

GOOD MORNING... ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Mark your calendar for a weekend Retreat** at the end of this month. **Swami Nirakaranandji** of the St. Louis center will be here from Friday evening Apr 26th till Sunday morning on the 28th, offering us his wisdom about Raja Yoga. Schedule online & E-news.
- **Seva Saturday for this month** falls on the 14th. Please note that date — it's the 2nd Saturday of the month, as usual — please join us sometime between 10am and 2pm. This is an excellent way to demonstrate your dedication to the Center and its success.
- **Next Sunday is Palm Sunday.** The talk will be about the *Yoga of Christian Mystics*.

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

April is a month for study of Raja Yoga, a spiritual path often called the yoga of meditation. A raja yogi uses ancient, proven spiritual techniques to quiet the mind and gain control of her or his attention. Regular daily practice of concentration may lead to meditation, which can reveal your True Original Nature and liberate you from the cycle of rebirth and death.

Self discovery. Self actualization. Self realization.

Self realization is one way to talk about the goal of all spiritual practices. It is the entire focus of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* — his sutras are the basis of Swami Vivekananda's book *Raja-Yga* and Swami Prabhavananda's *How to Know God*.

You can think of progress toward realization in three steps:

First, self discovery: What does it mean to be fully human? If you are bold, you begin to find this out during your student years, and the early part of householder life— up to about age 30. It's a time of exploration, definition, adventure. If you're blessed to be a spiritual aspirant, it is also a time of breaking through inner boundaries, and beginning to feel the Living Presence that animates you.

Next, self actualization: In this phase you bring the talents and attributes you have discovered, and the spiritual treasures you are finding, to ever-greater manifestation. From about age 30 to age 60 you unfold your career, and also may have a successful marriage and bring up one or more children. This is very demanding and challenging! As Sri Ramakrishna said, a householder leading a spiritual life is the true hero!

And finally, Self realization: Sometime during that period of self actualization — after you have been practicing spiritual disciplines for a number of years — you start to realize the life you are living is merely the surface appearance of what you truly are.

You become aware that your outward self, no matter how accomplished or successful, is merely an expression of, and evidence for a far greater Being that lies within, who empowers all your activities, thoughts, and experiences. You begin to think of yourself as that Living Presence, and know your True Original Nature — in raja yoga, the Atman.

Let's discuss all this in more detail.

During the youthful time of **self discovery**, the **Yamas** are likely to take up a good deal of your attention. Yama means restraint; for most of us the yamas involve first discerning, then actively working to curb those self-centered tendencies that keep us “at odds” with the world.

When you are harmful to others or the environment, deceitful, greedy or selfish, immoderately sensual, or covetous, you also must be — to one degree or another — anxious, on guard, always seeking to satisfy one more desire.

Living this life of the prodigal child may be fun, in its way, yet it's ultimately self-defeating.

Why? Because calmness of mind is impossible. A calm mind is essential for spiritual progress, not to mention an immeasurably great aid in becoming self-confident, self-determined, and self-sufficient.

When you move into in the **self-actualization** phase, as a spiritual aspirant, the **niyamas** probably will deserve more of your attention.

Niyamas are observances that focus on your internal world of body, mind and spirit.

Practicing the niyamas, you make daily, determined efforts to:

- eliminate all forms of inner and outer impurity
- be content with the circumstances of your life
- prefer the good over the pleasant (viveka-vairagya)
- learn from sacred texts, and from your own weaknesses and mistakes; and
- offer every aspect of your life and all it contains — including the results of your spiritual practices — to the Divine Presence.

As you come to understand that Living Presence is you yourself, this prayer may become a favorite:

*You are the source of infinite energy;
fill me with that energy.*

*You are the source of infinite strength;
endow me with that strength.*

*You are the source of infinite courage;
inspire me with that courage.*

*You are the source of infinite fortitude;
grant me that fortitude.*

Self realization: In 1896, Swami Vivekananda wrote *Raja Yoga* as a guidebook for Westerners who had more than a casual interest in self realization. Pointing directly at the purpose he had in mind, Vivekananda said:

“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship or psychic control or philosophy – by one or more or all of these and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details.”

Swami Vivekananda yearned for each of us to access the illimitable source of knowledge within — our everlasting birthright — and manifest our innate divinity.

Raja Yoga — the yoga of psychic control, of meditation and other special techniques — is one gateway to our birthright — one path by which we can overcome the world.

We can take the inner, subtle knowledge of cause and effect gained by raja yoga's practices and turn it into ever more perfect action in the world.

As Swami Swahananda often said, "The only true measure of spiritual progress is change in behavior."

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the Master says:

"What is beyond speech and mind is born in the flesh, assuming various forms and engaging in various activities ...

"How long should a man perform his duties? As long as he has not attained God. Duties drop away after the realization of God. Then one goes beyond good and evil. The flower drops off as soon as the fruit appears. The flower serves the purpose of begetting the fruit ...

"But one who has attained perfection, realized God, cannot commit sin. An expert singer cannot sing a false note."

Conversation/Commentary and Regular Closing prayer