody, thank you so much. To all my relatives out there, and that's not just including humans, and I say that mostly because the fact is that there is no exclusion in these languages, these earth languages. So if you feel exclusion, maybe it's that we should look at the language that we're using, and how conceptual it is, to conceive everything out of that mind.

There is not a place in this language to hold those movements, those motions, those quantum physics coming from the earth, describing all the consciousnesses that we know of. Mainly *chante'*, which, in Lakota, is *of the heart*, which is of the tree, knowing that the tree and the heart have the same heartbeat. Also, the consciousnesses of all elements, the thought processes of the elements—the rock, the fire, the plants, the water. Jana was referring earlier to the fact that we were disrespecting the earth. We were digging it up. We were thinking that the world was ours, so we developed a language around possessiveness.

To think out of that less-than quantum physics thought process is to always center it on the individual—the I, the me, the my, the mine or ours—as if we were lacking something. When I think about, Wow, how am I going to describe this? Am I just going to hand over the answers for those who think in I, me, my, mine and ours? That we're so lacking that we forgot how to be truly generous. Not just with self, but with your seeing the consistent generosity of earth. I like to start it that way. Are we using the same language to try to wake up that has gotten us into this position in the first place?

So I'm speaking in this foreign language, which I'd say is English to me. Lakota is one of many thousands and thousands of indigenous languages across the world that are the majority of languages. The language that I'm speaking to you is a dominant language. I begin this with saying that in our language, and in many indigenous languages, there's no need and no value or no concept or word for domination.

We think about how in the hierarchy of today's structures, even in how we think about this virus, we are using such words and domination concepts. When I'm introducing myself in this way of English—my default is not English. My default is not concept. My default is not a noun. My so-called default is more of emotion. Emotion—things are in motion. Things are not stagnant as we would see every day. Before I came into this little box here of right angles, I went out to the nearest fire that I had last night. And I asked her, I asked Mother, I asked all those elemental consciousnesses that I named before, "What do you want me to say?" 'Cause obviously I'm here not knowing what to say. If I have all of these consciousnesses around me, giving me, showing me, helping me, assisting me,—those processes are the ones that we have missed by speaking the self-centered languages of I, me, my, mine and ours. The possessiveness of all those thought processes meant that we severed our spiritual umbilical cord to those processes.

When we do that, we're only putting the human with this value, on this pedestal. As if we were the only ones that mattered, because it's happening to us. But when you're out there with what you call nature, which we call nurturing, we have no word for nature. We are nurturing or being nurtured by the nurturing, the Mother.

We think in verbs. We feel in verbs. And to think in concepts where there's a beginning and an ending and there's a hierarchy and there's subjectiveness and there's objectivity, and therefore we can name it and label it and put it in a dictionary and an encyclopedia—we lose the process of really understanding the expression earth is giving to us all the time, through our bodies, through the water, through the air, through all of that. So you see the relational values of these languages that we are ignoring and want to bring back into the box or the default box of I, me, my, mine and ours.

We want to bring those outside of the box in, so we can explain our exis-



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tence. Once we are in the box, we rationalize why we are this way, why it's a reset button that the system is going through, that we have to continue the same dichotomy—the dichotomy of dichotomies—which is part of the cause and effect. It's the extreme of binary thinking. Intelligence means between the lines. If we're speaking between the lines, we're talking about the mystery. I think part of the essence of knowing the mystery is the fact that the Western mind tries, and is always trying, to solve the mystery. So much so that they think that they can define what the mystery is in religion and science and government.

But in indigenous languages, there is no trying to solve the mystery. There's more of an acceptance of it. We're living the acceptance. We're living the mystery. We're living the generosity of what earth is already giving. We say that at this time of fear, panic, and pandemic, all of those *pan* words—Pan, the Greek god who terrorized the people in the forest—they come out of *panic*. Pandemic. I think about, as coming from the indigenous folks here in Turtle Island, the history that we don't know before 1492. Most Americans, we refer to 1492 or 1620 as, “This is a country like no other”. So it's all this idealism going on. But there's no practicality of the mystery.

How do we understand what has been before 1492? And what is going to be after this state that we have now? We really have to work with the present, which is twenty-four hours ago to twenty-four hours tomorrow. That is the present for us. It's the past and the future.

Yet, I do understand the concepts in English. We're into prophecy, we're into prediction through economics, through religion, through governments. We're all laying our energy out there. We're not ever centered. Our way of being is that the center of the universe is everywhere. And that's coming from the elders of the Lakota. So we understand that all things, without thing-ifying them, have consciousness and they're also the center of the universe. Therefore we have this

relational language with has no authority. Once you understand the relationship, your language, your energy of generosity opens up. Your language of abundance opens up.

All of these conceptual, feel-good words we have, in this language at least, are no longer applied to something that we can't ever figure out or comprehend. Because the language that I'm speaking now, most of it has to do with knowledge and information. When you're coming into this society, from a culture to a civilization that has rules, it's difficult to put all of that understanding, all of the dimensionals that we understand in our language, to bring it into knowledge and information.

Not having an alphabet is part of that. The symbology of A to Z and capturing concepts between those letters and symbols. You see how we think about uneducated people in this Western society is that they don't know enough. Of course, we're not going to know enough, because that knowledge and that information is controlled by the authority. And yet, if we think in this way—that earth is the authority—she knows more about us than we will ever know about her. And yet, this knowledge and information of authority is trying to control what earth is already understanding about us. The elemental intelligence that is out there, the mystery that is there is very much acceptable within indigenous folks. We don't have to speak it. We're already understanding that. And it's nothing to do with the brain, this sensor up here. Everything that we come from is the earth, is here, is coming from that New Age word *vibration*.

And so our information is, as you might probably have guessed, “What is Tiokasin talking about? He's talking like he's coming from everywhere.” It's not a streamline consciousness. It's not a beginning and ending, and it doesn't streamline. It's everywhere. Information is available in these languages everywhere. Just as you go into nurturing or into nature, and that information is everywhere and you

feel it. And you understand what's beyond the clouds, what's beyond a full moon that was here last night. You understand these things. But there is no knowledge and information to say it. And out of that box we're saying, “Well, there's confusion. There's lack of control. What are we going to do? Are we going to save earth? Are we going to save the human beings?” Because it's all about the I, me, my, mine and ours; it's about the human. And there's no being there. Being with earth, or even “to be” doesn't exist in a lot of indigenous language. To be what? To be other than what you are? To be what? So that doesn't exist, that vernacular of “to be”. It's because that means you're disrespecting what your gifts, your talents are, and the responsibility of those gifts and talents.

The statement that Eddie read earlier is really apropos. Because yes, we're going to have to simplify our languages and not rationalize why we have to conceive of the virus as an enemy, something to be conquered and dominated. Because that's exactly what it's doing to us, you see. So many people have been hundreds of generations from relationship, even with the virus, even with the bacteria, even with so many viruses in the earth. The virus is with the earth. It's all what Mother Earth is able to balance.

In our ways—I'm speaking generally now of a lot of Native people—this is the time of cleansing. These next few years, starting from 2012, which is not really the date—it's an off because that's done by some foreign calendar, Julian or Gregorian calendar. We have an earth calendar, and she will always balance herself. I know that we could say, “Oh, the earth is cleaning up because we stopped our human thing.” Yet that human thing is still going on. We're still building the walls. We're still thinking in the Western way of how to take care of the earth, how to steward her, right, which is another false idea of ownership.

Letting go of all these tethered concepts and allowing that understanding the earth is bringing to us—so intelligent. Even if we start spiritually as

infants, the innocence is always there. No matter what age we are, we all are innocents. But we don't see the responsibility that innocence is giving to us. And we base it on guilt. And so we feel bad about what we did to the earth and yet we'll all be wanting things to go back to the old way, so we can run to the store out of convenience, and get all our knowledge and put it in books, and so that we have the answer. When we've been concluding with the wrong answers over this millennia or so, I suppose, ever since Western democracy came what, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 years ago? And conceived of putting the earth below and being dominated.

A lot of those peoples who are in the panic, they're in that boat. I'm not on that boat. I've never been on that boat. The opening statement—I said that 20, 30 years ago. Because we on the outside of the box kept seeing, Well, that's not the way to live with the earth. 'Cause you're living on the earth. You're speaking and thinking the domination of on the earth, and your gods are sky gods, and that something out there, salvation point mentality, is going to come to save you.

We thought, "Well, if you just allow earth, leave her alone, she can save us." It's always been that way for us. And so you have to understand, there are different ways of thinking. There are different ways of feeling. It's not in the emotional context of fear and love and all those things that actually sound kind of cliché for us, because it's not a new language. It's the old language.

The earth languages, compelled by earth, will come through this whole dimensional effect of everything being all jumbled and mixed up politically, scientifically. All these are jumbled. We don't know whether we're going forward or backward, the same way, another way, a new way. But no one is here. We're exacerbating our tragedy by saying, "What's wrong with us?" by saying, "What's happening to us?" by what this coronavirus has caused.

And we do it in right angles. You want things to return to normal, and

that normal means right angles. As original peoples, we've never fit inside that right-angled viewpoint. It sounds oppositional, the way I'm speaking. But yet in the indigenous languages, it's all about relationship with all that is. Human beings are part of that. Not just that we can hold court, so to speak.

It's only within our value-ship as humans, thinking, "Well, we have more knowledge, and I have more knowledge, I have this Ph.D., and I've done so and so." None of that matters. None of that will matter.

It's really, what we've always said, "Be here now". We've always had that—we say that we are the beings of the ancient future now. We've always been this. So that listening ability of the earth, who listens to us. Now, think about that. Earth listens to us. How is she doing that? It's not that we have to go listen to the earth, because we take that sort of arrogance, saying, "Oh, we, the humans, can go listen to the earth". Yet all of the animals, all of the life out there has been listening to us and answering every question that we have, even before we had the question. She answers. They answer everything, and provide everything.

Therefore, our language is one of abundance. Not take. "What's your take-away?" No. What did you give away? The generosity is unappreciated. The generosity of the coronavirus, you look at the generosity that little, tiny, microscopic intelligence brought. She's changing everything, even how we're talking to each other. You can social distance, but that's what we're used to as Native people. We've been socially distanced from this civilization. We've been socially distanced 'cause we're stuck out on reservations, 'cause we have a culture, not a civilization. We have a culture of earth. That's what she's looking for. The communities are coming through now. The communities, but not neighborhoods. You see, it's a community of the earth. And she will define that. And she is defining that all over the place.

I can say that we're not in the same boat, we are with the same earth. She,

our mother. As children, how are we behaving? Are we still planning to go back into the same structure, and wipe our foreheads because, whew, we've been through it, now we can deal with this? But I say no. A lot of indigenous folks have been thinking, feeling post-paradigm, post-corona, post-Western, post-democracy, post-communism, post-socialism, post-I, me, my, mine and ours.

It's a relationship. And that's the language that I'm expecting you all out there to somehow feel, instead of coming up with an explanation and an argument as to why we have to think the way we do now. Because down the line, you're going to see that all of our talents, all of our gifts that we will assume responsibility for, will come into play. And they will all come from the earth. Everything that we breathe and eat. The food grows us. The food blesses us. We don't bless the food. We don't bless the earth. The earth blesses us.

We listen to the earth underneath. She has the intelligence to upload to us, 'cause we've been doing this other way for thousands of years, waiting for something to come out of the sky and save us. It's always the balance of that. Right now, the balance of the earth is coming through. Just the human part of me is confused when I'm thinking here, 'cause I always have to separate myself when I'm speaking this language; it feels like I have to separate.

Which is sad to me. Because it feels that we've forgotten the earth languages, the earth languages that don't need an alphabet. Those understandings, of the quantum physics, the dimensional languages or the dimensionals, many dimensions that we can't put into this one- or two-, three-dimensional language of English, the right angles.

You see, it's not just a brain involved here. It's that the brain is coming from the heart. The brain is a seed of the heart. And our root, our tree of consciousness is coming from the heart. And we could say, "Oh, it's a heart language." But no, it's the language where our feet are rooted with the earth. And if we feel left out of

this, I think we have to all understand that maybe it's part of our severing the tethering to that way of thinking that Mother Earth will identify and say, "Welcome back, 'cause I've missed you all this time."

ES: Well, Tiokasin, that was so beautiful. And it is a truth, I'm not even going to call it a message, I'm going to call it a truth that the world needs to hear. Thank you for these words coming through you.

TG: The consciousness and generosity has always been present, and has always been showing us how to listen, if we could just stop presuming that we already know, or that we already do listen. This other way of listening comes from the ancients. If we understand that civilization goes by rules and regulations and tiers of authority, and that the relationship is what comes from respect—respect for earth, respect for honoring all that is before us.

Those elders that I went out to were all the elements. They were here before me. They're my elders. Where is our language to know that without having to make it scientific all the time? To really understand that truer spiritual technology comes from relationship with the land, peace with earth, not peace on earth, you see. Why are we thinking dominant all the time when there's no such concept in relationship as we speak those languages that we've forgotten?

It's good for us to be here. All is in relationship, and beyond $e=mc^2$. It's not stated fact or science or a formula. No one's going to figure it out, so why try? Why make yourself crazy? Accept it. It makes us stronger. A big thank you from that place we know as beyond. Thank you.

ES: Profound gratitude, Tiokasin. Thank you.

Now I would like to introduce Maarten von Huijstee who is the co-founder of Delight Yoga and the co-creator of Inner Peace Conference and Wisdom in Business. A dear

friend, a visionary, an amazing design artist, a kind and gentle human being. I will turn it over to Maarten to close out our first day of Inner Peace New York, online edition.

MAARTEN VON HUIJSTEE: THANK YOU Eddie for hosting us all today. I want to close off with two small practices. During the conference I wrote this little meditation, of which every line is stolen from all the speakers. It's first and foremost a big thank you to all the speakers and participants, but also to the organizers. First, thanks Wessel for founding Delight and being the source of the things that came out of it, one of which is the Inner Peace Conference.

Thanks Veet, Yanica, and Quinten in particular for making this all happen, for realizing or manifesting this. And then above all, Eddie for being so generous and being the person that you are. You always unite these amazing people around you, and it's an honor and a pleasure to be amongst them.

I just want to conclude with a little meditation. If you would all close your eyes, then I will take you through the day with some of the quotes and messages that came out, and in that way, conclude. So please, let's take a deep breath and go for a little ride through the day in meditation, go into our inner space, this place of peace.

Let us find unity in diversity.

Let us dance together to advance together.

Don't think about tomorrow; just live in the now.

Inner peace is beyond language. You can just break through by giving up.

Let's keep on rocking in the free world, with calm, compassion and clarity.

Until we lost love that we had to lose, we don't know what love is, so now we learn the blues.

We are the beings of the ancient future now.

Thank you for being here today for this first online Inner Peace Confer-

ence. I hope this is the beginning of something beautiful. We like to call it the Inner Peace Network of friends and family and people that find and search for something which is true. Let inner peace lead to world peace. Thank you.

ES: Thank you very much, Maarten. I loved your poem. Thank you everyone who attended today. The speakers today were tremendous and inspiring, beyond our imagination. Have a nice rest of today, and we look forward to seeing you tomorrow morning for day two of Inner Peace online. Thank you all very much.



INNER PEACE CONFERENCE - DAY 2

Talks given at the Inner Peace Conference online May 8th & 9th, 2020, transcribed and edited.

Speakers: Dena Merriam, Bob Roth, Agapi Stassinopoulos, Sharon Salzberg, AnnaLynne McCord, Adam Bucko, Laurie Anderson, Veet

Moderator: Eddie Stern

EDDIE STERN: FOLKS ARE SIGNING in from all over the world. It's amazing; we can reach so many more people than we would have if it was an in-person conference. There are folks signing in from all over Europe, from Iran; someone from Auroville just signed in. People from New York City, Stockholm, Philippines, Brazil—it's really quite wonderful.

As we did yesterday, we'll start with a short invocation to Ganesha, the remover of obstacles; to Saraswati, the goddess and patroness of the arts, eloquence and language; and to the guru by whose grace we have all the knowledge that we do.

*Gannaanaam Tvaa Ganna-Patim
Havaamahe*

*Kavim Kaviinaam-Upama
Shravastamam |*

*Jyesstha-Raajam Brahmannaam
Brahmannaspata*

*Aa Nah Shrnnvan-Uutibhih
Siida Saadanam*

Maha Ganapataye Namah

*Prano Devi Saraswathi Vajebhir
Vajinivathi Dhi Nam Avitriyavathu
Vag Devyai Namah*

*Om Akhanda Manadalakaram
Vyaptam yena Charaacharam
Tadpadam Darshitam Yena
Tasmai Sri Guruve Namah*

OM Shanti Shanti Shantih

Good morning and welcome. I would like to invite my very dear

friend Dena Merriam to give the opening remarks today. Dena is the founder of the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW), which was launched after recognizing the absence of feminine perspectives and leadership in both religious and political life. Her response was to organize the very first World Summit of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders in Geneva in 2002, which then led to the creation of GPIW.

Among the many goals of Global Peace Initiative of Women is to bring youth and elders together to listen, reflect and explore ways to foster new means of creating loving and respectful relationships with each other and the earth. Dena holds dialogues in conflict zones around the world, aiming to bridge conflicts through communication, listening and understanding.

She's the author of two brilliant books. The latest one is *The Untold Story of Sita: An Empowering Tale For Our Time*, which I highly recommend everyone read. It's a remarkable book, and a very unique take on the story of Sita.

I've been working with Dena and the Contemplative Alliance for many years and taken part in her dialogues, which she leads with an unparalleled clarity and genuineness. Her work is tremendous and we are delighted to have her here today, not only as one of our partners in the Inner Peace Conference, but also as the person who shall welcome and give our opening address today. So Dena, I give the floor to you.

DENA MERRIAM: THANK YOU, AND welcome everyone. I'm so grateful for the whole team of Inner Peace for making this possible via our friend Zoom. Thank you Eddie for that lovely introduction, and for inviting me to make some opening remarks. This second day of this Inner Peace Conference is really about how to bridge our inner and outer world—spiritual activism. We're all engaged in society in some way. How do we bring our practice of inner peace into the world?

When I think about activism, actually, I think about my meditation practice—any spiritual practice. For me, it's my meditation practice. Because to me, that is the strongest form of activism that I can engage in.

We live in a vibrational field. The vibrational field is composed of all the thoughts, not just of humans but of animals too—all the feelings and thoughts. That creates the field in which we operate. We know now that this field is filled with fear, and we know that this field also has a lot of anger in it. So how do we counter this fear and this anger? There's a lot we can do out in the world, but the most powerful thing we can do is our inner practice, because the inner practice connects you to this field. The deeper you go in your inner practice and your meditation, the more impact you can have in clearing away the negative energies that are clouding this field, the more you can put positive energies of love and thoughts of kindness into this field.

For me, activism begins on the in-

ner plane. I think there's a call now for all of us to go much deeper, because we've reached a critical phase in our social development where we have to make some radical transformations. That can only happen if we change thoughts, thoughts that lead to changes in behavior. Working at the thought level is very important right now—being conscious of the thoughts that we put out, and being extra conscious, as we go into our meditation, of clearing our thoughts and going to that deep space, that thoughtless place where we clear ourselves and can enter the space of joy and peace.

To me, that is the greatest activism. Now, we're also called to do other things. We don't just sit in meditation all day long. Hopefully we have a good time in the morning, and then we have to go out into the field. The deeper we go in our meditation, the more we're able to carry this into our work life.

I want to share a story from my own life of something that happened to me about eighteen months ago. Every year I bring a group of spiritual teachers to the UN Climate Conferences to organize a session on the spiritual dimensions of the climate crisis. Eighteen months ago we were heading to the climate conference, which that year took place in Poland. As we were en route to the conference, I had a dream vision. It was just before waking. It was a very vivid dream vision.

In the dream vision I was standing in my apartment, which overlooks the East River, standing by the window. As I was looking out at the river, a very large whale swam up the river, stopped right in front of my apartment, and looked up at me. It was eye to eye contact. And a transmission took place where I suddenly grasped everything that was happening, all that the whale community was experiencing. I, in thought, said to the whale, "I hear you." And the next day, I arrived in Poland for the UN Climate Conference. I didn't know what to do with this experience. Here I was, now connected to the whale energy, to the whale life forms. And here we

were talking about climate change. I went to the session on oceans. There was not one mention of ocean life. Everything was about the impact on human life that the changes in the ocean are going to cause. The depletion of the fish, not for the sake of the fish, but for the sake of human life.

I thought to myself, "Okay, I just had this experience, where I said to the whale, 'I hear you.' How can I bring that voice into this forum?" As I reflected on it many, many days after, I realized that the experience I had with the whale was much more powerful. I've been going to these UN Climate Conferences for over ten years, organizing sessions. We feel we make a little dent, we reach a few people. But the power this transmission had on me was lasting. I have not lost it after eighteen months. I still feel connected to the whale world. There was a transmission that took place.

I'm accompanying the whales on the journey that they're going through. And the interesting thing to me is that there was no anger coming from that whale. It was pure information: "This is what's happening." Now, of course, with our global pause that we're all experiencing now, the sounds in the ocean have decreased enough so that the animal life in the oceans is able to return to places that they had left.

A lot of changes are taking place within the animal world because of this pause. Basically, we've given the animal world and the plant world a recuperation time of just a few months. The question is, what happens when we go back? What happens when the pause begins to ease? Can we be on a permanent pause? There's a lot of reflection that needs to take place during this time. We've been given this opportunity to really look deeply at things.

For me, the two things that jump out are that it's not so much what I can do, as what I can be. In the experience that I had in that transmission from the whale, we were communicating and I was allowed entry into their world—I attribute it to my meditation practice which opened me

in a certain way. The whales may be trying to seek entry to many, many humans. But because of my practice, for some reason, not just me, I'm sure it's happened with other people too, they were able to access an openness in me. And I found that much more powerful than anything I could do in the external plane.

It's thinking, again of not so much what I can do, but what I can be. Then also reflecting on how we can shift from a human-focused society to a life-based society. A society that looks at all of life and the flourishing of all of life. Everything within our field is about how it affects humans, with very little attention paid to how humans are affecting the rest. All those in the environmental world know this, and I know there's a lot of frustration within the activist world, because we feel like we're not making a dent.

But actually, that's a trap to think we're not making a dent. We are making a dent. And the only thing that's needed is persistence and a deepening of our practice. Because the deeper we go, the more powerful our thoughts are and the more we'll be able to change minds. Just as the whale was able to enter my mind, we're going to be able to enter the minds of the collective who are so receptive to thoughts. The reason why so many people are in fear now is because there's a lot of fear energy being put out. They're just vulnerable and receptive to that fear energy.

It's the same thing with anger. A lot of people who would not necessarily be angry are being fed thoughts of anger. And so they're reacting to that anger energy. The more we can put out thoughts of encompassing and caring for the whole of the life community, and not just being so self-focused on the human community, I think the more likely we are to see changes in the thought patterns.

When we think of activism, I think we have to think about more than just what we do on the outer plane. If a patient comes into the hospital with fever, of course you're going to try to bring that fever down. But if

you don't deal with the cause of the fever, the fever will come back. Other symptoms will show up. Putting out a fire, we're always dealing with the symptoms. This pause is giving us an opportunity to look deeper into the causes of the dysfunction and to try to address those. And the way we can address those is through our meditative power.

Think of meditation as an energy force, as a way of putting out thought forms into the collective—to me, that's the greatest form of activism. That's how I want to introduce the theme. I hope we hear more from others about how they bring their inner life into the outer field. Thank you.

ES: Thank you so much, Dena. That was a beautiful introduction to the day. I love how you showed this transition from “What I can do” to “What I can be,” and from creating a human-based society to a life-based society, based on change of thought patterns to create change in the world. A little last word on Dena, also she's a student of Paramahansa Yogananda, and she's been practicing Kriya Yoga for over forty years, even though she's only about 43 years old.

DM: That's right.

ES: Our first speaker of the day is Bob Roth, another dear friend and one of the most experienced and influential Transcendental Meditation teachers in America, though he would balk at that description, of course. He's the CEO of the David Lynch Foundation and Center for Leadership Performance, and he has helped bring TM to literally a million school children, veterans and families who suffer from post-traumatic stress, women and children who are survivors of domestic violence, and victims of trafficking.

Bob first met his guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in 1968, and in 1972 became a meditation teacher. He has taught untold thousands of people how to meditate, and his work in schools, the military and with victims of abuse has most definitely

helped make the world a kinder, more thoughtful and gentler place. His New York Times bestseller *Strength in Stillness* is an absolute must-read for anyone who meditates or doesn't meditate. Every time I hear Bob speak, I learn something new. I look forward to that as well today.

I would like to say that Bobby is my meditation teacher as well. He taught me TM a number of years ago. It's a practice that I hold dear, and he is a person I hold dear to my heart as well.

BOB ROTH: I WAS MOST HONORED to be asked to speak here and join you for this amazing conference, and feel very honored to be joining so many wonderful speakers.

I feel what's going on in the world right now, the big transition is the nature of the mind. The nature of the mind is to want happiness, to be towards *more*. I want more happiness, I want more pleasure, I want more joy, I want more stability. That desire for more has been driving us outward through our senses into the world. The way nature is organizing now is that out there ain't doing it anymore. There's no stability, there's no strength, there's no reliability. The experience outside doesn't create dopamine in the reward center in the brain.

I see in this whole thing that's going on now—this shelter-in-place—that nature is bringing everybody down. It's just settling down. For some people, that experience of settling is rough, 'cause they have to deal with stresses. But it's a huge retreat that the world is being put into. I find, and maybe you do too, so much more interest in meditation these days than ever before. Because the desire for happiness has to turn within. The desire for satisfaction, for joy, for stability, for knowledge has to turn within. The same desire that pulls me out as I'm sitting in a room hearing some terrible music and in the other room some beautiful music comes on, my attention is drawn to that beautiful music just automatically. In the same way, give the attention of the mind an inward direction and it will just

be drawn inward. Towards what? Towards transcendence. Transcendence. You look up the definition of the word *transcendence* in the dictionary, and it says, “To go beyond all human limitations, all ordinary limitations.” And where is transcendence? It sure ain't out there. Transcendence ultimately, as Dena was saying, is in deeper meditation, more truthful, deeper. As the attention is drawn inward, we fill up with that connectedness. We fill up with that energy. We fill up with that love which is the nature of those deeper levels. And then we're in a position to really transform the world.

When I was a kid, when I was young, I wanted to change the world. I'm a child of the '60s. I worked for Senator Bobby Kennedy. I wanted to become a US senator like Bobby Kennedy, and change legislation so you could change the world. I learned to meditate back in 1969. Right away I had a thought, “Oh, this is a tool I want to bring to kids.” That was June 28th, 1969. Now I look back, and I have the good fortune to run a foundation that was started by David Lynch, and we're bringing it to a million children. But a million children is a drop in the bucket. There are sixteen million children in America who live at or below the poverty level, and the number two cause of death among all teenagers in America is suicide.

There's a real emptiness. And I think it's all of our responsibility, all of our *dharma*, all of our joy, to bring whatever we can to help that next generation. All of us are overwhelmed by the demands and the challenges and the stresses and the craziness and the disinterest—Dena's discussion about people talking about, “Oh, we're not going to have enough food from the ocean for ourselves” to say nothing about the poor fish. We have a new generation that's coming that doesn't have any filtering. All these experiences are overwhelming them. We could lose a generation.

The tools of transcendental meditation, of mindfulness, of *vipasana*, yoga, natural approaches to health care, Chinese medicine, Ayurveda—



any of these approaches that have been shown to work have to be brought to the next generation. Equally important, I think—because Eddie wanted me to talk about ancient and modern approaches—is what modern science can give, a validation to these ancient approaches, these ancient meditation techniques, these ancient health care systems, these ancient systems of *vas-tu* architecture, that we all have about how we live in harmony with nature in our built environment.

What we're doing with the David Lynch Foundation is subjecting the meditation to the same rigorous studies that any medicine would be subjected to. Because our vision is to have this be available as a medical intervention as part of the health care system, as part of the employee assistance programs, as part of Medicare. It's time for new medical interventions that can actually prevent disease and promote health, rather than just fight a losing battle against the spread of these diseases.

For me, the democratization of these approaches is what is most important. That it's not just limited to people on the Upper West Side, or people who have the luxury and the time to be able to do some meditation. I want it to be included in a company, so the single mom who has some job, part-time work, temp work because she has children she takes care of, can learn to meditate on company time. The company pays for the meditation. And she meditates on company time. And the same with kids, learning to meditate during the school day, and then meditating during the school day.

I want to give you one experience that I've had that happened ten years ago that I have never forgotten, day after day after day. It fuels my desire to make a change. That desire to make a change is on the basis, as Dena said, of my own inner practice. It doesn't happen unless I live it. Unless I'm rooted in that, it doesn't happen, there's no power to it.

We do something called quiet time, which is where all the kids in the school and the teachers begin and end

each school day with ten minutes of meditation. They get there on time, the school bell rings, they're sitting in their chairs. Every kid actually has a choice. They could meditate, they could do silent sustained reading, or they could nap. But the school recognizes the importance of silence, that we just can't jam everything into these kids' heads. So they start with ten minutes of silence, ten minutes of quiet time.

Now, in this one school in south San Francisco, in one of the toughest neighborhoods, overlooking Cow Palace and Hunters Point if you know San Francisco, the kids had to be in the school, sitting in their chairs by 8:20 when the bell rang in order to get to meditate with their fellow students. Otherwise they'd have to do it in another room. And all the kids wanted to meditate together. I got a phone call from a teacher at noon, Mr. Harrison. Mr. Harrison called me up and said, "I have to tell you about this little girl named Charlene. We were meditating this morning, quiet time, and Charlene came running into the classroom at 8:23. And she, out of breath, dropped her books on the floor, and her backpack, and sat down and started meditating. I thought, should I make a big deal out of it? Should I just let her meditate? Don't be so fussy, she's here." But then he said, "We really want to teach kids discipline. They really need to know the requirements." So, he said, "I walked over quietly to her and I whispered, 'Charlene, you're late, you're going to have to step outside and meditate outside in the hallway with some other kids.'" He said Charlene stood up, and he noticed that she had red paint splattered on the side of her white sweatshirt. They walked outside, and he said, "Charlene, you're also going to have to call your mom to get a clean sweatshirt because you can't be dressed like that." And Charlene started to cry. Turns out, it was not paint. She had been standing next to her uncle at a bus stop, and that was her uncle's blood. Her uncle had been shot in a drive-by shooting. He was okay,

but Charlene ran for her life. Charlene had no safe place to run to—not home, not a church, not a community center—other than school. That was her safe haven. So many schools these days are breeding grounds of trauma. That was her safe haven. She didn't want to miss her meditation.

I think to myself, how many Charlenes are there in the world? You can tell me it's *karma*, but I don't buy it. Fine. But it's our job to change that situation. How many little girls are like that? Those of us who have these skills—and it's not just transcendental meditation, it's not just mindfulness, it's not just this or that, it's everything—we have to bring what we know out. This is the time when people are listening. This is the time when people are going to yoga. More than ever, this is the time. So my message is democratization. This is the time.

I want to tell you two stories, and then I could take a question if you have, or else we can move on. But I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with Maharishi. There was one particular day when he was being interviewed by this reporter. Maharishi had already spent forty years bringing meditation. The reporter said to him, "You know, you should really dial down your claims about meditation. It's too much. I think your meditation is great, but it's too much. The world has been in violence, the world has been stressed, there's been crime, sickness, suffering for forever. And you're saying people can meditate, and then their lives can be transformed within a few weeks or months? It's too much. How do you justify that?" And Maharishi said, "You can have two rooms. One room that's been in darkness for one night and another room that's been in darkness for a hundred years. You can light a candle in both rooms and the darkness disappears just as fast." It's not like the one where it's been dark for a hundred years takes an extra three seconds. Because darkness is just the absence of light. Darkness is just the absence of the divinity, the light which is within every human being that transcends religion, that tran-

scends philosophy. I'm talking to the converted here. I'm just telling you what's in my heart. You all know this. But that transcends philosophy, that transcends culture, that transcends nationalities. It's there.

We have to provide the tools so that people know it's not just going to be found out here, rushing like crazy people—"If I own that, if I buy that." You can't tell people not to do that. Their mind is drawn that way. But you can give them a taste of that inner. Then what happens is, serotonin increases. And the amygdala, the reactivity center, calms down. And blood pressure goes down. Cortisol decreases a lot.

Then they start looking around and they start going, "Oh, I like this inner experience, and it brings more long-standing satisfaction than the outer." And it creates a balance. Because the outer is necessary. This is how we live our lives. It's a world. So that was Maharishi's first statement, "When we bring the light, darkness disappears." The darkness is just absence of light.

I'm not being foolish and naive here. I know that there's a lot that has to be done. But the basis has to be that awakening of consciousness. The basis has to be that awakening of the light. Then everything else we can do. We can wake up the creative networks in the brain. It's in the front, the middle and the back of the brain. They used to call it the default mode network; it was just your boring mind wandering, lazy mind. Now they have two new names for that network. It's called the imagination network, and it's called the genius lounge. Isn't that a great term? The genius lounge. That's where the real creative ideas are going to come from that are going to change our health care system, that are going to make it fair and prevention-oriented, that are going to change our economic system. It's not going to come from just bashing heads. It's going to come from an awakening.

The second quote: The reporter went on and said, "But why is there so much suffering in the world? Why are there so many problems?" Maharishi could've talked about *Kali Yuga* and

the different yugas. He didn't. Why is there so much suffering? Maharishi gave this talk about cause and effect. Anything you look at, there's a cause somewhere. It's a law of nature: cause and effect. When the guy said, "Why is there so much suffering in the world?" Maharishi's first answer was quite shocking. He said, "Everything is as it should be." And then the reporter said, "Then why are you and so many other people working so hard to change it?" And Maharishi said, "Because everything is as it should be."

There are reasons for this fear, for the trauma. The first thousand days of a person's life, the trauma that they experience from conception through their second birthday really governs the decisions they're going to make in their lives. So many of the decisions that are being made in society today by our leaders are trauma-informed, trauma-driven, separating, dividing.

But there's neuroplasticity in the brain, and the brain can be healed with these tools.

I am honored to be part of this discussion. So thank you. I just wanted to share those thoughts with you.

ES: Thank you so much, Bob. That was beautiful. A question has come in: "Could you describe the process of what happens in the mind when you meditate or when you transcend, and what does the word transcend really mean in this context?"

BR: It's a beautiful question. Transcend, If you look *transcend* up in the dictionary, it says, "To go beyond ordinary human limitations". Now, we're constantly looking for transcendence in our lives. From the simplest thing—"Let's go to a different restaurant". We get bored. Just the same old boundaries, boundaries, boundaries. We want to mix it up. So I'm going to go to a different restaurant. Or we go to a different place on vacation, or see a movie, or date night or whatever it is. We live life through channels, boundaries. That's an anathema to the mind, so the mind wants to break those boundaries. And so that desire

to transcend, or I'm going to take a spin class, or I'm going to join a drama club. I'm going to challenge myself. Break boundaries.

But those are on a horizontal level. That sort of transcendence is on a horizontal level. And what is extraordinary quickly becomes ordinary. Outside. But inside, if you use an analogy of an ocean, choppy waves on the surface, and the ocean is silent and unbounded at its depth. Pretty silent. We can say the mind is the same way. Surface of our mind is active, some people call it the monkey mind, they call it the gotta-gotta-gotta mind—on the surface, tense, agitated, heated. But just below the surface, mind is more settled, more expanded, and settles down to that unbounded silence.

I think it's not an either-or. I think that there are many mindfulness techniques and I think you could look at TM as another mindfulness technique. I don't like it when people say, "I do this meditation and I don't do that." I think it's a yes-yes.

In this particular type of meditation, you get a *mantra*, which is a word or a sound in TM that has no meaning. If it had meaning, then you're stuck up here in the head. It's very simple. Then the teacher teaches you how to experience that sound, that mantra, at deeper, more abstract levels—fine levels of the mind. When you meditate with a mantra, it's a faint idea. It's not a clear pronunciation. Some people have said to me, "Well, what does that mean?" And I said, "When you have the thought, 'I'm going to the store,' it's very clear. But when you're walking to the store, you're not going, 'I'm going to the store, I'm going to the store, I'm going to the store,' every step of the way. No. It's an intention. It's a faint idea." So when you learn TM from a teacher, then you're given a mantra and you're taught how to think it in a way that just takes advantage of the mind's desire to go to something more satisfying, which in this case is to come back *Home* to yourself, capital *H*. And you're taught how to use it properly. So to transcend in this instance means to go deeper.

It's a very comfortable experience. It's an effortless experience.

Afterwards, I find that I'm naturally more mindful, naturally more present, naturally more compassionate, all these wonderful things. So long answer to the idea of just easy settling down to that unbounded nature of your quiet self.

ES: Another question. "We're seeing an increase in ideological and political polarization, 'us versus them'. How do you see us evolving through this to greater unity and common purpose?"

BR: It has to start from within. And I ultimately think it has to start with kids. Because their traumas are not as etched. It's not like us in our 30s, 40s, 50s. William Yeats said, "Education has to be more than just filling a pail, it has to be lighting a fire." We give these kids this fire of their own inner self. Then they wake up. So we need to create a new generation of leaders who are inclusive—diversity doesn't frighten them, diversity's just seen to be a celebration of one's underlying unity.

At the same time, David Lynch Foundation right now has an office on Capitol Hill, and we're teaching members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to transcend. More candles, brighter light.

ES: And another: "Would TM help with all the mental health issues that so many kids have today?"

BR: A hundred percent. 'Cause so many of these mental health issues are born of that trauma in the first thousand days from conception. The seeds are planted there. We start teaching kids from the age of four to do a walking meditation, and then at ten to do a sitting meditation. It's absolutely the time to catch them, early on.

ES: Would you like to tell people a website they can go to if they want to learn TM?

BR: Yes, you can go to TM.org and you can find a teacher in your area.

I would just say whatever you do, whatever your passion, just keep doing it.

The Persian poet, said, "Even after all this time, the sun never says to the earth, 'You owe me.' Look what happens with a love like that. It lights the whole sky."

ES: Beautiful. Bobby, thank you so much for joining us today, and for your inspiring words.

ES: WE'RE GOING TO MOVE ON NOW TO Agapi Stassinopoulos, another dear friend. Agapi's name actually means *unconditional love*, and she definitely tries to bring the meaning of her name, to embody it completely, through her entire life and everything that she does. She is a meditation teacher and a bestselling author. She inspires audiences around the world with her workshops and her talks where, if you have ever had the pleasure of seeing her present, she gets people dancing and singing and moving to music in amazing ways. Her previous book, *Unbinding The Heart: A Dose of Greek Wisdom, Generosity and Unconditional Love*, shares the wisdom from her life's adventures and her multitude of experiences. She brings home the importance of self care, practicing gratitude, generosity and self-love to enhance performance and productivity so we can experience happiness and fulfillment.

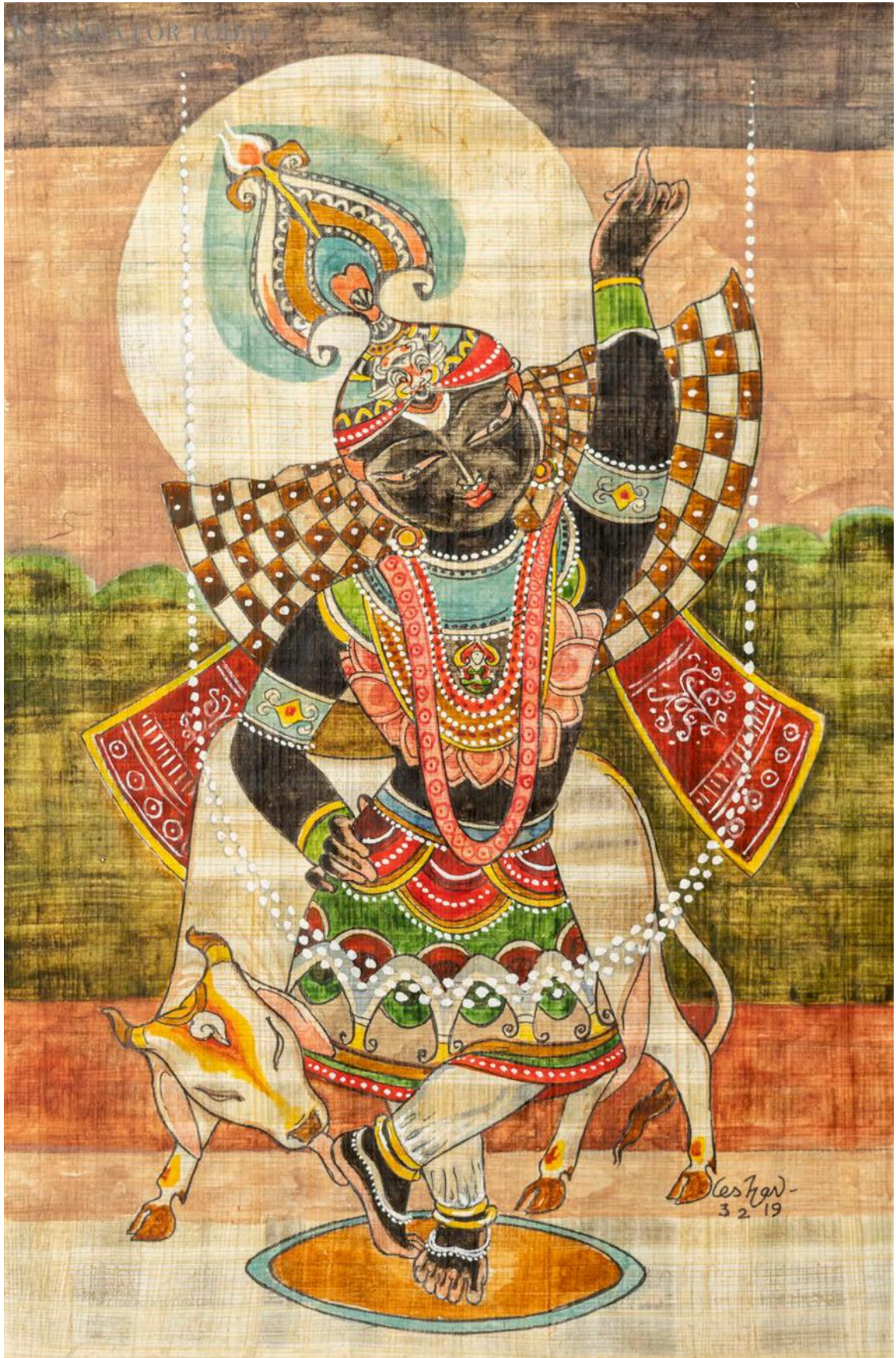
But truly, her message and her aim in life is to awaken feelings of love in all of us, in our own hearts. She has a wonderful book called *Wake Up To The Joy of You*, which is 52 different meditations, one you can follow every week of the year. I definitely recommend it. Agapi, we thank you so much for joining us today.

AGAPI STASSINOPOULOS: THANK YOU, Eddie. What an amazing thing you're doing, putting everybody together with their wisdom. Thank you to all those people who have been able to join us. I am speaking to you from Los Angeles, California. I am so filled with the joy of coming together today

to just really remind ourselves that there is a place of peace in each one of us. So thank you, Bob, for bringing this wisdom. My dear friend Bob, I love you and you've been such a light to my family. I can't wait to hug you again. The same for everybody. Being a Greek woman who is asked to do social distancing right now, it's hard. I do hug my family a lot.

As we come together, I wanted to speak about my favorite subject, which is love. As we address the consciousness of inner peace—how do we find ourselves in peace and how do we bring our peace in the world?—I want to read you a quote. I'm writing a new book on the power of prayer, prayer beyond religion. Prayer that has to do with the humility of the reverence of the human being for the divine being, which is accessible to all of us 24/7. My spiritual teacher has a quote that I live by: "Heaven is not a location. Heaven is a vibration." This is what brings me to my peace every day. Heaven is here right now. It's a higher consciousness, it's a higher vibration. But most of us have been living in the lower vibration. In order to move into the higher frequency of love, we must come into the peace of our heart. And in order to come to the peace of our heart, we must forgive everything that is not of that.

How do I do that every day? Because every day we are challenged, every day we hear the news and we get disturbed, we hear people who are going through horrible times and way bigger challenges, maybe, than any of us, or maybe some of you are going through big challenges. How do we find that peace? To know, as the phrase says, that God is within, that stillness, that power is inside, we must practice it not only in meditation, but unceasingly throughout the day. My mother used to say, "Meditation is when you are fully attentive when you're washing the dishes, or you're mopping the floor, or you are listening to somebody." It's not a separate thing, "Oh, I meditated in the morning and now I can go back to the frequency of being myself in my daily life."



Srinathji ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

The extraordinary thing that's happening right now in these times is that we are given an golden opportunity for each person to move to that higher soulful place inside of us. You, my friends, each one of you has the blueprint. It's not going to be found—maybe the books will bring you inspiration, and maybe listening to teachers will bring you guidance—but ultimately you've got to do the work. You've got to go there. You've got to go to that deeper part, maybe the part that hurts. Maybe that part that forgot that you are more than enough. Maybe the part that feels, "They have it but I don't". Maybe that part that feels you are alone.

That is a human habit, that we forgot that we walk with the divine. I'll tell you how I explain it and how I understand it. There's an intelligence in us that has 37.2 billion trillion cells. These cells are making life in us. That energy of love, that energy of life is way beyond what we can understand. But if we come into the peace, if we come into the kindness, into the tenderness of ourselves, then we find that we move into that other consciousness which is present all the time.

For me, a lot of it has to do with accepting every part of myself, however I find me. Basically, you've got to love yourself exactly where you find you. And you've got to do these little things, that are not little, that tune you in, like a violin. If you've seen the orchestras before they play, they all tune their instruments. For me in the morning when I get up, other than having my coffee—I'm Greek, I can't start my day without my coffee, my cappuccino, my espresso—I have moments of just coming into the presence and asking for the divine to be with me. I bring myself into my vulnerable openness, into my ability to really say, "I know that I'm not alone, because right now I'm being breathed." That to me is the prayer; the prayer is a way of community with God. You don't have to be in a church or a mosque or a temple to pray. You can pray in the car, the shower, the coffee shop, the gym, in conversation with strangers.

Don't let religion confine your faith. We can't change the world by going to church. We need to be the church and become the walking prayer. I feel this is the call of the times. I do feel that this conference of the Inner Peace is just the beginning of what is going to be happening in our world for those who choose to become the walking prayer. We have about, I think, 1,300 people right now on this webinar. If each one of you comes to this place and evokes it every day, and is making the commitment to say, "What is this time for me? If I'm challenged, can I reach out? Can I ask for help? Can I listen to people who can advise me, who can help me, who can pray for me?" Because a lot of people are having a very, very hard time, and you might be one of them. This might not be the time where you know how to become more kind and loving to yourself. I do talk to a lot of people, and we thrive. We have a lot of people who are challenged in managing their jobs, managing their families, managing their children, and being able to really feel, "My god, I managed another day." They might need your help.

At this time we're called to be the givers and the receivers. The "receivers" first comes with you connecting to your source. If you don't know your source, and if you've been living your life maybe up until now thinking you're by yourself, then this is the time to say, "Let me find out who else is here with me, walking me, breathing me, digesting my food, putting me to sleep, waking me up. Who is that?" That is what my mother used to call, "Know yourself, and know something larger than yourself". That larger than yourself makes us very humble. We now all face humility, because we can't understand the crisis and we feel a sense of helplessness. I was listening to Jerry Seinfeld on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* the other day, and Jimmy Kimmel said to him, "Jerry, what do you think this time is all about? What do you think we're learning?" He said, "This is nature's big way of saying, 'You're nothing.'" Dena addressed the experience that nature is speaking to us.

Nature is trying to get our attention. I think it is imperative that we realize that this vulnerability that we all have in front of the powers of nature is to our benefit. That it's something that we can work with because that's the thing that will bring us the inner peace that we're looking for.

Whenever you find that you're not at peace, ask yourself, "What am I judging? Who am I judging? What am I against?" Because if we open the field of our acceptance, if we open the field of our kindness or our tenderness, we find that we are in peace. If we're judging everything that's going on, and if we are consuming the news so that we become so fearful that we can be paralyzed from fear and the absolute questioning—what's going to happen next, how are we going to come out of this—then we will lose the most precious thing that we have right now, which is the connection with our inner peace, with our soul.

And that, my friends, is always there, like your breath. Your breath never leaves you till we pass from this earth. In the same way, our peace is connected to our breath, to our heart right now, and how we open our hearts and how we love, it starts at home, right here.

Every morning, start your day with putting your heart in your heart. Why don't we just do this all together right now? Why don't we come on a little journey to find our peace, and to collectively—imagine how powerful is that—that all of us here, we do not see each other, but we can transmute this love to each other. Right now if we come into our heart, and make a commitment right now to access our spirit, to access our soul, which is present. The invisible force that is our support system, the invisible force of life, of the divine, of what we call God, is here right now.

As we evoke it, it comes and connects with us. All it takes, my friends, is a willingness to go there. God is not a being, it is a state of being, a state of being accessible to us. Come into your heart; rest in your heart for a moment.

Right now, we ask that we connect

with our breath. We give thanks for this moment. We give thanks to all the people who are gathered here together. And we ask with all our hearts to move into a place of calm, a place of peace. We ask that any disturbance, any fear, any separation or judgment, may leave us and be transmuted. In its empty place, where there was fear, we place peace. And where there was separation, we place love.

If you would like, you can place your hands on your heart or on your belly where the emotional center lies, and feel the light coming in right now, in all levels of our consciousness. We turn our attention inward. We feel the loving presence pulling us more deeply into ourselves. Wherever the beloved is inside of us, we turn our gaze to that which breathes us. And we bring that love, that light, that unspeakable, powerful energy of the soul and who we are at the depth of our being. And we ask for grace for each person here today, wherever we are, and however we meet ourselves in our conditions or challenges, to God we ask grace. Help us understand what we cannot understand. And help us to give. Help us accept everything in ourselves, and to have compassion, love, kindness. And please give us patience. Somewhere in our consciousness, we know joy. Please, right now, activate our joy. Activate the part of us, even in the midst of all that's going on, and find the peace.

With your breath, my friends, breathe alive the consciousness of peace right now, as if you're entering a zone or field of peace, filled with peace like a field of beautiful daisies. Walking hand in hand with each other, imagine this unity of inner peace. Imagine your hands are opening up, your arms are opening up, your heart is opening up. Feel that energy coming from you—because it can—and touching others.

Extend this consciousness to others, your family, your friends. Like a blanket of love. A blanket or canopy of peace that covers the first responders, covers the doctors and hospitals. It covers your home. This energy holds you, envelops you, embraces you, just

as you are.

For this moment, we are willing to give up the struggle, the pain. We are giving it up. Let each one of us be the peacemaker, divine, loving, the silent one that walks in peace. See yourself with your life right now, whatever you're doing, the tiniest little action, see that, through your hands, love comes. Peace comes through your eyes, through your voice. Let love flow through. And from your heart, know that there's always peace, there's always love. Keep going out into our beautiful planet, all around the globe. We are sending beams of peace and love and healing energy.

You don't have to know. You just become conduits, emissaries of peace. Make this your commitment right now, that from this moment on, you will be an emissary of peace. First for you, for your life, then for those around you, for your friends, your coworkers, and then for all those you don't even know.

Take a deep breath. Breathe it in all the way. Feel that energy down to the soles of your feet. Feel it in your belly. Remember connecting your heart with your solar plexus, where the emotions can disturb you. Your peace from your heart can come there. Feel that place in your belly right now. There is calmness. There is peace.

Make the commitment that you will be calm throughout all this. And that, if you are not calm, you will evoke your calmness. In the midst of the fear, your calmness will be bigger. Your peace will be bigger. Your acceptance will be bigger. Because as my beautiful mother Ellie used to say when she faced the Nazis in the Second World War, "I am bigger than this". We are bigger than this.

I send you all my love. I pray for all of us to stay in that place and see ourselves through this, so when we come out of this, we will come out stronger, more resilient, more awakened to who we really are. I love you. Eddie knows where you can reach me if you need to reach me. I'm here for you. I support you. God bless us.

I will read you one of my favorite

poems by Kabir:

Are you looking for me? I'm in the next seat. My shoulder is against yours. You will not find me in the stupas, not in Indian shrine rooms, nor in synagogues, nor in cathedrals, not in masses, nor kirtans, not in legs winding around your own neck, nor in eating nothing but vegetables. When you really look for me, you will see me instantly. You will find me in the tiniest house of time. Student, tell me, what is god? He is the breath inside the breath.

Let's all go there. Because we know it's available to us. Thank you.

ES: Agapi, thank you so much for that beautiful meditation and beautiful presentation.

AS: Thank you, Eddie. I'll be with you, watching for the next speakers till we all meet together. Please feel free to give my email, agapi@unbindingtheheart.org. I have a lot of meditations that I give for free. Unbinding the heart is what I'm all about, and what I think the world needs now is unbound hearts. Stay in touch, stay connected. My deepest gratitude to all of you for doing this together. Thank you so much.

ES: Our next speaker is Sharon Salzberg, who as you all know is a world-renowned meditation teacher, a visionary, a New York Times bestselling author. She's one of the early pioneers who set the stage for our present meditation culture that is immensely popular today, and is the co-founder of one of the most prestigious and respected meditation retreats in the world, the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts.

We all know the word "mindfulness" now. Meditation has worked itself into the fabric of Western culture. But in the 1970s and in the early 1980s, when Sharon started meditating, and when she started bringing all these teachings to the West, it was not well known. Right now you can say "meditation" and "mindfulness" where-

ever you want, and people think they know what you're talking about. But thirty, forty years ago, that wasn't the case. Sharon truly was one of the people who was at the forefront of what we now call the mindfulness movement.

She has a fabulous podcast called *The Metta Hour*, which you can find on her website which is packed with information and teachings. She has a vigorous teaching schedule. Her eleventh book, *Real Change*, is coming out on September 1st. It examines how, and I quote this from her blurb about the book, "meditation is not a replacement for taking action, but rather a way to practice generosity with ourselves and summon the courage to breathe through boundaries, reconnect to a movement that's bigger than ourselves, and have the energy to stay active".

She definitely embodies all of these things. We're delighted and honored to have her with us today. More than that, I think we're all immensely grateful to what she has brought to the world meditation stage and how, largely because of her work and her dedication, we can all freely say the words "mindfulness" and "meditation" in public, and it's accepted now. Sharon, thank you for that.

SHARON SALZBERG: THANK YOU SO much. How delightful to see you, and know that all of you are here. I'm speaking to you from snowy Massachusetts, which is a really odd thing to say on May 9th. It's one of the strangenesses in the midst of a lot of strangeness. And it's beautiful, Eddie, that you've brought people together, to get us to really look so deeply within and with one another at what we really care about.

It is true, I have a book coming out. The book was originally supposed to come out on June 2nd. And then with everything that happened, the publishers postponed it to September 1st. What that meant was that I've been given the chance to write a preface. So I've been really pondering a lot of things in this period. A friend of mine

was reading the book for an excerpt, and while I believe he really liked the underlying themes of the book, he said—this was really in the beginning of a lot of anxiety and dread about things—he said he would read the examples and would think, "That's what made you anxious back then? Whoa. Wait till you see what's coming".

I realized that I had to somehow try to land the effort I had put into creating the book in the present moment, and contextualize it in some way. The question for me became, what's still true in the midst of disruption and chaos and grief and loss and anxiety and all of these things? What's still true? What can I rely on? What am I counting on? What's sustaining me? What's supporting me?

That became such a profound reflection for me that it's actually a lot of the context in which I'm teaching these days—and in a few minutes maybe we'll get to just sit and each do that reflection: What's still true for me? What hasn't been broken? What hasn't been shattered? Because I think that's actually what keeps us going, not just surviving but finding a way to come through and really express our deepest values and have that sense of meaning, even in the midst of a tremendous amount that is unfamiliar.

What would be true for me to begin with is a sense that I am counting on my meditation in order to sustain me. What I'm seeing is this practice—which I've done through good times and bad, and through very ordinary times—of using something like even just the feeling of the breath to stabilize my attention, and of remembering certain things like: I have a capacity to step back when I feel immersed and lost and overwhelmed and just driven by the circumstances around me. Oh, let's just take a breath. Let's just step back and return.

What I've found is that when I return to the breath, something like that, I return to myself. And then my values can shine forth, and the things I really care about can shine forth. I always think of the stress dynamic, which is a dynamic, there's the stress-

or, the pressure, the difficulty. And then there's the resource with which it's being met. We know that just from life, right—from ordinary life. You can be in a beautiful place, surrounded by loving friends, but you're feeling cut off and alone, and you're not allowing them to help you. You can't actually receive the helping hands reaching towards you. Or you're so frightened, or something is going on so that you're not taking in, you're not able to absorb, the joy or the beauty around you. And we also know we can be in a time of tremendous adversity and difficulty, but not feel so alone. You feel a sense of community, you have a sense of meaning or purpose, even through that. It's a different experience.

What I've seen is that what has always been true for me is still true for me: that somehow reaching within and cultivating that sense of inner strength is a big part of what gives me some sense of resource. The other part is connecting to others, is recognizing that we live in an interconnected universe—and is this is not necessarily just a spiritual understanding; economics shows us this, and environmental consciousness certainly shows us this, and even epidemiology shows us this—I was saying this way back when, and people used to say to me, "What's epidemiology? Why are you talking about that?" Actually, the reason I was talking about it is that I had friends who were very involved in the smallpox campaign in India. And so it's always been part of my consciousness.

We can think that what happens over there is nicely going to stay over there. And it never does. It comes over here. And what we put our energy toward, what we care about, it matters because it too will ripple out along these lines of interconnection. There are so many ways in which right now what is being revealed to us is the kind of terrible face of interconnection. The other face of interconnection is our capacity for compassion and recognition of everybody, of all of life—that we can go there as well.

I think this is very important. In

my pondering of what's still true, I remembered this quotation from the Buddha, which has always been a little bit awkward in a way for me, where he said, "Hatred will never cease by hatred. Hatred will only cease by love. This is an eternal law." It's awkward in that it's difficult. But what was really awkward for me was the last sentence. "This is an eternal law." Here's Mr. Impermanence, who spent his life teaching about impermanence and change and letting go, saying, "This is an eternal law." I thought, whoa. What is that about?

But here we are. What's still true? It would be so convenient and so easy if hatred could cease by further hatred on our parts. Wouldn't that be easier a lot of the time, perhaps? Or at least some of the time? But what if hatred can never cease by hatred? What if hatred can only cease by love? What are we then called upon to do?

I also find what is still true for me is that my first acquaintance with the Buddhist teaching was about inclusivity. It remains to this day, in the sense that no one is left out of this possibility of being able to connect and care and grow and be wiser and stronger and have this kind of love, even in the face of hatred. We are all said to be capable of that. Then the rest is up to us. What do we execute? What do we prefer? What do we prioritize? What do we remember, maybe even after having forgotten for a good long time?

For a few minutes right now, just sit comfortably, and in a relaxed way, you can close your eyes or not, however you feel most at ease, settle your attention into your body, perhaps into your breath. And see what arises for you, just as that kind of reflection. What's still true? What's upholding you? What's not broken or shattered in current circumstance?

If something came up in your mind, I would cherish it and see what happens as you remember it throughout the day.

Another thing that is still true for me is recognizing the power of awareness—you can call it mindfulness—in the sense that even in ordinary times

it can be very difficult to recognize joy or happiness. We seem to be wired, according to evolutionary biologists, to look for threat, for danger. That's just where our attention goes. But ultimately, and especially now in stressful times, we get exhausted and depleted; there's plenty of danger to look out for. And yet, remember, it's the meeting, it's the dynamic. What is the resource with which we're meeting that? And it needs to involve a few things. One is rest. One is taking in the joy, not being completely obsessively focused on what's wrong. This takes some intentionality.

Somebody sent me a link to an article written by a disaster survival specialist. I didn't know there was such a field, but apparently there is, and it was a really good article. Among the things I got from it were two things in particular. One was the author made a comment like, Stop judging yourself so harshly. No one is going to get an A+ in pandemic survival. There will be times you are overwhelmed, you're exhausted, you do the wrong thing, you waste an afternoon, whatever. But just as I have learned in meditation practice, you can always begin again. You don't have to define yourself as that person who's gone off the rails; let's start over. We can let go and we can start over, just like in meditation practice, or any practice, where you lose it, and then you have to begin again. If you spend forty hours judging yourself for having lost it, that's a waste of time. And it's very demoralizing.

Then the author said, interestingly enough: Do some gratitude practice. In the midst of all this difficulty and perhaps much sorrow and anxiety, just spend a little bit of time looking for what you have to be grateful for. Many psychologists will say that one of the most healing things any of us can do is make a list at night of three things that we are grateful for from the day. I always say that it doesn't have to be grandiose or magnificent. Some small thing, even. Although somebody told me once that they were thinking of trying to find one thing a month to be grateful for. And I said, "I don't

think that's enough. Let's aim for two to three a day. Something like that."

And that doesn't come naturally to me. My personal conditioning, my familial conditioning would lend me more to come to the end of the day and complain. What do I have to complain about? I didn't show up in the way I had hoped to. This other person disappointed me. In the old days, there was always an airline or something like that to complain about. That's just where my conditioning would leave me. It takes, not force, not coercion, but just some intentionality to say, "Okay, what else happened today?" It's not being conflict avoidant, it's not being in denial. It's recognizing, "I give so little airtime to the good. What if I just turn my attention to include that?"

What that brings us to is actually a truer picture of life, even in very difficult times. One of the interesting things about gratitude is that it's often decried. Many people say, "If you do a practice like that, you get stupid and complacent, and if you're in an oppressive situation you're just grateful for the crumbs thrown your way."

It's not like that. Research very recently has been done on different kinds of gratitude practice, showing that it actually makes you stronger. It fortifies us. It picks us up so we're not so exhausted. It also makes you concerned about the wellbeing of others, because you would like to have others enjoy more of the bounty of life or the good things of life.

In many ways, a practice like that is a practice of generosity. It's like generosity of the spirit. It's very clear in the Buddhist teaching as well that the best kind of generosity comes from a sense of inner abundance, or at least inner sufficiency. So that you don't feel you are losing by offering, by giving. And that doesn't have to be material. It's thanking somebody. It's recognizing somebody. It's listening to somebody. Even if it's not grandiose, we can be engaging in that kind of activity, which will return us to that sense of inner sufficiency or wholeness.

People are telling me incredible sto-

ries. I have a friend who's 85 years old, and he's in New York City. He told me that he got the management company of his building to give him the phone numbers of, as he put it, "all the older people in the building." He didn't say, "all the other older people in the building," but, "all the older people in the building". And he calls them just to see how they are.

Another friend in New York City tells me that she never knew her neighbors' names, even, and now everybody's exchanged phone numbers so that if they need one another, they can reach out to one another. I had this really incredible experience, also, in terms of the book and the preface, because I was reading one of the guided meditations in the book to be recorded. The passage that the journalist chose was a meditation on loving-kindness which in a lot of ways is similar to that kind of gratitude practice. It's a shift in awareness to be paying attention in a way that may not be that common for us, but is very important for us.

In doing loving-kindness practice, we offer well wishes. Things like, "May you be happy, may you be peaceful, may you be safe" through the silent repetition of phrases like that. There's a certain sequence that is very classical. We offer those phrases to ourselves, because that's important. We offer those phrases to a category of beings, someone who's helped us, remembering to thank them and appreciate them. Things like that. We go through these categories, and we come to this place called "a neutral person". That was the passage that the journalist wanted me to record. A neutral person is someone we don't especially like or dislike. It's somebody we feel kind of indifferent to. They're usually the sort of person, maybe they play a role in our lives, and we look right through them, or we discount them, or we look around them. We objectify them in some way. We're asked in the process of that meditation, over time, to choose someone who does play a role in our lives, so that we can just see as we're running into them now

and then if our sense of them and our connection changes in any way as a result of the meditation. So probably for thirty-five or forty years, my colleagues and I have been saying, "Choose the checkout person in the supermarket. That would be a good person. The kind of person we usually look right through. We're completely indifferent to. We don't care about, really, at all". And so I'm reading this out loud, and I thought, "Whoops. Wait a minute." Talk about interdependence. How could we hold such beings in indifference? How do we think we get food? Look at the current conditions under which they're working. It was such an interesting moment for me. I thought, metaphors are dissolving. Imagery is all shaken up. The stories, the examples don't necessarily hold true. But what is true is that to hold beings in neglect or that kind of indifference is really a result of not paying any attention. Because that food didn't just miraculously appear. And now, really think about the farmers and those who transport that food and prepare that food, perhaps, for us.

We live in this interdependent universe. If we are willing to pay attention differently, we can take on that beautiful face of recognition, of finding ourselves in one another. In the Buddhist tradition, recognition is based on a couple of different things. One is remembering that everybody wants to be happy. Everybody. Not happy in a superficial sense, but everybody wants a sense of belonging. We want a sense of having a home somewhere, in this body, in this mind, with one another, on this planet. We all want that.

The problem is ignorance; we are fed so many myths and even distortions and lies about where happiness is to be found: endless acquisition. One of my favorite phrases to take apart is, "It's a dog eat dog world". I mean, that's a really ludicrous phrase, right? "Don't help anybody else, 'cause they're not going to help you." "Step on anybody you need to step on to get ahead. It's the only way to get ahead."

Many of us have that conditioning, right? But is that true? I once co-taught

at a six-day seminar somewhere. The first evening I was taking apart that phrase. This young woman raised her hand and she said, "I never knew that was the phrase. I always thought people were saying, 'It's a doggy dog world.'" Like, puppies jumping up and down in meadows and having a good time. She said, "What a horrible thing to say." And then six days went by, and it was the closing. And she came up to the microphone and she said, "I've decided I'm not going to live in a dog eat dog world. I'm going to live in a doggy dog world."

What are we taught about where happiness is to be found? Our own urge toward happiness is not the same thing as craving or greed. It's wisdom. We should be happy. And not just us, either. If we can combine that with some understanding, then it can cut through many obstacles. Everybody wants to be happy. The other insight is that everybody is so vulnerable. Look at where we are. We can think of a quality like compassion as being very hierarchical, like, "I, who have this perfect life which is so intact and together, am bestowing some kindness on you way down there 'cause your life is falling apart and mine never could." But guess what. We don't all share the same measure of pain, that's clear, but we are all vulnerable. There's a tenderness in that, so that we can reach out to one another, and we can care about one another. That knowledge should bring us together, so that we have a whole different worldview and a sense of what is motivating us to action. Those things are all still true for me. I think they are all still true, actually.

I would really urge you just to come back to that. There's so much to do each day just to get by and manage things and so on. Even in the midst of all of that, see if you can just return every now and then through reflection, through contemplation, through just pausing and bringing your attention within, and just see what are the guiding lights for you. What is the North Star that you really want to be spending your day with. Even if the manifestation is going to be very

unusual—it's not going to be what it once was and what it may yet be in the future—it's something. We can find meaning in that expression, even if it is calling somebody to see how they're doing, or doing some loving-kindness, holding someone in your heart and wishing them well, not looking the other way because they're struggling.

Remember that we are an important recipient of that kind of consideration, so that we also count. Without having that sense of honoring ourselves and taking care of ourselves, we're not going to even have the energy to have this kind of comprehensive view of what's possible. All beings want to be happy. What about me too? It's okay, right. That's the funniest thing, that our own wish toward happiness can make us so awfully squeamish and embarrassed. But it's correct. Let's just combine it with wisdom, with intelligence, so that it can really give us the inner strength and the kind of energy we need, not only for our own wellbeing but to really start to make a difference with others.

Thank you. May you be happy. May you be safe. I don't know exactly who you are, but I see you at the top of my screen and I know you're all around the world, contributing to this wonderful gathering. So thank you.

ES: Thank you so much, Sharon. That was really helpful. It was a very touching and meaningful contemplation on what's still true. I think that was really helpful for everybody. You're a voice of comfort in what can be really difficult times. I really appreciate that you took the time to join us today. I know you're doing so much.

People who are listening, please check out all of Sharon's books if you haven't read them already. You have up until September to finish ten of her other books, and in September you can read the newest one.

Our next two speakers are going to represent—I don't want to call them the younger generation, but in some ways they are. We've heard from the original line of meditation defense in America and around the world, from

Dena, who's been practicing for over forty years, and Bobby who learned in the 1960s, as well as Sharon. I fall somewhere right in the middle. I started practicing around 1986, '87.

Now we're going to hear from two amazing people who are bringing a whole new generation into the practice of meditation and contemplative life, into the worlds of activism. Not only is it a whole new generation, but it's a generation of their peers that they reach in particular ways.

I would like to introduce AnnaLynne McCord, who is a new friend. I met her through an old friend of mine, Stacey Bendet, who's a designer for Alice + Olivia. AnnaLynne and I struck up a quick friendship over our mutual love for meditation and activism. She is an actress, a writer, a director and a producer. She's the founder of Together1Heart, which empowers women and children victimized by human trafficking and sexualized violence. She launched *The Love Storm*, which is a global awareness world tour featuring a compassion meditation in twenty-two cities across six continents, with the aim to end slavery from the inside out. This is a tour, of course, which has been slightly interrupted by the coronavirus but is still going on in other ways.

AnnaLynne was awarded a US Congressional Medal of Honor for her work in ending human trafficking. She has appeared in about forty-two movies and TV shows. She's extremely devoted to meditation. She is a yoga practitioner who spends a tremendous amount of time and energy working to end the slavery of the mind that has ensnared our world. I think this is one of the key things that is so important about her approach to activism. It's not just that she wants to end human trafficking and all sexualized violence, but she recognizes that we eight billion people who share this planet, all of our minds collectively, are ensnared by a type of mental slavery which has led us to have this apathy and bypassing that allows for trafficking and climate change and the destruction of our natural world and abuse towards

women and children to happen. This is a collective thing that we all need to move past. It's not just that we need to save and protect these people from harm's way. We need to save and protect ourselves from harm's way as well. And this is truly what AnnaLynne's work is about. AnnaLynne, thank you so much for joining us today.

ANNA LYNNE McCORD: THANK YOU. I'm so grateful that you mentioned the youth part, 'cause I was sitting over here, and I'm like, "I'm literally twelve. What do I have to offer with all these amazing people who have brought so many years of expertise to the table?" I was feeling myself get nervous. I'm like, "Wait, how can you be nervous listening to Sharon Salzberg speak? I don't even understand how your body can get anxious. She's so beautiful and calming."

To that point, the mind and the voice inside that ensnares us immediately was going like, "What do you know? You're just a thirty-something little actress. How are you going to talk about inner peace? Look at how not peaceful you are right now. You're all anxious." But this is actually the point, right. This is a practice. It's not something that you arrive at. It is something that can get easier. I love what Bob Roth said: it doesn't matter if you have a dark room for one day or for a hundred years, you light a candle in that room and immediately it's light. It happens like that. I think that I lived a lot of darkness in a short period of time. It's relighting that candle for me that is the move to fight the chains that have been on my brain, personally.

I think one of the biggest things that we have a really hard time with no matter who we are is that lovely little voice in our head that keeps us so ensnared and tells us, "Oh, okay, you're too anxious to be talking at an Inner Peace Conference. It doesn't matter if you're in your own house. What are you going to offer?" Then click by click, if we attach, those chains begin to build up, and we believe it. Then we're in a prison again, and we silence



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ourselves as a result.

One of the things that is the hardest to look at, I think, is our darkest parts, right. It's our shadow. The parts of us that say if we're going to be the president of an anti-trafficking organization, people can't know about our proclivities. We can't be the things we are in private. We have to portray this saint-like whatever. And I don't fit into that, 'cause I'm not a saint, right. And I often would feel like a fraud as a result. Should I not be in this role? Because I mess things up all the time. I'm always getting it wrong. How am I in a position where things can be said of me, and Congressional honors and all that stuff? When Eddie was reading that, my ego was like, "Oh, yes, I have done things. Oh yes, I am important. Listen to Eddie."

There's this back and forth between this "I'm nothing" and "I shouldn't be allowed on the video conference" over here to "Aha, I've gotten the piece of paper that says I'm important from the United States of America." So which one am I? Where do I fall in between these two very, very different ends of the spectrum?

I'm the dark room with the candle in it. Sometimes when we open the window, a draft comes in and the light goes out, and it feels dark again. I've got to feel around for my matches, but I can light that candle. The lighting of the candle is that returning, it's a dropping back in. The things that Bob said about the youth in our world, the sixteen million kids in American poverty—I was one of those kids, right. Number two reason that teenagers die? Suicide. I was attempting that.

Bob said something that made me cry, that we could lose a generation. That weighs heavily on my heart, because I'm a part of that generation. They're my friends, and they're my peers, and they struggle with this consistent feeling that they don't matter and this need to run into the arms of the ego when someone says anything nice about them. It's just this back and forth, back and forth.

I love the David Lynch Foundation. That's where I learned TM, from Lynn

Kaplan here in Los Angeles. It requires us to dive deep into those still waters, and be okay with the waves still at the top. That's the part that I had a hard time with. I wanted to be a perfect meditator, where no thoughts ever occurred at all. I love the way Bob talks about it, and that's how the David Lynch Foundation teaches TM. The waves don't stop. The waves are beautiful. I love waves. Oh god, I got in late last night because I raced straight to the beach, because, due to pollution, it's been twenty-five years since bioluminescent plankton has been in the beaches of Southern California. Thanks to COVID-19, our waves were bright blue last night. I went up with a couple of my friends, and we were just screaming every time the wave crashed, and it was bright blue, and the plankton were lighting up.

I was sitting there, and people would come out. My friends are like, "Get out of the way!" "Don't splash, we're trying to watch." I was thinking, Wow, nature just goes on. It is resilient, and it moves away when it's toxic, right. It returns when it's safe. If we could do that ourselves, if we could see the moments with a beginner's mind, the way nature shows us it can. Twenty five years. Someone hurts me for twenty-five years, I'm not trying to rush out there and be with them the second that everything's okay, you know what I mean? I'm like, "I don't trust you. I've got to put you through some hoops." And that's all the chains on the mind, holding onto these things. Yet nature is like, "You have systematically destroyed me," and two months of safety, after twenty-five years, there's the bioluminescent plankton brightening up my night, and certainly the waves.

What does that look like for the individual? For me personally, right? I have to look at the toxic parts of me. I can't run away from myself and not come back. I have to also look at the moments when it's safe, and brighten up my blue bioluminescent lights. Be in the moments as they are. And embrace the toxic moments. This week I did things that I don't think someone

talking at an Inner Peace Conference should've done. I've done things that I wasn't proud of. I got into a tiff with my older sister, and I said things that I wish I hadn't said. And we had to work through that. Those parts of me, I can easily feel the chains of guilt and shame and the immediate need to make this the end of the world, that there's not a comeback from this, and I've gotten it all wrong. And yet, how can I see those parts of myself if they don't happen? What a gift, that I made a mistake. Something more to look at. Something to dive deeper into. We're problem solvers. We definitely have a negative bias, biologically hardwired, right? Rick Hanson talks about that. Love that.

But it's in our ability to see that—not unlike what Sharon was saying. Maybe we can just say thank you to it. Thank you that I have a negative bias and I can immediately highlight all the problems. Thank you. If I can do that, then I'm also capable of seeing their opposite. Let that negative bias be the waving flag that reminds you to see the positive. It's literally what I was doing when I started to feel nervous listening to Sharon, I'm like, "I have to follow Sharon Salzberg. Arrgh!" And then I was like, "I'm grateful that I'm on a video conference with Sharon Salzberg". How 'bout that? Let's split this around. I'm grateful that I'm here with you, Eddie, with Bob, with whoever is here.

All of a sudden, all that little bubbling up just started to fizzle out. Then I was present again. I do this all day long, every day. Because I lived in a very, very dark, dark place for a very long time. I experienced sexual trauma as a child and assault as a teenager, all things that put you in a position to not just be in darkness, but very well potentially remain in darkness for the rest of your life, or end your life. All these things are actually what broke me to light, because they were so dark that I couldn't be there anymore. And it wasn't true. I'm not dark. I'm not damaged. Something I believed about myself for years and years and years and years, something that caused me

extreme anxiety, something that threw me into the arms of the ego whenever I could think that I was something; I would have to buy into both sides, all the ugly things about me, if I wanted to hear that I did anything right.

I've started to do what I like to call this dance with my shadow, I dance with her. She whisks me away sometimes, and other times I'm like, "Come back over here. I'm just going to make you a little less shadowy. Just a little more light on you." But I don't shame her. I do not guilt the parts of me that get it wrong. I do not tell that part of me that there's something inherently wrong with me. I say, "This is a moment." For twenty-five years there was a moment where the plankton wouldn't show up, right. And then in one moment, they were back. Sometimes twenty-five years is a moment. And you might lose it again, and it might be another twenty-five years. But I'm so grateful for the moments, for all the moments. The steps that I take to remind myself of that are—I'm a little bit of a nerd, I like to create neural associations, like "I'm going to consciously use my mind powers to neural associate my negative, toxic triggers to dive deep into my meditative or mindful practice."

During this whole period with COVID-19 and everything—Bob was talking about how a lot of us are turning to meditation, and I'm so grateful for that. I've been meditating several hours, as much as six hours a day. Yes, I don't have much going on, okay. Actresses are really shut down right now. But I have never had more opportunities that, as soon as this frees up, come into my life, while laying on my couch doing absolutely nothing. Literally nothing. I'm not going after things. I think I've missed a couple of tapings that I was supposed to do 'cause I was probably laying there—"I am in the unified field, in the quantum"—and I've missed things. But I've had movie offers come in. I've had opening up of opportunities like this, that is really where my heart is now, and this shift is happening.

I've just been offered a huge project

that would be able to be filmed at my own home. They're going to set up the whole film crew and the whole thing, and it would involve these types of talks, but in a more news kind of capacity. And I'm like, Wait, I worked so hard. I trudged. I left home at fifteen years old, and I was going to make it as an actress. And all of these things. And I literally lay on my couch during COVID-19 and meditate for six hours, and suddenly offers are like, "Hey, AnnaLynne, you want to do this?" "You want to do this?" And I'm like, there's something that we don't know enough about.

I'm in the middle of Rick Hanson's book right now. I just finished reading *MetaHuman*. And it's very interesting, what has transformed inside of me—this belief that I had no support, that I was an island, that I had to make it on my own because I couldn't trust anybody, because unlike the plankton, there's no way I was giving anybody a chance to get any of my pretty blue light. That wasn't going to happen. People had hurt me, and it was a dog eat dog world for sure. This transformation occurred when, about 18 months ago, my memories returned about my childhood abuse. The only way out of this was the only way out of anything. The most difficult and yet the most beautiful, transcendent moment of my life was inviting, first, compassion for myself—that this was my narrative and I didn't know and all those things—then, compassion for the person who did what he did to me when I was a kid, for all those years. And realizing that chains are contagious, but we don't have to have them bind us. They can link us, right. His pain, my pain, your pain, their pain, the earth, Mother Nature's pain. It can unite us if we let it. It can make you know that I feel you, and I get it, and that it doesn't have to be put on a scale—"Technically my pain is a little heavier than yours is, so you need to feel me," when it's not like that, right. Pain is felt in the exact same place in the brain. It's all relative.

For me, in this moment when something clicked inside of me that

this person who had done this to me for years, it had happened to him. And the little boy that he was—the first, what, thousand days of a child's life is what Bob said determines—that type of trauma affects them long-term throughout their life. Attachment issues and such.

So this perfect little boy that someone tainted would then go on to send me to a point where I almost downed a bottle of pills and ended my life, right. We have the same pain. We went in different directions. If I can take what's inside of me that's so angry and so hurt, and in a moment look in the face of who he could've been, not who he became but who he could've been, all in that moment I am love. That is what I am. I am the most powerful energy in the universe. And I am a force.

The Love Storm, which, Eddie, thank you for mentioning that, *The Love Storm* is still going to happen. We're not flying on planes and taking trains and stuff right now, but I am love, and I'm a storm. That's what *The Love Storm* is about. It's that you don't have to give up those fierce parts of yourself, those parts that you had to become to break those chains. You had to be a storm. You had to wash away the toxicity on the streets and all around. You had to do a cleansing, right. Don't lose that part of yourself. That storm is beautiful. But transmute it. And you can do that. And the only way you can do that, in my opinion and in my experience, is with compassion.

The Metta meditation is what we lead *The Love Storm* with. And it's, "May you be happy, may you be at peace, may you be free from suffering." And when I think of the face of this person who hurt me so much, and I imagine him as the adult who was hurting me and the child he had been before he became what he became, I take everything that it stirs up in me, the angst, the intensity, the pain, the sadness, the heartbreak, all of it, and I let it conjure into this intense storm. And then I'm like, WHOOSH. "MAY YOU BE HAPPY. MAY YOU BE AT

PEACE. MAY YOU BE FREE FROM SUFFERING.” My Metta meditation is very not-Buddha-like. It’s not very quiet, and it is a storm, for all intents and purposes. But it’s a very AnnaLynne way. In those moments, I sometimes feel like I’m lifting off.

This is a very scary time for a lot of people. It’s a lot of things for a lot of people. But for me, it shows the power of how fast something can spread around this planet. Just as much as fear is contagious, so is love, so is freedom. My little message, I guess, if there’s anything, is that as a human being, as a social being, I found something that makes what was such a dark room just a little bit brighter. I can shine my blue bioluminescent light now without fear. That’s because I finally, after all this time, set my mind free. And I hope to share that, because we’re social beings. We want to share what we have. Freedom is contagious, and that’s the virus that I’m spreading. Thank you, Eddie. Thank you, everybody.

ES: Amazing, AnnaLynne. Thank you so much for your honesty and vulnerability, and I think that there’s an entire generation of young men and women who’ve watched you in so many of your movies and shows and *90210*—I know my daughter did. You were her favorite character. They need to hear these things from you. Thank you for providing that.

I know that you read a lot, and you like to characterize yourself as a neuroscientist nerd. My question for you is, do you have plans to write your own book about this type of thinking and experiencing and what you think the world needs to hear at this stage of the game from your generation?

AM: Maybe, if you’ll be my guide through the process. I would love to share my thoughts on this. I write down a lot of stuff when I’m processing and going through things. There’s definitely a compilation of a lot of stuff that I’ve experienced. Recently, during COVID, I’ve been rereading so many books. And I’m like, “Oh my god, how did I miss this? Yes, this

part.” It’s as if I was reading it for the first time. And what I’ve realized is, when we’re learning, when you read something and it affirms something you already know inside yourself, that’s what most guiding words are. If I could affirm something for you in the moment that you’re in, where you’re at, that would be the angle I would want to go about. But most of the time, we aren’t at that space.

I was joking with my mom, and I was like, “I should do a book called *The Surefire Path to Misery*.” She was like, “What? What do you mean?” And I was like, “No, no. I’m going to tell you all the ways to have the most miserable life possible. And when you start reading it you’re going to be like, ‘Wait, I do that.’ ‘Wait, I do that.’ ‘Wait! Am I on the path to misery?’” Which would be my joking way to do it. But I think that sometimes, if we come from the standpoint of the teacher, then we lose the experience of learning from the student. And if a student reads a book thinking, “This is my teacher,” then they don’t always open themselves up to teach themselves and to become the teacher. So maybe I affirm those parts that you might want to look at a little deeper and then you do the work. Because the brain will do it immediately. It’ll be like, “Oh, that’s a path of misery? No, thank you. I’m going to skip that.” There’s been some little dabblings with that. I’ll get back to you on whether or not it’ll turn into something.

ES: Brilliant. I think you should do it—*Stuff You Already Know* by AnnaLynne.

We have one difficult question: “AnnaLynne, I went through sexual trauma and assault, many events. How can I reach out, or where can I find stuff to help me feel better? I’m a PTSD survivor.”

AM: You can reach out to me, for one. annalynne@together1heart.org. I would love to be a support however I can. And I have a lot of tools, obviously. Because of PTSD showing up,

that is actually when my memories returned. Eighteen months ago I underwent EMDR, which is a PTSD treatment. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing is a very powerful way to release trauma from the body, which is oftentimes what we’re dealing with when we’re dealing with PTSD. It’s not really what happened to us, but it’s our survival instinct unrealized. We weren’t able to run or fight, and it got trapped inside of us.

I have a lot of tools. First and foremost, I would like to say thank you for opening up and sharing that—it’s not easy to do—and taking a step towards your own healing. One of teachers that Jack Kornfield talks about was like, “It’s already too late for you. You already took a step in the right direction.” So it’s too late for you. You’re going to find the healing that you need, because you’re moving in that direction. I would love to be a part of your journey. Thank you for sharing that, and we’ll get you out of those chains in no time.

ES: Great. Check out *The Love Storm* and together1heart.org. AnnaLynne, thank you so much, again, for joining us, and for everything that you have brought to the Inner Peace Conference. We really, really appreciate it.

AM: Thank you, Eddie, for doing this. I’m so grateful to be a part of it.

ES: We are going to move on to my friend Adam Bucko, who is another excellent human being I met through Dena Merriam. Adam is a newly ordained reverend. He’s an activist and author, and the director of the Center for Spiritual Imagination at the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island. This is a new office; one that has never existed before. One of Adam’s primary roles will be the development of this new initiative. Through a rich variety of innovative gatherings, programs and services, the Center for Spiritual Imagination will be a catalyst for the integration of contemplative prayer and just practice into daily life.

Adam has been devoted to serving

homeless youth. He is the co-founder of the Reciprocity Foundation, which serves homeless and marginalized youth in New York City. He has examined what an engaged monasticism for the 21st century looks like, and he's at the forefront of a new movement for contemplative Christianity. He is definitely a very influential voice in the movement for the recovery and renewal of Christian contemplative spirituality.

Adam has written an award-winning book called *Occupy Spirituality: A Radical Vision for a New Generation*, and *The New Monasticism: An Inter-spiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living*.

When I first met Adam, it was after Occupy Wall Street started happening. Frankly, I was a little bit cynical about the whole Occupy movement. It was started by Adbusters, a magazine in Canada. There was no organization, and there were no stated goals, there was nothing. It started splintering off into different parts. Eventually at one point, the Occupy movement had disappeared. You didn't see it, and nothing really happened with Occupy Wall Street. One day I said to Adam, "You know what, the Occupy movement, it didn't even last. Where is it now?" And he said to me, "It's everywhere." And he was right. One day when I walked into the Reciprocity Foundation to do a class with the youth there, a huge heart was drawn on the chalkboard. Just above it, it said, *Occupy your*—and then there was a huge heart. I thought, "This is really Adam's message. Occupy your own heart." That's where we need to be.

Adam, it is a great pleasure to have you here today with us. Thank you for making the time.

ADAM BUCKO: THANK YOU, EDDIE. Thank you so much for inviting me here. It's a joy to be part of this gathering. Initially we were planning to do it in person, but I'm so happy that this is happening online. I thought that maybe I'll just talk for about twenty minutes, and then if there are any questions, or maybe we

could engage in a conversation. I often find that when we talk with other people, sometimes we kind of notice ourselves saying things that were just discovered in the moment. So let's see.

To begin this talk, I think that I would like to just share a few stories from my life. Stories of heartbreak, but also stories of discovery—discovery of God, a God that I tried to find in my early twenties in different monasteries in the West, in some Himalayan hermitages in India. But then in the end, in my case at least, I was able to find that God on the streets of New York City, in the broken bodies and hearts of New York City homeless kids. I want to share some of these stories, not because I think that they're unique, but rather because we all experience pain and suffering in our lives. Most of us also experience glimpses of God, who, like a loving mother, sometimes shows up unexpectedly where we least expect it, and just leads us into moments of peace where we feel completely held, where we feel completely cared for, where all of the broken pieces of ourselves that we struggle with on a daily basis are all of a sudden transfigured into something that maybe could become our unique gift to the world.

When I look at my life, and when I think about the theme of this conference which is Inner Peace—inner and outer peace—I think about my childhood. I grew up in Poland during—I'm 45, so late '70s, early '80s. When I was growing up in Poland, my country was essentially occupied by a totalitarian regime. Things were not that great. We were under a Communist regime. When I looked at some of my friends in my neighborhood, very early on, it became very clear to me that basically, when thinking about my life, I have two choices. One of those choices was to become an alcoholic and just basically give up, which many of my friends did. The other choice was to become an activist, and to try to engage with some of those structural realities that were really making our lives very hard.

I chose to become an activist. My

parents often tell me that when I was a kid they were often afraid, 'cause every time I went outside I would always bring back home some posters of the resistance—at that point you could go to jail for that, for just having those kinds of materials at home.

Early on, I knew that my purpose in life was to engage with this reality of the world, and to make it just a little bit better. In Poland, all of our resistance to the systemic injustices were very alive, because probably 60 or 70% of us literally existed outside of the official system, with our own networks of distribution of food, with our own networks of sharing information, etcetera. All of that was somehow connected to the church. Churches were really the only places where we were able to go and feel free, where we were able to voice our dreams and longing for a better tomorrow, where it was safe to do that. So early on, I started looking into these priest-activists who were proclaiming the message of nonviolence, who were in many ways inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. They were bringing some of these messages to Poland, and talking about love, talking about nonviolence, talking about speaking truth to power.

As a kid, I was observing those priests and just wanted to mimic them. I remember one of my favorite activities at home was to essentially build an altar and try to do mass like those priests. Maybe that's why now I'm a priest.

Something that became very clear to me was that everything around me was falling apart. The system was falling apart. Young people were at times committing suicide or drinking themselves to death. There was a lot of violence. Then at some point when I was a kid, the Chernobyl disaster happened, which also our government didn't tell us about. We found out later on. Everything was collapsing. I needed to find something in my life, something that could hold me, something that could convince me that even though there is all this chaos around me, nonetheless, life is worth living.

I remember building a little altar at home and trying to do mass, and wrapping myself in some kind of a blanket. I think my parents were very frightened by that. My grandmother, who was a very religious person, loved it of course. That was probably one of my first experiences of God, where all of a sudden, standing there at that altar, I felt like everything stopped and there was this peace. There was this power that literally held me. Even though everything around me was falling apart, nonetheless I was safe.

I continued to follow those priests. Both of the priests that I especially was attracted to were killed by the system. One of them was my parish priest. And so early on, it became very clear that, number one, I need to be faithful to that presence that I experienced in my prayer. Number two, looking at those priests, to be truly faithful to that presence, to truly say yes to God means saying no to everything in this world that violates God's love and justice and compassion. And then the third lesson that I learned from them is that living your life that way, there are consequences. They paid the ultimate price. On some level, choosing that path was also very frightening.

The next stage of my discovery of spiritual life and this God of peace was when I came to the States. We came essentially running from Poland, trying to find a better life. We came as undocumented immigrants, we ended up in New York without knowing any English, without having any kinds of connections. Because I had dreadlocks, my way of just getting into the New York City culture was to go to the Village every day and hang out with some Rastas on Broadway. That's how I learned English, by just sitting with some of those guys who sold incense on the street in the 1990s.

But what happened was that after awhile, this alienation that I felt and some of the post traumatic stuff that was happening, things that I was carrying in my body from Poland—I essentially collapsed. I found a counselor who started teaching me meditation. Almost immediately, I felt like some

of the trauma was kind of taken care of. And so I began practicing meditation and my life literally changed within weeks. And I remember asking my counselor, "What should I do now? Everything changed. Should I be a monk?" And I remember she gave me a name of a bookstore. It was East West Bookstore. I'm sure some of you remember. I remember going into that bookstore, by then I was able to speak English, and picking up the first book that I could see. I opened it, and there was this Himalayan yogi inside with long, long dreadlocks, down to the floor. I looked at it and I was like, "Oh my goodness, this is my guy. This is what I want to do with my life." So eventually I ended up in India. I went to India essentially to become a Christian sadhu. I had a spot reserved at the hermitage, Jivandhara Hermitage, which is a Hindu-Christian hermitage at the foothills of the Himalayas outside of Rishikesh, run by this wonderful old nun who was both a Hindu swamini and a Catholic nun. Those things only happen in India, I think, where you can kind of participate in both traditions so beautifully and with such integrity.

On my way to that hermitage, everything changed. Because when I arrived in Delhi, I had an experience that I think almost everyone has when they go to India. I was approached by a homeless kid, this little girl who came up to me, took my hand and started walking with me, asking me to buy her something to eat. You know, everyone sees those kids. I was also told before going to India never to give them any money, that they're hustlers. Things you hear. But something happened for me. I think it's easy to ignore someone's words, but the moment there's that connection, the moment there's that touch, looking at the face of this child, her face burned with cigarettes, she was just skin and bones, dressed in this very dirty dress. Something happened. And all of a sudden I realized that she is a call that I needed to answer.

Eventually, that led to me moving into a Christian ashram in the slums

outside of Delhi, and living with people who were rescued from the streets, working with homeless kids. I think that that was really what gave me my calling in life, in some ways. Because prior to that moment, even though I had those experiences in Poland where I knew that my spirituality needs to be engaged with the world, the moment I started getting into meditation, into contemplative prayer, I felt like I kind of exited the world. Left the world, so to speak. All of a sudden, the ideal for a spiritual life became this ideal of a guy who sits on the top of the mountain, and he's completely free of any suffering. He's completely pure, and he's completely disengaged.

I think what the experience of living in that community did for me was to help me realize that yes, I was peaceful. Meditation gave me this gift of peace. But that peace was kind of a detached kind of a peace. It was almost like I was in some kind of a spiritual coma. That experience brought me back to life, brought me back into the world, and showed me that if I can show up and be present to those who are suffering, be present in a way that I would be present to God, showing up for them in the same way that I show up for prayer, showing up with my open heart, bearing witness to what is there, showing up without any kind of buffer, seeing their pain, accompanying them into the depths of the pain, sometimes breaking with them as we experience this pain, and then in the midst of that, when we are broken into pieces, discovering that underneath all of that there is this motherly presence of God that is always able to show up, pick up the broken pieces from the floor, and reassemble them into something that could become our offering to the world. All of a sudden our pain, our mistakes and everything else that we've experienced could be useful to serve the world.

That became really a big and an important thing for me. Because it helped me to integrate prayer and meditation and contemplative practice with service in the world. Eventually, that led to some work on the streets of New

York City, founding that center that Eddie described, which was really a very special place. A place of love where kids from all over the city were able to come and experience what it feels like to be loved. What it feels like to discover that their heartbreak could still be transformed into something that could enable them to serve the world.

Right now, I just took a little bit of a break from my life, so to speak, 'cause I was training for priesthood. I spent three years living in a quasi-monastic setting in Wisconsin, being sent to probably one of the most conservative places. For someone like me, who on a political spectrum probably falls somewhere left of Karl Marx, that was a big deal. But now I'm back in New York. I'm at the Cathedral of the Incarnation. And we just founded the Center for Spiritual Imagination, and also a new monastic community that essentially is going to be teaching these practices of contemplation and how to learn and practice engaged spirituality, and then as a result, be sent back into the world.

We have two mottos. One is that we believe, as Father Bede Griffiths believed—this Benedictine monk who lived as kind of a Christian sannyasi in India for more than forty years—he called this, *universal call to contemplation*. Essentially, we believe that intimacy with God does not belong to a special group of religious professionals, but is available to all. We try to democratize, essentially, the gifts of monastic spirituality, and translate them into something that everyone could live.

In addition to that, our other motto is that, given today's crisis the world over, we can no longer afford to hide our contemplatives in comfortable monasteries. We need to reunite contemplation, meditation and action. We need spiritual activists, and really, spiritual warriors on the streets of our cities and in all of our professions and institutions. We need them to reinvent those institutions with spiritual values, and to teach us how to see every person in need, every structural

imbalance, every cry including the cry of the earth, as a call for us, to be answered.

And so this is my work now. One of the things that we're doing right now, especially during this COVID-19 crisis, thanks to the leadership of Father Michael Sniffen who's the dean of the cathedral, who has done a wonderful, really beautiful job putting things together, and who was one of the leading organizers of Occupy Sandy, the mutual aid network that emerged out of Occupy Wall Street after the Hurricane Sandy disaster—one of the things that our community does, because we can't do very many things, we are serving anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 meals to frontline health care workers in different hospitals that serve the poor around New York City, especially in Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island.

And slowly, as the medical crisis is stabilizing, we are moving slowly into supporting poor communities. If the headline of a recent article from the *New York Times* is correct, it's not the coronavirus that will kill us, but hunger. We need to really worry about hunger, because people are losing jobs. A lot of our networks for the distribution of food have been destabilized. And so we feel that it is our obligation to put our resources to work, to mobilize volunteers and to essentially serve people on the streets of New York City in communities, especially those communities that are really suffering right now.

I thought that maybe I would stop my rambling and that maybe we could engage in some kind of a conversation.

ES: Definitely. That just has been so beautiful, Adam. It's wonderful to hear your story, starting from Poland and all the way through the streets of New York to where you are today. How can any of the people present today support the activities of the church in feeding people?

AB: We have a GoFundMe. Operation Feed The Front, it's called. Which has a very punk rock name, and I

think that was on purpose. So Operation Feed The Front on GoFundMe. You can donate. You can also go to our website, spiritualimagination.org, which just launched, and simply email us.

At this particular point in time, we're trying to do things with as few volunteers as possible. The food is prepared in kitchens in different country clubs around Long Island. People live there and normally they wouldn't be able to work, but because of our fundraising activities, we're able to essentially pay those people to prepare meals and to have work. And it's very safe. And then one person delivers, the other person picks up. This way, all of it is very safe.

My guess is that within the next few weeks, things might change and we may need more volunteers and more people to be involved. My hope is that some of the structures that were created to support the frontline health care workers could be maintained to support the poor. In my experience working with street kids, I know that whenever big crises happen, there's a lot of interest. But the moment some of our media channels are beginning to talk less about the suffering that the people are experiencing, usually there is less interest. And so the goal here, considering that so many people are losing their jobs, and especially the poor communities are going to be really deeply impacted by this, the goal for us is to keep on going at this and to keep on building structures that can support people.

ES: You have a question. "My question to Adam: Do you still have any connections to church in Poland, and would you share your perspective? I am from Poland too, living abroad, and I feel the church in Poland is now very far away from what you are doing and where it was in the 1970s."

AB: Yes. I agree with that. It's very unfortunate, what happened with the church in Poland. When I was growing up, it really felt that the church was this kind of loving mother that



Krishna retrieves the Shyamantaka from Jambavan ©Keshav Venkatraghavan

really was there to hold us. Then, immediately after the system changed, the church tried to replace the Communist Party and run the country. And that was not good. Essentially, it moved from playing the role of a loving mother to an abusive parent. So I don't have many connections with the Polish church. I know a couple of Polish priests who live in America, Polish Catholic priests—I'm an Episcopal priest—who are doing wonderful work. But, as a whole, I think something happened in Poland. Unfortunately, the church has not been able to go beyond its own needs for self-preservation, power and control. And that is very unfortunate, I think. It really breaks my heart, because I feel like, as a kid, I received so much from that church, so much spirituality. I saw so many examples of heroic activism, of what it means to essentially manifest Christ's love and nonviolence in the world. But now I find that it's very difficult to find that in the Polish church.

ES: The next questioner asks how one can discern a call from our ego.

AB: That's a very good question. When I was learning how to work with street kids in New York, I had this very unusual mentor who was a Hasidic rabbi. He mentored me quietly, because he said that these teachings never get out of the community that he was in. And so we would just gather, and he would read this Yiddish and Hebrew text. Of course, I didn't know any of those languages. I didn't also know much about Judaism. But there was this kind of transmission in the air that I feel like I really received something. And one of the teachings that I received was, he kept on repeating to me this old Jewish teaching that everyone comes to this world to fix just one thing. I think this is metaphorical, perhaps. But nonetheless, we're here to fix that one thing. And our job here is to figure out, is to find out what are we here to fix. Because we could do a lot of things. Maybe some even really amazing things. But our life will be not really all that great

unless we find out what that one thing is. And there's no one else in the world that could fix that one thing. So our lives are very valuable, especially if we say yes to our true purpose.

How do we essentially distinguish between all of those thoughts and impulses of the ego that we feel and what is the true calling? I know every time I close my eyes, I hear a lot of different things, but it takes some time to get to the bottom of things, to sort through those things.

A very quick story. Almost everyone, in the initial days of Reciprocity, was coming into our office and saying, "I want to become famous. Can you help me to become famous?" I didn't know anything about helping people to become famous. Also, it didn't really feel like part of my calling was to help people to become famous. They wanted to be fashion designers and musicians and you name it. And so I struggled with it a little bit because it felt like here I am trying to live a spiritual life, and all these kids are coming to me basically with these materialistic dreams. What the heck am I supposed to do? As I began listening to them, I discovered that with this line, "I want to become famous," what they're really saying is, "I want a life of meaning, purpose and significance." It's just that the only theology they have is a reality TV theology, so to speak. Within that framework, that's what you say when you want to accomplish something that matters. As I began paying attention to their dreams, as I began paying attention to things they were saying, including, "I want to become famous," I discovered these three questions that guided my work with people in helping them to discover their vocation, to discover their calling.

Number one was, "What breaks your heart?" Essentially, when you think about your life, when you think about the world, what breaks your heart? This question is not about just coming up with some kind of an answer. Spend a week fasting and praying and crying with God, holding that question with every cell of your body.

What breaks my heart? That's number one.

Number two, "What makes you truly alive?" And again, it's not just about answering and making a list. It's about holding it, holding that question with every cell of your body.

And then, "Who inspires you, and why?" And also thinking about it. In my discovery, what happens when we really approach our heartbreaks and our aliveness, and when we hold them simultaneously, something happens. I saw it so many times. All of a sudden, something clarifies, and the operating system in our head breaks for a moment, and there's this impulse of creativity that usually gives people some guidance as to how they're seeing themselves in the world. What are they called to do? And then once they start getting in touch with that impulse and once they start basically getting a download of what their calling might be, there is a final question which is, "Is this thing that is emerging in me, are my gifts, are my talents being used here in service of compassion and justice, or are they being used in service of my own self?"

In my experience, working with some of those questions really helps to sort through this question, "What is my ego telling me, and what is God telling me?" As someone once said, it's when our joy and when our longings and our heartbreaks meet in our offering to the world, that's when our calling is being addressed.

ES: Wow, Adam. That was one of the best answers I've ever heard for how to determine the difference between your calling and ego.

AB: Well, thanks. I learned it from being with homeless youth. 'Cause every time I would ask them questions, I had to work through the same questions. 'Cause you know how young people are. It's like they see it immediately when you're not on it.

Thank you so much for inviting me here. It's a real joy.

ES: Our final speaker of the day is Lau-

rie Anderson. Laurie is one of America's most renowned and daring creative pioneers. She is an avant-garde artist, a composer, a musician, a film director. Her work spans performance art, pop music and multimedia projects. She's not only one of the early pioneers of electronic music, but she's also invented several electronic musical instruments, including something called the tape-bow violin, which uses magnetic tape instead of horsehair on the violin bow, the talking stick, and her special voice filters.

Laurie has published eight books. The most recent is *All Things I Lost In The Flood*. She is a Grammy-winning artist for the Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance for *Landfall*. And she was also the first artist in residence for NASA, which is just a phenomenal thing.

The list of people that she has collaborated with is tremendous. Anyone who's familiar with any small bits of the New York City or American avant-garde or downtown music scenes will know the names of William Burroughs, Jean Dupree, Arto Lindsay, Bill Laswell, Ian Ritchie, Peter Gabriel—who of course is not a downtown music name—David Sylvian, Jean-Michel Jarry, Brian Eno, Philip Glass, Nona Hendryx, Bobby McFerrin, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Dave Stewart, Peter Gordon, Adrian Belew, Hector Zazou, and, of course, her late husband Lou Reed.

She has a very disciplined tai chi and meditation practice. She's a devoted student of Buddhism. I met Laurie some years ago through my friend Julian Schnabel when Julian wanted me to start teaching yoga to Laurie's husband Lou. Of course, growing up in Greenwich Village and being a young club kid from 1982, 1983, I knew who Laurie was. We all knew who Laurie was. Her video for *O Superman*, which was on MTV, was iconic and amazing. And frankly, I was scared to death to meet both her and Lou because they were such an influence in my early years in the clubs and downtown music scene. Going over to their house for the first time

was absolutely terrifying. Of course, I never told this to Laurie. And then later, Lou wanted me to go teach Laurie some yoga also. I had her do the most simple things because I felt she was tired. And she was like, "That's it?" And I was like, "Oh my god, Laurie Anderson hates me."

I'm so thrilled that she accepted our invitation to come speak today. When we were going to be in St. Bartholomew's Church, we wanted there to be talks and meditation and music and poetry. And of course, Laurie brings all these things to the table. We had all these things planned out for the narrative arc of our day that was going to be an entire inner peace experience. You know the saying: The best way to make God laugh is to make plans. Our plans, of course, didn't come to pass. And here we are, online together.

Laurie, as our final speaker, thank you so much for accepting this invitation. I'm really, really thrilled that you are here. You have been a big inspiration for so many people in all of the fields that you touch, from art to music to performance and to your new painting profession as well. Thank you, we look forward to everything that you have to offer to us.

LAURIE ANDERSON: THANKS EDDIE. I really love you. Thanks for inviting me to be in this conference. And hello to all of you who showed up today. Thank you for coming too. I really enjoy being with people in this way. You're all completely invisible, but I can feel your presence, like little sparkling lights all over the globe. By the way, there's a beautiful Dutch site that I've been using called Radio Garden, and you might want to check it out. You can spin the globe around, and you can listen to thousands of live radio stations around the world. If you're in the mood for 24-hour Hindi chanting, there's a place for you on this globe. The site was made in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision. So thank you Holland for that.

So anyway, I'm a musician. I do a

lot of live concerts. When I do these concerts, I depend on seeing people in the audience. People in audiences think they're invisible, but I make sure to light the first few rows, and I use people as editors. If the whole first row looks like they're falling asleep, I just take that part out. I work in a medium that happens in the moment. It doesn't happen later. Now, maybe people think about it later, but unless it happens right then it just doesn't happen. Also, as an improviser, I never know what note will be next. So music, both playing it and listening to it, turned out to be a pretty good training for living in the state of constant uncertainty that is our present reality in the pandemic.

Now that we're in the time of corona, we no longer have the faces of other people to tell us what they think. You know how it is. You might be losing a grip on who you are. Because among other things, we use reflection in other people's faces to learn who we are. And we learn that affirmation and connection, really, when we're babies, when we're little kids. If you watch a two year old try to get this confirmation from their parent, you can see how important it is. "Mom, look, I'm on the swing." And Mom says, "Yes, you're on the swing." And if those words aren't said, it's almost like you never were on the swing. And so we're finding ourselves more connected to other people than we thought. Defining what's real is not something we always do by ourselves, alone. We're also finding ourselves more in solitude, and that means finding paths into ourselves in new ways, and learning how to trust the person that you are now, in the midst of this.

And you know what? I really miss playing music for people in physical places. But when I think about it, I'm actually not talking to the people who come to these concerts, the people who buy tickets, the people who get up, get dressed, drive to the festival, sit down in the audience, the people who have personalities and styles and ways of expressing themselves. I'm actually talking to the part of the per-

son who doesn't ever speak, the part who's back there listening. The part of you who already knows everything. The part of you who has always been there, and who already has perfect inner peace. Always has, always will. And it's this part of you that comes peeking out now at a time like this, looks around and says, "Whoa, you've got to be kidding. This is different." It's the part of you that's centered and calm, and doesn't have to do the bad acting that you're often forced to do as a person when you're walking around in the world playing your various roles. And you know what I'm talking about. That you.

Anyway, I usually live in New York City, which I really miss now. But I'm in the countryside about a hundred miles away. There's a lot of wind today, and a lot of birds, and the ocean is nearby. Today I just want to talk about a few of the things that I'm learning here, and how some of that might relate to what might be going on with you.

I've been able to hear some of the speakers in the conference, which has been great. All these stories about whales and plankton, and this idea that we're each here to fix one thing. I like that so much. I've been thinking about words that we've all been using, like *peace* and *freedom* and *anger* and *love* and *loss*. And they're all such tricky words. It's like we don't have enough words for a situation now. We have to find them or invent them to make them real. It makes me ask myself not what peace or freedom is, but more like how they make me feel. How I experience them. For example, *peace*. I call that feeling of peacefulness, peace. But really, peace is a state in which I'm not there. It's not that I feel peacefulness, it's that I'm gone. There's no longer a me who's thinking something. There are no boundaries. It's like music. You just disappear into it. You sink into it. You're gone.

For me, the word *freedom* has a similar sense of gone, of absence. The way you can be free of something, like this dog is free of fleas, or this man is free of disease. And speaking of freedom, I

think the word *lockdown* is one of the worst words to describe the experience that we're having. It comes from a culture in which mass incarceration and prison and punishment are central to our ways of social control. In so many ways, our Puritan heritage comes out in corona. Our reactions to corona are fear and soap. So very American. Fear of being touched and physicality, fear of touching our own faces, even.

Like *peace* and *freedom*, the words *loss* and *love* are also full of new meanings. But there are so many holes in the English language. We're just missing so many words. So many of the things in the world just aren't real. They're made of nothing. They're just thoughts in the back of your mind. Words are even more abstract than that. So take the word *snaux*. It's actually a newly-coined word in English, and it's spelled S-N-A-U-X. It's not like Eskimo, where we need more words for snow. This word is new and specific, and it means a combination of *snow* and *faux*, F-A-U-X, which is French for *false* or *fake*. So it's faux snow, or fake snow. It sounds like snow, but it isn't snow. Something that looks real but isn't real. It's the *snaux* that piles up in store windows at Christmas and on the shoulders of plaster mannequins who are standing in *snaux*—S-N-A-U-X—drifts wearing real fur coats. It's the *snaux* on model trains or on Christmas trees.

But here's another word that's missing in English, although it exists in Inuit. And it's *iktsuarpok*. I-K-T-S-U-A-R-P-O-K. It means the feeling of edgy anticipation that makes you keep looking out the window to see if an unexpected visitor is coming up the path. We know what that feels like, but we really just don't have the words for it. And then in Swedish, there's *fika*, which is a coffee break in which you're not allowed to talk about business. Really good idea from Sweden.

There's something many of us are feeling right now. The Turkish have a great word for this. It's called *uzun*, which is *gloomy political dread*. We know what that means, and we need to understand where we are. Also, if you

can't find a word, stay with that feeling. And if you need to call it something, make up a word. But there's also the German *waldeinsamkeit*. And that's *forest loneliness*. Which is not like trees getting lonely, but it's the joy you feel when you're in the woods all by yourself. Which, by the way, brings me to the big confession that I feel I want to make to you, and it's one I'm sure a lot of you share, probably with similar feelings of guilt. And that's that I'm actually right now having the best time of my whole life. This insane merry-go-round of projects I was doing has stopped. Obligations, the things I was chasing, stopped, gone. The email I was supposed to answer, over. Time has opened up to me in a way that I always dreamed of, and freedom to look at many things that I was putting off. This is finally the rainy day we've all been waiting for. And it's changing me in fundamental ways.

Like many of my friends, I say, "I'm never going back, even if there's something to go back to, this is really how I'm going to be from now on." And then I think, "Hmm, that sounds familiar." It sounds a lot like another plan. Do you think you have so much control? Isn't that what you're running from anyway?

The Koreans have a word, not for things that you're looking for but the things that come looking for you. And they tend to be somewhat on the negative side. Remorse, free-floating guilt, various highly contagious flus, numerous kinds of linoleum glues that stick on your shoes. But anyway, back to the present moment.

First, there's the shock of the sudden pause. This screeching halt. Everything stopped. We're hanging suspended between two realities, almost like the bardo, this pause after death while consciousness shifts and takes another form. There's the great Buddhist teacher, Bob Thurman, who really elucidates the bardo. And you realize that the bardo he's talking about is also this period of time. This short span of dreams and reality between the time we were born and the time

we die, also known as life, the bardo of life.

In the middle of this solitude, we begin to define the feelings that we have for others in new ways, sometimes called compassion. But sometimes it feels too solid. Because it almost feels like borders are dissolving. And is there a word for that? I don't know. Probably a German compound word that's just an assembly, like a list of single-syllable words, rather than a real blend. Kind of like a British dessert. You know how they make that dessert with various things arranged on a plate. Some sponge cake, a little dab of custard, a few little hard candies. This is called dessert, or *pudding* in British English. But these items, they never actually cohere. The parts don't add up, unlike, on the other hand, the French *éclair*, which becomes a whole new thing, a whole new complete thing made of the parts of custard and chocolate and pastry but transcending the parts it's made of. I don't know why I started talking about that. Maybe just food is more interesting now than at times when I used to go to restaurants. It's harder to get.

What is it that we have in common now, other than hunger? I have a friend who's a writer, and she's looking for something all humans share. She is looking for some emotion or trait that's common to everyone. She spent a long time looking for that. And she said, "Is it love?" No, not everyone has that. Curiosity? There are plenty of people who just aren't curious. Hunger? Yes, but she's looking outside the purely biological. Is it generosity? No. Greed? No. And what she found was fear. And with something so basic, this is such a good time to see what part fear plays in our minds, to try to see it, to identify it, maybe even to befriend it. And see how it's used by leaders to batter people into obedience, and how then it enters the language, and how it's its own thing, and how it's part of some things and not part of others. As my teacher Rameshwar Das says, "Nirvana contains some sorrow. But some sorrow does not contain nirva-

na." Something to think about. But this is a good time to be curious about the feeling words like *fear*.

I have a friend who has a five year old boy. He didn't know the word *virus*. And he just kept hearing about the coronavirus, but he thought people were saying "corona pirates". The story really made sense to him, because the whole world is being attacked by the corona pirates, and so we have to wear masks and stay back, and we're all doing this fighting everywhere in the world. He could see the essential drama in a way that's completely lost on adults sometimes. So recently, I've just taken to hearing the word pirates when I hear the word virus.

How then can we use our minds in this moment? I remember as a child being a kind of untutored sky-worshipper. I would walk along on my way to school, and I'd look up at the sky—and this was the Midwest, so there was endless amount of sky. We're never going to run out of it. I'd think, "This is where I came from". And I remember how clear I was about this. This has really never left me, this feeling. When I look at the sky now, it's an immediate trigger, a kind of fast-track passport to freedom.

Especially now, I'm looking for other ways to keep me in the state of what we have to call awe. A few months ago, I decided to start a meditation group in New York City. I called a few friends but they were all so busy. We finally found a time slot, Wednesday, 6:00 to 7:00. We all agreed we could each wedge in a session if we really planned ahead. There was one more person I wanted to invite to be part of the group, and we were in line for a restaurant waiting for a table. It was really loud, crazy, noisy. And she said, "I just don't want to sit in one place and meditate. I can't do it. I just like to do it wherever I am." She said she was teaching herself how to use certain situations that would remind her to go quickly into that frame of mind. Let's call it a state of calm. Let's call it inner peace. So one day, the reminder method would be every time she puts her hand on a doorknob, she would

go into that state. Another would be every time she brushed her hair back or looked at her shoes, she would go into that state.

I was saying, "Wow, that wouldn't work for me. It would take me some time to go into that." She said, "Let's try it." She was already looking down at her shoes. And so I did that too. And then only for a minute, we looked at our shoes sitting on the floor like that down there. It did that for me. It put me back into that present moment. Actually, the only moment that we actually have.

But anyway, during this time I need all the help I can get, so I truly treasure my teachers. And one of the meditations I find the most useful is called "The Jewel Tree." It's a tree, you form it in your mind. On this tree you put all the people you love and who also love you. Philosophers, your mother, that crazy dog down the block, your sweet and generous third-grade teacher, Buddha, James Brown, whoever you want to put. You just put them all up there, and just keep this in your mind, your jewel tree—all the people who love you so much, and are helping you now.

I wrote a song for William Burroughs once, as Eddie mentioned. This is a guy I really admired very much. It was called *Language Is A Virus From Outer Space*. And it's a strange thing for a writer to say, that language is a disease communicable by mouth. But over the last especially three years, we've seen that language is a virus that can truly infect you. That it'll just worm its way into your ears. When someone says, "I can kill you on the street and get away with it" or when people say, "Women don't matter as much as men," up is down. Orwell's come home to live in our language now, and this Orwellian language virus creeps into your brain, and it hammers you, it insults your mind, it brutalizes you. We have to figure out either how to dissolve it or disinfect it or relegate it to some junk pile. But it takes a lot of energy. And then there's the energy you need to continue, to generate compassion

instead of hatred. This is the alchemy of meditation.

Of course, a virus itself is also a language. It's very complex. It works in many of the same ways. It can replicate, it can pretend to be something else, it can go wild. It's also not alive, but it can kill you. But this virus, this plague, of course, it's not new. For years, I've been waking up every morning with a combination of dread and disbelief. Did the Amazon actually burn? Did one billion animals just die in Australia? Did this actually happen, or was it just some kind of story? Reality just shifted, and living became so stressful. You just had to keep recalibrating every event you heard of so you wouldn't get too wound up. The entire Russian parliament resigned? No big deal. And one billion people are now homeless? Okay, that definitely went up. Hottest year ever? Okay. I see that.

We saw something coming, many of us did. For years, we've been saying, of course, that this is not sustainable. It's the biggest story of our time, and when we try to tell the story we keep running out of words. The end of the world, and climate collapse, and the collapse of our ecosystem, is a story that's just as hard to tell as, really, the story of the beginning of the world. Both are shrouded in myths and superstition and fear and awe.

And in fact, we are the very first humans to look at the possible end of life on earth, and then try to tell that story. But here's the thing about stories, a story is usually something you tell to someone else. And if you're telling the story to nobody, if nobody's there to listen to that story, is it still a story? This is our awesome job. We are the first humans to try this, to tell the story to nobody. It's so hard to tell the story of collapse when you're in the middle of it. To feel it, to understand it, to put it into words, to be part of it and to remain calm.

At home, the radio's on, the names of the dead are being read out. There's almost unbearable grief for the wreckage around us. Millions of people without work and hungry. It was go-

ing that way, but we didn't really put it into words. Our towns disappearing. In Indiana I have a friend whose hometown used to be dairy farms; the dairy farms and the industrial-sized chicken coops have all become fentanyl labs. For years, everybody knew this was unsustainable. They knew this was coming. And then it broke.

And now, in this broken time, we try to find a way to be here, and also to be with our anger about it, to acknowledge our anger. Sometimes, if we keep looking farther and farther and farther and farther down inside at the anger, weirdly, it stops looking like anger. You keep going and going past any sense of normal, past any sense of real, past any sense of "You're safe", past all the words, going and going and going down and down until your heart breaks. Then we find something that's so broken, and we're broken more than we could've imagined. And what to call this? Call it grief. But it will no longer be anger. And you will find it there.

This is, for me, when a very key teaching comes into play. My teacher Mingyur Rinpoche said, "Try to practice how to feel sad without actually being sad." This is an incredibly important distinction. To feel sad without actually being sad. Because there are very many really sad things in the world. If you pretend they're not there, you're an idiot. They will come and they will find you, they'll get you. He is, by the way, technically the happiest person in the world according to the University of Wisconsin Neurological Department. But anyway, as things continue to get weirder and more out of whack, I often think, "What would my heroes do?" And fortunately, I have a lot of heroes, and one is Phil Glass. And so I think, "What would Phil Glass do?" I think his answer may be, "Make music." What would John Cage do? And his answer might be, "Listen". And what would Gandhi do? "Resist". Then I wonder, what would James Brown, the godfather of soul, do? And I think the answer is, "Get up, get on up, get on the good foot, do your thing".

What is required of us now? How can we take what we're learning here and what can we do with this? I'm often asked from the point of view of an artist, "What will the future look like?" I do have a crystal ball. It's kind of a cheap knockoff and I forgot how to use it. But I do know that there are those who want things to be normal. People are so eager to get out of the present that they can't wait to get back to the normal of burgers and cars and problem solving.

I have a friend who is in isolation in the UK, in the Norfolk countryside. He hasn't seen anyone for weeks. Yesterday he went out to a nearby highway, and he saw these cars. And he was like, "People are going so fast. It was frightening how fast they were going, how angry they seemed, how literally driven they were." I have to say not what I see but what I hope for: to find new ways to see and feel despair, and to see and feel new ways to learn to love our brothers and our sisters.

This is also, of course, a moment to remain suspended in the present, if we can, and to recognize that that's all we've got anyway, and to see it as a moment of real opportunity. Our chance to wake up, to befriend our fears, to live without expectation, to live with gratitude.

I want to just read one of my favorite poems by Allen Ginsberg. Because he wrote about love and death and how they intertwine. It's called *The Weight of The World*.

The weight of the world
is love.

Under the burden
of solitude,
under the burden
of dissatisfaction

the weight,
the weight we carry
is love.

Who can deny?

In dreams
it touches
the body,
in thought
constructs

a miracle,
in imagination
anguishes
till born
in human—
looks out of the heart
burning with purity—
for the burden of life
is love,

but we carry the weight
wearily,
and so must rest
in the arms of love
at last,
must rest in the arms
of love.

No rest
without love,
no sleep
without dreams
of love—
be mad or chill
obsessed with angels
or machines,
the final wish
is love
—cannot be bitter,
cannot deny,
cannot withhold
if denied:

the weight is too heavy

—must give
for no return
as thought
is given
in solitude
in all the excellence
of its excess.

The warm bodies
shine together
in the darkness,
the hand moves
to the center
of the flesh,
the skin trembles
in happiness
and the soul comes
joyful to the eye—

yes, yes,
that's what

I wanted,
I always wanted,
I always wanted,
to return
to the body
where I was born.

Thanks Eddie for giving me this chance to join you all. Thanks everybody. I had such a good time today, listening to everybody's ideas about where we are and what to do. Good to just try to think of the job that only I can do. Such a good idea.

ES: Thank you so much, Laurie. That was beautiful. I loved how you talked about language. It really wrapped up the conference beautifully from yesterday when Tiokasin Ghosthorse was talking about how in his Lakota language they only use verbs. And you closed the conference today with how language is creating our reality, and new words that are coming.

We'll close by chanting *Om Shantih* three times, which of course means *Peace*.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti
Om Peace, Peace, Peace

I'm going to turn the microphone over to one of my co-organizers, Veet, who has been the instrumental in everything which has happened here in New York. It's been an absolute delight to work with him and to have his guidance.

Of course, we have a great team: Wessel and Maarten who created Delight Yoga and the Inner Peace Conferences; Jost, who's one of the partners at Delight; Yanica, our assistant for getting all of the communication and groundwork done here; and Quinten, also a partner in Delight Yoga, for tech and support with the website and everything.

Thanks to our partners from Chatwal Hotel, Global Peace Initiative of Women, The Well, the New York Open Center, and the Integral Yoga Center, spearheaded by Ashish Verma and Dena Merriam, Rebecca Perrick, Ross Gutler, Walter Beebe, Chandra,

and Swami Ashokananda. We have a tremendous amount of gratitude for all the support you've given us. And to the many others who have helped us along the way as well.

VEET: THANK YOU, EDDIE. I WAS very excited when we started, and now I'm very quiet. I think just listening to the teachers and taking it in gives me much more inner peace. So thank you, teachers and speakers. I'm so inspired by your honesty and your vulnerability, your bravery and your wisdom. I think I internalized a lot already, just listening to you.

Yesterday and today, more than 2,500 attendees joined us. We were with a lot of people, together. We are the inner peace community from all over the world. I'm so grateful that everybody joined us. I think if we can give hope and inner peace to people all around the world, our mission is complete.

We will have many more programs, so you can follow us on our website

Lastly, within the Inner Peace New York team, there was Yanica. I'm so grateful, Yanica, for you, that you were there. Your radiance is enormous, and your warmth is infectious. So thank you for that.

And last but not least, Eddie. I didn't know you, but I was so fortunate to get to work with you. Only to be in your space enlightened me already. So that is a big presence. I found out that stress is an illusion. You taught me that. You're never stressful. You're always there, you're always in yourself. That is great. The way you accommodated us for the last two days is really, really amazing, and very inspiring. So thanks for that.

And thank you everybody for attending. ❀



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