

Darshan

Winter Solstice
2019



Awake Yoga
Meditation

AWAKE YOGA MEDITATION

Awake Yoga Meditation is a vibrant spiritual community oriented around awakening to our true divine nature. With love and good humor, our community helps each other to wake up through yoga philosophy, Advaita Vedanta, and the mystical teachings of Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Hinduism, and Judaism. Meditation, Kriya yoga, self-inquiry, and devotional practices are integral to these teachings.

We offer weekly meditations for adults and children, spiritual discussion, and meditation instruction. All are welcome.

Schedules and Information

Sunday Morning Meditation for Adults
Sunday Morning Meditation for Children (Sept - June)
Every Sunday at 11:00 a.m.

Friday Night Healing Meditation, every Friday at 7:30 p.m.

Visit our website: AwakeYogaMeditation.org for more information on schedule and special events.

Temporary Location of Sunday Meditation
Waldorf School
4801 Tamarind Road
Baltimore, MD 21209

Temporary Location of Friday Night Meditation
Ruscombe Mansion Community Health Center, Hill House
4803 Yellowwood Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21209

Swami Nityananda offers private instruction in meditation (including Kriya yoga) and private spiritual counseling sessions by appointment. Call Lakshmi at 410-591-2646 or email Swami@AwakeYogaMeditation.org to schedule a conference.

THE SWEET LIGHT OF CHRIST

Sweetness is an amazing quality of the Christ Light. The sweet evergreen wreath makes visible timeless, endless love that takes form, that takes birth, as the Christ Light. Even in the middle of winter, during the darkest days of the year, the wreath reminds us that new life is always present and available. The Christ light is born within us every time we go to our heart and in stillness, with sincerity, courage, and humility, ask Divinity itself to share in us, with us, through us, and as us. We open ourselves consciously to this divine light that penetrates and illuminates every level and layer of our body and being. What we focus on becomes activated. Breathe the light of hope and peace and joy and love into the cells of your body and into your heart. Open to the Divine whispering in your ear in a calm, clear voice, saying things like, "Smile. Relax. Rest. Have courage. Have faith. Forgive. Let go. Keep going."

It takes great courage to let go of the plans and agendas that we have developed on the human level and to simply wait upon the Lord. The Divine is born in very simple, pure circumstances. Joseph and Mary are the perfect parents for Jesus because, according to these teachings, when the angel comes with guidance for them, they both say, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." Mary and Joseph prefigure in the stories of Jesus' birth exactly what Jesus does in his hardest hour when he is so afraid of what is to come that he sweats drops of blood. Then he says, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." And all is then done in fulfillment of the scriptures. Mary and Joseph are inviting us to let go of the way we once thought things would be and to open up to the divine plan and simply watch what unfolds. The trajectory of our life changes when we say, as Mary did to the announcing angel, "Here I am, a handmaid to the Lord. Let it be done according to thy word." Divine guidance and divine love can shake your world as you have known it, but know that divine reassurance always follows. Do not be afraid to step forward.

The swaddling clothes make visible that this little, precious child is wrapped in pure love. Every single child that is ever born, regardless of the human circumstances into which that child is born, is cradled in the divine hands of love. That's one of the most sacred and pure ways we can approach this story. Jesus was not laid in a cradle; he was laid

(Continued from page 1)

in a feeding trough for animals. And before too long, his parents have to flee the country because the ruler wants to kill him. Seemingly not a very auspicious beginning! The love that he connects with and then rises above all the unlikeliness of the circumstances of his birth. He brings light and love into visibility in an entirely fresh way that had never been born in this world before. Whatever touches the sweetness of the Christ light becomes transformed. The Christ light has thus transformed our world.

St. Therese de Lisieux says Jesus makes even bitter things sweet. As divine beings, each of us has this capacity. As with Jesus, within ourselves is also the perfect mother and father energy, embodied by Mary and Joseph. Each of us has the capacity to heal any aspect of our childhood that is still painful. We have the capacity to love ourselves perfectly, wholly, and unconditionally and to send a radiant current of perfect, pure love all the way back to the beginning of our life. Consciousness knows no time or distance. Love yourself with the love of that sweet Christ light and the perfect beautiful mother-father energy represented by Mary and Joseph. Allow this sweet Christ light within yourself to feel totally supported and nurtured. Give the gift of connecting with divinity. It's always available and it allows us to heal anything that we have ever gone through, physically, mentally, emotionally on any level of our lives. This is how we heal and rise above any circumstance.

We can know perfect love, first from deep within, in absolute humility and adoration, falling on our knees, bowing to the light. Then when we open our eyes, we become increasingly more capable of seeing that perfect light gleaming and glimmering and glinting through the eyes of everyone we meet. Always come back to this sweet Christ light in your heart and ask it to love through you the way it loves you. Your vision, your experience of the world, will transform. You will increasingly see that this world is God's world. It always has been. It always will be.

— Sri Swami Nityananda Giri

PRACTICING LOVE

If our motivation is to help others, we must love them by seeing the best in them, recognizing their potential, and actively voicing that recognition: *I recognize the divine potential within you, and I behold the unfoldment of that potential.*

Consciously and consistently remembering the divine potential in another creates a divine link between us and the inner Self of the other. This link resurrects the awareness of the Divine in the other person. We have to continue that practice so long as the other does not remember his or her divinity.

We can practice the same technique of recognizing divinity for the whole world. Our consciousness of oneness, of love, of creativity will bear fruit. Every time we hear about any adverse condition, we can practice love. Paul told us, "Beware of rumors of war." Beware of *any* rumor anybody scatters about another person. To beware means, *to be aware* of the truth about any rumor or any gossip. In the awareness of truth, we will not make a judgment of the person or the situation. When we know the truth, we are then free to release the love that is within us. Our love will bless the individual or the situation. In this way, we transform all that needs to be transformed every moment of the day.

When we recognize the divine potential in everybody, including ourselves, we are then seeing God face to face. Then we start giving love, and loving divinely releases the expansiveness within our infinite sacred heart. Divine love uncovers the universality whereby we truly know that we are love. The knowledge that we are love is the perfection of love wherein loving, lover, and Beloved are known to be one.

— Sri Swami Shankarananda Giri

LOVE WITHOUT GRASPING

In a conscious expanding, unfolding, and expressing of Pure Consciousness through human forms there is available an ongoing refinement and purification. One of the ways in which we can participate in this beautiful journey is to make conscious that which is not conscious, to bring light to that which is dark, to consciously dissolve all limitation into that which is limitless. As I dive deeply into this sweet adventure, I look for those ways in which I may be limiting myself so that I may be free of these and all limitations. I need not fear such limitations for they are often of my own making and certainly of my own perpetuation, often kept firmly entrenched by fear itself. They deserve most skillful discernment, of course. More so, each of us deserves to abide in the peace and joy over which they cast their mirage like, albeit convincing, shadow.

And so we come to love. It always comes down to Love, doesn't it? How can this love be more pure, more bright, more clear, more joyful, more true...beyond all limitation? Well, let's see...there's this whole "deciding who is deserving of our love" and this crazy "withholding love from some" that's got to go. There's "scorekeeping"; definitely got to go. And, of course there is "expecting love in return." Yikes! What does THAT have to do with Love?

As we deepen and nurture our willingness and capacity and dedication to loving fully and freely, without expectation, and without condition, we may discover even subtler limiting energies, bringing us to the title of this piece. There is a love available to us which is beyond attachment, beyond possessiveness, without grasping. Pure Love, available to us here and now in these human lives; a Love that naturally pours forth as we let go of all that keeps us feeling apart and separate, all that has us feeling cut off from our deepest joy. There is a wide open cosmos for us; limitless, boundless, beyond our imagination. Let's join together in consciously casting off all limitations and knowing Pure Love, Pure Givingness, Absolute Oneness. We face grasping; we recognize grasping for what it is; we choose again and again and again Love that is free from grasping, beyond grasping. Pure Love.

—*Acharya Premadas*

THE ART OF HAPPINESS

Art is the revelation of sublimity in the beauty of simplicity. Happiness is a sublime reality. It is attained in the utmost simplicity of our inner self. Happiness is not an ever-eluding hope. It is a tangible reality which can be attained by each of us. How are we to determine that happiness is a tangible reality? The effect of happiness within us is the self-evident proof of its substantiality. Happiness brings harmony within our nervous system and joyous serenity overfills our being. The power of happiness stimulates us in the inner strength that is at once rhythmic and beautiful. Happiness transforms our countenance with a divine glow of loveliness. Inspired by happiness, our mind gains the vision of fulfillment of hopes and aspirations. Courage, determination, and wise and constructive will kindle our mind with fervency, self-confidence, and zeal. Our heart is instantly lifted with joyousness and buoyancy when happiness encompasses our inner being. Happiness enlivens us with spiritual exhilaration. But the reality, power, and beauty of happiness are manifested in their fullest glory in our soul. It is in our soul that we realize the full depth of the purity, holiness and divinity of happiness. Happiness is a reality, the shores of whose infinity we all have touched with the qualities of our inner perception.

How are we to attain happiness? Happiness is realized by our total being comprising body, mind, heart, and soul. Each of the four aspects of our individual self plays a significant part in bringing joy to our life. The holiness of our sense faculties contributes no less than the divinity of our soul to bless our life with the grace of peace. Our mind offers us the contentment of self-enlightenment just as our heart infuses our being with happiness in the inspiration of love and devotion. The objective world, with all its beauty, magnificence, and glory, offers unto us the abundant beatitude of joy. We must devote our intellect and vision to enrich our sensory life so that we may drink from the cup of progress the full measure of happiness. Peace is not to be found in poverty but in the enrichment of life by the wise utilization of the munificence of God. Wealth does not impair wisdom. Wealth is a means, a sacred means, whereby the instruments of revelation and wisdom are secured. Wealth and wisdom must be made complementary to each other by spiritual idealism in order that our life on earth may be made joyous and peaceful.

STORYTIME

On a special day each year the king of a certain country held a great festival outside the palace. Anyone who could travel to the palace was welcome to come. The highlight of the festival came when the king would step out on a balcony projecting out over the courtyard and the people gathered therein. The king would reach into large baskets and draw forth fistfuls of gold coins, which he flung out into the crowd. The people could keep as many coins as they could catch.

One man came to the festival because he was in great need of financial help. He, too, stood among the crowd thronged below the king's balcony. As the king threw coins this way and that, one or two coins chanced to fall into the man's pockets. The man himself stood with arms drooped at his side, eyes downcast, while those around the man eagerly held out aprons or shirts or hats to try to catch all the golden coins they could.

The king represents God, and the coins represent the grace of God with which God is constantly showering all of us. The man who made no effort to catch the coins represents those who make no effort to recognize and acknowledge the grace of God and increase their receptivity to the ceaseless shower of grace. Although we take every step by the grace of God, we breathe twenty-four hours of the day by the grace of God, we live and exist by the grace of God, we may scarcely remember that all this is grace and naught else but grace. The people who stretched forth their aprons and shirts to catch as many coins as they could represent those who are consciously receptive to God's grace and who stretch forth their hearts and minds to comprehend this grace more fully, thus expanding their capacity to receive more grace and attracting the circumstances of ever greater grace into their lives.

—*Srimati Shanti Mataji*

THE JOY OF ONENESS

There are a multitude of ways to experience oneness. I've come to realize that most things I'm drawn to are because I feel connected to others in a way that inspires me and fills my heart with joy and (sometimes) awe. I love the feeling of interrelatedness, when we are brought together with others through shared experience.

One recent Saturday morning, I was walking back to my car from the farmer's market and had to cross the route of the Baltimore marathon. I didn't know anyone running in this event, but felt impelled to set down my bags and watch for a few minutes. The woman standing next to me lived a street over and had stopped to watch for a few minutes as well. We both clapped and chatted in between our shouts of "Go runners!" or "Looking good!" or "You are awesome!" to the hundreds of people who passed before us in various states of exhaustion. We were positioned around mile 19, and the last three or four miles had been largely uphill, so those on the course looked in need of encouragement. Many acknowledged our cheers with a nod of thanks or a wave.

I was uplifted watching the hundreds of people run by, each displaying a unique quality. Some wore Batman costumes, some wore tee-shirts with the name of an organization for which they had raised money. There were runners with a local organization that uses running as a means of helping people overcome addiction. Other teams consisted of four or five runners who took turns pushing young people with physical disabilities in adaptive strollers. People were running for countless reasons, but all were united in a common goal—to cross the finish line.

I stayed for over an hour. The passion and persistence of the runners inspired me, as did the enthusiasm of the supporters lining the streets. I didn't know any of these people, and yet I felt a connection—both to the runners and to those cheering on the sidelines. It is a kinship born of joining with others to support people in their efforts to challenge limitations—self-imposed or otherwise. We ourselves are elevated when we encourage others to realize their vision. It is what we do for one another in our community. Oneness is where joy abides.

—*Karuna*

REVELATIONS OF A COSMIC TRAVELER

Let us realize the peace that passeth understanding, the peace that we find within, the peace that flows forth from prayer and meditation and Self-realization, the peace that allows us to truly be of service, knowing that the Divine is the only doer.

When we come into contact with that peace, we inherit the earth. We are one with all that is.

We realize that there is only one will, ever—divine will—and that divine will expresses fully and freely in earth as in heaven.

When we are one with divine will, one with divine love, then there is no separation between earth and heaven.

There is no human-created judgment, separateness, or limit that can withstand eternal Love.

There is only Love.

—Sri Swami Nityananda Giri



TIMELESS STAINLESS CHANGELESS

Some conventional assumptions remain unquestioned because they appear so fundamentally true and obvious. At the top of that list is our compulsive conditioned habit of focusing on experiences. Experiences in the broadest sense include everything that comes and goes—all thought, feeling, person, object, and circumstance. Not only are we conditioned to give experiences our total attention, but we learn that skillfully interpreting, labeling, and controlling experiences leads to happiness.

We all learn that control is the antidote to suffering. When this strategy is questioned, we see the struggle to control unpredictable experiences is actually what makes us ill.

When we deeply recognize how little control we have and how our conditioned relationship to experience is not fulfilling, there is openness to explore a new relationship. That new way is based on resting from control and from endlessly seeking a better experience, state, and feeling.

In case your mind just exploded as it imagined life with hands off the steering wheel, please offer your mind a soothing cup of tea and reassurance that its imaginings are completely untrue. Conditioned thinking can't actually help in understanding or establishing this new way of being.

When attention is no longer fixed on cleaning the dirty dishes, we notice the stainless and changeless background of the sink itself. The sink was already and always there but remains unnoticed while busy compulsively managing dirty dishes.

Without attention riveted to controlling unpredictable experience, the unchanging and timeless background and source of all experience can be noticed. This background, an unstainable infinite sink, is the indescribable reality in which all appearances appear yet remain inseparable and indivisible. Offer your loving attention to that timeless ground and become familiar with it. It is always here and always available. Let it reveal itself—its stainless nature, its will, its way, its pure love, and wisdom. It is your true nature.

TEACHINGS OF THE GURUS

“Walking in beauty is not just about outer beauty, although it also encompasses that. It’s the energy of balance that is always present within ourselves and within all of life. It is the energy of harmony, of wholeness, the energy of caring, strength, and tactfulness. It’s the energy of being able to tune in and practice discernment, the energy of being able to open to possibility, to insight, to inspiration, to connectedness with all of life. When we are in contact with that energy, the energy that is the substance of all forms, the energy that is liquid light taking the form of each one of us and of everything and everyone that we have encountered in the realm of time and space, we do indeed walk in beauty. No matter what is going on with us, in our relationships, in our health, in our work, in our finances, in our homes, in our world, we walk in beauty.

“It’s important for all of us to focus upon this because we are here, as every human is always here, at a time when the outer world is experiencing change, transformation, chaos, crisis. We are here to be the calm in the midst of whatever is going on in the outer world. When we connect with the energy of beauty, the energy of steadiness, the energy of kindness, the energy of awareness and forgiveness, of serenity and steadfastness, we’re doing this for ourselves and for everyone we ever encounter, including complete strangers to whom we will never speak. The more that each of us consciously chooses to walk in this balance, connected with the beautiful energy of life itself, the more that kindness, peace, possibility, and healing silently share themselves through us wherever we go.”

— Sri Swami Nityananda Giri

“How do you know what is your highest good? It is that which makes your heart sing, that which makes you feel alive, enthusiastic, appreciative, self-confident, energized and vitalized—that which brings out the best in you. Change is always for the better, always for our highest good, summoned by the soul within us for a life of infinite self-expression, creativity, unfoldment of the love that we are. Yielding to your highest good is a loving yielding so that the highest good will manifest, because your trust vibrates, and that vibration attracts your

TEACHINGS OF THE GURUS (continued)

highest good. *I lovingly yield to the very best within me knowing it responds, knowing it will guide me and sustain me, support me and always assist me.*”

— Sri Swami Shankarananda Giri

“If you have given up hope of ever being happy, cheer up. Never lose hope. Your soul, being a reflection of the ever joyous Spirit, is, in essence, happiness itself. If you keep the eyes of your concentration closed, you cannot see the sun of happiness burning within your bosom; but no matter how tightly you close the eyes of your attention, the fact nevertheless remains that the happiness rays are ever trying to pierce the closed doors of your mind. Open the windows of calmness and you will find a sudden burst of the bright sun of joy within your very Self.

“The joyous rays of the soul may be perceived if you interiorize your attention. These perceptions may be had by training your mind to perceive the beautiful scenery of thoughts in the invisible, intangible kingdom within you. Do not search for happiness only in beautiful clothes, clean houses, delicious dinners, soft cushions and luxuries. These will imprison your happiness behind the bars of externality, of outwardness. Rather, in the airplane of your visualization, glide over the limitless empire of thoughts. There behold the mountain ranges of unbroken, lofty, spiritual aspirations for improving yourself and others. If you have made up your mind to find joy within yourself, sooner or later you shall find it. Seek it now, daily, by steady, deeper and deeper meditation within. Make a true effort to go within and you will find there your longed-for happiness.”

— Paramhansa Yogananda

JOY OF THE INFINITE

“We stand in humility, in purity of heart, inviting the shining Grace that visited Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, to share itself with us. We open to the brightness of that star that shines right now.”

“Let us allow our every breath to fill our hearts with hope. Let us give ourselves lightness and brightness of heart, so that we feel the Hope that we are, the Hope that we prepare to welcome as it is and was shared through that great Master of Galilee, whose Light is so available to all who practice compassion, caring, and clear seeing.”

“The light of joy shines us home, illumines our every step, lifts us up when we feel doubt, encourages us, hopes for us, loves through us, transforms all that is limited into the infinite graciousness that we are eternally.”

“Let me be a lantern of love, a beacon of caring, a candle of the Lord. Let me be transformed, so that all that I am becomes one with caring, compassion, and kindness. Let my every word, thought, and action be motivated only by pure generosity.”

“Divine Grace comes to each person and says, ‘Let me share a secret with you: All the love in the world is asking to be born through you.’ This truth shares itself during Advent, and always. We open to transformation, so that we may shine with reverence, clarity, helpfulness, and hopefulness.”

“We bow our heads before the radiant infant, the Christ light born not just long ago and far away, but right now, every time we choose forgiveness, every time we choose generosity of spirit, every time we choose to love in purity and humility, intending to be of genuine service to the highest and best in ourselves and in all.”

—*In joy, Swami Nityananda Giri*

SWAMI SHANKARANANDA'S PEARLS

“This is the time to be most hopeful for the emergence of the light of unity to bring humanity together to share its natural resources, skills, and vision for a world of enlightenment. The light of hope will take you from the darkness of despair to the remembrance that God’s love and guidance are always available.”

“A current of bright energy called peace is moving across the face of the world. Peace can only be achieved by peaceful means. The light of peace is real and true and a gift of the Divine unto every being. Peace is innate and we will not be at peace until we manifest our innate divinity, which includes sharing peace with all.”

“O friend, you need not wait for joy to come to you. You need but perform all actions with a light, open, and giving heart, always seeing light where there is darkness, seeing hope where there is despair, seeing forgiveness where there is withholding of love. Your joy will expand as you contemplate the divine presence, the I Am, within you. You can choose to hold on to misery or to rush toward the embrace of joy. Joy awaits you. Are you ready to embrace it?”

“There is naught that love cannot accomplish or overcome when we remember that to love is our nature, to be love is our very existence, and to welcome love is to acknowledge its universality. Through love we ascend to the Christ-consciousness within, and through love we also descend to expand the love of oneness and to nurture all life with the gift of love.”

“Once again, the birth of Christ in human form assures us of God’s unfailing love and care for every being and creation, that we are loved into foreverness. Honor the Christ light within you, that you may acknowledge it in all others. Shine that light into all problems, and you will find the solution.”

“There is a struggle going on within every heart between what has been and what is or can be. As you deliberately breathe in the breath of gratitude, love, light, peace, and then breathe it out in expansiveness to the world, you will truly experience self-renewal with every breath.”

—*In love, Swami Shankarananda Giri*
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GARLAND OF TRUTHS

“We cling to our own point of view, as though everything depended on it. Yet our opinions have no permanence; like autumn and winter, they gradually pass away.”

— *Zhuangzi*

“We cannot stop the winter or the summer from coming. We cannot stop the spring or the fall or make them other than they are. They are gifts from the universe that we cannot refuse. But we can choose what we will contribute to life when each arrives.”

— *Gary Zukav*

“A few more moons, a few more winters, and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graces of a people once more powerful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man whose God walked and talked with him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all.”

— *Chief Seattle*

“For unless one is able to live fully in the present, the future is a hoax. There is no point whatever in making plans for a future which you will never be able to enjoy. When your plans mature, you will still be living for some other future beyond. You will never, never be able to sit back with full contentment and say, ‘Now, I’ve arrived!’ Your entire education has deprived you of this capacity because it was preparing you for the future, instead of showing you how to be alive now.”

— *Alan Watts*

“For the unlearned, old age is winter; for the learned, it is the season of the harvest.”

— *Hasidic proverb*

LIGHT OF THE UPANISHADS

The indescribable bliss of recognizing the world-soul
in one’s own soul

The Inner Soul (antarātman) of all things, the One Controller,

Who makes his one form manifold—

The wise who perceive Him as standing in oneself,

They, and no others, have eternal happiness!

Him who is the constant among the inconstant,

the intelligent among intelligences,

The One among many, who grants desires—

The wise who perceive Him as standing in oneself,

They, and no others, have eternal peace!

“This is it!”—thus they recognize

The highest, indescribable happiness.

How, now, shall I understand ‘this’?

Does it shine [of itself] or does it shine in reflection?

The self-luminous light of the world

The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars,

These lightnings shine not, much less this (earthly) fire!

After Him, as He shines, doth everything shine,

This whole world is illumined with His light.

— *Katha Upanishad*

Translator: Robert Ernest Hume



GUIDED MEDITATION

We're invited to take a gigantic breath in through the nose and a huge breath out through the mouth. Do that again consciously. We're gathering up all the static, all the distraction, anything that has been keeping us from light. Breathe in through the nose and let a gigantic, enthusiastic breath out through the mouth. Just let it go, let it go, let it go. Physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, energetically, gather up all the static. Take a giant breath in through the nose, and let it go out through the mouth.

Consciously allow your feet to touch the earth. Actually activate your legs and push your feet into the earth. Feel the way the earth responds to your push with support. There's a rebound, an energetic flow that greets you from the earth and rises up into you. We're opening to receive that contact, that life energy, and inviting it to pour through the bottoms of the feet, up the legs to the knees, and from the knees to the base of the spine.

There's a root, a foundation, at the base of the spine. Connecting with the root, we have clarity, tranquility, strength, joy, and buoyancy. From that steady, four-cornered foundation at the base of the spine, allow a river of energy to course up the spine to the space just between the eyebrows, at the center of the forehead. This river of light flows always. It is a source of clarity, beauty, strength, balance, kindness, and bliss. We're connecting with that river of light silently, affirming, *I am willing to let go of limitation. I am willing to let go of old patterns. I am willing to let go of old energy. I am willing to let go of obstructions. I am willing to let go of the ways I have been resisting or blocking the joyful forward movement of the Divine.*

Rest this energy in the heart; invite the heart to open. Silently, with willingness, affirm, *I am the energy of newness. I am the energy of vitality. I am the energy of freshness. I am the energy of harmony. I am the energy of graceful, joyful, blissful, forward movement.*

— Sri Swami Nityananda Giri

QUOTES FROM THICH NHAT HANH

"Guarding knowledge is not a good way to understand. Understanding means to throw away your knowledge."

"If you abandon the present moment, you cannot live the moments of your daily life deeply."

"When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there?"

"To meditate means to go home to yourself. Then you know how to take care of the things that are happening inside you, and you know how to take care of the things that happen around you."

"People have a hard time letting go of their suffering. Out of a fear of the unknown, they prefer suffering that is familiar. It's normal for human beings to identify with their own separate self."

"The problem is that we get caught in that notion of ourself as a separate individual and caught in that individual self's agenda."

"If you truly get in touch with a piece of carrot, you get in touch with the soil, the rain, the sunshine. You get in touch with Mother Earth and eating in such a way, you feel in touch with true life, your roots, and that is meditation. If we chew every morsel of our food in that way we become grateful and when you are grateful, you are happy."

SPIRITUAL READINGS

Prayers of Self-Realization
by Swami Premananda

Each of the prayers that we read during every Sunday service come from this extraordinary book written in 1938 by Swami Premananda, one of the gurus in the spiritual lineage of our community.

Swami Premananda (1903-1995) was a native of India who studied at the school established by Paramhansa Yogananda in Ranchi and at Calcutta University. Brahmachari Jotin, as he was known then, moved to the U.S. in 1928 to organize the Self-Realization Church in Washington, D.C. at the request of his guru. He was given the title of Swami in 1941, and led the church for nearly 70 years. During this time, he published more than 30 books on Vedantic philosophy, including translations of 15 Upanishads.

In the introduction to *Prayers of Self-Realization*, Swami Premananda defines prayer as “the expression of both actual realization and the desire for a higher state of consciousness.” He then guides us on this spiritual journey through prayers organized in six sections: Awakening and aspiration; Wisdom and enlightenment; Meditation and revelation; Services and Self-manifestation; Love and resignation; and Realization of absolute Self-perfection.

Every prayer encourages spiritual devotion with expressions that are equally poetic and heartfelt and straightforward and sublime. Open this book to any page and you will find a divine well of inspiration. One of my favorites is on page 70: “Guide me on the path of subjective illumination / That I may realize the divinity of my soul / In the perfection of thy transcendental Self.”

Swami Shankarananda once told me that he asked his guru if he was going to write an autobiography of his life. Swami Premananda responded that his life was already written in the prayers in this book.

—Ananda

SHARING GIFTS OF PEACE AND JOY

At the winter solstice, we welcome and celebrate the lengthening of the days, the return of increased light, and, in the Christian tradition, the birth of the master Jesus.

The outer trappings of the season such as parties, shopping, or travel, not to mention family or other drama, can leave us feeling exhausted and empty, or in the words of Monty Python, “nibbled to death by ducks.” Stepping back from the fray, even for a few quiet moments, a few mindful breaths, gives us access to the steady undercurrent of peace, joy, and harmony that is always present and available.

There is a famous letter written by the Franciscan friar Fra Giovanni to a countess on Christmas Eve in 1513. I don’t know the details of her situation, but his letter is full of comfort, urging her to recognize the peace and joy that no one can give another, but that are ours already, there for the taking. He said, “No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. Look! I beseech you to look. Take heaven! Take peace! Take joy!”

While it’s true that we can’t give the heaven we find within us to one another, we can silently share it when we access it ourselves. When we open to and are filled with the love, peace, joy, kindness, compassion, and generosity of the Divine within us, those beautiful qualities naturally flow out from us, making them vibrationally available to all seeking and ready to open to them. I imagine that whatever the countess was going through, her consciousness was uplifted and transformed by the transmission of love and compassion in Fra Giovanni’s letter.

During this season when so many are focused on the light, let us join with all whose hearts are opened in devotion, accepting with joy and gratitude the sacred gifts of the Divine. Every day we have opportunities to take heaven for ourselves and to offer it in turn to one another and all we encounter in consciousness and action, helping to spread peace on earth and joy to the world.

—Padma

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question: During the holiday season I often feel overwhelmed with all the extra activities and preparations. Studying for finals adds even extra stress. How do I transform these feelings while staying on top of things?

Answer: A Sufi teaching warns us of the duck of urgency, the feeling that everything is an emergency, that others' expectations of us are paramount, that everything must be done immediately. Ask, "Have I been carried away by the duck of urgency?" If so, come fully into the presence of the Divine Swan. To help complete tasks quickly, go to the calm stillness of the Divine first and behold everything unfold as if you're not even doing it, with a greater quality and energy of ease, grace, and depth. Go to the Swan. The Upanishads tell us the whole universe is only the energy of a sacred Swan gliding serenely on the lake of the Divine, floating and gliding over the waters of life. So no matter what comes, the swan helps you navigate. If you've ever seen a duck shake its wings and the water droplets fly off, similarly, nothing can stick to you if you're in contact with your true swan nature. Always and especially during the holidays, have the clarity to ask, "Am I activating the duck of urgency for myself right now? Am I allowing other people's pressures and expectations to activate the duck of urgency for me? If so, would I lovingly like to set it aside? Oh, yes!"

Here is a very accessible meditation that I would love you to have in your back pocket for when you need it. For three minutes simply breathe in a full breath through the bottoms of the feet and then breathe a full breath out through the tops of the feet. See if you can do this silently for three minutes while also becoming aware of your own heart energy. See if you can be very steady and stable so that you're connecting with a sense of resilience, stability, balance, and poise deep, deep, deep within yourself.

You'll be able to be more present and responsive, more openhearted and caring. You might even say a few words to a wound up, frenzied person, but the stillness and the calm that is present in your energy field as you do this simple breath practice will continue to share itself with anyone who is speaking to you. Silently, without your seeming to do anything at all, their energy can shift as yours does.

QUESTION AND ANSWER (Continued)

By staying in contact with stability within ourselves, we give others permission to find that same stability in their own hearts. It's not something we can force on anyone, but it's something we can make present and available.

Always, and especially during the Christmas season, the light of hope wants to live through each of us. Ask, "To what extent am I giving the Divine permission to allow the sacred teachings to be lived through me in my daily life?" This is a very focusing practice to engage in during the holidays and one that will bless everyone else as well.

Say, "I'm willing to let go of my individual tangles, my individual anguish, my individual blaming, my individual story. I'm willing to let go of needing to be right." We are the ones in whom swords can become plowshares. Let us continually, day by day, moment by moment, in our kitchens, in our bathrooms, in study rooms, in our streets, at our Christmas parties, wherever we might find ourselves, within ourselves, turn the swords into plowshares. Let us fill ourselves with the light of hope. Let us open our hearts. Let us allow the Divine to share through us and allow the pure energy of hope to pour forth into our world. We change and the world changes for us and with us and through us and as us as we do this.

— *Sri Swami Nityananda Giri*

FROM THE SUNDAY MEDITATION
FOR CHILDREN



During a lesson about devotion, the children discussed various things they devote themselves to: love, family, kindness, God. One child observed that we are all connected by heartstrings, which are invisible to our physical eyes, but can be seen by our third eye. We then participated in the annual Thanksgiving light ceremony, where we honored Swami Shankaranda's devotion to unconditional love, which he shared with us so generously.

A HYMN TO CHRIST

In what torn ship soever I embark,
That ship shall be my emblem of thy Ark;
What sea soever swallow me, that flood
Shall be to me an emblem of thy blood;
Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face, yet through that mask I know those eyes,
Which, though they turn away sometimes,
They never will despise.

I sacrifice this Island unto thee,
And all whom I loved there, and who loved me;
When I have put our seas 'twixt them and me,
Put thou thy sea betwixt my sins and thee.
As the tree's sap doth seek the root below
In winter, in my winter now I go,
Where none but thee, th' Eternal root
Of true Love, I may know.

Nor thou nor thy religion dost control
The amorousness of an harmonious Soul,
But thou wouldst have that love thyself: as thou
Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now,
Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, Thou free
My soul: who ever gives, takes liberty:
O, if thou car'st not whom I love
Alas, thou lov'st not me.

Seal then this bill of my Divorce to All,
On whom those fainter beams of love did fall;
Marry those loves, which in youth scattered be
On Fame, Wit, Hopes (false mistresses) to thee.
Churches are best for Prayer, that have least light:
To see God only, I go out of sight:
And to 'scape stormy days, I choose
An Everlasting night.

– John Donne (1572 – 1631)

LIGHT OF VEDANTA

Come, let us all live in peace and happiness by transcending the wrong concepts of sense-identification and sensory attachment. Let us abide in the freedom of pure-consciousness even while we live with those who are identified with and attached to the senses and the sensory world.

Those of us who are free from anger, hatred, pride, vanity, selfishness, attachment, and the like, and above all in whose consciousness there is not the least trace of the ignorant and false concept that man is a sensory being, they alone live in peace and happiness while on earth. Come, then, like the self-illuminated souls of the higher planes of consciousness, let us live in peace on earth.

—*Dhammapada, Chapter XV, verses 3-4*

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Awake Yoga Meditation

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OUR LINE OF TEACHERS

Swami Nityananda

Joyfully following the path blazed by our founding teacher, Swami Shankarananda, our presiding teacher, Swami Nityananda, emphasizes our connection and oneness with all life, selfless service, meditation, Self-realization, and unconditional love. She is dedicated to helping us apply these ideals in our everyday life and promoting the progress of all beings – our global family.

Swami Shankarananda

The spiritual founder and preceptor of the Divine Life Church of Absolute Oneness in Baltimore. He was the disciple of Swami Premananda. Swami Shankarananda left the body on November 24, 2014. He appointed Swami Nityananda as his successor.

Swami Premananda

A direct disciple of Swami Yogananda. Swami Premananda established the Self-Revelation Church of Absolute Monism in Washington, D.C.

Swami Yogananda Paramhansa

He was the first of this line of gurus to come to America, and was the guru of Swami Premananda, ordaining him as a minister in India and later consecrating him as a Swami in America.

Swami Sri Yukteswar

A man of profound wisdom, a great astronomer, and adept in the science of astrology. He was a self-dedicated humanitarian. He was the guru of Swami Yogananda Paramhansa.

Shyamacharan Lahiri

He attained the supreme illumination of God-realization while living an exemplary family life. He was the guru of Swami Sri Yukteswar.

Aum Babaji

A guru of divine revelation and a man of supreme compassion. He was the guru of Shyamacharan Lahiri.



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