A logo for a yoga center

Description automatically generated

1. To disseminate the essence and mystical meaning of all *Vedantic* Scriptures and the Scriptures of the world, revealing thereby that “Truth is One - Sages and Saints speak of it in different ways.”

2. To emphasize the oneness in Creation and cultivate a Spirit that communes with the Ocean of Universal Awareness in the spirit of the *Vedantic* axiom - *“Vasudeva Kutumbakam”* - this world is our family.

3. To introduce to the world the time- proven philosophy of Integral Yoga to bring about the highest culture that humanity can attain.

4. To serve humanity by raising human consciousness through teaching the technique of mastering the mind and following the principles of “simple living and high thinking.”

5. To promote the understanding that the ultimate purpose of life is Self-Realization, and to offer powerful and time-tested techniques for attaining it.

6. To demonstrate that one can live in this stressful world, and yet rise above it by learning to use every circumstance in one’s life to their advantage.

7. To make available to all, the means to attain a healthy body through *Hatha Yoga* exercises, and *Pranayama* (techniques for breathing correctly).

8. To train the mind to be focused, peaceful, and relaxed, and to go beyond self-limiting concepts in order to discover one’s infinite potential.

9. To teach the art of meditation to enable one to render the mind acquiescent, and ultimately to learn how to transcend the body and the mind to experience the super-conscious state of *samadhi*.

10. To publish and make available through books and all media possible, teachings of the highest order, drawn from the ancient wisdom of *Vedanta*, and expressed with rare intuition by the Spiritual Master— Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

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Yoga Research Foundation 6111 S.W. 74th Avenue Miami, Florida 33143 U.S.A. Tel: (305) 666-2006 • www.yrf.org

ISBN: 0-934664-49-8 Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004 106541

Cover: Sushila Oliphant Interior Design: Swami Umananda and Sushila Oliphant Editors: Swami Umananda and Daya Callan

Photography of Swami Jyotirmayananda: Rajnish Kashyap

**DEDICATION**



Pandit Bhairo Persaud

*AUM Asato Ma Sad Gamaya Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya*

This booklet is dedicated to Pandit Bhairo Persaud, whose quest for knowledge and commitment to Sanatan Dharma has been and continues to be an inspiration to the hearts he touched while he graced this earth.

He was born on June 21, 1913; the second son of Pandit Chatterpaul and Lachminia of Batchelor’s Adventure, East Coast Demerara, Guyana. Pandit Bhairo Persaud studied Sanskrit under Professor Mahatam Singh and in 1957 he was recognized as a Sanskrit Scholar. His adult life was greatly influenced by the teachings of Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, India. In his later years, he was blessed to have received personal guidance from Swami Sivananda’s disciple, Swami Jyotirmayananda. He died on August 9, 1994, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Our Father taught us many things in our lives—lessons that we hold close to our hearts. With these lessons, we’ve gone many places, met many people, and done many things. But of all the things we’ve done, and of all the things we are, we are most proud that we are our Father’s children. Our Father was a man of unswerving principles and unrelenting discipline. As we look at his life, and the man he was, we hope that we would demonstrate the sort of strength of purpose that was our Father’s hallmark.

We are grateful to our Father for many things, but are most grateful that he lived long enough to see each of his children grow into caring parents and compassionate individuals. We are grateful also that he lived long enough to witness the lessons that he and our mother instilled in each of us take root and help us develop into the people we have become. Our father drew many circles in his life; he drew in many people, and offered them his experience, his strength and his hope. He gave his love and support without condition, and rejoiced in the success of those he loved.

As children, we always admired our father’s commitment to working to support his family and his commitment to self-effort. He taught us that Life is not defined by the world around us, but is truly spiritual and infinite, and that the dear- est essence of Life, ideals like Beauty, Love, Truth, Purpose, and Peace were the most important qualities to cultivate.

He will always be a light to guide our lives as long as we grace this earth. Our Father had a favourite prayer that we would like to share with you in his memory:

*Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukinah Sarve Santu Niramayah Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu Ma Kaschit Dukha Bhag Bhavet*

Translation: May all mankind be happy; May all be free from disease; May all see what is auspicious; May none suffer from pain and misery.

From your wife, Khubia; your children – Betty, Gajaindri (Lily), Pulastya, Bhagwandai, Endra, Vidya, Leela and Leekhant (Prakash), your loving Grandchildren and Great grandchildren.

**INTRODUCTION**

The perennial search for happiness continues in spite of the rapid technological advances of the latter half of the 20th century. Improvements in the standard of living world-wide have not produced the results anticipated by those championing the cause of materialism.

Although materialism has no doubt contributed significantly to man’s worldly comforts, it addresses only his physical needs. Being a highly developed psychological being, man needs emotional satisfaction. Being highly intellectual, he is restless and impatient with imperfection. Most importantly, because he is a spiritual being, he yearns for fullness, the peace that comes from enjoying a state of equilibrium or rest. The downside of materialism is that it burdens man with endless anxiety and an insatiable desire to possess more and more, to acquire, to aggrandize and to live in slavish attachments.

The Kathopanishad tells us that the Creator has made man with his sense organs turned outward and so he lives generally at the level of the senses. Man seeks to find fulfillment and happiness in the world outside, from external sources, from toiling for and finding temporary gratification for his needs, mental urges and intellectual cravings. All of these take him away from his own inner equilibrium, resulting in the current alarming statistics claiming that more people are killed by worry than by work.

When we realize that success has not delivered the peace of mind or internal fulfillment we need, we heed the clarion cry of all spiritual masters from the days of the Upanishads to our own times. Their message is to re-direct our search from the external to the internal, for true and lasting happiness can come only from within. As Jesus Christ himself said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Mathew’s Gospel 6:33)

In the Srimad Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna tells us in his dialogue with Arjuna about the staircase that leads down to the three gates of hell: *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger) and *lobha* (greed) (Gita 16:21). Viewing the same subject from a positive perspective, the great scripture Yoga Vasistha introduces us to the four gates to “heaven”—the Vedantic Palace of Liberation. As Sage Vasistha commences his teachings to enlighten Rama, he tells Rama that the Palace of Liberation has four gates. The gatekeepers at these gates are *shama* (serenity), *santosh* (contentment), *satsanga* (good association) and *vichar* (spiritual inquiry. In order to enter this Palace, one must befriend at least one of the gatekeepers—and then friendship with the others will automatically unfold.

The discussion of the Four Gatekeepers at the Palace of Liberation in this booklet is drawn from Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda’s lectures on Yoga Vasistha at his ashram in Miami, Florida. Swamiji uses illustrations, examples, parables, and his all-pervasive wit and humor to convey great spiritual truths so that they make an indelible impression on the mind and remove doubts and misconceptions.

Careful reflection on these teachings of Yoga Vasistha can bring a complete transformation in the human personality. This teaching nourishes the soul and awakens a yearning for freedom and an exquisite peace unknown before.

We hope and pray that this booklet will help in your search for happiness and fulfillment. May God’s choicest blessings be yours always.

*Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhawantu*

(May all be happy!)

*Hari Om Tat Sat, Hari Om!*

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Picture of Swamiji

SHAMA (SERENITY)

**The Great Healer**

*Shama* or serenity is magical. Consider your inner being like a tree whose branches have been sheared off. If you allow a gentle shower to descend upon it, something magical happens. The tree will again grow its limbs; its leaves will sprout and its flowers will bloom. The whole tree will come to life. Bring serenity to your heart and the tree of your personality will regain health and be decked with blossoms.

Serenity is like nectar. As you allow drops of nectar to trickle into your mind, all the suffering that has gone on through many lifetimes dissolves. This suffering is of two types: that which is more mental *(adhi)* and that which is more physical *(vyadhi)*. Both *adhi* and *vyadhi* invade the mind like disease-causing germs. Sometimes, although there are no negative circumstances present, your physical body has aches and pains that prevent relaxation. Some- times your agitation is not based on physical problems, but on situations that produce aches in the ego. For example, someone insulted you when you expected admiration. They called you a “donkey” when you thought you had done something quite brilliant.

The greatest remedy to treat the twofold disease, *adhi* and *vyadhi*, is serenity. Allow a gentle spray of serenity to wash over your mind. Gradually, all the injury and fear created by past sufferings disappear.

**Making Problems Vanish**

When you are serene, you have an objective view of your situations. In this state, your intellect brings you solutions to your problems. On the other hand, when you become agitated and allow your reason to be clouded, naturally you do not know how to deal with situations. Although your problems could be easily resolved, because of lack of serenity, the problems linger.

One night a family was packing for a trip. The stern head of the family was constantly agitated; no one could say anything to him. He continued asking his family for a flashlight. It was getting late, but no one dared tell him he was holding it in his own hand. This crude example shows how agitated conditions prevent you from solutions you have at your fingertips. The restless mind will not listen. Although you have unlimited resources and people to assist you, they dare not. Lack of serenity breeds disharmony, discontent, agitation, fear, and insecurity. Serenity, on the other hand, dissolves all these.

**A Sense of Mastery**

When you enjoy serenity, whatever you do is enjoy- able. If you are walking, you enjoy the walk. If you are eating, you enjoy the food. If it rains, you enjoy the rain. If the sun shines, you enjoy the sunshine. You enjoy life, no matter which way it presents itself.

You remain balanced in pleasure and pain because your happiness is not dependent on external things. It flows from deep within your heart.

Serenity implies mastery over the senses. Your mind becomes so calm that you do not need the excitement of the senses. The joy you experience is subtler and far greater than that derived from sense enjoyments.

You remain detached from the world because you do not lean on it to enrich yourself. While serene, you enjoy the Bliss of the Self that nothing in this world can replace. You are not dependent. Though performing various deeds led by fructifying karma (*prarabdha),* a serene person is like the sky— unaffected by the clouds. Indeed, he is *Brahman* Himself.

There is a sense of victory, a sense of mastery. You do not feel compelled to do things. However, if you lack serenity, you are always compelled, though there is no one to compel you. You are compelled by nature, by your whims, by your own mind and ego. You have no freedom. You do not enjoy life.

To the extent that you have serenity, you feel a sense of sovereignty. The world does not enslave you; you are its ruler. If you have serenity, you rule the world. If you lack it, the world is your captor.

**Benefactor of All**

Serenity has profound effects on all around you. No one opposes serenity and everyone benefits. If you are serene, whoever approaches you receives a gentle vibration. When a tree shares its cool shade, no one curses that shade; no one opposes it. Robbers passing by sit under the tree; saintly people sit there. Everyone, good or evil, can enjoy it. Much in the same manner, if you have serenity, you cast a cool shade, allowing people to feel better. Therefore, if you want to be liked, if you want to succeed in a world of so much tension and stress, develop a serene personality.

A serene mind brings forth a gentle shower of nectar that influences everyone. Consider the sunlight pouring through the clouds. As serenity develops within you, the nectarine radiation of the Self pours through your mind, benefiting all you contact.

Among learned scholars, doers of great deeds and heroic personalities, one who is endowed with serenity outshines them all. One whose mind is filled with serenity has be- come the very embodiment of the moon. Just as the moon showers enchantment through its nectarine rays, similarly, rays of peace emanate from one who enjoys serenity. That was how Buddha deeply influenced the world of his time and continues to do so. As you look at the face of Buddha, serenity is its most overpowering feature.

By having the vision (*darshan*) of a serene person, a subtle and secret joy enters your heart. You cannot experience that joy even by seeing your closest relatives. Even the dearest will not give you that joy you experience by having *darshan* of a saintly person endowed with serenity. That true serenity is beckoning your soul to Enlightenment. It is singing a melody of eternity that captivates your soul.

A serene person interacts with all types of people in the most ideal manner. With children, he is a child. With grownups, he is an adult. With intellectuals, he is intellectual. He is able to blend with anyone. The speech of a serene person is ever sweet. Serenity and sweet speech are twins. Serenity is internal, while speaking gently is its external expression.

Further, although a serene person knows others’ defects, his mind remains unaffected and nonjudgmental. While living with all types, he moves on to the highest, deterred and obstructed by none. The serene mind is like the full moon calmly observing all. Thus, one who is serene is admired in every company, by all beings.

**Vibrant and Dynamic**

Although a serene person is calm even in the most difficult circumstances, he is never dull. Do not confuse serenity with passivity. Serenity is a vibrant virtue. A tranquil mind is dynamic, yet neither distracted nor restless. When clouds have moved away, the sky is serene, yet the sun continues to radiate all its dynamic energy. In the same way, the Divine Presence dynamically operates through your peaceful mind.

Similarly, do not confuse serenity with quietness. Se- renity is a state of mind. You may be quiet, but without a tranquil mind you are allowing the fumes of dejection and melancholy to proceed from your mind. With serenity, on the other hand, there is a radiation of Bliss.

**Stop Wasting Precious Energy**

Imagine how much mental energy is wasted from morning to evening in just one day. How many times does the mind tremble out of insecurity and fear? The mind has created a habit of negativity. The mind irrationally wastes energy on situations that have no bearing on one’s personality.

If you put a person who has lived a life of daily agitation, excitement, and fear into a situation in which they have nothing to be afraid of or agitated about, they will feel as uncomfortable as a fish out of water. Until they discover how to create agitation, they will be miserable. They will begin to blame the rug under their feet, the roof over their head and the window for the way it is decorated. If they are determined to find things to be agitated about, they will find thousands. Human beings outwit their own intellect by justifying their rationalizations.

However, if you learn to develop serenity, you avoid all this. The mind’s immense energy that is being wasted begins to flow towards God. If you learn to love tranquility, your mind will find every reason to be serene, no matter what happens.

Serenity leads to serenity. Agitation leads to agitation. When you remain agitated, you create more impressions of agitation. As you gather more and more impressions of serenity, your mind tends to remain calm even in the worst conditions. However, if you have burdened your unconscious with impressions of agitation, then even in the most heavenly conditions, your mind will not be serene.

**Watch Your Mind in All Situations**

Your serenity is not dependent on the world and its conditions; it is dependent on how vigilantly you handle the mind day by day. What type of thoughts do you want to permit in the mind?

You have the power to keep your mind under control. Constantly attend to that challenge—even under the most provocative conditions. It is no accomplishment to remain calm when conditions are favorable. If there is no provocation and you have gone to sleep, naturally you are serene.

Pleasure and pain are both agitating to the mind. Therefore, during conditions that are painful as well as during conditions of pleasure, observe your mind. Learn to remain calm like the vast, blue sky unaffected by the swirling clouds.

It is important in this endeavor to pay more attention to your mind than to the world. However, this is not the norm for most people. They put more importance on the objects of the world than the mind. For example, if a cat jumps on your table and breaks your teacup, you might become agitated and angry. But why do so? The accident has already occurred. The cat cannot do anything about it. You cannot do anything about it. The cup is broken; why break your mind? Why lose mental peace, which is a thousand times more valuable than a cup?

Let not situations and circumstances trigger agitation within your mind. You allow the triggering process and then justify what you did. You say if certain things had not happened, you would not have been agitated.

Serenity is the greatest shield for your soul. Arrows cannot pierce a shield made of diamond. Even the sharp- est arrows will become blunt when they hit a diamond. Similarly, if you are armored by the shield of serenity, all the world’s torments cannot affect you.

VICHAR (SPIRITUAL INQUIRY)

*Vichar* literally means inquiry. It refers to spiritual re- flection, specifically, inquiry on the question, “Who am I?” However, in its broader implication, *vichar* includes promoting purity of the intellect so that you are governed by your intellect and not by your mind and senses.

**The Chariot of Human Personality**

Human personality is like a chariot. The chariot has horses, reins, a driver, and the chariot itself. All these must have a certain order. The horses, or senses, must be con- trolled by the reins of the mind, and the reins themselves must be controlled by the driver—the intellect. In turn, your intellect must be harmonized with the Cosmic Mind.

With everything in order, your personality travels on the right path to Liberation. However, that is not the case with most people. The chariot of their personality is left at the mercy of the horses; that is, the senses run uncontrolled. The mind may control the senses to some extent, but there is no clear direction for the chariot. As a result, people waste their precious energy in a flurry of agitation.

Imagine a drunk man riding a horse. The horse faces east, but the rider faces west. When he directs the horse to run, there is a lot of galloping, and the man is very proud to be in control. However, he does not have the least idea where he is going. In fact, he has even forgotten that he had a destination. He is only aware of the activity.

Such is the modern world. The majority of people are interested in action, in the latest technological advancement, not in their ultimate destination of Self-realization. When the intellect is not given proper respect as the driver of the mind, great chaos results.

The intellect is the greatest gift from God. Thoughtful- ness is possible only in a human being. Although there are exceptions, animals cannot be expected to be thoughtful. However, a person who does not know how to maintain strength, clarity, and purity of intellect has not learned the art of life. If you have not learned this art, you return again and again, through repeated embodiments, until you learn it.

**FIVE TYPES OF INQUIRY What Is Substantial?**

There are five types of inquiry (*vichar)*. The first type is reflection into what is purposeful, meaningful, and substantial in life. Shun what is meaningless and move to what is substantial. God has given you a limited duration in this life. If you use your intellect, you will gain what is significant within the limited time at your disposal.

Think of a student who appears at an examination. He is a good student and has not waited to study until the examination draws near. Rather, he is well prepared from the very first day he entered college, keeping in view that the examination is inevitable. During the exam, he answers all the questions to the best of his capacity and within the time allotted. He has done his duty and has time to relax and enjoy what he has done. He can look over his work, make certain embellishments and feel happy about his accomplishment.

Life is similar. A time will come when you will have a final examination: the great examination of death. The very first day you breathe when coming into this world, that examination date has been fixed. As you live on, your mind must understand what is substantial and what is not substantial. You should not say, “Who cares what is substantial or not because I have so many years to go?”

Do not think that you have at least thirty or forty years before you when even three or four years seem like a lot. If you think that way, you will be in the same situation as the student who thinks that there is a whole year before the examination. He waits until one month before and suddenly becomes paralyzed because there is so much to do within a short period of time.

If you use your intellect, you are clear about your life and what you want to accomplish. To the extent that you accomplish it, you enjoy inner peace. Thus, one aspect of reflection is understanding that Enlightenment is the only goal that is truly substantial—and it is worth pursuing with patience and perseverance.

**What Is Real?**

The next aspect of *vichar* is inquiry into truth and falsehood, real and unreal. What is real in this world and what is unreal? The world is a blend of both. Real is that which never changes; unreal is what is constantly changing. Look within yourself and notice all the changing forms of the waking state. You are able to shake these off and enter into dream. Since you are able to shake off the waking world, the waking world is also unreal. It is not the abode of your Self.

Similarly, you can shake off the dream world and move into deep sleep or back to waking. Waking, dream, and deep sleep are variables, while You are an invariable, unchanging entity. Allow the intellect to grasp that the real “I Am” is unchanging, unalterable, and not involved in any of these fluctuating states. If it were so, you wouldn’t exist when the waking world subsided and you entered into dream—but you do.

In the same way, you exist when the dream world is set aside. You also exist when the sleep world is set aside. You exist with the body as well as without it; the body is variable. You exist with the senses and mind as well as without them. The senses, mind and intellect are all vari- able. What is variable is not real. That understanding is the goal of the second aspect of inquiry.

**What Is the Role of Karma and Upasana?**

The third aspect of inquiry is to reflect upon the meaning of action (*karma)* and devout meditation (*upasana)*. Strictly speaking, *karmas* relate to rituals prescribed in the Vedas, while *upasana* relates to meditation on the Divine Self. Some people consider *karma* the ultimate. In other words, they are always thinking of what they should do in order to attain the highest goal. However, it is not a question of what you should do, but what you must understand. Understanding reveals your inner nature, not quantitatively but qualitatively.

If you perform action to purify your heart without giving value or importance to your ego, *karma* is in harmony with your spiritual goal and is called Karma Yoga. Meditation is similar. You can meditate on God, all the while hoping that as a result of your doing so He will help you win the lottery. On the other hand, you can meditate to allow your ego to melt in the ocean of the Self, thus maintaining the higher goal of Self-realization as the focus of your meditation.

The role of karma or action is to free your mind from gross impurities (*mala*) like anger, hatred, and greed. If your energies are properly utilized by the right activity, if you have the proper attitude in your action, you are liberated from mental impurities. You find that you are in control of your mind.

However, if you do not have that art and insight, you are being driven by anger, hatred and greed. When these dominate your mind, the light of intellect is obscured. That is why a person under the domination of impurities cannot reason. You cannot reason with a person with a bad temper. You cannot say, “Let’s sit down and talk about it.”

A great amount of time is wasted when you are dom- inated by *mala*. When your mind is involved in excessive hatred, uncontrolled temper, abnormal fear and insecurities, your God-given faculty, the intellect, becomes paralyzed to guide you. When you are able to control *mala* through good *karmas*, your personality comes within the guidance of your intellect.

Another obstacle to overcome in spiritual movement is distraction of the mind (*vikshepa)*. The scriptures have designed meditation (*upasana*) to help conquer *vikshepa*. The goal of meditation is to still the mind so you can attain Enlightenment.

There is a great deal of confusion about meditation. The purpose of meditation is not to gain psychic powers, fly or become invisible so you can spy on your friends. The ultimate goal of meditation is to free the intellect of obstacles.

When that happens, the third aspect of *vichar* dawns. When mental impurities and distractions are destroyed, the intellect becomes reflective, leading to the next aspect of *vichar*: understanding *dwaita* and *adwaita*.

**What is Dwaita and Adwaita**

*“Dwaita”* means duality: you and the world, you and God. Duality involves multiplicity. *“Adwaita”* literally means non-duality. It implies bringing your intellect to the understanding that “*Brahman* alone is. I am *Brahman*.” In day-to-day life, your concept of yourself is governed by limited perceptions. The concept that you are the psychophysical personality, the body and mind complex, has become embedded in the mind from life to life.

People use up so much energy to discover what they believe to be their origins. They search for the roots of their family to determine who were their great, great grandparents and where they came from. This fascinates the mind, yet is a misuse of the intellect.

With a purified intellect, you understand that the real “I Am” is universal like the ocean. In daily life, your mind creates the illusion of waves. You are identified with a wave-like existence and have given prominence to that wave. You are not really that wave, you are the ocean. What a difference it would make if you were to understand that you are not a limited personality.

You are the Universal Self. That revelation about your own inner Self is greater than all the gold, all the treasures, all the power of the world.

**Who Am I?**

The final stage of *vichar* is inquiry into “Who am I?” All other aspects of *vichar* culminate in this stage. The scriptures give you guidance into leading your intellect onwards to the highest purification. By the practice of *vichar*, the intellect develops a subtle quality, enabling the soul to discover, “I am *Brahman*.”

**Spiritual Intellect Versus Academic Intellect**

The intellect referred to in the Vedantic practice of *vichar* is *buddhi*, a faculty which not only allows you to grasp academic material but also enables you to understand and dispel the subtle defects in your personality. It allows you to profoundly understand yourself and others.

An intellectual may lack intuition, sympathy, and compassion. An academic intellectual may solve great problems of mathematics or science, but be unable to handle the deeper realities of life. An academic intellect will not help you when facing adversities. It cannot show you how to be balanced. That intellect will help you measure the distance between the sun and Mars, but not recognize the unity of Self. The intellect that results from personality integration and helps you to continue to become more perfectly integrated is the intellect with which you practice *vichar*.

A humorous story is told about a great chemist who was so absorbed in analyzing things in his laboratory that he forgot about his food and his responsibilities at home. His wife tried to shake him from that state. She would talk to him and when he would not attend to her, she started weeping. He looked at her eyes filled with tears and said that he didn’t understand why they were there. He then started to collect her tears to perform a chemical analysis on them.

That is what happens when there is only intellect and no feeling. With that intellect, you cannot understand Vedanta. You may become an intellectual philosopher able to pass examinations on Vedanta philosophy, but not experience anything of a substantial nature.

People who are not highly educated can possess more *buddhi* than scholars or academic professors. Though you may be a great scholar, if your intellect does not show you how to control the mind, you still have a dull intellect. If the intellect helps you change within, then you have a spiritual intellect. That intellect allows you to reflect upon “Who am I?”

**God Guides You through Your Own Intellect**

When you encounter difficult situations in life, *vichar* helps you to remain unaffected. In baffling sit- uations, you will be able to receive inner guidance. If you become hysterical or agitated, you will not find the way. When you pray to God during adversity, one quick response from God is that your mind relaxes and your intellect begins to guide you. God guides you through your own intellect.

Some people become confused. They frequently pray because of sickness, yet they do not feel better. Then they go to see a doctor who gives them medicine and they are cured. They then say that the prayer did not help them; the doctor did. They do not realize that they went to the doctor because of an inspiration from the prayer.

Prayers are answered miraculously, but we may not recognize them in this world full of unacknowledged miracles. If you are praying for wealth, God will not open your roof and suddenly dump the treasure down. In some unique cases he has done so, but do not expect that. Your higher intellect has the answer in every situation. Even in practical life, through use of your intellect and prayer, you can defeat inimical forces.

**The Story of the Wise Rabbit**

A parable is told that once in a forest a lion became a very cruel, tyrannical king. Whenever he was hungry, he would pounce on animals and kill them, destroying more than he could eat. The animals gathered together, came to an agreement, and presented their appeal to the lion.

“Oh great King,” they said, “Every day we, ourselves, will present you with an animal for each of your meals. Thus, you will not have to exert yourself to find food and we will be happier because you will not kill more of us than you need. In this way, there will be greater harmony in this forest.” The lion thought it was wonderful that he would not have to hunt for his own meals, and so he agreed.

Day by day, different types of animals presented themselves to the lion and the lion continued to enjoy his life—until it was the rabbit’s turn. The rabbit thought his life was too dear to be lost, so he used his intellect to devise a plan to save himself from the lion.

On the day he was to be eaten, the rabbit arrived very late. The lion was doubly frustrated because, first, there was a delay, and second, his meal was to be such a small animal.

The lion shouted, “How dare you come so late!” The rabbit answered humbly, “Oh great King, another lion caught me and said that I was his food. It took me a long time to convince him that my first duty was to you. As it was, I had to leave my twin brother with that other lion.”

When the lion heard about a second lion in his territory, he became very angry. “How dare another lion come into my forest,” he roared. Then he demanded to know where the other lion was. The little rabbit guided the lion to the edge of a well.

The lion complained that he did not see any other lion in the area. The rabbit said that the other lion must have been terrified of the king and hidden himself in the well.

The lion then looked into the well and in it saw his own face reflected along with the face of the rabbit. Thinking he was seeing his rival and the rabbit’s twin, the lion was so agitated that he finally jumped into the well to show his rival who was boss! Needless to say, the wise little rabbit lived happily ever after as did the other animals in that forest community.

The moral of the story is that although the rabbit was small and the lion so ferocious, the intellect surpasses all. The rabbit used his intellect and was able to free himself from that great calamity. He not only saved himself, but he restored peace and harmony in the forest.

Similarly, by properly purifying the intellect through *vichar* and allowing the intellect to regain its strength, you can defeat ignorance, which, like a lion, has rendered everyone like a rabbit. There is no remedy greater than *vichar* for all the torments of the world-process.

**Free Intellect from the Domination of Ego**

In the majority of people, the intellect is left inactive and idle. God has given the best gift to every human being—a lamp much more powerful than Aladdin’s lamp. All too often, though, it lies in a corner, gathering dust, encrusted by dullness, delusion, anger, and hatred.

As long as the ego dominates one’s personality, the intellect is not properly used. All too often it whirls furiously only to serve the ego’s demand to eradicate anything and anyone who appears to cause the ego trouble. Intellect remains the servant of “me” and “mine” (*ahamta* and *mamata.)*

A philosophical life begins when you free the intellect from ego’s domination. When you begin to enjoy possessing a serene intellect untainted by the ego’s anxieties, it is like having a head without a headache.

Everyone’s intellect is tinged with ego, creating a chronic low-level headache. Such an intellect wants only to apply balm and sit in the darkness. When enjoying prosperity or success, the first thing a person does is invite guests and have a drunken party. During adversity, the intellect becomes similarly obscured. In this way the ego insists on keeping the intellect in darkness. When the ego’s domination diminishes, however, the intellect begins to reflect on “Who am I?” and guides you towards your essential nature.

**The Egoistic “I AM” Versus the Real “I AM”**

You can be aware of your legal identity, your name, your nationality, and the time of your birth, but this identity is based on lack of *vichar*. However, as your intellect becomes purified, you become deeply interested in discovering “Who am I?” and experiencing “I am *Brahman*—I am the All-pervasive Reality.”

The “I am” in your daily life is like a wave; the real “I am” is like the ocean. When you lack purity of intellect, your mind builds up the erroneous notion that you are the limited “I am” and the ego is fattened. As long as you cling to that erroneous definition of yourself, life is miserable and you are continuously agitated.

However, when the intellect shines with the light of truth, your attention shifts from the little ego to the Absolute and this works miracles within your personality. This transformation does not happen all at once, but gradually. If you were insecure, you become secure. If you were weak, you become strong. All other weaknesses also gradually vanish.

All the troubles and turmoil of life arise because the mind clings to the little ego. The mind is never at rest as it strives to protect that ego. There is an instinctive urge to help the ego—to protect, sustain and make it eternal. Of course, all these efforts are in vain.

Think for a moment about the sun in the sky and the reflection of the same sun in a little jar of water. The reflected sun is not the abiding reality, even though it shines like the real sun. It is changing, trembling, and shifting according to the nature of the water.

Similarly, *Brahman* is the Divine Self that shines like the sun. The ego is the reflected self, a reflection of the Divine within the conditioned waters of your mind. That ego is erroneously considered to be the “I” in day-to-day life. The mind tries to protect and sustain it. As a result, desires build for wonderful property, lots of money in the bank and the admiration of those around you. Your mind tries hard to achieve all these, but to your shocking surprise, the ego is never pleased.

However hard you try to protect yourself from any future calamity, you realize that your ego is not yet safe or secure. There is always fear and insecurity, always inimical forces. From life to life, you are unable to satisfy the ego. In this vain process, karmas are created that continue to trap you in the world-process.

The ego rises in your mind like a fever. When you have an inflated ego, your whole personality suffers. If you are creative or artistic, every talent within you diminishes. When the ego relaxes, you become inspired. When you are truly successful, you do not assert your ego; you become shy. When you are not successful, you look to others for recognition. When they do not recognize you, you build up anger, hatred, and animosity.

Just a little inner reflection allows a person to under- stand that their ego is not their real Self. However, the vast majority of people spend most of their life involved with the little ego. From morning to night, there are arguments and bitterness. However, when one goes to sleep, the little ego fades away. The unchanging “I am” remains the same whether one is asleep or awake.

How can you hold on to that vision of the immutable “I am” and turn away from the ever changing and trembling “I am?” This shifting of the mind from the little ego to the universal “I am” is true religion and spirituality. *Vichar* enables you to make this shift.

**The Glory of the Luminous Intellect**

The world is full to the brim with the Presence of God but the mind cannot see this. The intellect is clouded. On one side is obstruction, and on the other, distraction. The mind has developed a fictitious notion of one’s identity, subject to pleasure and pain, gain and loss, sorrow and joy. The world of *Maya* cannot touch your inner core, yet people continue trembling, exulting, and grieving.

Upon Enlightenment, you realize that there is nothing but *Brahman*. Past, present, and future are all inundated by the presence of *Brahman*. Just as the sun cannot be drowned in darkness, the inquiring intellect cannot be drowned in the world of ignorance.

The luminous intellect lights your path at every step. You are aware that every situation has been promoted by the Divine Plan for your own good. There is a purpose behind all things.

**The Himalayan Majesty of Vichar**

The Himalayas are often used as a symbol of *vichar* because they remind you of three things: invincibility, coolness, and sublimity. You discover within yourself invincibility. Storms go on raging, but the Himalayas still stand. With *vichar*, you know that nothing can defeat you for you are the Self. In adverse, challenging, provocative situations, you will remain unaffected.

You discover coolness, the eternal snows of the Himalayas settling within you, so that even in the most agitating circumstances you do not become hot-headed. You also discover sublimity and unimaginable heights within yourself.

When you practice *vichar*, you realize that beyond your mind and intellect, there surges the ocean of eternity. You are the ocean, not a wave. You are the sky, not a patch of blue created by clouds. With that majestic understanding, there cannot be even a tinge of ego. However, when you try to assert grandeur based on your ego, that sense of majesty is fleeting.

**When Thunderbolts Proceed from the Moon**

With its characteristically subtle and poetic magic, *Yoga Vasistha* reminds us that when lack of reflection dominates one’s mind, then one’s thoughts can strike like thunderbolts proceeding from the moon. Where there is no misery, misery will spring up.

The healthy mind is like the moon radiating coolness, peace, and harmony. Without reflection, the very same mind that could have given you the peacefulness of moonlight now gives you the turmoil of a thunderstorm.

The same mind that could have thrilled you with ecstasy now gives rise to all disturbing and terrorizing thoughts and ideas. Your mind develops a strange ability to create misery from nowhere. With *vichar*, on the other hand, even in a world of turmoil, you find yourself unaffected, like the sky beyond the clouds.

A mind that does not practice *vichar* is a great store- house of three miseries: miseries in the seed state, miseries that have sprouted, and miseries that have become trees. Karmas harmful to oneself and others arise from a mind not illumined by the light of inquiry. With reflection, you avoid negative actions. You will not promote disharmony or lose sight of God Who abides in all conditions.

**Gaining An Aerial View of Your Problems**

*Vichar* implies possessing the subtle vision that endows you with the highest realization: “I am *Brahman*.” That vision is known as *divya chakshu*, the Divine vision, or *jnana chakshu*, the vision of wisdom. If you possess that vision, you will defeat adversities. You are as if taking flight above the world—observing life from an aerial view. Things that seemed so important to you when you were on the ground become little; roads turn into little lines, cars appear to be small bugs.

The moment you have that aerial vision, you can observe your problems with greater objectivity. You are not drowning. In fact, you realize there are no problems. What you considered a problem is actually prosperity in the making. As *vichar* allows your intellect to view life transcendentally, you are able to cross over adversities, confidently face difficult situations, and remain unaffected by the varying conditions of this world.

On the other hand, if you lack *vichar*, there is always mental agitation. The mind is dominated by your senses, and the senses always drown your mind with insignificant things. Even if your intellect is singing a fine tune, if your mind is not well-disciplined, it vibrates to the discordant music of the senses.

Therefore, the mind has no objectivity and becomes lost. Every situation invades the mind. But if the mind were to learn to listen to the purified intellect, even in agitating situations, it would have an amazing ability to remain calm.

**Contentment Born of Vichar**

Generally, the human mind is constantly busy trying to gain things it does not have and relinquishing things it does have. You become bored with things and want to replace them with new things. You are always trying to accept and reject. The mind, therefore, is never satisfied, never contented. Something new must always be around the corner.

In the state of Enlightenment, you become detached from the world. You become happy with whatever presents itself according to your karmic process. There is no accepting or rejecting on a profound level. *Vichar* is the fire that burns up the subtle seeds of impressions. You can then handle the world and live with all its practical realities, but it will not create karmas for you or force you to continue to reincarnate.

As you become increasingly aware that the real “I am” is universal, you feel an indescribable happiness and peace. When you look at the world and all it offers, you realize it can give you nothing worthwhile or abiding. Therefore, you are not tempted by the world. The world never surpasses what you already have within yourself, so you remain detached in all conditions. You are neither interested in keeping yourself actively involved nor in keeping yourself inactive. Action and inaction alternate in your life like day and night. You accept them both.

However, if you are not enlightened, there is always a sense of contradiction. If your life is too busy, you ask, “When will I retire?” If you have no work at all, then you ask, “When will I find something interesting to do?” In- activity brings boredom; too much activity brings stress.

But with *vichar*, you enjoy both activity and inactivity. Inactivity allows you to create a deeper relationship with your essential Self. You open the inner window to eternity and enjoy a glorious vision of universality. Activity gives you the thrill of interacting with God in so many names and forms. With *vichar* you are a skilled swimmer who enjoys both battling the waves at the surface of the ocean and diving into the depths where no waves exist. Both are exhilarating.

**Maintain a Continuous Practice of Vichar**

In the dark despair of adversity or the dazzling glory of prosperity, *vichar* should remain unfailing. One should not abandon *vichar* for a single moment. The world has been well planned by God to lead your mind to Enlightenment. Prosperous conditions help you in one way, adverse conditions in another.

It is true that when you are in an adverse situation, you may not be able to practice your *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) with the same intensity as before. Nevertheless, your effort should still continue according to your capacity. Challenging conditions are your tests. When people around you say you are shining like *Brahman*, naturally it is easy to say, “I am *Brahman*.” However, when people say you look like a donkey, asserting “I am *Brahman*” is a challenge.

Even in difficult times, you must be able to repeat mantra, think of God, exercise your intellect, and practice reflection. You should not let go of your *sadhana,* even though it may not be to your satisfaction. By developing that habit, you realize you are able to utilize adversity as well as prosperity in enriching your life, in allowing your mind to flow towards God. You do not waste any experience.

**Lift Yourself by Yourself**

The Gita states, “Lift yourself by yourself.” By exercising the higher aspect within, you lift up the lower as well. By allowing the intellect to assert its purity and clarity, you allow yourself to be freed from the domination of the mind and senses. Instead of sinking in the ocean of the world, you are lifted up and begin to glide, to cross the ocean without any difficulty.

One should reflect upon “Who am I?” Am I the body, the mind, and the senses? What is the nature of this world? What is the underlying reality behind it? Through *vichar*, you realize that the essential nature within you and within the world is the Divine Self, *Brahman*, Pure Consciousness.

That is the implication of the great instruction, *“Tat twam asi”*—“Thou art That,” given by a Guru to his disciple. That Pure Consciousness is your very Self. You are not this transient personality. You are not this body of flesh, blood, and bones. You are not these senses that are fickle and finite. You are not this mind that is changing and limited. You are not this intellect that gives value to things of the world. You are not this ego that asserts and arrogates. You are far beyond all finite media with which you are identified, and which you consider, in ignorance, to be your very Self.

When you think deeply, reflect profoundly, and meditate seriously, you discover that That which shines in the sun, sheds luster through the moon, surges in the ocean and races through the wind—That which is the Beauty of the beautiful, the Joy of the joyous, the Essence of all... is your very Self!

SANTOSH

(CONTENTMENT)

**The Glory of Contentment**

“*Santoshat anuttam sukh-labhah”*—“By contentment (*santosh)*, one enjoys incomparable Bliss.” This statement is very significant. The happiness of one who enjoys contentment far surpasses that of an emperor. It is even higher than heavenly enjoyment because it leads to the highest goal—Liberation.

Contentment destroys cravings, feelings of humiliation, and the impurities of the heart. One who is contented enjoys rare inner peace and restfulness in a world that continues whipping a person like a harsh master.

If you are drinking the nectar of contentment, the world of the senses becomes insignificant. Upon possessing a diamond, you will not chase after glass. If your mind is flowing towards the Self and you are tasting the joy of *Brahman*, your mind no longer creates creepers of miseries and afflictions. Your intellect no longer degrades itself.

Think of the joy experienced by a traveler who has crossed over a burning desert when he sees ahead of him a wonderful, green forest with sparkling streams. He lays down to rest under the cooling foliage of a tree with great delight. *Santosh* or contentment bestows even more profound rest on the mind of a person who is struggling through the world-process.

The mind is always being buffeted by external conditions, but one who possesses a mind that has envisioned the eternity of the Self is not dependent upon the world. They have secretly commenced tasting the sweetness of the Divine Self and receive endless refreshments from within.

**Real Versus Sentimental Contentment**

Contentment is not a sentimental state of mind. Sometimes a person may say that they are contented, that they have everything that they want... until someone flashes a lottery ticket in front of them. That is sentimental contentment.

Real contentment demands a change in the impressions of your unconscious, a change brought about by the flow of the mind toward the Self. As long as the mind does not flow towards the Self in a spontaneous manner, the mind continues creating karmas, giving rise to adverse and sorrowful conditions.

**The Folly of Comparing Yourself with Others**

People are always comparing their happiness to the happiness of others, feeling that they are lacking something because they do not have the wealth or accomplishments possessed by another. When you compare yourself with others, your mind is always degrading what you do possess. You look down upon what God has given you, ever imagining that others have been given much more.

While people waste their energy in envying others, everyone’s feet are actually trapped in the jaws of a shark. Indeed, there are many sharks in the ocean of the world process: baby sharks who seem to mean you no harm, and mighty sharks who cannot be so easily ignored—such as death. Although death is waiting for all, the majority of people ignore that fact and spend their precious time comparing imaginary advantages that one seems to have over another.

The Mahabharata gives a graphic description of this delusion. Many animals are lined up to be butchered, but they choose to ignore this obvious fact. Looking at the line in front of them, they console themselves with the idea that there is yet a long way to go. In the meantime, they are fighting over who is stronger, who is wiser, who is more popular, all the while suppressing the knowledge that they are all steadily marching to their death.

If you had deeper insight, you would realize that the world has been so fashioned that although one may have many benefits, there is always something that spoils them somewhat. With philosophical insight, you learn that no one truly enjoys anything in this world. Nature does not care to fulfill all your desires in this plane of existence. Therefore, while Nature with one hand gives you an abun- dance of prosperity, with the other hand She twists a little thorn into your flesh.

Nature has not given anyone an absolutely perfect situation. If you can’t see the defect in a particular case, it is only because you do not have all the information. Many people do not reveal the things that are gnawing at them. They always try to portray themselves as happy and prosperous. This brings about many illusions, with everyone thinking that others are so happy and they are the only ones who are miserable.

**Contentment Is a Dynamic Virtue**

Developing *santosh* does not mean that you will become passive or lazy. Certainly, you will continue to work hard to progress in all planes of life. However, your work will be performed with a calm mind, not one burdened with the illusion that you cannot be happy until you accomplish a given project. If you are content, you simply work with joy.

With spiritual contentment, you are free. If you succeed in a given project, wonderful. If you don’t, then you have still succeeded in a far more important project—maintaining a tranquil mind.

**Learn to Observe Your Mind**

To promote contentment, watch your mind under three conditions: when a desire for an object or circumstance first asserts itself, when you acquire the desired object, and when you lose it. What happens to your mind in these three situations? Ideally, the mind should not vary in its state of tranquility. It should remain balanced at all times.

The majority of people have no understanding of the benefits of a balanced mind. Day by day, they put their mind under extreme tension: desiring something with tremendous involvement; developing hatred towards anyone or anything that seems to be an obstacle in obtaining it; becoming agitated with elation once the object of desire is attained; struggling to maintain or hang on to what is attained; then, inevitably, grieving terribly when the object is lost or they become disillusioned with it. Most people allow their minds to fluctuate in this way. They know of no other way to live. Therefore, they have no idea of the type of serene happiness that can be experienced in a calm and relaxed mind.

However, just as dust in the atmosphere settles down when there is a shower of rain, in the same way, all anxious desires in the mind settle down under the shower of contentment. A contented person is not agitated by attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dwesha*), or dominated by ego and its expectations.

**Contentment Brightens the Intellect**

If you are content, you enjoy inner peace. Your mind is not ruffled by objects and conditions. The light of the intellect is no longer obstructed or refracted by the agitations of the mind.

The moment your mind becomes calm and relaxed, your intellect becomes especially bright. If your mind becomes relaxed through the practice of meditation, even for five minutes, immediately certain powerful thoughts and insights arise. You will be amazed by those insights. This demonstrates that if the mind enjoys continuous tranquility, the light of intellect will continue to burn bright. Therefore, there will be rootedness in God, an internal sense of identity with the Absolute Self.

**Discontent Obscures One’s True Identity**

Just as you cannot see your face reflected in a mirror that is covered with dust, similarly, you cannot see your deeper Self in a discontented mind. Because it is confused, such a mind prevents you from knowing your true inner identity. The discontented mind always exaggerates things. At one time, the mind asserts its greatness. The ego soars. Then in another moment, the mind laments, “I am the most unfortunate person! The whole world has been created just to hurt me.” When you think too highly of yourself, that is one

exaggeration, and when you think too little of yourself, that is another. A discontented mind does not allow you to understand yourself profoundly. Only in a state of contentment do you rise beyond your mind and realize, “I am *Brahman*, I am universal, I am the Absolute.” A contented mind is like a clear mirror in which your spiritual face reflects without any distortion.

**A Contented Mind Is the Greatest Wealth**

If a person is financially poor, yet possesses a mind that is content and free of defects, that person is wealthier than the greatest monarchs in this world. As you study this point in an objective way, you realize that for the majority of people becoming rich does not mean that they are going to be happy. If wealth comes to a person on the basis of goodness, as the grace of Goddess Lakshmi, then a spiritually advanced person will make good use of that wealth for the betterment of all. However, if wealth has been obtained by hook or by crook or is obtained by someone without proper effort or spiritual readiness, then that wealth will probably lead to unhappiness.

Whatever little happiness a person had is probably going to be lost the moment they win a huge lottery. The moment they become too rich, they cannot enjoy a walk outdoors without a bodyguard. They cannot talk to their friends without wondering what they want from them. If such a person were later to enjoy real serenity, they would realize that all the wealth of the world is nothing compared to contentment.

**Contentment Prevents Vitamin “P” Deficiency**

People often entertain the illusion that certain objects are absolutely necessary for their happiness. For example, a person has a perfectly good car, but then he sees a neighbor’s car and becomes fascinated with it. He says to himself, unless I get that type of car, I am not going to be happy. The moment that idea enters his mind, his own car no longer gives him any happiness. Whenever he sees his neighbor’s car with all the latest advances, he becomes discontented.

One who does not have that type of expectation and is able to enjoy whatever he has is able to live in the present. The moment you have expectation, you are living in the future. If you believe that by gaining an object you will be happy, you are living in the future.

Much in the same way, due to lack of contentment, people tend to live in the past. If there is frustration and you feel that you cannot fulfill your desires, then the mind resorts to returning to the past, thinking that once upon a time you were so happy and everything was so wonderful. In reality, it was not as enjoyable as your memory now depicts it to be. If God were to send you back to that time, you would be miserable.

Thus, the majority of people either turn backward or go forward, but never enjoy the present. Therefore, they become deprived of a special nourishment of the soul. It is called Vitamin “P”—Vitamin Present. The mind must be nourished by the present. When there is contentment, your mind enjoys the present, and on the basis of the present it builds a future with a sense of fullness and expansion.

**A Mind Sanctioned by God— Not by the Ego**

When the mind enjoys contentment, any idea that arises in that mind is sanctioned by God. A discontented mind is under the influence of the ego. The ego’s desires and expectations, which are generally ostentatious (*rajasic*) and degrading (*tamasic*) in nature, are not sanctioned by God.

When the mind has reached a high level of purity and tranquility, whatever desires arise in that mind are not based on the ego, but on love of God in the world. It is that type of desire, *sat kama*, true desire, that becomes the basis of the great deeds done by Sages. All prosperity flows to a person who has developed that state of *santosh*.

**From Darkness to Light**

When the mind is not contented, the defects of your personality become highlighted. However, if the mind is highly contented, the defects of your personality begin to fade away. To clearly understand this, think of the moon in the night sky. When the moon is not full, you see dark shadows in the moon; but when the moon becomes full, its fullness overpowers the dark shadows. Certain limitations are always present within the human personality as long as one is bound by the world. But when the mind is contented, there is a special ability to transcend the limitations. The inner fullness cascades over your limitations and drowns them.

The mind becomes restful when you see the luminous face of one who is contented. When you see that face, you are seeing your own face that will appear in the state of Enlightenment. The face of the contented person beckons your soul, like the face of Buddha beckons you to *Nirvana*. Whoever is endowed with perfect *santosh* is adored by God. The whole atmosphere adores that person.

 