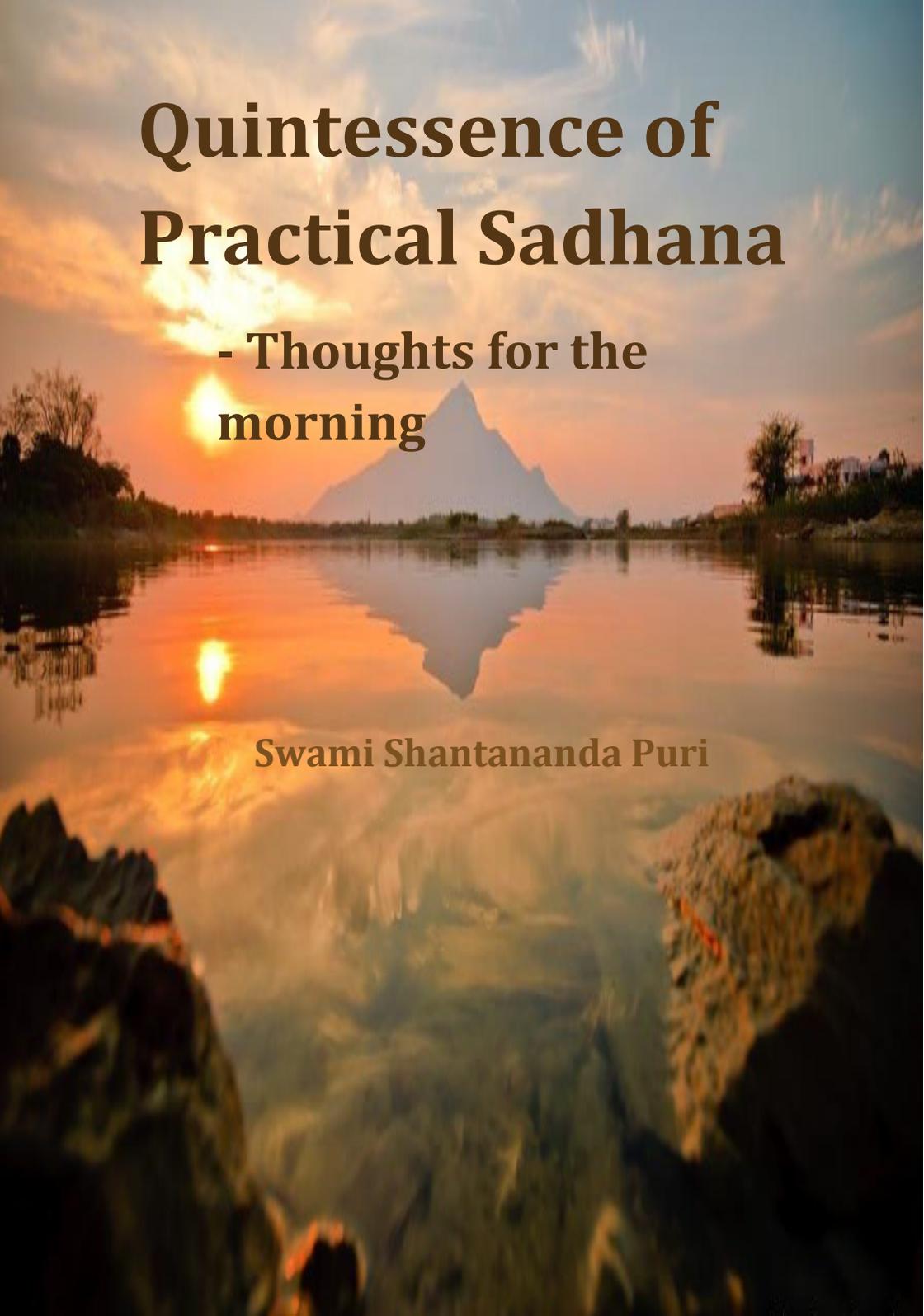


Quintessence of Practical Sadhana

- Thoughts for the
morning

Swami Shantananda Puri



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Swami Shantananda Puri

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- Thoughts for the morning

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SAMARPAN

This Book is dedicated with veneration at the

Lotus Feet of my revered Guru

Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj

of Vasishtha Guha, U.P., Himalayas

– Swami Shantananda Puri



H.H. Srimad Swami Purushottamanandji Maharaj



H.H. Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj

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Introduction to the Book

One day it came suddenly in my mind that I should write a little everyday with special reference to what one should do as a spiritual practice. It should be shorn off all theories and should concentrate only on the practical side of spirituality as to what one should do.

I cannot say that it is all-comprehensive but it contains whatever the Lord wanted me to bring in print. The basis for my inspiration to write this was the morning talks Swami Chidanandaji of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, which were later on put in book form as “Ponder these thoughts – early morning meditation talks”.

I only hope that this booklet will be of interest to many who would like to start practising spirituality.

The entire book is as inspired by the Lord and I have no credit for this.

May the Lord’s blessings be on us all and let us all reach the goal without much efforts.

Swami Shantananda Puri

Day 1 – What to do in the morning once we get up?

Enjoy the Silence:

As soon as we get up whatever the time, do not straightaway plunge into the world. Throughout the entire night we have been absolutely quiet without thoughts. Try to consciously extend it. The moment we get up, let us not jump to the bathroom to have a wash. The moment we leave the bed to go to the bathroom, the entire world will flood into the mind – thoughts such as my uncle is coming home today, have a client meeting at office, something needs to be dispatched to someone, etc.

Usually when we get up, the immediate awareness is that I am Deepti, etc. No world has come in the inner consciousness. Stop with that. Just remain quiet enjoying the silence, inner silence of the night.

Let there be commotion outside – imagine absolute silence inside and outside and withdraw from the world. Remain in this shell of silence for 5-10 minutes. This should be the first step early in the morning.

Chant Om

In case you are unable to sit quietly without thoughts in the morning, then you can chant Om eleven times. This will conserve your energy.

How to chant Om:

- Om can be chanted from the lungs. This is a bad method as it does not allow the breath to go deeper.
- Om can be chanted through the head. This is also not a good method as the chant is like that of a peacock.
- What is needed is the roar of a lion or tiger which comes from the naval [or nabhi] and starts from down below the stomach. Start from there. In this same way, Om should be chanted.

Give an interval of half a minute after every chant. We allow an interval because the first time we chant Om, we experience inner peace. Whatever problems may be bothering us [like broken bones, financial problems, etc.], the moment you chant Om, you get divine peace. Remain drowned in that peace of mind. Every time you chant, you get peace. Be quiet for half a minute – this is the optimum time for which no thought will come and you will enjoy the peace. If you can do it eleven times in the morning it would be nice. Some saints have suggested twenty two times.

However, for a normal householder who cannot do it twenty two times, eleven times chanting is fine.

This will create a reservoir of energy. On any day, any type of crisis, social, financial, official, everything can be faced with equanimity without being perturbed.

Take the Lord's name

There is a third method of what we could practice in the morning.

The First method was to simply remain quiet and the second method was to chant Om. In the third method which is much easier for many, simply take the Lord's name, any Lord's name – Krishna, Govinda, Ram, Mahadev, Divine Mother. Any name of the Lord is perfectly okay. The purpose is that the names of God, the various aspects of the Ultimate reality in addition are all sound effects. When you say Ram, Ra creates a subtle fire which will burn away all our vasanas. Then Ma is the constructive syllable which rejuvenates by building the Lord's remembrance over the dead vasanas. Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to take the names of the Divine Mother both morning and evening. Thus, they have shown the way as to how even though the people may be following the path of jnana, nothing prevents them from taking the names of the Lord early in

the morning, which creates a Divine atmosphere for the entire day. All the names and stotras should always be chanted loudly. This is the normal principle.

Day 2 – The role of a Guru

For all Sadhanas, a living master or a Guru is essential. It is not necessary that each one should look for a Guru who is perfect, liberated, fully acquainted with the Vedas and Vedanta. One gets the Guru he deserves. Ultimately the one who works through all the Gurus, whether competent or incompetent, is the Lord Himself.

It is the Lord who works for the spiritual upliftment of every person by giving him a live Guru. The grace of God is always expressed only through the Guru. The Upanishads enjoin us to incessantly think of the Brahman in the heart one pointedly. As we will not be able to get interested and love a God whom we have never seen and of whom you have got very sparse data, the Lord makes us do our sadhana through the Guru's grace and takes us to the ultimate reality only through the Guru. So instead of thinking of a formless God who is also known as the Brahman or the Atman [the Self] one can continuously think of the Guru who will enable the person to obtain God realisation.

Day 3 – How to get a Guru?

When we have an intense volcanic longing to get a Guru, that very longing will rope in and bring the right Guru to your door. This happened in the case of the great king called Parikshit who was cursed by a saint that he was to die within seven days bitten by the king of serpents. The king did not bother about death but was very anxious that within the seven days, he should do whatever is required to get the Lord within the seven days. Lo, the best of the Gurus known at that time as Sukadeva, who never went to anybody's house but wandered from place to place without any aim or destination goes to the king Parikshit and guides him, so that the latter gets his liberation on the last day after hearing the stories and anecdotes of the Supreme Lord.

The second method can be to pray to the Lord by taking His name or doing the japa and leave it to the Lord for sending a good guide. Or one can pray to the good Lord to send him a holy and wise master to guide him. One can go to a congregation of saints and holy men called the satsang where one may come across a Guru of one's choice.

Day 4 – What is the purpose of meditation and how to get established in meditation?

After having the Guru, the next question is, “What is the purpose of meditation and how to get established in meditation?” The entire practice consists of meditation. Meditation means dhyana. Dharana, dhyana and samadhi are three steps as per Yoga sutra. What is the purpose and how to meditate? Anything which you have forgotten if you want to remember and get in contact with it, the only way is to continuously keep thinking of it and suddenly when you feel tired and want to leave off, the answer comes in a flash with something that you are familiar with. As our source from which we all emanated is a supreme energy, we were in contact with it at that time, when we were born. But later on, while enacting in the world’s drama of the cosmic director we lose touch with it. The moment you lose touch with your source, all your troubles start. The troubles, sufferings, tortures, all these things start only because we have forgotten our heritage. Only if we had remembered, no suffering would have touched us. The purpose of meditation is to continuously think of that Supreme Lord, the Supreme Energy, which is also known as Brahman or the cosmic reality and known as the Self at the level of individuality. It is like the electricity in the generator passing through various bulbs. The electricity when it is distributed to the bulbs, energy in each bulb is at

an individual level called the Self; while at the generator level it is the totality called Brahman. We have forgotten and think that each one is an individual and hence all the troubles. Hence, the purpose of meditation is by constantly remembering the Lord, to come into direct contact with Him – the source of our energy. This is only an imaginary contact – but by thinking continuously again and again, we are able to come into contact with that Supreme energy. It is the energy which has created the entire illusion of the universe [not just the world, but all the galaxies including the sun, the moon, the stars etc]. When once we identify with that energy, we alone exist, all powers are ours, we are that energy, what else do we need?

Day 5 – Prayers, a method of meditation

The second way of meditation is prayers. A bird cannot fly with just one wing. It requires two wings. The second wing of meditation which is complementary to the thinking of God is prayers. It has got a lot of value and people are not aware of it. Some people think that saying Krishnaya Namaha, etc. has more value. Not at all. Prayers come from the heart, from the Self to the Self. There is no giver and no taker. There is no applicant or an appellate authority at the top. When we pray honestly, I have myself seen its effect. There are so many stories about the effect of prayers and I will tell you a nice story.

There was a couple who had no children and they had lived a married life for more than twenty five years. They never quarrelled and loved each other very well and the usual routine used to be in the evening. He was very busy in the morning at office; in the evening he would come home either with the newspaper or a good book in his hand and he would sit at the dining table. His wife would bring a big pot of tea with two cups and both would go on sipping the tea. He would read out some juicy portion from the newspaper or he would read out a book and say, “How nice it is and I am going to read the entire book and you hear me.” Suddenly one day after his reading session, he called her, “Mary I am sorry, it may come as a shock to

you. I was thinking for a long time what to do but there was no other go. I am tired of you and wanted to discuss with you. I intend divorcing you.” This came as a thunder falling on her head. She had never imagined in her wildest dreams that a day would come when her husband would want to divorce her.

She never protested, she only told him, “Look here, we have been together for more than 25-28 years. Don’t make it so sudden. Just allow me two weeks. At the end of it you put the question whether you would like to divorce me and then I won’t say anything against your decision. Let things go on as usual.” Well, he agreed. But from the next day onwards, he would not come in the evening but used to come later in the nights at 11.00 pm. He stopped having dinner at home and stayed late at office. He used a separate room for sleeping. The entire second day she prayed to the Lord, “Lord, what folly I have done? How have I offended you? Why have you arranged for such a shocking end of our life after having lived together for nearly twenty five years? Please Lord, please help me. I won’t be able to live alone and I cannot think of remarrying at this age.” She was weeping and praying honestly. There was nothing but the Lord, the prayer and herself. Two days over and again on the third day she did the same prayers. On all the three days she would bring the pot of tea and keep it on the dining table with the two cups. She would

imagine that her husband was reading a paper or a book. And she would be telling, “Wow, aha, oho”, an appropriate exclamation from time to time. All was imagination. While he started coming at 11 pm, he opened the door with his key and would not depend on her for opening the door. He would never greet her good morning, etc. and would not speak a word; while she continued to do her prayers. After ten days were over, on the eleventh day, again she did the same thing. She brought two cups and a big pot of tea and began to pour it. She began to make appropriate exclamations from time to time as if her husband was reading out to her. On the eleventh day when she brought the tea and sat down, she saw her husband coming as usual and saying good evening and having kissed her he sat on his chair. As usual he read the paper and made exclamations. She couldn't believe her own eyes. She thought to herself, “Am I dreaming or is it really happening.” She pinched herself and found it was all true. Eleventh day, twelfth day, thirteenth day, etc. the daily routine was taking place. Well she was happy beyond measure and couldn't contain herself. She did not relax and stop her prayers. She used to say, “Lord I don't know whether what I see is imagination or a dream but I am very thankful to you. I think you are hearing my prayers and doing something. How can I ever recompense you for your kindness and compassion?”

On the fifteenth day, the verdict day on the proposal to divorce, he came in the evening and sat together for having tea. He was about to leave his chair to do office work on a laptop in the inside room. She asked her husband, “John, well, do you remember today is the fifteenth day. You gave a proposal that you wanted to divorce me and I said that I would tell you the reaction and decision on the fifteenth day.” The husband replied, “What Mary you are talking in riddles. What is this divorce? Mary, forget it, I don’t remember it.”

Their life began to go on as usual. Her prayer for just fourteen days bore fruit beyond her imagination. This is one of the stories I read in a book written by Norman Vincent Peale. He had written a book on the efficacy of prayers. And Vincent Peale was running a clinic for people who suffered depression or wanted to commit suicide, etc. For such people he was having a clinic and would collect such real life cases. It seems the lady narrated her case and he has written all such anecdotes. Nearly ninety percent were witnessed by him. He wrote a number of stories that I have now forgotten; except this one which made an impression on me. This is the effect of prayers.

This is a story that made a deep impression in the last thirty years. Before going further into prayers, I thought of narrating this story.

Day 6 – Prayers [various methods]

Yesterday we talked about prayers and especially nowadays we give less importance to prayers. But prayers can have a beneficial effect more than any other method and at the same time it is absolutely easy to practise. Prayers can be of three types:

1. The first and the best type of prayer is to pray from the heart, whatever comes to you. Say for instance we say, “O Divine mother how can I ever thank you for all that You have done from the time I was born, I require only one more thing. I want to be permanently absorbed at your feet. I want nothing else mother, physically I may be a cripple, I may be a leper, I may be having cancer. I don’t mind all those things, if I can only feel your consoling physical presence by my side at all times.”
2. The second method will be to recite some borrowed prayers. Great and wise holy men like the Adi Sankara have written so many prayers on every form of God and they are very inspiring. There are people who get them by heart and recite them. These prayers need not be recited by sitting at one place. While walking, while bathing, we can be reciting these prayers.

Third method we will continue tomorrow morning.

Day 7 – Prayers [various methods], [Continued from previous day]

We were talking about prayer. There is another type of prayer where we just describe the deity whom we worship. It is like a physical description as if we think of the Lord physically like God with two hands, six heads, etc. wearing yellow silk.

Adi Sankaracharya has written on both types of prayers.

In one type, one would pray for example:

O Lord please help me,

*“Matsamah pataki nasti papaghnee twatsama nahi
Evam jnatwa visheshena yatha योग्यं तथा कुरु”*

Here the devotee prays to the mother saying, “O Mother, we are pitted against each other in the finals. I am the champion among the villains. There is no sin which I have not committed in the world. So I have fought with others like me and I have now come to the finals. You are reputed for annihilating all the sins of people and purifying them. And you hold the championship on that side so far. If I lose the battle, there is nothing lost because already I belong to the dregs of the society. If you lose, the biggest reputation of your capacity to dispel all the sins will be lost and you stand to lose a lot. Have this in mind and do what you

want. If you want to retain your title you have to fight against my sins and annihilate them. I do not care whether I win or lose because my reputation is already at its lowest and it cannot get lower.” This is one type of prayer.

The other type of prayer will be just to give the physical description of the divine mother or the Lord. For example, early in the morning there is a prayer to invoke Lalita. There the devotee prays:

“O Mother, early in the morning I remember your beautiful face with your red lips and with your nose prominently glowing with the ornaments made of pearls, etc. etc.”

Here we do not beg anything from the Mother. We only give expression to our revelling in the beauty of the divine mother.

This not only keeps the mind one pointed on the divine mother, but also helps in constant remembrance, which is the key for realisation.

Tomorrow we will talk about the visualisation process in prayers.

Day 8 – Visualisation during prayers

There was an Eastern Orthodox Church which used to give a lot of importance for prayers. The monks of this order travelled beyond Egypt to the desert and built small huts. They used to put hooks on top of the ceiling and tie up their long hair with the hook by a rope so that they might not fall down sleeping and they could continue to pray.

They wrote a book by the name Philokalia which was in seven volumes. Not written by one person but by different desert fathers. They have done lot of research on the way prayer can be done.

“Oh Lord, please protect us.” The same thing can be told.

“Oh Lord, please protect us; Oh Lord protect us or Oh Lord protect us.” While saying the prayers, the emphasis can be on Lord, or on protection, or on us, etc.

Each one when said with different emphasis, they found that it resulted in different consequence.

So important is prayer in our life. The prayers can be made more effective by adding two more things:

1. Firstly by Visualisation and
2. Secondly by trying to feel the presence of God

What is visualisation?

Visualisation: Just imagine that you have come out of the body and you are the spirit which is universal. At the same

time you are also inside the body. In other words you are the observer and the observed. The body is through which the universal energy works. Just imagine that you have attained what you wanted like, you wanted to become a great sage where you constantly think of Lord. You are in a deep forest with lots of flora and fauna everywhere, etc. Sitting there you are continuously doing the prayers. Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Bhagavan.

With matted hair, you imagine that you are observing yourself in your body which has become skin and bones and constantly thinking of God. And you are imagining God to be another image of you. So many smaller gods are around because of austerities being performed. They do not want to go away from you. Like that one can imagine. Visualisation is quite effective.

In the first case of simple visualisation, I will give you an example. In America there was once a newspaper boy who was an orphan. He was an orphan who had no body related to him – no father, no mother, no brother etc. He was a newspaper boy and his job was to throw newspaper in every house. He was getting a small amount of payment for this. He was living underneath the staircase – a small hollow where he could conveniently lie down. He used to sleep with the consent of all inhabitants in the apartment block. One of them had presented a full length

mirror with two cracks which was kept to be thrown out. Daily the boy would sit before it and start imagining. "I am a millionaire sitting behind a mahogany desk on a rotating chair and three assistants are standing before me with a notebook and pen to take down whatever I dictate." He would imagine several phones on his table, and imagine that he is talking in one, "Yes, I told you to sell off 300 shares" and moving to another phone "Purchase it man, I told you yesterday also, it will go up further" etc. "To visualise" does not mean that I will become a millionaire in one day. But I become aware of the opportunities which are to be grabbed.

The mind becomes sharp due to this.

The boy became an assistant to a store owner who was importing bananas from India and selling them. The store used to purchase one banana at one dollar each and will sell it for two dollars. The boy continued working there and the boy knew all the techniques, how to import, take delivery, sell, etc. One day it so happened that a very big consignment was ordered from India and it got delayed in transit. The skin of each and every golden banana turned black. Customers are very particular about the external beauty and nobody would purchase bad looking stuff. As this loss was not covered under insurance, the store owner lost a significant sum and he was extremely sad and

started weeping. An idea came to the mind of the assistant boy. He told the store owner, “You have lost only one dollar each. I shall take out these bananas and pay you in a few instalments at a time. I will sell it at my own cost. In the evening, I will return one dollar for each banana, so that you do not have to suffer the loss.” He took the bananas with him to the end of a pathway. He sat there with a large bunch and kept a board with the announcement, ‘Freshly arrived – black bananas. For the first time imported black bananas. Each one will cost 4 dollars.’ The tendency of many customers is to go by the cost. Many people came and purchased. Within half an hour all bunches he got were exhausted and within two days he was able to sell off all the goods at four dollars each and made a profit of three dollars each. He went and established a banana shop of his own. And thereafter with a friend he started the business of stocks and shares. In due course he not only became a millionaire but a billionaire.

Thus, visualisation can be very helpful and tomorrow we can see how we can add visualisation in the presence of God in addition to visualising ourself.

Day 9 – Practising the Presence of God

We were talking about visualisation of ourselves and God. This means we visualise not only ourselves as the sadhakas but we also visualise the Lord and we are able to talk to him as if two friends talk to each other and in this case, so long as we want to practice the presence of God, there are two books worth reading on that, very small books.

1. The first one is the letters from Brother Lawrence or How to practice the presence of God. It was recommended by Vivekananda too.
2. The second book is a small booklet by the Yogada society where Pramahansa Yogananda has written about practising the presence of God. This book also may appeal to some.

As regards the first booklet by Brother Lawrence, he was a cook in a monastery and he was daily talking to God. For instance one day, he was cooking for a large number of people in very big vessels. The chief pastor of the church when he came to the kitchen, was shocked as there were normally only 3-4 inmates who used to take food. When he asked Lawrence whether he had gone mad to prepare for so many people, the latter answered, “A number of cardinals from the Vatican at Rome along with their followers are coming to the monastery and as they would be famished with hunger after a long journey, they would

require food immediately.” The priest replied, “If that were the case, I would have got a cable announcing their arrival. I have not got any. This is sheer madness on your part to imagine something and cook for numerous people.”

The chief priest was surprised when all of a sudden by the noon, a number of cardinals and their followers actually arrived. Lawrence was told about their arrival by the Lord himself when he was talking to him. There were so many such mysterious occurrences in the life of Brother Lawrence.

At one time the Pope offered to make him the chief priest of a church. But Lawrence refused pleading that the Pope should not deprive him of the chances for feeding so many devotees as a cook.

Similarly, there is a story, that a devotee called Namadev used to play chess with Krishna and talk for long hours like close friends. Even in Srimad Bhagwatam third skanda, there is a description that at one stage of sadhana, the seeker could see a number of Gods moving about in their respective vehicles and also talking to the seeker.

Even though initially, we may not see the Lord face to face; as time passes with intense sadhana, the Lord with form appears before the devotee, talks to him and moves with

him like a common man. We should not get discouraged, if within a few days we are unable to talk with God. With persistence and perseverance, the seeker on the devotional path will be able to feel the presence of the Lord.

Even those on the path of jnana, will be able to visualise the God without form also.

Day 10 – Constantly thinking of the Brahman

According to all the Upanishads, the main sadhana will be to constantly think of the Brahman, the name given for the highest truth or the only reality.

You have to constantly think of that reality. How to think of it? It has two qualities:

- One is 'sat'. Just think of it as your 'am-ness', i.e. our simple existence or being
- We can think of it as pure awareness, i.e. chit. Even a table or a chair exists, they are not aware that they exist. That self awareness is the second attribute of the Brahman.

The Brahman is not visible to us even though it is everywhere because it is covered [avarana]. By continuously thinking of it those thought waves go and break the shell covering the Brahman and in the process the thought of Brahman which is ignorance dies itself like a suicide bomber who dies along with the victim.

We will continue tomorrow.

Day 11 – How to concentrate single mindedly?

In order to concentrate single mindedly, there are two processes involved. The one is the purification of the mind and the other is calling on the Supreme God to reveal himself. In order to ensure the purification of the mind, we do several things like going to the holy rivers like the Ganges and taking bath, visiting many holy temples, performance of the various formal rites as prescribed in the Vedas, etc. Many of us from birth to death continue to do this only and never go to the next process. Many think that going to the holy rivers, etc. alone will bestow moksha. It is not so. These things are not directly related to moksha at all. On the contrary, it is the second process of calling on God with a real volcanic longing or doing japa, etc. which is more important. This itself will ensure that the mind is purified.

Day 12 – Calling on the Lord

It is the second process of calling on the Lord which is more important. Infact if one does it earnestly, the first process also could be fulfilled by this itself. For example, if an Indian wants to invite the President of United States to come on a visit to India and then to his own house, we have to get some influence from somewhere even to get an interview with the President. When once that is accomplished, we have to persuade the President as to why it is important to visit the house. At last if you are able to persuade him, he will fix a date and also inform his personal secretary to arrange everything for a visit to my house. Naturally, within a week's time, a posse of police headed by some top officers of USA will visit my house to find out as to which are the vulnerable places in the house wherefrom some terrorists may have an opportunity to have an easy access for shooting. They will find out the places where both the local police and their own intelligence should be deployed during the visit of the President. Then they will casually come inside and see the haphazard state in which the house is kept. They will get furious and tell the owner of the house, "Aye, how have you kept the house and how did you dare to invite the President to a shabby house. We are here for another five days. Within that time, have the house cleaned and nicely decorated befitting the visit of a President." Then, I may

weep saying, “My wife is dead long ago and the servant maid I had employed has resigned her job only yesterday. What can I do, you tell me?” The police officers will say, “You are a fool. Come on, get us the broom stick and we shall get it done.” And they will themselves get the room cleaned, etc. In a similar way, when we call on the God through japa, through meditation, through one pointed concentration, etc., that will itself purify the mind. Bhagavan Ramana has told that the method of self inquiry alone will ensure that the mind is rendered pure.

Day 13 – Control of mind

The main practice should be to one pointedly fix the mind on the ultimate reality or the Self or God, it is essential that there should be no diversion of the mind. But it is very very common that the mind will have hundred different thoughts within a few minutes. So the question will be how to control the mind? There are broadly three methods of controlling the mind:

1. This is the orthodox way where every time the mind goes out, again and again you bring it back to the Supreme God. This is called in Sanskrit 'abhyasa' [repetition of a practice]. Here an example we may give – there is a satsang going on and a lady has got a small child say 8 months old. The child is trying to go out where there is a sheer drop of 25 feet and it might fall down. The mother runs to the child and brings it back. Again the child wriggles out of her lap and goes to the verandah. The mother again rushes to bring back the child. Thus as many times as the child goes, the mother untiringly brings back the child. Ultimately the child itself gets frustrated and continues to remain in her lap. The same thing is to be applied to the mind.
2. The second method is to observe the mind. You just become a witness and observe the mind as to where all it goes and what thoughts it entertains and the more you observe it, the mind begins to keep quiet and stops

its movements. It is just like a person taking bath in the bathroom dancing and prancing about with a song. The moment he finds that through a hole in a door somebody's eye is watching him, all his dance comes to a stop. The same thing happens to the mind.

Day 14 – Control of mind [Continued from previous day]

The third method is to annihilate the mind itself so that we will be still without any thoughts. When we are asleep we see a dream which looks very real to us. When once we wake up the dream goes away. This shows that the dream was only a product of delusion and it was only a superimposition over the waking state. Similarly when once the delusion of a serpent is removed, the substratum is found to be a rope only which was not known to us earlier. In the same way, when all thoughts are removed, all the thoughts were only a superimposition on the substratum which is the Ultimate Reality alone which only existed. So if the mind is annihilated, all the thoughts are annihilated and the substratum, namely the Brahman alone is visible. Hence, in this method, we practise to be still, i.e. to remain without any thoughts. This is done everyday for about an hour or two [we may start from half an hour or fifteen minutes even]. We sit and whenever a thought comes we tell “out please”. The thought will go away but another thought will recur within a few minutes. Again you say within your mind “out please”. The thought will go away for sometime. Thus practicing again and again day after day the number of thoughts which intrude will become less and less till we can remain thoughtless and be still for atleast an hour or two. It is told in the Bible, “Be

still and know that you are God". The famous Sufi saint Jalal Rumi had also repeated it. It is in that state we remain only in pure self awareness. If we abide continuously in that state, we realise the Ultimate Reality or in other words the ego disappears and Self realisation takes place.

Day 15 – Vasanas

Now we are going to deal with vasanas which is an important impediment or obstacle towards our progress in spirituality. First we should know what is vasana, how does it come to us and what does it do to us and then we will think as to how to eliminate it. What happens is whenever we do any action there is a two fold effect for the action. Or in other words the reaction is two fold. Let us take the case of a man, say myself, who found one of his guests has left his purse inadvertently. I just take away the purse and hide it as nobody will suspect me of having taken away the purse. As I have committed a theft, I have to reap the punishment for it in the next birth and for getting the punishment I have to take another birth and in the entire course of life of the next birth, I may commit further sins for which further births are forged and so on. This may be likened to the Newton's third law of motion which says that action and reaction are equal and opposite. The second effect of the action done is that I begin to like taking away somebody's purse. Thus a habit is formed. Thus habit follows from birth to birth as the mind goes along with the subtle body to the next birth. In the next birth also I am induced to commit more such action. I get a desire to take away somebody's purse or money. This habit inducing a desire to repeat the action is called 'vasana'. In any birth when we have to do any fresh action we can do it

out of our own will. But the vasanas which may be good or bad forces us to repeat our habit and thus the free will is completely suppressed as you become a slave to your vasanas. Thus if I want to go on the spiritual path and if I have the vasanas inherited from previous births, our mind is not allowed to go on the spiritual path but we are compelled to go as the vasanas lead us.

Elimination of vasanas:

These vasanas are a great impediment to our spiritual progress. Even a man who has done austerities for years suddenly flares into a temper and gets angry, for however justifiable reason it may be; he loses the merit of the austerities of thousands of years. In anger if you abuse a person and later on in a saner mood you would like to retract whatever you had said in anger but it will be impossible. The vasanas are an impediment to spiritual progress. There are several instances in the Sastras of some Swamijis who have been affected by the vasanas coming in the way of spiritual progress. In Ramayana, Hanuman when he went for the first time to find Sita, the people of Lanka set fire to his tail. In anger, with that tail he jumped from building to building and set fire to Lanka and he himself remained unharmed. Then, when he was returning and came to the ocean he was grief stricken repenting for his anger. He suddenly remembered that Sita

herself was very much in Lanka and by setting fire to the entire Lanka he might have been the cause of death of Sita herself. Such an event would set a chain of deaths because Rama would die on hearing the news, Lakshmana would follow suit, on hearing the news, Rama's mother would commit suicide, etc. Luckily certain demi gods flying over the sky assured him that Sita was safe in the Asoka Vana. This shows how a man commits crimes unmeditated earlier in the fit of his anger and later on regrets it when the past cannot be undone.

So the first method is to do the opposite of the vasanas. There is a story of a fighting cock. A king had a fighting cock and he wanted to hold a cock fight with all the cocks of his lords [courtiers]. He gave his cock for getting it thoroughly trained to a reputed trainer who was also a Sufi saint. After about three months, he asked the trainer as to whether the cock was ready for a fight. The trainer answered, "No. Whenever other cocks come in its presence this cock of yours gets very angry and stamps its feet. This has to be corrected." The king was unable to understand why the fighting qualities of a cock should be curbed. Anyway, he allowed another three months to pass. When he asked for the status report after three months, the trainer replied, "Sorry the cock is not yet ready sir. Whenever it hears even the footsteps of other cocks, it bristles and becomes ready to fight. This should not be." The king was again puzzled.

After about two months, he brought the cock to the king and said, "Sir, the cock is ready." Within a few days time the king held a cock fight. The king's cock was standing with its eye closed. In the middle of the arena, the other cocks stamped their feet, flapped their wings and they came towards this cock in a threatening manner. The king's cock was unruffled. It never opened its eye even. It was standing in the same way as earlier. The cocks were surprised at this inexplicable attitude of the king's cock. All the cocks together raised some weird noises and with their flapping wings they circled around the king's cock. When no reaction came from the king's cock, all others got afraid. They began to think that it was not a cock at all but another strange animal looking like a cock and hence more dangerous. They finally withdrew in fear and went back without fighting the king's cock which won the game. It was something very surprising. The king asked the trainer to explain the attitude of the cock. The trainer said, "Sir, I have trained the cock to have no reaction at all when others come to fight with him or express their anger. It is through the absence of anger that one should conquer anger." It is what one should do when the vasanas trouble us.

The second method is by doing our japa in a one pointed manner or by resorting to self enquiry in due course all these vasanas die by themselves.

The third method is praying to the Supreme Lord ceaselessly and with deep emotions to rid us of the vasanas.

By also going to the satsang and being in the company of holy men our vasanas will gradually diminish.

The vasanas can be removed in due course by fighting against it each time, each time we may fail and vasanas may get an upper hand. Fighting each time a day will come when the vasanas will not rise. Say there is a rock lying on the top of a mountain. You push it in order to make it fall down. The rock does not move. You push it again and still the rock does not move. You go on pushing it and at last on the twenty first time it falls down. It does not mean that only the twenty first effort was responsible for the falling of the rock. Every time you tried, a little of the friction got loose so that on the twenty first time the entire friction became nil. In the same way, every time we fight with the vasanas the first few times we may fail but a time will come when we will be able to remove the vasanas completely after failing to do it several times.

So these are all the methods suggested for the elimination of the vasanas.

Day 16 – Ego

To consider this body as ours is called the ego. All the evils, sufferings, tribulations and unhappiness stem out of this ego only. As we consider the body as ours, any physical ailments to the body upsets our mind. As our children have been born out of this body and even the wife is considered as mine because of the relationship with my body, any ailment or other problems which they face agitates us and upsets our mind and we are prepared to adopt any crooked means to save those people. Thus all the sins accrue to us because of this original sin of considering the body as mine. As the body itself is imaginary and part of the mega dream of the Supreme Lord, the vasanas cannot be real and true. In this connection, there is a story:

Bodhidharma was the first Buddhist monk to go to China and propagate Buddhism. As King Wu was one of the big kings of a portion of China [China had been divided into various kingdoms in those days], he had invited Bodhidharma to come to his country and freely propagate his dhamma. When the monk went to China, the King welcomed him with due reverence. After sometime, King Wu told him, “O Monk, I have a great problem. I do not know whether I can solve it. I started as a small king and by invading all my neighbours and annexing their kingdom I became one of the biggest kings. I have excellent wives

and sons who obey me in all respects. Side by side, with the growing of my status and prosperity, my ego has also grown to an elephant size. If anybody dares to question any of my commands, I get so angry that I cut off his head immediately but later on regret it. Can you please annihilate my ego thoroughly.” The monk replied confidently, “Do not worry Sir. Tomorrow we shall put to death your ego.” The King was shocked, “How can ego be ended within a day or two? Is this monk a charlatan or is he genuine?” He only asked the monk, “Sir, what shall I do for it.” The monk replied, “Tomorrow morning you shall come to the royal guest house where you are going to house me at 3.00am in the morning. But you should not bring along with you any arms or anybody.” The next day morning, the King presented himself before the monk at 3.00am. The monk asked him, “Have you brought your ego with you?” The King gathered courage and answered him, “Sir my ego is not anywhere outside. It is only inside.” The monk replied, “Then it is far easier. We will have to search for the location of the ego within a short area. You just sit here, shut your eyes and search vigorously as to the exact location of your ego inside your body, i.e. head, heart, stomach, etc. You immediately let me know by moving that portion of the body or by pointing to that portion of the body to me. With one stroke of the staff which I am holding, I shall kill your ego by beating it.” The King again got a doubt as to whether the monk was an imposter,

“With one stroke of his staff, will he kill me too?” The pockmarked face of the monk was terrific to look at because of the various scars he had had in his early days as a champion boxer. The King began to search furiously inside and went into the samadhi state. At about 10am in the morning, Bodhidharma awakened the King by touching him with his stick, “Aye, what are you doing? I asked you to search for the ego and you have gone to sleep or what?” The King woke up as if from a dream and answered with a smile, “Sir, there is no ego at all inside.” Bodhidharma asked him, “You told me that ego was not outside anywhere. Now you say it is not available inside also. Where is it gone?” The King answered with a broader smile, “There was no ego at all. It was all my imagination.”

Thus, when the body is imagined, the ego is also naturally imagined.

As I told, ego means the attachment with the body, i.e. to consider this body as ourselves. Unless that goes, we will never get the ultimate truth face to face and get that ultimate bliss.

For removing the ego, one of the methods is to be humble towards all including people in much lower status than ourselves. When anybody in a very low status bows and

says namaste to you, you also repeat the same gestures not in a hypocritical way but with real humility.

This alone will not do. For removal of ego one has to resort to the company of holy men which is called satsang and serve those holy men with all reverence and love. Doing the japa given by the Guru for a long time can also remove the ego. We require mainly the grace of the Guru for removal of ego. We can also pray to the Supreme Lord to take away our body sense.

As I had already told earlier, just as in the dream you make the mind inactive so that no relationship of ownership of father, mother, wife, son, etc. remains just as in the deep sleep state, you will then get rid of the body sense.

The last but the most effective method is to pray to God to remove our ego.

Day 17 – Progress

Many people are worried that they are unable to assess the progress they have made in their spiritual growth. When a billionaire with one lakh of rupees in his pocket went to sleep, he had a dream that he was a beggar standing in front of the Balaji mandir in Tirupati. As a beggar he was shouting to the people, “You are all taking lakhs of rupees and putting them in the hundi of the Lord. Can’t you give me some five rupees for my meals? I am poor and I have not taken any meals for the last three days. Is your Lord only inside the temple and not among us poor people?”

Thus even though while dreaming too he was a billionaire only there has been a super imposition of a beggar on his status as a billionaire so that he considered himself in the delusion as a beggar only. Early morning when once he woke up, even though he remembered his dream of having been a beggar, he remained a billionaire only. Obviously, he did not progress from a beggar to a billionaire overnight. When the delusion of a beggar vanished, in the same minute he was aware that he was a billionaire. There was no progress during the night from the status of a beggar to a little higher status and then to a higher status, etc. till he became a billionaire. When the delusion was gone, simultaneously he was aware that he was a

billionaire and he never lost that status even during the dream. In a similar way, we are imagining that we are ignorant and suddenly one day we find ourselves as possessing all knowledge. The ignorance was part of a mega delusion and we were always part of the indivisible full knowledge. Hence, the question of assessing any progress in spirituality does not arise at all. The moment the delusion of ignorance goes away, he realises that he was always one with the Ultimate Reality. We only think that our status as a jnani or a devotee was progressing. That is only an imagination.

Day 18 – Subsidiary things for effectively doing either Self inquiry or to do Japa, etc.

Certain subsidiary things for effectively doing either Self inquiry or to do Japa, etc.

1. One of them is not to eat things which have been kept for more than 3 hours. Nowadays some people have the habit of keeping cooked items in the fridge for 1-3 weeks. By these means perhaps the taste may remain alright but definitely certain chemical changes unknown to us take place and that is why in Bhagwad Gita such things like those kept overnight with a foul smell, etc. have been prohibited.
2. Gita also prohibits eating things which are extreme in their taste, i.e. extremely bitter, extremely sweet, extremely hot, extremely pungent, etc.
3. Another thing is we should not normally sit either in our own bed or in somebody's bed and do japa, etc. In this process, while on the one hand we are trying hard to get rid of our own vasanas, we will be imbibing the vibrations and vasanas of others too.
4. As regards doing the japa, i.e. repetition of the mantra given by the Guru, the sastras insist that they should be counted and repetition of the mantra without counting has no value. Whatever may be the loss of time involved in counting the japa through beads or by the hand, it must be done.

All these subsidiary instructions regarding food, bed, etc. are not as important as continuously thinking of the Lord or the Self. Hence, our entire effort and attention should be to attain that goal of realising the Self and all these subsidiary instructions can be abandoned if necessary.

Social service

Before we know as to who you are and do self inquiry, etc. and come to know ourselves, there is no meaning in doing social service. Ultimately as the entire life is a drama where the ultimate Reality alone is taking all the roles and plays the role of all the actors, where is anybody else other than the Supreme God to be helped in any way. So the question of any compassion towards anybody does not arise. When the telegram containing the news of the demise of Ganapati Muni was received by Bhagavan Ramana, I was told that the latter exclaimed, “Unnecessarily Ganapati Muni participated in the swatantra war for getting independence and to get rid of the British rule but for which he could have obtained liberation in this very birth which has now been postponed.” Only after knowing who you are we will know about the reality or otherwise of the world and our duties towards the world. There is no meaning in helping the world which is non-existent and is a product of a mega delusion.

Knowledge / Education?

For knowing who we are, through self inquiry and japa there is absolutely no necessity for any worldly qualification such as passing an MA, BA, etc. On the contrary, acquisition of worldly knowledge will be more of an impediment in our spiritual progress. No doubt the base for our Hinduism and our main authority is only the Vedas and the Vedas are required only to know that the cause for our sufferings and unhappiness is our ignorance of our nature. So to that extent, the Vedas should be studied for knowing the cause for our unhappiness in this world and to know as to what are the means for getting unceasing bliss. Beyond that unnecessarily arguing about the interpretations of the various parts of the Vedas is not required at all. Infact, the Kathopanishad clearly says that the ultimate reality cannot be obtained either by arguments or by learning of the Vedas. Infact the study of the Vedas should be preceded by six limbs or six other branches of knowledge like phonetics, etc. which are not done by more than the majority of the vedic scholars who only get by heart the Vedas without understanding its purpose. Such a study of Vedas is not of much use except perhaps for cleansing the mind to a small extent.

Day 19 – Anxiety for liberation

Another factor in this is even though in the initial stages a deep longing for getting liberation is prescribed [called moksha], progressively we should curb our anxiety in getting the results. As Aurobindo has told, “We should be doing the sadhana as if the result will take millions of years but we should have the enthusiasm as if we are going to get our liberation within a few minutes.”

Any continued anxiety on our part that we have not so far got any indication that we are progressing very well and we have not acquired any siddhis will definitely lead to mental depression. At a later stage, all desires including the desire for moksha should be completely left. One should not be anxious at all that no progress is seen in the form of the Lord talking to us, or seeing some lights, etc. We do not know what sadhanas we have done in our previous births. In this birth most of us spend most of the time for the world gossiping with friends, going to office and doing work, etc. and barely one or two hours we spend for God. Naturally when we meditate it is only the world which will come and dance before us and not God. Even if we spend six to eight hours for God, we do not know the Lord’s will and when we will get liberation. The entire anxiety for liberation stems out of our ignorance that we are all individuals and God is somebody apart from

us. When once we know that we are only appearances and are the mere thoughts of the Supreme entity, the entire thing becomes a play as we are already liberated and form an indivisible part of the Ultimate Reality.

Day 20 – Ritualistic practices and Satsanga

The ritualistic practices of doing some havan, elaborate puja, etc. are also required for many people. This can be explained by an analogy. A rich man [a bachelor] sitting at his home at New Delhi was boozing continuously since morning. In the afternoon at about 3.00pm he called his driver and asked him to drive him to his house as it was quite late. The driver asked him, “Master, this is your only house. Where would you go?” The rich man was annoyed at this cheeky reply and told him that in future if he ever spoke against his command he would be dismissed. The driver took him in an intoxicated condition through the entire Haryana and other places and brought him back to the same house which they left at about 3.00am in the morning. The inebriated condition of the rich man has now improved. On arrival in his house, he recognised his place and exclaimed, “Yes, you have brought me to the correct place. This is my house.” Even though he came back to the same house, the time he spent on the ritual of going around Haryana and other places was essential for the rich man to get rid of his intoxication and regain his normalcy. In a similar way, as men remain inebriated with the world, because of the delusive power of the Supreme Lord, the ritualistic methods are necessary to regain his normalcy and to finally know that no search is to be made outside

but he has to come back inside. Apart from this, these rituals have also the effect of purification of the mind which is a sine qua non for God realisation.

Satsanga

All the scriptural and other texts relating to Indian philosophy have laid a lot of emphasis on the importance of satsanga or seeking the company of holy men. The Yoga Vasishtha has eulogised the effect of satsang. By going to satsang and by living in the company of other serious devotees, we begin to love the Supreme Lord by imbibing the vibrations of the saints. There is a story in Srimad Bhagavatam that Sage Narada in his previous birth had been only the son of a servant maid in a charity house [dharma sala] where as a boy he had the satsang of a number of saints and other devotees who used to spend their period of chaturmasya by talking on subjects relating to the Supreme Lord. As a boy, he served them so well that one of them gave him a mantra. By continuously doing his japa, he was born in a later birth as a high level devotee and was known as Sage Narada.

By living in the company of these saints constantly for sometime, one completely forgets the worldly life and is one pointedly devoted to the constant remembrance of the Lord himself through Bhajans and the lectures from the saints. The satsang also purifies the mind which is a precondition for God realisation.

Day 21 – Advice to Householders

The householders have an excuse that they have to do so much work relating to the world at home and office so that they have no time for God. This is not acceptable. Even in times of yore, maharshis were also householders with a number of children. They used to till the land themselves, perform daily rituals like the agnihotra or other yagas too, teach their wife and children [as there were no schools at that time], in the evening listen to the puranas narrated by the sutas [specialised in expounding puranas] and do their meditation too. It would seem that they used to do much more work than a modern man and did so much sadhana that they could realise God in this very birth.

Even if a householder is to devote half an hour per day in the beginning to meditation in due course the hours could be raised. On Sundays and other holidays, as suggested by Ramakrishna Paramahansa one should go out of the house all alone early in the morning, sit in a lonely spot on the banks of a river, near a mountain, etc. and simply be looking at the flow of the river or at the peaks of the mountains. This is a good sadhana by itself. For householders, it is essential they should seek the company of holy men [satsang]. There are institutions like the RK Mission who lecture on the holy texts like the Bhagavad Gita or Bhagavatam, etc. every Sunday. It would be

advantageous to attend those lectures. They could themselves read books like Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc., call a few persons to their house on Sundays and holidays and give lectures on the juicy portions they had already studied. They should make it a point to go to their Guru and spend as many holidays as possible. Thus keeping in touch with the Guru frequently is by itself a great sadhana. At night, they could read portions of Mahabharata and Ramayana to their wife and children which will benefit them as also their family members.

There is a story to demonstrate how God gives to the householders more concessions in their sadhana than for others who are able to spend most of their time for God being retired, etc. [Story on next day].

Day 22 – Story [concessions given by God to householders]

Once Narada approached Narayana and asked him as to who was the best devotee of the Lord in the Earth. The Lord gave him the address of one farmer who used to till his own land. Narada went and lived in his house for a couple of days and was observing what the farmer did from morning to evening. The farmer used to get up early in the morning and tell twice the name of Lord Narayana. Then he was busy with his daily routine and after tilling his land used to return at night 8.00pm or so and take his dinner. Just before going to sleep, while sitting in his bed, he used to take the name of Lord Narayana twice. Narada was astonished as to how the Lord could consider him as the best of his devotees while he could utter the name of the Lord only twice a day. He went back to Vaikuntha and asked Narayana about his doubts.

Lord Narayana asked him first to take on his head a big pitcher with oil filled upto the brim, to go round the Vaikuntha three times. He however warned him to be very alert as even if one drop of the oil was to fall down Narada's head would be split into a thousand pieces. When Narada came back after finishing his assignment the Lord asked him as to how many times he remembered God's name during the period of his circumambulation. Narada

exclaimed in horror, “How could I think of you when all my attention was concentrated on the pitcher to ensure that not a drop of oil fell down so that my head could be safe and sound?” Lord Narayana smiled and asked him how he expected the farmer who was working from morning to evening to remember God even once. It was something great that the farmer could take the name of Lord Narayana atleast twice a day.

This is the reason why the farmer was considered as the best of Lord’s devotees.

Similarly, a householder is beset with various problems like taking the children to the school, going to the office, etc. and rarely he could have time to think of God for atleast half an hour in one day.

Even if we spare one hour daily for the Lord, the Lord is like the proverbial camel in the tent which displaces the traveller in the tent after getting his permission to keep his head inside the tent to avoid the rain. We would find that God had appropriated in due course the major portion of the day.

If a person is unable to do the puja of the Lord elaborately, God would be satisfied even if the God was to be remembered for half an hour or more in a day.

A householder should celebrate the seasonal festivals in an elaborate way accompanied by various musical instruments like the percussion.

Once in a while he could also go to holy rivers and temples of hoary origin so that his mind could be purified.

Day 23 – Taking the name of the Lord

For those people who had no initiation [diksha] from a Guru, an equally good alternative will be to take the name of the Lord. That is why our ancestors had not only written thousand names of Vishnu, Siva, Lalita, etc. but there are three or four sahasranamas [thousand names] for the same Lord. In taking the name of the Lord, the advantage is that anybody irrespective of caste and creed can take the name and even Ramakrishna Paramahansa made it a point in the evening as soon as the lamps were lighted to take several names of the Divine Mother. As all these names were not given by men but were produced at the level of the divinity, just taking the name of the Lord himself purifies the mind. There are no specific laws prescribing ancillary measures like taking bath, etc. for taking the name of the Lord. Whenever any rituals are done in the houses we have a specific verse which says, “Whether in a pure or an impure state, whether after rising up from the bed or after sleep, in all these states, if only we take the name of the Lord both inside and outside of us get purified.” On the contrary by applying soap, etc. we are able to only keep the externals clean but internally the bladder is getting filled up at all times with urine while the intestines also get filled up with faeces. Thus any amount of applying soap or mud will not be able to clean our inside.

There is a story to illustrate the effect of the name. There was a man named Krishna Sastry who used to chant thousand names of Vishnu everyday. He was always glowing with divinity. The local zamindar came once to meet him and Mr. Sastry refused to touch him and shake his hand. The zamindar felt insulted and went back home vowing revenge at some future date. When Mr. Sastry became old, he was affected with leprosy and was admitted in a hospital for infectious diseases where he had the company of many other lepers. A few months earlier one of his devotees had presented him with a beautiful sweater which he [Sastry] used wear constantly on all days. A day came when he died. As there was no other relative or friends, the hospital authorities detailed a nurse to give him a ritual bath before taking him to the cremation ground. The nurse took off his sweater before giving him a bath and threw it on the bed next to him. The sweater fell on an old lady who was in her terminal state of life. Her skin was wrinkled completely and her face had become ugly due to the malignant disease. The moment the sweater fell on her, she found herself miraculously cured and she had become young and beautiful. She began to dance with happiness on her own cot. All the people around were surprised at this turn of events. This sweater with which Mr. Sastry had chanted the thousand names of Lord Vishnu for several days did not cure Mr. Sastry himself

but had the power to cure the lady who came in touch with it. This is the power of taking the name of the Lord. On hearing the demise of Mr. Sastry the Zamindar came running to him and took both of his hands in his own hand and derisively told the dead body, "You would not touch my hand in those days as I was impure. Now both your hands are held by me. What can you do?" When he tried to release his hands, he found that his hands were stuck up with the hands of the dead body and would not come out at all. So many people tried their strength which was of no avail. The local Pujari [priest] came and chanted so many mantras but his hands could not be released. The Zamindar became panicky. At last the priest chanted the thousand names of Lord Vishnu and prayed that the Zamindar's hands should be released. It was then that the hands of the Zamindar were released. This proves the power of taking the names of the Lord.

Day 24 – Mouna

The ultimate reality is actually a grand silence where all thoughts are eliminated. There cannot be any thoughts because in the ultimate non experience, the reality alone remains which cannot talk with anybody. In practice too, we should try to keep silent for a few days at a time or everyday for a fixed number of hours. Its benefits are numerous and it will ultimately lead us to the only reality namely the Self or the Brahman. This silence can be classified as 1] silence of the mouth and 2] the silence of the mind along with silence of the mouth. When I started my spiritual life in 1950 when I was 22 years old, I was keeping silent on every Sunday and it gave me immense peace and the mind became mostly indifferent to many of the worldly attractions. From the year 1954 for about 2 years I was keeping this silence on every Sunday. To avoid replying to the hotel staff questions, etc. I would not go on Sundays at all but manage to live on tomatoes and some fruits. Many wise people who have never done an iota of sadhana in their entire life used to freely comment, “What is the use of the silence by mouth alone? After all the mind will go on chatting.” I have already written an article as to what I got out of my silence for one whole year at the bidding of Bhagavan Ramana in the year 2001-2002 and it is available in my website. The silence I kept without even gesturing or writing on paper proved of great value to me. I

had to learn patience when somebody offended me, verbally or physically. This itself was a great advantage. For instance, if in a crowd if somebody had trampled my foot with his booted foot, I could not express my anger. I had to remain quiet. When in a company of friends, when they were exchanging nice jokes, I could not share my own jokes even though some of them were far superior to others' jokes.

I have seen certain sadhaks observing daily silence from morning 6.00am upto 12.00 noon. In the initial stages, this sort of partial silence everyday is also good. Preferably the timings of silence should be so chosen that it will be the time when a maximum number of people would be contacting one either through cell phone or personally. During all the days of silence, one should ruthlessly put off the cell phone so that nobody's call would disturb you. This also would bestow us with the ability to ignore worldly contacts whether they are of use or not in public life.

Day 25 – Is Sanyasa necessary?

According to Adi Sankara, as he argues in Chandogya Upanishad, for traversing the last lap of journey to moksha formal sanyasa is a must. No doubt there are stories of Maharashtrian saints like Tukaram, etc. who were only householders. In almost all these cases, we only presume that the other person has been liberated. Nobody can say whether somebody is liberated or not. As such unless somebody comes back after moksha to tell us that he attained moksha without taking sanyasa, we can ever say as to who attained moksha or not? Once when Bhagavan Ramana was asked whether he could pick out the liberated ones from a big crowd of people he answered in the negative. This is perhaps because for a liberated soul everybody else is ever liberated and being bound or and being liberated is only a delusion. Even otherwise, if one is to follow the rules of sanyasa properly, the disciplines prescribed there will definitely be helpful in getting one's liberation. When one is completely after the realisation, one cannot understand why one should at all hesitate to take up sanyasa. The very hesitation to take up sanyasa shows that either the man is not fully mature or some attachment somewhere holds him back. Personally speaking, I feel that it is always better to have sanyasa [monkhood] in order to enable a person to develop his vairagya [dispassion].

Even though the Upanishads talks of a few Brahmavadins like Gargi who had a good knowledge of the Brahman, nowhere it is mentioned that those ladies ever got liberation in the woman's body; and if they have had liberation they would not have accepted defeat by Yagnavalkya [Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad]. In Jainism, they clearly declare that women are not entitled for liberation unless they are born again as men. In spite of it, out of their 24 Theerthankaras, one of them was a woman. This is contradictory to their theory of the women's ineligibility for liberation.

Even though the scriptures never sanctioned it, in recent times people like late Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh [Divine Life Society] had given sanyasa to a number of women of both Indian and foreign nationality. So many other sanyasis have followed suit.

My own feeling is that if women are well versed in Vedas and its six limbs, like the phonetics and they have got absolute dispassion [vairagya] accompanied by a deep longing for the Ultimate Reality or the Atman or the Brahman, they should be given sanyas. Even if they do not get moksha in this birth, it would form the basis for the samskara for the next birth.

Day 26 – Miscellaneous

- a. The question is whether people who are on the spiritual path can take cigarettes and alcoholic drinks like whisky, etc. The answer is there is no use of trying to wean people away from the long standing habits but so long as we do the japa and prayer to the Lord to wean us away from such bad habits, in due course one will get rid of those habits. Till that time one should go on with his japa [or chanting of the mantra] and also try to reduce the intake of alcohol, cigarette, etc. to the extent possible. A day will come when automatically one will develop distaste for cigarette and alcohol and leave them altogether.
- b. Even though all mahatmas have stressed the need for vegetarian food only, I have not personally come across any scriptural authority for the same. One who has been accustomed to non-vegetarian food from childhood should not be asked to suppress his taste. No doubt the intake of non vegetarian food will result in increase of rajo guna and tamo guna both of which are undesirable. Here again continued chanting of the japa and remaining in the company of holy people will itself result in one's automatically leaving non-vegetarian food and taking to vegetarianism.
- c. Cinema and serials in the Television: This will again involve us in the attractions of the world. To avoid it,

one could take to japa, prayers and satsanga [company of the holy men]. On the one hand trying to get out of the entanglement in the world and to enjoy them vicariously on the other are contradictory to each other and one has to leave the vicarious enjoyment through cinema serials.

Day 27 – Self Surrender

Unconditional surrender to the Lord is one of the methods of reaching the ultimate goal while living a normal life of a bachelor or a householder, etc. Actually when the mind is made still as per the method given earlier, the universal totality alone takes charge, the individuality disappears and becomes nil. Thus when the individuality vanishes we become zero and the Lord becomes all. This also leads to self surrender. Physically speaking the surrender can be made up of six factors as follows:

1. Accept whatever takes place or comes to you unquestionably with pleasure
2. When something happens, which you do not like, say for instance a transfer order to Timbuktu, do not try to get it cancelled by trying to approach great persons of influence.
3. Have full faith that the Lord will definitely protect us and will do only such things as will be of ultimate benefit to us.
4. We should also call on the God by taking his name to protect us when a crisis comes.
5. Completely dedicate yourself to the Lord. This is like giving the irrevocable power of attorney to the Lord in all our affairs. In such a case we cannot be interfering time and again and advise the Lord as to what He should do to us.

6. The last factor is absolute helplessness. A child six days old is so helpless that it cannot ward off even a mosquito or a fly. That is a state of utter helplessness. We should remain in such a state.

When all these six factors are satisfied, that is called complete surrender.

Day 28 – Sufferings and Pain

Bhagavan Ramana says that pain and suffering may exist but there is no sufferer. So the pain and suffering we feel are purely mental and there is no physical evidence of any pain whatsoever under any circumstances. One of the highly reputed and highly experienced neurologists who has submitted several papers to international meets has also confirmed to me that even according to medical science there is no suffering or pain at all which is supposed to emanate from any part of the body. So just as all the joys and sorrows in this world are purely mental imaginations and are not substantial, in the same way, the pain or suffering exist. There was a gentleman who went to Bombay long ago from his village leaving his wife and child for furthering his financial prospects. For quite a long time afterwards, he did not communicate with any of his relatives including his wife. At that time he had left a child just two years old. After about 18 years, by which time he had accumulated a lot of wealth at Bombay, he started towards his village to go and find out the whereabouts of his wife and child. Enroute he stayed the night in a motel and was given a room on the first floor. In the meantime, his son, now aged about 20 had also started on a similar mission of finding the whereabouts of his father and enroute he came to the same motel where his father was staying unknown to him. He had no money and was racked

by a terrific cough. The motel people allowed him to sleep in the verandah on the first floor which happened to be just outside the room of the Seth, his father. The Seth was highly disturbed by the continued coughing of the boy. He called the manager at night and told him that either the boy should be removed immediately or he would leave the motel. The motel people requested the boy to get out of the motel at midnight. Early in the morning, when the Seth came out of the motel, for continuing his journey, saw that boy and inquired, "Aye, are you the same boy who disturbed me yesterday night? Where are you from?" When the boy gave details of his village, the Seth was very much interested as the boy had mentioned his own [Seth's] village. He found out further, that the boy mentioned the Seth's name as his father's. The Seth was highly delighted that he had come across his own son. He embraced him with all warmth and asked the motel keeper to give that boy the facilities for bathing and a nice breakfast as also to call the best of the local doctors to examine the boy. Here is a case where even the boy was the same, in the previous night and now in the morning, the suffering and agony of the Seth of the night has been turned into extreme happiness. This clearly proves that joy and sorrow are only imaginations of the mind.

It is also likely that we may see a realised soul and feel that he is suffering and is in pain. But that man of knowledge

had never felt either suffering or pain. This happened in the case of Bhagavan Ramana who had a severe cancer of the left arm. Further, for reasons of his own, the realised soul may pose as if he is suffering while in reality he had no reaction. To cite an example, a great Guruji in a village was taking classes in a monastery and was teaching his disciples that fear never existed and it is all a mental imagination. One need not flee from the objects of fear. Just then news came that a band of robbers were coming on horse back to loot the village and to kill the inhabitants. All the disciples immediately ran into the nearby forest to hide themselves. The Guruji also ran fast and reached the forest before others and hid himself. After all the commotion subsided, when they all assembled back in the monastery, the disciples asked the Guru as to why the Guruji was also afraid and ran to the jungle to seek shelter just like the others. The Guruji replied that if he were to stay back in the monastery, his ego will rise beyond bounds and he will be later on announcing to others as to how he was fearless while all the rest ran away. He said he preferred the ignominy of being called a coward to the demonstration of his ego.

There can be many reasons why we will absolutely misunderstand the actions of a realised soul and we can never judge them. We are not bothered about judging anybody.

Thus, either we have to raise our level of tolerance for the pain and suffering which is after all mental only. As the nature of the suffering both as per the tenets of spirituality and by medical standards are one and the same let us not worry about something which is not substantial but only imaginary.

Day 29 – What is our Duty?

Before we ask the question as to what is our duty, we should first know who we are and then only the question of duty arises. The superficial answer will be, I am David, I am Ramamurty, I am Angela, etc. No that is not the fact. If I fall dead this moment, people will go and tell the people outside that Shantananda is gone. How can it be? Shantananda's feet are there, his body is there, his eyes are there, so what do you mean by Shantananda is gone? This means that we do not recognise the body as Swami Shantananda. We only consider as Shantananda the energy inside the body which enabled us to see, to hear, to walk, to talk, etc. In other words, the body was not Shantananda at all. He was a living and loving energy who was inside the body to enable the various senses to perform their respective duties. This is again at a superficial state. Let us go a little deeper. When the mother conceived me on the second or third day I was only a gel [neither liquid nor solid] which slowly descended into the womb. This gel had no power to breathe, to lift the hand, etc. It was only a mass of flesh. It slowly descended into the womb and became big. According to the medical science the energy came into the womb in the fourth week after this gel was formed. In other words, the energy which was me or which was you came into the womb only after 4 weeks had elapsed since the gel was formed. This means that you are

never the body but you are always the energy, a living and loving energy. For instance the electricity is a dead energy because it cannot react to my love or anger. In other words, it is dead. On the contrary, this energy known as vital élan which came into our body, is capable of reacting to others' anger, love, etc.

Now that we know that we are not the body the question remains as to wherefrom the energy inside came. Just as in the case of a generator from which the electricity went into all the bulbs and lighted them all, similarly, the energy from one source has gone into all the bodies which are in the place of bulbs. As there are billions of beings in this world and some more beings are going to be born within the next ten months that energy has to be immense, infinite and boundless.

So the source from which we are born is something infinite and immense. That being the case, if only we come into contact with that infinite source our power will be immense. Sitting at one place we can transform or help the beings lakhs of kilometres away in the progress in spirituality. But unfortunately, even though we are born out of that source and in contact at that time, we have forgotten our source and heritage. If only we can again regain that contact with that infinite source we will have as much power as that one infinite source out of which the

entire world has been produced. As we are not aware of it, we pride ourselves after doing small things unaware that it is a criminal underuse of our ability as we are not aware of our entire ability.

It is very clear from this that our main duty is to know who we are and to reclaim our immense heritage. Even otherwise everybody wants ultimately to have perennial happiness unmixed with sorrows, tribulations and sufferings. This immense happiness we can get only from a thing which is infinite. When we come into contact with people who have attained perennial happiness and ask them the source of their happiness, we understand that there is one supermarket for perennial happiness whose keys are held by somebody called God. That is why many of us want to please and secure and get an entrance into that supermarket by pleasing the God. When once we get into the supermarket of infinite happiness, we become merged in that happiness and we can never come out of it. This is the reason why one Supreme entity is worshipped by many of us calling him as God, Krishna, Rama, Siva, etc. and so for those people who are unable to think of a formless, immense, source of energy, the alternative of thinking of a God is prescribed as their duty.

Why have our scriptures prescribed other things like, mother, acharya, etc. as our main duty to protect and worship? That means there are many duties?

The question arises as to why looking after the mother, looking after the father, worshipping the Guru, have all been prescribed as a duty in the Upanishads. This is because a number of people are not at all interested in spirituality and they may sink into licentiousness, drinking, drugs, etc. Hence, a line has been drawn below which the person may not fall. When once a person is aware that there are higher values our only duty is to find out who we are and to come into contact with our source.

Day 30 – Think universally and act individually

When once, a disciple personally came to me [Swami Shantananda Puri], I told “always think universally and act individually.” When the disciple asked for further explanation, I told, “Think universally means one should not feel his doership while thinking of doing the work. One should think that it is the Lord who is doing and I have nothing to do with it. This is thinking universally. Thinking universally may also mean that one should not think of his profit only and work for selfish ends. To the extent possible, one should think as to how much an act will benefit the man in the street. In case there are no specific benefits to the world that you can think of, atleast see to it that your work does not cause any harm to any other individual or impede his progress in the path in which he is set out.

Although the thinking is universal, the act happens through an individual. The individual acts as a conduit for enabling the universal work to happen through him. In other words, acting individually means the universal has taken a passage through the body and thus has to work in the individual capacity. The planning has been done by the universal and one need not think as to how to work; the work takes place automatically.”

In this connection, I narrated the following story. A reputed German wanted to learn Zen Buddhism. He approached a highly reputed Zen master who asked him to come to the field the next day morning. The German thought that his teacher would teach him some type of meditation. To his surprise, the teacher had kept a number of bows and arrows. He asked the German to take up one set of bow and arrow and to hit the target. Ten out of ten the German scored by hitting the target. The teacher was highly displeased and spat at the floor. He told him, "Fool, you should not drive the arrow. The arrow should go by itself. We do not care whether the target is hit or not." The German tried his best that day and for many days to come to shoot the arrow without himself shooting it. It was not possible at all. Being disgusted with his incompetence, he went to his master and told him, "Sir, I am sorry. I am not competent enough to drive the arrow in the manner suggested by you. So I am leaving the course and going back to my home tomorrow." The teacher assented to his request. The next day when the German came to bid goodbye to his master who was teaching some other younger boy he idly took in his hand a set of bow and arrows. After watching as to how the teacher was sending the arrows in an unconcerned manner, irrespective of whether the arrows hit the target or not, something flashed in his mind. He drew the bow and discharged the arrow. The arrow did not hit at the target. The teacher

gave him a full throated applause and told, “Now you have done in the correct manner. So long as you think that you are the doer and you are discharging the arrows, it is of no use. The moment you left it to the cosmic director and allowed the arrow to fly in the air, you have left the doership and that is the right method of thinking universally and acting individually.”

Day 31 – Qualities to be developed by a sadhaka

The last item here are extracts from my Guru Swami Purushottamanandaji's talks given in a brochure by Omkar Asramam founded by him at Desamangalam, Thrissur [Kerala].

Sadhana is a discipline undertaken in the pursuit of a goal. Abhyasa is repeated practice performed with observation and reflection. Kriya or action also implies perfect execution with study and renunciation. Therefore, sadhana, abhyasa and kriya all mean one and the same thing. A sadhaka or a practitioner is one who skilfully applies mind and intelligence in practice towards a spiritual goal.

The divine qualities which have to be developed by the sadhaka in connection with sadhana are:

1. Do your duty whole heartedly but without caring for the results.
2. Do puja but it should not be harmful to anybody. He means by this the prohibition of pujas with the sacrifice of animals, etc.
3. Do not wound the feelings of anybody.
4. Go to the sacred places

5. Do namaskaras. This means wherever there are respectable sadhus or famous Gods installed, one should do namaskaras.
6. See God in all creatures.
7. Do not be attached to anybody or anything.
8. Try to keep your mind in the highest state all the time.
9. Worship those who are great.
10. Have love and sympathy for those who are poor.
11. Be friends with all.
12. Observe yama and niyama i.e. the “dos and the don’ts”.
Yama means abstaining from stealing others’ property, continence [i.e. observing celibacy], non accumulation of possessions, etc. Niyama means to be straight forward, to keep oneself pure and holy, etc.
13. Always hear the sacred texts like the Upanishads, Srimad Bhagavatam, Ramayanam, etc.
14. Repeat the Lord’s name and mantras.
15. Be straight forward. This means what we think we should speak and we should act as per what we spoke.
16. Always mix with good people i.e. devotees.
17. Be free from ahamkara [ego].

****End of Book****



His Holiness Sri Swami Shantananda Puri of Vasishtha Guha (Himalayas), born in 1928, is a disciple of Parma Poojya Sri Swami Purushottamananda Puri Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas. Swamiji is a scholar par excellence in Vedic scriptures as well as in the puranic texts. His deep knowledge and lucid exposition of Srimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavad Gita and Ashtavakra Gita have made him a popular guide to spiritual aspirants. His simplicity, transparent deep faith in the divine force and absolute surrender to the Supreme have made him an ideal combination of Jnana, Bhakti and Vairagya. Swamiji's prodigious learning and deep devotion to the tenets of Indian philosophy and culture have reflected themselves in all his works, which are practical guides for inner personal experience and to raise oneself to a higher level of being. His emphasis has always been on 'Practice, practice, practice'. In this booklet, revered Swamiji has given very effective guidelines for day to day living by earnest sadhaks.