

MAN'S ETERNAL QUEST

COLLECTED TALKS AND ESSAYS ON
REALIZING GOD IN DAILY LIFE,
VOLUME I

BY
SRI SRI PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



Yogoda Satsanga Society of India
FOUNDED 1917

Paramahansa Yogananda

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Dedicated by Yogoda Satsanga Society of India/
Self-Realization Fellowship
to our beloved third president,
SRI SRI DAYA MATA
whose faithful devotion to recording the
words of her Guru for posterity has
preserved for us and for the ages the
liberating wisdom and God-love
of Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda



The Spiritual Legacy of Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda

A century after the birth of Paramahansa Yogananda, he has come to be recognized as one of the preeminent spiritual figures of our time; and the influence of his life and work continues to grow. Many of the religious and philosophical concepts and methods he introduced decades ago are now finding expression in education, psychology, business, medicine, and other spheres of endeavour—contributing in far-reaching ways to a more integrated, humane, and spiritual vision of human life.

The fact that Paramahansa Yoganandaji's teachings are being interpreted and creatively applied in many different fields, as well as by exponents of diverse philosophical and metaphysical movements, points not only to the great practical utility of what he taught, but also to the need for some means of ensuring that the spiritual legacy he left not be diluted, fragmented, or distorted with the passing of time.

With the increasing variety of sources of information about Paramahansa Yogananda, readers sometimes inquire how they can be certain that a publication accurately presents his life and teachings. In response to these inquiries, we would like to explain that Paramahansaji founded Yogoda Satsanga Society of India/Self-Realization Fellowship to disseminate his teachings and to preserve their purity and integrity for future generations. He personally chose and trained those close disciples who head the Yogoda Satsanga Society/Self-Realization Fellowship Publications Council, and gave them specific guidelines for the preparation and publishing of his lectures, writings, and *Yogoda Satsanga Lessons*. The members of the YSS/SRF Publications Council honour these guidelines as a sacred trust, in order that the universal message of this beloved world teacher may live on in its original power and authenticity.

The Yogoda Satsanga Society of India/Self-Realization Fellowship name and the YSS/SRF emblem (shown above) were originated by Paramahansaji to identify the organization he founded to carry on his worldwide spiritual and humanitarian work. These appear on all YSS/SRF books, audio and video recordings, films, and other publications, assuring the reader that a work originates with the organization founded by Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda and faithfully conveys his teachings as he himself intended they be given.

YOGODA SATSANGA SOCIETY OF
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How Seekers First Found God

*Self-Realization Fellowship International Headquarters,
Los Angeles, California, November 11, 1934*

We can readily understand how man first conceived of a science of medicine. He suffered physically and therefore sought a method to heal himself. But how did man happen to try to find out about God? The question gives scope for profound reflection.

In the Vedas* of India we find the earliest true concept of God. In her scriptures India has given the world immortal truths that have stood the test of time.

Every material inventor is actuated by material need—“necessity is the mother of invention.” Similarly motivated by necessity, the early *rishis*† of India became ardent spiritual seekers. They had found that without inner satisfaction, no amount of external good fortune can bring lasting happiness. How then can one make himself really happy? That is the problem the wise men of India undertook to solve.

Three Aspects of Nature

Worship of God in prehistoric times began through man's fear of the various forces of nature. When it rained excessively, floods killed many people. Awed, man thought of the rain and wind and other natural forces as gods.

Later on, human beings realized that nature operates in three ways: creative, preservative, and dissolutive. A wave

* From the Sanskrit *vid*, “to know.” The Vedas comprise a voluminous scripture of 100,000 couplets. The origin of the Vedas is lost in antiquity. They were passed down orally for millenniums. According to tradition, the illumined sage Vyasa, who lived at the time of Bhagavan Krishna (see glossary), was the compiler and arranger of the Vedas in their present form: Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda.

† Literally “seers.” The rishis were the inspired personages to whom the Vedas were revealed in an indeterminable antiquity.

rising out of the ocean exemplifies the creative state; staying for a moment on the sea-breast, it is in the preservative state; and sinking back into the deep, it passes through the dissolutive state.

Just as Jesus beheld the universal force of evil personified in Satan, so the great *rishis* beheld the universal forces of creation, preservation, and dissolution personified in definite forms. The sages of old named them Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. These primal powers were created as projections of the unmanifested Spirit to unfold His infinite drama of creation, while He, as God beyond creation, remains ever hidden behind their consciousness. In times of cosmic dissolution, all creation and its vast activating forces dissolve back into Spirit. There they rest until called upon again by the Great Director to reenact their roles.*

A Story About Brahma, Vishnu, And Shiva

In India there is a popular story about Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. They were boasting among themselves about their tremendous might. Suddenly a little boy came up and said to Brahma, "What do you create?" "Everything," Brahma replied grandly. The boy asked the other two gods what their work was. "We preserve and destroy everything," they answered.

The young visitor was holding in his hand a single piece of straw about the size of a toothpick. Placing it in front of Brahma, he asked, "Can you create a piece of straw like this?" After prodigious effort, Brahma found to his astonishment that he could not. The lad then turned to Vishnu and asked him to save the straw, which was slowly starting to dissolve under the boy's steady gaze. Vishnu's efforts to hold it together were fruitless. Finally, the little stranger produced the piece of straw again and asked Shiva to destroy it. But try as Shiva would to annihilate it, the tiny straw remained intact.

The little boy turned again to Brahma: "Did you create

* "They are true knowers...who understand the Day of Brahma, which endures for a thousand cycles (*yugas*), and the Night of Brahma, which also endures for a thousand cycles. At the dawn of Brahma's Day all creation, reborn, emerges from the state of non-manifestation; at the dusk of Brahma's Night all creation sinks into the sleep of non-manifestation" (Bhagavad Gita VIII: 17-18).

me?" he asked. Brahma thought and thought; he could not remember ever having created this amazing child. Suddenly the boy vanished. The three gods awoke from their delusion and remembered that behind their power is a Greater Power.

God, the Supreme Cause

In the Western world the idea of God developed through observation of the law of cause and effect. Man can materialize objects by taking materials from the earth and shaping them in accordance with a preconceived idea; therefore it seemed reasonable to conclude that this whole universe must have been created out of ideas. This led to the concept that everything must have existed first as an idea. Someone had to create that first idea or cosmic plan. Thus through the analogy of the law of cause and effect, intelligent men reasoned that there must be a Supreme Cause.

Science has learned that all matter is made of invisible building blocks—electrons and protons—just as a house is built of bricks. But nobody can tell why some electrons and protons become wood, and others become human bone, and so on. What Intelligence guides them? This line of questioning gives room for God in even the material scientist's theories about the nature of the phenomenal worlds. The sages of India say that everything proceeds from and goes back into its source: God.

Evidence of Order and Harmony Is Everywhere

Perceiving that every human being is a compound of matter and mind, the earliest Western thinkers believed that two independent forces existed: nature and mind. Later they began asking themselves, "Why is everything in nature arranged in a particular way? Why isn't one of man's arms longer than the other? Why don't stars and planets collide? Everywhere we see evidence of order and harmony in the universe." They concluded that mind and matter could not be both separate and sovereign; a single Intelligence must govern all. This conclusion naturally led to the idea that there is just one God, who is both the Cause of matter and the Intelligence within and behind it. One who attains the ultimate wisdom realizes that everything is Spirit—in essence, though hidden in manifesta-

tion. If you had the perception, you would see God in everything. Then the question is, how did seekers first find Him?

As the beginning step, they closed their eyes to shut out immediate contact with the world and matter, so they could concentrate more fully on discovering the Intelligence behind it. They reasoned that they could not behold God's presence in nature through the ordinary perceptions of the five senses. So they began to try to feel Him within themselves by deeper and deeper concentration. They eventually discovered how to shut off all five senses, thus temporarily doing away entirely with the consciousness of matter. The inner world of the Spirit began to open up.* To those great ones of ancient India who undeviatingly persisted in these inner investigations, God finally revealed Himself.

Devotion and Right Activity Attract God's Attention

Thus the saints gradually began to convert their conceptions of God into perceptions of Him. That is what you must do also, if you would know Him. You don't stay long enough at your prayers. First you must have a right concept of God—a definite idea through which you can form a relationship with Him—and then you must meditate† and pray until that mental conception becomes changed into actual perception. Then you will know Him. If you persist, the Lord will come. The Searcher of Hearts wants only your sincere love. He is like a little child: someone may offer Him his whole wealth and He doesn't want it; and another cries to Him, "O Lord, I love You!" and into that devotee's heart He comes running.

Don't seek God with any ulterior motive, but pray to Him with devotion—unconditional, one-pointed, steady devotion. When your love for Him is as great as your attachment to your mortal body, He will come to you.

In seeking the Lord, activity comes after devotion in importance. Some say, "God is Power; therefore let us act with

* "...for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (*Luke 17:21*, Bible).

† Meditation is that special form of concentration in which the attention has been liberated, by scientific yoga techniques, from the restlessness of the body-conscious state and is focused unflinchingly on God. Meditation is the concentrated flow of one's attention and consciousness toward communion and oneness with God.

power." When you are active in doing good, with the Lord ever uppermost in your mind, you will perceive Him in this way. But there is wrong as well as right activity even in doing good. A zealous churchman who brings more and more people into his congregation solely to satisfy his own ego is not going to please God through that activity. To realize the presence of the Divine Indweller should be the first desire in every heart.

It is when you persistently, selflessly perform every action with love-inspired thoughts of God that He will come to you. Then you realize that you are the Ocean of Life, which has become the tiny wave of each life. That is the way of knowing the Lord through activity. When in every action you think of Him before you act, while you are performing the action, and after you have finished it, He will reveal Himself to you. You must work, but let God work through you; this is the best part of devotion. If you are constantly thinking that He is walking through your feet, working through your hands, accomplishing through your will, you will know Him. You should also develop discrimination, so that you prefer spiritually constructive, God-conscious activity to work performed without any thought of Him.

Meditation Is the Highest Form of Activity

But greater than activity, devotion, or reason, is meditation. To meditate truly is to concentrate solely on Spirit. This is esoteric meditation. It is the highest form of activity that man can perform, and it is the most balanced way to find God. If you work all the time you may become mechanical and lose Him in preoccupation with your duties; and if you seek Him only through discriminative thought you may lose Him in the labyrinths of endless reasoning; and if you cultivate only devotion for God, your development may become merely emotional. But meditation combines and balances all these approaches.

Work, eat, walk, laugh, cry, meditate—only for Him. That is the best way to live. In so doing you will be truly happy serving Him, loving Him, and communing with Him. So long as you let the desires and weaknesses of the physical body control your thoughts and actions, you will not find Him. Always be master of your body. When you sit in the church or temple,

you perhaps feel a little devotion and a little discriminative perception, but that is not enough. The esoteric activity of meditation is necessary if you really want to be aware of His presence.

You might think that after two hours of meditation I would be bored to death. No, I couldn't find anything in the world as intoxicating as this God of mine. When I drink that aged wine of my soul, a skyful of happiness throbs in my heart. Divine joy is in everyone. Sunlight shines equally on the charcoal and the diamond, but the diamond reflects the light. Such are the transparent minds that know and reflect Spirit.

Thus in the esoteric activity of meditation you have the solution to the mystery of knowing God. I do not blame you for what you do, but for what you do not do. You think you have no time for God. Suppose the Lord were too busy to look after you? What then? Wrest your mind from the mirage of the senses and habit. Why be deluded like that? I am pointing out to you a land more beautiful than anything here can ever be. I am telling you of a happiness that will intoxicate you night and day—you won't need sense temptations to enthral you. Discipline your body and your mind. Control your senses. Find God!

I often say that this body is a switchboard and the five senses are its telephone instruments. Through them I am in touch with the world; but when I don't wish to communicate, I shut off my five senses and live in the inexpressible joy of God. The Heavenly Father doesn't want you, His children, to suffer anymore. The sensory delusion in which you live must be overcome. You should conceive of God as the highest necessity of life. Break the shackles of limitation, of dark habits and mechanical daily routine. I condemn no man—only man's unbelief and oblivion of God. He can be known by using the technique of meditation. Then He shall throb as wisdom in your mind, and as joy in your heart, and you will be more active and more successful than you have ever been before.

Dear ones, I was once like you. I walked the earth seeking truth and happiness, yet everything that promised me joy gave me misery, and so I turned to God. You all must discover your own divinity and win the kingdom of God for yourselves.

The Self Is Your Saviour

These deep truths are not for the inspiration of a passing moment but should be assimilated and made practical for your highest benefit. If only people knew wherein lies their own good! To those who act wrongly the Self is an enemy. Befriend the Self and the Self will save you. There is no other saviour than your Self.* The fetters of ignorance and bad habits keep you bound. It is because you are determined to follow your wrong habits that you suffer. If only you would picture life a little ahead; lest the time, the precious time that is given you, slip away fruitlessly. The Hindus have a saying: "The child is busy with play, the youth is busy with sex, and the adult is busy with worries. How few are busy with God!"

Banish the imaginary hope that happiness will come from worldly fulfilments. Prosperity isn't enough, "gracious living" isn't enough. You want to be eternally happy. Seize the God within you and realize that the Self is Divinity. You must be able to answer with surety the highest question of your intelligence: "Whence did I come?"

God and immortality are not myths. It is the gravest insult to the Self within you to die believing you are a mortal being. How long will you let yourselves, sons of God, be helplessly mowed down by the sickle of death because you never tried during your lifetime to conquer *maya*,† ignorance?

Reason Gives Man the Power to Seek God

There is a God. He has given man independence, power, and reason. Man can find the Lord because of the gift of reason. To spend your time just playing with life and not finding God is wasting the divinely bestowed power within you.

* "Let man uplift the self (ego) by the self, let the self not be self-degraded. For him whose self (ego) has been conquered by the Self (soul), the Self is the friend of the self; but verily, the Self behaves inimically, as an enemy, toward the self that is not subdued" (Bhagavad Gita VI:5-6).

† Cosmic illusion; "the measurer." *Maya* is the magical power in creation by which limitations and divisions are apparently present in the Immeasurable and Inseparable. In God's plan and play (*lila*), the sole function of this delusive power is to cast a veil of ignorance over man to divert his awareness from Spirit to matter, from Reality to unreality.

Use the key of reason. It is not found in stones and animals. God gave man reason that he might find freedom from the delusion of mortality. If you let your reason be trampled by ego and wrong habits, what then? If people bow to your will, what then? Happiness still eludes you. That is why Jesus chose God instead of Satan when the Devil tried to tempt him. Jesus realized that although worldly power has many attractions, it does not last. He had found something greater than all the riches of this universe. The things that most men desire are perishable. But God will never leave Jesus. He is still enjoying the omnipresent divine kingdom. So should each one of us choose the life that leads to God.

You are punishing the soul by keeping it buried, slumbering in matter life after life, frightened by nightmares of suffering and death. Realize that you are the soul! Remember that the Feeling behind your feeling, the Will behind your will, the Power behind your power, the Wisdom behind your wisdom, is the Infinite Lord. Unite the heart's feeling and the mind's reason in a perfect balance. In the castle of calmness, again and again cast off identification with earthly titles, and plunge into deep meditation to realize your divine kingship.

Look within *yourself*. Remember, the Infinite is everywhere. Diving deep into superconsciousness,* you can speed your mind through eternity; by the power of mind you can go farther than the farthest star. The searchlight of mind is fully equipped to throw its superconscious rays into the innermost heart of Truth. Use it to do so.

Remember, it is you who must travel to the kingdom of heaven; it will not come to you by special delivery. Each man has to hie his own way alone. From this day make a resolution in your heart to seek God. When many devotees follow the path to Him, there will arise a "United States of the World,"† with God and His love as man's Director and Guide.

* Soul-consciousness, which is intuitive and all-knowing. The superconscious mind is thus the omniscient power of the soul. (See also *spiritual eye* in glossary.)

† As the individual states of America maintain independence and yet are united in common ideals and goals, so if God's kingdom is to come on earth, the various countries of the world must similarly unite in a bond of harmonious cooperation and brotherhood.

I want to give you more than the temporary inspiration of words alone; I want to shoot star-shells of wisdom straight into your spiritual darkness, that by their bursting light you may see for yourself the truth of what I have said.

The Two Paths: Activity and Meditation

To summarize, there are basically two approaches to God-realization: the outer way and the inner, or transcendental way. The outer way is by right activity, loving and serving mankind with the consciousness centred in God; the transcendental way is by deep esoteric meditation. By the transcendental way you realize all the things you are not, and discover That which you are: "I am not the breath, I am not the body, neither bones nor flesh. I am not the mind or feeling. I am That which is behind the breath, body, mind, and feeling." When you go beyond the consciousness of this world, knowing that you are not the body or the mind, and yet aware as never before that you exist—that divine consciousness is what you are. You are That in which is rooted everything in the universe.

Why not inquire behind the darkness when you close your eyes? That is the place to explore. "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."* Vast lights and cosmic forces are moving there.

Skyfuls of Eternal Bliss Will Be Opened

Samadhi† is a joyous experience, a splendid light in which you behold the countless worlds floating in a vast bed of joy and bliss. Banish the spiritual ignorance that makes you think this mortal life is real. Have these beautiful experiences for yourself in eternal *samadhi*, in God. Auroras of light, skyfuls of eternal bliss will be opened to you.

All great teachers declare that within this body is the immortal soul, a spark of That which sustains all. He who knows his soul knows this truth: "I am beyond everything finite; I now see that the Spirit, alone in space with Its ever-new joy, has expressed Itself as the vast body of nature. I am the stars, I

* *John* 1:5 (Bible).

† Spiritual ecstasy; state of God-union experienced as the ultimate goal of meditation.

am the waves, I am the Life of all; I am the laughter within all hearts, I am the smile on the faces of flowers and in each soul. I am the Wisdom and Power that sustain all creation."

Realize that! My words may remain vibrating within you; but if you sleep on in delusion, you will not know it. If you awaken, you will be conscious that the truth I have spoken is ever throbbing within your soul. Meditate. Learn this liberating lesson. Wait no more. I came here not to entertain you with worldly festivities* but to arouse your sleeping memory of immortality. You do not realize the pain that comes to those who remain in delusion. I suffer for you, and will do everything to help you realize that illumination is within.

Free yourself forever!

* As a part of his effort to foster a broader understanding between the cultures of East and West, Paramahansa Yogananda occasionally arranged social gatherings at the Self-Realization Fellowship International Headquarters. He refers here to a "Hindu-American Banquet" that was to follow this talk.