

Brother Satyananda
Living the Spiritual Life in a Material World
Lake Shrine Temple
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This great universe is a creation of Cosmic Consciousness and it is a creative act; it is a creative form. We, as part of this great creation of cosmic consciousness, also have the power of creativity within ourselves. We want to express it. We want to allow it to express through us. There are so many ways that we can express the energy of divine creativity -- problems solving, helping to negotiate peace, establishing harmony and expressing beauty in so many different forms. When we feel this divine energy of creativity flowing within us, express and know that it is part of the infinite qualities of God that has created this universe and created us with that same power of divine creativity.

Time magazine, a few years ago, did an online poll on meditation. Brother checked it out and found that there were over 8,000 respondents and that he also participated. There were several options to choose from.

“I have tried meditation” was one of them -- 70% said: ‘yes’;
“I am interested in meditation” -- 20% said: ‘yes’; and finally,
“I couldn’t care less” -- 10%.

Amazing percentages! That was three years ago. The interest in meditation is growing. For some years now during his travels as a minister, Brother has adopted his own survey on the same subject. When he’s squashed in coach with a seat mate, he says he’s always asking, after giving his name, what they do. They tell him what they’re doing in life and when they ask him what he does, he says: “I teach meditation.”

Then comes the survey -- their reaction -- 4 out of 10 say: “Yeah, I’m tried meditation.” They’re positive about it. Another 4 out of 10 say: “I have been thinking about it. What is meditation all about?” Then the other 2 out of 10 kind of give him that look, bury themselves and there’s no further conversation. Still, by far, the majority of people are open to the survey and Brother encouraged each one to conduct their own survey. There is a great deal of interest and those who don’t know about meditation are curious and they want to learn more.

Brother said he was conducting his typical meditation survey on a flight when returning from Europe last fall. He’d boarded with a young, handsome man in Zurich and that they ended up seat mates in coach. It was an eight hour flight, so Brother introduced himself and asked the guy what he was into. It turned out he was a mountain climber in Switzerland and then he asked Brother what he did. When Brother told him he taught meditation, they came to an agreement that the young man would talk to him all about mountain climbing in Switzerland and Brother would teach him how to meditation. Since they would be in the air for about eight hours there was no rush.

The young man told Brother all about the ascends that he'd made, the people that he climbed with, his favorite mountains and all that stuff. Then Brother talked to him about and guided him through a meditation. He, also, turned him on to someone he knows in Berkeley, who is a major slack-liner and runs a Rock Shop. The young man was rally jazzed to hear how meditation can actually be good for mountain climbing sometimes.

Brother said his message this morning was aimed at young adults....the twenty and thirty generations...the slack-liners, fast food caterers, web developers, filmmakers. That kind of genre. There are all kinds of you out there doing your thing. Whether you're twenty something and getting started or fifty something and getting restarted, an important empowering tenant of yoga philosophy is simply: know thyself.

Film star, Kirk Douglas, likes to tell a story about when he was driving across the California desert to his house in Palm Springs. He saw a young man standing on the side of the road looking for a ride. Kirk Douglas, being a cool guy, pulled over and the young man hopped in, throwing his backpack in the back. As Douglas pulled out on the highway and the young man looked over with his water bottle poised to take a drink and saw this famous face. His mouth opened wide and said: "Hey, man, do you know who you are?" Douglas says he likes to tell this story at parties because at the end he always says that it is a good question and we should ask ourselves every now and then: "Do you know who you are?"

Brother went on to explain that during the Sunday message a couple of weeks ago he gave our guru, Paramahansa Yogananda's, answer: "*You are an immortal but you must believe in your immortality.*" We are a unique divine being on an amazing soul journey. Our bodies may be born and pass away but our essential spirit-self never dies. Affirm: "That is who I am. My state of awareness -- I experience, I am alive!" This state of being is not dependent on your physical body. It exists beyond the life and death of the body. The homework that he gave that day was to affirm this in our daily life and not only that, to believe it because it is so easy to assume that we are mortals...that we are born, that we die and that when we die our existence ends.

Immortality then becomes kind of wishful thinking and, yet, the real truth, the absolute truth, the reason that all of us are here today, is because we need to change that way of thinking. We need to change our very self concept; we need to turn our natural assumption on its head, that is, make our immortality an assumption about ourselves. Assume our divinity! Let that be the launching pad for our philosophy about life; our concept of ourselves and all the work we do in life. This is not a selfish egotism, it's a dose of reality. It personally empowers us; energizes our endeavors.

The world of psychology teaches self esteem. What we are talking about is something deeper -- soul esteem. When, if we mentally accept this truth of spiritual immortality and oneness with God and emotionally embrace it, then we begin to get some confirmation that comes through meditation. In the stillness of scientific meditation, beyond the pattern of thoughts that affirm our mortality, in the stillness, in the silence, there comes a

feeling, a perception, that is more real than this world. It has a very strong message to give, that is, beyond this body we exist. We never die.

From Chapter II of the *Bhagavad Gita*: “No weapon can pierce the soul; no fire can burn it; no water can moisten it; nor can any wind wither it. The soul is uncleavable; it cannot be burnt or wetted or dried. The soul is immutable, all-permeating, ever calm, and immovable – eternally the same.”

Our Guru comments: “The soul, the individualized reflection of Spirit is made of vibrationless joy -- the immortal, omniscient, omnipresent, ever new Bliss of Spirit.”
Taking this as a foundation,

Brother explained that he wanted to move into some practical applications as to how we can put this soul-esteem to work.

We’ve made this assumption that we are essentially divine beings and part of Cosmic Spirit. That is really who we are. Also, that we have a mortal nature that possess awesome personal strengths. These are two important affirmation perceptions that we want to use as a foundation for our self-concept.

We, also, want to acknowledge that we may have some bad habits or weaknesses that need to be worked out and overcome in the process of life’s experience. We’re taking a holistic, 360 degree view, and we are affirming that essential truth of our immortality and we’re focusing on our strengths.

We all have certain bad habits and Brother said he calls his own personal favorite bad habit the “compound screwup.” He said that he knows it really well and that when he comes to a really good decision, a good course of action, he then second guesses himself and goes in another direction, which is completely wrong and he’s screwed up. Then he realizes that his original decision was right and when he tries to go back there, he makes another screw up. He said that this can happen several times. Also, that it’s hard to forgive oneself when we know we could have done it right the first time.

During the week as Brother was walking the path around the lake, a man was walking by and as he passed him, Brother heard him uttering: “You dummy; you are such a dummy.” That made Brother happy because misery loves company...but that’s negative, too.

Brother then went on to focus on strengths -- our strengths. He said that we all have them and he asked if we’d ever done a strength assessment? If we’d ever identified and acknowledged our personal strengths? Also, when the last time was we reflected on the best part of ourselves?

There is a part of us that we deeply trust; there is a part of us that we use every day in some way and we totally take it for granted... but it works for us, it really works and we can rely on it. There is a quality about us that when we express it, it expresses who we are and that we are really at our best at that time -- we may even be able to solve complex problems more easily.

When other people are confused and not sure, we can easily see a path forward. Sometimes people will come and talk to us just to try to sort out their confusion. We can help them see their path forward with their problems and help come up with a solution or maybe we have an easy insight to the nature of people, their motives and their purposes. Maybe we have good social sense and we rely on this every day to inform us and guide us as we navigate life or maybe we have a keen sense of beauty that relates to interior spaces. We may walk into a place and get a sense immediately of how it could be improved...the feelings are already there. These are skills that no one has taught us; we just know them. We've had this as a part of us all the time. We were born with it.

This is the important part of the message because we all have some fully developed skill-set that we bring with us into this incarnation. We have developed it before. Paramahansa Yogananda says that we come into this life, not just as little babies who are innocent without a background but we have a whole fully developed skill-set and we can rely on it. We know because we didn't have to train ourselves, we didn't have to go to school to learn it, it's already there. It is valuable to know these kinds of innate strengths, to identify them and to acknowledge them in ourselves because then we can consciously build on them, to develop them further this gives us a head start in doing good and accomplishing good things in the world.

Paramahansa Yogananda tells us that if we recognize the prenatal skill, we have a head start and we can gain success faster that way.

Paramahansa Yogananda said: *"Look at life unmasked. Observe perpetual current of emotions and thoughts that arise within you. Examine the heart of your aspirations, ideals and hopes. Life manifests itself through these channels and so it is that these fundamentals demand understanding through intelligence, wisdom and love.*

"Assuming our divine essence, focus on those prime strengths. We can become wisely aware of bad habits and weakness that need to be overcome. In this balanced, spiritual approach towards life, drawing on our soul esteem, it sets the stage for brilliant, smart choices in life."

Paramahansa Yogananda, in the Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons, gives a very cool formulae for success drawing on this concept. He says that if we want to wisely choose a career, a good place to start is to choose something that we love to do. Something that we naturally love to do and that comes easy to us, to refine the required skills and perform them as a service to others. It's okay to expect some compensation in return but dedicate it all to God. In this we have a kind of holistic package of how we can be the best we can be and how we can build upon pre-developed skills and strengths.

Actor Denzel Washington said: "I have developed a relationship with God in my life. I take what talent I've been given seriously and I try to use it for good." He's expressing very succinctly this universal formulae. We have God as a partner in life. We are aware

of our talents and we try to develop them. We take them seriously and then we try to use them for the good of all. In this sense we are cooperating and participating with God's divine plan.

We want to discover our natural talent and ability and take it seriously. We want to cultivate it and we want to do good with it. Where do we start? What do we love? What do we love to do? We know that when we do something we love, we're not watching the clock, are we? We kind of forget about time and immerse ourselves and the creativity flows naturally. We can feel that energy flowing when we're totally absorbed in what we're doing. It creates a good feeling inside and it produces good results if this is something we love to do and we can build on this very effectively towards a meaningful contribution.

Brother went on to tell us about a tour program he was on in Germany some years ago. In between programs he was in the beautiful, historic university city of Heidelberg. He was with a group of Guruji's disciples, of all ages, who were taking a little break and they were going for a walk in the forested hills above the city. They were just walking quietly down the beautiful, forested paths with little conversation when a young woman caught up with him.

She said: "Brother, do you mind if we talk as we walk?" Brother replied: "No. What's on your mind?" She said: "Well, my thirtieth birthday is coming up soon and I'm freaking out. I'm really scared because I don't know what I should be doing with my life. I have to finally make some decisions and go in that direction. My boyfriend wants to get married and settle down but I'm not ready for babies. My mom wants me to get a job and earn some money for the family. It all sounds so boring! What should I do?" Brother's response: "What would you like to do?" "I don't know." "Well, maybe you do. You're a well-educated woman. Isn't there something you'd love to do?" "No, I don't think so."

Brother said: "Look, if there were no pressure and there was no one telling you what to do and you could do anything you wanted and there were no obstacles, what would you do." She smiled and said: "I would travel the world and be a photographer." Brother said: "Really. What kind of a photographer would you be?" A fully developed vision unfolded. She had a plan that she was in denial about. She said: "I would like to travel, if I could do anything I wanted, and I would photograph sacred places around the world. I would photograph sacred, religious events and build a gallery for that portfolio, just for that niche genre of photography."

Brother's response was: "Wow! I don't think anybody is even doing that. You should do it!" Fast forwarding ten years later, she's a recognized photographer, traveling and shooting religious events...*Khumba Mala* in India, Easter morning procession in a small town in Italy, religious festivals, sacred spaces, ashrams, Tibetan monasteries...showing her work in art galleries and art shows around the world. She's doing what she loves and she's doing it really, really having fun.

So one should build on something that we naturally love. That is, take a dream, take something that we have perhaps pushed aside as a hobby because our parents never encouraged us and go with it.

Another woman was crying and said: "I don't know what I want to do with my life. My dad wants me to be a lawyer." Brother said he told her that the world doesn't need another unhappy lawyer, clarifying that he knows that there are some happy lawyers in Self-Realization Fellowship.

Then he asked the woman what she would really like to do and then the dream started to come out. All that was needed was some encouragement. The dreams are there and they're built upon these past life strengths, something they've cultivated in a past life and they know it intuitively. It comes quickly and it comes easily.

We learn fast when it's something that we love and do it because it comes naturally to us. It's like a past life proficiency and we can cultivate and build on it and make a contribution easily. There is already a momentum and energy moving forward and we can easily build on that momentum. We have disciples doing that... beautiful, spiritual men and women who are following their dreams and making advanced contributions.

A woman working with the United Nations in New York is sponsoring a Women's Rights Program all around the world. We have filmmakers producing quality, instructive and high caliber entertainment. We have women offering a book on online teaching. We have a man building an international charity to help poor nations share resources. This is cutting edge stuff. They are investing their skill-sets in making contributions and it's in alignment with their spiritual lives. It's not easy. There's a lot of work involved. There are risks involved but they are functioning at a higher level and taking advantage of these skill-sets that they brought with them to be useful.

This a wonderful way to help to choose a direction and harmonize career choices with our spiritual goals. We can also use this in guiding children, as parents, grandparents, educators. In little children it is easy to recognize their natural inclinations. It comes out in play when we watch them. Play is serious work; it's the work of childhood.

A little boy may be seen busy building something. One realizes that he is very serious about his work. He doesn't just leave it to go somewhere else or knock it down. He constructing something and wants to finish without being asked to leave it to do something else. In that little head is an idea about what he wants to build. There's a past life strength and a skill-set there. He's got an ability that he's exercising in play.

A little girl is in her play arena and every time a squabble breaks out among other girls, she's the one that is trying to make peace, trying to comfort, trying to sort of work things out. We have a little negotiator. She practicing her skills. We can watch for these signs in children and we can identify their certain strengths. If we do that and encourage them along these lines of natural strengths, along these lines of activity, where they have a natural confidence. Later on they will invest this confidence in something that they

choose to do in life. It all starts with these natural preexisting strengths that we bring with us.

An accomplished artist, performer wrote this poem:

*"I Have to create;
I Have to make something grow;
I Have to write something;
I Have to say something;
I Have to put something out.
It is not a need to prove anything.
It is who I am.
It's just my way of life."*

Master says: *"God has chosen you for specific work in this world and whether you are a business man or a housekeeper, play your role to please Him alone. Then you will be victorious over the sufferings and limitations of this world. He who has God in his bosom, has all the powers of the angels with him."*

There's a lot of sweet talk here and good news but there's a dark side. We've got an evil twin. We all know it. We all get discouraged when something doesn't go well. We feel lost and a little voice says: "Well, it's all a dream; it's just a big illusion; it's not worth all the worry and all the effort. It's all going to fail in the end anyway. What's the point if I get bummed?"

Do we know that voice? That voice is not our higher self speaking. This state of psychological malaise is like a trap door of *maya* that we can fall through very easily. Even the highest cosmic thoughts, without the corresponding positive action, lead into a vacuum. If we're just thinking and dreaming, we're not acting. Gradually we just kind of cruise into a vacuum and then this darkness can come in. It can take over even the most noble ambitions and dreams. We can feel it because when we're stuck there we're not moving forward, we're not evolving and we're kind of devolving, slip sliding away. We can feel it and we know.

The way to get out is through passion. We have to act. We have to choose a direction and we just have to move because if we don't move then we get deeper into this vacuum of inactivity. We must resist this dark, whispering voice. It is not whispering the truth at all. It is just a temptation for us to get lazy and take off refusing to gather our personal strengths with our personal dreams.

Get an action plan. Meditate and pray asking God for support. When we're building on some of these natural strengths, building on things we know we love to do, we will find that God will support our prayers and it's like a chain reaction that launches us forward. God can be a partner in all of this.

Remember, the formulae:

- Choose something we love to do;
- Acknowledge the required skills or actually improve on what skills we already have;
- Offer it as a service;
- Ask for reimbursement or pay; and then
- Dedicate it to God.

The dark side, also, has a fear of failure. Risk, naturally creates insecurity in this world of duality. We have no guarantees. We don't know how things will work out. It is easy to slide into a vacuum of inactivity. A young adult in Washington, DC asked this question in *satsanga*: "As I look ahead toward life, Brother, I feel a lot of insecurity. There are so many choices and everything is super intense. I get scared. What is the best perspective with which to view the challenges that I see ahead in my future."

Some years ago, Brother and another monastic, attended the 70th birthday performance of Ravi Shankar, the famous sitar player. There was a full house and all the proceeds had been dedicated to a very worthwhile charity. He was in a very jovial mood, talking with the audience and everyone was sort of talking back. It was like a big family there in the theatre. He put on a beautiful performance with the other players. Near the end of his 2nd set he asked a lovely young woman in her late teens or early twenties to come up and sit with him. It was his daughter, Anoushka Shankar. She sat with her sitar next to her maestro father and they played sitar duets. It was very beautiful to see this father / daughter playing together this complicated instrument.

Then, as their set together was ending, Ravi Shankar moved into the teacher mode. He would play something, a little lead, on the sitar and Anoushka would close her eyes and repeat note for note everything that he had played. Then he would play something a little more difficult. Again, Anoushka would close her eyes, concentrating...the audience was holding their breath...can she do it? Again, she played it perfectly note for note and everybody applauded. He did this again and again and each time it would be a little more complex. As everyone held their breath, she repeated the notes successfully. Finally, after 45 seconds of a really brilliant, technically complex set of notes and a hushed audience, Anoushka with eyes closed started off beautifully and then blew it. She was unable to remember and just stopped. There was only silence! Then father and daughter looked at each other and just started laughing. The whole audience laughed and everybody applauded.

Life is a little bit like that. We learn on stage, don't we? Everybody is watching. Sometimes we do it and sometimes we don't do it but do we laugh. No, it's not so funny then. We have to admire the training process that goes on and the sense of non-attachment that compliments such a training process.

After the concert, Brother Vishwananda and Brother went back stage to present garlands to Ravi Sankar from Daya Mata. They'd had a long connection and both Brothers were representing Daya Mata at her request. The Brothers got in line back stage and when it was their turn to greet Ravi Sankar, Anoushka was sitting right next to

him. After receiving the garlands, compliments and the greetings of Sri Daya Mata, Ravi Sankar said: "Please, give my reverent greeting to Mata."

Brother then took the opportunity and said: "It was a brilliant concert. I so much enjoyed your informal rapport with the audience but, I must confess that my favorite part was, the interaction you had with your daughter, Anoushka." Ravi Sankar response was: "Anoushka is an ideal student. She never tires of learning new things."

Now it is more than fifteen years later and Anoushka has a new CD. Brother quoted a critic from the sleeve of the CD: "No one in life embodies the spirit of innovation and experimentation, more evidently than Anoushka Sankar." So along with her ability to play a very complex instrument, she has a native soul quality of courage that allows her to innovate on an instrument, even to innovate and improvise on stage, at the risk of failure. That is a quality that she possesses that is recognized by her peers.

Brother then asked a trivia question: Anoushka has a famous stepsister. Does anyone know her name? Answer from the congregation: "Norah Jones." Brother explained that they both have the same mother.

Bill Gates to a group of Harvard grads: "When you're failing you are forced to be creative. Dig deep and think hard day and night. It's amazing how many obstacles just fall away if you set your mind on something. When you make a mistake, don't put it behind you until you've figured out what it tells you about your limitations. Then once you do, let it go."

Paramahansa Yogananda said in the 1930s: *"Learn how to use the psychology of victory. Some people advise: don't talk about failure at all but that alone won't help. First analyze your failure and its causes; benefit from the experience and then dismiss all thought of it. Though he falls many times, the man who keeps on striving, who is undefeated within, is a truly victorious person. This truth I have learned from my contact with Spirit."*

To all young adults and older, young adults: You are immortal souls on a divine spiritual quest, a cosmic adventure. You have and you possess some very awesome and natural strengths that you brought with you. You already have them. You can develop them further into an incredible set of skills that you can use to help and serve humankind. You can balance your material life with you spiritual strivings; your hopes and dreams with your divine aspirations and as you move forward in this way, willing to take risks, willing to innovate, willing to fail and overcome the fear of failure, you will find that you are moving forward with both your earthly mortal dreams and your divine spiritual ones.

As the saying in India goes: "BANAT, BANAT, BAN JAI!" "MAKING, MAKING, MADE!"

Let us gauge ourselves in this way. We have a divine goal and we can attain it in this lifetime. Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* says: *"With heart and mind absorbed in me and by My grace, thou shalt overcome all obstacles."*