

Peace

For Ourselves, Our Families,
Our Communities & Our World



Be The Example. Others Will Follow.

H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

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Our Communities & Our World

By
His Holiness
Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

Be the Example. Others will Follow.



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Our Communities, & Our World
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ॐ द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः
शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः ।
वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वे देवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं
शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Oṃ dyauḥ śāntir-antarikṣgum śāntiḥ
Prthivī śāntir-āpah
Śānti-oṣadhayaḥ śāntiḥ |
Vanaspatayaḥ śāntir-viśve devāḥ
Śāntir-brahma sarvagum śāntiḥ
Śāntir-eva śāntiḥ sā mā śāntir-edhi ||
Oṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||

*May there be peace to the Heavens,
peace to the sky, and peace to the atmosphere.
May there be peace on the Earth and peace in the waters.
May there be peace to the forests and peace to the mountains.
May there be peace to the plants, animals and to all creatures.
May we all live in peace.
Om peace, peace, peace.*



Dear Divine Soul,

*May this book show you the way to attain
peace in every area of your life.*

*May you become a torchbearer of peace,
inspiring and touching others
wherever you go.*

*May God shower His blessings of peace,
prosperity, health and happiness upon you
and your loved ones forever.*

*With love and blessings,
In the service of God and humanity,*

Swami Chidanand
ॐ

Swami Chidanand Saraswati



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The Tragic Paradox of Our Times

*We have taller buildings but shorter tempers;
wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints.*

We spend more, but have less.

We buy more, but enjoy less.

*We have bigger houses and smaller families;
more conveniences, but less time.*

*We have more degrees but less sense;
more knowledge, but less judgment;
more experts, yet more problems;
more medicine, but less health.*

*We have multiplied our possessions,
but reduced our values.*

We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

We've learned how to make a living, but not a life.

We've added years to life, not life to years.

*We've been all the way to the moon and back,
but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbor.*

*We've conquered outer space, but not inner space.
We've done larger things, but not better things.
We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul.
We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice.
We've built more computers to hold more information,
to produce more copies than ever,
but we communicate less and less.
These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion,
big men and small character,
steep profits and shallow relationships.
These are the days of two incomes but more divorce;
fancier houses, but broken homes.
These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers,
throw-away morality, one-night stands,
overweight bodies,
and pills that do everything
from cheer, to quiet, to kill.*

Author unknown

Peace in the New Millennium

Each year, our scientific, technological, medical and mechanical prowess increases. Each year, our newfound skills and feats – defying previously-assumed fundamental laws of nature which limit man's power – dwarf the achievements of years passed.

Each year, in full pride and glory, we break through yet another layer of the glass ceiling, accomplishing tasks previously deemed impossible. Each year, the number of people saved by astonishing advances in science and technology increases exponentially.

Yet, simultaneously and perhaps not coincidentally, each year the number of people killed, maimed and terrorized by violence in the name of religion also increases. Each year, the number of children orphaned needlessly and senselessly by crimes of hate, terror and revenge scales new heights.

We pat ourselves on the back as smallpox and polio get eradicated, sparing the lives of innumerable children. Yet, the streets of countless cities worldwide teem with wandering, starving, begging orphans whose parents were killed in the name of God.

The irony of the modern age is unprecedented. Countries across the world spend billions of dollars on research to prevent untimely deaths due to illness, injury and even old age, followed by billions of dollars implementing the vaccination, inoculation and treatment programs. Yet, perhaps blind to the contradiction and hypocrisy or blinded by their own fear and power, these same countries spend billions of dollars on missiles, guns, bombs, fighter jets, armies, navies, submarines and tanks designed to obliterate the lives of the greatest number of

people in the least amount of time.

Peace – in our world, in our communities, in our families and within ourselves – has become the greatest need, a common catchphrase, and yet the scarcest commodity. “World Peace” has become a slogan, printed on bumperstickers, t-shirts, posters and benefit rock concert billboards. Yet, paradoxically, despite the proliferation of peace paraphernalia, each passing year we don’t seem to be any closer

Without peace – both inner and outer – all else is meaningless. We can spend millions of dollars building posh downtown centers in our cities, but if we are at war with another country, they will bomb those centers to ashes in a second. We can spend thousands of dollars building beautiful homes, but if our neighborhood is violent, our windows will be smashed and our new lawns destroyed. We can work hard and successfully at our jobs, but if we come home to turmoil in the home, there is no joy in the success obtained at work, for there is no one with whom to share it. We can devote ourselves to obtaining a top education, the highest credentials and a beautiful figure. However, if we are miserable inside, no outer achievement will ever pacify us.

Lao-Tse, the founder of Taoism and one of the greatest spiritual philosophers said it beautifully:



*If there is to be peace in the world,
there must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
there must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
there must be peace between neighbours.
If there is to be peace between neighbours,
there must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
there must be peace in the heart.*

Until we can accomplish the goal of living peacefully and lovingly side-by-side with all of creation, we will never fulfill our greatest human potential, regardless of whether we vacation in space, travel the speed of sound, or defy death.

How to do it, though? What is the answer?

In this book, I will address five aspects of peace:

- 1. Peace within ourselves**
- 2. Peace in our families**
- 3. Peace in our communities**
- 4. Peace in the world**
- 5. Peace on the Earth**

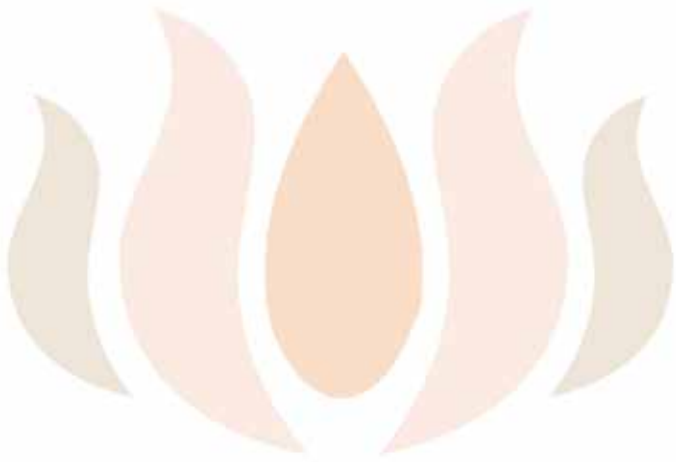
As rungs on the ladder of eternal harmony, the aspects have to be taken in that sequential order. Even if our ultimate goal is only world peace, still we must start at the bottom, with ourselves. If we are not in peace personally, the best we can hope to achieve for the world is the same temporary, fleeting facade of peace that we have achieved for ourselves. As Mahatma Gandhi so eloquently put it: *“We must be the change we want to see in the world.”*



“We must be the change we want to see in the world.”
Mahatma Gandhi

Part I

Inner Peace



Chapter 1

Introduction to Inner Peace



“Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way.”

— His Holiness the Dalai Lama¹

Let us begin with how to create peace internally.

When you are in peace, you exude peace, manifest peace and spread peace. When you are in pieces, you exude pieces, manifest pieces and spread pieces. Ironically it seems that day by day, we become less and less peaceful internally while we are yearning more and more to be calm and centered. Our tempers have become shorter. We have to take pills to alleviate our own anxiety and to help us sleep at night. Yet, each day we are striving, searching, and hungering for inner peace.

Peace is, however, not something for which we have to search. Peace is our basic, most fundamental nature. We feel restless, anxious, distressed and agitated due to the covering of our golden peace with the dirt of various emotions, characteristics and habits.

There is a beautiful story of a temple in Thailand where for years people worshipped what they thought was a clay statue of the Buddha. One day, by mere chance, one of the workers who was cleaning the statue discovered that beneath inches of tightly-packed clay, the statue was actually solid gold. Centuries before, to protect it from looters and invaders, the Buddhists had covered the Golden Buddha with clay. None of those who knew its true form survived the invasion and onslaught. Hence, all worshippers thereafter assumed the image was one of clay, until the day, hundreds of years later, the pure gold core was discovered.

The same is true with our own lives. We are golden. We are divine. We are pure and holy. We are the embodiment of peace itself, at our core. However, that golden core has been covered by layer upon layer of greed, ego, attachment, anger, jealousy, illusion and desire such that we have come to believe that we are made of these emotions. We have forgotten our true nature.

When we get in touch with our internal divinity, we not only tap into the infinite well of peace within us, but we also become instruments of peace for the world.

There is a beautiful prayer by St. Francis of Assisi which is perfect for anyone looking for internal, everlasting peace or hoping to lead the world into a brighter future:

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
And it is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
It is in dying [our ego, our sense of self] that we are born to eternal life.*

¹ From Foreword to *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991, Bantam Press.

Chapter 2

"I Want Peace"

The mantra of today seems to be "*I Want Peace.*" Every day people tell me this. They all say, "Swamiji. I want peace. Tell me how to find it."

The obstacle and the solution are buried in the statement. Listen: I want peace. What do we have in that statement? An "I," a "want," and a "peace." If you remove the "I" and the "want," what is left? "Peace." You do not have to look for peace, find peace or create peace. All you have to do is remove the "I" and remove the "want," and peace stands there, in its full glory, as divine nectar for all the world to imbibe. It is the "I" and the "want" which obscure this treasure from our view and prevent us from reveling in the truth of our own peaceful natures.

There is a beautiful story of an elderly woman who was outside in the evening searching on the ground, under the light of a bright street lamp. A wise man was walking and saw her. "Mother," he asked. "Can I help you? What are you searching for?"

The old woman replied, "I have lost my key and I am searching for it." At this, the man too bent down and began to look in the street for the key alongside the old woman. After many minutes of searching however, he stopped and asked, "Mother, where exactly did you lose your key? Do you remember?"

"Yes, of course," she replied. "I lost it in the house."



"I want peace. I want peace," you say. Just remove the 'I' and remove the 'Want,' and only peace will remain."

“Then why are you searching outside in the street for it?” he asked.

The woman looked at him and said, “Because in my house it is dark. There is no light. Here there is a bright street lamp, so I am looking in the light of the street lamp.”

The wise man gently responded, “Mother, if I may offer you some advice, go back inside. It may be dark, but eventually you will find the key. Even if you had an army to help you search, you would never find your key out here because – no matter how much light there may be – the key is not here.”

In our lives we do the same thing. For this old woman the key was, perhaps, the key to a dresser or a safe or a door. For us, it is the key to peace. We search and search outside for that key when really we have lost it inside. We look in the shopping malls, in retreats, in courses, in possessions, in other people. But the key is in none of these places. The key is within us.

The way to have internal peace, then, is not to go out in search of it, but rather to quietly, sincerely and devotedly work to remove the “I” and the “want” so that peace can be found.

REMOVING THE “I” – OUR EGO

First let’s talk about “I.” I is one of the greatest obstacles to peace. I is our ego. I is our sense of ownership, doership and pride. This I says, “I want to be in the center.” We always want to be the ones getting the glory, the appreciation, and the prestige. Even when we don’t do anything, still we want to be appreciated. This is our downfall.

Calm Your Pose



“Everything is set. We have tea sets, TV sets, sofa sets, video sets, but we ourselves are upset. Everything is set and we are upset.”

Once, a woman came to see me when I was visiting Chicago. She told me that she was stressed and tense. In order to sleep at night, she took pills called “Compose” (a medicine for anxiety and insomnia prescribed in India). Yet, I told her that she did not need to take Compose. “Just calm your pose,” I said. “And you will sleep beautifully at night and be peaceful all day. You do not need Compose. You need only to calm your pose.”

If we are peaceful inside, humble inside and sincere inside, then nothing outside can take away our peace. So, the first message is, “*Calm your pose and you will never need to take Compose.*”

Usually, though, we do the opposite. We pose our calm. We put on airs of being wise, aware, centered and peaceful. We want others to look at us and think that we are calm and serene. However, inside we are steaming; our anger, greed and envy have grabbed the reins of our lives and are steering us in violent, corrupt, dishonest, *adharmic* and anxiety-ridden directions.

Surrender

So what to do? Surrender. Become humble. Realize everything is due only to God.

In India, in every village or on the outskirts of every village there is a temple. I remember when I was young (and it is still mostly true today), first thing in the morning everyone would go to the temple.

Before beginning the day’s tasks, everyone went to the temple and took three *parikramas* (performing a circumambulation around the deity of God). The point of this was not merely ritual. Walking around God three times signified, “God, I am about to go out and perform my duties, but I know that everything I do is only because of Your grace. So, let me always keep You in the center, let me remember that everything is for You and because of You.”

Then, in the evenings, on the way home from work, everyone would once again stop at the temple. “God, if during the day I have forgotten that You are the center of everything, please forgive me. When I go home to my family, please help me remember to keep You in the center instead of trying to keep myself in the center.” This tradition still occurs in almost every village, especially the small ones, every day. People in these small villages have very little in terms of material possessions or comforts. Most of them live below Western standards of poverty. Yet, because they have God in the center of their lives, they are in peace.

These days, we have everything. Everything is set. We have tea sets, TV sets, sofa sets, video sets; but we ourselves are upset. Everything is set and we are upset! Why? Because of this “I” that tries to keep us in the center of everything.

There is a beautiful mantra which is perfect for eliminating the ego and surrendering to God. The mantra says:



कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा बुद्ध्याऽऽत्मनावा प्रकृतेः स्वभावात्
करोमि यद्यत् सकलं परस्मै नारायणायेति समर्पयामि ॥

*Kāyena vācā manasendriyairvā
Buddhyātmanāvā prakṛteḥ svabhāvāt
Karomi yadyat sakalam parasmai
Nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayāmi*

This means, “Oh Lord, whatever I have done, whatever actions I have performed through my speech, through my mind (anything I’ve thought), through my intellect (anything I’ve planned, achieved or understood), through my hands or body or through any of my senses – therefore anything at all that I have performed, perceived or thought – it is all due to Your divine grace and I lay it all humbly at Your holy feet.”

By chanting this mantra sincerely, deeply and devotionally every night, we remove any vestiges of ego which may still be lingering, clinging and preventing us from being in peace.

We Are Only His Tools

Our ego thinks: “Oh, I am so successful at my job. I am so good. No one could do what I do as well as I do it. I am the best.” But, the truth is that we only go to work – it is God who truly works. We can do nothing without His grace. One minute we may be at our desks, acting like king of the world. The next minute, if just one microscopic nerve in our brain fails, we would no longer be able to speak, write or even feed ourselves.

So the truth that we all must realize, as difficult as it may be for our egos, is that we are merely pawns in His hands. We are clay in the hands of the Divine Sculptor. As long as He wants us to succeed, we will continue succeeding. As long as He wants our hearts to continue beating, they will beat.

Of course, this realization does not exempt us from working diligently. It does not release us from responsibility. We must fulfill our duties to the best of our abilities. We must be sincere in every undertaking. However, the sincerity and assiduousness with which we work is our own duty, our own *sadhana*. The fruits of that labor are in His hands alone. We must realize we have no control over them.

When we truly surrender our lives, our actions and our work to Him, our little, individual “I” becomes merged in the big “I,” the universal “I,” the divine “I.” Our lives become like drops of water that merge into the Divine Ocean. The tension, stress, arrogance and separate-



“The truth is that we only go to work – it is God who truly works. We can do nothing without His grace.”

ness melt instantaneously and we become bathed by the great Ocean of Peace.

Bend the “I,” Make It a Bridge

So, ideally we remove this I, which is dividing us from our own true selves, dividing families and dividing nations. Yet, this is very difficult. Living in the world today, it can seem nearly impossible to completely remove the sense of “me,” “mine,” and “I”.

So the next best option is to take this “I” and transform it from being an obstacle to peace into something that is conducive to peace.

When “I” stands vertically, it is an obstacle, a wall. It creates borders, barriers and boundaries between ourselves and others. A vertical “I” represents the strong, unshakeable, tenacious and unyielding ego.

But if we take this “I” and turn it sideways, making it horizontal, then it becomes a bridge – a bridge between our families, our communities, and our nations. We must let this “I” become a bridge in the service of the world. If we keep standing so arrogantly, tall and proud as the vertical I, then we will always stand alone. If, however, we turn this “I” sideways and say, “Let me be a bridge, let me bridge chasms instead of creating them, let me stand smaller than others instead of always trying to stand tallest, let me put others in the center instead of myself,” then we will stand united and peaceful.

What does it mean to bend the “I”? It means to become humble. It means to sacrifice. It means to realize that everything is due only to God’s grace. It means not to worry if others are in the spotlight. As long as God is the light of our lives, then it does not matter whether we



“Bend the “I” and make it a bridge. Bend your ego. Become humble and bridge the chasms that divide us.”

or someone else stands in the fleeting, insignificant light on the stage.

There is a saying in Hindi which says:

झुकता तो वो है जिसमें जान होती है ।
अकड़ तो मुर्दे की पहचान होती है ॥

Jhukatā to vo hai jisamēṇ jān hotī hai

Akaḍ to murde kī pahacān hotī hai

It means, you can tell if a man is alive by seeing whether he can bend. A corpse is rigid. A living man is flexible. However, the saying implies something much deeper and more profound than the science of *rigor mortis*! It means that if we want to be truly alive, truly living, truly making the best use of our God-given time on Earth, we need to be flexible. We need to bend ourselves in humility. Otherwise, we are no better than corpses.

So let us bend this “I,” and thereby become truly human and truly alive.

REMOVING THE “WANT” – OUR DESIRES

What is “want?” Want symbolizes our needs, our desires, and our cravings – our insatiable appetite for more and more. All the advertisements, magazines, movies, TV shows – the entire culture – is aiming to convince us that the deepest joy, the most meaningful experiences, the surest peace can be found in owning the right car, wearing the right brand of jeans, living in the right type of home in the right area of town, or by vacationing in the right resort.

The insidiousness of this indoctrination is that not only is it false, but



“Comfort is the poison that kills the passion of your soul.”

Khalil Gibran

it is also contradictory. Not only will possessions not provide peace and joy, but the constant struggle for more and more will actually lead us further and further down the road to anxiety, restlessness, anger and frustration.

Attachment to Possessions

Once I was on a very short airplane ride from Detroit to Pittsburgh in the USA. Seated in the row next to me were a young girl, perhaps ten years old, and her mother. From the moment they sat down, the girl began asking, in a voice filled with rising desperation, "But mom, where are all my things?" The mother explained, over and over, that her things were in the suitcase which was under the airplane and as soon as they landed in Pittsburgh she would be able to get her belongings.

The child accepted the answer for a short time, yet fifteen or twenty minutes later, she would again cry, "My things, Mom! I want my things!" Finally, when the airplane landed and the doors opened, the child leapt from her seat and rushed frantically out into the galley between the airplane and the gate, shouting "My things! Where are my things? Mom, you said my things would be here!"

This is the tragic state of many people today. The culture has indoctrinated and blindly led us to believe that our state of joy and peace rests in the amount and quality of "things" that we have.

The Insidious Veil of Maya (Illusion)

We have been hypnotized to believe that the key to life lies in the attainment of material possessions, professional success, external achievement, and status and sensual pleasures. We have been deluded, deceived and blinded by the power of *Maya*, Cosmic Illusion. *Maya* lures us into its trap, falsely convincing us that the world of possessions and pleasures is real, permanent, everlasting and significant. We may have fleeting moments in which we see clearly that our possessions are not truly fulfilling us and that real happiness and peace do not lie in external comfort or pleasure, yet these moments and glimpses are ephemeral,

as *Maya* wraps us tightly in its soft, sweet-smelling, hypnotizing veil, and we lose sight of the Truth that lies beyond. We continue to follow, blindly and obediently, like the circus animal promised a cookie for his jump through the flaming hoop of fire.

If we are looking for deep and lasting joy, if we are yearning to be truly peaceful, we must tear off the veil of *Maya* and realize that possessions, pleasures and comfort are not the answer.

Khalil Gibran says it beautifully: “*Comfort is the poison that kills the passion of your soul.*” I would add only three words to this and say, “*The quest for comfort is the poison that kills the passion of your soul.*”

Comfort itself can only be blamed for lulling us into complacency, not for the true murder of our passion. It is the never-ending quest, the drive, and the craving for external comfort and ease which leads us to forsake all else and go straight into the waiting clutches of desire.

Expectation is the Mother of Frustration

I always say, “*Expectation is the mother of frustration and acceptance is the mother of peace and joy.*” If we live without expectations, we will always be in peace. We must accept everything that comes in life as God’s *Prasad* (divine gift and blessing). Our successes, our failures, our gains, our losses – we must see them all as God’s divine gift to us.

We must always be sincere and diligent in our duties and perform everything to the very best of our ability. However, we must not base our emotional stability upon the expected outcome of our work, as that is in God’s hands. If we succeed, great. If we do not succeed, that is also fine. The ultimate goal is not the external portrait of success, but rather our internal state of equanimity.



*“Expectation is the mother of frustration.
Acceptance is the mother of peace and joy.”*

The Incessant, Insatiable Drive for More & More

Possessions themselves do not breed unhappiness or unrest. There is nothing inherently wrong with being wealthy or owning luxury items. Our scriptures are full of stories of those who were torchbearers of *dharma*, righteousness, truth and peace, yet who were also wealthy. Even Lord Krishna was a King, and he lived in Dwarka, a city made of gold. It is not possessions or wealth which wrest peace from our hands and disconnects us from our true Divine Self, but rather the incessant and unrelenting drive to obtain more and more.

On my very first trip to the United States in 1980, I was staying in Malibu, California, a city near Los Angeles. The host where I was staying wanted to take me to see Universal Studios in Hollywood. In order to please him, I went along for the day. This devotee was a very wealthy businessman and we drove in a beautiful, luxurious Rolls-Royce car. On the way back home, as we drove on the freeway, deep in the midst of an important discussion, he suddenly stopped himself mid-sentence and pointed excitedly to the car next to us on the freeway. "Do you see that, Swamiji?" he asked. I nodded. "Okay," he continued. "I'll tell you about it when we get home." We continued our deep discussion and I forgot all about the car which he had pointed out to me.

That evening, just before I retired for the night, he came into my room and sat down quickly. "Swamiji, I want a special blessing," he said. "What is it?" I asked.

"Do you remember that car we saw on the freeway? That is the best model of Rolls-Royce. I am dying for that car. Please, Swamiji, bless me that I may receive that car. I will not rest comfortably until it is mine."

It was amazing. Here he was, living in a mansion, driving a Rolls-Royce, yet he would not be happy until he got the newer, better model.

My dear, there is no end to our desires. The constant drive to attain more and more, better and better leads us nowhere but to frustration and disappointment.

Once, many years ago, we traveled to Kashmir to spend a few days meditating on the beautiful and heavenly Dal Lake. However, we enjoyed ourselves so much that we actually stayed one month instead of a few days. Each week we would postpone our departure from that heavenly, pristine, glorious environment.

Finally, after one month we knew we needed to leave so we went to bid farewell and give payment to the kind boatman who had taken us out onto the lake each day. When one of the devotees offered payment, the simple boatman refused. He said, “I thank you for the money, but more than the money I want one special blessing from Swamiji. Could I please speak to Swamiji and ask his blessing?”

When the boatman came to see me, he fell in prostrations on the ground. Finally he looked up, tears in his eyes, and said words I will never forget: “Swamiji, I don’t know what horrible karma I must have performed to be stuck here on this lake my whole life. I beg you to please give me the blessing that I may go one day and see Bombay.”

I was amazed! We had come from all over India (and many devotees were from Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, etc.), and we had fallen in love with the serene, divine atmosphere in Kashmir. The devotees from Bombay would have given anything to be able to stay forever on the lakeside. Tourists travel from every corner of the Earth to visit Kashmir. When there is not war going on in the area, it is known as the greatest natural paradise on Earth.

Yet, this man who had taken birth here, who lives every day in the midst of the most beautiful lake, dreams of nothing but Bombay!

There is a beautiful prayer we chant each morning in our prayers at Parmarth Niketan. It says:

*Vidhi kā vidhāna jāna hāni lābha sahiye
Jāhi vidhi rākhe Rāma tāhi vidhi rahiye
Phala āśā tyāga śubha kāma karate rahiye
Jāhi vidhi rākhe Rāma tāhi vidhi rahiye
Jindagī kī ḍora saṁpa hātha dīnānā ke*

Mahaloṇ meṇ rākhe cāhe jhonpaḍī meṇ vasa de
Dhanyavāda nirvivāda Rāma Rāma kahiye
Jāhi vidhi rākhe Rāma tāhi vidhi rahiye
Āśā eka Rāmaji se dūjī āśā choḍa de
Nātā eka Rāmaji se dūjā nātā toḍa de
Kāmarasa tyāga pyāre Rāmrasa pagiye
Jāhi vidhi rākhe Rāma tāhi vidhi rahiye
Sītārāma Sītārāma Sītārāma kahiye
Jāhi vidhi rākhe Rāma tāhi vidhi rahiye

This beautiful prayer tells us that we should expect nothing, want nothing, crave nothing other than God. Whatever God gives us and wherever God puts us we should be joyful and grateful, and we should accept it as His divine gift. As long as our hopes are pinned on material and sensual pleasures and achievements, we will be forever miserable. Only by attaching ourselves to God and God alone will we be able to attain the true divine state of bliss and joy.

Sacrifice

Another key to removing the “want” from our lives is to give more, serve more and sacrifice more.

One of the most common Hindu rituals is a *yagna* fire. Devotees sit in a circle around the sacred fire and place offerings into the flames. With each offering, after each mantra, the priest chants, “*idam namamah.*” This means, “Not for me, but for You.”

The purpose of this is to remind ourselves that everything is for God. We must offer every thought, every action, and every breath at His holy feet. We must give more and want less. Then, we will know true joy and peace.

Winston Churchill once said, “*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.*” How true that is!

Prayer is the Broom that Sweeps Out Our Hearts

How to become selfless? How to learn to give more? Prayer. Peace comes through prayer. It doesn't matter what name you use for God or what language you pray in. You can pray to Lord Krishna in Sanskrit, you can pray to Allah in Arabic, you can pray to Jesus in English, you can pray to Adonai in Hebrew, you can pray to Buddha in Japanese, or you can pray to any other form of the Divine in any other language – it doesn't matter. What matters is that the prayer is earnest, pure and heartfelt.

When I met Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she said the following beautiful poem:

*The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love.
The fruit of love is devotion. The fruit of devotion is service.
The fruit of service is peace.*

That beautiful poem shows us, so clearly, the benefits of simple prayer.

Sometimes people think that in order to pray one must be very learned in the scriptures of a particular religion, yet that is not true at all. Prayer is speaking to God, and God understands all languages, both the simplest and the most complex.

There was once a little boy who went to temple with his father. He heard all the people chanting so many prayers in Sanskrit. For hours they chanted so many different prayers and mantras and shlokas. Then, at the end, the priest said it was time for silent prayer.

The little boy was nervous. He didn't know any of the prayers. But, he loved God, and he wanted to pray to God. So, he closed his eyes and he silently said, "God, I don't know any of the Sanskrit prayers. I'm only a little boy. The



"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

— Winston Churchill

only thing I know is the alphabet I learned in school. I know that all the prayers come from this alphabet. So, I will sing you the alphabet and then whatever prayers you like best, you can make from this alphabet.” And so he started to sing, “A, B, C, D, E, F, G...”

God is happier with that little boy, with his devotion, purity and piety, than He is with all the people who chant verse after verse of flawless Sanskrit or Latin without love.

The point is, love God, whatever form or name you use. It doesn't matter what language you pray in. Just pray, and you will see the magic.

*Prayer is calling back home.
Prayer is, in essence, coming home,
for it brings us into connection with our deeper Selves.
It is the way we speak to God,
and its beauty and poetry and devotion should match that in our hearts.
Prayer is the broom that sweeps out our hearts,
so the home we offer to God is an immaculate and pure one.
Prayer is a time when our mouths, our minds and our hearts
are filled with the glory of God,
when we simultaneously speak, think and feel our love for Him.
Prayer is the blanket that wraps itself around our souls.
Prayer is the water that quenches the thirst of a man lost in the desert.
It is the stars that glisten in the dark of night,
giving light to all those who may need it.
It is the sun that shines in the middle of winter,
coaxing the flowers to open their petals.
It is medicine to the sick, food to the hungry, and shelter to the homeless.*



*The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love.
The fruit of love is devotion. The fruit of devotion is service.
The fruit of service is peace.*

— Mother Teresa

Chapter 3

Multivitamin for Spiritual Health

Physical health is marked and measured by our weight, our blood pressure, our blood sugar, the color of our skin and other corporal determinants. Spiritual health, however, is measured by our state of equanimity in the face of trials and tribulations. It is measured by our ability to remain calm, focused, serene and loving when life throws failure, difficulty, insurmountable hurdles and betrayal on our path. It is easy to be peaceful, joyful and calm when everything is going according to our own plan. The true test comes when God's plan runs contrary to our own.

In order to maintain inner peace, calmness and stability regardless of external circumstances, we need a daily multivitamin of meditation, no reaction and introspection.

MEDITATION

Meditation is the best medication for all agitations. People have so many troubles today, mainly related to the stress in their lives. To address this anxiety, sleeplessness and discontent, people take pills and fill their lives with excessive, material “pleasures.” For example, when people feel stressed they frequently attempt to forget about it by going to the movies, shopping, drinking alcohol or indulging in sensual pleasures.



“Meditation is the best medication for all agitations.”

However, these are not solutions, as they neither address nor alleviate the underlying issues. They are simply band-aids to a wound that runs deep beneath the surface.

Meditation truly calms the mind, fills the heart with joy, and brings peace to the soul. The serenity and joy found in meditation last throughout the day and throughout life. Meditation is not a simple diversion which works only as long as you are actively engaged in it. Meditation is not a pill which quickly wears off and carries unpleasant side-effects. Rather, meditation brings you into contact with God; it changes the very nature of your being. It brings you back to the world from which you truly come: the realm of the Divine.

As you sit in meditation you will realize the insignificance of that which causes anxiety; you will realize the transient nature of all your troubles. You will realize the infinite joy and boundless peace that come from God and through union with your own divine nature.

Try to make a time each day that is “meditation time.” It’s no problem if you only have five or ten minutes. Don’t worry. Just do it. Do not say, “Well, I don’t have an hour to sit so I won’t bother.” Commit at least a few minutes to meditation each morning. Try to set time aside for meditation in a quiet, serene atmosphere. It’s not crucial that meditation be for an extended period of time. What’s important is that you get connected.

When you’re traveling on a trip away from your loved one, you don’t need to talk for hours on the phone each day, but you do yearn to call and just “check in” with each other, to hear each other’s voice, to “get connected.” It’s the same with God. Even though ultimately we are one with Him (He is inside of us and all around us), until we can deeply realize this Oneness, we feel separate. As long as that feeling of separateness is there, we need meditation. It is the time in which we reconnect with Him, delving deep into the inner core of our own being, merging and melting into the Divine Ocean of bliss.

Then with practice, slowly you will see that your life becomes meditation. It will not be restricted to one time and place. Even when it is not “meditation time” or when you are away from your home, away from your “meditation place,” do not think that you cannot meditate. Take five minutes at work to simply close your eyes, watch your breath, focus on the Oneness of us all, and connect with the Divine.

Eventually, your life will become meditation and you will become a torchbearer of peace, spreading the flames of serenity, love and brotherhood wherever you go.

NO REACTION

Be Like the Ocean

After the vitamin of meditation comes the vitamin of “no reaction” which we should practice all day. We need to learn to be calmer in our lives. We need to learn to remain still and unaffected by all that happens around us. We must learn to be like the ocean. Waves come and go, but the ocean stays. Even a large rock, thrown from a great distance with great force, will cause only temporary ripples in a small area of the surface. Most of the ocean, the depths of the ocean, will remain unaffected.

Typically in our lives we act like the water on the surface, allowing ourselves to get tossed around by every passing wave or gust of air. We must learn to be like the calm, undisturbed water in the depths of the ocean itself, unaffected by small, transient fluctuations.

The waves of life, the waves of anger, anxiety, jealousy, greed, and lust are just as vast, just as strong and just as restless as the waves of the sea. We must let these waves come and go, while remaining calm and undisturbed.

Frequently, we act as though we are light bulbs and anyone who wants can simply switch us on or off. The smallest comment, look or action of another changes our mood 180 degrees. We may be in a wonderful mood, yet if someone at the grocery store is rude to us, or if someone on the freeway passes in front of our car, or if a friend is cold and distant, our mood immediately switches as though it were a light bulb.

Many times I hear people say, “Oh, I was in such a good mood, but then Robert called and told me what Julie said about me,” or, “Oh, that phone call just ruined my day.” The opposite is also true: sometimes we are sad or depressed, but we get a nice phone call or letter in the mail, or we eat some good cookies, and we feel better.

How is that? How can one phone call or one rude comment from a person have so much control over us? Are our emotions so volatile and are we so impotent over them that others have more power to control our moods than we ourselves do?

It should not be like this. We, as humans on the spiritual path, are bigger, more divine and deeper than this. There is so much more to this human existence than the law of action and reaction. We must learn to keep that light switch in our own hands and to give it only to God. Otherwise we are switched on and off, on and off, all day long and the only effect is that the light bulb burns out!

Let us take whatever comes as *prasad*, as God’s blessing. Let us remain calm and steady in the face of both prosperity and misfortune. We must not lose our vital energy in this constant action and reaction to everyone around us.

How to remain unaffected by the waves of life? Spiritual practice.

Silence Time

One of the best ways to learn “no reaction” is through silence. When we are anxious, angry, tense or frustrated, we tend to say things which

we later regret; we let our words fuel the reaction in our hearts.

Let us learn the power of silence. Silence on the outside will lead to silence on the inside. This is why so many saints and other spiritual people have “silence time”; it is a time of remembering that we are more than our reactions, a time of tuning in to the Divine Insurance Company, a time of charging our inner batteries.

I recommend to everyone – those who are embarking on a spiritual path and those who have been treading a spiritual path for decades – to make some time each day for silence. It should not simply be time you’re already silent, such as while you’re sleeping or in the shower, but rather a time when you must consciously remind yourself, “I am in silence.”

The instinct to speak, to make our voices heard (literally and figuratively) is innate. Even young babies who cannot articulate their words are eager to babble, and they do so incessantly. To speak makes us feel that we are alive, that we are someone, that we are not forgotten. Many times people speak without even having anything to say. If you listen carefully you’ll hear how much people speak needlessly, giving running commentaries on their own actions, vocalizing every thought and sensation, rehearsing conversations which have not yet taken place and replaying those which have already occurred.

There are so many times in life when we wish we could take back our words. We lie in bed at night hearing and re-hearing everything we said that day which we wish we had not. Yet, a word once spoken is an arrow that has already been let loose from the bow. It can neither be returned to the bow nor caught mid-flight.

The practice of daily silence gets us into the habit of thinking before we speak, of remembering that – although we may have a thought – we have a choice whether to speak it out loud. This way, we become the master over our speech rather than its slave. Our words become our powerful and loyal servants, to be used when, how and where we deem fit. We will find that we “act” more and “re-act” less.

Grace of the Elephant

There was once a huge elephant crossing a wooden bridge high above a raging river. The bridge was old and rickety and it shook under the weight of the elephant. As the elephant was crossing the bridge he heard a voice say, "Son, Son!" The elephant looked around him, but he was all alone. "Son, son!" the voice continued. When the elephant reached the other side of the river, he saw a small ant crawl onto his nose. "Son!" the ant cried. "We almost collapsed that bridge, didn't we? Our weight was so great, so immense that the bridge almost collapsed beneath us, didn't it, son?" Of course the elephant knew that the ant's weight had been completely irrelevant to whether the bridge collapsed. And, of course, he knew that the tiny ant was not his mother. However, what good would it have done to engage in a battle of egos with the ant? Instead, the wise, calm elephant simply said, "You are right, Mother, our weight almost broke the bridge."

The elephant retained his serenity and retained his peace and joy. The ant, for what it's worth, was allowed to continue believing in its own greatness. But, how many of us could be like the elephant? Aren't we always trying to prove ourselves to others? Aren't we always ready to shoot down anyone who trespasses on our egos?

We must emulate the grace, humility and serenity of the elephant who knew that only harm would come from the fight. We must make "no reaction" the *sutra*, the *mantra* of our life. Then we will know real peace.

Message of the Buddha



There are many beautiful stories from the life of Lord Buddha demonstrating "No Reaction."

After attaining Enlightenment, the Buddha traveled from village to village spreading the great message. However, naturally he was not well received everywhere. Every great spiritual leader in history has had to face innumerable obstacles and

enemies. The power of the status quo is so great that people fear any new belief system which challenges their current one. Even when the message was coming from the mouth of one as enlightened, divine and peaceful as the Buddha, there were still those who responded negatively.

One day, the Buddha was besieged in a village by the violent and vehement tirades of some of the ignorant villagers who did not understand the Buddha's great message. They provoked him, insulted him, belittled him and abused him. The Buddha remained absolutely unshaken, and the peaceful smile never left his lips even as these people spit in his face.

After several hours during which the Buddha received the onslaught in silent peace, a light began to dawn on the abusers. They ceased their abuse and several fell humbly at the Buddha's feet begging his forgiveness.

"But tell us," they asked. "How is it possible that you just sat there for so long without defending yourself, without fighting back, without saying one word?"

The Buddha responded as follows: "My dear, if I send you a package but you refuse to receive it from the postmaster's hands, to whom does the package belong?" The villagers agreed that the package would still belong to the sender if it was not accepted or received.

"In the same way," the Buddha continued, "if I do not accept the words you speak, if I do not receive them, then they do not belong to me. They still belong to you. You may speak whatever you wish. However, your words have not been accepted or received by me. Therefore, why should they affect me at all? This abuse does not belong to me; it belongs to you."

This is a divine example of "no reaction." The Buddha did not sit there silently sulking or rolling his eyes in disgust. Simply to refrain from speech is not the same as not reacting. A non-verbal response may be as powerful and damaging as a verbal one. No reaction truly means no reaction at all, on any level. It means not accepting or receiving the words which have been spoken as provocation.

The Crucial Space Between a Thought and an Action

Whenever I talk about “no reaction,” people frequently say that it is impossible. “How is it possible not to react when someone makes you angry or makes you sad?” Here it is very important to distinguish between feelings and actions. We are human, and part and parcel of being human is the softness of our hearts, the sensitivity of our emotions, and our susceptibility to joy, pain, anger and pleasure.

“No reaction” does not mean that we become indifferent and stoic or that our hearts turn to stone. It does not mean that we should not feel emotions in response to daily happenings. What it does mean is two-fold. First, it means that we should not let these emotions overpower us, that we should learn to become like the calm, stable depths of the ocean rather than like the turbulent waves. Second, it means that, although we may feel the emotion, although we may have an immediate, instinctive reaction in our heart and mind, we should not act out this reaction.

Thoughts come – that is natural and human. Only after great *sadhana* does one learn to master one’s thoughts. We must accept thoughts and emotions as human and, for the most part, inevitable. However, what we do based on the thoughts and emotions is our decision. That is where we must focus our attention.

To try to become thoughtless is a great *sadhana* and one that will take us to the peaks of Realization. However, that is a practice only for those whose lives are committed and dedicated to *sadhana*. For those living in the world, it is unrealistic to expect to attain a state of thoughtlessness in a short time.

That however does not doom you to a life of underscoring Newton’s Law – that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. It does not doom you to a life of negative reactions to life’s pains and difficulties.

If you become quiet and still, you will notice that between every thought and action there is a space, a brief moment of time – a gap. First, there is the thought that we want to act (for example, “I’m so angry, I am going to slap her”). Then there is a space. Then there is the action (actually picking up our hand and slapping her). The action may seem instantaneous if you are not aware. It may seem to you that you had no choice, that the reaction just came immediately. However, if you practice being aware, you will find that there is always a space after the thought or emotion and before the action. It may only be a split second, but it is there.

Grab that space. In that space you must find the restraint not to act. Have the feeling or thought, if you must. No problem. Acknowledge it. Try to remove it from your mind through prayer, good work and *japa* (chanting of God’s name). But, even if the thoughts seem intractable, realize that you have the power not to act on them. Tell yourself, “Okay. I have these thoughts of anger or jealousy or pain. I realize it. Temporarily I accept them, because it seems that right now there is nothing I can do about them, but I’m *not* going to act on them.”

The more you practice focusing on the space, the more you will be able to grab it. With time you will find that the space becomes longer and more conscious.

Responding negatively is easy. Fueling the fire of anger with more anger is easy. Meeting criticism with criticism is easy. Spreading pieces is easy.

The challenge comes when we want to spread peace. That is what we learn by grabbing the space. In that moment, we have the divine opportunity to meet pieces with peace, to douse the fire of anger with the water of compassion.

The Buddha said that he was like a river. Even the strongest, raging fire cannot last a moment if it is placed into the deep waters of a river. Similarly, if someone came to him full of burning flames of anger, the

flames were immediately extinguished by the flowing river of his love.

If we want to be torchbearers of peace, we must first become rivers of love, dousing all flames of discord in the waters of our own compassion and serenity.

No Junk Mail

Every day in our e-mail inboxes we receive so much “junk mail.” Does it affect us? Do we react to it? When we see an e-mail that we are going to receive \$10 million, do we become ecstatic? Of course not. We know it’s junk. When we receive an email filled with vulgar things do we become upset and offended? No. We know it was not intended for us but rather was sent out through the vast network of cyber-spam. We don’t even read it. We simply delete it and go on with our day.

Similarly, we must realize that so much of what comes to us during the day is simply “junk mail.”

We receive junk mail through our ears – by listening to gossip, by listening to lurid and offensive lyrics in a song, by listening to the man in the car next to us swear vulgarly while we are stopped at a red light, by listening to commercial advertisements telling us that our eternal and everlasting happiness is dependent upon our purchase of the right brand of soap.

Even the criticism or sarcasm we hear from those in our families, schools or offices can frequently be considered “junk mail.” They may speak the words to us, and hence we assume we are the true object of their disdain. However, frequently the harshness with which others speak to us is simply a product of their own depression, anxiety, jealousy or pain. We are no more the rightful recipient of that criticism than a fifteen year old student is the correct recipient of e-mails offering to lower his mortgage payments. However, the student understands the mail is junk, while we accept the criticism, receive it into our hearts, and allow it to hurt us.

We receive junk mail through our eyes – through the constant barrage of images and stimuli that flood our visual field every second, through the indoctrinating propaganda relayed carefully and methodically to us by the media in order to ensure the maximum effect, through the looks, smiles, frowns and tears on others faces. Most of this stimuli does not merely blow harmlessly across our consciousness like wispy clouds across the sky on a windy day, but rather it lingers around and seeps into our minds and hearts just as the cold dampness of black rain clouds seeps into our bones.

To truly remain peaceful, we must have a “no junk mail” policy on our hearts! That which is unacceptable should not be accepted. That which hurts us, offends us, injures us or simply wastes our time should be refused, just as if we received a gift sent to the wrong address.

There is of course criticism which is valid. We are not perfect, and there may be times in our lives when it is important to hear and accept someone’s criticism so that we can change ourselves for the better. There are also legitimate situations in life in which we cannot “send back” the pain, the tears, or the shock. There are times when that which saddens us is not “junk,” but rather an important part of our lives. As you practice meditation, no reaction and introspection, you will attain the ability to discriminate between that which is truly meant for you – for your ears, your eyes, and your heart – from that which is either random junk or simply someone else’s misplaced projections. You will learn to quickly sift through the real mail from the junk mail.

Daddy, It Happens

One of the greatest ways to practice “no reaction” is through a mantra I learned from a precocious and wise four-year-old girl.



“Stop accepting junk mail through your eyes and ears into your heart and mind. Throw it away or return it to the sender!”

I once was requested to attend a house-warming party at the home of a devotee many years ago. They had just built a large, beautiful home in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. On the day the home was finished and they were going to move in, we had a special puja (ceremony) at the home followed by a gathering. When I arrived there I was taken to the new living room – replete with wall-to-wall plush white carpeting. I was seated on a couch at the far end of the living room, and the host entered from the kitchen at the opposite end. He was carrying a glass of orange juice for me on a tray. As he entered the living room, his young daughter, barely four years old, ran up to him and excitedly asked, “Can I take the juice to Swamiji? Please Daddy?”

The father was quite pleased that his young daughter was so eager to serve a Swamiji. In Indian culture, when children exhibit pious behavior and a tendency toward service it is seen as a reflection of the parents’ own dedication and piety. “Sure, honey,” he told his daughter as he gently handed her the tray. “But be careful not to spill it.”

This young girl walked, ever so gingerly, step by barefoot step across the length of the living room, barely making an indentation on the new carpet with her small feet. Both hands grasped the tray and her eyes were set, unwavering, on the silver glass of juice. When she got about two or three feet from me, she looked up (presumably to measure the number of steps left), her eyes met my eyes, and she was startled. Perhaps she’d never seen someone with such a long beard or so much hair. Or perhaps the excitement was overwhelming. Or perhaps she simply lost her balance. Whatever the reason, the result was the same: the glass wobbled, toppled and fell. A huge orange stain spread quickly through the white carpet.

The father, watching his daughter from the kitchen doorway, shouted, “Priya!” His voice was filled with unmasked rage and fury. Little Priya did not move. She did not even blink. She continued to stare down at the orange painting on their new white carpet. Again he shouted, even louder and more ferociously, “Priya!” Priya was very calm. She looked up from the carpet into my eyes. Her father shouted again, desperate for a reaction, “Priya!”

Finally, young Priya, her voice steady, calm and sweet, looked back toward her

father and said, "Daddy, it happens."

"Daddy, it happens!" What a mantra! Yes, it happens. She did not intend for it to happen. She did not maliciously plan to ruin her parents' new carpet or sabotage their elaborate plans for a house-warming party. She was not being reckless by running down the carpet. She had done everything correctly. She walked slowly. She held the tray with both hands. She concentrated with every ounce of concentration her small being could muster. Yet, still, it happened. There was no way to rewind the clock and undo the spill. The only question was how to respond.

"It happens" is one of the best no-reaction mantras I can give you. Inevitably, despite our best efforts and most sincere precautions, things will happen in life. But although events may happen, mistakes may happen, we should not let our reaction happen. Just remember, "*It happens.*"

INTROSPECTION

So, in the morning we begin with meditation. All day we practice no reaction. And at night? Introspection. At the end of the day, a good businessman always checks his balance sheet to see how much he has earned and how much he has spent. Similarly, a good teacher reviews her students' test scores: how many passed, how many failed?

By looking at their successes and failures, they assess how well they are doing. Are the businessman's profits greater than his losses? Are most of the teacher's students passing the exams?

In the same way, each night we must examine the balance sheet of our day: what were our successes, what were our failures? For all the successes, all our "plus-points," we must give credit to God. We have truly done nothing but let Him work through us. All credit goes to

Him. He is the one who saves us, the one who maintains our dignity and our success.

Just imagine if God had put a television screen on our foreheads and everything we thought was broadcasted for the whole world to see! All our reactions, all our inner sarcastic comments, all our judgments, all our weaknesses....just imagine! We would never succeed nor would we have many friends! Isn't it true?

It is by His grace that the world does not see our thoughts, only He sees our thoughts. For this, we thank Him. We say, "Thank you God for bringing success to this venture," or, "Thank you God for letting me truly make a difference in someone's life today," or simply, "Thank you God for all that went well today."

Our failures must also be given to God. The fault is definitely ours, yet He is so forgiving and so compassionate that He insists we turn these over to Him as well. We must say, "God, please take these minus points. You know that I am weak, you know that I am nothing. Look at all my failures, all my minus points for even just one day. I cannot go even one day without accumulating so many minus points. But, still you love me. Still you protect me from having the world see all my minus points. I am so weak, but you protect me."

In this way, each night we check our balance sheet, and we pray to God to help us have fewer minus points, to make us stronger, to make us better hands doing his work, and to give us more faith and devotion.

What to Check?

When we sit for introspection, what are all the things we should check about our day?

- **Check your volume:** Did you raise our voice unnecessarily today?
- **Check your values:** Did you make decisions in concert with

your deeper values and ethics? Did you display integrity, honesty and righteousness in your actions?

- **Check your eyes, ears and speech:** Did you accept any junk mail from someone with your eyes or ears? Did you send anyone else junk mail with your speech?
- **Check your actions:** Did you perform actions today which helped people or those which hurt people?
- **Check your thoughts and your mind:** What thoughts are filling your mind? Are your thoughts positive, pure and pious?

Gandhiji's Three Monkeys

Mahatma Gandhiji used to frequently make reference to a famous image of three monkeys. One monkey had his hands over his eyes, another had his hands over his ears and the third had his hands over his mouth. The caption was, “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” Gandhiji taught that in order to live *dharmic*, *sattvic*, and peaceful lives we need to adopt this motto in our lives.

I would add two more monkeys to Gandhiji's three. My first monkey would have his hands clasped together and the caption would read: “Do no evil.” Directly or indirectly so much that we do is harmful to others. In order to live peaceful lives, we must commit ourselves to *ahimsa*, or non-violence in word and deed.

My second additional monkey would have his hands on his head, and the caption would read: “Think no evil.” Thoughts are extraordinarily powerful. Many times we pay them little heed, mistakenly assuming that they are “only thoughts.” However, we must remember that everything which happens in the world – from the best, most beautiful, divine movements, to the worst, most evil acts of destruction – begins with a mere thought.

From our thoughts, our destiny is created. It is said beautifully:

*Sow a thought and reap an action. Sow an action and reap a habit.
Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a trait.
Sow a trait and reap a destiny.*

Therefore, we must be careful with our thoughts. We must protect our thoughts as if we were protecting our own future as well as the future of the world. That is the power of a thought!



*“See no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.
Also, we must think and do no evil.”*

Chapter 4

Adapt Yourself

Another great obstacle to our inner peace is our belief that every fault is someone else's. This is true in our families, in our workplaces, in the communities – everywhere.

We are so quick to judge others, so quick to accuse, so quick to condemn. Rarely do we turn this sharp eye of discrimination upon ourselves. Yet, that is exactly what we must do. So much of our time and energy is lost due to power struggles, ego conflicts, jealousy and back-biting. Not only is this counter-productive for any family or business, but it also ensures that everyone involved is bubbling and boiling with anger, frustration and jealousy.

Rather than focus on what others are doing or not doing, we must focus on ourselves. We must walk a straight line in our own lives, not trying to beat others out of the way or step on their heads as we proceed, but rather we must simply walk the truth of our own path, and find the way even amongst the challenges, obstacles and barriers on the road.

Find Your Own Way in the Midst of the Chaos

When I was very young, an old, revered saint came to Rishikesh to give his satsang at our ashram, Parmarth Niketan.

However, rather than staying in the comforts of the ashram, he used to stay in a small hut on the banks of the sacred Ganges river, a little bit away from the center of the town.

I was given the special seva (divine duty) of going to pick him up each morning

and bringing him to the ashram. As we walked through the busy marketplace, I would try to push everyone and everything out of his way so that the revered saint could walk comfortably and unimpeded to the ashram. I asked everyone along the way, "Side please. Please give us the way to walk." I would gently push all of the wandering cows and donkeys out of his path. I moved standing bicycles and fruit carts out of the way so he could pass.

Finally, as we reached the gate of the ashram, I felt very happy that I had been able to bring him so safely and smoothly, and that I had been able to clear such a nice path for him to walk.

This saint, however, looked at me lovingly and said, "Beta, kis kis ko hatate rahoge? Aur kab tak hatate rahoge?" ["My child, how many people, cows and donkeys can you push out of the way? For how long can you move other people and things out of your path? That is not the way. "] "Apna rasta banate jao. Apna rasta banake nikalte jao." ["Do not try to move others; rather find your way between the others and around them. Make your own path, but do not worry about moving others. Find your own way in the midst of the chaos."]

In our lives we frequently get frustrated and broken by feeling that others are blocking our way and thwarting our path. We blame their presence and their actions for our own failure. We tell ourselves that we would have been able to succeed if only they had let us, if only they had moved out of the way for us. We try to push people and obstacles aside to clear a way for ourselves in life.

However, obstacles never stop coming. People who are jealous never stop trying to block our path. For how long can we try to move them aside? How many obstacles, how many enemies can we try to push away? The answer is to simply find our own way, around them, between them. If they are blocking the path on the right, we walk on the left. If they are blocking the path on the left, we walk on the right.

We must be more concerned about finding our own way rather than focusing on moving all of those whom we think are blocking our path.

For those who are pure in mind, thought and deed, there will always be a path in which to walk. The path may be narrow at times and it may seem that obstacles and enemies line both sides. But we must humbly and sincerely make our own way on the path of life. We must just keep walking the path of our *dharmā*, the path of righteousness, the path of honesty, purity and piety without worrying about those who try to block our way.

So much of our precious time, energy and focus is wasted in the futile task of trying to remove obstacles and other people from our path, but this is not necessary. The more attention we give to those who are trying to sabotage us and thwart our progress, the less time and energy we have to walk the right path. By doing that, in a way the enemies win, for they have stolen our peace of mind, our tranquility, and our joy, as well as our time. Instead of trying to fight them out of the way, we must remain humble, pure and single-minded on the goal. If we can see our destination clearly then we will always be able to find a path in which to walk.

Find your own path around the obstacles. Carefully examine the situation and see where the path is clear. Then, choose that path and continue on your way.

Chapter 5

Acceptance of the Divine Will

Just Accept and You'll Be Guided to the Destination

One of the greatest sources of depression and discontent is our inability to accept that which befalls us. We try to impose our will onto every situation. We try to sculpt the world into our own pre-conceived image of what is right, as though we were appointed the Great Divine Sculptor, given the task of ensuring that everything conformed to the correct mold. However, we were not appointed as such, nor has anyone been given the Divine Vision to know the Divine Plan. Thus, for us to take on the task of trying to make the world conform to our will is not only futile, but it also ensures that our lives will be frustrating, unfruitful and marked by perspiration rather than inspiration!

The only way to live peacefully, with joy and bliss, and to fulfill your individual *dharma* here on Earth is to allow God's will rather than your own will to guide you.

These days in the West all the new cars have GPS navigation systems where the computer in the car gives directions on how to reach your destination. As you sit in the car, you simply enter the address of where you are going, and throughout the journey a pleasant woman's voice guides you, "Take a left turn in 200 meters." However, after you've entered the destination address, before her guided instructions begin, you must press the "Accept" button on the screen. If the button is not pushed, the guided route will not begin and you will be left to your own devices to reach the destination.

In our lives, it is the same. There is a divine Source, a Power, a Super-computer ready to guide us every step of the way. We must simply push the “Accept” button!

GPS stands for “Global Positioning System,” but I think it also stands for “God’s Perfect System.” He knows the way to the destination of our life, to the fulfillment of our unique, special and divine mission. He has designed the map. He has laid the roads. He has created the mountains, rivers, highways and train crossings. He knows every turn, every corner, every one-way street. He never loses His way.

If we don’t push “Accept” on the GPS system in the car, our journey will be filled with tension and worry. At each intersection we will have to gauge whether it is best to continue ahead or to turn left or right. We will have to stop and ask directions from people passing by who may not be any more acquainted with the roads than we are. We may eventually reach the destination, if we are focused, efficient and lucky, but we may be late and the journey will have been tense.

Alternatively, if we simply press “Accept,” we will be guided gently and correctly at every step. We will know where to turn, where to continue straight and where to stop. Our minds will be free to contemplate God, to think pleasant and peaceful thoughts, to converse with others in the car. The journey will be peaceful, smooth and enjoyable.

Similarly in our lives, if we accept God’s will, if we allow Him to guide us along the path, our lives will be filled with inspiration rather than perspiration, and we will certainly reach the destination in the shortest amount of time.

Frequently however, we doubt God’s path. “Is this really the way?” we wonder. We become skeptical of the Divine plan. We lose heart and faith.

Once there were three men sitting under a tree in a garden who started talking about God. One man said, “I don’t believe that God is perfect. In fact, there

are so many things which even an ordinary reasonable man would be able to plan better than God. For example, look over there.” The man drew his friends’ attention to the pumpkin patch where hundreds of pumpkins were growing large and round. “God has put these huge, heavy pumpkins on the end of tiny, thin vines which always collapse under the weight of their enormous fruit.”

One of the other men joined in, “Yes, you’re right,” he said. “Look there at the mango trees. Huge, strong, sturdy trees. And their fruit? A tiny four-ounce mango! What kind of backwards planning is this? Put the heavy fruit on the thin weak vine and put the light fruit on the tall strong tree? I agree that God definitely is far from perfect.”

However, the third man was unpersuaded. “What you both are saying certainly is compelling. You are right that it might have made more sense to put the heavy fruit on the strong tree and the light fruit on the thin vine, but still I believe that there must be a bigger, better, Divine plan. I still believe that God knows exactly what He’s doing and that His planning is perfect even if we don’t understand it.”

The two friends chided the third for his simplicity and blind faith. “Can’t you see with your own eyes how stupid it is? Even an idiot would know better!”

Wounded by the other men’s criticism, yet secure in His faith, the third man stood up and went to rest under a nearby tree, separate from his two critical friends. All three drifted off into a deep afternoon slumber in the shade of the mango trees.

With the afternoon clouds, a strong wind rose up and whipped through the trees. Branches swayed in the heavy wind, causing ripe mangoes to fall to the ground. The sleeping skeptics awoke, startled by mangoes falling on them.

One of them exclaimed, “Our friend the believer was right! It is certainly a good thing that only mangoes hang from these branches. The weight of a falling mango was enough to startle me from sleep and bruise my cheek. Had it been heavy pumpkins falling onto us we would have become pumpkin pie! It is very good those heavy pumpkins grow so close to the ground!”

God's ways are frequently mysterious; we fail to see the full picture until it is unveiled for us. However, the enigmatic nature of His plan should not cause us to lose faith or to impose our own will. We must continue to "Accept" the guidance given by God's Perfect System whether we are familiar with the route He is taking us or not. Let us always remember that He is the creator, He is the planner, He is the driver and He is the guide.

Chapter 6

Other Barriers to Inner Peace

The barriers to inner peace are many and multifaceted. Peace – our true, inherent, natural nature – is obscured and veiled from our view (thus absent from our lives) due to layer upon layer of ego, emotions, desires and attachments. We’ve discussed already how to wipe away the layers of ego, desires and attachments. We’ve also discussed, in general, the detrimental role that our volatile emotional life plays in our endless, fruitless quest for peace.

However, of the emotions, three of them are the most insidious and play the greatest role in ensuring that we continue to live in a perpetual state of restlessness, anxiety and dissatisfaction. These are anger, judgment and jealousy. I will address anger and judgment here in this section on inner peace, and I will address jealousy in the third section when we talk about peace in the community, as jealousy is one of the greatest hurdles to living and working together in peace.

ANGER

Depression is unfulfilled expectation turned inward. Anger is unfulfilled expectation turned outward. We expect other people to behave in particular ways, to perform particular tasks in a particular manner, to treat us with a particular amount of respect, to say particular things. We expect the world around us to move and function according to our particular view point of what is “right.” Inevitably though, the people around us do not act in accordance with the role we’ve assigned

them, and the world does not function in accordance with all of our preconceived notions. Hence, expectations are frustrated and we become angry (unless we turn that frustration inward, in which case we become depressed).

The insidiousness of anger lies in its cyclical nature. I become angry that Person A does not respond in the manner I want him to. My anger, in turn, makes Person A even less likely in the future to act according to my wishes. I, therefore, become more angry. Or, alternatively, a situation in my life is not working out the way I had hoped or anticipated. I become angry in response. Then my anger clouds my vision, steals my patience and handicaps my decision-making capacity, thus depriving me of any possibility to rectify the current life-situation. As my situation becomes even worse, I become even more angry.

When we become angry our blood pressure rises, our pulse rate jumps, our vision becomes clouded, and we become “possessed” by a being who seems not to be us, who says things we later regret and commits acts for which we must reap the consequences.

Anger – whether it’s expressed, suppressed, or repressed – is one of the greatest contributors to not only psychological distress but also to physical ailments ranging from heart attacks and strokes to diabetes.

What is the answer then? How to extinguish this deadly fire that burns within us when it is still kindling, before it explodes and turns our life into a flaming inferno?

The task of freeing ourselves from the vile and violent hands of anger can be approached in two ways – preventatively and responsively. Working preventatively is, clearly, the most effective model as it eliminates the very existence of anger before it even begins to burn within us.

How to Prevent Anger

1. Minimize Expectations

The first step to removing anger is to remove our expectations. If anger is due to frustrated expectations, and if expectations are bound to get frustrated by someone or some situation at some time, then the presence of anger in our lives tragically becomes inevitable and inescapable. Thus, the best solution to preventing anger is to reduce our expectations. As I mentioned earlier, “*Expectation is the mother of frustration. Acceptance is the mother of peace and joy. Expect less. Accept more.*” We must cultivate a spirit of true, deep acceptance of all those around us, not only for their sake, but for our sake as well. Living in an environment of acceptance gives everyone the freedom and the space to grow, to live and to behave according to their own destiny, their own beliefs and their own natures.

This does not mean, of course, that we should not try to gently encourage those we care about to choose the correct path. It does not mean we should watch idly as our loved ones act in decadent, heedless ways. Nor does it mean that we should complacently accept failure in our lives. The acceptance of which I speak is not a passive, complacent, apathetic acceptance. Rather, it is an active, positive relinquishing of the fruits of our labor. We must work hard for that which matters to us. We must toil diligently and assiduously to achieve our goals. We must try indefatigably to guide our loved ones on the right path. However, we must turn over the results, the fruits of our labor to the Divine Will. We must rest assured that we have done the best to our ability and relinquish attachment to what actions will reap what results.

To act with diligence, conscientiousness and tirelessness coupled with non-attachment is very difficult. To live with love, compassion and tenderness while remaining unattached is achievable only after many years of intense *sadhana*. Once we give ourselves fully to a person or a project we inherently become attached. The development of non-attachment without apathy or dispassion is achieved only by a rare number of truly advanced beings.

Thus, if we cannot be present, fully-committed and fully-compassionate while not being attached to the results of our actions, and if the results are inevitably going to bring frustration at some point, then what is the answer? How to respond when our expectations are not fulfilled? Earlier, I spoke about “no-reaction.” I gave tools to help us stay calm in the moment and not react. Yet, let us go a step deeper into our human nature that predisposes us to react in the first place. How can we develop an internal consciousness that is so peaceful, calm and understanding that “no-reaction” becomes instinctive?

2. We Are Not the Center of The Universe

We must cease to see ourselves as the center of the universe and all other people as actors in our own drama. Each person has his own *karma* to work through in this lifetime which influences and determines his actions. Yet, often we take every action, every word and every response from others as though the other is only an actor in our own universe. When someone says something which insults us, we automatically assume that she meant to be insulting. When someone does something that hurts us, we automatically assume that he intended the hurt, or at least that he was aware of it. Rarely do we step back and ponder what other circumstances – having nothing to do with us – may have led him or her to act or speak in the way that they did.

In most circumstances that I have seen, everyone is acting and re-acting from their own fear, desires and confusion, along with their own *karmic* path. These fears, desires and confusion were generated internally, and their *karmic* path is something over which we have no control. Therefore, instead of assuming that every person’s action has to with us, we must learn to practice stepping back, cultivating a wider, vaster panoramic view of the situation and seeing all possibilities of why and how someone may have acted the way he or she did.

The same is true with projects on which we work that may or may not succeed. When something does not go the way we anticipated, we tend to blame ourselves. We assume that it was some fault, failing

or curse of our own that caused the project not to bear the intended fruit. However, God's plan is sometimes inscrutable and His ways are frequently mysterious. The reason for a project's failure or a venture's loss may have no connection with our hard work or capabilities. It may simply have to do with the script of the Eternal and Universal Drama.

There is a story of a poor man who owned nothing but a donkey to ride, a lantern and a rooster. One night he rode into a village hoping to find shelter and a hot meal. However, no one in the village would house him for the night. Feeling very dejected, he continued to ride his donkey to a hill near the town. During the night he was visited by even more misfortune. A lion came and killed his donkey and rooster, and a harsh wind blew out his lantern. He was now left alone, light-less and hungry in the cold, dark night, and he could not imagine a worse fate.

However, in the morning when he walked back to the town to see if he could beg for a cup of hot tea, he found that a band of robbers had come into the town overnight, killed all the inhabitants, and looted every home and shop. He then understood the divine workings of God. Had he been given a place to stay, he too would have met the same fate. Had his lantern not blown out, the light would have alerted the robbers to his presence and he would have also been killed. Had the lion not killed his donkey and rooster, they each would have made noise (as roosters and donkeys are inclined to do), calling the attention of the robbers. He then realized that, although he had lost his donkey and rooster, God had saved his life.

Similarly, in our own lives, much that happens is for the best. It may take hours or days or even years for us to understand that, but we must not lose faith.

3. Have A Spiritual Corner

I always say, "If you never want to be cornered in your life, have a spiritual corner in your heart and in your home." We spend so much time and energy designing and decorating our rooms and offices. We have beautiful bookcases for our books and photographs. We have

spacious closets for our clothes. If our body is tired we can get into bed or take a hot bath. But, where is the place for our heart, our mind and our emotions? Where is the place where we can go to be replenished and rejuvenated?

That place should be the spiritual corner. If we live in a large, spacious home we might be able to dedicate a full room as the “prayer room” or “meditation room” or “breathing room.” However, it doesn’t matter if we don’t have that much space. The quantity of space is not what is relevant; only the quality is.

The spiritual corner should be a place filled with any and all objects that bring peace to your mind and heart. If you worship God in any particular form, you can have images of that form. If you do not worship God in form, then you can put things there that connect you to God spiritually, such as flowers or candles.

The spiritual corner should be kept *only* for spiritual practice – for meditation, *japa*, *puja*, introspection, relaxation, breathing, silence, etc. Over time, you will see that the vibrational energy there will come to be different from the rest of the house. The place will be “charged.” As soon as you enter the room or sit in that corner, your entire nervous system will undergo not only emotional and psychological changes, but physiological changes as well. The energy will be calm, serene and tender.

4. Recharge Your Batteries

Typically, outbursts of anger and frustration are due to our spiritual batteries being low. We overextend ourselves so much – physically, emotionally and energetically – every day and take such little time for



“If you never want to be cornered in your life, have a spiritual corner in your heart and in your home.”

personal replenishment. Just as the body needs many hours of sleep each day in order to be fresh, healthy and productive, so we also need to give time to our spirit to rest, withdraw and reconnect with the Source. Meditation, silence, prayer – these are all ways in which our spirit reconnects with the Source and draws energy and inspiration from the infinite, Divine Ocean.

When our mobile phones lose battery charge, what happens? The line becomes full of static. We cannot hear each other properly. Mistakes and miscommunications arise. We get “cut off” from each other. In order to solve the problem we have only to reconnect the phone to the charger. In a short time, the batteries will be recharged and our conversation can continue, clearly and uninterrupted.

The same is true in our lives. When our spiritual batteries run low our lives become full of static! We move through each day in an unplanned, unfocused and uncentered way. The connection to our deep Self, to the inner voice, to that sacred well of peace within us gets “cut off,” and we begin to wander aimlessly and without direction.

When our spiritual batteries are low we lose touch with the infinite Source of peace and joy; hence small events during the course of each day take on exaggerated importance and our emotional well-being is at the mercy of every person, every phone call and every traffic jam.

How to recharge our batteries? Plug yourself back into the Source. Get connected again to God. Sometimes people mistakenly say, “God is so far away from me,” or, “God has left me.” No. It is never like that. It is we who have left God, we who have gone astray. The moment we reconnect, the connection is there!

The spiritual corner should be the place where we reconnect to the Divine Source, where we recharge our batteries. When our batteries are charged we can hear not only each other clearly but we can also clearly hear the inner, Divine voice.

How to Respond to Anger

Prevention is always the best medicine. By following the steps outlined above, we will slowly find that our propensity to anger diminishes. Day by day, we will find that we are more peaceful, more loving, less irritable and slower to anger.

However, despite our most sincere efforts at prevention, there will still inevitably be times when the demon of anger will rear its fiery head. Before we realize it, we will find our blood rising within us, our hearts beating fast and the volcano within about to erupt. What to do then? How to save ourselves and our sanity from the clutches of anger? Below are some simple yet profound techniques, ancient yet timeless, to help us gather the reins of our emotions back into our own hands and return to a state of equanimity and peace.

The goal of all of these techniques is simply to get *you* back in touch with *you*! When we become filled with anger, we lose ourselves and anger takes over as ruler and king.

1. Breathe

The breath is inextricably, intricately and inherently linked to both our deepest Self and also to our most fleeting emotions. The same breath can either take us deep into the core of our Divine Being or into a state of ephemeral, superficial passion, anger or anxiety.

Try it. Close your eyes gently. Take a long, slow inhalation and an even slower, longer exhalation. Take the breath from low and deep in the abdomen rather than from just the upper part of the lungs and rib-cage. Let the abdomen expand on the inhalation and release on the exhalation. Feel yourself drop deeper and deeper on the long, slow exhalation. Even in just one or two minutes you will notice a profound sense of connection with the Self and a calming detachment from the current stress in your external world.

Now, close your eyes again. Breathe quickly. This is not a *pranayama* exercise so don't overdo it, but take the breaths shallowly – from high up in the lungs and sternum. You will see how quickly a state of anxiety rises within you and how difficult it is to even keep the eyes closed. The mind instinctively wants to open the eyes and respond to the stress-inducing situation which lies before us.

The breath is very powerful and serves both as a cause and also as an effect of our emotions. When we are calm, peaceful, centered and in a state of Love, our breath is slow, deep and long. When we are angry our breath becomes short, fast and shallow. But the breath is not only a symptom or indicator of our mental state, it also can be used to change our mental state. Anger causes shallowness and quickness of the breath; conversely, long, deep and slow breaths rid the body of anger just as our immune system fights off invading bacteria.

The next time you feel that unmistakable sensation of anger rising within you, immediately close your eyes and return to your breath. Concentrate only on the breath. Help the breath become long, deep and slow. You will see how quickly the anger dissipates. Of course, your breathing does not necessarily excuse someone else's mistake, but it makes you the master of your actions and emotions rather than their slave. It gives you the freedom to decide how to act and what to say rather than being a puppet in the hands of your emotions.

2. Be a Witness

One of the best practices for when we find the wave of anger rising within us is to be a witness. Watch the anger. Don't try to fight it. Don't run from it. Don't push it aside. Just be aware of it. Watch it. See it. Recognize it. Then realize that it is only an emotion and this, too, shall pass.

As I mentioned earlier, in an ocean, the depths are still. The surface is turbulent, tossed about by the incessant waves. We are the same. Our deepest, innermost core – our Center – is calm, peaceful, and joyful,

One with the Divine. On top of that core we have piled so many layers of emotions, expectations, attachments and frustrations that our surface too has become turbulent.

Unfortunately, due to ignorance and illusion, we have come to associate ourselves with the turbulent surface rather than with the peaceful, imperturbable core. Like a leaf in the ocean, we allow ourselves to get tossed around by every passing wave or gust of air.

Instead, let us imagine ourselves as a meditator, sitting on a cliff watching the waves crash onto the rocks below. Regardless of how turbulent the waves become, regardless of how furious and ferocious their intensity, we do not throw ourselves off the cliff and into their midst. Rather we sit and watch, calmly and peacefully. The waves are thrashing. We are watching.

Whenever the waves of anger rise up within us and begin to crash and thrash in our minds, let us remember that we have a choice. We can hurl ourselves into their furious midst and allow ourselves to be tossed about like pebbles in the stormy sea, or we can sit on the cliffside, watching the waves, remaining safe, serene and far above their fury.

3. Don't Bite the Mad Dog

If you were taking a walk in the park one day and suddenly a mad dog came dashing at you and bit your leg, what would you do? You might grab your leg in pain. You might put your sweater there to stop the bleeding. You might even cry if the pain were severe. However, under no circumstances would you run after the mad dog, chase him through the park and bite him back! Instinctively, regardless of the pain inflicted by the bite, you would realize the futility and absurdity of trying to “get even” with the dog. In fact, there is a saying in media circles which goes: “*Dog Bites Man*,” is not news. “*Man Bites Dog*” is great news.”

Yet, in our lives, when someone inflicts pain upon us, when someone

– out of his own fear or confusion – treats us in a way that hurts, what do we do? How do we react? Typically our minds become filled with thoughts of vengeance and retaliation. We react instinctively. We want “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” A hurtful comment begets a hurtful comment. A cold shoulder begets a cold shoulder. Betrayal begets betrayal. In essence, our usual response is the equivalent of running down the road after that mad dog, grabbing him, breaking his legs and sinking our teeth into his flesh.

Restraining ourselves from biting the mad dog is remaining aware of our true nature and the dog’s true nature. We know that we are a human, capable of logic, planning, common sense and understanding. We know that the mad dog is merely that – a dog in the clutches of rabid illness, unable to control his own behavior. Because we are able to understand this distinction between us and the dog, his bite may hurt the flesh but it does not wound our spirit. When others act like dogs, when they bite us and injure us, let us remember that just because we’ve been bitten doesn’t mean that we should bite back. Just because they are “mad” doesn’t mean that we should lose our own sanity.

4. Remember Your Own *Dharma*: The Saint & Scorpion

Once there was a sadhu (monk), living on the banks of a river performing his sadhana with great piety and determination. One day as the holy man went for his bath in the river, he noticed a scorpion struggling in the water. Scorpions, by nature, cannot swim and the sadhu knew that if he did not save the scorpion, it would drown. Therefore, carefully picking up the scorpion, the saint lifted it out of the waters and was just about to set it down gently on the shore when the scorpion stung his finger. In pain, the sadhu instinctively flung his hand and the scorpion went flying back into the river. As soon as the sadhu regained his composure from the sting, he again lifted the scorpion out of the water. Again, before he could set the scorpion safely on the land, the creature stung him. Yet again, as the sadhu shook his hand in response to the pain, the scorpion fell back into the water. This drama went on for several minutes as the holy man continued to try to save the life of the drowning scorpion and

the scorpion continued to sting his savior's hand before reaching the freedom of the river bank.

A man who had been out hunting in the forest noticed this drama between the holy man and the scorpion. He watched as the saint carefully and gingerly lifted the creature out of the water, only to fling it back in as his hand convulsed in pain from each fresh sting. Finally, the hunter said to the sadhu, "Revered Swamiji, forgive me for my frankness, but it is clear that the scorpion is simply going to continue to sting you each and every time you try to carry it to safety. Why don't you give up and just let it drown?"

The holy man replied, "My dear child, the scorpion is not stinging me out of malice or evil intent. It is simply his nature to sting. Just as it is the water's nature to make me wet, so it is the scorpion's nature to sting. He doesn't realize that I am carrying him to safety. That is a level of conscious comprehension greater than his brain can achieve. But, just as it is the scorpion's nature to sting, so it is my nature to save. Just as he is not leaving his nature, why should I leave my nature? My dharma is to help any creature of any kind – human or animal. Why should I let a small scorpion rob me of the divine nature which I have cultivated through years of sadhana?"

In our lives we encounter people who harm us, who insult us, who plot against us, whose actions seem calculated to thwart the successful achievement of our goals. Sometimes these are obvious acts, such as a co-worker who continually steals our ideas or speaks badly of us to our boss. Sometimes these acts are more subtle – a friend, relative or colleague who unexpectedly betrays us or who we find has been secretly speaking negatively about us behind our back. We often wonder, "How could he hurt me like that? How could she do this to me?" Then, our hearts become filled with anger and pain, and our minds start plotting vengeance.

Slowly we find that our own actions, words and thoughts become driven by anger and pain. We find ourselves engaged in cunning thoughts of revenge. Before we realize it, we are injuring ourselves more by

allowing the negative emotions into our hearts than the other person injured us by their words or actions. They may have insulted us or plotted against us or sabotaged a well-deserved achievement at work, but we injure ourselves more deeply and more gravely by allowing our hearts and minds to turn dark.

Our *dharma* is to be kind, pure, honest, giving, sharing and caring. Due to ignorance, due to lack of understanding (much like the scorpion who doesn't understand the *sadhu's* gentle intention), or due to the way in which their own *karmic* drama is unfolding, others may act with malice, deceit, selfishness or indifference. We, however, must not let their actions or their ignorance deprive us of fulfilling *our dharma*. We must not allow ourselves to be lowered by their ignorance, their habits or their greed. The darkness in their heart should not be allowed to penetrate into the lightness of our hearts.

Sometimes people ask, "But Swamiji, how long should we continue to tolerate, continue to forgive, continue to love in the face of other people's aggression, jealousy, hatred and malice?" The answer: *forever*. It is not our job to mete out punishment to others based on their actions. That is God's job and the job of the law of *karma*. They will get their punishment. Do not worry. They will face the same misery they are bringing to you. But, it is not our job to hand that to them. It is God's job and – with the exacting law and science of *karma* – evil-doers will receive punishment, but not by our hands. If we allow ourselves to injure, insult, plot against or hurt them, then we are simply accruing more and more negative *karma* for ourselves.

If the *sadhu* had allowed the scorpion to suffer and drown in the river, he would have forsaken his own divine path in life. Sure, we can say that the scorpion deserved to die for what he had done to the *sadhu*. We can say that the *sadhu* had tried and tried to save the scorpion but the scorpion would not let him. We can give a list of explanations to excuse the *sadhu* for not rescuing the scorpion. But, to pardon bad behavior is not the goal. To excuse ourselves for failing to fulfill our

duties is not the goal. The goal is to live up to our full, divine potential as conscious, holy beings.

So, let us remember that our *dharma* is to live lives of purity, piety, peace, selflessness, integrity and love, and let us never allow anyone or anyone's actions – however malicious or crazy or poisonous they may be – to divert us from that goal.

5. Understand = Stand Under

Much of our anger stems from misunderstandings. Someone says something or does something and we misunderstand it or misinterpret the motives. Our response is a reflection of our interpretation. Thus, when we misunderstand the meaning behind someone's words or actions, we frequently create a negative situation which did not previously exist.

We must stop and ask ourselves "What is really going on? What might be all the possible reasons that person said or did what I think he said or did?" In order to find the answer, we must be humble enough to momentarily disengage from the immediate reason and reaction which comes to our mind.

Say a co-worker goes privately to the boss in order to get a raise. As we walk by the boss' office we hear that she is over-valuing her own work and exaggerating the reasons why she is so important to the company. We hear her take credit for projects in which we know she only played a small role, and in which we actually played a vital role.

Immediately, our instinctive reaction is one of judgment and anger. "How dare she take credit for work we have done! How dare she have the audacity to make herself seem so important! How dare she be the one to approach the boss for a raise when so many people (ourselves included) deserve it more!" we say. We immediately start planning what we will say to the boss when she leaves his office, how we will repudiate what she said, how we will get all the co-workers together to prove to the boss that she is not nearly as crucial and important as she

claims to be. Essentially, we assume that her motives are dishonest and egoistic.

However, if a small angel allowed us to see the movie of what took place last night at her dinner table we might see the following scene: Her husband, with tear-filled eyes, announces that he has been laid off from work with only thirty days notice. Her son – in the midst of chemotherapy treatments for cancer – is unable to eat anything due to the pervasive nausea he experiences from the treatment. When she finally does manage to feed him one chapati and a small bowl of dal, he immediately rushes into the bathroom to vomit. Her father-in-law, hands shaking uncontrollably due to Parkinson's disease, reminds her, scornfully, that she must be cursed as she's brought such bad luck upon the family.

As her tears soak through her pillowcase, sleep evasive as ever, she realizes that she will never be able to single-handedly support the family on her current income. How long it will be before her husband is re-employed is anyone's guess. The burden, for now, is solely upon her. She resolves that tomorrow she has no choice but to beg the boss for a raise and hope that he will see her as an important enough part of the team to justify an increase in salary.

Had we been able to watch this movie, had we been given insight into our co-worker's true motivations, the wave of anger and vengeance in which we found ourselves drowning would never have washed over us in the first place.

Where there is understanding there is compassion. Where there is understanding there is tolerance. Where there is understanding there is acceptance. It is the tragic lack of understanding between people that leads to much of our personal and interpersonal anguish.

In order to understand someone else, we must be prepared to place aside – even just for a moment – our own ego-centric world view. We must be prepared to look beyond our own preconceived notions of justice, righteousness and truth. We must be prepared to step out of the one-dimensional and self-centered paradigm of thought in which we typically operate.

In order to truly understand someone, we must be prepared to “stand under” them, to see them from below rather than from above. Only by removing the glasses of selfishness and superiority through which we’ve become accustomed to viewing the world can we truly see another person.

So, the next time we find ourselves outraged, shocked or pained by another person’s behavior, let us try to stand under them, to see them through our divine, unmasked eyes of humility and egolessness. Let us pray for the purity of sight and the purity of mind to see their true motivations and circumstances.

6. Listen More

Frequently the people who injure us, who pain us and who anger us actually do tell us the reasons and the truth, but we don’t listen. We become hurt by our husband’s reticence about his feelings. We want to hear him say, “I love you,” more frequently than he does. We yearn for effusive and demonstrative acts of affection. We interpret his reticence and restraint to a lack of love.

However, it is likely that he has told us already (either verbally or non-verbally) that, due to several reasons stemming from his own childhood and his own insecurities, he has never developed the ability to show his feelings to others. He may have lived a repressed childhood or one in which he had to be the “man of the house,” taking care of everyone else, and hence did not have the luxury of expressing his own feelings of pain or fear or confusion. Or, he may simply be from a culture where it is not considered socially appropriate for men to be effusively emotional or show tenderness.

Yet, do we listen to these explanations? Rarely. We usually undermine them with further examples of ways in which he has let us down, situations in which we needed his affection and he was unable to demonstrate it.

One crucial component of understanding is to listen. Frequently, we hear someone, but we don't listen. We hear the sound of their voice. We hear the noise. We hear their words and verbal intonations, but we have not really listened to what that person has told us. Listening implies focus, concentration, and attention. Hearing can be passive and unfocused, like the sound of a TV in the background while we are listening carefully to a person on the telephone.

Many times we think we have listened, when really all we have done is heard. Our ears have processed the auditory sensations, but our heart and mind have remained unchanged and unaffected.

In order to understand someone's deep emotions, in order to be able to "stand under" them with compassion and love, we need to open not only our ears but also our hearts and our minds to the words they are speaking and to the message beneath the words.

JUDGMENT

Our constant judging of others is not only detrimental to our interpersonal relationships, but it also wrecks havoc on our own mental health. The more we become focused on others and their perceived faults, the farther we stray from our own path. To judge others makes us feel superior, confident, and worthy. We value ourselves in comparison to others. Therefore, to put others down makes us feel higher. This is not the way however to succeed in any area of life.

We may feel temporarily good when we put others down. Our egos get a natural "high" when we criticize and condemn the other. Yet, we are actually sinking lower and lower on our own quest for true peace.

There is a wonderful story told of two monks who had renounced the world and taken vows of celibacy and simplicity. One monk was older and the other was relatively young. They were wandering in the forest one day and came upon a

rushing river. On the edge of the river stood a beautiful young woman. Her face was marked by anxiety as she explained to the two monks that she needed to get across but that the river was rushing too fast and she was afraid. She humbly requested that one of the monks be good enough to carry her across. The older monk immediately picked her up gallantly and carried her to the other side while the younger monk walked by his side. Upon reaching the other shore, the monk placed the woman safely on the ground, and they bid her farewell.

One week later the two monks were sitting under a tree for their morning meditations when the younger monk suddenly exclaimed, "OK, I've been keeping this inside for the last week but I cannot keep it inside anymore. I cannot believe the way you picked up that young, beautiful woman and carried her body so close to yours! After taking vows of celibacy before God, after promising to forsake the touch of a woman, how could you wrap your arms around her body and carry her tightly in your arms? I had such respect, even reverence for you for so many years, and now I feel so betrayed. You are not a true monk! You are not a true celibate! I must find another companion with whom I can tread a path of purity."

The elder monk listened with a faint smile growing across his face. "My brother," he said when the younger monk had finished his tirade. "I carried that young woman in my arms for approximately two minutes and left her by the side of the river after setting her down safely. She has not been with me since. You, on the other hand, have carried her in your heart for the last week. You have slept with her, eaten with her, breathed with her and even meditated with her because you cannot get her out of your mind. She is living permanently in your heart. It is your own heart you must seek to purify, not the actions of your traveling companions."

How many precious minutes of each day do we waste by judging others? Too many. We barely even realize how much we do it. We analyze and judge each other's actions, words, and even each others' articles of clothing or choice of perfume. We assume, naturally, that if we were in their shoes we would do nearly everything better. But, like in the case of the two monks, it is really our own hearts which

need to be bettered, not the actions of another.

This constant judging and condemning of others pollutes our own hearts, wastes our precious time, creates boundaries and barriers between us, and steals our peace. We are so busy re-hashing everything other people did during the day of which we did not approve that we cannot fall asleep at night.

Further, much of our “judgments” are not even true. We are so quick to condemn others while we are so slow to condemn ourselves. This inevitably leads to a situation where we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt but don’t give it to others.

There is a well-known term in psychology called the “Fundamental Attribution Error.” What this means, in essence, is that when someone else does something of which we disapprove, we attribute their actions to their nature. She did something mean because she is a mean person. He acted in that parsimonious way because he is a miser. She made a mistake on the report because she is careless, or because she is inept. He was short with me on the phone because he is rude. However, when it is we who have acted in a less than ideal way we attribute it to the situation. I made the mistake on the report because I was given the wrong figures, or because I had been up all night working on it and my eyes were bleary. I was short with him on the phone because I was in a huge rush. I acted in a less than generous way because my husband just got laid off from work and we are in financial trouble.

Interestingly, when the actions are positive, beneficial or successful, we attribute things in reverse. Other people do things right or good because of some situational or circumstantial reason while we do it because of our nature. For example, she succeeded on the exam because she studied hard. I succeeded because I am smart. He gave money to charity because he had just gotten a raise. I gave money to charity because I am generous by nature.

Watch yourself. Chances are you will find that you, too, make these

attribution errors.

So, if we want to truly find peace – within ourselves as well as in our relationships – we have no choice but to turn the harsh eye of judgment upon ourselves rather than upon others.

Chapter 7

Forgiveness

One of the greatest abilities given to human beings, and one of the most important on the spiritual path, is the ability to forgive.

Forgiveness is not condoning someone else's hurtful behavior. Forgiveness is not saying that no mistakes were made. Forgiveness is not inviting the pain or abuse again. Forgiveness does not mean that the perpetrator should not be punished.

Forgiveness means that we, as human beings looking for peace, must release the pain, anger and grudges which act like a vice on our heart, squeezing our vital energy and life force, suffocating us in their grip. Forgiveness removes the vice from our hearts and allows us to breathe, live and love freely.

THREE WAYS OF DEALING WITH ANGER:

When someone hurts us – knowingly or unknowingly, purposely or accidentally – we have three ways of dealing with that hurt.

- 1. Expression**
- 2. Suppression**
- 3. Forgiveness**

1. Expression

The first way is expression. We can express our anger, hurt and pain. Sometimes this is useful, particularly if we can express our feelings calmly, articulately, peacefully and in a productive, constructive way.

However, typically the “expression” of anger degenerates quickly into

shouting, tantrums and revenge. Our vision becomes blinded and we can see only the hurtful act. Years or even decades of love – as well as our inner calm, balance and peace – get left by the wayside of our consciousness as the steam engine of fury plunges ahead.

Further, expression of anger becomes a habit. We become accustomed to immediately giving voice to our wrath and rage. Slowly, we become the slave of our anger. We are unable to contain it, unable to restrain it, unable to rein it in. Our temper becomes intractable. We become our own greatest hurdle on the path to peace.

2. Suppression

Another way of dealing with anger is suppression. We feel angry, we feel pain, but – due to societal, cultural or psychological factors – we are unable to express it. The pain is real. It lives within us, feeding on every thought of vengeance, playing and replaying the wrong which has been perpetrated upon us over and over again on the screen of our consciousness. We are able to squeeze our lips shut, preventing the venomous words from spilling out, but we continue to seethe on the inside and our ire becomes a festering wound within us.

Suppressed anger causes depression, anxiety and stress within us. There are innumerable illnesses linked to the unhealthy suppression of these emotions. Therefore, this is not the answer either.

3. Forgiveness

The only other option is to forgive. Many people misunderstand forgiveness to be a pardoning or exoneration of the act committed. It is not.

Forgiveness is more for ourselves than for the person who committed the act. Every wrong act and every evil deed will be punished by the law of *karma*. *Karma* is an absolute law of action and reaction. Isaac Newton discovered that “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” This was hailed as a ground-breaking scientific

discovery, and to this day Newton is regarded as one of the greatest scientists of all times.

Newton was a brilliant scientist. His precision, his method, his vision and his discoveries were unprecedented. However, our ancient scriptures had already given the law which is today known as Newton's 3rd Law of Motion. We simply call it *Karma*. Every action you perform is like a boomerang. It comes back to you – if not in this life, then in later lives, if not directly then indirectly. Whatever pain we cause to another, we will experience ourselves. Whatever injury we inflict upon another will be inflicted upon us.¹ No one is free from the law of *karma*.

I am stressing this point because it is crucial to understand that forgiveness does not mean that we absolve someone of their *karma*. That is God's role and it is not one that we have the power to play even if we wanted to.

Forgiveness means that we are able to separate the person from the act. It means that the act may be deplorable but the person who committed the act is still human and therefore has strengths as well as weaknesses, good points as well as negative points. Forgiveness means that we are able to tap into the well of compassion which flows in our hearts and offer some of it to those who have wronged us. Mahatma Gandhiji used to say, "*Hate the sin but not the sinner.*"

Forgiveness means that we need to move forward, that we do not want to freeze in the moment of pain. When we hold onto our anger it immobilizes us, stopping us from blossoming into the people we are supposed to become and achieving that which we are supposed to achieve.

¹ Note – The law of karma is not so simplistic as to say that if you give someone a black eye, you will get a black eye, or if you have an affair with someone's wife, someone will have an affair with your wife. Rather, it means that the experience of pain which your actions have caused to another will have to be experienced by you, even if the means of the pain is different.

When Will You Draw the Line?

So many people come to me, their identities determined and lives plagued by wrongs which have been done to them sometime in the past – sins of commission (e.g. the abusive parent), sins of omission (e.g. the absent or indifferent parent), sins they can recall, sins they cannot recall, sins committed by those who are still living, sins committed by those who have long since passed away, sins by those they knew, sins by strangers, sins upon them personally, sins upon the collective consciousness of which they are a part.

Their lives, their paths and their decisions have been shaped by the enduring pain of these past wrongs. They may not remember details of the wrong itself, but they are vividly aware of how this wrong has ruined every day of their life since. They are stuck, unable to move forward, held prisoner by acts long-ago committed, abuse lashed onto skin cells which have long ago perished.

The abuses, wrongs and betrayals are all very real. The stories are heart-wrenching, and my eyes fill with tears for each person who has had to endure pain. I am confident that the perpetrators have all received or will receive in the future the bitter fruit of this *karma* they have committed.

However, just as tragic as the stories of abuse and betrayal, of stolen childhoods and shattered dreams, are the stories of these people today: broken adults unable to cut the chains that bind them to events of the past, unable to take a step without the shackles of yesterday.

I ask each of them the same question: “*Are you going to take this pain to the grave?*” They all emphatically reply, “*No!*” or, “*I hope not!*”



“Hate the sin but not the sinner.”

Mahatma Gandhi

I then ask them, “*Are you going to release the pain on your deathbed? How about a week before your death? Two weeks before your death?*” These people are usually decades away from old age, and their answers unanimously reflect their wish to be free of the pain long before the end of their lives.

So then I ask the crucial question: “*But when? When will you release the pain? You are waiting for someone to come and draw the line, to come and say, ‘Now you are free.’ No one will draw the line for you. You must do it yourself. But today I tell you, ‘You can be free.’ Just draw the line.*”

We hold onto our pain because it identifies who we are, it gives us an excuse for behaving the way we do, it has become such a familiar feeling that, regardless of its self-destructive nature, we cannot let it go. Yet, let it go we must if we want to move forward.

The best way to release the pain is to honestly and deeply forgive the person who has wronged you. By seeing the perpetrator as a fallible human being, by allowing the love in our heart to flow towards him or her, by feeling compassion for the situation (either physical or mental) that he or she must have been in to commit this mistake, the chains that bind us are loosened and we are free to take a step forward into today and tomorrow.

It is not an easy task, but it is an essential task if we want to have any peace in our lives, especially if we want to help spread peace to others. Those who are hanging on to old wounds, whose behavior is shaped by events of the past, whose identities are marked by wrongs that have been perpetrated upon them can never be agents of positive change. Only by first forgiving those who have wronged us can we help others forgive those who have wronged them.

Inspiration for Forgiveness from Great Masters

The ability to forgive is one of the surest signs of spiritually advanced souls. The more tenaciously we clutch to our grievances and grudges, the more we stagnate in the pool of our past and the further we become from achieving our highest potential on any level.

The scriptures, stories, mythology and folklore of every religion are filled with beautiful, inspiring examples of forgiveness.

The Message of Jesus:

Probably the greatest example of divine forgiveness under the most difficult situation is Jesus Christ. Whether we accept him as the son of God or not is irrelevant. What is indisputable is that he was a spiritual leader, a teacher of peace, and a teacher of *dharmā*. Falsely imprisoned and convicted by treachery, his enemies led him to die on the cross.

However, even with his lifeblood pouring out of the gaping wounds in his hands and feet where he had been nailed to the crucifix, even as he knew that he was dying due to the betrayal of his own people, still his dying words, his prayer to the Almighty Lord were: “Forgive them, Father. They know not what they do.” Jesus’ message is clear: the act is reprehensible, the act is undoubtedly conspiracy, yet the doers are humans capable of ignorance and error.

Saint Eknath’s Patience:

Another inspiring example is in the life of Saint Eknath, a beautiful spiritual teacher and philosopher who lived in the 16th century.

Like any truly enlightened master, Eknath had his enemies, people committed to sabotaging and undermining the flow of divine, positive energy. These enemies conspired that the best way to humiliate Saint Eknath was to provoke him to lose his temper, thereby ruining his reputation as the embodiment of peace.

They offered a local villager a rich reward if he could succeed in making the saint lose his temper.



“Forgive them, Father. They know not what they do.”
— Jesus Christ

Every morning Eknath went down to the river for his bath as part of his daily rituals. The villager sat beside a tree on the path that Eknath took from the river back to his home. As Eknath approached, having completed his morning bath, the villager rose and spat on Eknath as the Saint passed by.

Silently, Eknath turned around and walked back to the river where he had another bath. As he returned home again on the path, the villager stood in the same place and again spat on him. Once more, Eknath turned around quietly and performed his bathing ritual for the third time.

This drama continued 108 times. Every time Eknath walked up the path from the river, the villager spat on him, thereby compelling him to return to the river for another bath.

Finally, as the Saint approached the villager for the 109th time that morning, the drops of water from his 108th bath still glistening on his skin, the villager fell humbly at his feet. He kissed the ground upon which the Saint walked and begged Eknath for forgiveness.

Eknath was unperturbed. “For what shall I forgive you, my son? Due to your actions, I have had the divine opportunity to have 108 baths today in the holy river. It is the first time in my life I have been so blessed.”

The villager sheepishly confessed the entire plot to Eknath. Eknath put his hand on the villager’s head and said, “My son, I wish you had told me this plan earlier. I would have acted angry so you could have claimed your rich reward.”

Swami Dayanandji – Save the Killer:

There is a beautiful story about the last days of the life of Swami Dayanandji, the founder of the Arya Samaj and one of the greatest spiritual thinkers and leaders of India. As a seer and proponent of Truth, he spoke his beliefs without hesitation or discretion. As is frequently the

case with philosophers whose beliefs shake a well-established paradigm, he had many enemies. Some of those enemies felt so threatened by Swamiji's philosophy and way of preaching that they plotted to kill him.

They bribed Swamiji's cook to mix small doses of poison into Swamiji's food, so that day by day the poison would increase in Swamiji's body, eventually killing him. They reasoned that the slow-acting nature of the poison would throw off suspicion, and all would assume that Swamiji had passed away due to some illness or other natural cause. However, as Swamiji started to suffer the effects of the toxin, he understood what was happening. He knew that he was not suffering from any natural illness or ailment but that there were poisonous chemicals coursing through his blood. He also understood that the only way the poison could be administered was through his food.

One day, he quietly called his cook to his quarters. "My son, take this money," Swamiji said as he handed his cook a large sum of cash, "and escape to Nepal. Go quickly now because when my devotees find out that you have poisoned me they will surely be furious and kill you."

The cook bowed at Swamiji's feet and followed his instructions. The effects of the poison were irreversible and untreatable; eventually the toxins wrested the life out of Swamiji's body. However, his cook was never found.

Forgiveness in Our Own Lives

The examples given above are divine, beautiful and true stories of how vast the ocean of forgiveness can be. Let us fill our cup from that infinite ocean of compassion and forgiveness so that we too can step freely, peacefully and joyfully into the future, leaving the shackles of the past behind. Let us fulfill our unique purpose, our Divine mission here on Earth, rising to our greatest potential – academically, professionally, emotionally and spiritually. Then we will truly be able to serve as warriors for peace in every situation we encounter.

Chapter 8

The Effect of What We Eat On How We Feel

In the preceding pages, we discussed numerous ways in which we can turn our inner world from pieces to peace, how we can find and hold onto a state of stable calmness, serenity, peace, joy and love. Before we move ahead into peace within the family, I want to give one more suggestion of how to attain and maintain balance, equanimity and peacefulness in our lives.

The answer is to be a vegetarian.

Eating meat is not only violent to the animal from whom we wrest its precious lifeblood due to our insatiable desire for the taste of hamburgers, steak, chicken and fish. Eating meat is also one of the most profound ways we wreak violence upon our own bodies physically and emotionally.

Each day people come to me and they say, “Swamiji, I am filled with anxiety. I am restless. I cannot sleep properly at night. I feel tense and stressed. I suffer from high blood pressure.” This is not surprising. Our world today is filled with tension and strife. Heart disease and cancer rates are sky-rocketing. High blood pressure and insomnia affect innumerable lives. The “developed” world is marked by outer busy-ness and inner restlessness.

Much of this of course is due to the lifestyle and culture which propagates success at all costs. However, a large part of our physiological anxiety and anger is due to the meat we consume. Let me explain:

When animals (humans included) are threatened or scared, our adrenal glands secrete a flood of hormones, known as *adrenaline*, into our bloodstream. The purpose of this adrenaline is to give our bodies the strength and energy to save our lives – either by fighting off the attacker or by running away. Thus, this hormonal reaction of our sympathetic nervous system is sometimes referred to as the “fight or flight” response.

The effect of the hormones is that our hearts beat quickly, our blood pressure rises, our digestion and reproduction systems shut down in order to send the blood to our extremities, and our physical impulses become very acute and sharp. All of these responses are beneficial if we need to stave off a vicious attack or run to save our lives. Miraculous stories abound of hundred-pound mothers who lifted cars off of their trapped babies, of unfit people who ran miles and miles at top speed while chased by an attacker, of people who scaled trees to save their lives. This “miracle strength” comes from the adrenaline.

When an animal is about to be killed, even if it can neither fight nor flee due to chains or boxes or restraints, its body still releases the same stress hormones. These hormones course through the animal’s blood at the time of death and become absorbed into the tissues of the body. When we eat those tissues in the form of hamburgers or steaks or chicken nuggets, we ingest those lingering hormones. When the meal is digested and the fats, proteins, carbohydrates and nutrients are absorbed by our bloodstream, so is the adrenaline. The adrenaline then courses our own bloodstreams, giving the same messages of “fight or flight” to our bodies, sending the chemical signals to our brains that our lives are in danger and we must prepare to save ourselves.

Our world is becoming more violent each day. Uncontrollable outbursts of anger and tantrums have become common. More and more people are simply out to get ahead and protect themselves, even at the sake of others. These are the characteristics adrenaline and the other stress hormones prepare our bodies for. They are necessary when our

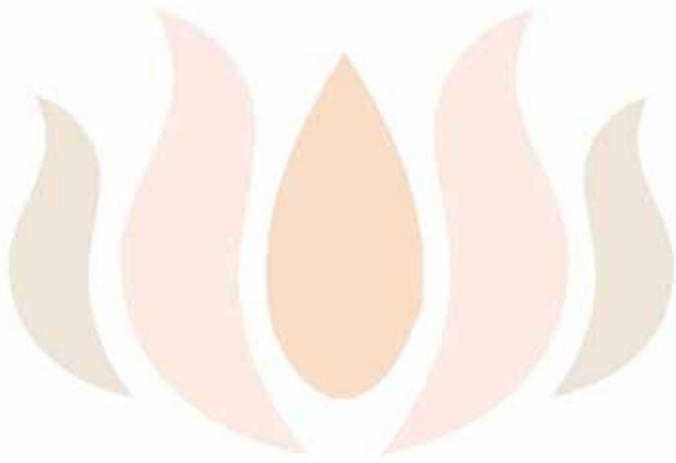
very life is on the line. Yet, they are counter-productive and detrimental when we want to live in peace, with ourselves and with others. When we regularly and continuously ingest hormones which send “danger” messages to our body, we naturally become hyper-vigilant, restless, anxious and angry. Slowly over time, these hormones change the very nature of our beings, and we wonder what has happened to us.

When someone asked the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw why he was a vegetarian, he replied, “Because I don’t want to make my body a cemetery of dead animals.” Our bodies should be temples, not graveyards.

Perhaps, if we treat this temple that is our body like a temple, it will feel like a temple – pious and pure. When we treat it like a battleground and cemetery, how can we wonder that we feel wars are being waged inside us?

Part II

Peace in the Family



Chapter 1

Peace in the Home

Acceptance of Each Other As Individuals

We each have our own preconceived notions of how a proper wife, husband, mother, father and child should be. These ideal characters, rarely human, are ones we've seen on TV, in the movies or in years worth of dreams about what our family life would be like. When our family members do not comply with these ideals, we become frustrated and dejected.

Perhaps these ideals are even taken from our own parents. We may view our mother as the perfect mother and thus project perfection as a wife onto her as well. When our own wife does not fulfill the standards set by our ideal-mother whom we assume to be an ideal-wife, we feel cheated. What we never realized though, since we've seen her only through the perspective of a doting son, is that although she may have been perfect as a mother, she and our father actually had their own share of issues and conflicts to work out during the course of their married life.

One of the most important aspects of finding peace in the home is to see each other *not* as objects put onto Earth to fulfill our own dreams and desires, but rather as separate, divine individuals each with his or her own *karma*, own tendencies and own *dharma* to fulfill.

Trying to put each other into our own pre-designed box of "husband" or "wife" or "daughter" or "son" only ensures that we will never be satisfied and the other will live with constant awareness that he or she is letting us down.

There are two beautiful poems I want to share with you, both by Khalil Gibran. One is about marriage and the other is about children. Both are precious jewels of advice on how to live peacefully and joyfully together as well as how to use family life in order to progress closer and closer to God.

Marriage

*You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore.
You shall be together when white wings of death scatter your days.
Aye, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.
But let there be spaces in your togetherness,
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.
Love one another but make not a bond of love:
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.
Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous,
but let each one of you be alone,
Even as the strings of a lute are alone
though they quiver with the same music.
Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.
And stand together, yet not too near together,
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.*

Khalil Gibran

Children

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters
of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might that
His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as he loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.*

Khalil Gibran

The ultimate, beautiful message in both of these poems is that everyone – including yourself, your spouse and your children – has a special, sacred role to play on Earth, and it is detrimental on every level, for everyone involved, if we try to impose ourselves and our will on each other. Rather, we must see both marriage and parenthood as opportunities to progress with another person, and through our relationship to another person (not dependent upon the actions or attitudes of another person), closer to our own Self, closer to Peace and closer to God.

Chapter 2

Peace in the Marriage: Husbands & Wives

Humility

I heard a wonderful story about a very wise man who had been happily and peacefully married to his wife for sixty years. When asked the secret of his enduring and successful marriage, he answered, “In the beginning, my wife and I made an agreement. We decided that throughout our lives together, she would make all the little decisions and I would make all the big decisions. Luckily, in sixty years, we’ve never had to make a big decision.”

This statement shows not only a great understanding of how to make a marriage work, but also great humility. In order to live peacefully, whether it’s in a marriage, in a family or in the world, we need first to cultivate humility and surrender.

Earlier we discussed taking the capital, vertical “I” and bending it to make a bridge. Bending the “I” symbolizes bending our ego and becoming humble.

In order to live peacefully in a family, we have no choice but to bend our egos. Two strong, stubborn, unyielding egos cannot reside peacefully and lovingly in the same house. At least one will have to bend or there will be daily bickering if not full-blown war!

Divine Mantra: “Ok, Honey.”

In the sacred, divine and beautiful scripture the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna speaks the commandments of life to Arjuna, telling Arjuna

how to live, what to do and how to do it. In just 700 stanzas, the true essence of life is imparted to Arjuna for the entire world, to serve as the foundation of our *Dharma* and to guide us through every aspect of our lives.

After Lord Krishna had eloquently and compellingly explained the true nature of life to Arjuna, and after the Lord had told Arjuna exactly what he should do and how he should do it, the Lord did not say, “Now you must follow my instructions.” Rather, He said, “I have told you everything. Now the decision is yours.”

This is beautiful. Even Lord Krishna, having spoken irrefutable Divine Truth, still gave Arjuna the choice of whether to follow it or not. In contrast, in our own lives, we insist that everyone follow our advice. If we tell someone what to do and they do not do it, we become agitated and upset. Our egos become injured. We frequently criticize and condone those who make decisions which are not in accordance with our advice and guidance.

However, after Lord Krishna gave Arjuna the option of how to act, Arjuna says one of my favorite lines in the *Gita*:

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत।
स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥

*Naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtirlabdhā tvatprasādān mayācyuta
Sthitosmi gatasandehaḥ kariṣye vacanaṁ tava*

The last part (“*kariṣye vacanaṁ tava*”) is the most important. It means: “I will do whatever you say.”

This is the mantra I want to give you all: *Kariṣye vacanaṁ tava* – I will do whatever you say. If we can keep this as the mantra for our family life, we will always live in peace, love and harmony.

The problems in our families come because we all want everything to go our own way. “*My way or no way*” is the usual ultimatum we give our loved ones. This inevitably leads to ego struggles which end in frustration, depression and even divorce.

Therefore, if our goal is to live happily and peacefully together we must adopt the mantra “*Kariṣye vacanam tava.*” Or, to make it even more simple and easy to remember: “OK, Honey.”

We may not get to eat at every restaurant of our choosing; we may not always get to watch the TV show we wanted; we may not always get to do exactly what we want when we want it. However, in exchange for giving up a few preferences in life, we get the divine gift of a peaceful, joyful marriage and peace and serenity in our own hearts.

Never Hold A Grudge

One of the most important rules a marriage and a life should have is to never go to sleep angry. Any argument must be over by bedtime. If you can’t agree or resolve it, no problem. Before bed, just go to sit at the temple or in your “divine corner” or “quiet space.” Hold hands and ask for divine guidance. Sit in meditation together for a few moments, embrace, and then sleep. You will find that this, in and of itself, will solve most problems. If not, don’t worry. You can resume discussions the next day. But at least give yourself those moments of reconnection before sleep, lest you forget your true, eternal, Divine connection. Under no circumstances should you permit anger or resentment in the bedroom. Once it has lasted one day, what will keep it from lasting two days, or three days, or three years? The key is to just end it and move on.

Daily Arguments and Stubbornness

Another big complaint I hear is, “We always fight over little things. Everything is an argument.” This is a matter of ego. Somewhere along the way, both husband and wife have decided that they know

best and that they will have it “my way.” This gets nobody anywhere. Our own ego thinks that we are always right, that everyone around us should do things the way we say.

So many times husbands and wives begin to quarrel over something little. Then, it escalates and escalates into a full-blown battle. If you actually stop them in the middle and say, “What exactly are you fighting about?” neither can remember. This is not the way to live.

We tend to spend so much time arguing or holding grudges that we forget to love each other, and we forget to be thankful for what God has given us.

One time when I was in Australia, I was sitting in the car going to a lecture program and we stopped at a red light. Suddenly, even though all the windows were closed, we could hear a great racket coming from the car next to us. Sitting in the back seat of a brand new Mercedes were two beautiful children, dressed in what looked like brand new clothes. The children were perfectly groomed, but they were trembling with fear and tears were spilling down their cheeks. In the front seat, Mom and Dad were screaming at each other so loudly that even through all the closed windows we could hear the noise. There they were, in a beautiful car, with beautiful children, apparently perfect health, and they were screaming. What for? Probably some small issue. Perhaps he was mad that she took too long to get ready and so they were fifteen minutes late. Perhaps she was mad that she had to force him to wear a tie, because he didn't want to. Perhaps he was going to turn left at the previous light, but she decided that the faster route was to go straight. It could have been any one of a million things, but I am sure that this was not the first time they were fighting like that.

Can't we control our own egos long enough to take a deep breath and move on? Must we really assert ourselves so forcefully at every opportunity? Aren't we able to step for just a moment into the other' person's shoes?

We have been given a finite amount of vital energy in our bodies, a finite number of hours each day, and a finite number of days in our

lives. Why should we waste so much energy and time engaged in battles of the will? I heard a wonderful quote once that said, *“There is no such thing as winning an argument with your wife. If you have ‘won’, then what exactly is it you’ve won? Her anger, her pain and her condemnation.”*

We tend to work and assert ourselves in life for our own will – for that which we want to happen. However, instead of living and working for our own will, let us live and work for “well” – the well-being of others and the well-being of the planet.

Surrender

The trees that can bend with the wind are the ones that survive the greatest storms. Those that are rigid and unyielding are uprooted and unearthed in the cyclones. Similarly, we must learn to bend with life. To row a boat against the current takes you nowhere; you only expend your energy and get tired. If, however, you can swallow your pride and ego and turn that boat around, then the current will gently carry you.

Before we say “no,” before we make an issue out of something, let us stop and really ask ourselves, “Is it worth fighting over? Is my way so much better than his way that it is worth our time and energy fighting?” If the answer is no, then just let it go. This does not make you a lesser person, or a weaker person. Rather, it is those who are truly great and strong who can sacrifice their own egos and yield to another’s wishes.

Chapter 3

Parenting for Peace

The Tone of Love

An important aspect of raising divine, peaceful children is how you and your spouse act and speak to each other. We tend to think of children merely as small, unaware creatures who sit there, oblivious to the world around them and unable to comprehend our language. But, this is far from the truth. Children absorb everything – if not the words, then the tone.

So, be sure to speak softly, gently, and lovingly. Don't raise your volume. I have noticed that whenever parents raise their volumes, the children instinctively raise their own. "Shut up!" the parent will shout at the child. "You shut up!" the child yells back. This is clearly not a productive or fruitful conversation. We think that by raising our volume, our children will become obedient and respectful. However, the opposite is true. A child learns and emulates what he sees and hears. So, don't raise your volume, and also don't engage in gossip about others or your children will learn that this is okay.

In order to counteract the violent or superficial/materialistic influences that children frequently receive in school and outside, it is important to make the home a place where love, piety, peace and devotion are actively taught. Don't assume your children know that you are pious and loving. Show them. Be calm. Be pure. Express love and compassion to your family and to others. Your actions speak a thousand times louder than your words.

The “Benefits” of Successful Careers

Recently, I was staying with a very prosperous family in America. One day after school, the young brother and sister came to me. They wanted to know why they had to go to school. “Why do we need an education?” they asked. I told them that it was very important to keep going to school and studying hard so that they could get a good education and then a good job with which they could help other people. The two children looked at each other.

Finally, the boy looked up at me and he said, “Swamiji, what is the point of an education? What is the point of a good job? Our dad is a doctor with an M.D. Our mom is a psychologist with a Ph.D. They make a lot of money and they say their jobs help other people. But when they come home from work at night, all they do is fight, fight, fight. Didn’t they learn anything in school? How can they help others if they can’t help themselves?”

What message are we giving to our children? We think they don’t notice. We think we can hide from them. Yet, they absorb everything like small sponges.

So, first we must make sure that the parents are in peace and only then can that peace be passed onto the children.

Violence in the Home

So many people come to me and ask whether it is okay to spank or slap their children. I also hear from other family members who are concerned about what may be excessive violence toward children.

I want to make this point clearly: a child should never be physically injured in the name of discipline. Parents assuage their own consciences by saying that the child “deserved it,” when the truth is that the parents simply cannot control themselves, or they don’t know any other way of discipline.

Animals never injure their own children. Even these creatures we

insultingly call “beasts,” these creatures who are without our human instincts for compassion and love would never purposely harm their own children. How, then, can we call ourselves “human” and these creatures “animals” if our behavior is even more primitive and bestial?

People seem to believe that children require physical and emotional violence in order to be “well-trained” or to be properly scolded for their bad behavior. This is, however, a tragic falsehood, and one that leads to nothing more than an escalation of violence in our society.

Violence leads to violence. Peace leads to peace. This is a truth that pertains to large countries at war as well as to our youngest children. When we raise our voices, when we become angry and aggressive, our children raise their voices and their fragile bodies become flooded with anger and aggression.

When we act with anger, we create an environment of anger in the home. This negative energy persists, like a toxic chemical, in the home long after the actual fight is over. Our children, at the most receptive time of life, are then breathing air filled with violence and negativity. Then, we wonder why our world is becoming more violent each day. It is not such a mystery.

Additionally, when we hit our children (and this includes slaps and spanks, which many people seem to believe do not count as “violence”), we lose their respect. Children are much more perceptive and insightful than we sometimes believe. As they watch our faces turn red with rage prior to our explosion of verbal or physical attacks, they know we have lost control. They know we have no other methods by which to teach them. Their respect for us quickly diminishes.

This, of course, pertains to teachers as well. It is so important for children to respect their teachers. How else can young, exuberant bodies sit still for so many hours each day? Yet, when they lose respect for us as people, they simultaneously lose respect for what we are teaching. There are so many important lessons to be learned in school and

in life. We cannot afford for children to lose their respect for their teachers and parents.

We seem to believe that if we punish them severely they will respect us. This is absurd. Sure, they will fear us. But respect and fear are not even related. We do not want our children's (or our pupils') fear. We want their respect.

We complain that our children lie, that they hide from us, that they disrespect us. We ask why, yet the answer is not such a mystery. Children are like sponges, voraciously soaking up every aspect of the environment in which they live. If they live with lies, they will tell lies. If they live with disrespect, they will show disrespect. If they live in the vicious cycle of action/reaction, they will only know how to act and react. If they live in a home in which there is neither tolerance nor understanding, they will learn to keep everything to themselves. But, if they live with patience, love, tolerance, and a tender touch of teaching, they will manifest patience, love and tenderness as well as learn the lessons we are trying to instill in them.

The keys to divine children lie in changing the nature of how we as parents behave. We must never act in anger or frustration. How many times have we had exasperating days and come home and taken it out on the children (or on our spouse who then, in turn, takes it out on the children)? Too many. And what do the children learn from this? Nothing other than low self-esteem and insufficient tools for dealing with their own emotions. We must wait until we have calmed down and then, gently and tenderly, explain things to children. Then, and only then, can we be sure they are only getting the teaching they deserve, and not the brunt of our anger from the office or from the traffic on the way home.

Velvet Not Violent Touch

So, the first thing to do is wait until you are in a “teaching” mood, not a scolding mood. Children need not only the teaching, but they need

the “touch.” That touch should be velvet, not violent. With a velvet touch and calm mind you can achieve anything with children. A beautiful, divine soul, the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram said, *“It is not with severity, but with self-mastery that children are controlled.”* Thus, first we must learn to control ourselves, our tempers and our words.

I understand that this is not easy. It is not easy to be calm when we are full of rage inside. It is not easy to use a velvet touch when our instinct is to hit.

Perhaps we say, “But I was hit by my parents and by my teachers. That is just the way it should be.” No. We must be better than this. We must not fall into the trap of being like robots, unable to think critically. I, too, was slapped frequently by my first Spiritual Master. He believed it was the way to teach. Sure, at the time I obeyed him. I feared him. I also worshipped and revered him, but that was due to his divinity and not due to his style of discipline. I can see, in retrospect, however, how much more I learned through his silence or through his calm – and sometimes stern – words than through his slaps.

Our scriptures say that a mother and father are enemies of their children unless they teach their children well, unless they fulfill their duties of imparting understanding and values. The scriptures say that parents are enemies of their children unless they provide real education. Education does not mean simply dropping the children off at school each morning. It means ensuring that they are learning right from wrong, truth from falsehood, and integrity from deception.

The children are the future of the planet, and it is our responsibility to help them make that future a bright one. Will we lead the world toward violence, or will we lead it toward love? Will we instill the values of forgiveness in the future world leaders, or will we instill in them the values of retribution and vengeance? Will we lead our world toward greater calmness or toward greater chaos? We must never take for granted the role we play in the future of the world through what we teach our children. Our leaders govern as they were governed, and

the first “government” they experience is the home.

True Success, True Wealth: Love

If you ask most parents what their concerns are regarding their children, you’ll hear, “I want him to get into a good university,” or, “I want her to get a good job and be successful.” Time and energy are therefore expended in pushing the child academically, encouraging the child to excel, and punishing or reprimanding the child for less than superb performance.

Yet, a degree from a top university, a well-paying job or a lucrative career are not the true marks of “success” in life.

There is a story of a young wife who was home alone one day when an old man knocked on the door. She immediately invited him and his two friends inside. However, the old man first asked whether her husband was home. Upon hearing that she was alone, the old men said they would wait outside until the husband came.

Later, when her husband returned home, his wife told him what had happened. “Well, quickly, go and invite them inside,” he told his wife. “It is nearly dark.”

The woman went out to the garden where the three men were waiting patiently. “Please, come inside. My husband has returned home.” One man spoke. He said, “Actually, we cannot all come inside. Only one of us can come in. I am Love. With me are Success and Wealth. Go and ask your husband which of us he would like in the house. The other two must wait outside.”

So the woman went inside and told her husband and daughter what had happened. She said, “I think we should let Success come in. Then, finally, you will get that promotion you have been wanting and our dear daughter will get accepted into the best college.”

However, her husband disagreed. He said, “I only want the promotion so that I can have a higher income. Let us invite Wealth into our home, then we will not be concerned about promotions or top universities. We will already be

prosperous.”

The daughter spoke softly. She said, “Mom, Dad, I appreciate that you want us to be successful and wealthy. But, I think that – in the long run – it would be better to have Love. Then at least even in poverty or failure we will have Love.” Her parents smiled at their daughter’s wisdom and agreed to invite Love into their home. The woman went outside and said, “Okay Love, please, you are the one we selected to enter our home.”

The old man named Love stood up and started walking toward the house. However, to the woman’s surprise, Success and Wealth also stood up and followed him. “Wait,” she said. “I thought you said only one of you could come inside. Why are all three of you coming?”

Love explained, “If you had chosen Success or Wealth then he would have had to enter alone. However, wherever Love goes, Success and Wealth always follow. So, by choosing Love, you automatically also get Success and Wealth.”

Let us fill our homes with love – love for God, love for each other, love for the community, love for all of humanity. Then, through that love, through that divine connection, all else will automatically follow. It is when we focus only on Success or Wealth that we find ourselves rich but not fulfilled, successful but not content.

We Reap What We Sow

If we bring Love into our homes (whether success and wealth ever follow or not), our children will grow knowing love, acceptance and peace. Those seeds of love and peace we plant in our children will grow later into trees of love and peace which will shower fruit upon the entire world.

If, on the other hand, we sow seeds of violence, intolerance and distrust in the home – whether through word or through example – our children will learn that the world is not a safe, nurturing place and that they need to remain constantly vigilant and defensive. This hyper-

vigilance and defensiveness in adulthood frequently leads to aggression, depression and violence.

I have seen so many people who perform *seva* or donate large funds for peace-building organizations, including local temples, women's shelters, orphanages, environmental groups and more, yet who can't even bring two peace-filled children into the world. They are willing to spend time and money volunteering or supporting organizations committed to peace; thus they feel that they are noble, spiritual people helping to benefit the world. Yet, despite the hours or dollars they dedicate to peace, their words and actions with their own loved ones sow seeds of anger and violence.

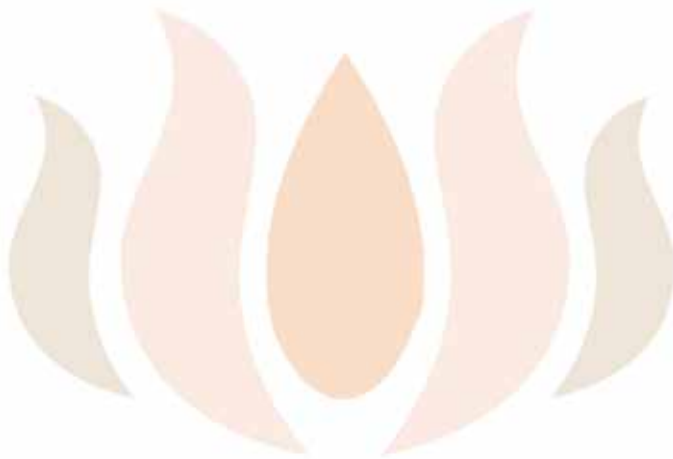
More important than your hours or dollars for an organization is to ensure that at least those you meet, those with whom you interact, those with whom you are in a relationship become filled with peace and love through your presence.

Although we all pray for peace in the world, we cannot have peace in the world until we first learn to have peace within ourselves and peace within our families. Any peace brought to our world that is not preceded and accompanied by inner peace will be shallow, fleeting and unsustainable.

In order to bring deep and lasting peace to our world, we have no choice but to begin from the inside and move outwards.

Part III

Peace in the Community



Chapter 1

Community = Come Unity

We've discussed how to attain peace within and peace in the family. Let us now turn to how to attain peace within our small communities, for the world is nothing but an extension of our community. The problems that arise internationally are the same problems that arise within an office or on a committee. Let us first address these problems on the small scale and then move to the international platform.

The word “community” is made up of two words: “come” and “unity.” A community should be an entity that brings people together, uniting them in a common cause, or a common location, career, interest or inclination. Unfortunately, it is frequently in our communities that we find not unity, but disharmony and discord. Whether it's a community of employees in an office place, a community of members at a temple or church, or a community of spiritual seekers, we never seem to be far from conflict.

The old adage says, *“United we stand and divided we fall.”* We are all aware that, in theory, we accomplish much more when we are united in team spirit than when we are bickering amongst ourselves. Yet, it is difficult to put that awareness into practice, and inevitably we find ourselves involved in petty disagreements, quarrels and disputes with our co-workers, board members and team members.

HOW TO HAVE UNITY IN THE COMMUNITY

What is it that makes it so difficult for us to work peacefully together

with others for the same goal? There is only one answer: Ego! Whether it is in the workplace or in the temple, egos abound. I often wonder how many hours are wasted each day, how many precious moments of productivity are lost forever, how many projects and programs are left incomplete due neither to inability nor incompetence, but rather due to internal discord within the community.

There are a few different general problems that lead to disharmony within communities. The main ones are jealousy and power/control.

Jealousy

Due to our own ego, we always want to be the one in the center, the one with the power, the one who takes the lead and gets the credit. Very few are content to be the quiet, assiduous worker performing one's tasks egolessly.

We become jealous of each other's role, each other's position, and each other's success. Rather than support one another and bask in the joy of each other's achievements, we vie for position and prestige. We hamper rather than help each other's efforts. We silently sulk at each other's success and secretly smile at each other's failures. This is due to nothing other than the insidious grip of envy. We must fight to extricate ourselves from its fatal clutches.

God has given each of us individual gifts, abilities and talents. He has made no two alike. Each of us is endowed with our own strengths and weaknesses. The goal is to heighten our strengths and minimize our weaknesses, to discover – each of us for ourselves – that which makes us unique, that which makes us special, that gift which is given by Him to us and to us alone. Then, we must embark on tasks which utilize our abilities and potential and not get bogged down in situations where we are not capable.

Khalil Gibran says it beautifully: *“The wind speaks not more sweetly to the giant oaks than to the least of all, the blades of grass.”* It is difficult, however,

to remember this when we allow ourselves to be filled with jealousy. When we feel like the tiny blade of grass, living in the shadow of so many oak trees, we begin to permit ourselves to be filled with feelings of inferiority, jealousy and contempt.

In communities, as we watch others work and live, it is so easy to compare ourselves unfavorably to each other:

“His house is so much nicer than my house.”

“She has the nice corner office with a view while I’m stuck in a cubicle.”

“Why are her children always so clean and neatly dressed while mine look like they just walked in from the dirt fields?”

Or, we silently criticize the others to assuage our feelings of jealousy:

“He’s been president of this temple for five years and hasn’t done anything worthwhile at all.”

“If the boss had given that contract to me instead of to her I would have surely clinched the deal.”

“He is full of nothing but hot air. I don’t understand why he’s always the one given the credit when clearly we are the ones doing the work.”

This gets us nowhere. It causes nothing but suffering and discontent in our own hearts. It neither changes the current situation nor convinces those in charge to distribute the work or the praise any differently. Bitterness causes only pain in our own hearts and stifles our own ability to grow. It gets us neither the corner office, nor the raise, nor the power, nor anyone’s admiration. Rather it causes our own heart to become a festering wound and becomes an unshakeable obsession in our minds.

Further, by criticizing others or constantly complaining about what we perceive to be unfair treatment, it lowers us in the eyes of those around us. Although we may think we have masked our jealousy ever so cleverly (and perhaps we have even masked it from ourselves), the root cause of our bitterness and anguish is usually clear and obvious to others.

Conquering the Green-Eyed Monster

So, what to do? How to battle with the green-eyed monster? **The only answer is to practice, practice and practice. Practice loving those of whom you are envious. Imagine yourself being the one to give him the brand new car. Imagine yourself being the one to give her the raise. Practice seeing only his positive qualities and make a list of these. Whenever jealousy overcomes you, just read the list of her positive attributes.**

Most importantly, however, practice being grateful for all that which *you* and *you* alone have. Make a list of all the gifts and blessings that God has bestowed only upon you and not upon those of whom you are jealous. Read and re-read the list focusing your mind on how blessed you are, how special you are, how chosen you are. Sure, that person may be the temple president for a few years, or make a little more money than you do, or have a more expensive diamond ring or be the boss's favorite. But, just look at all the things you have that she doesn't. Look at all the ways God has blessed you individually.

Jealousy is a curse, a demon with whom we have to fight again and again during the course of our lives. The above steps are not a permanent inoculation against envy. It will probably continue to raise its evil head, insidiously, again and again during the course of your life. However, the above steps will enable you to be victorious, again and again, in the battle and will slowly lead you to a great victory over this parasitic emotion.

In order to truly have peace in the community, we must perform our duties – not vying for place, position or prestige – due to the simple fact that they are our duties. We must not begrudge others their success or acclaim, but rather work to achieve our own success, to manifest the greatness that is within us, in whatever realm and whatever way. We must work not with contempt for that which we've not been given, but with gratitude that God has given us our work and the ability to fulfill it.

Power/Control

Another impediment to successful and peaceful communities is the constant vying for power. In order for most communities to function, there must be some distribution of work and power. Anything else would lead inevitably to disorganization and inefficiency and could even descend into chaos.

However, not everyone can be in charge. Inherent in the concept of an “in-charge” (whether the title given to the “in-charge” is boss, president, chairman, leader or anything else) is that all others are not “in-charge.” If everyone were “in-charge,” then it would lose its very meaning.

Intellectually, we all understand this. We know that someone must be appointed or elected to be the one in-charge, to be the head, to be the leader. Yet, unless that someone is ourselves or the person *we* wanted to be chosen, we frequently rebel – internally as well as externally – against the person in power.

Our egos do not want to be told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Hence, if we are not the one chosen to be in charge or if we have to work under someone whom we deem difficult, demanding, arrogant or our intellectual inferior, we seethe internally, paying more attention to the mistakes, rude comments and failings of the person trying to lead us than to the task at hand. Or, we may purposely try to sabotage the project, in order to prove that the person is not capable to be a leader.

This is neither the way to live peacefully and productively in a community nor the way to get any work successfully accomplished. We should be prepared to put our own ego aside for the ultimate goal.

Work as Worship

In order to bring peace to our community as well as to accomplish

our goals, we should remember something very important: work is not for work's sake alone. This is true whether it is work in a financial planning company, work for the temple/church, or volunteer work at a non-profit organization. Work is the means to an end, not an end in and of itself. What is that end? The end is always to become one with God, to realize our own Divine nature, to be the best and most sincere worker that we can be, and to fulfill our given duties, whatever they may be. That is the path. That is the whole point of why we work. Financial success, acclaim, positions – these are all just fruits that sometimes come on the path and sometimes don't. They are neither the goal nor the point of work.

There is a beautiful poem by Khalil Gibran that says:

*When you work you fulfill a part of Earth's furthest dream,
assigned to you when that dream was born.
In keeping yourself with labour you are in truth loving life,
And to love life through labour is to be intimate
with life's innermost secret.
All work is empty save when there is love;
And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself,
to one another and to God.
And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you
should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple,
taking alms from those who work with joy.
For if you bake bread with indifference you bake a bitter bread
that feeds but half of man's hunger.
And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes,
your grudge distills a poison in the wine.*

Our work should become our worship, and we should approach each task – small or large – as though given to us by God Himself. Rather than feel resentment at being “ordered around” by the person in charge, we should remember that ultimately our work is for God. He is the true “in-charge” to whom we must report. He is the true judge who

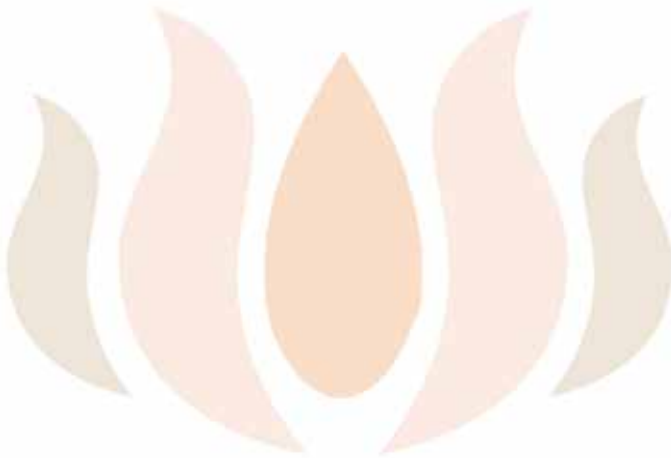
will decide if our efforts are worthy or unworthy. He is the ultimate authority who will tell us whether we've succeeded or failed.

We may have completed an assignment brilliantly, but if we did it with contempt in our hearts, then fundamentally we have failed. Regardless of how superficially perfect our work may be, unless it is done in a spirit of joy, service, acceptance and gratitude, the fruits of that work will also be only superficial, unable to touch the depths of our being and fill us with peace. Only when we work joyfully, gratefully and in a spirit of acceptance will our work bear fruit both in the professional and the personal arena. Only then will we succeed internally as well as externally.

So, if someone else is given a position of power over you in the workplace, in the community, on a board or committee, recognize it as an opportunity for you to be an instrument of peace. Recognize that you've been selected for a challenging and crucial role in the peace-building process. Recognize that it is not as simple and superficial as he/she being more qualified than you are; rather there is a cosmic universal plan which is unfolding and your role in that Divine Play is not only to perform the specific duties delegated to you, but to perform them as though God were the only audience, as though every move, every action, every thought were prayer.

Part IV

Peace in the World



Chapter 1

What is World Peace?

Today, our world stands on the brink of destruction. Whether we die from a gunshot wound, from thirst in a drought, from lung cancer due to air pollution, from food poisoning, from a tsunami or hurricane, or from a grenade filled with nails, the end result is the same: untimely death due to preventable, self-induced causes. The human race is on a path of self-destruction which, if not curtailed, will inevitably lead not only to the annihilation of our race but to the dissolution of Life as we know it on Earth.

Peace is Not Only the Absence of War

When we talk about peace in the global, international arena, frequently we are simply referring to the cessation of violence. To bring “Peace in the Middle East” means that Israelis and Arabs stop killing each other in the fight for land. To bring “Peace to Kashmir” means that Indians and Pakistanis stop fighting for control of the region. To bring “Peace in Nepal” means that the Maoists, the military, and the Nepali people will stop fighting over who will rule the country.

However, while all of the above are noble and beautiful goals, these definitions of peace are overly simplistic.

- Peace is not merely the absence of war.
- Peace is not empty space from which violence has been removed.
- Peace is not the passivity which is the opposite of aggression.
- Peace is full.
- Peace is positive.

- Peace is active.
- Peace is a relationship or a society or a world in which there is a dynamic, constructive utilization of energy for the betterment of ourselves and each other.
- Peace is progress, moving further in our personal and collective evolution every day.
- Peace is living in harmony within ourselves and with all those with whom we share the Earth – the humans, the animals, and the plants.

Violence is Animalistic. Peace is Planned.

Many people think that violence and war require strategies, and that peace is passive. However, although countries and individuals who engage in violence usually plan out their attacks in advance, the compulsion to act violently is actually instinctive rather than planned.

Violence is a vestigial remnant of our animal past, the crudest aspect of our lower nature and the most destructive of our basic instincts. Animals rip each other to shreds over territory. Animals fight violently and viciously to establish social hierarchy. Animals will avenge one death by killing another. Humans should not follow suit.

Peace requires us to respond in a way that is higher and greater than our most basic, animal instinct. It requires deep thought and planning. It frequently requires us to put the greater needs of the whole over our own individual desires.

Chapter 2

Planning for Peace

Wanting It

In order to truly work and plan for peace, we have to want it. This is not as easy or obvious as it may sound. If you ask every single person in the world today whether he or she wants peace in the world, I believe that 100% of the people polled would say yes. Yet, ironically, our world is being violently battered. How can we all want peace and yet perpetrate war?

The answer is that we want peace, but only if it comes in the specific “peace-package” that we deem appropriate. We do not want peace at all costs. For example, those fighting over land in various parts of the world certainly want peace, but they want control over the land more than they want peace. Hence they are prepared to fight, kill, and die for it.

If we are going to work to bring peace in the world, we have to be prepared to put peace first and our desires second.

This does *not* mean that we have to calmly stand aside while other people or other nations invade, pillage and destroy us, our families and that which is ours. It *does* mean though that we will neither invade nor pillage nor destroy that which is someone else’s, regardless of how much we want something they possess. Really wanting peace means that we have to be willing to sacrifice for the greater good.

Acceptance Versus Tolerance

One of the mistakes that we make in the peace-building process is when we speak about “tolerance.” We say, “*We must learn to tolerate differences.*” However, implicit in the very word tolerance is the underlying assumption that we do not approve of that which we are tolerating. Tolerance implies bearing something unpleasant. It implies endurance and forbearance in situations we would rather avoid.

Rather than tolerance, we should cultivate acceptance of differences. Let us not begin the peace-building process on a foundation of negativity. If the soil is bitter, the fruit borne by the tree is sure to be bitter. If the seeds we sow are toxic, so will be the harvest. Let us switch from talk of tolerance to talk of acceptance. Let us lay a positive foundation of mutual respect and acceptance. Let us work to truly accept each other, despite innumerable differences of culture and creed, rather than simply tolerate each other.

Every Side is Our Side

Another tragic flaw in the current peace-building processes is the inherent sense of “us” versus “them.” We are so focused on the differences between our cultures, between our nations, and between our religions that we forget we are all brothers and sisters on this Earth.

The similarities between us far outweigh the differences, regardless of how deep or wide the chasm between us may appear. We are all human. We all have the capacity to feel love, to feel pain, to feel fear, hunger, sadness and joy. We all are attached to our families and want only the best for them. We all strive day after day to improve our own lives and those of our loved ones, frequently toiling long hours in order to provide a brighter future for our children.

We all deeply believe that we are working for “good” and “right.” No one who picks up a gun or a grenade or fires a missile believes that he is in the wrong. Everyone – from Hitler to Mother Teresa, from

Saddam Hussein to Mahatma Gandhi, from the World Trade Center attackers to Martin Luther King – believes that the path they stand for is a path of truth and righteousness, and that their way is going to lead to the greatest ultimate good. Each believes God is on his or her side.

Therefore, the goal of peace-building is not to ascertain who is right and who is wrong, who is righteous and who is unjust, who is the holy one and who is the infidel, but rather to break the barriers, boundaries and borders that separate us, to work for solutions that address our basic and intrinsic human needs and aspirations.

The goal is to realize that every side in a war is “our side,” that every woman killed is our mother and every boy killed is our son, that every patch of land stained with blood is our land and our blood, and that every bombed building is our home.

When we can truly cultivate these feelings of oneness in our heart, then and only then can we really begin working for lasting, unshakable peace in the world.

Chapter 3

Working for Peace

When we have reached the stage where we can see everyone – even our most bitter enemy – as a human being complete with strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, habits, tendencies, fears and confusion, then we are ready to become actively engaged in peace-building.

Every conflict is unique. Every war is different. The nuances of each situation and the details of each time and place inevitably vary. Therefore, the points I give below are general guidelines for the peace-building process. They are neither specific answers nor specific solutions to particular wars. However, they can definitely be applied, with perhaps some variation, to almost every circumstance.

Dialogue is Dialysis

War and violence are the frequent result of a lack of communication. Sometimes there is not even an attempt at communication, and sometimes the communication breaks down due to the obstinacy of both sides.

However, dialogue is the only answer. It is the only way to have positive, lasting peace – whether it's a family, a company or the world. We must communicate and keep communicating until an agreement has been reached.

Dialogue is like dialysis. Normally, our kidneys perform the job of cleaning the body, removing salts, excess fluids and toxic waste from our body and restoring the natural balance. If our kidneys fail, dialysis is required to perform this function.

Similarly, typically life between individuals and between countries is peaceful, and problems are solved by built-in trouble shooting mechanisms. However, when this normal process of living in harmony breaks down, dialogue is needed, like how dialysis is needed when the kidneys break down.

Dialogue removes the toxicity of misunderstanding and miscommunication between people and nations, which can also be deadly if left untreated. Dialogue restores the natural and healthy balance of emotions and understanding in a relationship.

If a kidney patient decides, half-way through his dialysis treatment, that he has already spent too much time and energy hooked up to the machine, and hence abandons the treatment to return home, he will certainly suffer and possibly die. A dialysis treatment cannot be rushed. It takes a certain and specific amount of time to clean and purify the blood in the kidneys in order to remove the toxins. If the chemicals are not removed from the kidneys by dialysis, the body will become flooded with waste, salts and fluid. Havoc will be wreaked upon the delicate balance of chemicals in the bloodstream.

One of our revered Swamijis left his body in this exact way. He was very young and robust, yet he had diabetes and his kidneys were weak. He received dialysis daily and was scheduled for a kidney transplant at the best hospital in India, in Mumbai. The doctors wanted him to continue the dialysis until he was strong enough to travel from Haridwar (north of Delhi) to Mumbai. However, he did not take the treatment seriously. One day, while in the middle of the dialysis treatment he decided that he had had enough for that day. It was evening time, he was tired and wanted to get back to the ashram. Although the doctors urged him to finish the treatment, he replied, "I'll come back tomorrow. It's been enough for one day." That same night his bloodstream overflowed with toxic chemicals from the kidneys, and he passed away. If he had continued the dialysis treatment that day, he would have eventually become strong enough to travel to Mumbai,

where he would have received the transplant, and he would be healthy today. The belief that “enough is enough” is what led to his sad passing at a young age.

Similarly, if we abandon dialogue, our nations will become flooded with the toxicity of anger, vengeance and conflict. Chaos will reign over the normal balance of give and take. Havoc will be wreaked upon the crucial elements of understanding, acceptance and sacrifice.

We may feel “enough is enough.” We may be tempted to stop in the middle. We may question the efficacy. Yet, we must continue until the dialogue has reached a successful conclusion. Dialysis broken in the middle is deadly for the human. Dialogue broken in the middle is deadly for the society, the nation and the world.

Allow Suffering As It Leads To Compassion

Each of us has had the experience of watching a news show on TV and seeing images of war-torn areas. We see naked children with tear-streaked faces, orphaned by the bombs that wrenched life out of their parents. We see parents, wretched and inconsolable, as they pull out their own hair standing over their child’s grave. We see teddy bears, chalkboards and bicycles strewn amidst the rubble. Instinctively we change the channel and search for something “lighter” to watch. The graphics of war are too distressing for us to sit with for long.

When the photos in a newspaper show bloodied corpses of children in a bombed-out school, we may read the story but pass quickly over the photo, careful to ensure that the image does not burn itself indelibly into our consciousness. We do not want to “ruin our day” by hearing or reading about the tragedies of war.

This is understandable. Violence is so widespread, wars so never-ending, the death toll keeps rising ceaselessly hour by hour. How can we live calmly, joyfully, meaningfully in the world if we really allow ourselves to absorb the pain of war?

Yet, absorb it we must. Until we can truly, each of us, feel the pain of war in our hearts, until we can become one with the mother who has lost her son or the son who has lost his father, we cannot hope to end the carnage.

Human beings have been given the beautiful gift of compassion. Compassion allows us to feel deeply for another person. It allows us to empathize, to feel someone else's pain as our own. Compassion is one of our greatest assets and should serve as one of our greatest guides when we make decisions concerning other people. By allowing ourselves to have the normal human response of compassion to the pains of war we will be able to make decisions that serve not only ourselves, but the planet as a whole. If we continue to inoculate ourselves from feelings of pain and isolate ourselves from our brothers' and sisters' suffering, we will never be able to play a valuable role in the peace-building process.

Disparity in Daily Life

When war breaks out, when one group invades or attacks another, we are usually shocked. However, in retrospect we can carefully analyze the events leading up to the attack. Most frequently, the violence was sparked by one group or one nation feeling suppressed, oppressed or repressed by another group or nation. When one group sees what they perceive to be an unjust disparity between themselves and others – typically in terms of resources or opportunity – the perception of injustice and oppression serves as kindling for the fire of violence.

If we are truly going to usher in an era of peace, if we are truly going to commit ourselves not only to a temporary cessation of violence but to the construction of a solid foundation of international harmony, we have no option other than to commit ourselves equally to the removal of this great disparity. The bridgeless chasm between the haves and the have-nots is not merely a figment of the imagination of the poor. It is a real, undeniable yet tragic fact of our existence, and it must be

dealt with if peace is going to stand a chance.

We can hope for nothing other than more and more violence as long as over a billion people in the world continue to eke out survival on less than one dollar a day, while the television airwaves fill homes, restaurants, clubs and roadside stands across the world with images of the rich and privileged living lives of decadence.

Let us take a moment and step back. Let us close our eyes and ask ourselves a very honest question.

Let us imagine that we are a farmer in a third world country whose farm has been decimated by drought year after year. We manage to survive on what little we can grow or beg for. All dreams and hopes of what our children's lives would be like have long since vanished, as we have no choice but to send them out into the village at dawn where they can earn a few cents by selling the watered-down milk from our one remaining cow. In the evening time, we frequently walk into the village where we can have a cold drink and escape the pain of our existence by meeting and socializing with others who share the same fate. The children kick a stone around on the dirt path, pretending they are soccer heroes. They take each others' photo with invisible cameras and interview each other with sticks as microphones.

As the one TV in the village — hooked up to the tea stall but facing outward so everyone can see — shows dubbed versions of western serials, we are faced, over and over again, with colorful images of rosy-cheeked, glossy-lipped people as they shop for more and more possessions or casually stand up from their dinner when half of it is still on the plate.

We've become used to these images and don't think much about them. However, one evening when we are sitting at the tea stall, a group of strangers start talking about a "movement," a "plan" to regain our rights, to take back that which is rightfully ours, to bring about "justice" in the world. We are told that it is because of these people whom we watch on TV that our crops are failing and that we don't have enough to eat. We are told that they are getting so fat day after day that obesity is the worst disease in their country while we have watched

child after child die in the painful throes of hunger. The strangers tell us that there is a large movement of people who have pledged their lives to defending our people, that those we see on TV have disobeyed God's orders and must be punished. If not, they will continue to push us further and further into our own parched Earth.

We are urged to leave behind the desiccated fields and come to their "camp" where we will be trained to be part of the movement. We are promised that our families will receive money, our children will be fed, and our wives will be cared for. Our only task is to stand up in the name of justice, in the name of our people, and in the name of God.

If we sit quietly and honestly with this image in mind, isn't it somewhat easier to see how and why discontent and violence are bred throughout the world? I have given, of course, only one small, hypothetical example. There are dozens others I could have given which would be equally real and equally compelling.

If we hope to create lasting and solid peace in the world, we should begin by working to uproot the seeds of discontent and anger in those who become our enemies. The task may seem daunting, but we have the means and the resources to accomplish it, if only we make it a priority.

The Violence of Poverty

We reel back in horror, our eyes become red with anger, thoughts of vengeance flood our minds when we witness events like September 11, 2001 or the bombings in London, Mumbai or Madrid. These events are atrocities of justice; they are unforgivable acts of terror, and we are correct to be horrified.

However, let us look at the situation from a slightly different perspective, for the sake of future peace-building. On September 11, 2001, over 3,000 people died in the terrorist attacks, sparking a retaliatory air and ground attack in Afghanistan that is still on-going, and leading

to the eventual invasion of Iraq as a “pre-emptive” strike. However, on that same day, nearly 40,000 children died of starvation across the world, as they do *every day*. Where is our outrage at these deaths? Where is our pledge to avenge these senseless killings? Where is the horror, the anger and the vengeance?

The attack of September 11th – as well as every previous and subsequent terrorist attack – is horrendous. It is a travesty of Divine Justice. The perpetrators must be held accountable and punished for their crimes. However, the deaths by starvation, by thirst, and by treatable and preventable illnesses which occur every day are also horrendous. They are also a travesty of Divine Justice. The perpetrators of these crimes must also be held accountable. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of the latter crimes are us. By standing back and allowing such disparity, by not taking a stand against hunger, poverty, illiteracy and disease, we are silent co-conspirators to the crime.

When we pledge to work for peace in the world, we must also pledge to remove the poverty which is not only violence in and of itself but which also serves as the flammable kindling for uprisings and revolts. This is more easily done than we think.

Look at the following statistics:

1. **The official figure for the 2011 United States defense budget was \$708.2 billion.¹**
2. **The United Nations has estimated that for an additional (above current spending) \$9 billion annually, we could provide clean water and sanitation for every single person on Earth.²**
3. **For an additional \$12 billion annually, we could provide reproductive (pre- and post-natal) care for every woman on Earth.**

4. **For an additional \$13 billion annually, we could give every single person on Earth enough food to eat every day, as well as basic health care.**
5. **For an additional \$6 billion annually, we could provide basic education to every person on the planet.**
6. **Added together, for an additional \$40 billion annually we could provide every single person on Earth with clean water, sanitation, food to eat, basic health care, and education, while providing every mother with pre- and post-natal care.**

\$40 billion annually may seem like an extraordinary amount of money and not feasible. However, when we compare it to the defense budget we realize that it is only slightly more than 5% of the US annual defense budget! This means that we could still spend almost 95% as much money as we are already spending on defense, and divert approximately 5% of that to feeding, educating, healing and housing the entire world.

I share the above statistics with you to give you an idea of how very achievable the goal of poverty reduction is. It requires not only think-tanks, summits, conferences and panels, but it also requires us to reassess our own priorities, agendas and choices.

I am not a political scientist. I don't have the answer to how that 5% annual reduction in defense by the US could be redistributed to provide much needed facilities to the world. However, there are politicians who do know, people who are learned experts in global development. They can implement the plans, but we, the people of the world, must call the plan into action.

I earnestly believe that if a man is well fed, warm in the winter, healthy, clean, educated and secure in knowing that his wife and children will be adequately cared for, he is significantly less likely to take up arms against the "oppressors." By addressing the underlying grievances of

terrorism's foot soldiers (and particularly through such a small decrease in defense spending), we can make dramatic head-way into creating a culture of peace. And, compared to the cost of war – financially, emotionally and humanly – the cost is minuscule.

The Effect of Our Food Choices on Poverty & Hunger

The United States alone produces enough grain to give *every* single person on Earth two loaves of bread a day. Yet, every day, 40,000 children starve to death.³ Why? Where is this grain going?

The grain which is being produced is being fed to fatten up livestock, which will be eaten by a select few rather than being fed as bread to the world.

Across the world, an average of 40% of the grain which is grown is fed to cows, pigs and poultry being raised for meat. That is food which is being taken out of the hands of those whose lives would be saved if only they were as valuable to us as our favorite chicken sandwich.

Some people might ask, “Why not just grow more grain?” The problem lies not in a paucity of grain but in the way the grain is used. It takes sixteen pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef. This grain is fed to the cows who are later killed to make beef. However, it takes only one pound of grain to produce one pound of bread. So, if we used our grain to produce bread rather than feed it to cows to make hamburgers, we could feed sixteen times as many people.

1.4 billion people in the world could be fed by the grain which is fed to livestock in the United States. There are approximately one billion people in the world who don't have enough to eat. If we cut down our meat intake by two-thirds, we could feed them all. This means we could still eat meat every one out of three times that we do now. If we eat meat three times a week, we could eat it once a week, instead. That simple change – if made by every meat-eater in the world – would be enough to feed all those who are now going hungry.

On five acres of land, you can grow enough food to feed forty-four people by growing potatoes, or thirty-eight people by growing rice. But, by raising chickens on that land (and the grain to feed the chickens), you would only be able to feed four people. Worse, if you used the five acres to produce beef, you would only be able to feed two people. Imagine: five acres of land used to feed two people.

We could feed ten billion people a year if everyone ate vegetarian. This is more than the human population. There is no need for anyone to go hungry in the world. Eighty million people go to sleep hungry every night and 40,000 children perish of starvation each day. The only reason is the choices we make.

When we speak about violence to other people, particularly the tragedy of innocent casualties of war, we must not forget those who suffer and die each day of preventable starvation. The number of people who go to sleep hungry each night far outweighs the injuries of any war in history. Those who perish each year due to hunger, while our livestock gets fatter and fatter, annually outnumber the deaths of World War I and II combined!

Not only are these deaths violence themselves, but the stark, blatant and obvious connection between the food choices of the privileged and the hunger of the underprivileged contributes to the anger, hatred and vengeance which is the hallmark of terrorism today.

War Can Never Lead to Peace

So frequently we hear our political leaders tell us that military action is required to bring peace, that in order to “restore” or “ensure” peace, we must spend billions of dollars amassing weapons of destruction and then let them loose on those we deem our enemies. The concept of using violence to bring peace is a tragic, ironic mistake. Violence breeds only violence.

The best violence can lead to is submission or defeat. On the surface

there may appear to be peace and we may be lulled into a false sense of security. However, neither submission nor defeat ever leads to the change of heart necessary to prevent future violence. They lead only to a temporary reprieve while wounds are treated, resources are re-gathered, and strategies are re-planned.

What peace requires is a change of heart in those who are perpetrating violence. Being pummeled into the ground, watching one's children be struck by a missile, or having one's house burned down does not change a man's heart toward peace. It only fuels the fire of vengeance and aggression already burning wild in peoples' hearts.

Only by extending a hand in peace, sincerely and honestly, and following up with actions that match our words can we inspire the trust, faith and goodwill that true peace requires.

To be the first one to extend a hand in peace is difficult. Our egos rebel against the idea. Our fears of being taken advantage of fill us with dread. Our minds remind us of all the evil deeds perpetrated by our enemy and rationalize that it is not safe to stop the offense.

However, to end any conflict, one side must always come forward first in a spirit of peace and attempt to bridge the chasm. This does not mean conceding to the others' demands, relinquishing that which is rightfully ours, or abdicating our position of power. It simply means stopping the retaliatory violence and stepping forward – with peace, love and brotherhood in our heart – to work for a peaceful and mutually beneficial solution.

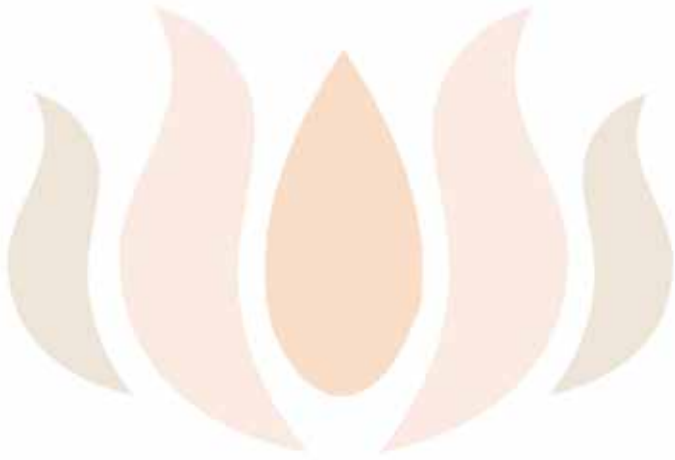
1 Taken from the official United States Military Defense Budget, available at: http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2011/fy2011_BudgetBriefing.pdf

2 All the statistics in points 2-5 are taken from the United Nations Development Program statistics for 1998.

³ All figures for this section taken from *Diet for a New America*, by John Robbins, 1987, Stillpoint Publishers; *The Food Revolution*, by John Robbins, 2001, Conari Press; and www.earthsave.org

Part V

Peace to the Earth



Prayer for Peace

Our scriptures have a beautiful mantra that is as follows:

ॐ द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं ॐ शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः
शान्तिः ।
वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वे देवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं ॐ
शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*Om dyauḥ śāntir-antarikṣgum śāntiḥ
Prthivī śāntir-āpaḥ
Śānti-oṣadhayaḥ śāntiḥ ।
Vanaspatayaḥ śāntir-viśve devāḥ
Śāntir-brahma sarvagum śāntiḥ
Śāntir-eva śāntiḥ sā mā śāntir-edhi ॥
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ॥*

It means, “May there be peace to the Heavens, peace to the sky, peace to the atmosphere. May there be peace on the Earth and peace in the waters. May there be peace to the forests and peace to the mountains. May there be peace to the plants, to the animals and to all creatures. May we all live in peace. *Om* peace, peace, peace.”

The violence committed in the world today takes many forms. We are violent to ourselves, to our families, to others in our community, and to others across the world. Sometimes it is physical violence; other times it is emotional or psychological violence. Sometimes it is vio-

lence through acts of commission; other times it is violence through acts of omission.

There is also violence we perpetrate to our Mother Earth Herself and to all the creatures with whom we co-habit.

The choices we make in our lifestyle have direct and sometimes dire consequences for the planet our children will inherit. What we eat, what we buy, where we go and how we get there all play formidable roles in whether we will bequeath to our children a planet that is green, lush, healthy and able to sustain life, or one that is desecrated, polluted, poisoned and poisonous to its remaining inhabitants.

There are many books and resources available on the subject of environmental preservation and protection; hence I am not going to elaborate too much on the details. However, no book on peace would be complete without at least touching upon the abuse we knowingly and unknowingly inflict upon the planet by whose grace we survive.

Chapter 1

Pollution

There is a beautiful saying which is used frequently by those who spend time in the forests and woods: “*Take only memories and leave only foot-prints.*” The Earth is here to sustain our life, not for us to extinguish Hers. Yet, through the way we are polluting the air, the water and the ground, that is exactly what we are doing.

POLLUTION OF THE EARTH

Consumer Excess – Waste Management

Everything we use which is not biodegradable – each item, each piece of packaging, each container, each garment – will someday end up taking precious space in our Earth’s landfills.

Further, the manufacturing of everything we use generates a huge amount of waste that is dumped directly into or onto our Earth. We may hold a small Styrofoam cup filled with tea or coffee in our hands and think, “It’s not more than a few ounces, a few square inches in area. It won’t have that big of an effect on the Earth.” However, we have to trace back the genesis of the Styrofoam cup to its roots. Only by seeing the full amount of resources used in the production, manufacture, transportation and sale of this Styrofoam cup can we grasp its global impact.

This, of course, does not mean that to live peaceful lives we should never purchase or use anything. It simply means that we need to live

with awareness. It means, in continuation with our Styrofoam cup example, that we may decide to purchase a small, personal, insulated travel mug (which are available everywhere these days) which we can fill with the beverage of our choice rather than throwing away paper, plastic and Styrofoam cups every time we purchase a drink.

Through being constantly aware of the impact of our choices, we will see innumerable areas where we can make decisions that generate peace rather than pieces for the Earth on which we live.

Toxic Chemicals

Another serious area in which we pollute the Earth is through our dependence on toxic chemicals for everyday needs. Detergent, bug spray, cleaning supplies, fertilizer, insecticides – all of these are filled with chemicals that are poison for us, poison for our children and poison for the Earth into which they eventually seep.

When these chemicals soak into the soil and groundwater or get carried on the wind, they affect and infect agricultural fields where our fruits, vegetables and wheat are growing.

The level of toxins in young children living in industrialized societies is not only far higher than those in undeveloped, rural areas, but it is significantly higher than any governmental or health organization's recommendations. Why? Our children are not swallowing bottles of toxic chemicals. How is it getting into their bloodstreams in such alarming percentages?

When the soil and the groundwater get polluted with these toxic chemicals, three things happen. First, these chemicals leach into the fruits, vegetables, and grains that are growing in the soil. When we consume the produce, the chemicals end up in our bodies. Second, when the chemicals seep into the groundwater, our water supply becomes contaminated. Then, the groundwater drifts eventually to the ocean, where the chemicals pollute the water. Thus, all marine life becomes

affected and infected by the chemicals which lodge into the tissues of the fish. When we eat the fish, we consume the toxins.

WATER POLLUTION

The billions of tons of industrial, toxic and household waste that gets dumped into the oceans each year has led not only to a significant and tragic depletion of marine life and a desecration of the undersea eco-system, but also to a sharp increase in disease among those who consume fish or any oceanic products.

Worse than our own personal, household chemicals being dumped into the water is the toxic chemicals dumped by factories whose goods we are dependent. When we purchase, for example, a leather belt, we may be aware of the fact that a cow's life has been taken for it. However, we may not be aware of the tons of toxins which have been produced by the tannery to turn the flesh of the cow into a belt. In India, the greatest polluters of the holy River Ganga are the tanneries (leather producers). In spite of government sanctions, they continue to dump tons and tons of hazardous and toxic waste into the divine river every day.

Lakes in numerous countries of the world have become so polluted from the untreated, casually dumped waste of nearby factories that crops perish, animals who depend on the lake's water become extinct, and villagers suffer hunger, thirst, malnutrition and eventually death.

The factories in developing nations which are dumping their waste unconscionably into the water are most likely producing products for export. It is not the villagers living around the lake or on the river's banks who are purchasing the items whose manufacturing is contaminating their land and water. It is us.

We are concerned about ending the violence between warring factions

in countries across the world, as we know that communal violence leads to injury, pain and death. However, in those same countries, many more people are at risk of death from drinking contaminated water, eating fish whose tissues have dangerously high concentrations of toxins, or eating fruit grown in toxic soil.

If we are truly concerned about bringing peace to the world, we must take a step toward purchasing only those products which have been manufactured conscientiously, responsibly and without causing harm to people, animals or the land.

AIR POLLUTION

The Greenhouse effect (the rise in global temperatures due to excessive emission of certain gases into the air) is probably the most serious threat to the Earth and our existence today. Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, CFCs, PFCs and other greenhouse gases which are produced by cars, factories, livestock production, and other daily industrial activities are trapping heat in our atmosphere.

That extra heat will not only cause a few-degree increase in global temperatures, but it also threatens to wreak havoc upon the delicate balance of the oceans, forests, icecaps and continents of the world.

In the United States, nearly seven tons (6,350 kilograms or 13,970 lbs) of greenhouse gases are emitted per person each year. Of this, 82% is emitted through fuel that is burned to generate electricity and to run our cars. This means that each person's use of electrical appliances and a car causes approximately 5,207 kilograms (11,455 lbs) of greenhouse gases to be emitted each year.¹

The potential effects of global warming are disastrous for ourselves, for the Earth, for all the species that exist on the planet, as well as the possibility of life for our children, grandchildren and future genera-

tions. Even a few-degree rise in global average temperatures is enough to injure, disrupt and even extinguish the life of innumerable species of animals and plants, not to mention the human race.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

In short, the way to minimize our personal contribution to pollution is through reversing those behaviors which exacerbate it. For example, by using low-energy bulbs, fuel-efficient cars, and “Earth-friendly” appliances, we reduce the amount of greenhouse gases which our personal devices emit into the air.

Again, awareness is the key. For peace within ourselves, we need to be aware of our own ego, greed, anger, and other emotions. For peace in the family and community, we need to be aware of inter-personal dynamics which contribute to conflict. For peace in the world, we need to be aware of how our behavior, lifestyle and priorities can lead to a global environment which is fertile soil for the seeds of discontent and violence to be sown. For peace on the Earth, we need to be aware of how every choice we make impacts the planet today and in the future. Then, we will be able to make conscious choices that minimize the detrimental effects of our time spent walking on Mother Earth.

See Appendix 1 for some very simple choices we can each make in our daily lives to dramatically minimize the amount of pollution our existence creates on the land and in the water.

See Appendix 2 for specific ways you can help minimize global warming.

By implementing some of these choices in our life we can move a step closer to leaving only footprints on our Mother Earth. Read, then re-read these steps and see how many you can implement on a daily basis.

¹ United States Environmental Protection Agency data available at www.epa.gov

Chapter 2

Deforestation

Another form of violence we are inflicting upon Mother Earth is the destruction of Her precious, pristine forests, the home of millions of species of birds, animals and insects as well as innumerable populations of humans.

Rates of deforestation are running rampant across the planet, as we clear-cut ancient forests for the fulfillment of our transitory pleasures – a mahogany table or teak bookcase, oil to fuel our gas-guzzling SUV, or our insatiable desire for meat (I will explain in the next section how the meat industry is inextricably linked to the destruction of our planet).

Most of us assume that there is plenty of forest land left in the world. We imagine the maps of our schooldays showing millions of square miles of tropical and subtropical forest areas in South America, North America, Asia and the Pacific. However, in just the last few decades, over 3.5 million square kilometers of tropical forest have been totally, completely deforested, and an additional five million square kilometers have been degraded by commercial logging.¹

The clear-cutting of non-sustainable rainforest wood (such as mahogany, teak, and redwood) threatens to destroy the lives, homes and culture of over fifty million indigenous people living in these forests, as well as countless species of birds, animals and insects who reside only in that delicate balance of soil, rain and climate that can be termed “rainforest.”

In the United States alone we have the following tragic statistics:²

- **More than 95% of the contiguous states' (USA not including Hawaii or Alaska) original primary forests are gone.**
- **In the Pacific Northwest, the largest area of primary forest, only about 10% of the original forest remains.**
- **Less than 1% of North America's original tallgrass ecosystem remains.**
- **More than 90% of the United States' rivers are so degraded (polluted, dried, or dammed up) that they no longer receive the governmental designation as "wild" or "scenic."**

Trees and forests are crucial to our existence. Trees and greenery not only provide oxygen without which we could not live, but they also absorb carbon dioxide, the increasing concentration of which – as one of the main greenhouse gases – threatens to unravel the very fabric of life as we know it.

Further, by providing millions of square miles of shade and absorbing the sun's intense rays, the thick forest cover is our best hope at offsetting the perilous effects of global warming. The trees and plants of the rainforest and other forests also provide the foundation of innumerable life-saving drugs, most of which we purchase without a moment's thought as to where the miracle has come from.

A famous Native American, a true warrior for peace, Chief Seattle said nearly two hundred years ago:

*"All things are connected. This we know.
The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the Earth.*

¹ Greenpeace International (see www.greenpeace.org)

² Taken from www.biodiversity911.org and the World Wildlife Fund (see www.worldwildlife.org)

*All things are connected, like the blood which unites one family.
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.
Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."*

The truth of this has never been more crucial for us to believe, to appreciate, and to live by than it is today.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The rainforests, tropical forests, sub-tropical forests and all other wetlands, drylands and natural areas are being cut down due to one reason only: consumerism. Our consumption of the following items leads directly to the destruction of the forests:

1. **Wood products** – The trees themselves are cut for this purpose.
2. **Paper** – The trees themselves are cut for this purpose
3. **Oil** – This is particularly true of the rainforests, as much of the sacred rainforests are being destroyed in order to run oil pipes through it. Also, many natural areas are being destroyed in order to rig oil wells.
4. **Meat** – The production of meat is the largest contributor to the clear-cutting of forests, due to the necessity for land on which to graze the animals.

While some people will commit their lives or their earnings to working tirelessly to prevent the destruction of our forests, what most of us can do is simply cut back on our use of those items which contribute to deforestation.

**Note: See Appendix 3 for other specific ways to minimize deforestation.*

Chapter 3

The Benefits for the Earth of Vegetarianism

In order to be true torch-bearers for peace, our own lives must be pledged to awareness, integrity and conscious-living. This does not mean we all must be *sanyasis* (renunciants) or that we must live in caves wearing only a loincloth. Rather, it simply means that we – as warriors for peace – must tread on the Earth consciously, with full awareness of the impact each step makes. There is no right way or wrong way, but there is a conscious way and an unconscious way.

My greatest hope for the people of this planet living in the 21st century is that we remove the tinted glasses of material success, financial achievement and social status through which we tend to view the world and make our decisions. Many of us today live with tunnel-vision. We can see only the goal in front of us. For achievement of a particular goal, the ability to be completely focused and concentrated is a wonderful attribute. However, for cultivating peace on every level, we must broaden our vision, expand our horizons, and remove the glasses. Let us see the world with our bare eyes, unshaded and uncovered.

In previous sections of this book I've mentioned the role that being a vegetarian plays in our own personal sense of inner peace, as well as the role our food choices make in the availability of food for those who are starving. There is another important aspect of vegetarianism, and that is the role it plays in the preservation and protection of Mother Earth.

Being a vegetarian today is the only choice for anyone who is concerned about the health of Mother Earth and all the people who live here. It is the best and easiest way we can help to eliminate hunger, thirst, species extinction, rainforest destruction, deforestation and the depletion of precious resources such as water, land and power. It is perhaps the most important thing that each man, woman and child can do every day to demonstrate care for the Earth and care for humanity.

To be vegetarian is to make the choice to live peacefully and *dharmically* in the present, and to preserve a world for tomorrow.

The Effects of Meat-Eating on Global Warming

Animal agriculture (raising animals to be killed for food) releases more than 100 million tons of methane gas into the atmosphere each year. Methane gas is one of the worst contributors to global warming. Approximately 50% of the human-induced global warming is caused by methane emissions. This huge production of methane from animal agriculture is due to the energy used in clear-cutting the land for grazing, the enormous amount of methane released as gas from the animals themselves, and the energy used in killing them.¹

In addition to the millions of tons of methane released into the air, animal agriculture also produces millions of tons of carbon dioxide, another leading greenhouse gas. The numbers are breathtaking:

The average car, if driven all day long, releases three kilograms of carbon dioxide into the air. The production of one hamburger releases seventy-five kilograms of carbon dioxide, due to the energy expended in clearing the forest, grazing, etc.

This means that eating one hamburger causes the same damage to our atmosphere as driving your car continuously for three weeks!

To minimize greenhouse gases, it is much more expedient to become

vegetarian than to simply try to reduce the amount of fossil fuels we use. The lifespan of animals raised to be killed is only one or two years, so a sharp reduction in meat intake would lead to almost immediate drops in methane emissions. On the other hand, the lifespan of a gas-guzzling car, industry, factory or power plant is decades.

Earthsave International explains the situation clearly:

‘Even if cheap, zero-emission fuel sources (to minimize carbon dioxide emissions) were available today, they would take many years to build and slowly replace the massive infrastructure our economy depends upon today. Similarly, unlike carbon dioxide which can remain in the air for more than a century, methane cycles out of the atmosphere in just eight years, so that lower methane emissions would quickly translate to significant cooling of the Earth.’²

The Effects of Meat-Eating on Deforestation

The leading cause of the destruction of our precious forests across the world is the growing appetite for meat. Millions of acres of rainforest are clear-cut, destroying innumerable species of animals, plants, birds and insects in order to make room to raise the animals who will end up on our plates.

Every second, one football field of tropical rainforest is destroyed to graze cattle who will become hamburgers and steaks.

More than 50% of the land on this planet is used to graze livestock. Imagine what we could do with that land if we put it to better use.

The Effects of Meat-Eating on Water Shortage

All over the world people are suffering from lack of water. Fields become desiccated, crops perish, villages starve. “Conserve water” has become a catch-phrase of the environmental movement. Low flow shower-heads and toilets have become common as have a myriad

of water-saving practices and techniques. All of this is laudable, as it shows we are prepared to take steps to help preserve our most precious resource. However, one of the greatest ways we can conserve water is by switching to a vegetarian diet.

Newsweek magazine is quoted as saying, “The amount of water that goes into a 1,000-pound steer [a male cow who will become beef] could float a Naval destroyer ship!” Imagine how much water would be needed to keep a Naval destroyer ship afloat! That same amount of water is used to produce beef from just one cow.

The December 1999 issue of *Audubon* concurs, stating, “Nearly half the water consumed in this country...is used for livestock.”

The production of one pound of beef takes approximately 2,500 gallons of water. The production of one pound of chicken uses approximately 815 gallons of water. This water is used to grow the food for the livestock, to water them, and then to wash their bloody bodies and turn them into food.

In contrast, the production of one pound of wheat or potatoes takes only twenty-five gallons of water. That means that the production of meat uses one hundred times as much water as the production of vegetarian food.

In an average shower of seven minutes every day, you would use approximately 2,600 gallons of water in bathing over a period of six months. **That means that the same amount of water is used in the production of one hamburger as in showering every day for six months.**

Across the industrialized world, everyone is talking about what we can do to save the planet. There are thousands of programs dedicated to protecting our rapidly dwindling natural resources and adopting a more Earth-friendly approach to living.

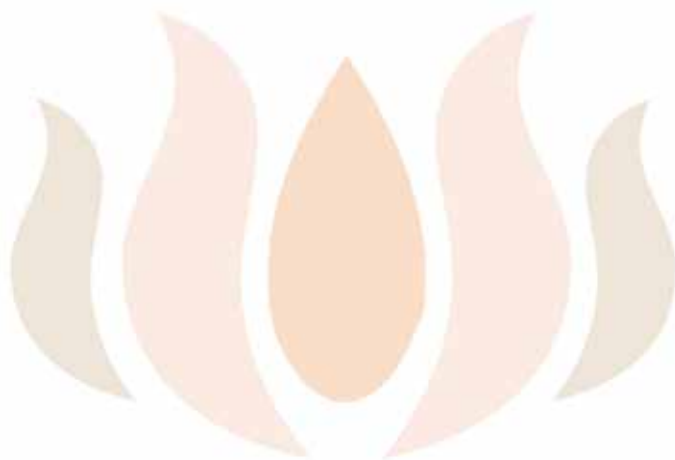
We may not be able to personally replant every tree that has been cut down in the forest. But, we can strive to make our own lives and our actions pure and divine.

Let us make our every day, our every meal, one that offers peace to our bodies, to our brothers and sisters on the planet, and to the Earth.

¹All facts and figures taken from *Diet for a New America*, by John Robbins, 1987, Stillpoint Publishers; *The Food Revolution*, by John Robbins, 2001, Conari Press; and www.earthsave.org

² www.earthsave.org

Conclusion



Although we search for peace, yearn for peace and pray for peace, the object of our search remains tragically elusive. Hopefully through this book, the ways and means of attaining peace – within yourself, within your family, within your community and within the world – will be clearer and more attainable.

Free Your “Self” From Yourself

The greatest message on the subject of inner peace is that we are our own worst enemy and our own greatest obstacle. Our own egos, expectations, and habits are the most insurmountable hurdles on the path to peace. The more we can free our Self (the divine, peaceful, joyful and pure Self which is part and parcel of the Divine) from ourselves (the external personality, fears, expectations, desires and ego), the closer we will be to peace. If I can leave you with one mantra for finding inner peace it is: “Free your Self from yourself.” That which you seek is within you; you must simply be quiet, still, humble and committed enough to find it.

There is a beautiful story of a seeker who traveled everywhere, searching for God, for that Divine Source, Divine Peace and Divine Truth. Finally, after years of searching and feeling no closer to finding God, the seeker gave up. Collapsing under a tree in the forest, he cried aloud, “Oh God! How could you be so far from me? I am dying without You, yet I have searched and searched and You are nowhere to be found. I will sit under this tree until my breath leaves this body as I cannot bear another day without You.”

Tears poured down the seeker’s cheeks as he lay his head against the tree and waited for death to come. At that moment, a fish jumped out of the water from the river, panting and crying hysterically. The fish’s cries pulled the seeker from his misery, and he turned his attention to the fish. “What is wrong, my dear fish?” he asked.

The fish replied, thrashing its body back and forth on the surface of the river and crying hysterically, “Water! I need water! I cannot live without water, but I cannot find any water. I am sure to die!”

The man looked incredulously at the fish. “But, my dear fish, you are living

in the river. The river is nothing but water. How can you say that you cannot find water? Water is all around you and within you. Every gill of your body is soaked in water. If you stop flapping about hysterically on the surface and go back deep into the river you will find all the water you could ever want.”

Suddenly the fish stopped panting and crying and its voice became very calm. “My friend, just as I am living in water and hence my despair about lack of water seems absurd to you, so you are living in God and your despair seems absurd to me. Just as every gill of mine is seeped in water, so is every cell of yours seeped in God. Just as the river is nothing but water, so is the world nothing but God. My tears are no more confounding or misplaced than yours. You have advised me to go back into the depths of the river and there I will find water. I advise you to go back into the depths of your being and there you will find God.”

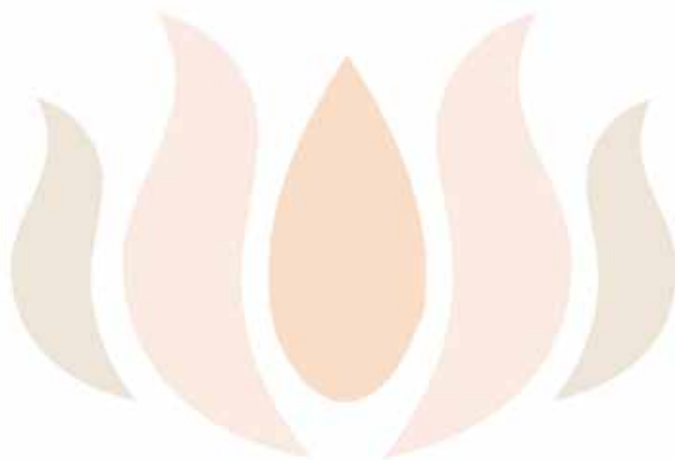
In our search for internal peace, we must realize that peace is our true, divine nature and that we must remove the obstacles that are obscuring it from our view – our egos, expectations, desires and emotions.

Regarding peace in the world: I know the task seems daunting. Every day the newspapers and airwaves fill our awareness with images of the dead and dying, the maimed, the tortured, and the bereaved. The numbers are astounding and grow exponentially each day. Our eyes brim with tears when we watch the news or hear a particularly heart-wrenching story. It seems that we have no option other than to simply pray, for we are helpless to do anything else.

Through this book, I hope to have given you all some ideas and tools which you can use to help move the world toward a peaceful tomorrow. Each of us, regardless of our profession or the amount of “power” we wield, can make a significant contribution to world peace if we sincerely want to. Through our individual actions, through our votes, through our choices, through our commitment, we *do* have the power to create a future of peace in the world.

May God bless you all.

Appendices



Ways to Help Reduce Pollution

1. In your home or in the office use unbleached or non-disposable coffee filters. The process of bleaching paper often creates dioxin, a toxic chemical that can end up in landfills and incinerators.
2. Ask your school or employer to use recycled white paper and to recycle all paper. Colored paper requires more bleach in the recycling process to remove the inks and dyes.
3. When practical, use latex or water-based paint instead of oil-based paint. Oil-based paints and their solvents can be toxic, and the by-products of manufacturing these paints are dangerous pollutants.
4. Instead of using toxic chemical pesticides on your garden, use organic ones such as rotenone and pyrethrin, or a soapy spray. Once pest populations are reduced, introduce predatory insects like ladybugs and praying mantises that eat the plant-eating pests. Chemical pesticides can endanger wildlife and beneficial insects, contaminate groundwater, and destroy soil microorganisms essential for healthy and productive plant growth.
5. Use the least toxic cleaners you can find, or make your own for easy cleaning jobs. Mix together vinegar and salt for use as a surface cleaner. Alternatively, add 4 tablespoons of baking soda to 1 quart of warm water, or even use plain baking soda on a damp sponge. To clean windows, mix 1 tablespoon of vinegar or lemon juice in 1 quart of water and spray on. Use newspaper to wipe windows and mirrors dry. For furniture, mix 1 teaspoon of lemon juice in 1 pint of mineral or vegetable oil, and wipe on furniture.

6. Avoid the use of toxic drain cleaners. To open clogged drains, use a plunger instead of toxic chemical products. Or, pour one cup of salt and one cup of baking soda down the drain, followed by six cups of boiling water, and let sit overnight.
7. Use a non-chlorine bleach whenever possible. Chlorine is a powerful chemical that can kill fish and other aquatic life if it ends up in streams, rivers, or lakes.
8. Help cut down on the use of toxic chemicals around your home by using natural lawn care methods. If homeowners reduced their use of pesticides by 10%, we'd remove five million pounds of toxic chemicals from the environment every year. Try weeding by hand, using ladybugs and other natural pest controls, and planting native species adapted to the conditions in your area to keep your yard healthy and toxin-free.
9. Help improve your pet's (and the planet's) health by cutting down on flea powders and other toxic chemicals to control fleas. Use pesticides only during the height of flea season, wash your pet with soap and water, and use a flea comb regularly.
10. Instead of using toxic pesticides, try less toxic alternatives to battle cockroaches and ants in your home. Mix powdered sugar and borax in equal parts to make a powder and sprinkle it in places where the critters crawl.
11. Avoid using toxic chemicals on your carpet. To deodorize dry carpets, sprinkle liberally with baking soda. Wait at least fifteen minutes, then vacuum. Repeat as needed.
12. Ask the managers of the stores you frequent to offer effective alternatives to cleaning products that contain hazardous chemicals. Many types of non-toxic, environmentally friendly cleaning products are available.
13. Find out if any dry cleaners in your community use eco-friendly

alternatives to perchlorethylene (known as perc), the most common chemical used in dry cleaning. A growing number of businesses are starting to offer alternatives to this toxic chemical that has been linked with cancer.

14. If you live in the USA, learn about releases of toxic chemicals in your community and what you can do about it by consulting the EPA's toxic release inventory (TRI) at www.epa.gov/tri, or visiting Environmental Defense's scorecard Web site at <http://scorecard.goodguide.org>. Organize a group of students to raise awareness in your school about the toxic chemicals being released in your community by helping them to navigate and understand the Web sites and having them share what they learn with the rest of the school.

15. Find a hazardous waste disposal site near you. The average American home contains twenty-five gallons of hazardous chemicals that must be disposed of properly when no longer needed. The American Petroleum Institute's Web site at www.recycleoil.org can help you find the nearest disposal site for household hazardous wastes such as paints, cleaners, oils, and pesticides.

16. Identify the toxic chemicals in your home. Common household items such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides often contain hazardous chemicals. Read the labels to find out if a product is toxic; look for warnings like danger, caution, toxic, corrosive, flammable, or poison. These products are considered household hazardous waste and should be disposed of properly. Contact your local environmental, health, or solid waste agency to find out if a collection program exists in your area.

17. Organize a group of students to conduct an inventory of the toxic chemicals in your school or office. Talk with your teachers, principal, employer, other employees, cleaning staff, and groundskeepers to find out what kinds of cleaners, paints, and pesticides are being used around the school and office. Then look for ways they can be reduced.

18. Dispose of your rechargeable batteries properly. While rechargeable batteries help reduce the amount of waste in landfills, they do contain toxic chemicals.

19. Use and store hazardous chemicals carefully. Never store hazardous products in food containers; instead, keep them in their original containers with their original labels. Seal containers tightly to prevent volatile chemicals from evaporating into the air. Never mix leftover hazardous substances, because they might react, ignite, or form a new mixture that is un-recyclable.

20. Help protect agricultural workers, yourself, and the environment by buying organically grown produce and grains. Organic fruits and vegetables are grown without applying toxic pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and, therefore, are friendlier to farmers, consumers, and biodiversity.

21. Whenever possible, buy organic cotton. Cotton is the most pesticide-intensive crop in the world, accounting for 25% of the pesticides used in the world. Help give biodiversity a break from these toxic chemicals by buying organically grown cotton.

22. Help get your local golf course off “drugs.” Across the nation, golf course groundskeepers are taking steps to reduce their use of toxic chemicals like pesticides. Golf courses that introduce measures to sustain biodiversity, reduce toxic chemical use, and reduce waste can become certified by Audubon International as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries.

¹ All items taken courtesy of www.biodiversity911.org

Ways to Reduce Global Warming

- 1. Conduct an energy audit of your school or workplace.** Organize teams to evaluate how the school or office uses energy and where it can be cut down. You might look particularly for places where air can escape, lights are left on when no one's using them, and natural light can be used instead of electric lights. Contact your local electric company for more ideas and help. One organization, after conducting an energy audit, replaced its cooling plant and lights and saved \$1.8 million over a period of three years.
- 2. Invest in compact fluorescent light bulbs** and encourage your employer or school to do the same. They use one-fourth of the energy of an incandescent bulb, last at least ten times longer, and release much less CO₂ into the atmosphere.
- 3. Plant deciduous trees on the south side of your home** to provide summer shade and cut air conditioning costs. In some studies, researchers have seen a 20-30% reduction in electricity consumption for air conditioning when residents planted shade trees.
- 4. Paint your home a light color** to help reduce home cooling costs and energy consumption. Researchers have found that houses painted white are 5°F cooler than those painted gray, and 4°F to 8°F cooler than those painted black.
- 5. Recycle your metal food cans** and anything else containing tin. Reusing the material in tin cans reduces related energy use by 74%, air pollution by 85%, and solid waste by 95%.
- 6. Keep your car tuned up** so that it's fuel-efficient. This will save

you in fuel costs. A well-tuned car will also pollute less. Also, the simple step of keeping tires properly inflated can reduce gasoline consumption by 5%.

7. If you're buying a new car, buy one that gets good gas mileage. That car could save you at least \$1,500 in gasoline costs over its lifetime. And if all of America's 187 million drivers switched to more energy-efficient cars, we'd reduce the amount of CO₂ – a key greenhouse gas – by more than three billion tons.

8. When buying a new car, go fuel-efficient. If you switched from a car with average gas mileage to a large sport utility vehicle (SUV), you'd consume as much additional energy in one year as you would if you left your refrigerator door open for six years!

9. If you're buying a new car, consider a hybrid electric car. Hybrids get excellent gas mileage (some can travel up to 700 miles on a single tank of gas) because an electric motor helps share the work with a gasoline-powered motor. But unlike electric vehicles, these cars don't need to be plugged in.

10. Try carpooling. Encourage your employer to set up a carpool program for employees. Carpooling saves on gasoline, pollution, and parking spaces.

11. If possible, ride a bike or walk to school or encourage your parents to carpool. Every year, the average car pumps its own weight in CO₂ – a gas that contributes to global climate change – into the atmosphere. But the only CO₂ that bikers and walkers emit is from their own breath!

12. If your community provides mass transportation like buses, use it. Sharing rides on buses and trains helps cut down on emissions of CO₂ from cars.

13. If your community provides mass transportation in the form of

buses, **encourage your community to use the most fuel-efficient buses possible.** Many communities are investing in electric and hybrid electric buses to help cut down greenhouse gas emissions.

14. Contact the city planners in your community to find out what they're doing to help residents cut down on driving. Encourage planners to consider providing sidewalks and bike paths, public transportation, and other options to help residents eliminate or consolidate driving trips.

15. Insulate your hot-water heater to cut down on energy use around your home: \$3 to \$4 worth of insulation could save \$20 a year in energy costs and help cut down on greenhouse gas emissions.

16. Turn down the temperature setting on your hot water heater and save one percent on your energy bill for every degree you turn it down. Most manufacturers set the thermostat at 140°F, which is hotter than you need it. By turning it down, you'll save money and help the climate. However, don't set your thermostat below 120°F as harmful organisms can grow in a tank kept below this temperature.

17. Shorten your showers to help save energy. Not only will you be saving water, but also you'll be saving energy by giving your water heater less water to heat.

18. Have your home furnace and air conditioner tuned up, and change or clean your air filter regularly so that the units run at their maximum efficiency. This will save you 5-15% on your energy bills and reduce destructive emissions.

19. Set your thermostat in your home and office a little lower in the winter and a little higher in the summer. For each 2°F reduction in winter and 2°F increase in the summer, you can avoid creating about 500 pounds of CO₂ a year, and you will also see a reduction in your monthly energy bills.

20. In the winter, put weather stripping and caulking around doors and windows to avoid sending your heat “out the window.” This will save you 10-30% on your energy bills.

21. Check for places where heated or cooled air can escape from your home, like cracks or holes in walls and ceilings; sites where plumbing or wiring penetrate walls, floors, and ceilings; and leaks in attic doors. Seal those leaks in the appropriate manner to help save on heating and cooling costs. Look under “energy” or “heating” in the directory for professional assistance.

22. In older homes that have only single-pane windows, install thermal replacement windows or add storm windows. This could save up to 25% on your energy bills.

23. Install insulation in your attic and walls to reduce your home energy consumption and cut down on CO₂ emissions. The insulation currently in place in buildings in the United States reduces the amount of CO₂ emissions by 780 million tons every year.

24. Pull down window shades at night and close the curtains when the weather is cold. Window coverings make a “wall” that helps keep heat inside your home, reducing your need for furnace heat.

25. Install an attic fan or exhaust fan in your home to cool your rooms. These fans can supplement or replace air conditioning on summer days, resulting in lower utility bills.

26. Look for energy-efficient appliances when buying new air conditioners, refrigerators, furnaces, hot water heaters, and clothes dryers. The EPA’s Energy Star rating will help you identify the most efficient appliances.

27. Help your refrigerator run at optimum efficiency by using a vacuum cleaner or brush to clean the condenser coils on the back or bottom at least once a year.

28. Clean or replace the filters on your air conditioner once a month. If you don't, the fan has to work harder and it consumes more electricity.

29. Turn off the lights and other electric appliances when you're not using them. You not only will save money, but also will reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Electricity is often generated by burning coal, which produces gases that contribute to global climate change.

30. Choose clean energy. Where possible select a power plan that uses at least 50% clean energy. If you live in the USA, see if such a power plan is available in your state by visiting visit the Department of Energy website. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 7,000)²

31. Recycle. Recycling saves a lot of energy needed to make new products. If you recycle 50% of your glass, aluminum, plastic, cardboard and newspapers you will save 2,400 pounds of CO₂ per year.

32. Buy a programmable thermostat. Automatically lower your monthly energy bill by giving your heat and air conditioning a break while you are asleep or out. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 1,050)

33. Replace a worn-out refrigerator with an Energy Star model. The US would need thirty less power plants if all Americans used the most efficient refrigerators. Visit EPA's Energy Star website to see a list of energy efficient appliances. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 1,000)

34. Turn your computer off overnight and put it into a power save mode. A standard monitor left on overnight uses enough energy to print 5,300 copies. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 950)

35. Drive fifteen miles less each week. Shrink your gas costs and your waistline by walking, biking and taking public transportation. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 900)

36. Avoid idling. Give your engine and the climate a break by turn-

ing off your car when you aren't moving (except in traffic or at a stop light of course). Try to cut out ten minutes of daily idling. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 550)

37. Wash clothes in cold or warm water. Skip the hot water on two loads per week. You'll save energy and should have less wrinkled clothes. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 500)

38. Use compact fluorescent bulbs. It's a bright idea to replace three incandescent bulbs with fluorescent bulbs that last up to ten times as long and use a quarter of the energy. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 300)

39. Keep your tires filled. Your ride will be smoother and you'll save up to 5% on your fuel tab. (Pounds of CO₂ Savings Per Year = 275)

¹ Item numbers 1-29 taken courtesy of www.biodiversity911.org

² Items number 30-39 taken courtesy of World Wildlife Fund www.worldwildlifefund.org

Ways to Help Minimize Deforestation

1. Stop junk mail from arriving at your home. If one million people did this, we could save 1.5 million trees and a lot of energy. In America, write to Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, P.O. Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008. Or visit www.the-dma.org/consumers or stopjunk.com.
2. Consider alternatives to using or buying items made from tropical hardwoods, such as teak, mahogany, ebony, or rosewood. If you do decide to buy them, look for woods that are marked with a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) label, which means they were harvested sustainably.
3. Help protect tropical forests and birds by buying shade-grown coffee. Coffee plantations that grow coffee under a canopy of trees provide better habitat for biodiversity than plantations that strip away all vegetation but the coffee plants.
4. When making home improvements, choose woods that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). FSC-certified wood is harvested in ways that protect forests.
5. Instead of buying a new table or dresser, shop around at used furniture outlets, yard sales, and antique stores. Not only will you save money – and maybe even find a real steal – but you’ll also save trees and wood.
6. Plant and nurture trees in your community and around your school. Trees not only produce oxygen but also guard against global warming by absorbing CO₂. Trees even lower our air conditioning needs in summer by shading our homes and offices. The National Arbor

Foundation at www.arborday.org and TreeLink at www.treelink.org can provide information and resources and can help you find others in your community with similar interests.

7. Encourage businesses in your community to plant trees. Research suggests that shoppers are willing to pay more for products they buy in areas filled with trees than those that are devoid of trees. Trees might not only help biodiversity in your community, but also might help your community's economy.

8. At your dinner table, use cloth napkins rather than disposable paper ones. Paper accounts for the largest percentage of solid waste at landfills. By reusing cloth napkins, you can help cut down on solid waste and help protect forests.

9. When shopping, choose products in limited packaging, such as buying pasta and cereal in bags rather than boxes. This will not only help cut down on the amount of waste in landfills, but will also help reduce our need to harvest trees for paper packaging. If you bring your lunch to school or work, pack it in a lunch box or reusable cloth bag rather than in disposable paper bags. Using reusable bags not only will help cut down on the amount of waste in landfills, but also will help reduce our need to produce throwaway paper products.

10. Look for ways to reduce your paper use. Try using both sides of every sheet of paper, cutting paper into smaller squares for memo paper, reusing envelopes, and other paper-saving techniques. On average, each American uses 730 pounds of paper per year. That's approximately nine trees, and seven times as much as the world average.

11. Recycle your old newspapers. Americans throw away the equivalent of more than thirty million trees in newsprint each year. Take them to a commercial or community recycling center if your town doesn't have curbside recycling. Recycling one ton of newsprint saves seventeen to twenty trees, uses 30-70% less energy than making new paper from trees, and reduces related air pollution by 95%.

12. Help start a paper recycling program at your office or school if there isn't one already. Every year, the average office worker throws away about 120 pounds of high-grade recyclable paper. You might collect information about recycling services in your community, organize students or co-workers to help in paper collection, and provide information about how many resources can be saved by recycling paper.
13. Buy recycled paper products for your home, including sheet paper, envelopes, paper towels, napkins, and toilet paper. Look for products that contain at least 50% post-consumer waste. This means that at least half of the material used in making the item comes from paper that people have recycled. If your store doesn't carry recycled paper products, tell the manager you would like it to do so. Encourage your employer or school to also buy recycled paper products.
14. When making copies, use both sides of the paper. If your office doesn't have a copy machine that can do that, encourage the purchaser of such equipment to buy a two-sided copier next time around. Not only will you save paper, but you'll also need less space for filing documents.
15. If your company or institution uses pallets to store goods, repair broken wooden ones instead of disposing of them, and consider using pallets made of alternative materials like recycled plastic. Although these alternative materials may cost more, they last much longer and are recyclable.
16. Donate used books and magazines to hospitals, retirement homes, women's shelters, or libraries. The donations not only will help these organizations, but also will reduce the resources used to produce paper.
17. If your business has access to the Internet, use e-mail for inter-office memos and external mail. This will reduce the use of paper in your workplace and will save money on paper and filing. Every year, Americans throw away enough office and writing paper to build a twelve-foot-high wall stretching from Los Angeles to New York City.

18. Consider taking a family vacation that will help biodiversity. Earthwatch (www.earthwatch.org) is an organization that allows citizens to assist with scientific research, and the group's Web site details a range of research expeditions that explore the biodiversity of the planet. You could spend your next vacation working with scientists studying anything from ospreys to orangutans.

19. Visit forests responsibly, remembering to bring out everything you take in, clean up litter left by others, stay on marked trails, and respect wildlife. To learn more, contact the Leave No Trace program for publications and educational materials on the internet at www.lnt.org.

¹ All items taken courtesy of www.biodiversity911.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*His Holiness Pujya Swami
Chidanand Saraswatiji*

H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji's motto in life is, "In the Service of God and humanity." **Selflessly dedicated to the welfare of all, He leads, directs and inspires numerous, wide-scale service initiatives.** Touched by the hand of God at the tender age of eight, Pujya Swamiji left His home to live a life devoted to God and humanity, spending His youth in silence, meditation and austerities high in the Himalayas. At the age of seventeen, after nine years of unbroken, intense *sadhana*, He returned from the forest—under the orders of His guru—and obtained an academic education to parallel His spiritual one. Pujya Swamiji has master's degrees in Sanskrit and Philosophy as well as fluency in many languages.

Pujya Swamiji is President and Spiritual Head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh, India, one of the largest interfaith, spiritual institutions in India. Under His divine inspiration and leadership, Parmarth Niketan has become a sanctuary known across the globe as one filled with grace, beauty, serenity and true divine bliss. Pujya Swamiji has also increased several-fold the humanitarian activities undertaken by Parmarth Niketan (www.parmarth.org). Now, the ashram is not only a spiritual haven for those who visit, but it also provides education, training, and health care to those in need.

He is the Co-Founder of Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA), the world's first-ever international interfaith initiative which brings together the world's faiths as allies in ensuring every child around the world has access to safe, life-giving Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). (www.washalliance.org; www.facebook.com/washalliance)

He is the Founder of:

1. **Ganga Action Parivar (GAP)**, a global family dedicated to the preservation of the River Ganga and Her tributaries in their free-flowing and pristine state. GAP work includes everything ranging

from solid waste management to wastewater management as well as awareness and educational outreach to make this vision of a clean and free-flowing River Ganga and Her tributaries a reality for all. (www.gangaaction.org; www.facebook.com/gangaaction)

2. **Divine Shakti Foundation (DSF)**, which is dedicated to the holistic well being of women, their children, and orphaned/abandoned children, and to all of Mother Nature. DSF runs and sponsors free schools, women's vocational training programs, orphanages/gurukuls, frequent free medical camps, animal care programs, a rural development program, and innumerable other humanitarian projects. (www.divineshaktifoundation.org; www.facebook.com/divineshaktifoundation)
3. **Interfaith Humanitarian Network/Project Hope**, an organization dedicated to disaster relief which has been active in providing both short term, immediate relief as well as long-term permanent relief to victims of the 2004 Asian Tsunami, 2013 floods in Uttarakhand India and 2015 earthquake in Nepal (www.interfaithhumanitarian.org)
4. **International Yoga Festival** at Parmarth Niketan (Rishikesh) held annually from the 1st -7th of March. In 2018, we welcomed more than 2000 participants from over 100 countries from all over the globe and each year the festival draws countless NRI's back to India to the birthplace of yoga to truly imbibe its divine nectar at the source, on the holy banks of Mother Ganga, in the lap of the Himalayas. (www.internationalyogafestival.org)
5. **India Heritage Research Foundation (IHRF)**, an international, non-profit, humanitarian foundation which just say the launching the first-ever International Edition of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism (www.theencyclopediaofhinduism.com) as well as ashrams and medical clinics in the sacred land of Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash in Tibet. He is the founder and inspiration behind the famous Hindu Jain temple in Pittsburgh and the Minto Shiva temple in Sydney Australia and has played a crucial role in the founding of innumerable temples and Indian cultural centres all across the world.

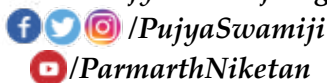
He is a member of the Advisory Board of KAICIID (King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue), which is an intergovernmental organization whose mandate is to promote globally the use of dialogue to prevent and resolve conflict and to enhance understanding and cooperation among different cultures and religions.

Pujya Swamiji's religion is unity, and he has been a leader in numerous international, inter-faith summits and parliaments, including at the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and the Parliament of Religions as well as with Religions for Peace, KAICIID, the Hindu-Jewish Summit in Jerusalem, the Hindu-Christian dialogue by the Vatican and so many others. He is also a leader of frequent world peace pilgrimages across the world.

Pujya Swamiji is the recipient of innumerable awards, including the **World Peace Ambassador Award, Mahatma Gandhi Lifetime Peace & Service Award** presented by the President of India, **Hindu of the Year Award, Prominent Personality Award** by Lions' Club, **Best Citizens of India Award**, the **Uttaranchal Ratan Award, Award for Extraordinary Service and Vision** by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, **Utkrishta Samman Award, Surya Ratna National Lifetime Achievement Award, Devarishi Award, Bhaskar Award, Bharat Nirman Award, Award of Kentucky Colonel and Award of Key to the City of Louisville, KY, International Interfaith Harmony Award** by WorldWide Sikh Dharma Association, **International Peace Award**, and many more.

However, Pujya Swamiji seems unaffected by this incredible list of accomplishments and remains a pious child of God, owning nothing, draped in saffron robes, living a life of true renunciation. His days in Rishikesh are spent offering service to those around him. Thousands travel from across the globe simply to sit in his presence, to receive his "darshan." He travels the world, bringing the light of wisdom, inspiration, upliftment and the divine touch to thousands across the world.

www.PujyaSwamiji.org



PARMARTH NIKETAN ASHRAM RISHIKESH (HIMALAYAS), INDIA



H.H. Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji is the President of Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, India, a true, spiritual haven, lying on the holy banks of Mother Ganga, in the lap of the lush Himalayas.

Parmarth Niketan is the largest ashram in Rishikesh. Parmarth Niketan provides its thousands of pilgrims – who come from all corners of the Earth – with a clean, pure and sacred atmosphere as well as abundant, beautiful gardens. With over 1,000 rooms, the facilities are a perfect blend of modern amenities and traditional, spiritual simplicity.

The daily activities at Parmarth Niketan include morning universal prayers, daily *yoga* and meditation classes, daily *satsang* and lecture programs, *kirtan*, as well as full Nature Cure, and Ayurvedic treatment available on the premises.

The world-renowned Ganga Aarti held every night at Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh draws people of all faiths from across the world to enjoy a serene sunset ceremony of song, inspiration and lights.

Additionally, there are frequently special cultural and spiritual programs given by visiting revered saints, acclaimed musicians, spiritual and social leaders and others.

Further, there are frequent camps in which pilgrims come from across the world to partake in intensive courses on *yoga*, meditation, *pranayama*, stress management, acupressure, Reiki and other ancient Indian sciences. Parmarth Niketan hosts the annual International Yoga Festival from the 1st-7th of March every year. (www.InternationalYogaFestival.org)

Parmarth Niketan's charitable activities and services make no distinctions on the basis of caste, color, gender, creed or nationality. Instead they emphasize unity, harmony, peace, global integrity, health, and the holistic connection between the body, mind and spirit.

**True to its name, Parmarth Niketan is dedicated to the welfare of all.
Everything is open and free to all.**

www.Parmarth.org
f t i y /ParmarthNiketan



INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL



Parmarth Niketan's world-famous International Yoga Festival is a beautiful time of seeing the world come together in the name of yoga, or union, on the holy banks of Mother Ganga.

In 2018, over 2000 people from 100 countries came to learn asana, pranayama, kriyas and meditation from over 80 presenters from 20 different nations.

Each year, International Yoga Festival provides participants with darshan, satsang and inspiring discourses by revered saints and yogis, who fill the atmosphere with *bhakti yoga* (devotion) and *gyan yoga* (wisdom).





*To learn more about International Yoga Festival,
please visit www.InternationalYogaFestival.org.*



GLOBAL INTERFAITH WASH ALLIANCE



Since the dawn of history, faith has provided a foundation from which social norms develop. It is to faith leaders that billions are drawn to in times of joy and sorrow, as well as in the search for inner meaning. As teachers to the masses, the words of faith leaders motivate, persuade and enable. Through their speech and actions, they can bring about change in ways that others, quite simply, cannot.

An estimated 5 billion people across the world are members of religious communities, underscoring the crucial role religious leaders can play in addressing seemingly intractable problems – such as access to safe water and sanitation.

The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (WASH) is the world's first initiative that is engaging the planet's many faiths as allies in efforts to create a world where every human being has access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation and proper hygiene.

Launched at UNICEF World Headquarters in New York during the United

Nations General Assembly Meetings, under sponsorship of USAID and the Government of the Netherlands, GIWA was Co-Founded by interfaith leader, Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, the Founder of Ganga Action Parivar, Divine Shakti Foundation and India Heritage Research Foundation, and President of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh.

GIWA's many programs include:

The Swachhta Kranti:

GIWA feels that nothing short of a behaviour change revolution is required in order to ensure healthy, sustainable WASH for nearly half of India's population. Our compelling faith-based *Swachhta Kranti* (Clean Revolution) campaign has been designed to do just that. Through the inspirational words of beloved faith leaders, populations that had never dreamed of building and using toilets are being motivated to embrace improved sanitation and more. As they do so, they join GIWA in expanding the *Swachhta Kranti* campaign amongst their friends, neighbours and others through their own endeavours and by participating in GIWA's grand processions, mass pledges, Sanitation & Hygiene Rallies and more.



World Toilet College: GIWA's World Toilet College offers classroom and outreach trainings that cover the entire range of sanitation topics. So far, our World Toilet College provided more than 3000 people with knowledge

and skills to directly address India's most pressing sanitation needs. Courses offered included Toilet Building, Sanitation Ambassador Training



Programme, Hygiene in Schools, Student Led Total Sanitation, Healthy Homes and Families, Professional Toilet Cleaning, and various capacity building programmes on WASH for key stakeholders such as SHG members, grassroots-level volunteers and natural leaders of communities.

WASH on Wheels and Swachh Bharat Yatras:

Dedicated social workers, volunteers and performers are providing outreach in festivals, events, streets, slums and villages through GIWA's unique WASH on Wheels programme and Swachh Bharat Yatras. WASH on Wheels is an inspired mobile educational platform which features videos of foremost faith leaders promoting the use of toilets, as well as street theatre, puppet shows, sanitation walks and more. With two trucks in constant use, a full-fledged outreach team motivates people of all ages through interactive activities geared towards promoting lasting change.



WaterSchool: Providing classes within two schools a day, 6 days a week, GIWA's WaterSchool programme trains and motivates teachers and students to learn the principles of sustainable water, sanitation and



hygiene for becoming social change agents. WaterSchool also offers teacher's workshops, large-scale student programmes, and the provision of WASH needs including toilets, hand-washing stations, clean water and more. So far, thousands of teachers and students have been sensitized through our classroom programmes, workshops and practical demonstrations.

Women for WASH: GIWA's Women for WASH Initiative is enabling women from villages and slums to become WASH entrepreneurs. Together, they are assembling to wage their own local Revolution against

pollution, hardship and disease by helping to ensure their neighbours embrace, and have access to toilets, clean water, and more.

To enable disadvantaged women to become WASH entrepreneurs, GIWA officially launched special toilet building classes under its Women for WASH Initiative. This was accompanied by other capacity building trainings to enable these women to become more involved in making their communities Open Defecation Free.



www.WashAlliance.org

 /WashAlliance

 /Wash_Alliance

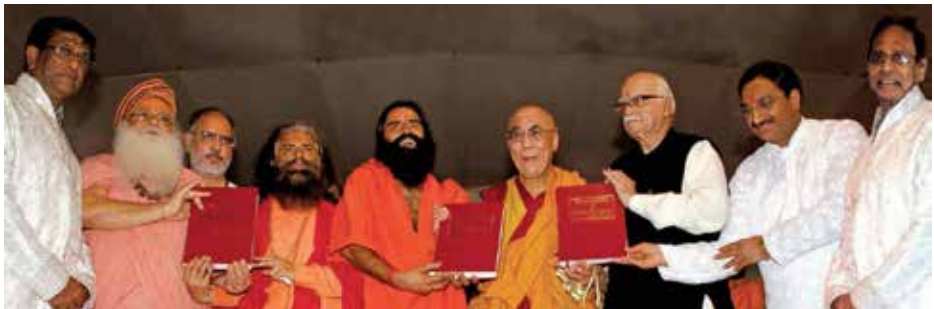
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HINDUISM



Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji conceived of the idea for an Encyclopedia of Hinduism in 1987 when He was in Pittsburgh, USA, after establishing the Hindu-Jain Temple there. In order to bring the vision to fruition, He founded and chaired the India Heritage Research Foundation (IHRF). Over the next 25 years, IHRF, with more than 1000 scholars from around the world, led by

Dr. K.L. Seshagiri Rao, Late Dr. Pandit Vidya Niwas Mishra and Dr. Kapil Kapoor, compiled the first Encyclopedia of Hinduism in history.

Eleven gorgeous volumes, approximately 7000 entries and thousands of illustrations, comprise the recently-completed and launched encyclopedia. The *Encyclopedia* marks the first time that the urgent need was met for an authentic, objective and insightful well of information, capturing both the staples and the spices of Indian tradition and culture. It is a significant landmark, encompassing the entire spectrum of the land called Bharat.



The Encyclopedia was previewed and blessed in India by HH the Dalai Lama and many revered saints during the Maha Kumbh Mela in Haridwar in 2010. The academic launch of the international edition, published by Mandala Earth Publications of California, USA, was hosted by the University of South Carolina, Columbia, USA in the summer of 2013 in the presence of the Governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley, and many other dignitaries and internationally-esteemed scholars. The first set in India was presented to the Hon'ble President of India in a grand function in June 2014 in the presence of revered faith leaders, national leaders, social leaders and celebrities.

The Encyclopedia was presented to the Hon'ble President of India HE Pranab Mukherjee at a glorious function in June 2014 by revered interfaith religious leaders, distinguished cabinet ministers, and dignitaries.

In October 2014, the Encyclopedia was officially launched in India by the hands of the Hon'ble Vice President of India Dr. Hamid Ansari & Mananiya Dr. Mohan Bhagwat with renowned religious leaders and dignitaries. On the 27 October 2014, the Encyclopedia was launched in London by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of England Mr. David Cameron.

For more information, visit www.theencyclopediaofhinduism.com.



DIVINE SHAKTI FOUNDATION

*"Do Divine! Be Divine! It is not enough to just BE divine,
one must also DO divine!"*

*"We must all spread the message that women and girls
are divine and worthy of worship."*

- Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, founder of
Divine Shakti Foundation

The Divine Shakti Foundation is dedicated to the holistic well being of women, their children, and orphaned/abandoned children, and to all of Mother Nature and Mother Earth. Our programs include free schools for children, women's vocational training programs, women's empowerment programs and international events bringing women (and men) together to discover and nurture their oneness with the Divine Feminine.



Schools, vocational training and empowerment programs: poverty, illiteracy and lack of training are tragically common in India. With in-

creasing population, basic education and marketable skills have become absolute necessities in order to subsist in even the smallest communities. Hence, those who lack this education and training go to sleep hungry each night. DSF is dedicated to providing them with the best chance possible to live a life free from destitution. The Divine Shakti Foundation's programs encompass children's schools for both girls and boys as well as computer centers where they learn practice and theory, as well as specialized vocational training and empowerment centers for girls and young women.





Animal Seva

Recognizing that the Divine does not just lie within our temples and our other holy places, but also in the Creation itself, Divine Shakti Foundation dedicated is to providing care and shelter to all of Mother Nature.

Cow Care: Plans are on to build *gaushalas* to provide proper veterinary care, shelter and food to the stray cows who currently roam the streets of India.



Street Dogs: Divine Shakti Foundation teamed with Karma Animal Trust of Siberia to bring healthcare to the street dogs of Rishikesh. For several months of the year, veterinarianians and technicians offered their time, talent and technical expertise to sterilize primarily male dogs, vaccinate and treat street dogs and cats. As most street puppies and kittens die from significant diseases, motorbike accidents or hunger, it is very important to control the population so that they are healthy and happy.

www.DivineShaktiFoundation.org
 *[/DivineShaktiFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/DivineShaktiFoundation)*



GANGA ACTION PARIVAR

The holy, life-giving Ganga is one of the most at-risk rivers in the world. Every day, it is polluted by some three billion liters of sewage and chemical waste, threatening the health and lives of millions. Its ecology, containing some of the world's rarest plants and wildlife, is under similar threat.

On April 4th, 2010 by the hands of H.H. the Dalai Lama, H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, former Deputy Prime Minister Hon'ble Shri L.K. Advani, former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand



Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Major General B.C. Khanduri and many revered saints and dignitaries, Ganga Action Parivar was officially launched at Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh at a special "Sparsh Ganga" ("Divine Touch of Ganga") function, an event to raise awareness about the need for collective and holistic, solution-based action to address the crucial issues facing the holy river. Since then, hundreds of supporters and family members have been mobilized, coming together to find solutions to the problems facing Ganga and Her tributaries.

Activities of Ganga Action Parivar range from working with top government leaders and institutions to create and implement sustainable, environmentally-friendly solutions for the various, complex problems facing Ganga, to working at the grassroots levels.



GAP's 6T's Program

When Pujya Swamiji, Founder of Ganga Action Parivar, completed 60 years of life, everyone wanted to give Him birthday presents. He however declared that there is nothing He wants, nothing He needs, but only the gift of people committing themselves to the “6Ts” program, which signifies six-ty years of life.

Ganga Action Parivar's Six Ts program provides a foundation for a cleaner, greener, more sustainable Ganga River Basin. Through its comprehensive, interlinked initiatives, the people, animals and ecology of the watershed are enabled to not only survive, but thrive.



In so doing, GAP has identified six categories of outreach that are designed to complement each other: Toilets, Trash, Trees, Taps, Tracks and Tigers.

Toilets

Over 500 million people live near the Ganga River and its tributaries.

Many have no access to sanitary facilities. Populations are forced to use the Ganga as a toilet out of necessity, fouling its waters and potentially spreading disease. Our work includes both provision of toilets as well as wide scale awareness raising campaigns.

Trees

Trees are crucial to life. Yet, to meet the needs of rapidly-expanding populations, far too many trees have been cut down, robbing the Ganga River Basin of its key benefactor. GAP is planting and maintaining thousands of trees as a direct response.



Tigers

Under the Six T's program, "Tigers" represents all endangered animals inhabiting the Ganga River Basin. Working side-by-side with conservation groups, GAP provides education and awareness programs, enabling populations and visitors to become protectors of their own environments, enabling nature's creatures to flourish as they should.

Taps

Access to clean and safe drinking water is a basic human right. Yet, every year in India alone, 400,000 children die, and many more are sickened,

by water-borne diseases such as typhoid, dysentery and cholera. Adding to the problem are contaminated and shrinking ground water tables alongside untamed pollution in the Ganga. GAP works to provide taps to the rural poor, as well as water filtration systems, while also teaching skills in proper water use management.



Trash

In the Ganga River Basin, trash is often disposed of directly into or near the river, endangering wildlife, plants, and populations, while also spoiling the appearance of what should be pristine waters. GAP works with local populations, municipalities, and administrators to ensure proper trash disposal, including rubbish bins and recycling. Additionally, GAP provides mass awareness campaigns, aimed at motivating populations and visitors as to how to properly dispose of their waste before it reaches the Ganga.

Tracks

The Indian train network is one of the most impressive in the world and also one of the dirtiest. GAP is providing the Ministry of Railways with concepts and ideas for new initiatives for cleaning and greening the land alongside the rail tracks. GAP also helps to advise regarding the improvement of sanitary facilities within India's trains and train stations.

www.GangaAction.org

  /GangaAction

MOUNT KAILASH/MANSAROVAR TIBET ASHRAMS

Under the guidance, inspiration and vision of Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, IHRF has built three ashrams and a medical clinic in the holy land of Lake Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash in Tibet.

Prior to this project, there were no indoor lodging facilities nor medical facilities for hundreds of kilometers. People frequently suffered from basic, treatable ailments due to lack of medical attention. Therefore, after undertaking a *yatra* to the sacred land in 1998, Pujya Swamiji took a vow that – by the grace of God – He would do something for the local people (who didn't even have running water) and for all the pilgrims who travel there.

In July 2003, we inaugurated the Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar Ashram on the banks of Lake Mansarovar, the first ashram ever in this holy land. There are 20 rooms with 5-8 beds each. Additionally there are two large halls for katha, meditation and satsang, which can also serve as additional dormitories. In 2004, a team of nearly 40 doctors and medical assistants traveled from USA in the first free medical camp in Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash.





There are now three Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar ashrams, on the banks of Lake Mansarovar, in Paryang, Tibet and in Dirapuk at a height of nearly 17,000 feet, on the sacred Mt. Kailash parikrama route. Dirapuk is the place where all yatris who are undertaking the parikrama spend their first night, 20 km

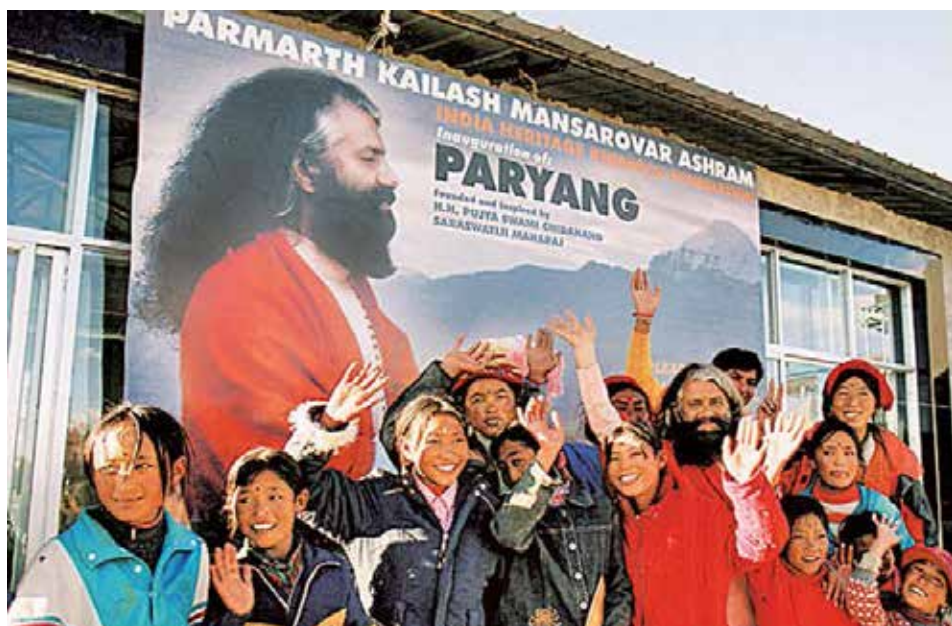
beyond the starting point. It is the location from which the darshan of Kailash is the closest, clearest and most spectacular. The ashram is double-storied with nearly 50 rooms, as well as a hall and dining facilities. All rooms face Mt. Kailash.

In September 2009, Pujya Swamiji officially inaugurated the Dirapuk ashram, with over 150 yatris from around the world, as well as local Buddhist monks and dignitaries & officials of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The ashram is already a great boon for the town, as we hired local people for the construction and trained them in masonry, carpentry and painting. The ashram is run and maintained by local Tibetans, and proceeds from the ashram go back into the community for education, health care and other projects.

Previously, in 2006, we inaugurated the Parmarth Mansarovar Ashram in



Paryang, Tibet, the place where all yatriis stay the night before reaching Lake Mansarovar. The ashram has more than 20 rooms -- singles, doubles & triples, and also two large halls for satsang, meditation or for use as dormitories.



INTERFAITH HUMANITARIAN NETWORK

Founded under the vision and leadership of HH Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, the Interfaith Humanitarian Network is a Trust to reduce the impact of natural disaster, build bridges to prevent conflicts, and respond in times of crisis.

IHN's work began as Project Hope, a project of the India Heritage Research Foundation, which was founded by Pujya Swamiji in 2004. Later, Project Hope combined forces with the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, giving rise to the Interfaith Humanitarian Network.

In light of the growing threat of disaster, the mission of IHN is turning to prevention-based capacity development, advocacy, and community building, so that local communities may be better enabled to prevent crises. When unfortunate circumstances do occur, our teams may be found on the scene to provide immediate- and long-term relief interventions.

Major interventions have included:

The Mass Himalayan Flood Disaster in Uttarakhand, India (2013):

- **Immediate Interventions:** through evacuation assistance via our convoys of 20 large buses at a time; mass distribution of relief supplies; multiple relief



camps within disaster zones and IDP transit points; the region's only comprehensive, computer-based family reunification services; the provision of clean water; medical assistance for 60,000 people; facilitation of dignified final rights for thousands of the deceased; and continual fact-giving consultations with governmental officials.



- **Medium-Term Interventions:** included the provision of food and supplies to 50 villages for three months; mobile medical assistance; and policy consultations for the sustainable redevelopment of the region, including a large policy conference with the region's foremost leaders and experts.
- **Long-Term Interventions:** included the rebuilding of schools and community facilities; the provision of vocational training and vocational centres for widows and disadvantaged women in

particular; installation of clean water systems and eco-friendly toilets within schools and pilgrimage centres; mass tree plantations to protect water resources while preventing soil erosion and landslides; regular medical camps and services, including for prosthetic limbs and physical rehabilitation; WASH training; policy consultations, and more.

The Nepal Earthquake (2015):

- **Immediate Interventions:** through medical teams, relief supply trucks, the provision of clean water, and other humanitarian measures.
- **Long-Term Interventions:** included direct rebuilding assistance; WASH consultations and education; women's and children's vocational training assistance; the provision of medical services; and the complete rebuilding of a temple.



Tsunami in South India (2004)

- **Short and Medium-Term Interventions Included:** the provision of direct humanitarian aid and medical assistance immediately after the crisis.



- **Long-Term Interventions Included:** construction of an orphanage, school, medical clinic, women's vocational training centre, the complete construction of 100 homes, and the renovation of a residential centre for widows and disadvantaged women in Tamil Nadu.



The Muzaffarnagar Riots (2013):

- **Interventions Included:** a targeted Interfaith Unity March and Peace Programme at the peak of the riots, in the heart of the riot area, with participants including foremost Muslim, Hindu and Jain leaders; as well as the provision of humanitarian assistance.



Other Major Relief Interventions Included: the Gujarat, India Earthquake (2001), the Orissa, India Super-Cyclone Disaster (1999), the Chamoli, India Earthquake (1999) and the Uttarakashi, India Earthquake Disaster (1991), and more.

To learn more about all of Interfaith Humanitarian Network's projects, please visit www.interfaithhumanitariannetwork.org.

GURUKULS & ORPHANAGES

Simple shelters with food, beds and babysitters are not sufficient for the impoverished, orphaned and disadvantaged children of rural and mountainous India. All children need not only to be fed and sheltered -- they need to be educated and trained so they can be productive members of society. They need to be inculcated with values, ethics and spirituality which will make them torchbearers of Indian culture.

Our education initiative includes the following essential components: (1) a full, standard academic education, (2) training in the ancient Vedic knowledge and traditions, (3) a moral and value-based education which is crucially needed in modern society.

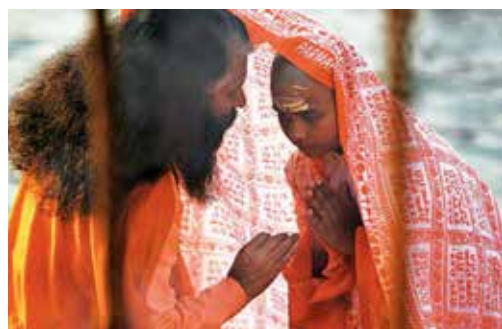


In the “Dust to Diamonds” program, our gurukuls/orphanages provide approximately 500 young, impoverished, disadvantaged boys with a basic academic education, as well as intensive Sanskrit and ancient Vedic texts. Their days are filled with yoga, meditation, Vedic chanting, reading of scriptures, mathematics,





seva and special programs designed to infuse their lives with essential values and ethics. They are not only getting a full academic education, but they are also being trained to be



cultural ambassadors, carrying with them -- wherever they go -- the deep values and culture of honesty, integrity, purity, piety, dedication and selflessness.

Once a child comes to the orphanage/gurukul, a rapid, divine transformation takes

place. Looks of hopelessness become looks of great optimism and hope. Lightless eyes become bright shining eyes. Feelings of destitution and despair become feelings of pride, of faith and of enthusiasm.

The rishikumars travel on yatra to the Himalayas, perform yoga, yagna and prayers on the banks of Mother Ganga, study academics and computers as well as the scriptures, perform dramas based on Indian spiritual history and -- of course -- have time to run and play!



RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR GREEN & SERENE LIVES

In different rural areas on the banks of Ganga and in the nearby hilly areas is our special Rural Development Program to enable eco-fiendly, self-sufficient lives.



The Rural Development Program's components include:

- Solid waste management
- Sewage control and sanitation programs through laying of sewage lines in the village and construction of toilets for the villagers, so that no pollution goes into Ganga.
- Tree plantation program

- Construction of a proper road in the village
- Organic gardening program. We have brought in trained organic farmers and scientists to teach the local farmers alternative, chemical-free methods of farming. Further, we have our own organic farm.



- Spirituality and Culture – we have started an evening devotional ceremony at Veerpur on the banks of the Ganga, called Aarti. It is a way for the villagers to come together in a spirit of peace, culture and piety.
- Girl's Orphanage - Plans are underway to open an orphanage for abandoned young girls and babies in the beautiful, natural surroundings of Veerpur.



PROJECT GIVE BACK

We are committed to providing health care to those who would otherwise go untreated. To this end, we sponsor and support numerous health care programs and runs several annual free health care camps in Rishikesh as well as in other rural areas ranging from Mansarovar and Kailash to the

Himalayan region, a project of the Divine Shakti Foundation.



Each year, there are numerous free medical health care camps, ranging from urology camps to eye camps (including free cataract surgeries), and including nearly every discipline.



Hundreds of patients receive free testing, diagnoses, medicines and treatment for ailments that otherwise would go undiagnosed and untreated.

Every week, our caring volunteers travel to some of the most remote of the Himalayan villages, disaster zones and other areas to provide



compassionate medical care. Many of the men, women, and children treated by our team of medical professionals and sevaks have few to no opportunities to see doctors, and are thus overjoyed when our “Free Medical Camp” banner rises for all to see.

Beautiful medical camps are also held at Parmarth Niketan throughout the year, offering specialty services, including prosthetic limbs, eye care, physiotherapy and much, much more.

*To learn more about our medical services,
please visit
www.divineshaktifoundation.org.*



INTERFAITH HARMONY

Every year, as part of His mission of peace, Pujya Swamiji interacts with numerous world leaders – spiritual leaders, social leaders, and political leaders – in His international travels or when they come to the banks of Mother Ganga at Parmarth Niketan.



THE NATIONAL GANGA RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Founded by Pujya Swamiji, the National Ganga River Rights movement is a coalition of concerned citizens and organizations that are taking a stand on behalf of the Ganga River and its tributaries—while there is still time.

For far too long, people have said there is nothing that can be done. But all the while, the water that nourishes us has become so polluted that it has become a hot-spot for cancers and other deadly diseases, such as typhoid and cholera. The beautiful river that has inspired poets and sages has sadly become one of the most endangered rivers in the world.

As a coalition, we bring a new and strong voice, backed by the successes in nations such as Ecuador, New Zealand and the United States. But we need you to help us make the change.

Sign the petition for Ganga's rights at www.gangarights.org.



THE GREEN KUMBH INITIATIVE

Kumbh Mela is one of the most ancient, and yet still living, traditions of India's glorious past. The festival dates back to the pre-Vedic period, as even in the Vedas Kumbh Mela is described as a tradition that was already well established. The popularity of Kumbh Mela has only increased over the millennia, gathering millions together every twelve years at each of the four holy places, Prayag Raj- Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik, in which the auspicious event occurs and making it the world's largest gathering of people on Earth.

At every Kumbha Mela, you can likely find us rallying with beloved faith leaders and the masses for great and lasting change. From grand rallies to processions to mass events to live shows and community interactions through our WASH on Wheels and Education Stations, you will find us working to ensure Kumbha Melas result in a cleaner, greener and more sustainable world.

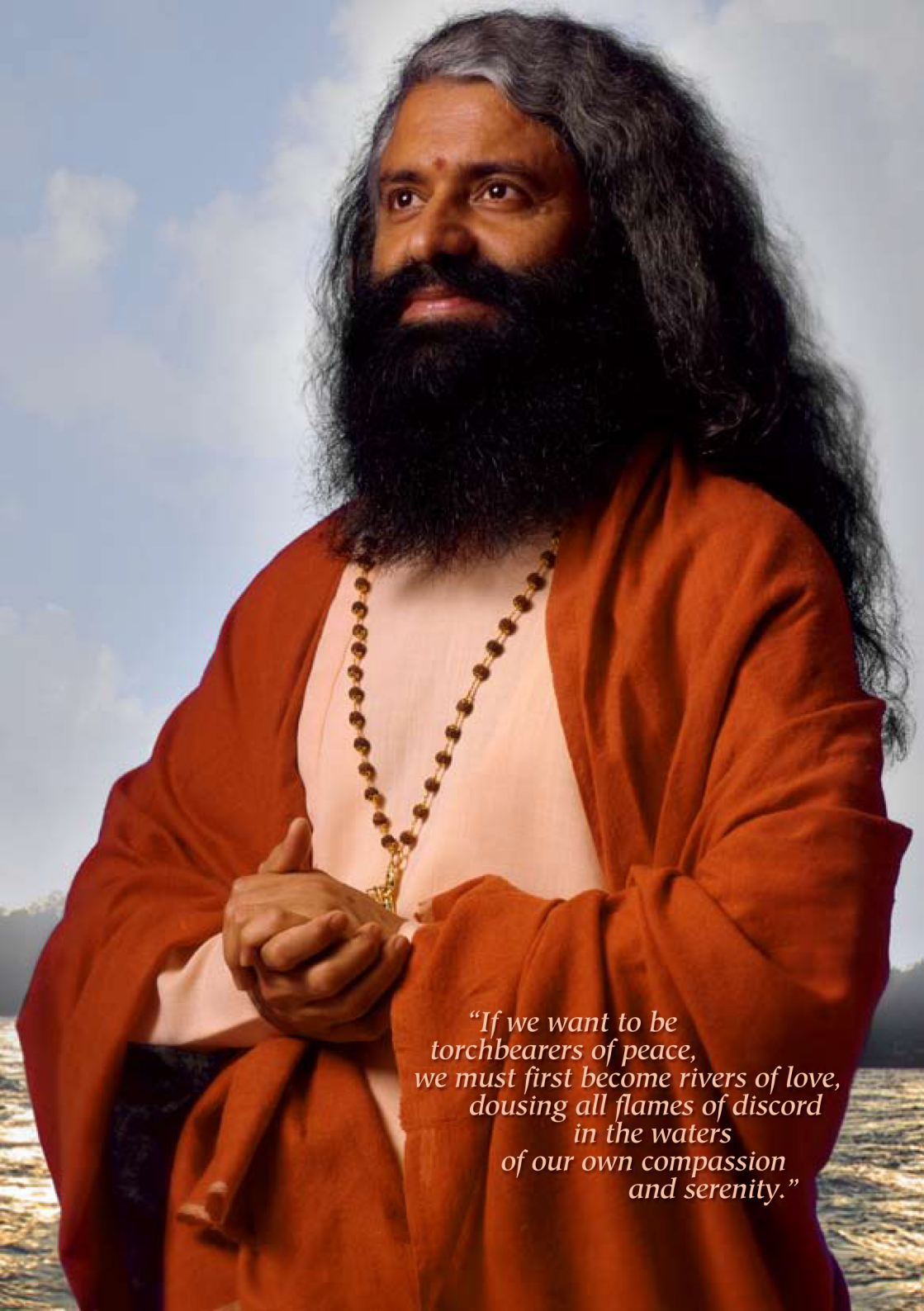


GREEN KATHAS FOR A CLEAN, GREEN & SERENE WORLD

Pujya Swamiji has inspired “Kathakar Social Responsibility” (KSR), like Corporate Social Responsibility, to utilize the immense power that Kathakars have in reaching their communities through their commentaries on religious scriptures to create positive change and green action amongst the masses.

He urges that the time has come that our festivals, our kathas and our holidays must be green and sustainable. He says, “through our respected Kathakars and their Kathakar Social Responsibility, we can be inspired and charged to make every moment and minute of our lives more green and more sustainable.”





*"If we want to be
torchbearers of peace,
we must first become rivers of love,
dousing all flames of discord
in the waters
of our own compassion
and serenity."*