

Brother Ritananda
"The Scientific Art of Living"
Lake Shrine Temple
October 30, 2011

If you're new to Self-Realization Fellowship [SRF] Paramahansa Yogananda's mission was to reintroduce the lost science of religion, the lost meditation techniques of yoga. During the dark ages they were lost due to the need for secrecy but now in the ascending Dwapara Yuga, are being reintroduced and it is through those techniques that we can most quickly reverse the condition of constant state of agitation.

Yoga is a science and part of the definition of a science is that the results are repeatable. And if we make the effort through meditation the results are guaranteed. When through meditation we realize that calmness we will realize God within. We don't have to take anybody's word for it we will express our oneness with God within and without, in all people and in all creation. Meditation is the cornerstone of the SRF teachings.

It was the mission of Paramahansa to reintroduce this scientific art of religion. This science applies to every aspect of our lives. Brother went on to explain that if we don't bring it into every aspect of our lives how that portion of life leaves us dissatisfied. In a nut shell, the scientific art of living can be defined as devotional meditation, positive thoughts and right activity.

Tomorrow being Halloween, people are preparing and plotting their costumes and their roles, if you will. It is good to first reflect on what our important role is on this Halloween drama of creation. Just like Halloween there are many things in life – illness, disease, natural disasters, tests, wars, and so forth – that can cause us to be afraid. That fear can knock us off balance; it can compromise our priorities; it can make us lose focus as to what's really important in life, as to what our highest goal is. So it's important first to have clarity as to what is our highest role in life. When we know that we need to remind ourselves daily because maya is a comic conscious force as Gururji said. The sole purpose of delusion is to keep enmeshed in this delusion. He is very good at his job and always dropping these thoughts of distraction – desires, tests, discouragements – to knock us off balance; knock our priorities out of whack. We're all here because we'd reached a point where we've enjoyed the finer things in life, which is okay, but never figured our happiness is contingent on them and realized that there's got to be more to life, more to me than meets the eye. And there is!

All the scriptures of the world state that God made man in His image. We don't feel that divinity every day due to delusion but it's true. Through the science of right living, the science of religion, yoga meditation, and right activity we can realize who we truly are in one lifetime, in this lifetime. That's our highest role.

We have many other roles, roles within roles. Family roles, social roles, vocational roles and so forth but our main role is to realize who we truly are and this does not give us license to be indifferent, irresponsible, unsympathetic. Even though we play all these roles our priorities are established around

that highest of Self-realization, realizing God within.

Guruji states in *The Science of Religion*, which is a transcript of his first talk in this country, it is often times the best introduction of SRF for some people in Brother's view. The vast majority of people find this path through the AY but sometimes it's too much for some. Brother went on to tell a story that Brother Dharmananda, who passed away several years ago, told. Brothers Dharmananda and Achalananda were best friends before they entered the Ashram. Brother Achalananda read the AY first. He gave Brother Dharmananda a copy and after a couple of weeks returned it to Brother Achalananda saying: "This is the best science fiction book I have ever read." People like that think *Science of Religion* is the best introduction because as Guruji states that every man, woman and child is seeking the same thing. First he points out that there are not many things in all the religions of the world can agree on. But one thing they can agree on is that God made man in His image but God is not a flesh and blood savior sitting on a throne. And as it says in the Ay: "God is not sitting on a throne in some antiseptic throne of the cosmos. God is Spirit. He is Eternal Consciousness – Eternal, Infinite, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. All these words to describe God but He is not flesh and blood.

Then Guruji points out that we will all agree that we want to eliminate suffering from our lives permanently. Also that it's not elimination would yield peace but peace in itself is not happiness producing. So beyond elimination of suffering is the attainment of positive happiness. We've all experienced happiness and joy in this world that is fleeting. Everything in this world eventually loses its appeal and has limited shelf life. The happiness we want is never ending, for all eternity, all the time. Happiness that is ever new and will never grow stale. Only God can meet those criteria, nothing else. He is the source of all happiness for all eternity. There is no end to the manifestation of God's bliss, joy, freedom, wisdom, etc. That is how Guruji could say that every man, woman and child are seeking the same thing and that the criminal and saint are performing their actions for the same purpose, to eliminate suffering and realize greater happiness.

So the highest priority in life is to make sure we are adopting those thoughts, words and actions, that will yield this ever existing, ever conscious, ever new joy. That is our major role and all the other roles should revolve around it.

We should never take for granted this clarity that we have as to the purpose in life. When we think about our lives we remember that it was dissatisfaction that ultimately drove us to a search for something more. We need to remind ourselves daily of these higher truths of life as we are bombarded by negative thoughts so as not to lose sight of that goal.

Guruji in the AY and the Lessons describes all the experiences we can have with God. He does that so we continue to aspire, always make an effort, never being satisfied, not to discourage us but strive to attain that desired goal.

We should never be discouraged because many great yogis and saints have fallen from their lofty state

because of pride when they had these spiritual experiences. Sri Yukteswar warned Guruji about this, saying: "Spiritual aspirant who tries to flee and clutches material attachments, in his delusion often wants matter in the form of miracles. Therefore when trying to get away from that habit do not deceive yourself and invite it in another subtle form. If all miraculous power and every imaginable material possession were given to you, you would nevertheless remain dissatisfied or you would grow tired of all that you had received. There is only one thing that you will never become tired of if you once have it. You will never become tired of joy – ever new lasting joy is God – and you will become tired of everything except ever new joy."

He is right! All material possessions, glory, riches could be given to us and all phenomenal experiences wouldn't satisfy. Guruji said, "Pursuit of evil or of good, it is happiness you are always seeking. Evil promises happiness and gives sorrow. Goodness may seem to offer sorrow by its requisite of discipline and will power but it will surely give lasting joy in the end. God is ever lasting, ever-new joy and when you have found Him you need no longer pursue the eternally elusive, will of the wisp something else that has always eluded you in all fulfilled desires. God is that something else. Finding Him you will need to seek no further. In ever-new joy you will have everything you ever sought."

So we should let nothing deter us from our highest goal – God-realization – nothing else! Gratitude cultivates devotion and we should always appreciate the realization of this truth of our true purpose. If we don't follow this science of living into all aspects of our lives it will leave us utterly dissatisfied.

Brother went on to share the following quote from George C. Scott as an example. He was an Academy Award winning actor who had reached the pinnacle of his profession, he was well admired and respected. A journalist from "Life Magazine" interviewed him. And asked: "What advice would you give young aspiring actors who look up to you as an example." And he says: "My advice, don't become an actor! You will not be happy. I've said that ever since I've become an actor. This is an incredibly cruel business. It is full tormented, tortured, warped personalities, addicts, drunks, suicides. I don't expect the kids to accept what I say but not the other hand I don't delude myself and say I am a happy person. I know I'm not and never have been. I don't know why and I'm no longer interested in finding out."

It is so tragic; it's funny. Brother said he was judging him or his profession. This could happen to a mom or a professor if we don't bring God into every avenue of our lives.

Ian Fleming was the author of the James Bond stories. He was interviewed at the end of his life about his liberating achievements. Literature is a funny field. There was an author who once said, "It took me fifteen years to discover I had no talent for writing. But I couldn't give it up because by that time I was to famous."

When Ian Fleming was asked what literary achievement he was most proud of, he said: "Dust, dust, all is dust." We have to remember that is the fatalistic way but we could experience that to certain degrees because life will seem so unsatisfying if God is not part of it if we're not pursuing our highest role in addition to our other roles.

We live in a world of duality – pain and pleasure, light and darkness. Guruji says, “Pain is a prod to remembrance. There is a good purpose to it. When it comes into our lives it’s a reminder that this isn’t your home.” This isn’t your home! It’s a reminder that maybe we’re gone off course. We then need to introspect as to what we need to change to get back on course and feel that calmness, peace and happiness again.

We all reached that point of the polar bear cub. The cub asked his father, “Dad, am I one hundred percent polar bear?” The father answered saying, “My parents were one hundred percent polar, so I’m one hundred percent polar bear. Your mother’s parents were one hundred percent polar, so she’s one hundred percent polar. So yes, you’re one hundred percent polar. Why do you ask?” The cub said, “Because I’m freezing.”

The purpose of pain is to get us to question what the highest goal of life is. Eventually we will believe what the saints and the scriptures tell us. In this awakening age God is trying to tell us this truth through all channels. Now these truths are coming through our peers by examples of people who have had near death experiences.

This one lady was a Christian and so this wasn’t necessary part of her theology before her experience. In her near death experience, she said: “I understood with pure knowledge that God wants us to become as He is and that He has invested us with God-like qualities, such as creativity, will power, intelligence and, most of all, the power of love. I understood that God actually wants us to draw on the powers of heaven and that believing we are capable of doing so, we can.”

That’s a big part of this science of living. He has also taught us to think that we can do it. Maya drops thoughts in us like, “she can do it; he can do it but surely not you”. But we can all do it. We are all made in the image of God. We are working with a science and it works like mathematics. We cannot fail! Any effort is progress and as long as we don’t give up the results are guaranteed.

We are constantly under the assault of maya to knock us of our balance, so we need to remind ourselves again and again what is the goal of life and what leads to true happiness. We have to maintain that positive attitude that we can do it in spite of our many roles. Guruji points out that if we think we can do it we can and if we think we can’t, it won’t happen. Discouragement is maya’s most powerful tool.

Guruji was once talking to the devotees and what he said to them is so simple and if we follow this our success is guaranteed. He told them: “Remain calm, do your best and leave the rest to God. That is all that God expects.” If we follow this simple guidance and apply this science of living, we will be successful. Remember simple solutions to complex problems are the easiest to remember on the battlefield of activity.

To remain calm is a powerful weapon at our disposal and yet so difficult to achieve in this world because of all the tests, trials, natural disasters and wars that can frighten us. It is a choice that isn’t cultivate

over night but through our daily efforts and upon looking back over the years one realizes that one is calmer, ones temper is under greater control, one has more patience and one does not respond emotionally in the way as in the past.

Guruji said, "If I put a screen before me, I will still be here but you won't see me. Take the screen away you'll see me. So the screen of feelings arising from the ego hides God's joy. Remove the screen through meditation and you will behold that joy." He went on to say, "Your real nature is calmness. You've put on a mask of restlessness. The agitated state of your consciousness resulted from the stimuli of feelings. You are not that mask. You are pure and calm spirit. It is time to remember who you are – a blessed soul or reflection of Spirit."

Every once in awhile while studying Guruji's writings a quote comes up that really touch moves you or touches your heart. The following paragraph is one of those for Brother. It pertains to calmness. Guruji said, "Try to be more calm. There is no excuse for being restless within. If you are always calm you will also be more efficient. And if you want to wake up from this cosmic dream world you must practice calmness, no matter what happens."

That's a pretty powerful statement "if you want to wake up from this cosmic dream world you must practice calmness, no matter what happens". No excuses. Guruji goes on to say, "As soon as your mind becomes restless give it a whack with your will and order it to be calm. Don't make a fuss about anything."

According to Brother the following is the bombshell. He said, "Remember whenever you worry, you are deepening the cosmic delusion within you." And it's not just worry. Some place he says that worry, fear and anger are the three most destructive emotions. We know they take their toll physically, mentally and spiritually over a period of time. Remember we have a choice. Even as yogis we are not perfect and we become susceptible to these qualities but by introspecting and right activity as part of the science of living we will succeed. But if we indulge in worry, fear and anger we are deepening the cosmic delusion within us.

Somebody said: "I am so sick of this delusion. I want to be free; I want to be free! I am so sick of drama." And yet are our words backed up by action? Oftentimes they don't. Brother was conducting a regional retreat in New York one weekend and dealt with calmness a lot. He said this was his first talk here at Lake Shrine and that we'll probably here him refer to it a lot. He sees it as operating systems upon which all other software program of divine qualities can operate. If we cultivate those qualities without it they will be corrupted. When the operating system is working properly, we have that foundation of calmness then all the other divine qualities can manifest.

The retreated ended and Brother was outside greeting people when devotees came up who were just in a tizzy. Their boss had called very angry with them. They made arrangements to work later in the day but the boss forgot or was just in a mood. They asked what they should do. Brother suggested they apologize to the boss by taking the blame and telling him they'll make up the hours later in the week. He

also advised them to hang on to their calmness but they chose to allow that person's anger to upset them. We always have a chose. That is an example of words not backing up actions – "I am so tired of the drama." So when we introspect we may find that our actions are not in alignment with our words. It is a chose!

During the first three years a disciple of a Greek philosopher was instructed to give the person money every time he felt insulted or something mean was said about him. So for three years he did that and after three years his master said, "Okay, now you're ready to go to Athens and learn true wisdom." So the disciple went to Athens and as he was entering the city gates a wise man sitting at the gates every day insulting everyone who left or entered the city insulted him. The disciple just started laughing. The wise man said, "Why do you laugh when I insult you." Because for three years I've been paying for this kind of thing and now you give it to me for nothing." And the wise man said, "Enter this city. It is all yours."

It is true! We refer to Paramahansa Yogananda as Master. He's not master of us; he's master of himself, of creation, of drama and when we can cultivate that calmness we can "stand unshaken amidst the crash of breaking worlds" we are the master of our world and creation is all ours.

Guruji received the same training as the disciple of the Greek philosopher. We read in the AY how he met Sri Yukteswar in Benares and then thirty days he moved back home, entered college and after his classes he went to Sri Yukteswar's Ashram in Serampore, a suburb of Calcutta, and he would serve, have dinner and listen to Sri Yukteswar's discourses. He had to catch the last train back to Calcutta and when the time of the train would approach, Guruji got very agitated inside. Sri Yukteswar knew what time he had to leave, yet said nothing that gave Guruji leave to depart. This training went on for a while and Guruji wrote: "At first I thought he was very unreasonable but after a somewhat strained period of disciple, Sri Yukteswar explained: 'I am not begrudging your preparing timely to go to the train but I say there is not need for you to be restless. Why allow nervous excitement to ruffle your mind. You should be naturally calm when you are with me and when the train time comes, calmly get ready to go.' He made me miss several trains before I learnt to be calmly active and actively calm."

Sri Yukteswar would not accept any excuse for mental restlessness and agitation as an excuse at any time. So as Guruji said, "We must practice calmness, no matter what happens." That's our goal. It doesn't happen overnight but day by day through meditation, practicing the presence, plus enduring is how we cultivate calmness.

As Guruji said we're most efficient when we're calm, we're at our best. It helps us in every aspect of life – in relationships when someone says something to us in a mean way, instead lashing out – when we react with calmness we are act from our soul nature – from the foundation of calmness and thus avoid much suffering.

People would even attack Guruji, an avatar He would just listen and respond by saying: "Maybe you're right. Maybe you're right." He wouldn't admit that they were right but he wouldn't engage in the fight.

We have that same choice. Calmness will serve us in all our problems in life. When we are calm our intuition is heightened and through intuition we can perceive answers to all our problems.

Albert Einstein is a good example in this quality of peace. He wasn't famous yet and well before television and the Internet. He was sent on a lecture tour on the history of relativity. He was taken from college to college and university to university in a chauffeur drive car. After about thirty lectures the chauffeur said to Albert Einstein: "Dr. Einstein, I've heard deliver that lecture about thirty times. I know it so well that I can give it myself." If you've read about Einstein you know he didn't take life too seriously.

So he said, "Well, I'll give you that chance. The next college we're going to don't know who I am. When we get there I'll take your hat and introduce yourself as Dr. Einstein and you deliver the lecture." And he did. The chauffeur delivered the lecture flawlessly and as he was leaving the stage to the applause of the crowd when a professor stood up and asked him a question filled with mathematical equations and formulas. He was in a pinch but he remained calm and he perceived the solution to the problem. He said, "Well, the answer to your question is very simple. So simple that I'm surprised you asked the question. It is so simple I'm going to ask my chauffeur to come up and answer your question." That's how calmness can serve us when we follow Gururji's counsel and do our best.

It is important to remember that all we can do is our best. God doesn't expect perfection from us. We live in a world of duality, perfection is not possible; excellence is. We can strive in meditation, at work on a project that a supervisor asks us to do. Maybe it comes out well and maybe it doesn't but the first question should be did we do our best. If we did our best then we can remain calm. If we've failed somehow we can calmly ask ourselves what went wrong? What can I change? How can I improve it?

The question we need to ask our self is did I do my best? Because life is hard enough; the spiritual path is hard enough and we don't need to make it harder than it needs to be by measuring ourselves against the state of perfection. Sometimes we expect perfection from ourselves when God doesn't even expect that. We're expecting more of ourselves than God. Then will only add to the pain and suffering in our lives.

We don't have to pray for pain and suffering to come into our lives, it's going to find it's own way. It does serve a purpose but we just simply have to do our best. After we've done our best, as Master said "remain calm and leave the rest to God." If we're truly able to follow that step then what we'll find is we're retaining that calmness we established in the first place. If we make some important decisions, then take some actions and worry ourselves sick, then we know we're not leaving the rest to God. Then we know we're too attached to the fruits of our actions. It is a choice to leave the rest to God and maintain that peaceful, calm consciousness no matter what happens. Calmness should never leave us!

The first manifestation of meditation as we've said is usually this peace. It can be very subtle so don't overlook or minimize the peace but appreciate it, work with it and you'll find that it becomes an infinite number of manifestations of God's presence but it starts with that simple peace. Gururji said that life is simple and everything else is complex. Oftentimes on the path we postpone our happiness

thinking we'll be happy when this happens, or when we achieve this that or the other thing. Brother earlier talked about the concept of being happy now; of living in the present.

Guruji talked about something that is very important when applying this science of living because we can only love God right now! We can only be happy right now! Yes, it's okay to set plans for the future, to set goals for the future, introspect on the past but because we spend most of our lives living in the present moment that's only time we can feel the love of God. That's when we can experience happiness when we can give our love to God.

Guruji said, "The minutes are more important than the years." If we fill our minutes, the present moments, with thoughts of God, the happiness, calmness and contentment, it follows that we will most likely be happy in the future.

Brother ended the talk by sharing the following story called The Station: The author wrote: "Tucked away in our subconsciousness is a television. We see ourselves on a long trip that spans the continent. We are traveling by train. Out the windows of the train the passing scene of cars on nearby highways, children waiting at a crossing, the cattle grazing on distant hillsides, row upon row of corn and wheat on flat lands and valleys of mountains and rolling hillsides of city skylines and village halls. But upper most in our minds is our vital destination. On a certain day at a certain hour we will pull into the station, bands will be playing and flags waving. Once we get there so many wonderful dreams will come true and the pieces of our lives will fit together like a completed jigsaw puzzle. In our restlessness we will be pacing the aisles damming the minutes for loitering, waiting, waiting, waiting for the station. When we reach the station then I'll be happy. When I buy that new Mercedes then I'll be happy. When I get a promotion, when I retire, when the last kid graduates from college and so forth, then I'll live happily ever after. Sooner or later we must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy of the life is the trip. The station is only a dream that constantly outdistances us. Relish the moment is a good motto, especially when coupled with the song, This is the day that the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. It isn't the burdens of today that drive men mad. It's the regrets of yesterday and the fear of tomorrow. Regret and fear are the twin cities that rob of us today. So stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often and swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, cry less. Life must be lived as we go along. The station will come soon enough."

There is no station here on this physical plane but there is that station of God-realization -nirvakalpa samadhi, salvation, liberation, freedom - whatever you want to call it. That's the station. Even then it's never over. God is infinite - ever new - there is no end to the manifestations of God's beauty, wisdom, power, truth, joy, love but it is important for the beginner to give things to God and we will enjoy every moment along the way. Resist that temptation of mental restlessness, the agitation that prevents us from perceiving God's presence within, without and eventually in all people.

So our highest role in this cosmic drama of live is God-realization, we have this tremendous blessing to know that and to have that clarity. When we remember what it used to be like before we had God, we

should remind ourselves daily of what a blessings it is. Any pursuit without the thought of God will always leave us with “dust, always dust”. When we apply this science of meditation plus right activity, it can be incorporated into every aspect of our lives. It is a science that works like mathematics and cannot fail. As long as we are making the effort, we are progressing and then leave the rest to God.

As Guruji said, “Remain calm, do your best and leave the rest to God, that is all God expects.”