

CONSCIOUSNESS

THE
FINAL
FRONTIER

Your journey to
inner peace
and fulfilment

DADA GUNAMUKTANANDA

CONSCIOUSNESS:
THE FINAL
FRONTIER

Your journey to inner
peace and fulfilment

CONSCIOUSNESS:
THE FINAL
FRONTIER

Your journey to inner
peace and fulfilment

Dada Gunamuktananda

Inner World Publications
San Germán, Puerto Rico

Published by Inner World Publications
www.innerworldpublications.com



Copyright © 2023 Dada Gunamuktananda

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

ISBN 978-1-88171790-4

Cover background image courtesy of NASA

Back cover photo of the author in meditation courtesy of Shriidhara (MysticMedia)

Cover design and editing by Acharya Narada Muni (Alister Multimedia)

Contact Dada Gunamuktananda:
dada@consciousfrontier.org
www.consciousfrontier.org

“*Consciousness: The Final Frontier* is filled with inspiring reflections that lead to change and transformation resulting in personal freedom, peace and fulfilment. A must-read for anyone seeking to be more effective in any area of life.”

— Anita Moorjani, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dying to Be Me*, *What if This is Heaven?*, and *Sensitive is the New Strong*

“Dada invites us to return to pure Consciousness by stilling the mind through meditation, which brings relief from the mental conflict of discursive thought.”

— Bhagavan Das, spiritual icon, first Western disciple of Neem Karoli Baba, chant artist and author of *It's Here Now: Are You?*

“Dada clearly illustrates the immensity of the universe ‘out there’ while illuminating its seamless connection with the boundless realm within. By sharing insights, stories and practices, Dada encourages further exploration of one’s vast inner-landscape as an access point to greater peace, bliss and liberation, as well as an increasing awareness of oneself as the Infinite Consciousness of the universe itself.”

— Amulya Maa, mystic, transformational healer, inspirational teacher, singer and writer

“Ram Dass, my beloved teacher, has said that consciousness was what God meant to him. Dada Gunamuktananda’s beautiful book about consciousness confirms, as he so eloquently says, that ‘a life lived in consciousness leads to a better self and a better world.’ I recommend this book to anyone who wants some help exploring that amazing possibility.”

— Sita Lozoff, spiritual director of the Human Kindness Foundation, best known for its Prison-Ashram Project

“If you are looking for yoga’s profound and practical wisdom beyond the physical postures, this book’s timeless ideas will inspire your heart and transform your mind. Dada Gunamuktananda has awakened millions with his TEDx talk on Consciousness as life’s spiritual source and humanity’s ultimate goal. In this groundbreaking book he shares his insights in more detail, with the same appeal as his talk — deep and insightful, yet easy to understand too.”

— Ramesh Bjonnes, yoga scholar-practitioner
and author of *A Brief History of Yoga*

“Distilled wisdom of the ages packed into a small book, its contents may be considered as a recipe for a better life and a peaceful society.”

— Dr Shambhushivananda, Chancellor (Kulapati) Ananda
Marga Gurukula, author of *Towards a Brighter Future*

“*Consciousness: The Final Frontier* is one of the best guides you will ever find and gifts you will ever receive to help you achieve peace of mind that contributes to peace on Earth. Use it to become whole and help those around you do the same.”

— Dr Mark Goulston, founding member of Newsweek Expert
Forum and author of *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting
Through to Absolutely Anyone*

“One of the best pursuits anyone can do for humanity and their loved ones is to raise their level of consciousness. In this book Dada Gunamuktananda makes it easy to use simple tools for a life well-lived.”

— Von Galt, host of Merkaba Chakras

“Just one book out of millions out there. Yet one that emanates Consciousness and Bliss, and which contains the whole Universe in it.”

— Nicolae Tanase, author of *Buddha Life, Zenful Life*

To my Gurudeva, whose knowledge, teachings and inspiration this book is a mere reflection of, like the Moon's reflection on the surface of a lake.

“There is one Moon, but its reflections, falling on countless bodies of water, appear as countless moons. No new moon is born. The same Moon is being reflected in many receptacles. Similarly, the one and the same Supreme Consciousness is being manifested as limitless individual entities, in countless mental receptacles, in countless minds.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Contents

Preface	<i>xv</i>
Introduction	1
1. Crisis as Opportunity	5
2. Worldviews Apart	19
3. Awakening to Consciousness	31
4. Life, the Universe and Everything	40
5. Life, Death and Karma	52
6. The Conscious Worldview and Modern Science	69
7. The Yogic Lifestyle	81
8. Looking Within: Meditation	99
9. Peace Within, Peace in the World	111
10. The Culture of Love	123
11. The Economics of Love	133
12. By Cosmic Grace	148
Acknowledgements	167
About the Author	169

Preface

In 2014 I was invited to speak at a TEDx event on the theme of Space. The first thing that came to mind as the title of my talk was the introduction to the old Star Trek TV series: “Space, the final frontier.”

That opening line refers to outer space. But as a yogi and meditator — as an explorer of the inner world — I felt drawn to develop that theme into the concept of inner space as what we experience within ourselves, rather than just outer space as everything outside ourselves — to expand the concept of the exploration of outer space into the exploration of inner space, our own consciousness.

Hence the title, “Consciousness: The Final Frontier”, a talk in which I put forth the case for a conscious universe and a life lived in consciousness.

This book expands the scope of that talk into an in-depth exploration of both our inner space and outer space: how a life lived in consciousness leads not only to the ever-increasing feeling of inner peace, love and happiness, but also to the outer expression of that inner fulfilment as love and compassion for all people and beings of the world. In other words, how a life lived in consciousness leads to a better self and a better world.

Introduction

Peace, love, happiness, bliss. We may use any of these words to try to describe what we are looking for within ourselves. We all know what that feeling of deep love and contentment is, although we may not usually experience it in our day-to-day lives. No matter how we try to describe it though, whatever words we use, any or all of them will be entirely inadequate. What we ultimately want is something deeper than words can express — even deeper than the mind can capture in thought. It is a matter of the heart, and ultimately of the spirit.

Unlike many worldly pursuits, there are no shortcuts to inner peace. The journey is one of a lifetime, if not more. There are practices and techniques that give partial and temporary respite to the stresses and distresses of life. But they are only quick fixes. The main emphasis of this book is on a way of life — the lifestyle of yoga — that leads to lasting peace and fulfilment, wherever one may be, no matter what one may be going through. It is not only for those who want consolation for what they are presently going through, or inspiration for a brighter future, but also for those who want a concrete practice in their lives. I primarily want to convey the profound teachings and practices of the sages of the past — teachings and practices that go back thousands of years, which my own guru has expanded on and brought into relevancy for the modern world and which, with sincere and continued practice, are bound to result in the deepest experience of peace, love and bliss within you, as well as a loving and meaningful connection with all the people and beings in your

lives and the world. Over the course of my years of practice I've come to appreciate the depth and value of these ancient and powerful practices. I am confident that they will inspire in you the same kind of upliftment of mind and spirit that I've experienced in my life. Fast increasing in today's world are the number of people who are sincerely willing to do the everyday work for their own spiritual evolution as well as for the evolution of humanity on this planet. This is not only the priceless legacy of the past but also the invaluable way of the future.

Although practice is the most important aspect of the yogic lifestyle, the net is necessarily cast wider than that in this book. It is important to put the practice into perspective before we embark on the journey. We have to know where we have come from to know why we are here and where we are going. We should know that no matter what our past we all have a bright future, and that it is only a matter of time and effort before we attain the peace, love and fulfilment that we all aspire to. Once we are confident in that knowledge, then we can move ahead with strong faith that the practice will take us there. Perspective gives hope, meaning, a sense of purpose, and faith in the way forward.

In the first chapter we will look at how individual and collective crises are opportunities for personal growth and development. Because our worldview affects the way we feel about ourselves and our lives, in the second chapter we will compare prevailing worldviews and look at how one deflates the spirits while the other inspires. In the third chapter we look at the depth and inspiration of the conscious worldview. In the fourth chapter we take a more in-depth look into the philosophy behind the conscious worldview — the yogic philosophy of the unity of all beings of the universe. In the fifth chapter we look at how our present life and the way we live it is the result of our past and the cause of our future. In the sixth chapter we look at how the conscious worldview and the yogic philosophy are validated by modern science. The seventh chapter is where we will first start

looking at the practice — where the elements of the yogic lifestyle are introduced. In the eighth chapter we will focus on the most important aspect of yoga — meditation. This is where we will primarily address the matter of finding inner peace, because meditation is the process of looking within oneself — connecting to your inner self — and experiencing that inner connection as the deepest source of peace within; of discovering the essence of our inner reality as the greater universal reality; realising the greater self in ourselves and in all others too. In the ninth chapter we will consider the interconnectedness of all, how our own lives are linked to the lives of all others — how the individual and the collective, the personal and social, form one unified fabric of existence, and hence the importance of acting for the wellbeing of others as well as ourselves. In the tenth chapter we will expand that concept into the social philosophy of love for all beings of the universe as part of our one universal family. The eleventh chapter will serve as an introduction to a socio-economic model for the welfare and happiness of all. And in the twelfth chapter we will get an insight into how it all eventually ties in together — how a life lived in consciousness looks and feels through the examples of some enlightened ones of the past.

Read on, dear reader and fellow seeker. Let us continue now on our journey of self-discovery towards peace, love and fulfilment. Know that the journey is noble and that your destiny is bright. Make your life a mission in moving towards your destiny. And embrace it with all your heart and might.

Chapter One

Crisis as Opportunity

George Foreman grew up in one of the roughest neighbourhoods of Houston, Texas, so poor that he often went hungry. He took to street-fighting and a life of crime, gaining a fearsome reputation as the biggest, baddest, meanest guy in the neighbourhood, a reputation that followed him from the streets into the boxing ring.

After a string of wins in amateur boxing, he won gold at the Mexico City Olympics before embarking on a professional career that saw no less than 40 straight heavyweight wins, most of them by knockout. He won the world heavyweight title and then, a couple of fights later, was challenged for it by Mohammed Ali in what was billed as the “rumble in the jungle” in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). He was considered the favourite against an ageing Ali, expected by all the pundits to knock him out in the first couple of rounds. He thought he’d live up to that expectation, but Ali lured him into a clever trap, tiring him out before knocking him down in the eighth round.

Foreman had made boxing his life. It was all he had. He had never lost before. Now, with that crushing defeat — and the loss of his world title — he had nothing. He was devastated.

But more disappointment was yet to come. He clawed his way back to a rematch with Ali by winning his next five matches. Finally only one fight stood in the way of a rematch, and the title once again. He was up against a skilled and smart boxer called

Jimmy Young. Everything depended on this fight. If Foreman won he'd have the rematch with Ali. He'd get the chance to win his title back. If he lost, his dreams of regaining the title would be over. Both fighters were evenly matched and the closely-fought fight eventually went to a judges' decision. But the decision went against him. He had lost again. It was a defeat so demoralising that this time he hit rock bottom, mentally as well as physically.

Suffering from exhaustion and heatstroke after the match, Foreman later said that he felt he was dying. As he fought for his life, the fear of death gripped him. He heard a voice within him say, "Why are you afraid to die?" He pleaded with God to help him, saying that he would change his life and change his ways, that he would become a better person, that he would give money to charity... The voice inside his head said, "I don't want your money. I want you." Then he collapsed into what he described as nothingness and despair before he felt a "hand" pull him out of the abyss — pull him back from the precipice of death.

Foreman turned his life around that day and became a new man. He gave up boxing, became a minister and started a youth centre. He later joked that Young had knocked the devil out of him. His thought, manner and demeanour — even his appearance — changed. He now smiled rather than scowled, and his eyes glowed with good humour, wisdom and compassion, a striking difference from the mean look of his former days. He literally went from being a bad guy to a good guy. He later said, "You get a second chance to live and it makes a better person out of you. I realise that wasn't really a loss for me in Africa — it was a gain that I didn't appreciate."

Leonard Cohen was a singer-songwriter of some wealth and fame. In his sixties and early seventies he lived in a Zen Buddhist monastery on a mountain near his home in Los Angeles, trying to find deeper meaning as he headed into the twilight of his life. Then he found out that his manager had stolen all his money. So he had to come down off the mountain and start touring again.

He put a band together and hit the road, and the 380 concerts around the world over the next five years — taking him well into his late-seventies — were the most moving and memorable of his career. He later said that “there was something extremely fulfilling about that tour”, something that brought his career full circle that he hadn’t expected. In an interview a month before his death he said that being “forced to go back on the road to repair the fortunes of my family and myself... was a most fortunate happenstance”, that “I think it warmed some part of my heart that had taken on a chill”, and that “spiritual things... have fallen into place, for which I am deeply grateful.” He spoke of feeling blessed and ready to die. He not only recouped (and more) the money he had lost, but also attained a sense of completion, resolution and peace in his life that he may not otherwise have attained.

Eckhart Tolle had a profoundly unhappy childhood, troubled by depression, anxiety, fear and feelings of alienation. In his teens he started to work on himself spiritually but continued experiencing long bouts of depression that eventually became “almost unbearable.” One night he woke up feeling that he just couldn’t live with himself any longer, but then suddenly experienced an “inner transformation” which resulted in the dissolution of his sense of self into the peace of pure “beingness” and the blissful feeling that “everything was miraculous and deeply peaceful.” He says that feeling has continued to this day.

And there are many more accounts of people finding the light of deep meaning and fulfilment in their lives out of the darkness of deep crisis and adversity. These accounts illustrate that, if crises are viewed and acted upon as opportunities for reflection and inner growth, whatever happens in our lives — good or bad, loss or gain, victory or defeat — can be a catalyst for change towards a better state of mind; part of the continuum of our life’s journey towards a higher state of being. Despite the problems in our lives — and despite any feelings of helplessness we may have as the result of those problems — we can influence the course of our

lives from here on in. We do have a choice. We can either choose to give up or we can choose to fight the good fight. You can make yourself happy or you can make yourself sad — the energy needed for each is the same. Crisis, adversity and struggle are an integral part of our lives, but it is what we do with that adversity that counts in the end. We all have struggles and challenges in our lives that give us pain and discomfort. But if we see those struggles and challenges in the right light then we can change the way we feel about them and ourselves. To see the opportunities in crises is key to finding ever-new meaning in life and moving ever-forward in the spirit of self-development towards a bright future. We are boulders being shaped into gems. Crises, apparent failure and the crossroads they bring us to only serve to propel us ever-onwards in our evolutionary journey towards a greater understanding of ourselves, our purpose and our destiny, and to an ever-increasing feeling of inner peace and fulfilment.

And that works on the global level too; in a wider societal sense. Just as we face crises in our individual lives, we also face crises in our collective life, each to some extent connecting us all — the fate of each one of us ultimately being tied with the fate of us all. At this point in the evolution of humanity on our planet we have come to a major crossroads — a crossroads defined by both progress and crisis. We have come a long way in science and technology, in architecture and engineering, in communications and transport, in solving many of the world's problems. We have created a world of extreme convenience, but we have also created a world of extreme inequity: extreme economic inequity, extreme racial, gender and cultural inequity, and extreme inequity in the distribution of resources between different countries and peoples of the world. These inequities — along with the natural phenomena of pandemic, drought, fire, earthquake, famine, flood and all manner of other natural disasters — have brought us to our current crossroads, defined as much by crisis as by progress.

We have a leadership crisis. We are in need of leaders that care about us at least as much as they care about themselves; that help

us and not exploit us. We have an education crisis. We need education that teaches not only academic subjects but core moral and spiritual values too; values that educate our children — the leaders of the future — on the right way to live and the right thing to do under any given circumstance. We have an economic crisis. We need an economy prioritising the welfare of all people; that facilitates the sharing of wealth among the many rather than concentrating it in the hands of the few; that shares the resources of the world for the good and wellbeing of all people; and animals, plants and the whole planet too.

But above all, to some extent or another we are all suffering from an existential crisis: a crisis of faith; of meaning; of purpose. We have a surplus of information but a shortage of knowledge. The things in our lives give us pleasure but not satisfaction. We have no dearth of means but a lack of real meaning. And at times we may even feel that there is no underlying purpose to our lives; that we have nothing to live for.

This has, to a degree, been brought about by the social crises of leadership, education, politics and economics; by our increasingly materialistic and consumerist lifestyle fuelled by the superficial values of advertising, consumer culture and the mass media. But ultimately and essentially our existential crisis is brought about by the fact that our core desire for peace and fulfilment is not being met by the tools our society, education, leadership, culture and mass media have given us. We have not been given the means, the encouragement and the inspiration to search for deeper meaning within ourselves rather than in the things of the world. This is evidenced by our feelings of disconnectedness, of lack of hope, of lack of optimism about our lives, of lack of inspiration when we wake up in the morning, of fear, anxiety and depression, along with all the other social ills evident in our society and in the world.

It is now time for us to take stock. To take stock personally as well as socially, internally and externally, locally and globally. To reflect on what we have achieved and what we have lost,

individually and collectively, in our modern lifestyle. To align our thoughts, actions and lifestyle towards a better world. To foster the love and peace within ourselves that will lead to a better us and a better world. To work towards a world which will correct the inequalities — right the wrongs — that have brought us to this current point of crisis. And work towards a world which will satisfy not only our physical, mental, creative and intellectual needs, but also our deepest existential — spiritual — need for happiness, peace and contentment; for oneness, for expansion, for light, for love.

Crisis, suffering and hardship, of course, are nothing new. They have been an integral part of human life since the dawn of civilisation. Indeed, as we shall soon see, according to yogic philosophy they are not only an integral part of life but are also essential for the evolution of humanity and all other creatures too. Crises are necessary for the evolution of mind and society. “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Gain comes from loss. And coming to the crossroads of a crisis, although painful, affords us a great opportunity: for a new direction, for a better life, a better way of living and a better world. Through crises big and small we are continually evolving, moving towards a more positive worldview and its associated lifestyle of wellbeing of self, others and the planet.

The point I want to make here is this: if struggle is an integral part of life, then let it not be for nothing. Let us strive to create a world, a life and a lifestyle that will channelise all the fruits of our struggle into a greater state of being and awareness; a higher state of achievement and fulfilment. Let us strive, no doubt, to correct the inequities — to right the wrongs — as much as we can. But as long as we are struggling and striving, let us view that struggle and strife as a great and wondrous part of life, and let us use it to our advantage as best we can. If crisis and clash are inevitable, let us see them as assets to our progress. Let us see them as essential for preventing us from falling into a complacency that would otherwise be our undoing; that would

otherwise see us fall into a slump of despondency and despair.

A beautiful allegory comes to mind here. There was once a foot stone and a Buddha stone in a temple. The worshippers who came to the temple, as you might expect, stood on the foot stone while they worshipped the Buddha stone. Now, the foot stone and the Buddha stone were good friends. They used to talk to each other at night when no one else was around. One night the foot stone complained to the Buddha stone, “Everybody worships you, but they only stand on me. Why do you get all the adulation and attention while I am only stood on?” The Buddha stone replied, “Do you remember when they were building the temple? You were initially chosen as the Buddha stone but you made such a fuss when they were carving you that they had to give up on you being the Buddha stone and made you the foot stone instead. But I tolerated the pain of being sculpted into what I am today. Indeed I viewed it as part of my progress as a stone. That is why I am the Buddha stone and you are the foot stone. You were not prepared to suffer for the higher goal.”

Before I knew better — and just like the foot stone — I once tried to eliminate all the problems in my life. I carefully arranged my days so that I would have as few problems as possible to disturb my peace of mind. How naive I was to think that it would work like that. Of course I found that it was impossible, and indeed my problems only seemed to increase rather than decrease. If problems don't come from our external circumstances they are sure to come from within our minds, because the mind is the root of everything that happens to us. We will talk more about how this works later. Suffice to say for now that one may escape society to meditate in a cave, but one cannot escape the cravings of the mind.

We are evolving as humans and as a society not despite the problems in our lives and in the world, but rather because of them. The struggles and obstacles in our lives facilitate the unfoldment of our inner selves into a better state of being; an ever-increasingly more expanded state of awareness and wellbeing.

In Ananda Sutram, Shrii Shrii Anandamurti has stated, “Obstacles are the helping forces that establish one in the goal.”

So rather than view problems as bad, we should view them as good. If we cannot change the problems and challenges that we face in the world at any particular point in time, we can change the way we see them and how we respond to them.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

Reinhold Niebuhr

Of course we should not chase problems and difficulties — we should always try to reduce them, both in individual and collective life — but when they do come we should view them in a positive light. For indeed they are shaping us into the Buddha stone: they are sculpting us from humanity into divinity.

A man once asked God how he could accelerate his movement towards divinity. God showed him a boulder and told him to push it every day. The man did as he was told and eventually reported back to God that, although he had pushed it every day, he could not move it. “That’s okay,” God replied. “I said push it, not move it.” It is our evolution of mind that matters in the end, regardless of what we accomplish in the world. Struggle against obstacles builds the character of mind we need for our ongoing journey of self-discovery, regardless of whether we overcome them or not.

I could use any number of New Age clichés to further emphasise this crucial point which is fundamental to our growth and happiness from this point forward: no pain no gain; what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger; the road to success is strewn with failures; a setback is nothing but a setup for a comeback; a smooth sea never made a skilful sailor; you’ve got to burn to shine. And on it would go. But you get the point. They are

clichés because they are true. From hardships come our greatest experiences. The joys in life are the fruits of our sorrows. The eruption of Krakatoa lit up the sky for months with a beautiful orange glow.

I remember a day when I was suffering from a terrible headache in Singapore. Despite my best efforts, I could get no relief. A book lying on a desk caught my eye: *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. Immediately I thought to myself, “Pick it up, open it, and read the first thing you see.” I opened it and read:

“Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding. Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the Sun, so must you know pain. And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy. And you would accept the seasons of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.”

Diamonds are not found ready-made as jewels. They have to be extracted from the ground through hard labour, and then cut and polished. Just as the beautiful lotus flower grows out of mud, personal (and societal) growth comes through struggle. Where there is no mud there is no lotus.

If we do not see our struggles and strife in the right light and act on them with the right frame of mind, we are denying ourselves the insight and connection to our inner world that will transcend and overcome all problems of the outer world. Just as the world has been inundated with a materialist worldview and consequent materialist values such as consumerism, leading to more and more exploitation and consumption of the Earth’s resources at the expense of our own physical and mental wellbeing and that of other creatures and the planet, we have also been inundated with a materialist philosophy at the expense of

our spiritual wellbeing. We have neglected the spiritual for the material. We have valued material enjoyment over true contentment; cold comfort of the senses to the warmth of heart-fulfilment; temporary pleasure over lasting happiness.

The world only gives us limited objects of enjoyment, and a limited thing can only give a limited amount of happiness. But we want unlimited happiness. And that we can only find within ourselves. What we want is the bliss — the infinite happiness — within ourselves; the essence of ourselves. The problem is that we are a lot better at looking for (I say looking for, not finding) happiness outside ourselves than within ourselves. In a sense, we have diverted our desire (and search) for the infinite into the finite. And in all our looking around; in all our sensing and perceiving; in all our doing; in all our dreaming and thinking; we have developed a rock-steady relationship with the world but not with ourselves. We have developed such a good relationship with the things of the world that we have become attached to the world rather than our inner selves. And so it has become the human condition that we search for ourselves outside ourselves.

In a sense we have become like the silkworm who has entrapped itself in its own cocoon; like a fish caught in a trap. Even if we feel comfortable there to some extent, we do not realise that we have become complacent within a limited reality and a limited range of enjoyment which is preventing us from experiencing a far greater reality and enjoyment. If the fish is released from the trap it can enjoy the boundless sea. If the bird is released from its cage it will find freedom in flight rather than the mere cold comfort of a cage. Our minds are compelling us to break out of our shells, to leave the cage. Merely by living we get closer to realising our destiny. But we must take pains to live a life which enables the unfolding of our destiny rather than the stifling of it. The pain of breaking out of the shell or leaving the cage is nothing like the pain of remaining within it, encaged and entrapped.

In general, it is easier to attain the “fast food” limited pleasure of material enjoyment than the deeper and more

sustained happiness from within. Deeper happiness, although not as immediately accessible, is always available within. We only have to find it there and make earnest and sincere attempts to attain it. It takes time for the flower to bloom or the egg to hatch. But with a little bit of effort each day we can gradually transform our lives from the limited enjoyment of external things and relationships to the infinite happiness of the love divine within ourselves and within all things. In this process the objects of our enjoyment become gradually more subtle and sustained, and our experience of the world moves slowly but surely from crude to subtle; temporary to lasting; ephemeral to eternal.

That most sublime feeling of love, peace and bliss that we are ultimately looking for is beyond this physical world; beyond your body, your senses, your actions; beyond any superficial constructs you have been conditioned to believe is you (such as name, fame, lineage, reputation, wealth, prestige); beyond words, deeper than the mind, deeper even than thought itself. You are not your thoughts but the consciousness behind them — not the images on the screen but rather the light through which the images are projected. Our thoughts are a function of a much greater sense of being. To attain what we are all looking for we must expand our sense of being; expand our sense of existence; beyond our limited sense of self to a greater sense of self. We must transcend the mind into the consciousness within which it exists. When one realises one's small self as part of the greater self; the greater self as one's own self; that's self-realisation, the realisation of your higher self. The essence of that realisation is the fulfilment of our deepest desire; the experience of exquisite happiness; infinite happiness; the greatest inner peace and contentment; bliss... a sublime feeling beyond all worldly enjoyment. That realisation is inevitable for each and every one of us. We are all on a journey to realising that ultimate state of eternal bliss. The spiritual search is inherent in us all, like a precious jewel in a dark cave, symbolic of the bliss in all hearts.

We used to believe that the Earth was flat and that the stars were holes in the roof of the world. Then we believed that the Sun revolved around the Earth. Finally we accepted that the Earth revolves around the Sun. We used to think that our galaxy was the universe, until we discovered that our galaxy was one of many in a far greater universe than we could possibly imagine. If we had never questioned these beliefs we would never have come up with more enlightened answers. The time has come for us to make sincere and sustained efforts to break the shackles of our materialistic lives and find true happiness in the boundless sky of the spirit.

Swami Vivekananda once gave a stirring call of emancipation with these words:

“Break your chains and be free forever. What frightens you; what holds you down? Only ignorance and delusion. Nothing else can bind you.”

We must regain the noble heritage of our divine nature. And to do this we must regain the noble heritage of the teachings of the sages and wise ones of the past, applying their tried and tested practices in our lives in order to attain peace and fulfilment.

Many years ago I was sitting meditating in a park in New Delhi. It was a bright clear day, the air was fresh and clear, the sun was shining, the setting was perfect. As I sat there with my eyes closed, I gradually became aware of the sound of many tiny running feet, like a stampede of small elephants. The sound and vibration increased as it got closer until suddenly it stopped. I opened my eyes to find a group of about 50 or so five to six-year old students standing there dressed in their school uniforms, accompanied by their teachers, surrounding me. With folded hands they all gave *namaskar* in unison and then ran off again just as quickly as they had arrived. I was delighted, not only because of the sweetness of the gesture but also because it reassured me that the noble heritage of our past has not been fully forgotten.

Despite the barrage of corporate consumer capitalism impacting our lives in so many adverse and diverse ways, the noble teachings and spiritual culture of the past, although bruised and battered, is still breathing. We must revive it, within and without. We must resurrect those noble teachings, bringing them into relevance for the present, and move confidently ahead into the future, leaving behind the dogmas of past and present that have imprisoned us and held us down. We must rise up.

Swami Vivekananda again:

“Fight against inertia! Break it to dust! This is real courage. This is the path of the spiritual warrior.”

Now, at the crossroads of our current personal, societal and planetary crisis, we have a golden opportunity to turn our lives around and make our existence truly meaningful. If, after reading this chapter, you recognise and accept — as I recommend you do — that crisis and struggle are an inevitable part of life, and view them as positives in our evolutionary journey as individuals and as a society, then we must go on to the next step. We must recognise that there is a higher meaning and purpose to our lives — indeed a higher conscious reality which is our destiny — and that it is entirely within our power to attain our destined higher state of being. Indeed, the struggles of life propel us ever-closer to that higher destiny. Finally, we must make sincere and regular efforts to live our lives in such a way that we attain our higher destiny as soon as we can, for our own happiness and emancipation as well as the happiness and emancipation of all people and all beings.

Let me reiterate these important points again, for clarity and reference. In short, we must:

1. Recognise and accept that crises and struggles are an inevitable part of life.

2. View them as positives in our evolutionary journey as individuals and as a society — that they are opportunities for more self-knowledge and inner peace.
3. Recognise that there is a higher meaning and purpose to our lives, indeed a higher conscious reality which is our destiny.
4. Recognise that it is entirely within our power to attain our destined higher state of being. Indeed the struggles of life propel us ever-closer to that higher destiny.
5. Make sincere and regular efforts to live our lives in such a way that we attain our higher destiny as soon as we can, for our own happiness and emancipation as well as the happiness and emancipation of all people and all beings.

Let us suffuse our lives with the greatest meaning and purpose. Let us live our lives in such a way that at the end of our days we will smile with the greatest satisfaction that we made the most of our time here on Earth; that we made real progress towards our destiny of inner fulfilment. Let us make our lives truly meaningful. Let us live glorious lives of self-discovery and fulfilment, both for ourselves and for all others in the world.

“This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one.”

George Bernard Shaw

Chapter Two

Worldviews Apart

Recently an artificial intelligence program called AlphaGo was developed to master the board game Go, a game so complex that the number of possible board configurations is more than the estimated number of atoms in the universe. When the developers were confident that the program was good enough, they matched it against the European champion (a human), who it easily beat, and then a few months later, after some more development, with the world champion (another human), who it beat 4-1 in a best-of-five match. The interesting thing here, though, is that in the second game AlphaGo made a move which surprised everyone because it seemed like a really bad move. No one could understand why it had made such a “bad” move. But as the game progressed they started to realise that it was actually a very good move — indeed it was a stroke of genius. They saw how it connected with all the moves before it and how it opened up the possibility of a beautiful network of connections to fall into place after it. In fact, that one move (now famous in Go circles, lauded as “beautiful”, “creative” and “special” among the pundits) turned the course of the game around, setting in motion a series of subsequent moves which lead to a resounding victory. The world champion later said that from that one move he learnt a whole new way of playing the game which in the thousands of years of its history hadn’t been considered before

— a vista of new opportunities that could take the game to an entirely new level.

I believe that there are two important things we can learn from this:

One, that the way we see something is not necessarily the only or the best way, and that it pays to be open to new possibilities.

And two, just as there was genius behind that seemingly bad move, there may well be “genius” behind the apparent randomness and chaos of life and existence as we know it — a deeper intelligence we may not have considered or been aware of before. What we often view as random or chaotic events in our lives and in the world around us may well have a deeper function, significance, harmony — indeed intelligence — behind them.

Consider, for example, what goes on in a tiny cell. It has the complexity of a small city, a microscopic world of intricate and seamless functionality. But we hardly consider to ask ourselves how it could possibly function so well without any intelligence behind it. It is the same for multicellular organisms also. Is it really possible to explain all the functions, thoughts and emotions of all creatures without considering the possibility of a guiding consciousness behind them? Consider for a moment the functions of your own body working seamlessly and tirelessly to keep you alive — a network of billions of cells continually cooperating and coordinating to sustain your existence. And that goes for all the natural systems in the world and the universe, from all the systems of life on our planet, to the functioning of our solar system, our galaxy, all the galaxies and other celestial bodies in the universe, and indeed the entire universe as one vast self-regulating super-system.

There are an estimated 250 billion stars (give or take a few billion) in our Milky Way galaxy alone, and at least 100 billion planets, possibly many more, something like 40 billion of which could support life like our own. And the observable universe is estimated to contain something like two trillion (two million million) galaxies (the Hubble space telescope revealed 10,000

alone in its ultra-deep field view of an area of sky the size of a grain of sand held at arms length). The number of stars in a galaxy varies from between around ten million to one trillion, but if we take an average of say 100 billion stars per galaxy, that would mean that there are about 200 billion trillion (a billion trillion is a thousand million million million) stars in the observable universe. And we are only talking about our current observable universe. The numbers may quite possibly be a lot higher. Whatever they may be, though, they are staggering.

Based on current astronomical data, taking the expansion of the universe into account, the distance from our planet Earth to the edge of the observable universe is about 46 billion light years (the distance you would travel if you were traveling at the speed of light for 46 billion years). That's just in one direction. So the total size of the universe is double that: 93 billion light years across. And again, that's only our current observable universe. It could turn out to be a lot bigger.

To put these staggering numbers and distances into perspective, if the size of the universe is imagined to be the size of our planet Earth, then our planet would be less than a billionth the size of a pinhead in comparison. A billionth the size of a pinhead is about the average size of an atom. So an atom compared to the size of the Earth. Our entire solar system would fit comfortably within the pinhead, and if we were traveling at the speed of light it would take us just over a second to get to the Moon, eight minutes to get to the Sun, five hours to get to Pluto (at the outer limits of our solar system) and about four years to get to our nearest star, Proxima Centauri of the Alpha Centauri system (about half a millimetre from the pinhead). Then another 10 years to get 1.5 millimetres outside the pinhead (a distance encompassing about twelve other stars), 350 years to get to five centimetres, 1,000 years to get to 15 centimetres (the thickness of the Milky Way), 27,000 years to get to four metres (the distance to the centre of the Milky Way), 100,000 years to get to 14 metres (the diameter of the Milky

Way), one million years to get to 150 metres (the radius encompassing most satellite/dwarf galaxies of the Milky Way), two million years to get to 300 metres (the distance to our nearest major galaxy, Andromeda), seven million years to get to one kilometre, 50 million years to get to seven kilometres (the distance to the centre of the Virgo Supercluster, of which our local group is an outlying member), 350 million years to get to 50 kilometres, one billion years to get to 150 kilometres, seven billion years to get to 1,000 kilometres, 70 billion years to get to 10,000 kilometres, and 93 billion years to get to 13,000 kilometres (the diameter of our Earth, which in our analogy is the size of the current observable universe).

That gives us some idea of the almost unfathomable size of our incredibly vast and complex universe; a universe that modern science expects us to believe suddenly and miraculously popped into being out of nowhere, without any conscious guidance behind it. That's like expecting us to believe that our phones and laptops just fell into place without anyone designing them, sourcing their material or putting them together. The universe is infinitely more complex than any piece of electronic equipment and it runs like clockwork, and yet according to modern science the existence of the entire universe and everything in it (including us — our bodies as well as our minds and consciousness) is based solely on matter. This is what's known as the materialist worldview, or materialism: that everything is matter, everything comes from — and is the result of — matter, and that the universe is nothing more than an arbitrary, mechanistic, unfeeling conglomeration of waves and particles.

What are the personal ramifications of subscribing to such a materialistic worldview? How does it impact our sense of existence, meaning, purpose and fulfilment?

Within the paradigm of our materialistic and consumerist society we have been conditioned to believe that we need to find happiness and fulfilment in people and things; that in order to be happy we need to cultivate good relationships, accumulate

more possessions, consume more goods, be as comfortable as we possibly can, and experience as much physical and psychic pleasure as we can. I remember being conditioned to this way of thinking when I was growing up. It was the prevalent way of thinking within many societies at the time — that happiness and contentment depend on family and friends, a good job, a nice house, other material things and meaningful pursuits. These things are all very well of course, but we should know by now that they are not the silver bullet that is going to solve all our problems and ultimately fulfil us.

Material things are limited in size, scope, amount and supply. Our relationships with people and other beings are also limited in what they can ultimately give us in terms of fulfilling our innermost desire for peace and happiness. And the pleasure we can get from people, creatures and things does not last forever either. You may be in synch with the people in your life for a time but you cannot be forever. We each have our own paths which — like ships passing in the night — cross the paths of others for a time but not forever. We may be compatible with someone else for a period of time but not forever. People change and for whatever reason — be it clash of personalities, sickness, death, or any other of a multitude of reasons — relationships do not last.

At the same time we are hardwired for limitlessness — for unlimited happiness. Our primary desire is for infinite happiness — bliss. So the longer we hold on to the belief (either consciously or subconsciously) of a materialist worldview in which we can be completely satisfied solely by people and things, the more we are setting ourselves up for a fall — an existential crisis that would eventually bring us to the point where we are compelled to ask ourselves: How do we resolve the dilemma that we are looking for infinite happiness within a finite world? How can we live our lives joyfully if we believe that we can never find what we are ultimately looking for — limitlessness — within a limited world of only people and things? How do we reconcile our yearning for meaning and immortality with the belief that it

is all for nought; that there is no overarching purpose to our lives; that our existence will ultimately end in nothing?

That existential crisis may very well lead us to feelings of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, depression, alienation, isolation, disconnection, insecurity and loneliness; and those feelings in turn then manifest as self-destructive behaviour which affects not only ourselves as individuals but the society as a whole: domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, obesity and other lifestyle diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes, even suicide. And if they do not lead to self-destructive behaviour, feelings of fear and insecurity often give rise to greed, selfishness and other anti-social behaviour which have manifested in our world as poverty, homelessness, crime and corruption, waste and pollution, racism and other forms of discrimination, extreme wealth disparity, corporate and political opportunism. Even terrorism is seeded in the way in which we fundamentally see the world and treat others. It is a reaction to cultural elitism and the exploitation of one group of people by another.

And so the materialist worldview and its associated materialistic and consumerist lifestyle has brought us to a point of crisis characterised by self-destructive behaviour, if not anti-social behaviour, or both. And ultimately an existential crisis: a crisis of nothingness; of lack of purpose and meaning; of lack of vision and goal and destiny.

Is there a way of out of this malaise? Do we have an alternative? Is there a positive worldview which is at least as potentially valid and counteractively positive as the negative worldview of materialism?

There is a story of two babies in their mother's womb. The first one says to the second one, "I am looking forward to meeting our mother." The second one replies, "Mother? What are you talking about?" The first one replies, "Our mother. We must have one." The second one replies, "Well, if we do then where is she? If she exists, why can't we see her?" The first replies, "We exist within her. She is all around us. She surrounds us. She

nurtures us. We could not exist without her.” “I don’t believe it,” insists the second one: “We can’t see her so she can’t exist.”

The fact that we can’t see (or prove) something does not negate its existence or prove that it does not exist. “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” And so it is a fallacy when science asserts that because we cannot perceive a higher power, force, consciousness, spirit, soul, God — whatever name we give it — therefore it does not exist.

Logic and reason, however, would suggest that we at least investigate the possibility of a conscious worldview that is the polar opposite of the material worldview. The concept of a greater conscious reality is no less valid than scientific constructs of material and temporal reality. The essence of the universe as consciousness is just as valid a premise as the essence of the universe as matter. The only difference is that one can be sensed and measured and the other cannot. Matter can be perceived by our senses and scientific instruments, while consciousness can only be experienced internally.

What if consciousness as a higher reality (whether we can prove it or not) were every bit as real as the reality of matter? Just think about that possibility for a minute. Instead of the bleak materialist worldview we have all been subjected to in one way or another, how about the worldview of an all-pervading blissful awareness inherent in everybody and everything? Of a greater consciousness as the essence of the entire universe, existing within everything; everything existing within it; everybody and everything as part of — and full of — consciousness. What if mind, matter and space were all full of consciousness? Would it not afford us some very real advantages in understanding our world and where we fit into it, and give us a potentially more positive and optimistic attitude towards our lives, the world, and the lives of all others in it?

In a purely material and mechanistic universe our own consciousness could only be the product of our brains. There could be no higher source from where it could come from. But

in a conscious universe our own consciousness is a function of the higher consciousness of the entire universe. In the first scenario, consciousness is a result and function of mind and brain. In the second scenario the opposite is true: mind is a result and function of consciousness. And the brain is the physical medium through which it operates, just like a vehicle is operated by its driver. The driver is the consciousness behind the wheel of the vehicle. In another analogy, consciousness is transmitted through the brain just like a radio or phone transmits invisible radio waves. The brain is the transmitter of the signal, not the signal itself — the vehicle of mind and consciousness, not the originator of it. The first scenario does not allow for the evolution of mind towards a higher conscious experience, and therefore is inherently limiting in scope. It cannot foster optimism for the expansion of mind. The second scenario, however, is inherently expansive in scope because it allows for the expansion of mind and consciousness into the infinitely expansive experience of infinite consciousness. It fosters optimism towards our cherished higher destiny of greater and greater conscious experience. It accommodates our inner longing for the infinite.

And so within the model of a conscious worldview, our own individual consciousness — our own feeling of existence; awareness of existence; awareness of being — is not merely a subjective experience confined to our own limited neural network, but an awareness which is continually expanding into a far greater sense of existence and being; a more expansive feeling of existence and being; a more blissful, connected and fulfilling one; and ultimately a more unifying one because it is the same for us all. We all have within us the urge for limitlessness, the constant driving desire to be greater than what we already are. According to the conscious worldview, that drive for limitless expansion of mind and consciousness is a self-fulfilling prophesy: we are all in the process of regaining our identity — our sense of being — with the greater consciousness within which we all exist.

In a conscious worldview, consciousness is not just a byproduct of our brains. It is the very essence of our existence. It's what make us us. You cannot prove it to anyone else, just as you cannot prove a mother's love for her child. But we all know it's there. We all know that we are conscious because we each have the experience of consciousness within us at each and every waking moment. But because it's inherently a subjective experience it can only be proven to ourselves and not to anyone else. The mind can only express something which is within it. But if the mind exists within consciousness — and not the other way round — then consciousness is in itself inexplicable. We can't prove the existence of consciousness objectively, but we can prove it subjectively. We all have the subjective experience of consciousness every moment of our waking lives, and that in itself is the greatest proof that consciousness is inherent in us all. The fact that billions of us have the same conscious experience cements it as the greatest universal truth, although it cannot be objectively proven as such by science.

A great intellectual once asked Shri Ramakrishna to prove the existence of God. Ramakrishna laughed and said, "The existence of God? You are the proof. Otherwise from where does such great intelligence come? It must be coming from existence, and if existence can produce you that means existence is not unconscious, is not unintelligent. It is strange that you are asking for the proof when you are the proof itself. I can bring anybody before you as a proof that existence is intelligent. That's all we mean by God: that existence is not without consciousness." The great intellectual was taken aback by Ramakrishna's answer and conceded defeat.

Just as a lightbulb is capable of shining light on the room around it but not on the power that illuminates it, so too can we comprehend the world around us but not the consciousness that animates us. It's beyond the normal functioning of the mind; beyond words; beyond even thought itself. The core of our being is not something that can even be spoken about, let alone

thought of. We can't prove the existence of a mother's love for her child, but that doesn't mean it's not there. Just as a mother's love for her child lies deep within her being, we can only validate the essence of our own being through the deepest internal experience of awareness within us.

A disciple of Shrii Shrii Anandamurti once related this conversation with his master:

I asked, "Baba, is God the imagination of the human mind or is it a reality?"

Baba: "Do you have a mind?"

"Yes, I have a mind."

Extending his palm, he said, "Show me your mind on the palm of my hand."

"I know I have a mind but I cannot show it."

Baba: "Just as you know you have a mind but cannot show it, in the same way God can be felt and realised. He is more real than you and I."

This is the basis of the conscious worldview: that consciousness is the core of our being; the essence of our existence; the essential reality within which all things exist as a continuum of expression; the common thread with which the entire fabric of existence is interwoven. Our own consciousness is part of a greater consciousness which is the core of all being; the essence of all existence.

Of course, this has been the basis of Eastern philosophical thought for millennia. But I take this opportunity to give a timely reminder of the wonderfully integral and logical nature of our great philosophical heritage from the East. Not only integral and logical, but, more importantly on the personal level, life-affirming. Staying positive in today's world of personal and social upheaval is a challenge. With a switch in perspective, however, to a blissfully conscious universe, we have every reason to feel inherently connected to people and to the world; to feel loved, hopeful, happy and at peace with ourselves and others. It would not take much of a leap of faith to instil ourselves with the most

life-affirming feelings of love, connectedness, hope, happiness, peace and fulfilment. Belief of — or at least openness to — a conscious worldview could turn your life around from feelings of insignificance and unhappiness to feelings of significance and happiness in the blink of an eye. It's as simple as that. As I have experienced personally in my own life, openness to a wider perspective of life and the universe based on the concept of blissful consciousness rather than that of cold, arbitrary, unfeeling matter can infuse our minds with positivity, optimism and inspiration; and our lives with meaning, purpose and a real sense of mission.

So instead of trying to validate a worldview that makes us sad and fearful of the future, I believe we should be trying to validate a worldview that will give us fulfilment and hope for the future. Not just as individuals but as a society. The benefits of a conscious worldview are immense. Therefore let us consider the possibility that, rather than consciousness being an entirely subjective experience produced by the nerve cells in our brains, it is the essential reality of the entire universe, within which everything exists, and that if we can connect to it, if we can feel it, then we will be able to attain what we are all ultimately searching for. It is entirely within our power to do so. Indeed, it is our destiny.

According to the sages of the past, we can make ourselves happy or we can make ourselves sad. The energy needed to do so, either way, is the same. The mind is a double-edged sword. It can lead us to the depths of depravity or the heights of sublimity. We can either bemoan our fate as infinitesimal and insignificant parts of the universe and accept an eventual ignominious demise into nothingness, or we can celebrate our existence as an inherent and highly significant part of the universe and work towards elevating our existence to infinity. The choice is ours. That choice is ours to make right here and now, at this very moment of our lives and in every moment of our lives.

There was once a Samurai warrior who went to a Zen master for wisdom. He wanted to ask him about heaven and hell. But

the Zen master made him wait... and wait... and wait. In fact, he had to wait several days before the Zen master would see him. Finally the master came out, but by this stage the warrior was fuming; furious that he had been made to wait such a long time. The master took one look at the dark ominous rage on his face and said, "That's hell." Suddenly the warrior had a deep insight into the truth of the master's statement. His anger went out the window and a blissful feeling of connectedness and understanding came over him. Then the master said, "That's heaven."

To find the deepest peace and contentment within ourselves we need to restore faith in the possibility of a deeper awareness as the ultimate consummation of all our thoughts, desires and aspirations. That means an expansion of awareness: from our small self to a greater self; from our limited sense of awareness, our limited consciousness, to the unlimited, infinite consciousness of the universe. The more we will be able to attain that state of awareness (that realisation) of infinity, the more we will feel the essence of our own existence as the essence of all beings and all things; that we exist within, as part of, indeed as one with, an all-encompassing universal oneness pervading everybody and everything, within which the whole universe exists as an expression of the One. Then, just as the Samurai warrior realised that heaven is a state of mind that is attainable right here and now, we can also realise that a greater state of mind continually awaits us right here and now.

Chapter Three

Awakening to Consciousness

As we discussed in the last chapter, beyond this everyday reality there is a deeper reality that we don't normally perceive because it's beyond our everyday perception; beyond space, time and mind. It's the subspace; the causal reality from which this phenomenal world is continually evolving; emerging from, existing for a time, and merging back into. It's the ultimate reality within which our perceived reality exists. It is the consciousness within which we all exist. For millennia saints, mystics, yogis — seekers of truth from all creeds and cultures — have searched for and tried to attain the experience of that deeper reality. And those that have attained it have realised that it is bliss inexpressible. We cannot think of, let alone speak of or describe, the consciousness which is the essence of our existence. It is inconceivable and inexpressible; beyond words, thought and mind. It will always evade sensory perception or intellectual analysis. The mind can think of everything under the sun except the consciousness which informs it. All the things of the world come within the scope of its cognition except the consciousness within which it exists; within which the entire universe is sustained. It is often understood that, when asked about the existence of God,

Buddha didn't say anything because he wished to convey that there was no God. His not saying anything, however, could just as well be interpreted as implying that God is beyond the power of mind and words to understand or express.

"I do not say that I know Him; nor do I say that I do not know Him. Because I know that He is beyond all knowing and not knowing."

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

As Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven does not come with signs to be perceived."

A frog in a well cannot fathom the vastness of the sea. Words cannot describe consciousness and the mind cannot think of it, just as a lightbulb cannot shine light on the power that illuminates it. No matter how sharp a blade is, it can never cut its own handle. Intellect can never penetrate the consciousness that upholds it. Consciousness is the controller of the mind-blade, not the other way round. Trying to explain consciousness is as futile as trying to see the back of one's own head. But the ego keeps trying; keeps trying in vain to explain the nature of its own existence. Just as we might vainly persist in trying to see the back of our head with the aid of mirrors, the mind-ego may try but in vain to describe the indescribable; to explain the inexplicable. But you cannot think of higher consciousness with the mind. You can only realise it beyond the mind. It is a matter of realisation.

According to yogic philosophy, which we will look at in more detail in the next chapter, cosmic consciousness is the one all-pervading blissful awareness of the universe. Just as your own consciousness is the essence of your own mind, the cosmic consciousness is the essence of the entire universe. It exists within everything and everything exists within it. Everyone and everything is part of — and full of — consciousness. It is within you like the water of the sea is within a wave. And you are within

it like the wave is within the sea. It is the essence of your existence, the source of all things, your innermost self, the core of your being, the life of your life, the mind of your mind, the soul of your soul; the ever-present, ever-radiant, ever-blissful awareness inherent in everybody and everything. That universal consciousness is all-pervasive and all-encompassing. It is the essence of our being. It is in all minds, just as the same moon is reflected in numerous puddles, ponds and other bodies of water; just as the same flower might be reflected in many different mirrors; just as the rays of the sun are the ultimate source of light and warmth, so is the cosmic consciousness the ultimate source of all knowledge and awareness.

“Consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown. There is only one thing, and that which seems to be a plurality is merely a series of different aspects of this one thing, produced by a deception... as in a gallery of mirrors.”

Erwin Schrödinger

Worldly knowledge is a mere reflection of consciousness, like the Moon's reflection is a reflection of the Moon itself. Just as the essence of a room is the space within it; just as the essence of the ocean is its water; the essence of the self is consciousness. Consciousness is the essence of your being just as oil is hidden within a seed. It is like the foundations of a house — you cannot see it, and yet it holds everything up. It so completely pervades our existence that we are normally unaware of it, like a fish that is unaware of the water all around it. Consciousness is the thread with which the entire fabric of existence is woven, like a beautifully intricate tapestry, perfect and whole in itself.

“Thus is the universe alive. All things are moral. That soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is

a law. We feel its inspirations; out there in history we can see its fatal strength. It is almighty. All nature feels its grasp. 'It is in the world, and the world was made by it.' It is eternal but it enacts itself in time and space."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The cosmic consciousness is the one all-encompassing, absolute and immutable reality of the universe. Everyone and everything exists within it; nothing exists outside it. King Akbar, who ruled during the Moghul period of India, once asked his clever and witty minister Birbal, "People say I am greater than God. What do you say?" Birbal replied with great tact and diplomacy, implying the opposite of the wise words he spoke, "Certainly you are greater than God. You can banish anyone from your kingdom but God cannot. If He wanted to banish anyone, where would He send them?" The ocean is great because it refuses no river.

That cosmic consciousness has projected everything as its own reality, just as a film is projected onto a screen by the light of a projector. He is both light and director, we are the actors, and the world is the screen. Just as the images of a film are a transient reality projected from the light of a projector, so are our lives in this world a transient reality existing within the greater reality of the light of consciousness. Just as the images on a screen are the transitory apparitions of the constant light projecting onto (or coming from) the screen, so too are our lives the transitory reality playing out on the screen of the world within the one constant reality of consciousness. The multifarious images of the world-drama of life plays out within the one constant beam of universal consciousness. The reality of our lives is so vivid and immediate while it lasts, but ultimately its existence dissolves into the greater reality of consciousness, just as the fleeting vision of fireworks dissolves into the night sky.

The entire universe exists in and of consciousness, like an iceberg solidified out of the vast ocean. All is within; nothing without. All is one loving inner spirit/self; the inner consciousness of everyone and everything. You are not only part of it, but one with it, like a wave is one with the sea. It is not outside you, or separate to you, but your inner state of being. It is your inner you. It is always with you. You *are* that infinite consciousness.

“You are never alone or helpless. The force that guides the stars guides you too.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

It is *Sat Cit Anandam* — being, consciousness and bliss. *Being* means that it is the sole existence. *Consciousness* means that it is all-aware. And *bliss* means that its essence is infinite happiness.

“It is infinite. It has no beginning and no end. It is the unbroken flow of pure and serene bliss, stretching from beginninglessness to endlessness.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

It is the one and only infinite entity. Not only infinite, but blissfully infinite. That’s why we want infinite happiness, because we are constantly drawn towards the essence of the infinite consciousness within us. We are constantly drawn to the bliss of our inner selves; our own blissful inner awareness.

An ancient Sanskrit verse states:

“The Supreme Entity is the vastest entity; the ultimate source of all cosmic emanations. The Supreme Entity, which is difficult to conceive, is the subtlest of the subtle. He is farther away than any

other entity, but again He is nearer than the nearest. Only the one who looks into the innermost recesses of himself can realise the Supreme Entity."

That infinite happiness — bliss — that we all long for is the essence of infinite consciousness, and we can only attain it by looking within our own consciousness. You cannot get the knowledge of a book from its cover. You have to look within the book to realise its full value. The deepest knowledge lies within us.

"Knowing oneself is the real knowledge."

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

There was once a Sufi mystic called Nasruddin. There are many stories of how he used to teach in eccentric and humorous ways. This is one such story. He had lost the key to his house and he was looking for it one night outside under a street lamp. A passerby asked him what he was doing. He replied, "I'm looking for my house key." She asked him where he'd lost it. "Somewhere inside my house," he replied. Baffled, she asked him why, if he had lost it inside his house, he was looking for it outside? "Because it's dark inside," he replied.

There is a similar analogy of a man searching for a light with his own lantern. What we really want we already have. What we are ultimately looking for is within ourselves. Only a fool would beg for food when delicious food was waiting for him at home.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you."

"Cosmic Consciousness abides in the very sense of existence, in one's very heart's desire."

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

We need to look for what we're looking for in the right place, even if it's hard to look for it there. It is easy to look outside; not so easy to look within. We find limited meaning in the things that we do in the world, but to find the true meaning that we are all ultimately looking for, we must also look within ourselves. What we ultimately want lies within, not without. And so to find it we must look for it within. When there is nowhere left to go outside, one must go further in. We must take the light from our own lantern and look for the infinite happiness we crave within ourselves. We have spent our lives looking at the passing show of the world-screen of life, not realising that the projector is the ultimate source of all light. We need to turn around and look towards the source.

Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to worship a statue of Kali by placing flowers on her head, but when he attained self-realisation he put the flowers on his own head instead, saying "I am my own Ishta."

If you grind oil-seeds you will find oil within. If you churn milk you will get butter. If a frog leaves its well it can discover the vastness of the sea. If you look deep within the calm waters of your mind you can see into the depths of your own being. A cup submerged within the sea holds a limited amount of water within it, but is surrounded by unlimited water all around it. If you remove the ego-cup of the mind you will discover the limitlessness of the ocean of consciousness around you. Dive deep within yourself and discover the greatest treasure within. Connect with your innermost sense of self — your deepest self — and be open to the possibility that it's part of a greater self that encompasses everyone and everything. Be open to the possibility of realising yourself as that greater self. As I said in Chapter One, when one realises one's small self as the greater self; the greater self as one's own self; that's self-realisation. And the essence of that realisation is the fulfilment of our deepest desire — the experience of exquisite happiness; infinite happiness; the greatest inner peace and contentment; bliss. And

again, I re-emphasise, so that no one should despair at the seeming futility of their existence — *that realisation is inevitable for each and every one of us*. It is just a matter of time and practice.

In the chapters that follow we will go deeper into the philosophy and path leading to self-realisation, and in the process of attaining that realisation the experience of inner peace and bliss as the essence of our deepest self.

But for now I invite you to try an introductory technique that will give you a taste of things to come:

I know this may seem a bit strange and difficult at first, but close your eyes and try to think of yourself.

Focus on your sense of self. Feel the centre of yourself. Feel your inner self.

Write down or remember one word which best describes your sense of self.

Now, feel your inner self as a centre of peace and happiness within you.

Expand that centre of peace and happiness to encompass your whole being. Then expand it out to all around you. Then expand it out to infinity.

Feel that infinite happiness all around you.

Now feel yourself merging into that infinite happiness. Feel that your own sense of awareness is merging into the infinite blissful awareness all around you. Feel that your own consciousness is merging into the infinite consciousness all around you.

Feel that your entire existence is suffused with that infinite peace and happiness; the bliss of the universe.

Feel that you *are* the infinite consciousness of the universe, and that your essence is pure bliss. Let that feeling of bliss pervade your entire being. Feel it as the essence of your existence.

Continue like that for as long as you like.

When you open your eyes, take a moment to reflect on your expanded sense of self.

Now what best describes your sense of self? Are they the same or different?

That was a taste of things to come when we venture into the yogic lifestyle in Chapter Seven and meditation in particular in Chapter Eight. But for now, in the next three chapters let us see that we have a sound philosophical and scientific basis for validating the conscious worldview and providing a firm foundation for our upcoming practice.

Chapter Four

Life, the Universe and Everything

A comprehensive philosophy of life, the universe and everything may seem a daunting prospect to read through and understand, but rest assured that the clear, concise and simple elegance of the yogic philosophy will give you a clear understanding of the purpose of life, provide answers to important questions you may not have found a rational answer to yet, and imbibe you with a sense of hope, optimism and positivity for the future of your life, of life on our planet, and of life throughout the universe. If we know where we have come from, why we are here, and where we are going, then we will be motivated to move forward enthusiastically. If the way is clear, the going is joyful.

Thousands of years ago, somewhere in the mists of time, people started asking the core existential questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? How did I get here? What am I doing here? Where am I going? How do I get there? Our journey has now brought us to this point in time when we are at a crossroads of thought and understanding. Now more than ever before in the history of human life on our planet we yearn for answers to the questions of the essence of life and the nature of existence. Up till now our modern worldview — and particularly modern science — has by and large forsaken the concept of higher consciousness

in answering these questions, relying on a mechanistic and materialistic model to explain the universe scientifically but not spiritually; a model which has failed because it fails to address our fundamental existential concern: who we really are, deep down inside. What is the nature, the thought, the *feeling* of our being? As we shall now see, the concept of higher consciousness as the underlying reality of the universe is a powerful way of addressing this core need-to-know within us, and of explaining life, the universe and existence.

And as we shall also see, yogic philosophy is universal — or cosmic — in character. It includes key concepts of cosmic oneness (of mind and matter), cosmic connection (an inherent bond between us all that deepens with the experience of higher consciousness), cosmic consciousness (that we are all part of the one universal consciousness), cosmic intention and purpose (universal consciousness as the intention behind the universe), and cosmic manifestation (universe consciousness as the basis of matter, mind and being).

The Cosmic Entity is everything. Everything exists within it, and nothing exists outside it. It is the one infinite, eternal and intransmutable bliss. In fact, there is no “outside” because it is infinite and eternal. There can be no existence separate to infinity. It is the one infinite, eternal and intransmutable bliss.

That singular Cosmic Entity is composed of two parts: Consciousness and Force. They are inseparable, like two sides of the same piece of paper; like milk and its colour; like fire and its capacity to burn; like a seed sprouting into two leaves.

For philosophical purposes, Consciousness is arbitrarily assigned the male gender. He is the nucleus and witnessing entity of the universe. His Force is assigned the female gender. She is the force which – under His direction – transforms part of Him into the universe. She is a blind force and is always under His control. He does not act but allows Her to act (like a father supervising the wedding preparations). He is the witness and the witnessed, and She is the action that links the two. Although a

part of Him is metamorphosed into the universe under Her bondage, He always remains in control. He gives Her permission to transform a part of His infinite cosmic self into the universe. He has the “thought” or “idea”, and She carries it out, just as a lame man might ride on a blind man’s back. A lame man can see but not move, and a blind man can move but not see. Together they can move with the direction of the lame man and the force of the blind man. Similarly, He is the intention and direction of manifestation, and She is the force and energy behind it. Shakti is dancing on the chest of Shiva. He allows Her to dance while He watches Her doing so.

Cosmic Consciousness is the thread with which the entire fabric of existence is woven. Just as the spider’s web comes out of the spider itself, and the spider sits within its web, this universe is a creation of Cosmic Consciousness, and Cosmic Consciousness pervades every particle of His creation.

“There is only the Supreme Brahma and no other entity. He controls this perceptible world through His Prakrti and at the time of universal annihilation, the entire creation merges in Him. He is concealing Himself in His own created universe.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Within Cosmic Consciousness is the Cosmic Mind, just as your own mind exists in and of your own consciousness. The Cosmic Mind is formed from the Cosmic Consciousness in three stages. First, a small portion of Consciousness is transformed into the cosmic sense of existence (feeling of “I am”). Then a small portion of that “I am” feeling, or “I”-feeling, is transformed into the feeling of “I do”. Finally, part of the “I do” feeling is transformed into the feeling of “I have done”. This last state — the “I have done” feeling — contains all the previous states within it (having evolved from and within them) and all three

states together make up the Cosmic Mind, existing within the original Cosmic Consciousness.

The Cosmic Mind then “imagines” the entire universe. The universe and everything in it is thus a giant thought (a thought-projection) of the Cosmic Mind. Just as a magician influences the audience to see what he wants them to see, the Cosmic Magician has created the relative truth of this universe through His thought-projection. The Magician knows all the tricks. He waves His wand and says, “Come delusion, come confusion!” How does this happen? The “I have done” feeling of Cosmic Mind is now further transformed into the fundamental factors of the universe. So the Cosmic Mind comes from the Cosmic Consciousness, and the universe comes from the Cosmic Mind.

The universe is composed of five fundamental factors: the etherial factor (space), aerial factor (gas), luminous factor (heat/light), liquid factor, and solid factor. Each factor is condensed from the subtler factor before it — from the transformation of part of that factor from which it comes — and as a consequence contains the essence of that preceding factor. Hence the aerial factor is condensed from (and contains) the etherial factor, the luminous factor is condensed from the aerial factor, and so on. Each successive factor comes from the transformation of a part of the factor previous to it. For example, clouds of gas (nebulae) form in space, new stars form out of those nebulae, and planets (either gaseous or condensed to land and sea) form from those stars.

You will note that each successive stage is cruder and denser than the one before it, the etherial factor being the subtlest stage of physical manifestation and the solid factor being the crudest and densest stage. All factors exist within the Cosmic Mind from which they came, and the Cosmic Mind in turn is inherent within them all. As the Cosmic Mind also exists within the Cosmic Consciousness, everything exists within Consciousness and Consciousness exists within everything. Each microcosm is reflected in the Macrocosm and the Macrocosm is reflected in

each microcosm. As each microcosmic stage becomes progressively cruder, the dominance of Cosmic Force over Cosmic Consciousness increases, and knowledge of Self (Consciousness) is gradually lost. Macrocosm gradually cedes its dominance to microcosm and eventually one of two things happen:

1. If the fundamental factors within a celestial body are not in the right balance, eventually that celestial body will explode, and all its constituent factors within it will merge back into their respective factors of the universe. For example, the etherial factor will merge back into the surrounding space, the aerial factor into gas, etc. The massive celestial explosions that we know as supernovae are examples of this.

2. If the fundamental factors of a celestial body are in the right balance, and the environment is favourable, some portion of the solid factor gets pulverised subtler than ether, and the “I have done” feeling within it (remember that the fundamental factors originally came from the “I have done” feeling of the Cosmic Mind) manifests as mindstuff, which gives the feeling of “I have done” (or “done-I”) to a new individual mind. Just as sparks can come from two pieces of rock when you dash them together, mindstuff comes from solid factor, and enough sparks of mindstuff together make up unit mind, which then gets attached to an appropriate body and controls the functions of that body. The mind of a creature, its awareness and consciousness, are expressions of the Cosmic Consciousness latent within it. And its vital energy (life force) come from the Cosmic Force also latent within it. Consciousness and Force always go together.

For example, unicellular organisms in almost suspended animation have been found living in the middle of rocks. How did they get there? Part of the rock (in its densest manifestation of solid factor) was metamorphosed into the minds and bodies of those unicellular organisms. This is how life begins in its most primitive form. Microbial life has also been discovered five kilometres below the surface of the Earth, apparently living for

thousands of years and only moving with the movement of tectonic plates. This is another example of how, if the conditions are right, the most primitive forms of life may evolve from seemingly nothing and nowhere.

And because the individual mind originally comes out of the solid factor (from a small part of the Cosmic Mind originally within that factor) it is said that “the microcosm is a miniature of the Macrocosm,” like a holographic image of the original source (holograms can be divided endlessly and still contain every aspect of the original). It can therefore be seen that mind comes from matter, and matter — via the Cosmic Mind — from Consciousness. The universe can be likened to a tree, having grown from its seed, the essence of that seed is in every part of the tree. Its diversity has grown from its essential unity, and the consciousness within each of its parts has come from the original Cosmic Consciousness.

“The universe is conscious due to the consciousness of God.”

Shri Ramakrishna

The whole process of evolution of Cosmic Consciousness into unit consciousness, and then unit consciousness back to Cosmic Consciousness, can be seen as a cycle, and we are now at the end of the first half of the cycle and at the beginning of the second half. The first half is up to the crudest manifestation of matter. You could say that this is the inanimate phase. Now in the second half (the animate phase) we have all the individual unit minds evolving back to their source: the Cosmic Consciousness. In this “returning phase” of the cycle, Consciousness gradually withdraws the power of His Force. Each of the countless unit minds gradually evolves through countless lives in countless different bodies to a more liberated and elevated state of consciousness as the Cosmic Consciousness inherent within

them gradually regains dominance over the power of His Cosmic Force — the Force which He had until now allowed to bind Him. This process can be likened to a cow on a tether being pulled back from the pasture which she has been allowed to graze on. He has allowed Her to bind Him to the ultimate state of crudity, and He now gradually contracts Her power until the individual mind merges back into Him. Consciousness within is striving for liberation.

In this returning phase the individual mind gradually evolves over many different births, in many different bodies (unicellular organisms, multicellular organisms, plants, underdeveloped animals, developing animals, developed animals, humans), just as a driver might own a succession of many different cars. It adopts more complex bodily structures as the mind itself evolves and becomes more complex. Note that there is a clear distinction here between body and mind. The body is the vehicle that the mind adopts according to its degree of evolution and what it wants to express, 'life' being the association of mind with a particular body, and 'death' being the temporary loss of a physical body until a new one is attained by the mind. And 'evolve' here means that the consciousness within a particular mind becomes gradually more and more apparent. As each creature evolves it develops a higher state of mind and consciousness. Dominance of the "I have done" feeling in the minds of less developed creatures is expressed as instinct. In the course of development, the "I do" feeling gradually becomes more dominant and this is expressed as intellect, or ego, in higher animals and in humans. Finally, the unit "I"-feeling (feeling of pure existence) evolves out of the "I do" feeling and this manifests as intuition in more highly developed human beings. In undeveloped creatures, Consciousness is hidden within them, and their sense of awareness is not very strong. They act mostly by instinct (the "I have done" feeling). As the mind develops, that sense of awareness increases as the consciousness within them becomes more expressed and they adopt more complex physical structures

for their expression. Instinct gradually gives way to intellect. For example, a dog has a certain amount of intellect as well as instinct. Other animals with developed intellect include monkeys, parrots and dolphins.

“God sleeps in the rock, dreams in the plant, stirs in the animal and awakens in man.”

Sufi Ibn Al Arabi

“He who has realised God knows that God Himself has become the world and all living beings... I see that it is God Himself who has become everything.”

Shri Ramakrishna

So we may find creatures and plants with only instinct, or with intellect as well, or with all three: instinct, intellect and intuition. In undeveloped beings it is instinct which dominates. In developing beings there is an increase of intellect over instinct. But it is only at the human stage that intellect dominates.

“It is from the formless that the entire relativistic world of form emerges, like waves and currents on and beneath the surface of an ocean, never separate from the ocean itself. This union of form and formlessness is the Ocean of Consciousness, the centre of which is love, the Divine Essence we all share, providing the cosmic context for all beings in the universe, including all of us human beings.”

Paul Hague

In general, human contact is beneficial to animals. It compels them to evolve faster compared with wild animals, which evolve

relatively slowly in comparison. So whether we view our contact with animals as having a positive impact on those animals (for example pets) or a negative impact (for example zoos or farms), that contact is generally beneficial to those animals when considered from the perspective of their overall evolution of mind.

Animals and plants have a predominance of “I have done” feeling, so their actions are mostly instinctual. Humans, on the other hand, have a predominance of “I do” feeling, so our actions are mostly ego-associated. The nature of the ego is “to do”. It always wants to do something; to achieve something. Now, the secret to lasting happiness and contentment is to transform that sense of achievement into one of ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’. That happens in the course of evolution of mind when intuition dominates over intellect and the pure “I am” feeling takes prominence. The individual mind is now returning to the original cosmic feeling of pure existence. As long as one’s sense of achievement is associated with achievement in the worldly sense (of possessions, position, power, etc.) it is bound to be thwarted in one way or another. But once it is associated with the achievement of regaining one’s sense of existence in the cosmic source, then that achievement is profound and long-lasting. There can never be absolute progress in the physical and psychic spheres of existence, only the spiritual sphere.

So at the human stage our consciousness is much more expressed and we have a clearer awareness of our individual existence as well as of the world in general. We still operate on the level of basic animal instincts for our most fundamental survival needs, but we live mostly in our “heads”, through the expression of intellect. That’s what it means to be human — intellect dominates over instinct. And we also have intuition, which gives us a deeper conscience and the capacity for in-depth knowledge and creative insight. With more development of intuition the mind starts to question the nature of its own existence and the spiritual quest begins. It is only due to the

relative freedom of Consciousness within a person's mind that he or she is able to ask the question, "Who am I?" Attraction towards the Cosmic Consciousness accelerates as the mind expands and becomes more subtle. This attraction is called devotion. Devotion is love for the Infinite. It is said that when devotion is attained everything is attained, because it leads to the feeling of absorption in — of oneness with — the Infinite Consciousness, and hence to the fulfilment of our deepest desire for peace and bliss. It is not possible to come even close to describing this state, let alone thinking about it, because it's beyond the mind. Because one's mind exists in and of Consciousness, we cannot think of it simply because it's not possible to think of anything beyond the boundary of one's own mind. We can only experience it when it eventually comes. With more and more spiritual attraction, evolution of mind accelerates until at a very advanced stage of human evolution the mind becomes so aware of its own existence as one with the universal existence that it loses its individual awareness and merges back into the original state of full cosmic awareness, realising its own consciousness as the Cosmic Consciousness; its own self as the Cosmic Self.

"It is the Godhead who has become the knower and the known, in order to enjoy His own bliss."

Shri Ramakrishna

The whole process is a cycle from Cosmic Consciousness, to Cosmic Mind, to matter, to individual mind (undeveloped, developed, human), to Cosmic Consciousness again. This is called the Cosmic Cycle, or Cycle of Creation. It is a cycle because the finishing point is the same as the starting point — the point of pure cosmic awareness.

Note that the cycle doesn't happen all at once for all minds. It is a perpetual flow, a continual process of transformation, with

different parts of existence concurrently at different stages of development. This explains why there are so many different creatures with so many different minds at different stages of evolutionary development. It also explains why scientists have discovered new stars within old galaxies — new matter is formed from the Cosmic Mind, becoming space, then stars and planets, while old matter gets transformed into new individual minds. So the whole universe exists within the infinite Cosmic Entity in a never-ending flow. All its diversities are the transitory transformations of part of Cosmic Consciousness in a continual process, with different parts of existence at different stages at any one time. This implies that life and the universe will never end, but that parts of it are continuously being created from Consciousness and concurrently merging back into Him. An apt analogy would be water evaporating from the sea into clouds, the clouds raining onto the land and forming rivers, and the rivers running in progressive stages back to the sea. We have all come from that original Consciousness, we are all existing of and within it, and we are all returning back to that original state of Consciousness. In the process, we are discovering our true nature; our true selves. When the river returns to the sea it becomes one with the sea. When the darkness is removed, one realises that one was always free and blissful because He is always free and blissful. The destination is one and we are all on a journey to that one state of eternal bliss. Spiritual practice and experience, therefore, is the process of transcending the mind into the Consciousness within which it exists: the Cosmic Consciousness. It is this transcendence of the “I-feeling” that results in the supreme experience of the Absolute.

“This universe has emanated from the Supreme Bliss, it is being sustained in Bliss, and it will finally dissolve in Bliss.”

Eventually we will realise our own consciousness as the essence of — as one with — the Infinite Consciousness of the universe; the Universal Consciousness; and then we will have attained our goal of eternal oneness, the essence of which is infinite happiness; perfect peace and contentment; bliss. This is inevitable for each and every one of us. Only then will we see beyond the illusion of the thought-projection of the Cosmic Magician. If you get close to Him you will know all the secrets of the universe. Just as one may find the secret behind the magic from the magician, the secret of the garden from the gardener, or the secret of the recipe from the cook, similarly, one may know the secrets of this world by knowing God.

“If the doors of perception were cleansed, man would see things as they really are — infinite.”

William Blake

Chapter Five

Life, Death and Karma

One day when I was eight years old I was sitting in the garden looking at a tree and the question, “Why is that tree existing instead of not existing?” entered my mind. Somehow, by pondering that question, I was able to transcend the intellect for a split second and get a glimpse into the mystery of immortality and the secrets of the universe. I can’t remember exactly what I experienced, because it transcended thought, but I do remember that it was very profound.

A similar question would have been why is the tree a tree and not anything else? Why are we who we are and not anyone or anything else. Have you ever wondered why everyone is so different? Why are we born with different bodies, personalities, fates and fortunes? Why and how is there so much diversity of life in the universe? Is life a giant lottery, where we are who we are just by chance? When you look at the degree of order and system in the universe, right down to the degree of organisation in a tiny cell, it just doesn’t make sense that something like the birth of all its creatures would be random.

According to yogic philosophy, the answer is very simple. The only rational explanation for the diversity of life in the universe is that each life is part of a continuum. Who we are right now is a snapshot in the continuum of our evolution that spans lifetimes. In other words, our overall evolution spans many different lives in many different bodies, and when we are finished

using one body we are born into another. You may have noticed that old people become childlike as they age. Then they die and become children again. So there is a smooth and seamless continuum from old age to childhood again.

Our current lives are part of a continuum in our evolutionary journey. Evolution not as a species, but evolution as individuals. The species we are born into is that which is optimal to our individual progress. Evolution of mind over a span of numerous lives forms a continuum which gradually leads to transcendence of mind. People are who they are because of their minds carried over from previous births, not because of the genetics of the family they are born into. Genetics is the superficial explanation of the process, not the deeper one. The genetics, or evolution of the species, is merely the physical medium for the evolution of each individual mind of that species; the vehicle for the expression of mind and hence manifestation of body in a particular environment at a particular time. The body, family and environment a person is born into is the body, family and environment that is most appropriate to the evolution of the individual's mind at that point in time.

Just as a driver requires a car to drive somewhere, the mind requires a brain to function. The brain is the vehicle of the mind. Throughout our evolutionary journey, we use different bodies and brains according to our stage of development, just like a child might start driving in a toy car, then graduate to a real car, then a racing car.

Life is parallelism between mind and body — where the psychic vibration of the mind is in synch with the physical vibration of the body, the wavelengths flowing in harmony with each other. Death is loss of that body-mind parallelism, where the wavelength of the body becomes unsuitable for the mind — the psychic vibration falls out of synch with the physical vibration, or vice versa, and the mind leaves the body. For example, a mind may become either too developed or too degenerated for its body and therefore the synchronicity between

body and mind is lost and the person dies. Or the body may lose parallelism with the mind due to illness or injury. Again, the synchronicity between the two is lost and the individual dies.

It is natural that we are apprehensive about death. It is the unknown and we have been indoctrinated with so many false and misleading ideas about it. But if we can see our current life as just one in the continuum of our greater evolution — a transmigration of mind through different bodies — then it can help to put our lives into perspective so that we are not so apprehensive about the things that happen to us in this life or the inevitable “death” that awaits us. In reality there is nothing to fear. No one can kill you. Your existence is eternal. You are on a journey of expansion of mind through different bodies and lives until you come to the realisation of yourself as the infinite consciousness of the universe, as the Greater Self, the Cosmic Consciousness.

Whereas death is the loss of mind-body parallelism, rebirth is the establishing of a new mind-body parallelism — a reconnection of mind to a new body which is most appropriate to what it wants to express. So we attain a body and family and surroundings that are optimal to our evolution, based on what our mind wants to express. And when it is time to leave that body the mind dissociates from it and finds a new one with which to continue its journey. There is a vibrational attraction between each mind and body. Their connection is naturally facilitated by the similarity in their vibrations. It's similar to the force of gravity or magnetism. Death is like changing your clothes, or trading in an old car for a new one. And then the mind is attracted to a new body most appropriate to its expression. It may happen immediately or it may take some time, but eventually each bodiless mind will be reborn into a new body by virtue of the similarity of their entitative vibrations, just as a piece of iron is attracted to a magnet.

If we return briefly to the analogy of the two babies in their mother's womb, the first one asked the second:

“Do you believe in life after delivery?” The other replied, “Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later.”

“Nonsense” said the first. “There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?”

The second said, “I don’t know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can’t understand now.”

The first replied, “That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need.”

The second insisted, “Well, I think there is something and maybe it’s different than it is here. Maybe we won’t need this physical cord anymore.”

The first replied, “Nonsense. And moreover if there is life, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere.”

According to the past life and reincarnation research of Ian Stevenson and his successor Jim Tucker of the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia, some children have been found to remember their past lives as well as display birthmarks which correspond to those memories. For example, a young boy with a large birthmark on his skull was able to identify and expose the man who had killed him with an axe-blow to the head in his previous life. It has been found that children may remember their past lives up to the age of five years of age, as evidenced by the phenomena of young children talking to “imaginary friends.” Beyond this age, however, they must lose these memories otherwise they would clash with the thoughts and memories of their current life as their ego develops.

Now, according to yogic philosophy, the attainment of a body suitable for one’s expression of mind is dependent on one’s collection of potential reactions of mind, or karma. Actually,

karma is not exactly the right term, but let us use it because we know it.

Let us use the analogy of a rubber ball. If you poke your finger into a rubber ball then an impression is made in the ball, and that impression has a potential reaction inherent in it. It is waiting to come out so that the ball can regain its original shape. First there is the action of pressing into the ball, then there is the potential reaction (the impression in the ball that stays there for some time), and finally there is the reaction as the dent comes out and the ball regains its original shape.

Just like the example of the ball, whenever we think or do something consciously — with intention — then we get the “karma” of that thought or action — a potential reaction forms in our mind which must some day be expressed as a reaction in the form of something that happens to us as a result of that original thought and action.

This is a subtler version of Newton’s physical law of action and reaction, “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” It operates on the mental level instead of the physical. Whatever has affected us mentally (made an impression in our mind) we store in the mind until it can be expressed as a reaction.

Buddha expressed this truth as, “To the slayer, comes a slayer. To a conquerer, comes a conquerer. A plunderer is plundered in turn.” Jesus said, “You reap what you sow.” A more contemporary version is, “What goes around comes around.” What you wish upon others you ultimately wish upon yourself.

What makes us individuals — each with our individual personalities, our likes and dislikes, our convictions and beliefs — is defined by our karma, the sum of all our individual karma being our “basket of karma” — our personality.

Once, the spiritual master Shrii Shrii Anandamurti removed the individual karma from two of his disciples and their automatic and irresistible response was to embrace each other tightly and try to become one because they did not perceive any difference between themselves. It was only when the master

reinstated their individual karma that they (rather embarrassedly) broke their embrace.

The mind gets whatever body is best for what it wants to express. The more developed the mind, the more developed the body. For example, a cat or a dog can sit around doing nothing because it doesn't mind doing nothing. If it wanted to do what a human being does it would be reborn in a human body. The mind of an ant is very limited in its awareness and hence its expression, whereas the mind of a human is much more expanded in consciousness and expression.

There is a parable of a yogi who had a vision that he was going to be reborn as a pig. This did not appeal to his sensibility, so he told his fellow disciples that if, in his next life, they recognised him as a pig then they should kill it. His vision came to pass and when his fellow disciples went to kill the pig it resisted, saying, "No, stop, I like it like this!" There is a reason behind everything that happens, including who and what we are born into.

This universe is an intricate web of vibrations. Everything is interconnected, interwoven in one vast universal tapestry. Whatever happens is the effect of something, and the cause of something else. "When a blade of grass moves, the whole universe quivers." Everything is incidental; nothing is accidental. We usually refer to something as an "accident" because we can't see what caused it, but certainly it was caused by something. Our present is the result of our past, and the choices we make in the present will shape our future.

If we experience a bad reaction, we tend to say that something bad happened. But it was only the reaction of a previous action, because everything is stored in the mind waiting for the chance to express itself. The more chances of expression, the more expression, the more pure the mind will become, and the more free and at ease we will feel.

What this means is that if something perceivably negative happens, it was meant to happen and we should welcome both positive and negative events in our lives. In the West people have

been conditioned to think that if something unpleasant or painful happens to them then it wasn't meant to happen at all. Their perspective is "I don't deserve this." But we should take everything that happens to us as a positive because it means that we have had the opportunity to lessen the burden of our karma. The concept of suffering is very much misunderstood if people believe that they only have one life. But from the yogic perspective suffering is positive. It means that you are working through your issues (past karma) and that you don't have to go there again: you've already gone through it. Of course, that does not mean that we should go looking for trouble, or accept our situation in life as fate without trying to better it. It simply means that whatever does happen to us we should see in a positive light in the overall scheme of things.

"When it comes to karma, the number one thing I would like to say is that you can go through life being a victor or a victim. You're going to have to face your karma. You can go through life with a 'poor me' attitude — 'Why me? Why this?' — or you can go through it saying, 'I'm going to honour my life. I'm going to honour my karma. I'm going to come through this. I'm going to be stronger, I'm going to be wiser, I'm going to help spread what I learned from this situation to other people.'"

Damien Echols

Eben Alexander, the brain surgeon who's near-death experience transformed the way he saw life and the world, says that knowing death is only ever temporary has helped him understand how a loving God can permit so many "tragedies and hardships and hurdles in the physical realm... I came to see all of those hardships as gifts... as beautiful opportunities for growth."

We are all on a path from limitedness to limitlessness; from

bondage to freedom; from humanity to divinity. And this is the process of getting there. Nothing that happens to us is in vain. It all contributes to the development of our purity of being and our eventual emancipation.

“What we are now is the result of whatever we have done or thought in the past; and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we do or think now.”

Swami Vivekananda

Therefore it would make sense to try to do the right thing at every moment of our lives, because if you do good you get good. Doing the right thing leads to a good life and a good death: a sweet life and a sweet death; to know the satisfaction of having fought the good fight, of having done the right thing, regardless of what the outcome turned out to be.

In *Ananda Sutram*, Shrii Shrii Anandamurti has stated:

“The requital of an action is guided by the divine longing for welfare.”

This explains why bad things happen to good people; why otherwise good people find themselves in bad — sometimes terrible — situations. Without a wider perspective the saying, “No good deed goes unpunished” may appear to be true under such circumstances. But it is not one’s good deeds that are punished, rather it is one’s bad deeds. With the wider perspective of working through one’s karma over as many lives as it takes, and learning over time (and lives) that doing good really does bring good in the long run, one can see that everything really does happen for the best. In the end, no desire goes unfulfilled; no longing goes unsatiated; no crime goes unpunished. Each and every action of each and every being in the universe must be

answered for. It is the universal law; the law of the universe. If you have the least desire to be with a lost loved one, you will be in the future in some form or another. If you think you have escaped the consequences of a transgression or misdemeanour, it will catch up with you some time, if not now then in the future. The scales will be balanced in the end. Your life is in the process of coming out even. The slate will be wiped clean for everyone. Cosmic justice ultimately prevails. You get what you give. There is a reaction to whatever you do which you will have to experience sooner or later. Therefore always try to do the right thing and your life will eventually turn out for the better. Whenever you find yourself in difficulty, it pays to reflect on this universal law and make changes in your life so that you do not end up in the same situation again. Life is a continual process of adjustment and readjustment as you move towards deeper and deeper inner peace and contentment.

“The world looks like a mathematical equation, which, turn it how you will, balances itself. Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty.”

Waldo Emerson

I used to frequent a certain cemetery for its peace, tranquility and beautiful environment. My favourite spot in that cemetery was the area surrounding the grave of a young girl who had died of cancer. Her mother had decorated her grave and the trees around it with a care and obsession which revealed to anyone witnessing that beautiful scene that she could not let go of her daughter's untimely death. I visited this grave frequently until, a year or two later, found that the mother herself had also died of cancer and had been buried with her daughter. I couldn't help feeling that, due to her intense grief and longing, there was a good chance they will be together in the next life, perhaps as

siblings, perhaps as friends, perhaps some other kind of relationship, but together nonetheless.

If you feel you're not getting a break, if you feel the weight of your problems weighing you down, see it as a positive. Your ego — that which is standing in the way between you and Divine Bliss — is being worn down by your troubles. Sooner or later your burden will be lightened.

In one parable, Lord Krishna stepped on a frog and the frog did not croak. Afterwards another frog asked his friend, "Why did you not croak?" The wise frog replied, "If I was in the jaws of a snake I would croak. But if Krishna is standing on me then I keep silent."

I remind you of the Kahlil Gibran quote I mentioned in the first chapter: "Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding."

If we can keep our difficulties in perspective in relation to the bigger scheme of things, it gives us strength and inspiration to move on. We can take heart in the fact that the difficulties we are having are helping us work through our karma, purifying our minds and opening our hearts to the Divine.

And if we really want to optimise the process, there are two practices in particular which we can proactively do to exhaust our karmic reactions: meditation and social service.

We will talk about meditation in more depth soon. Suffice to say here that the process of meditation is instrumental in freeing us from our karmic debts because it brings our past karma to the surface of our minds — matures it, if you will, like the ageing of cheese or wine — so that it can easily be expressed through our actions.

And the best actions for it to be expressed through are those performed selflessly in trying to help others in need. In other words, selfless service. The key here is helping others in need by giving of oneself without expecting anything in return. You may have noticed that whenever you do a good deed for others you feel good about yourself and what you are doing; you get a warm

feeling in your heart. This is part of the process of exhausting your karma, particularly bad karma, or negative potential reactions. The service you give to others, even if you are inconvenienced by it or suffer for it, is ultimately most beneficial to you, the one who gives it, because you are exhausting your karma in doing it, and you feel good about doing it too. The more you help others the more you shine with the resplendence of selflessness, internally and externally. The plough that works is always shiny.

Note here that the aim is not to have only good karma, but no karma at all. Whether chains are made of iron or gold, they still bind. A gilded cage is still a cage. We are still bound by the good results of our good actions, no matter how pleasurable they may be.

And then there is the flip side to this process: the way to avoid creating new karma. This can be accomplished by transforming one's own sense of doership (and hence self) into that of the Divine Self through cultivating the feeling that you are not the one performing actions, that rather it is the Divine acting through you. It is the process of letting go of the desire for the results of your actions and surrendering those actions to the Divine.

This is one of the main teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

“You have the right to the action but not to the fruits of the action. You must not do actions that will bind you, but you must not be averse to action either.”

One morning, after I had read these wise words, I went to the supermarket to get some pomegranates, which I knew were in season at the time. When I got there I found that they did not have any, but one of the store assistants told me that if I went down the road I would find a tree that was full of them and that they were available to anyone who wanted to pick them. I found the tree and picked a bag-full, only to have someone come out as

soon as I had finished and tell me that the tree was the property of the adjacent apartment block and that I must surrender the fruits to him. I did so reluctantly, feeling disappointed that I had lost all those delicious pomegranates. But as I was walking down the street I remembered the quote: “You have the right to the action but not to the fruits of the action.” My disappointment immediately turned to inspiration that I had been given such a literal example of that wonderful teaching. It certainly seemed like yet another case of divine intervention in the form of a very timely lesson in my life.

Through cultivating the feeling that we are not the one performing actions, and surrendering the results of those actions, we can not only avoid creating new karma, but we can act in a better way — we work better — because our mind is focused on the job rather than the result. And because there is no expectation for the result of our actions there can be no disappointment. If there is expectation of result then disappointment is inevitable because nothing really ever lives up to our expectation. Rather, if you work with cosmic ideation then your mindset will become gradually more spiritual and regardless of the result you will be happy and content. Happiness is in the journey as well as the destination.

An added advantage of this is that you make yourself available to the cosmic grace working through you. Cosmic ideation will facilitate cosmic intention working through you to do good work in the world. Because, after all, as we saw in the last chapter, everybody and everything, including ourselves, is an expression of divine manifestation. People, places, things and actions are all expressions of the Cosmic Consciousness within us all. That Cosmic Consciousness is always with you and it is that Cosmic Consciousness which is ultimately doing everything. In the *Mahabharata* it is said, “Krishna is killing and Krishna is being killed.” He is working through you and the result is in His hands.

Both these sides of the process (the exhaustion of karma and the prevention of new karma) are like a machine. The more you

hone the efficiency of each component — the more you get them working together — the more the process will run like a well-oiled machine and the greater will be your progress towards an uncluttered, pure and blissful mind and hence state of being. The exhaustion of karma is like bailing water out of a boat, and the prevention of new karma is like plugging up the hole in the bottom of the boat so that no more water can come into the boat. Through meditation old karma matures so it can be expressed, and through right action with the right ideation new karma is prevented from being created.

We are all carrying around emotional baggage and are all in some way or another in the process of letting it go. I used to frequent a beach which was strewn with many beautiful stones, each one sculpted by sea and sand into almost perfectly round circles. I used to like collecting these stones. Once when I had collected a whole pile of them I thought to myself, “You have become attached to these stones. Drop them and break your attachment.” I dropped them and instantly felt lighter, not just physically but mentally too. Drop the heavy load that you are carrying. Leave your baggage behind.

Once in Venice, Italy, I bought a slice of pizza and was sitting in the main square eating it when a bird swooped down and literally snatched it out of my hands. I could do nothing but watch helplessly as it flew away with it. But then — as with the pomegranates — I got another beautiful lesson in letting things go. As I watched the bird fly away I saw many other birds chase it. They gathered from far and wide and very soon there was a whole flock of them chasing it through the sky, harassing it so much that eventually it had to drop the pizza to get any peace. As it turns out, you can't get peace from a piece of pizza!

There is a story that a yogi was invited to stay at the palace of King Janak. During his stay the palace caught on fire and he panicked because he was worried that his robe he had left out to dry might get burnt. As he rushed out to save it, he saw the king sitting calmly watching the fire as everyone scurried around

trying to put it out. The yogi realised that this was a great lesson in detachment.

“Detachment is not that you should own nothing, but that nothing should own you.”

Ali ibn Abi Talib

For some years after I left my home town I used to dream about it on occasion. I would dream that I was walking through its streets, experiencing its sights and sounds, every time thinking “I’m back now” before waking up and realising that I wasn’t back after all. I obviously had an attachment to the place. Then some years later I did in fact return and as I was walking through the streets — this time for real — I said to myself, “This time I’m really back!” But it wasn’t the great reunion I had imagined in my dreams. All those years I had been glorifying it in my mind, imagining that it was bigger and better than it really was. But the reality was far from the dream and I never dreamt about it again.

One day Swami Rama asked his master what attachment is. The master told him that he would show him later. The next day they were walking through a forest when suddenly the master embraced a tree and shouted, “Help! This tree has caught me!” Swami Rama replied, “Master, what are you saying? The tree has not caught you. You have caught it!” The master replied, “Yes, that’s the nature of attachment.”

We are clinging to the world with our minds, like characters in a drama, absorbed in our different parts. We do not see it as a drama. All we know is the part we are playing. If we can see that we are only playing a part in the cosmic drama then we would not be so attached to the part. For a person not consciously working on themselves spiritually, the wheel of birth and death revolves seemingly endlessly as karma is continually renewed even as old karma is exhausted. But for those of us who are conscious of our karma and the way in which our actions affect

us in the deepest sense, we are able to work through our karma, lessen our attachment to the world, purify our minds, elevate our existence, and eventually attain complete identity with the Infinite Consciousness and hence our deepest desire — inner peace, infinite happiness, bliss.

“Whatever you speak or do, forget Him never. Keeping His name in your heart, work, remembering it is for Him, and endlessly active, drift in bliss.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

As we saw in the last chapter, we continue to be reborn in different bodies until we come to the realisation of ourselves as the Greater Self — the Cosmic Being. Eventually we will realise our own consciousness as the essence of — as one with — the Cosmic Consciousness; the Universal Consciousness; and then we will have attained our goal of eternal oneness, the essence of which is bliss — infinite happiness; perfect peace and contentment.

“Having attained liberty of spirit, so precious and so greatly desired by all, [the soul] went forth from low things to high; from terrestrial it became celestial; from human, Divine.”

St John of the Cross

This is inevitable for each and every one of us. Our future is entirely positive and there is every reason to be hopeful and optimistic. I quote George Orwell in saying, “The major problem of our time is the decay of belief in personal immortality.” But rest assured that the destination is one and we are all on a journey to that blissful state of eternal oneness.

“A soul makes room for God by wiping away all the smudges and smears of creatures, by uniting its will perfectly to God’s... When this is done the soul will be illumined by and transformed in God. And God will so communicate his supernatural being to the soul that it will appear to be God himself and will possess what God himself possesses.”

St John of the Cross

Say you are walking along a path and you know you must stay on the path and keep walking so that you reach your home by sunset. But then you see some beautiful flowers by the wayside and detour to look at them; to smell them and appreciate their beauty. Meanwhile you don’t notice the time slipping by and have to make your way back to the path in fear of the darkness all around you, and when you finally get back to the path you have to contend with so many other dangers of the night as you make your way home. To err is human, and we all have to undergo the consequences of our mistakes once we have made them. But those consequences are part of the divine plan to get us back to our divine shelter. All the tragedies and so-called miscarriages of justice in the world are guided by the divine wish of welfare for us all; the divine will that guides the entire universe.

One of my favourite movie lines is the last line of *The Martian*: “If you solve enough problems you get to come home.”

“The equilibrating law of karma is that of action and reaction, cause and effect, sowing and reaping. In the course of natural righteousness, each man, by his thoughts and actions, becomes the moulder of his destiny. Whatever universal energies he himself, wisely or unwisely, has set in motion must return to him as their starting point, like a circle inexorably

completing itself... An understanding of karma as the law of justice underlying life's inequalities serves to free the human mind from resentment against God and man."

Waldo Emerson

Chapter Six

The Conscious Worldview and Modern Science

In the last two chapters we saw how the conscious worldview of yogic philosophy can give us answers to questions that may not otherwise be answered rationally by the materialist worldview of modern science.

According to biologist Rupert Sheldrake, “Modern science is based on the principal, ‘Give us one free miracle and we’ll explain the rest.’ And the one free miracle is the appearance of all the matter and energy of the universe, and all the laws that govern it, from nothing in a single instant.”

If modern science dismisses the existence of a higher consciousness on the basis that it can’t be proven, that is a dogma. We’ve lived with dogmas before, of course, including scientific ones. For example, the ‘flat Earth’ theory, then the theory that the Earth is the centre of the universe, and now materialism and the ‘big bang’ theory. Scientific dogmas such as materialism and the ‘big bang’ are our current flat-earth theories. These dogmas are no better than the religious dogmas of the past, and we will have to overcome them before we can take science and our understanding of existence and the universe to the next level. Just like a frog in a well is oblivious to the rest of the world, it’s natural to be sceptical about something we can’t perceive. But that does not mean we should reject outright the possibility of a

greater reality. The concept of a higher consciousness is potentially no less valid than scientific constructs of a completely material reality. The essence of the universe as consciousness is just as valid a premise as the essence of the universe as matter. The only difference is that one can be perceived by the senses and scientific instruments and the other can't. And unlike the materialist assumption of annihilation after death, a conscious worldview engenders positivity, optimism and a joyful way of living rather than the cynicism, pessimism and joylessness of assuming the eventual annihilation of one's being. God-loving people — people who live in the belief of higher consciousness — can be the happiest people.

Baroness Susan Greenfield, a neuroscientist at Oxford University, rejects "scientism" which she describes as "this unshakeable belief, which is as strong as any religious belief, that science is the only approach to understanding the world around you." She recognises that people can have an experience "that is above and beyond the material."

The 'big bang' dogma came about because of the observation that the universe is expanding. And automatically the intellectual mind thinks that it must have expanded from one beginning point. But the "beginning" is a childlike concept, just like a child draws a blue line at the top of a page to represent the sky. To say that there was a beginning to the universe is like saying that there is a beginning to the sky. What is more likely is that the universe is pulsating — that we are living in the middle of an expanding phase of an unimaginably vast and eternally pulsating universe. The universe is vast and therefore its timescale is also vast. Something like 20 billion years of expansion before a contraction is entirely feasible if one is prepared to consider the possibilities.

"Nothing in our understanding of physics could account for why everything, gathered to a point, would suddenly and dramatically begin to expand."

Astronomer Fred Hoyle

Who is to say that the universe has not existed forever as an eternal expression of infinite consciousness? It may be a difficult concept for the intellect to grasp, but if we are going to understand the subtler aspects of existence and the universe we will need to refine our thinking and expand our perspective, just as we refined our thinking and expanded our perspective to overcome the dogmas of the past. We've done it before so we can do it again. In fact, we are right now in the middle of a shift in human consciousness on this planet, and a shift in understanding too. And that shift in consciousness and understanding is taking us to a more conscious paradigm of science that will be more intuitive and less intellectual; from materialist science which demands objective proof to a more expanded and enlightened science which is open to subjective proof for phenomena that may not be objectively provable. The science of the future will have two laboratories: the external laboratory and the laboratory of the intuitive mind. The idea of a universe bound by time is the result of science bound by intellectuality. The more we are able to expand our conception beyond the realm of the intellect and into the realm of intuition, the more we will be able to conceive of phenomena beyond the bounds of time and space, including consciousness. Just as humanity is at a crossroads, science is also at a crossroads. We are right now in the middle of a great paradigm shift, crossing into a more enlightened world; a world of intellectual liberation; of spiritual emancipation; of physical, mental and spiritual fulfilment. Meanwhile, we must continue questioning existing theories that limit us to the outmoded paradigms of the past.

On accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the Dalai Lama said: "Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things."

There is no reason why science and spirituality cannot agree with each other. They are not mutually exclusive. We just have to recognise and accept that there are currently some big questions that cannot be proven by science; that science is not all-powerful in explaining the universe and existence; that it has, like any field of knowledge, its limitations.

“Despite the towering intellectual and technological achievements of twentieth-century science, its spell over us has been irreversibly weakened. There are at least two important reasons for this. First, scientist and layman alike have become aware of the limits and shortcomings of scientific knowledge. Second, we realise that our perpetual hunger for spiritual understanding is real and undeniable. It can neither be defined away by subtle logic, nor be satisfied by viewing the universe as sterile, mechanistic, and accidental.”

Roger S. Jones

Modern science tells us that we need objective proof for everything, including consciousness, but there is a limit to which the burden of proof is sensible. Really speaking, we should not need objective proof of consciousness because it is an undeniable subjective reality for each and every one of us. Consciousness is quite clearly core and integral to all people, and animals and plants too if one really thinks about it deeply enough. We realise it more the more expanded our own consciousness becomes.

“Our culture makes a huge leap of faith in believing that there is something outside consciousness... what we call matter. Moreover, we believe that our own mind is derived from matter. In other words, we believe that the only thing that is ever experienced is derived from the only thing that is never experienced. The belief in a world made of matter outside consciousness is just a belief. It is a conditioning. It's like thinking the Earth is flat or the Sun goes round the Earth. It's just a way of thinking that we have all as a society bought into as the

most plausible reason for our experience of a shared world.”

Rupert Spira

Modern science is now coming to the same conclusions held by yogic science for millennia; to an explanation of the universe that can take our understanding to a whole new level. And that is that both the substance of the universe and the consciousness of its beings come from a deeper reality than the material one we normally perceive with our minds and senses. Science, if not bound and burdened by dogmas, can converge with spirituality in validating a conscious worldview, or at the very least not discounting it outright.

The physicist James Jeans wrote, “The stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears to be an accidental intruder into the realm of matter... we ought rather hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.”

Just as modern science relies on the free miracle of “the appearance of all the matter and energy of the universe, and all the laws that govern it, from nothing in a single instant” (in the form of the ‘big bang’), it has also invented such concepts as ‘dark matter’ and ‘dark energy’ to try and explain why calculations show that all the matter in the universe is just a small portion of the universe — that there is a huge gap in the calculated mass of the universe (based on the assumption that it’s either matter or empty space) and its actual mass.

We are used to thinking of matter as being full and space as being empty. For example, the space between planets and stars and galaxies. It’s a very mechanistic, all-or-nothing, view. But even matter would seem to be largely empty on closer analysis. What about the space between molecules and atoms, or even within an atom? If the nucleus of an atom were taken to be the

size of an orange, then its electrons would be specs of dust orbiting it a couple of hundred metres away. That's a lot of wasted space, even in matter. So even solid matter is not as dense as we perceive it to be. Our perception is just that: a perceived estimate of the reality. And it could well be that all the empty "space" in the universe, which according to the yogic philosophy explained in Chapter Four is actually the ethereal factor derived from consciousness, makes up for the discrepancy in mass that current science is explaining away as dark matter and energy. The possibilities are endless. We just have to open our minds to them.

Max Planck, the father of quantum theory, wrote:

"As a man who has devoted his whole life to the most clear-headed science, to the study of matter, I can tell you as a result of my research about atoms this much: There is no matter as such. All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particle of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together. We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind... the matrix of all matter."

...and that...

"I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness."

Other minds greater than the minds of our current materialist scientists and philosophers have weighed in on this view:

“Consciousness cannot be accounted for in physical terms. For consciousness is absolutely fundamental. It cannot be accounted for in terms of anything else.”

Erwin Schrödinger

“I see a pattern, but my imagination cannot picture the maker of that pattern. I see a clock, but I cannot envision the clockmaker. The human mind is unable to conceive of the four dimensions, so how can it conceive of God, before whom a thousand years and a thousand dimensions are as one?”

Albert Einstein

“If one proceeds directly and straightforwardly in this matter, without being deflected by a fear of incurring the wrath of scientific opinion, one arrives at the conclusion that biomaterials with their amazing measure of order must be the outcome of intelligent design... The notion that not only the biopolymer but the operating program of a living cell could be arrived at by chance in a primordial organic soup here on the Earth is evidently nonsense of a high order.”

Fred Hoyle

Hoyle compared the random emergence of even the simplest cell to the likelihood that “a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein.”

“Consciousness naturally resists anything unconscious and unknown... (we) erect

psychological barriers to protect ourselves from the shock of facing anything new."

Carl Jung

Similarly, it is most unlikely that we are here by chance and that there is nothing beyond death. There is strong evidence against this from past life studies where, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, children up to the age of about five remember past lives, often citing details that are then verified by revisiting people and places they referred to; people and places they would otherwise have had no way of knowing about. Thousands of these cases meticulously documented by the late psychologist Ian Stevenson and his successor Jim Tucker indicate that we have memories that cannot be solely stored in our brain; that they are part of a wider conscious experience spanning many lives; that consciousness transcends bodies and lives.

Many of these cases of "children who remembered previous lives" are backed up by reports of them also having "physical anomalies that matched those previous lives, details that could in some cases be confirmed by the dead person's autopsy record and photos." (*Scientific American*, November, 2013)

The physicist Doris Kuhlmann-Wilsdorf surmised that Ian Stevenson's work had established that "the statistical probability that reincarnation does in fact occur is so overwhelming... that cumulatively the evidence is not inferior to that for most if not all branches of science."

I once knew a family who told me that their three-year-old daughter had so many of the characteristics of her recently deceased grandmother (who had died about a year before she was born) that they were convinced the grandmother had been reborn as the granddaughter. The grandmother had been a hairdresser, and among other points of similarity the granddaughter was often overheard telling her friends at kindergarten, "I never have a bad hair day." She was also fond of telling her father, "You'll always be my little boy."

This points to a logical explanation (as opposed to a lottery draw) for the diversity of life on our planet and throughout the universe: that each and every mind represents an evolving state of consciousness on a continuum of evolution; all at different stages; each adopting the most appropriate body to facilitate its expression and evolution.

The materialist notion that our minds and consciousness are only the product of the nerve impulses of our brains is also refuted by the thousands of documented near-death experiences, often described by survivors in such terms as “infinite love... pure being/awareness... endless ocean of light, love and blessedness... overarching consciousness... boundless freedom... infinite expanse... all-encompassing sense of being... peace... lightness... like coming home... bathing in pure bliss.”

One such experience is that of Eben Alexander, a brain surgeon and neuroscientist who had, like so many of his colleagues, bought into the idea that the brain creates its own consciousness. Then, quite ironically, he contracted a brain infection that put him in a coma for a week, during which he experienced a heightened and enlightened state of consciousness despite the fact that he was clinically braindead at the time — there was practically no electrical activity coming from his brain. He said, “During my seven days of coma I not only remained fully conscious but journeyed to a stunning world of beauty and peace and unconditional love... in spite of the complete absence of neural activity in all but the deepest, most primitive portions of my brain, my identity — my sense of self — did not go dark. Instead, I underwent the most staggering experience of my life, my consciousness traveling to another level.”

These experiences are strong evidence that consciousness is not created by the nerve connections of the brain, and that ideas like eventually being able to construct robots and other forms of artificial intelligence with their own independent consciousness are little more than sci-fi fantasy. Unless, of course, the neural networking of such robots gets so complex that they could accommodate bodiless minds getting “born” into them. Whether

or not that could happen remains to be seen, but if so the consciousness of the resulting robot would not be produced by its neural network any more than it is in living beings.

Identical twins are yet further evidence that the brain does not create the mind. If this were so, the identical genetic information would produce the same mind and personality for each twin. But this is clearly not the case. Anyone who has known identical twins will know that, although some twins are relatively “identical,” many others have very different personalities, and may even grow to look quite different.

The spiritual master Shrii Shrii Anandamurti said “science is indispensable for human progress” and that, “we should probe for solutions to problems through the proper cultivation of science... No matter how complicated problems are, we have to evolve the necessary scientific means to meet the challenge.”

Having personally practiced the intuitive science of meditation for over 30 years now, I am convinced that the matter of the universe must have come from something greater than itself, and that our own consciousness cannot merely be the product of the physical synapses of our brains, but is an integral part of a greater consciousness which encompasses the entirety of existence. That this greater consciousness is inherent in, controls and is the essence of each and every particle of this entire universe. I believe the way of the future is one of openminded scientific inquiry working in close harmony with intuitive spiritual practice. The two — science and spirituality — can and should go hand in hand. Material science has given us many scientific and technological breakthroughs. Now, if we are to continue the evolution of human endeavour into more subtle fields of scientific enquiry, science will have to open its mind to the realm of endless possibilities. The global consciousness shift we are currently going through will not only affect the way we see the universe from a scientific point of view, but will also affect our emotional state, how we feel about the future, how we manage our lives, how we interact with other people, our

economics, and our relationship with the environment, animals and plants.

“The supreme task of the physicist is the discovery of the most general elementary laws from which the world-picture can be deduced logically. But there is no logical way to the discovery of these elemental laws. There is only the way of intuition, which is helped by a feeling for the order lying behind the appearance, and this *eingefühlung* [literally, empathy or ‘feeling one’s way in’] is developed by experience.”

From Einstein’s preface to Max Planck’s
‘Where is Science Going?’

“The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is at the root of all true science. Someone to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, is my idea of God.”

From Einstein’s ‘What I Believe’, originally written in 1930
and recorded for the German League for Human Rights

“Science has gone too far in breaking down man’s belief in his spiritual greatness... and has given him the belief that he is merely an insignificant animal that has arisen by chance and necessity in an insignificant planet lost in the great cosmic immensity...” The principal trouble with mankind

today is that the intellectual leaders are too arrogant in their self-sufficiency. We must realise the great unknowns in the material makeup and operation of our brains, in the relationship of brain to mind, in our creative imagination, and in the uniqueness of the psyche. When we think of these unknowns as well as the unknown of how we come to be in the first place, we should be much more humble."

Sir John Eccles

"When I asked Heisenberg about his own thoughts on Eastern philosophy, he told me to my great surprise not only that he had been well aware of the parallels between quantum physics and Eastern thought, but also that his own scientific work had been influenced, at least at the subconscious level, by Indian philosophy. In 1929 Heisenberg spent some time in India as the guest of the celebrated Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, with whom he had long conversations about science and Indian philosophy. This introduction to Indian thought brought Heisenberg great comfort, he told me. He began to see that the recognition of relativity, interconnectedness, and impermanence as fundamental aspects of physical reality, which had been so difficult for himself and his fellow physicists, was the very basis of the Indian spiritual traditions. 'After these conversations with Tagore,' he said, 'some of the ideas that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense. That was a great help for me.'"

Fritjof Capra

Chapter Seven

The Yogic Lifestyle

Before we get into the practicalities of the yogic lifestyle, let us summarise some important points discussed so far:

1. The goal of human life is the fulfilment of our primary desire: that of infinite happiness, perfect peace and contentment — bliss.
2. The goal is within us. It is our innermost self. It is the essence of our being. It is not a state outside us, or separate to us, but our inner state of being. It is you. What you ultimately want is your inner you.
3. It is one. Like many rivers flowing into the one sea, there is no possibility of ending up in the wrong place forever — only the right place. The total and absolute experience of that one and abiding love of all loves is your glorious destiny. There is every reason to be hopeful and optimistic about the future.
4. Our primary purpose is to attain that goal. Knowingly or unknowingly, whether we believe it or not, the blissful realisation of ourselves as pure loving consciousness is the primary purpose of our lives. We have many secondary purposes but only one primary purpose. We find limited meaning in the things that we do in the world (our secondary purposes), but to find the true

meaning that we are all ultimately looking for, we must also look within ourselves (our primary purpose). So we each have a great purpose in life, a great mission to fulfil, and it is the same one for each and every one of us. Our life is a mission, imbued with the deepest meaning and significance.

5. It is inevitable that you will attain that state of blissful loving oneness that you are ultimately longing for. It's just a matter of time and effort. Self-realisation is a self-fulfilling prophesy for us all. We are all on a journey to realising that ultimate state of eternal bliss because it's already there as the essence of ourselves. We just need to find it.

And the yogic lifestyle is the way to do that.

Yoga means 'union'. The English word 'yoke' came from it. It does not merely mean to unite, like mixing sugar and sand, but to unify, like mixing sugar and water. When you mix sugar with water the two become one. Yoga is like dissolving sugar in water — the union of the individual existence with the cosmic existence; the individual sense of awareness with the cosmic sense of awareness; the individual experience of limited pleasures and pains with the cosmic experience of the unlimited; the unification of the individual self with the Greater Self, of the unit consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness.

The *Bhagavad Gita* says, "Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self."

And the yogic lifestyle is the system of life that includes all those practices which are beneficial for the merger of one's own self into the Cosmic Self. It is an ancient system first systematised 7,000 years ago and brought into relevancy for modern life. It is the holistic approach to all aspects of life: physical, mental and spiritual. Physical health is the basis of mental balance, and mental balance is the basis of spiritual progress. Yoga is a comprehensive, scientific and practical system, and its

techniques lead to self-realisation: the fulfilment of our spiritual desire for infinite peace and happiness.

Now let us look at the main aspects of the yogic lifestyle.

Health and Hygiene

Physical health is the first step to a mentally and spiritually fulfilling life. As we saw in Chapter Five, the body is the vehicle of the mind. They are intimately connected and therefore the health of one affects the other. A healthy mind lives in a healthy body. You can't be healthy without being happy, and you can't be happy without being healthy. Health is not only the absence of disease — it is a positive state, not just the absence of a negative one.

There are three important aspects of physical health: cleanliness, resistance and vitality. The Chinese have a saying that disease starts in the stomach. If we keep the body clean, not only outside but inside too, then this goes a long way towards resistance to disease and vitality to live life to the fullest. Of course there are other factors that contribute to the two latter aspects, but cleanliness — internal as well as external — is the foundation. And not only of the body but of one's mind, dress, bed and environment too. As the saying goes, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

Practically, there are some important everyday practices:

Take a bath or shower at least once a day. The water should be cold (or at the most lukewarm) because hot water weakens the nerves and does not cool and refresh the body and mind like cold water does. To avoid the cold water shocking the body, first pour it on the navel, then the small of the back opposite the navel, then the crown of the head and down the spine. Then bathe normally. Incidentally, a natural soap is better for the body and

the hair than artificially perfumed soaps and shampoos, and coconut oil makes a much better hair conditioner (and deodorant for the armpits and groin area) than artificially perfumed commercial products. In general, prefer natural personal care products over commercial ones.

Proper posture. Pay attention to keeping the spine straight when sitting, standing and walking, to facilitate the flow of energy through the spinal energy channel. This energy channel forms the primary trunk from which the secondary energy channels of the body branch out from. If the spinal channel is straight and clear then the flow of energy throughout the rest of the body will also be optimised.

Proper breathing. Breathing should be diaphragmatic, which is sometimes described as breathing “into the stomach.” What this really means is that you are using the diaphragm (the flat muscle which separates the chest from the abdomen) to draw air into the bottom of the lungs and hence fill the lungs completely, rather than using the chest muscles to breath more shallowly and partially. Diaphragmatic breathing is a lot more efficient and vitalising than chest breathing, and apart from the physical effects of keeping the body oxygenated more effortlessly, this deep way of breathing will also affect your state of mind because there is a very direct and intimate connection between the breath and the mind. The deeper your breathing is the more calm and relaxed it will be. And the more calm and relaxed the breathing is, the more calm and relaxed the mind will be. To check that you are breathing diaphragmatically, put your hand on your stomach and take a deep breath in. If your hand (and stomach) are sucked in as you breathe in then you are not breathing diaphragmatically. If your hand (and stomach) go out as you breathe in then you are breathing diaphragmatically and correctly.

Proper food. As we shall soon see coming up in this chapter, this not only means nourishing the body nutritionally but also eating the right food for the mind as well as for a more sustainable world.

Avoid constipation. Constipation is one of the main causes of mental unease and physical disease. Just as a stream becomes stagnant if it does not flow, a clogged digestive system becomes a catalyst for chronic disease, including cancer, heart disease and diabetes. But if your system is clean and fluid, like the fresh water of a flowing stream, then you will be less prone to acute infections in the short term as well as chronic disease in the long term. A vegetarian diet rich in whole (rather than refined) grains, with minimal refined sugar and saturated fats, will go a long way to insuring your health and wellbeing now and into the future.

Drink plenty of water. Two to three litres per day is recommended. And especially good for constipation is lemon water with salt. Squeeze half a lemon into a glass of water and stir in a pinch of salt.

Pour cold water over the genital organ after urination. This ensures proper emptying of the bladder, prevents urinary tract problems, and keeps the area cool and clean. And for many reasons water is also preferable to using toilet paper after defecation. Likewise, squatting has many benefits over sitting on the toilet for defecation, or standing for urination in the case of men.

Ethical Living

Our mental wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of others we interact with in our lives, can be largely ensured by doing the right thing — or at least trying to do the right thing — under each and every circumstance we find ourselves in. We may or

may not succeed, but the important thing is to at least try. As we discussed in Chapter Five, this works on the karmic level (our personal pain and suffering gradually decreasing the more good actions we perform) and it also works towards an evermore positive state of mind — every good action going towards a clearer and clearer conscience. There are many rich and seemingly successful people who misappropriated their wealth, position and power but cannot sleep at night because their conscience is not clear. Opting for a personal short-term gain at the expense of the welfare of others can never be a good thing, either for others or yourself. You may get the short-term gain but it will come back to you in the long run as a loss. It is better for oneself and everyone else to do the right thing in the first place and gain the mental peace which goes along with it rather than sacrificing that peace for material gain. There is no greater wealth in this world than peace of mind. The moral high-ground is the most valuable real estate on Earth. From there the view of heaven is really quite spectacular!

Of course, it is not always easy to do the best thing in every circumstance. But it's the intention that counts. To have a benevolent intention and to always do one's best to act on that intention will eventually lead to you being able to act on it more and more, and hence towards a more and more giving and fulfilling life. Good thoughts and intention lead to good actions, which lead to good habits, which lead to a good character and ultimately a good destiny. And going with one's conscience rather than one's superficial desire for material gain gives one the moral force to accomplish anything in this world. What we need more than anything else now in our world is those people who act on the force of their conviction rather than their petty desires. Follow your conscience. Keep on the straight and narrow. The river must maintain its integrity in order to reach the sea. Always trying to do the right thing will lead to a better world for ourselves as well as for others.

“Morality is the base, spiritual practice the means,
and Life Divine the goal.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Among the yogic principles of morality are some specific guidelines:

Non-harm in thought, word and action. Maintaining the least harm in any given situation. This does not exclude the possibility of using physical force if appropriate. For example, if someone attacks you then you have the moral right to defend yourself. If someone attacks a helpless innocent person then you have the obligation to defend them. Sometimes you have to do a lesser harm to prevent a greater one. But in doing so it is your intention that's important.

Benevolent truthfulness. The use of mind and words in the spirit of benevolence. If you can get into the habit of it, it is easier to tell the truth than to lie because, as Mark Twain once said, “If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything.” But the emphasis should be on helpful truthfulness rather than unhelpful truthfulness. Sometimes it is better to tell a white lie than to tell the absolute truth. But again, it is your intention that's important. This is the spirit of benevolent truthfulness. Lord Buddha said that the first priority of one's words should be that they are helpful, the second priority that they are true, and the third priority that they are sweet-sounding. Once someone, with the intent of spreading malicious gossip, said to Socrates, “I have something interesting to tell you.” Socrates replied, “If what you intend to tell me is neither true, positive nor helpful, then I suggest you do not tell it.”

Non-stealing. Do not take what belongs to others without their permission and do not deprive others of what you owe them.

This has a very direct effect on one's state of mind as well as the obvious karmic effect in the longer term.

Simple living. Not to accumulate more than you need for a reasonable standard of living. As well as the positive social consequence of not depriving anyone of what they need, because, after all, the wealth and resources of this world are limited, this also has the positive personal consequence of keeping one's mind content and at ease. You cannot have peace of mind if you are always hankering for more than you really need, if you are always trying to "keep up with the Joneses." Living simply is essential for peace of mind.

Universal thinking. To consider everything as an expression of cosmic manifestation. If we can get into the habit of thinking this regularly, then the thought that we are all part of the same cosmic family will also increase in our minds, and this will naturally overflow into a more altruistic, compassionate and loving attitude towards everyone else, leading to us to do the right thing by them more and more. There is an amusing story which illustrates this concept of universal thinking. A man who lived in a small village was a living example of this thinking. Whatever happened he attributed to God. Whatever he experienced he attributed to God. Whatever he did he attributed to God. One day the villagers looked on in amusement as he was being chased by a bull. Afterwards they said to him, "If everything is God then the bull is also God, so why were you running away from it?" He replied, "My running away was also God!"

Good company, and as much as possible a good and uplifting environment, are also very helpful. There is a saying that if a saint falls into the company of thieves he will become a thief, and if a thief falls into the company of saints he will become a saint. Inspirational and uplifting reading (and other media) are also a form of good company.

Food and Fasting

The type of food we eat is important. If you want to build a good house you have to use good building materials. Similarly, if you want to live a healthy life you have to eat the right food. And as well as your own health, your food choices will make a difference to other people, animals and the environment.

Meat production is one of the main causes of environmental destruction. Plant production requires much less resources than meat, and produces much less carbon emissions. According to the UN, the meat industry produces more carbon emissions than all the world's transport combined. So a vegetarian diet is much better for the planet. And because it takes much less resources to produce the same quantity of plant-based nutrients than it does for meat-based nutrients, a predominantly plant-based food industry would, in combination with efficient and fair distribution of food resources, ensure that there would be more than enough food in the world for all of us. Overpopulation is often cited as the reason people go hungry in the world. But population is not the problem. As we shall see in Chapter 11, it is the way we utilise and distribute our resources that counts.

And not eating meat means less animal suffering in death and captivity. George Bernard Shaw said, "Animals are my friends and I don't eat my friends." All creatures are our friends; indeed our brothers and sisters in our wider cosmic family. A plant-based diet is the only right one on ethical and compassionate grounds. If suitable vegetarian food is unavailable then that's another matter. But in today's world that is hardly ever the case. The general rule for the yogic lifestyle is to eat less conscious forms of life over more conscious ones. Eating plants, which feel less pain on being killed, is preferable to eating animals, which feel more. If it's wrong to eat a dog, it's wrong to eat a cow. Do not invite a painful reaction on yourself (either in this life or a future one) by needlessly harming animals.

Thanks to research such as the China Study and the ongoing Adventist Health Study, the evidence is in that there is a clear and direct connection between meat-eating and the most common chronic diseases. An animal-based diet causes poor health and early death due to heart disease, cancer and diabetes, whereas a well-balanced plant-based diet provides all the nutrients we need, including protein, in more absorbable forms than meat, and leads to good health and a long life.

“In order to have a balanced mind and to progress spiritually, human beings will have to pay attention to the qualities of the food they eat... Only food which is helpful in keeping the body and mind sentient should be eaten.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Our state of mind is the most important thing. It determines the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we act. Vegetarianism is not only good for the environment, good for other people, good for animals, and good for the body — it is also good for the mind. Many of the hormones and chemicals in meat transfer to the meat-eater the stress, anxiety, fear and other negative emotions the animal itself felt in captivity and at the time of death. So a vegetarian diet helps keep one’s mind cool, calm and free of negative emotions. Even more so if it’s a yogic “sentient” diet, which is especially good for the mind because it excludes onions, garlic and mushrooms. Over thousands of years of experimentation, yogis found that these things have a negative effect on the mind. They prevent us from feeling clarity, inspiration and bliss. So sentient food is good for both the body and the mind and excludes onions, garlic and mushrooms as well as meat, poultry, fish and seafood, eggs, alcohol and other intoxicants, and stale or otherwise spoilt food. A sentient diet which is good for both body and mind includes fruits,

vegetables, grains, legumes, dairy products, nuts and seeds, and natural sweeteners, among others. Note that although milk comes from animals, it is beneficial to both body and mind in moderation. And although there are currently ethical concerns about the way cows are treated, I believe we are fast moving into a more compassionate world where cows will be treated well (much as they are in India today) and those concerns will not be an issue any more. Note also that you can compensate for the loss of onions and garlic in your diet with the use of herbs and spices, and fried roots such as ginger and asafoetida.

It is not only what we eat that affects us, but how we eat too. We generally eat too much and too often. So eating less and less often is a good rule to follow. In India there is a saying, “If in doubt about eating, don’t eat. If in doubt about going to the toilet, go to the toilet.” One of my colleagues is a naturopath who is convinced that the single-most harmful eating habit is snacking between meals.

“Voracious eating is the cause of all disease. It reduces one’s lifespan. You must avoid overeating at all cost.”

Lord Shiva

Taking this concept to the next level is the practice of fasting, which may sound intimidating at first, but if practiced in the right way is not only good for physical health but also mental health. At the time of writing I have been fasting regularly for over 30 years and have found it to be of tremendous benefit, giving clarity of mind and a great boost to one’s motivation and inspiration. Regarding the physical benefits, this is how it works. The digestive system has two main functions: digesting food and detoxifying the body. But we hardly give it a chance to perform its detoxifying function because we don’t give it a rest from digesting. It can’t do both things — digesting and detoxifying — at the same time. Only if we fast periodically can we allow it to

detoxify the body through digesting our toxins rather than our food. In addition, periodic fasting stimulates autophagy, the process proven by Nobel prize-winning cellular biologist Yoshinori Ohsumi, in which cells regenerate themselves by breaking down and recycling unnecessary, damaged or otherwise dysfunctional cellular components as well as pathogenic bacteria, thus contributing to increased health and longevity.

Fasting need only be practiced for 24-hours twice a month: at the time of the new moon and at the time of the full moon. Or, more specifically, three days before the new moon and three days before the full moon is actually most effective. That's because the gravitational effect of the Moon is strongest at these times, and fasting then will minimise the Moon's effect on the liquids of the body. A "dry fast" (without liquids) also has the added benefit of not diluting the digestive juices and therefore optimising the detoxification process that your body will be thanking you for at this time. Then the next morning you can break your fast with lemon water and salt to cleanse the system. Note that the more salt you add to your lemon water the more it will flush straight through without being absorbed. Aim for a balance between flushing the system and replenishing the body fluids. The best way to clean a dirty floor is first to sweep it first and then to wash it. Similarly, fasting "sweeps" the system by detoxifying it, and breaking your fast with lemon water and salt afterwards washes it clean. You can imagine the long term benefit of this regular practice in preventing chronic disease and maximising your lifespan.

Selfless Service

Selfless service is an important part of the yogic lifestyle. It means helping others in need by giving one's time and energy without expecting anything in return. Note here that it means helping those who need it, not those who don't. Giving money to a rich man is not service. There is no point in carrying coal to Newcastle.

We evolve as people whenever we give up our personal comfort and pleasures to help others. You aren't only helping others, you are helping yourself. True satisfaction lies in the giving, not the taking. Giving is indeed receiving. When we give we increase our sense of connection and feeling of oneness with all people and all things, indeed with the essence of all. The transformation of selfishness to selflessness is the transformation of one's limited self (one's limited sense of awareness) into the greater Self (infinite awareness). And the more we realise the commonality of ourselves and others — the more we realise that we are all part of the one universal family — the more we feel inspired to reach out and help others. The more we give of ourselves, the more a sense of unity with the world around us is reinforced within us. And it's that sense of unity — that feeling of oneness both within and without — that will truly fulfil us. Love flows freely when we give willingly and selflessly, and that love gradually increases to encompass the whole universe. The more we feel others as part of ourselves, the more we will be inspired to help others as ourselves; as part of the Greater Self. Although the true spirit of service is giving without getting, we always get the emotional payback, which ultimately feeds into the greater spiritual one.

"I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy."

Rabindranath Tagore

There are many ways you can render selfless service, spontaneously and on a regular basis, in your life. You can help others by taking care of their basic needs: feeding them, clothing them, caring for them when they are sick. You can help others by coming to their rescue in times of need, by going out on a limb to save them from distress and peril. "Go out on a limb. That's

where the fruit is.” You can help others financially, or finance the work of those helping them. And you can help others by educating them in different ways through different media. This is the greatest form of service because it empowers people in the longterm. And service to others also includes helping animals and plants, caring for them, nurturing them, saving them from death and destruction.

And part of the process of striving to help others solve their own problems is to learn to see problems in a positive light, to tackle them head on with determination, to work strategically to solve them, and to not be attached to the result of one’s actions. All the practices of the yogic lifestyle tie in with each other, and also with the philosophy, in forming an integral framework for the development of oneself and the society.

Yoga Postures and Exercises

Yogis in the past observed that animals have characteristics that are related to their posture, and that if they emulated those postures they could create the same characteristics in themselves. For example, peacocks are fearless. By practicing the peacock posture, which mimics that of the peacock, one becomes fearless. In other words, the posture affects the mind. So the main effect of yoga postures is on the mind. That’s because they put pressure on the internal glands, affecting the hormones secreted by those glands, and it’s those hormones that affect the way we feel. Practicing yoga postures is like giving yourself an internal massage — each posture massages a certain gland in such a way that affects the hormonal secretion from that gland, which in turn affects the mind and the emotions. And just as an external muscle massage will have an overall relaxing effect on the muscles, the internal massage of yoga postures has an overall positive effect in balancing the hormonal secretions and thus balancing the emotions. If the hormones are balanced, the emotions will also be balanced. So yoga postures keep the mind calm and balanced, and prepare it for meditation.

They also have many physical benefits: they relax the nerves, increase the flexibility of the spine and joints, improve respiration and circulation, detoxify the joints, and help cure many diseases. The effect of yoga postures on the body, the endocrine glands, our emotional state, and the subtle chakra system which connects body and mind, is part of an emerging and developing field of science called biopsychology.

Let us try three yoga postures which are very simple and effective. If you practice them daily you will soon see how they keep your mind calm and your emotions balanced.

Place a mat or blanket on the floor of a warm clean room. If you've eaten in the last hour or so, wait for two to three hours until your stomach is less full. Ideally yoga postures should be practiced before breakfast in the morning and before dinner in the evening.

The first yoga posture is called *Yogamudra*: Sit cross-legged. Hold your left wrist with your right hand behind your back. Slowly lowering your chin, then your neck, bend down as far as you can go, breathing out as you go down. Stay there for eight seconds with your breath held out then rise up, breathing in. Practice eight times.

Now the Cobra: Lie on your stomach. Place your hands facing down on the floor beside your ears. Supporting your weight on your palms, push up and raise the chest, looking up towards the ceiling. Breathe in while rising and hold your breath in that position for eight seconds. Come down to the original position while breathing out. Practice eight times.

Finally the Long Salutation: Kneel down with your buttocks resting on your heels and your toes pointing forward. With your palms together, extend your arms up vertically next to your ears. Slowly bring your arms and head down as one, first bending your neck, then the whole upper body until your fingers hit the floor,

keeping your buttocks as close to your heels as possible. Now stretch out with your forehead and nose resting on the floor. Breathe out as you go down, and stay there with your breath held out for eight seconds. Then rise up, breathing in. Practice eight times.

After practicing yoga postures, it is also good to practice two exercises which up till now have been relatively little-known in yoga circles. They both have numerous physical benefits and — unlike other exercises — also have significant mental and spiritual benefits.

The first is Kaoshikii, a unique exercise beneficial for the body, mind and spirit, especially for women. Among other things, it exercises the limbs, loosens up the spine and joints, keeps the body youthful, increases the lifespan, eases menstruation and childbirth, regulates the glands, improves the smoothness and lustre of the skin, removes lethargy, cures insomnia, prevents and cures numerous diseases, strengthens the mind, increases self-confidence, and helps in one's self-expression and creativity.

The second exercise is called Tandava, a vigorous exercise particularly beneficial for removing fear from the mind, developing courage and spiritedness, and improving the memory. Because of its effect on the glandular system — increasing male hormones and characteristics — tandava is only for men.

An online search will bring up a number of webpages and videos demonstrating these two exercises, both of which are fast growing in popularity.

During yoga postures oil from the sebaceous glands are naturally secreted onto the skin surface. This oil is beneficial to the skin, so after practicing yoga postures we do a skin massage to rub it back in. As well as increasing the suppleness of the skin,

this revitalises the nerves, increases the blood circulation and lymph flow, and harmonises the vital energy of the body. It is not a muscle massage, just a light going-over of the skin, as well as some extra attention to the lymph glands — under the chin and around the throat, under the armpits, in the groin, and behind the knee. First rub your palms together a few times to warm them up, then starting from your head and face work down the body, rubbing your hands directly over the surface of the skin as you go. When you get to your feet, pay particular attention to the soles. A foot massage (also known as reflexology) indirectly vitalises the internal organs through the subtle energy channels of the body.

Finally, deep relaxation gives the body a chance to assimilate the positive energy gained from the yoga postures. And through what is known as the “relaxation response” it relieves stress, lowers blood pressure and heart rate, strengthens the heart, relaxes the nerves and muscles, and even decreases the need for sleep. If you ever feel tired you can do it any time, anywhere, for a few minutes to revitalise yourself.

Using the same mat or blanket as for the yoga postures, lie on your back with your arms by your side, making sure that your breathing is calm and relaxed. Now go through your whole body, starting at your feet, consciously making sure that each part is completely relaxed — with no muscular tension at all. Relax yourself from your toes up to your head, imagining that you are breathing out all the tension and negative energy of your body and breathing in all the positive energy of the universe. Go from the feet up the legs, consciously checking each part, into the groin area, into the abdomen (feeling that your internal organs are also relaxed), into the chest and shoulders, from the fingers and hands up the arms, then into the neck and up into the face, relaxing the facial muscles, including the eyes, and finally to the top of the head, feeling that your brain is also relaxed. Check once more that your breathing is calm and relaxed, and stay like that, fully relaxed, for a few more minutes.

Chanting (Kiirtan)

Kiirtan (chanting a mantra aloud) gives a feeling of happiness and lightness to the mind and prepares us for meditation, getting us into a calm and meditative frame of mind, ready to enter the meditative flow.

We use the mantra *Bábá Nám Kevalam*, which means ‘infinite love and happiness is all there is’. It is sung with the hands in the gesture of greeting at the heart, or even better raised high above the head in a position of elation. This is an example of reverse psychology. When we are elated we have the tendency to raise our hands above our head. Conversely, if we raise the hands above the head it will stimulate the feeling of elation, and help to open the heart chakra which is the centre of love in the body. It can be sung to any tune, lightly tapping the feet on the ground in time with the music.

It is also good to sing the mantra any time — when you’re walking down the street, driving your car, cooking in the kitchen — whatever you happen to be doing and wherever you happen to be.

Meditation

As we have now seen, the yogic lifestyle encompasses a wide range of techniques for physical, mental and spiritual development. But the essential core practice is meditation. All the other techniques lead to it and support it, because once the body and mind are calm and contented, the mind is free to concentrate. And when the mind concentrates on the mantra, that’s meditation, and as we shall see in the next chapter it is meditation which is the essential technique for self-transformation and self-realisation.

Chapter Eight

Meditation: Looking Within

As we discussed in Chapter Two, we can only validate the essence of our own being through the deepest internal experience of awareness within us. And the systematic and scientific method of doing that in our everyday lives is meditation. Meditation is the process of looking within, of centring yourself on your inner self, of connecting to your true self; your deepest self; the essence of your existence; the core of your being. It is not the imposition of any belief from outside yourself. It's not about believing what someone tells you to believe or experiencing what someone tells you to experience. It's about believing what you experience within yourself. It's about you. It's about finding the essence of yourself within yourself and realising that essence as the inner self of all beings and the entire universe. In the process we get to know the universe and all its secrets, as well as the inner peace and contentment of bliss. Other benefits include relaxation, stress-relief, clarity of mind, improved memory, inspiration, motivation, creative insight and intuition. Unlike medication, there are no negative side-effects to meditation.

Meditation is a science. It's intuitional science, where consciousness is substantiated by a purely first-hand internal experience; in the laboratory of the mind, so to speak. It is

completely introspective in nature. *Med* means 'middle', or 'centre', so it means to centre yourself on your internal being; the core consciousness within you and within all beings. Through meditation it is entirely possible to experience higher consciousness as every bit as real as the reality of you reading these words right now. Once I had a particularly illuminating meditation experience where I felt the whole room was full of a field of consciousness vibrating with awareness and with bliss. It was so intense; so tangible, that I felt I could have cut it with a knife. It was undeniably real then, and I still have no doubt about it to this day. So according to my experience, higher consciousness does exist and it is attainable. You can know it within you and all around you, within yourself and all beings, through the regular and sincere practice of meditation.

The practice of meditation has also been validated to a certain degree by objective science too. Some findings:

Electroencephalography (EEG) studies measuring the electrical activity of the brain have shown brainwaves to slow down in meditators, who exhibit lower frequency alpha and theta waves associated with relaxation, positivity, clarity and happiness.

During meditation the metabolism drops to an even deeper state of rest than during sleep.

Meditation is the only activity that reduces blood lactate, a marker of stress and anxiety.

The hormones melatonin and serotonin, which have been linked with higher states of consciousness, are increased by meditation, and the stress hormone cortisol is decreased.

Long-term meditators experience 80 percent less heart disease and 50 percent less cancer than non-meditators.

Meditators secrete more of the youth-related hormone DHEA as they age than non-meditators. This helps decrease stress, improve memory, and control weight.

Meditation reduces the need for sleep, insomniacs were able to sleep more normally when they meditated, and people with

chronic pain significantly reduced medication when they began meditating.

Meditators associate with more positive and less negative self-views compared to non-meditators.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI and functional MRI) studies, which measure changes in blood flow and metabolism in the brain, have shown short-term and long-term improvement in brain function related to focused attention and control of emotions as well as long-term increase in brain structure such as grey matter. In other words, brain scans have demonstrated the phenomenon of neuroplasticity, where longterm meditators were literally able to increase the brain's structure and function in key areas such as self-awareness, introspection, happiness, empathy and compassion.

How does meditation work?

Meditation means to look within your mind to feel the bliss that is the essence of your existence. That bliss is within you, just as it is within everybody and everything. You only need to penetrate the thought-cloud of your mind to experience it. But that's easier said than done of course. The process of looking within naturally requires a certain amount of focus. We need to concentrate on only one thought. But there are usually many different thoughts in the mind. The average person has something like 70,000 thoughts a day. So how do we control them? We have to channel all our thoughts towards a greater one; a stronger and more positive one. And the strongest and most positive thought is that of bliss; infinite peace and happiness — the essence of our existence.

That positive thought is introduced to the mind through what we call a mantra. In Sanskrit, *man* means 'mind' and *tra* means 'that which liberates'. So *mantra* means a word or phrase which liberates the mind. Although we rely mostly on our vision to get around, sound has the most powerful effect on the mind. For

example, most people would rather watch a movie with good sound and bad visuals than a movie with good visuals and bad sound. So the internal sound of a mantra is the most powerful way of concentrating the mind. It concentrates the mind on a particular idea — the idea (or rather feeling) of infinite peace and happiness.

The mantra has three qualities which empower it to do that:

First it acts as an object of concentration, because the mind has to have something to focus on. The mind means thought. It cannot be thoughtless. As long as we have a mind, we must think. We must give the mind a suitable object of thought through the repetition of a suitable mantra.

Then it vibrates the mind. Everything has a particular vibration; everything and everybody. You like someone when their vibration suits your own. You like music that suits your own vibration. The mantra also has a particular vibration; a particular wavelength which vibrates the mind with the feeling of infinite happiness, of bliss.

Then last but not least is its meaning. “As you think, so you become.” This powerful psychological principle is the mainstay of mantra meditation. If you think negatively, your life will be negative; if you think positively, your life will be positive. The cloth takes the colour of the dye it is soaked in. Similarly, we are continually in the process of becoming the object of our ideation. The only reason we don’t become anything other than what we already are is because we don’t think of anything for long enough. But if you can think of the most elevating ideation on a regular basis, then your existence will gradually get more and more infused with the feeling of infinite happiness. So the meaning of the mantra is vital. After all, if you’re going to repeat it every day, it had better be good. It must be the most uplifting ideation; the most positive of thoughts. Again: infinite happiness; perfect peace and contentment — bliss.

By ideating regularly on the thought of bliss, one’s mind gradually expands, and that expansion continues until one’s

limited sense of existence merges into the infinite cosmic existence. One's individual experience of pleasure and pain eventually gets transformed into the constant experience of cosmic bliss, just as a river attains total freedom when it merges with the sea. The ego-river of the mind finds peace in the cosmic sea, the ocean of consciousness. Just as a river flows into the sea, we are all returning home. We are all on a journey to attaining that one ultimate state of eternal love; to realising that ultimate state of bliss — infinite happiness.

How do we practice it?

Now let us expand the exercise that we practiced at the end of Chapter Three. We are going to use a mantra to focus the mind on the feeling of our infinite self; the infinite consciousness:

Sitting with your legs crossed, place your hands one on top of each other in your lap, keep your back straight, eyes closed and tongue on the roof of your mouth. Take some time to focus on your breath, feeling the air flowing through your nostrils.

Now take a moment to centre yourself. Focus on your sense of self. Feel the centre of yourself; your core, the deepest essence of yourself; your unchanging, unwavering, ever-present essence; the inner bedrock of your being.

Now feel that you are completely at peace. Feel peace and happiness all around you. Feel that you are completely surrounded by that perfect peace, love and happiness.

Now feel that the perfect peace, love and happiness surrounding you is endless. It stretches endlessly in every direction. It is infinite. Feel infinite happiness — bliss — all around you. Feel yourself bathing in that endless sea of bliss. Feel it caressing your existence, soothing you to the very core of your being.

Now start to repeat within your mind the mantra introduced for chanting (kiirtan) in the last chapter:

Bábá Nám Kevalam

A more literal meaning of the mantra is this:

Bábá means ‘beloved’; your most beloved self; your deepest feeling of self; the Supreme Self; the source of infinite peace and happiness; the Infinite Consciousness within you.

Nám means ‘name’, ‘to identify with’, ‘to connect with’.

And *Kevalam* means ‘only’.

So the meaning of *Bábá Nám Kevalam* is “only to feel, only to connect with, only to identify with your innermost self; your beloved self within you and all around you.” In short, “My most Beloved is the only One.”

As you repeat *Bábá Nám Kevalam* within your mind, think of its meaning, but more importantly really try to feel its meaning deep within you. Feel the infinite peace and happiness within you and all around you; feel yourself merging into that infinite happiness. Feel that your own sense of self is merging into the Infinite Self all around you. Feel that your own sense of awareness is merging into the Infinite Awareness around you. Feel that your own consciousness is merging into the Infinite Consciousness all around you, just like a river merges with the sea. Merge your sense of self with the Infinite Self. Feel yourself becoming one with it. Feel that you *are* one with it. Feel that you *are* it.

Continue for as long as you like, then open your eyes and gently bring yourself back to your surroundings.

Meditation expands our sense of self beyond our everyday awareness into the realm of the mystical; the greater self that encompasses everyone and everything. Through it you can ultimately merge your individual identity with the greater identity of that Greater Self. When one does that, when one

realises oneself as the Greater Self; the Greater Self as one's own self; that's self-realisation. Self-realisation means self-fulfilment in the deepest possible sense; the fulfilment of our deepest desire. The essence of that realisation is the experience of exquisite happiness; infinite happiness; inner peace and contentment; bliss... a sublime feeling beyond all worldly enjoyment.

“Words are only shells. Win conviction of God's presence through your own joyous contact in meditation.”

Lahiri Mahasaya

But until then it can be a struggle. Sometimes you will have very blissful meditations and at other times it may feel like you are fighting your mind at every step. But that's part of the process. Without struggle nothing is possible. So don't worry if you have trouble concentrating — it's normal for the mind to wander when you're starting off. Whenever you realise that you have been thinking of something else instead of the mantra, just bring your mind back to the meaning and feeling of the mantra. Keep bringing your mind back to the mantra, like bringing a dog on a leash to heel. One must tame the mind, just as one tames a horse. It will get easier the more you do it. The main thing is to keep practicing, and really try to tap into the flow of the ideation. Gradually, with ongoing practice, your mind will become more steady and focused. The thought-cloud obscures our inner being. But clouds cannot cover the sun forever. Eventually the sun shines through them, penetrating the veil of darkness. Darkness cannot dispel light but light always dispels darkness. Keep chipping away at it, like Michelangelo sculpting David. The statue (your inner self — the Higher Self) is already within the marble. You just have to chip away the excess to become the masterpiece.

Some more guidelines for meditation:

Refresh yourself before you sit down to meditate. The yogic way of doing this is by what we call the “half-bath”. It calms and refreshes the mind by cooling the body, especially the sensory and motor organs, which are connected to the brain and hence the mind. The mind can be likened to a lake with five rivers running into it: the five sensory organs conveying sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. The more we can still the five rivers of the sensory organs (and the motor organs too), the calmer the surface of the lake of the mind will be and the deeper we can see into the depth of our being. The half-bath also stimulates what’s known as the “dive reflex”, the mechanism by which dolphins and other marine mammals conserve oxygen when they dive, lowering the heart rate, respiration, blood pressure and metabolism in general. It is also good to do the half-bath before practicing yoga postures, and before eating and sleeping, to keep the body and mind calm and cool. Here’s how to do it:

Using cold water, or lukewarm water in cold weather, first go to the toilet, pouring water over the urinary organ afterwards as recommended in the last chapter. Then splash water on your arms up to the elbows and legs up to the knees. Hold a mouthful of water in your mouth as you splash water in your eyes and on your face at least 12 times. It’s best to keep your eyes open, so the water hitting the surface of the eye can directly cool the retina and optic nerve and hence the brain. Wet the ears and the back of the neck, and finally flush the nose with water.

Choose the quietest and most peaceful place you can find for your meditation. This may be a corner of your bedroom, a spot on the balcony or in the garden, or if you have the space a dedicated meditation room. Let your family or other cohabitants know that this is your meditation time and not to interrupt you unless absolutely necessary. Use that place only for your

meditation and other practices such as kiirtan and yoga postures. The vibration of what you do and think affects your surrounding so the more you meditate in one place without doing anything else there then the more conducive that place becomes for meditation.

Sit with your legs crossed on a blanket or mat that you use only for your meditation and yoga postures. If you have trouble sitting cross-legged, put some cushions under you so your backside is higher off the ground. That will take some of the pressure off your legs and help keep your back straight. Avoid resting your back against the wall, or sitting in a chair or on your bed, otherwise you are likely to get too relaxed to concentrate. Your posture during meditation should be relaxed but alert — poised, like a cat stalking its prey. A poised body makes for a poised mind — alert and relaxed at the same time.

Your breathing should be calm and relaxed, through the nose. There is a direct link between the breath and the mind. You may have noticed that when you are engrossed in a book or movie, your breathing slows right down. The more engrossed you are, the more your breath slows down. It may even stop if you focus intensely enough. So if you can slow your breathing down you will be able to focus your mind like a laser. Before meditation you might like to take a deep breath or two before you start, to get you into the rhythm of calm, deep — diaphragmatic — breathing.

Practice at least twice a day, preferably at the same time and place. Each time is important, to get your mind and body used to it. Each time is like a link in the chain. A nail must be repeatedly hammered to drive it into a piece of wood. To keep your teeth clean you've got to brush them regularly, not just once in a while.

“Twice daily I feel the bliss of the divine... I connect to a boundless consciousness that has no palpable relationship with my thoughts, fears or desires.”

Russell Brand

You can meditate any time, but the best times are on a light stomach — before breakfast in the morning and before dinner in the evening. These are also the most peaceful times — when the sun is rising and setting.

Aim for a minimum of half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening. That’s a total of one out of 24 hours. Not too much to ask considering it’s the most important thing you can do for yourself and the world.

Singing the mantra aloud (kiirtan) before you meditate calms the mind and prepares it for meditation. You can sing to any tune you like, either by itself, accompanied by instruments, or to a recorded track. This will help you to enter the meditative flow and focus in your meditation.

Try to get into the habit of repeating the mantra throughout the rest of the day too, singing it if you like. This will give you a continual feeling of lightness and happiness, help you to get through difficult situations, and make it easier to meditate when you do. Keep the mantra-propeller running through all seas and situations, just as the propeller of a ship must be kept running through a storm.

Try to attend a group meditation once a week. The collective force of all the people meditating will be stronger than the sum of its parts and will give you a boost for the rest of the week.

Now, it’s really important to stick with the practice and really try to tap into the flow of the meditation. As time goes on it will

get a lot easier, but if you give up now you'll never get to that stage. You really only need two things to succeed in meditation: have faith in the process (or at least give it a chance) and practice sincerely. Don't be like the man who got his foot stuck in the railway track and prayed, "God, please save me, I promise I'll give up all my bad habits." After several minutes of praying and pleading like this he finally got his foot free then said, "No need God, I managed." Meditation is a very subtle, deep and hence gradual process. It is elevating your entire being all at one time. As such it may take a while to see tangible results. A strong tree takes a long time to grow. It is easy to pick up a stone but not so easy to lift a boulder. It does not take a lot of work to build a bamboo hut, but then you only have a hut to live in. A mansion, on the other hand, takes a lot of time and work to build, but then you have a whole mansion to live in. It takes time to go from a low state of mind to a higher state of mind, and then ultimately to the highest state beyond the mind.

"The more intimate and the more perfect the finished work is to be and to remain, the more intimate, perfect and pure must be the labour; the firmer the edifice, the harder the labour."

St John of the Cross

The most valuable treasure is the most expensive. The feeling of the infinite is elusive, like trying to catch smoke.

"So delicate is the angelic manna that ordinarily, if a man has desire or care to experience it, he experiences it not; for it does its work when the soul is most at ease and freest from care; it is like the air which, if one would close one's hand upon it, escapes."

St John of the Cross

But if you can catch even just a fleeting glimpse of it you will know it when you do. It is the feeling of coming home; of finding one's centre again; of returning to one's essential being. Meditation is the touchstone. It is paramount. It turns base metal into gold. Continue your practice and enrich yourself with the gold of God-wisdom.

“Train yourself in the ideal of the lily, which blossoms in the mud and has to keep itself engaged in struggle for existence day in and day out, parrying, bracing, and fighting the shocks of muddy water and storms and squalls and sundry other vicissitudes of fortune, and yet it does not forget the Moon above. It keeps its love for the Moon constantly alive. It seems, however, but a most ordinary flower. There is nothing extraordinary about it. Still this most ordinary little flower has a romantic tie with the great Moon. Similarly, you may be an ordinary creature — you may have to pass your days in the ups and downs of your worldly existence — still do not forget that Supreme One. Keep desires inclined towards Him. Always keep yourselves merged in His thought. Go deep into the mood of that Infinite Love.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Chapter Nine

Peace Within, Peace in the World

Your ongoing meditation practice will give you the ever-increasing experience of your own consciousness as being one with the infinite consciousness of the universe. You will feel that Infinite Consciousness within you and all around you more and more as an internal reality. And not only feel it but know it as the core of your being. This is not just an abstract concept. It's about the essence of us all. It's about discovering the greater consciousness within our own consciousness; of realising our own inner reality as the greater universal reality; a deeper reality beyond the more superficial and transitory reality of our everyday waking consciousness. We don't normally perceive that deeper reality because it's beyond perception; beyond space, time and mind. It's the subspace; the causal reality from which this phenomenal world is continually evolving, emerging, existing for a time and merging back into. It's the ultimate reality within which our perceived reality exists.

Once I saw a bird flying around inside a supermarket. I pointed it out to one of the store assistants and he said that it had been there for the last three years because it hadn't been able to find its way out. He said it survives on breadcrumbs from the bakery and water which melts from the ice of the fresh food department. In a way we are like that bird. We've gotten

ourselves lost in the supermarket of this perceived reality we call the world, and in the process have lost sight of the ultimate reality. That's the human condition. But just as the mind is a double-edged sword which we can use either for our benefit or to our detriment, there are also two sides to life: that of having lost sight of the ultimate reality and that of regaining sight of it. Although we are living in the supermarket of the world, we are all in the process of finding our way out again.

"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

To find our way, though, we need to live a life in harmony with the flow of the universe: a life which balances our perceived external reality with that of our deepest internal reality. In our modern society we have been living life out of balance. We are now in the process of regaining our balance; of creating a balanced lifestyle where we not only take care of our physical, intellectual, creative and emotional needs, but also our need for spiritual awakening and fulfilment. Our physical, intellectual, creative and emotional needs only play a supporting role in our search for fulfilment. Through our upbringing, conditioning, education, the media and advertising, our society has conditioned us into believing that they are the end in themselves. But they are only the means to the end, not the end in itself. Pleasures of the body and mind can never fulfil our deepest longing for infinite happiness — for bliss.

In order to fulfil our deepest longing and realise the infinite within ourselves, we need to cultivate a deeper awareness. We need to look within ourselves. We need to search for the essence of ourselves, to connect with our inner selves, because the essence of ourselves is the infinite happiness — bliss — that we all long

for. It is the essence of our deepest existence — the infinite consciousness — and we can only attain it by expanding our sense of existence out to that infinite state of being. As human beings on this planet we have evolved through many lifetimes to the human stage, and we are now in the process of continuing that journey from humanity to divinity. We are on this planet to realise our inner divinity; our innermost self; beyond the physical, beyond matter, beyond the mind — the infinite, the eternal; that which cannot be thought of, let alone explained. By its very nature, this involves an expansion of awareness from our small self to the Greater Self; from our limited sense of awareness — our limited consciousness — to the unlimited awareness — the Infinite Consciousness.

Gradually we are coming to the realisation of our own selves as the Infinite Self of the universe. It's happening individually, and it's also happening collectively. It's a shift in individual consciousness as well as a shift in collective consciousness. It's happening on our planet, and it's also happening on other planets throughout the universe too, where there are human civilisations less advanced than ours and there are human civilisations more advanced than ours. I use the term "advanced" here not only in terms of science and technology but also in terms of spirituality. We are all — humanity on our planet and humanity on God only know how many other planets — in the process of attaining the ultimate realisation of the deepest reality.

This is the process of human evolution — that of humanity to divinity — throughout the universe. Universal Consciousness is in a continual and constant state of re-imagining Itself; of re-affirming Itself; of realising Itself through each and every one of us; through each and every being; through each and every being of its Being. The cosmic drama is eternally unfolding around us and through us at every moment of our lives, at every moment of our existence, at every moment of Existence itself.

The more we realise our inherent divinity, and the inherent divinity of all beings, the more we will satisfy our inherent

longing: infinite happiness, bliss; the essence of Infinite Consciousness; the inherent divine within our own consciousness and the consciousness of all others; the core of our being; the essence of our existence; the essential reality within which all things exist as a continuum of expression; the common thread with which the entire fabric of existence is interwoven. Our own consciousness is part of that greater consciousness which is the core of all being; the essence of all existence. At the deepest level we are all unified in consciousness. Just as the many waves on the surface of the sea are one with the sea, so too are we all expressions of the unified whole.

Father Thomas Keating said, “The beginning of the spiritual journey is the conviction that there is a higher power: an Other. The second step is to try to become the Other. And finally there is the realisation that there is no Other. You and the Other are One. Always have been. Always will be. You just think that you weren’t.”

So we are all on a journey towards self-realisation; towards realising the divinity within us. That is our destiny. We are all destined to that same realisation; the realisation of our deepest self; our ultimate state of being. But as human beings we also have many secondary desires. We want to express ourselves physically, intellectually, emotionally, creatively. We have so many goals. We want health, wealth, recognition, friends, family, love. That’s only right and all very well, as long as we don’t mistake or substitute those secondary desires and goals for our primary desire and goal. To live a balanced life we must not only give importance to all the secondary supporting goals in our lives, but also to our primary goal, our internal search: to connect with the infinite source of love, peace and happiness within ourselves. This process is sometimes known as devotion — love for the infinite. It is the introversion of mind towards the one all-encompassing object of desire and fulfilment, rather than the extroversion of mind towards many limited and disparate objects of desire (and hence limited and disparate objects of fulfilment).

The cultivation of devotion — love for the Cosmic Consciousness within us and all around us — gives meaning to our lives; a higher purpose to our existence. The realisation of our limited selves as the Cosmic Self is the primary purpose of our lives. The fulfilment of that primary purpose is the consummation of our deepest desire, our deepest longing, because our deepest desire — that of infinite peace and happiness — is the essence of our deepest self, the Infinite Self.

“The spiritual awakening is the most essential thing in man’s life... it is the sole purpose of being.”

Kahlil Gibran

And that ultimate state of fulfilment is inevitable for each and every one of us. We are all on the journey to realising that state of eternal bliss. It is our destiny to realise ourselves as the one infinite and universal self, because the bliss we are all searching for is the essence of ourselves. It’s a beautiful paradox. Our inner self and our final destiny are one and the same. What we are ultimately looking for is not outside us. It is within us. It *is* us. We don’t actually have to find anything or become anything other than what we already are. We only have to realise the essence of our own existence. We only have to realise ourselves as part of the Greater Self. Not only as part of, but one with the Greater Self, just as waves are one with the sea.

As John Caird said, an enlightened mind “appropriates that infinite inheritance of which we are already in possession.”

We are the Infinite Consciousness. Our own consciousness is the infinite consciousness of the entire universe. We are all on a journey towards realising ourselves in the deepest possible sense; as the essence of our own existence and of all existence. We are all on a journey that will ultimately culminate in the total and permanent realisation of infinite bliss for each and every one of us. There is no cause for hopelessness in the realm of spirituality

because our destiny is automatically tied up with the inevitable fulfilment of our deepest longing. It's the ultimate inbuilt self-fulfilling mechanism.

So true spirituality is about looking within and realising ourselves. It's about transcending the mind into the consciousness within which it exists — the Cosmic Consciousness. It's about looking within yourself, strengthening the connection to your deepest sense of self, finding the essence of yourself within yourself and realising that essence as the essence of all things and the entire universe. And the more we realise our own consciousness as the Cosmic Consciousness — the more we feel it; the more we connect with our inner selves and truly identify with that infinite awareness; that infinite state of being — the more we feel that our own being encompasses all beings; that the essence of everyone else is our own essence too; that we exist within, as part of, indeed as one with an all-encompassing universal oneness pervading everybody and everything. The whole universe exists within it, everything an expression of that one universal consciousness, just as all waves are part of the same sea. Our own existence is one with the existence of all others. In fact, at the deepest level there are no others. We are all one. Another beautiful paradox. The more we feel our own self as one with the Cosmic Self then the more we feel all others as one with our own self. And the more we embrace others within our own sense of being and wellbeing — the more we feel the destiny of others as one with our own destiny — the more empathetic we will be, the more caring and loving we will be, the more compassionate, the better our relationships will be, and the more willing and able we will be to help others and share with others and make this world a better place.

We tend to take for granted the rhythms and workings of nature, oblivious to the sheer complexity of what goes on behind the scenes. For example, we are used to seeing plants and trees growing above ground but remain oblivious to the balance and harmony that is occurring between them below ground.

Recently it has been discovered that trees communicate and share their resources with one another underground, through their root networks and the fungi that connects those networks. Dying trees even transfer their resources to their neighbours as part of the dying process. So rather than the Darwinian model of survival of the fittest, we are now finding that it is cooperation rather than competition which is the main mode of survival and evolution. Just as trees are interconnected, we are all intimately connected, and it is only when we realise our own interconnectedness with all others that we will find fulfilment in all spheres of life: physical, mental and spiritual.

People get anxious, fearful and depressed when they feel disconnected, cut off from the joys and sorrows of the rest of the world, imprisoned in their own concerns. But the more we can expand our sense of self to encompass everybody and everything, then the more happy, inspired and connected we will feel, at one with the flow of the world and everything in it. Through our spiritual practice, particularly through meditation, we can expand our sense of being to feel the essence of ourselves as the self of all beings — as the Greater Self. In the end there really is no question of disconnection because we are all connected in the deepest possible sense. We just have to realise it. The inner quest facilitates the embracing of all within oneself. The more we realise ourselves as the essence of each and every one and thing, the more connected we feel to everyone and everything. We are all in this together. Loving oneself is loving all others too. We become happier, less fearful, less lonely and more connected, because we realise that all is a part of us and that we are a part of all. So the purpose of our lives is not only self-realisation but also translating that realisation — that expanded feeling of self — into loving others; including all within the embrace of our love; helping all to attain their inner destiny; our one collective destiny. The more we realise our oneness with others — all people, animals, plants, our planet, the entire universe — the more love we will feel for others too. At the heart of our own

emancipation lies the emancipation of us all. So the essence of a truly inclusive and comprehensive spiritual process is Self-Realisation and Service to All — a balance between one's own emancipation and the emancipation of all others.

“Any form of spirituality that remains privatistic and personal is too narrow and truncated. Any form of spirituality that is only communal and only institutional, that has nothing to say to the individual person, is too narrow and truncated. They go hand in hand.”

Cornel West

Self and society are interconnected. The health of oneself is dependent on the health of the society. Collective good lies in individual good and vice versa.

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Martin Luther King Jr

Just as individual notes unite to make harmonious music; just as many flowers make up a beautiful garden or garland; there is unity in all the diversity of the universe. Personal transformation and selfless service go hand in hand. We call this subjective approach with objective adjustment. While moving towards self-realisation (subjective approach), maintain proper adjustment with the material world through service (objective adjustment). “Hands to work, mind to God.” Be like the lotus, with its roots in the mud but looking up to the Moon above. The universe is always moving, flowing like a river. You have to get into its flow to feel it. When you are walking beside a river you cannot feel its flow. Only when you immerse yourself in it can you feel

it. Immerse yourself in the flow of the universe and feel the oneness of all beings. Only then will you feel truly whole and connected. Find the love and peace within yourself and embrace all within the circle of that love and peace. Love for oneself engenders love for the world. The main indicator of progress on the spiritual path is simply the radius of your love.

“One who has realised the Self sees the Self in everyone.”

Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi)

Once I was waiting out a rain shower under a bus shelter. Suddenly I turned and noticed a spider hanging by its thread just next to my face. In that moment I felt so much kinship for that spider. It was just like me, waiting under the shelter. We were waiting together, two souls bound by love. There was not a chance in heaven or hell that I could have harmed that spider at that moment, or any spider at any moment for that matter. Many a times I have coaxed an insect out of the sink rather than flush it down the drain. Once I came face-to-face with a three-metre black cobra. We stared into each other's eyes for minutes. I felt a profound love for it, and am convinced that it also felt the same for me. It could have struck me at any moment but it didn't. The possibility of harm never entered into the equation, not for either of us. There was only love between us. And I would have done anything to help and protect it. Once a couple of birds adopted me as their protector and built their nest in a tree within arm's reach of my verandah. I developed such a beautiful relationship with those birds and did everything I could to ensure their wellbeing and that of their young. I fed them by hand and watched as their eggs hatched and they taught their babies to fly by flapping their wings at them. The greatest fulfilment comes not only in one's own personal fulfilment but also in ensuring the personal fulfilment of others.

A yogi wanted to take his guru some food. On the way he passed a hungry beggar but refused his pleas for food, then a hungry dog and refused him too. Finally, on reaching his guru's house, his guru said to him, "Why are you offering this food to me now? I already asked you twice but you refused me both times."

There is a Sufi saying: "Past the beggar and the suffering walks he who asks, 'Why, oh God, do you not do something for these people?' To which God replies, 'I do, through you.'"

Not so long ago we used to live in a world where we believed that the more we got the happier we would be. Now we are in the middle of a paradigm shift where we're realising that's not true. Rather, we know that to be really happy inside ourselves we've got to give as much as we take. We've got to think about the welfare of others as well as ourselves. Our own happiness lies in the happiness of others. And that means all people and all creatures of the world. A compassionate, empathetic, loving, caring and cooperative society is the way of the future of human evolution on our planet.

When asked which is the most important commandment, Jesus replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

When one lives a truly balanced life, one's internal search inspires one to help others, and helping others inspires one's internal search. It's a perfect feedback loop. The more you feel it internally the more you feel like sharing it. And the more you share it the more you feel it internally. The two aspects — self-realisation and service to all — are complimentary. We need social as well as personal transformation. The two are interconnected. The wellbeing of each and every one of us is linked to the wellbeing of our society and vice versa. One realises this the more one's own sense of self expands to encompass a greater sense of self: a greater sense of oneness with all things. The

more one's own being becomes identified with a greater sense of being, the more one is concerned with the collective wellbeing as a natural consequence. We embrace all within ourselves and rejoice in fulfilling our shared destiny. We are all on a great journey together, moving together towards the one ultimate realisation of our selves as one with the Greater Self. In the process you will naturally become more loving, more empathetic, more compassionate, and more willing and able to help others as well as yourself. Just as a cup runs over when full, a fulfilled soul is naturally generous.

"The man who can reform himself can reform the world."

Paramahansa Yogananda

But do not wait until you feel fulfilled to help others. The very process of fulfilling others' needs fulfils one's needs too. One of the best things to do if you are feeling down is to find someone who is worse off than you to help. You may feel that you are not capable of doing anything useful in your present state, but it will turn out the best for one and all. There is a parable that a man used to carry water with a cracked pot. The pot would protest that it was of no use and would implore the man to use a better, less flawed, one. But the man assured his pot that it was good enough. Finally the pot realised the result of its work. A line of flowers had sprung up along the path the man had been walking day after day, due to water leaking out of the cracked pot.

"Knowing oneself is the real knowledge; serving all with the ideation of God the real action; and the vow to please God the real devotion."

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Spiritual practice is the effort to complete oneself. You only need persist in twice-daily meditation, as well as the other aspects of the yogic lifestyle, to find redemption. Do more and more meditation and service. Help yourself more and help others more. Take care of the needs of your family, friends, community and society, but at the same time also take care of your inner need; your ultimate need for fulfilment. It is this balance that will bring about personal as well as social harmony. Our search for inner peace is intimately and ultimately connected to greater peace in the wider world. It is that feeling of connectedness; of oneness; of belonging; that will ultimately engender the greatest peace, contentment and bliss within us all and amongst us all.

“May the heart of Earth flow to the heart of heaven through my heart and through all hearts together. And may our hearts be the heart of every being in all the starry sky. And may the heart of the heavens flow to the heart of the Earth through my heart and though all of our hearts together. And may our hearts be the heart of every earthly creature.”

Mayan verse

Chapter Ten

The Culture of Love

Have you ever wondered why, when you are on a train and you throw something like a ball or an apple in the air, it comes straight back down to your hand, even though your position relative to the ground has changed because of the speed of the train? I am no physicist, but I believe the answer is love. Between two things we call it “gravity”. The force of attraction — the gravity — between the apple and the carriage keeps it in the same place relative to the train. Love is the force of attraction that holds the whole universe together. Every object, whether it be a planet or an apple, is attracted to the objects around it. There is a mutual attraction between all things. Between two minds we call it love, and we experience it as a sweet feeling; a flow of happiness; an expression of joy; a sense of oneness; a sense of identity; of belonging; of being. Actually we can't really describe in words what that feeling is but we all know what it is.

“That which makes the mind soft and strong and strenuous, so it may keep itself in a balanced state even in the condition of pain, that which perpetually creates a pleasant feeling within is called love... Love is the first word, love is the starting point, and love is the last point.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Now, love for a person in the form of one's parents, one's spouse, one's children, one's friends, one's pets, or any other object of affection is all very well. However, simply because of the limited and temporary nature of the object of our love — be it a person or a thing — we are bound to lose that love some time or another. It is unavoidable. Therefore the ideation behind our love should ideally be that of cosmic ideation — translating the feeling of love for the finite into love for the infinite; feeling that finite love as an expression of the Infinite Love. Only then will we attain the deep and lasting love we are all looking for. Just like the story of the master clinging to the tree in Chapter Five, we must let go of our attachment to the finite in order to attain the infinite. Note that I say let go of the attachment, not the thing itself. We can love others and be loved by others without being bound by that love. It is the finite love of attachment to finite beings that prevents us from experiencing infinite love for the Infinite Being. We must let go of our attachment to the finite to get the infinite.

Once a man went to pay his respects to a saint and in doing so interrupted his meditation. The man said to the saint, "I admire you for sacrificing the ephemeral for the eternal." The saint replied, "On the contrary, it is you who have sacrificed the eternal for the ephemeral. Before you arrived I was enjoying the company of the Beloved."

Love for the finite and the ephemeral is emotion. Love for the infinite and the eternal is devotion. As mentioned in the last chapter, devotion is the introversion of mind towards the one infinite all-encompassing object of desire and fulfilment, rather than the extroversion of mind towards many limited and disparate objects of desire and fulfilment. To experience the Cosmic Consciousness is to experience a feeling of all-pervading love, benevolence, peace and oneness. We all have the potential for infinite love within us and we will only be fulfilled when we can experience it. And the experience of that all-pervading love for the Supreme Self — of loving one's own self as the Supreme

Self — translates into love for all others as the Supreme Self. Love is the precursor of empathy, compassion and peace.

“When the power of love overcomes the love of power, then the world will know peace.”

Jimi Hendrix

My guru used to say that the main sign of spiritual progress is the radius of your love — to what extent do you love not only those close to you but all people in the world. And not only all people but all animals and plants too. And not only on this planet but on all the planets and celestial bodies throughout the universe. In this way it is possible to expand one’s radius of love to encompass the whole universe. Devotion unfolds with the unfolding of consciousness; with the expansion of one’s sense of self into the Infinite Self. It is our natural destiny, our dharma, our innermost desire, our deepest longing. And we develop it through the *sadhana* (the effort) of our meditation.

Growing up in the West, I would sometimes hear people say “God-fearing,” as in “a good God-fearing Christian.” Whenever I heard this I would think they were saying “God-faring,” as in “to live in God,” which sounded reasonable to me. But then one day I saw it spelt for the first time and realised that they meant God-fearing rather than God-faring. What a pity and what a loss that God should be feared. Why should an all-loving God be feared? My guru, Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, used to say, “One should not be God-fearing. One *must* be God-loving.” When you love someone, you identify with them. The more you love them, the more you identify with them. Similarly, the more you develop a relationship of love with your inner self — the Greater Self within you — the more you will identify with the Greater Self and the more your individual self will become one with that Greater Self.

“Now this sadhana which is sadhana for complete merger, for unification, starts with fearful love. Love must be there. Unless and until there is love there cannot be unification. So love must be there but it starts with fearful love and ends in fearless love; and the space between fearful love and fearless love is the space of sadhana. What is sadhana? Sadhana is the transformation of fearful love into fearless love.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

It is said that there are two things God cannot do: hate anyone and exclude anyone. Remember Birbal’s clever reply to King Akbar in Chapter Three: “Certainly you are greater than God. You can banish anyone from your kingdom but God cannot.” Just as the Cosmic Consciousness has an indelible relationship of love and inclusion with each and every one of us, to experience God Consciousness we must develop the same feeling of love and inclusion with Him. The essence of the Cosmic Consciousness of which we are all a part — indeed one with — cannot be a negative feeling such as fear because it is the essential reality towards which all our hopes and desires are inclined. We cannot ultimately be attracted towards something we fear.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

Martin Luther King Jr

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti used to say that “God is love personified.” What more could one want than the deepest and most profound love for ourselves and all others as expressions of the Infinite Self. When love pervades one’s being — when one’s cup overflows with divine love — there is nothing more to desire.

During the Renaissance in Europe around 500 years ago, the concept of humanism arose, which expanded the collective consciousness of the time to the feeling of love and inclusion of all people. Now we are in the midst of a new renaissance which is expanding the collective consciousness of our time to the feeling of love and inclusion of not only all people, but all animals and plants too, of all beings of the planet. In fact, not only all beings on our planet but all beings on all celestial bodies in the universe — to the whole universe.

This expansion of the underlying spirit of humanism to universalism has been termed by mystic, philosopher and social reformer Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar as Neohumanism — new humanism — the culture of love for all created beings of the universe, animate and inanimate. Humanism means proper regard and compassion for people — for human beings. But it does not include other beings — animals, plants and the various aspects of nature. Neohumanism is the spirit of humanism extended to all: the elevation of humanism to universalism — love for all people, animals, plants, the planet, and the entire universe. It is an all-encompassing concept of the innate oneness of all things, expanding racial, national, cultural, religious and other limiting sentiments to embrace the whole world as our home and everything in it our family in an interconnected and harmonious web of unity. It means the expansion of one's inner love for humanity in every direction to include all people and all creatures of the universe as part of the one Cosmic Family.

“When the love of the human heart extends to embrace the entire living and non-living world, that is Neohumanism.”

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

The more we expand our sense of self into the Cosmic Self, the more our feeling of love extends to encompass everyone and

everything in the universe, the more we recognise that all are manifestations of the one Infinite Consciousness, the more we feel that just as our lives are important to us, the lives of others are equally important to them — that we must recognise, respect and nurture the lives of all for the evolution of all life on our planet. We must not only care for ourselves and our families, friends and immediate communities, but we must also care for the wider collective of the world as a whole, including all animals, plants and the planet.

“Where there is love there is no effort. When a mother carries a child in her arms, or when a child rests on the mother’s shoulder, it is not at all a burden for the mother. Once you have the feeling of universal motherhood; once your mind becomes as expansive as the universe; then you can carry the burden of the entire world. You won’t feel the heaviness.”

Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi)

It is the practice of Neohumanism within one’s life (through the introspective practices of yoga and meditation) and in relation to everyone else (through selfless service) that will ultimately bring about a world of social equity, justice and peace. Neohumanism challenges limiting beliefs and dogmas that separate people by encouraging rationality over sentimentality. Both rationality and sentiment function out of intellect. All living beings have instinct, but what distinguishes us as human beings is intellect — we have intellect as well as instinct, and intellect can either function sentimentally or rationally, with sentiment (at least till now) tending to win out most times.

Sentiment is intellect bereft of rationality. Based on selfish pleasure, it drives the mind to be attracted to whatever it wants,

without any regard for the consequences, and is therefore dangerous to oneself as well as to the society. It leads to dogma — irrational ideas without a logical foundation — and as such gives rise to superstition, exploitation and oppression in all spheres of human life.

Rationality, on the other hand, is the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, between what should be done and what should not be done, using one's conscience to make an informed and conscientious decision. Rationality leads to truth in the physical sphere (in the physical sciences and technology), truth in the mental sphere (in the sciences of psychology and sociology and in the arts), and to the highest spiritual truth through the intuitional science of yoga and meditation. Rationality gives rise to devotion. The more one thinks one knows, the more one negates the knowledge of a higher power. That higher power exists as the highest knowledge — the knower of all — and is ever-present, knowable and attainable for anyone who aspires to know it and attain it. Rationality leads to the inevitable conclusion that, for one's total and permanent fulfilment, one must fall in love with the highest truth, the Infinite Love that pervades all things. This is devotion (as opposed to emotion). Devotion is potentially and ultimately one's most valuable asset. It expands the mind and makes the heart sweet and strong. And because it is not a limiting sentiment it transcends all boundaries and limitations and transforms one's sense of worldly existence into the state of Supreme Bliss.

“Devotion must be accepted as the highest mission in life; it leads humanity towards the stage of subtlety, and finally ensconces a person in the state of Supreme Bliss, transforming the heart from a desert into a fertile oasis.”

I will end this chapter with a small selection of touching stories from the life of Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, the propounder of Neohumanism — stories which illustrate how a profoundly neohumanistic attitude can engender a surprisingly wonderful and otherwise unexpected relationship with the created world.

As a child he was witnessed riding a tiger on at least two occasions: once when a group of friends surreptitiously followed him into the jungle and reported the sighting to his mother; and again when a woodcutter reported to his father that he had seen him riding a tiger.

There was another reported encounter with a tiger years later when he was in the Indian Territorial Force during the second world war. During a training exercise in Assam in the north of India, a fellow cadet reported the following:

“One day four or five of us were on patrol duty in a nearby forest as part of our training. Prabhat was leading our squad. He was about 25 yards ahead of us and we were walking along a narrow jungle path, when suddenly a tiger leapt down from a nearby slope and came face-to-face with Prabhat. The rest of us were some distance behind him. Seeing him in imminent danger, we immediately trained our rifles on the tiger. We were afraid that it might leap on Prabhat at any moment, so we wanted to shoot it. But Prabhat made a gesture with his hand indicating that we should not harm it. We were transfixed and did not know what to do. In the terrifying moments that followed, Prabhat appeared completely undisturbed. The tiger glared menacingly at him for a while, and then to our relief slowly ambled off into the nearby woods. We all rushed over to Prabhat. We were very tense as we considered it to be a close call. But we found him calm and serene. One of us said, ‘Prabhat Da, we were really scared. For a while we were frozen with fear. We thought that at any moment the tiger would leap on you and we would be unable to rescue you. But you were quite unconcerned.’

“Why should I feel concerned?” he replied.

“The tiger was looking at you so menacingly. In one leap it could have finished you.”

Prabhat jokingly said, “Actually, we were having a friendly chat. The tiger was telling me about its mental agony.”

“Is that so? What did it tell you, Prabhat Da?”

“It said, ‘See, human beings think we are ferocious and cruel. In fact we aren’t cruel. We only kill when we are hungry, and then too only those animals that nature has prescribed for our food. But humans come to our jungle and kill us, even for sport. They enjoy seeing us die a painful death. They kill other living beings for their enjoyment too. Although nature has designed the human body to be vegetarian, they eat all kinds of animals just for the taste. They not only destroy us and our habitats, but they also destroy other human beings as well due to selfishness and hatred. Yet they have the temerity to call themselves civilised!’

“‘Yes Tigerji,’ I replied, ‘what you say is correct. Those people who don’t love other human beings and all other living creatures are not human beings in the real sense of the term.’ ”

“We all laughed heartily at the humorous way Prabhat described what had been a potentially dangerous situation, and this helped to diffuse the tension. We then continued on our patrol duty.”

A childhood friend who had often seen him sitting for long hours in a temple with his eyes closed — a sight that always impressed him — once saw something that amazed him even more:

“One day, when I was studying in class six, a group of four or five bulls started chasing me down a narrow lane. I dropped my books and ran for my life. As I was running, I saw Prabhat Da standing at the end of the street. When I reached him, he shielded me from the bulls. Just before they reached him, they suddenly stopped and became as still as statues. I was amazed. Then he told me to go and pick up my schoolbooks. I was afraid to do so, because in order to reach the books I had to walk back

past the bulls. But Prabhat Da assured me that I had nothing to fear, that they would not harm me. I hesitated, but finally gathered my courage, walked past them, picked up my books, then walked back again. The bulls didn't move an inch the entire time. When I came back with the books, Prabhat waved his hand in the direction of the bulls, and only then did they move. Turning around, they simply walked away."

Another popular story relates an occasion in his later years when, while travelling by jeep through a jungle with some companions, they came across a rhinoceros and her calf blocking the road. Despite repeated attempts by his companions to shoo them off the road, they would not budge. Prabhat then got out of the jeep, walked straight towards them and whispered something into the mother's ear. His companions reported seeing her shed a tear before she and her calf walked off the road. When Prabhat returned to them they asked him what he had said. He replied, "She was in need of some love."

"According to Neohumanism, the final and supreme goal is to make one's individual existential nucleus coincide with the Cosmic Existential Nucleus... That Neohumanistic status will save not only the human world but the plant and animal worlds also. In that supreme Neohumanistic status, the universal humanity will attain the consummation of its existence... And when this surging Neohumanism overflows in all directions, making all things sweet and blissful, unifying individual life with collective life and transforming this Earth into a blissful heaven... then nothing will be impossible for human beings; they will be able to do anything and everything."

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

Chapter Eleven

The Economics of Love

It will be clear by now that the spiritual practices of yoga are not escapism. Far from it. As you expand your sense of self and wellbeing through the practice of meditation you grow to identify more and more with the Cosmic Self and hence everyone and everything in the world. Your feelings of love for yourself as one with that Cosmic Self will naturally overflow into feelings of love, compassion and empathy for all others as part of our one Cosmic Family. And as we saw in the last chapter, this culture of love — this expansion of oneself to encompass all within the radius of one's love; the expansion of one's limited feelings of love to universal love, to universalism — is Neohumanism. Now, we can take that a step further and apply the spirit of that love to create a just, equitable and inclusive economics of love for the welfare and happiness of all people on the planet.

This is also part of the spiritual path. The physical and mental wellbeing of all is tied in with the spiritual search. The thirst for infinite happiness — perfect peace and contentment — can only be quenched with a healthy body and mind. And for a healthy body and mind the physical requirements of life are essential. Physical and mental satisfaction must precede spiritual development and elevation. So the proper use and equitable distribution of the resources of the world through a just and equitable socio-economic system is essential for each

individual's spiritual search within the development of an increasingly spiritual society.

In the same way that, in each family, parents take proper care of their children, making sure they all have their basic needs met, that everyone has enough food, clothing, education and healthcare, if we can apply that family spirit to our larger society, recognising that we are all part of the one universal family and as such we should strive to meet the needs of all people and all creatures, we will naturally create a society based on love, inclusion and justice.

"The basic ingredient for building a healthy society is simply genuine love."

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

Meanwhile our current state of affairs is one of growing wealth disparity, of oppression, injustice and exploitation, of environmental destruction, and of an increasing number of manmade as well as natural disasters that are threatening the integrity of our society and planet. The dogma of materialism which has prevailed for the last 500 years, which has conditioned us into believing in the selfishness of material gratification over the selflessness of spiritual elevation, has fed right into the prevailing dogma of capitalism to fuel profit-motivated consumption resulting in not only the plunder of the world's resources but also the degradation of our human values. There are no winners here. Both the exploited and the exploiters suffer.

"If a materialistic philosophy contains narrowness, psycho-physical imbalance is inevitable, and people will remain poor and deprived in spite of everything."

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

What we need is a people-motivated rather than a profit-motivated economy to lead us into a prosperous and sustainable future. We need another way to do business that is environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and focused on the welfare of all.

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice... injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere... the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience.”

Martin Luther King Jr

Pope Francis said in his Apostolic Exhortation:

“The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises... The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies... As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills... We need to be convinced that charity is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones).”

Despite the need for this message, I believe it is a good sign that religious leaders such as the Pope are beginning to speak out against the extreme social inequality and wealth disparity of our times. Just as a global shift in consciousness is happening as we speak, a parallel shift in social awareness and concern is also happening. We are in the middle of it. Just as we are in the process of replacing the outmoded materialist values of the past few hundred years with new spiritual values, we are also in the process of replacing the outmoded capitalist socio-economic system with a new socio-economic system for the wellbeing of all people, animals, plants and the planet.

Immanuel Wallerstein, an American sociologist at Yale University, said, “Modern capitalism has reached the end of its rope. It cannot survive as a system... the real political struggle that is going on in the world is not about capitalism but about what should replace it.”

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar has said, “In the interest of living beings, as a whole, capitalism must come to an end... Capitalism cannot serve humanity, while communism failed to serve humanity. Both capitalism and communism are dying. Capitalism will die a natural death, while communism died an unnatural death.” He not only introduced the concept of Neohumanism as a sublime social outlook for the future, but also a socio-economic model to implement that social outlook. That new socio-economic model is organically falling into place in different forms around the world. And the spirit of this falling into place of a new socio-economic order based on love, compassion, selflessness, foresight and sustainability is reflected in the preamble to the *Earth Charter*, an international declaration of fundamental values and principles:

“We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great

promise. To move forward we must recognise that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.”

In other words, we need to share the love and spread the wealth. On the one hand we need to give emphasis to true spirituality, the inner search for the essence of one’s being, and by extension the essence of all beings. And on the other hand we need to emphasise the importance of not neglecting the material necessities of life for oneself and society. But not to excess — not to the exclusion or deprivation of the needs of others. We need a change of system. Because it’s the system of corporate capitalism which is the vehicle of corporate hegemony. It’s the system which allows corporations to buy, control and own government. It’s the system which has allowed the corporatisation of our democracy. Rather, we need a spiritual economy — an economy based on people rather than profit, on giving rather than greed, on love rather than exploitation. Here are some key aspects of what I believe that system is starting to look like:

Holistic Approach Based on Spirituality

Spirituality must be the fundamental value of any humane socio-economic model. Our most fundamental spiritual thirst may be quenched by spiritual practice, including meditation. For spiritual practice, however, we must first have mental strength and balance of mind, and for that we must have our physical

requirements met. For spiritual practice a healthy mind is required, and for the mind to function properly the body must also be properly maintained. Physical requirements must precede psycho-spiritual development and elevation. So spirituality is linked to economics — it is at the core of human life on all levels.

Ethical Leadership

Leadership that will transform society, resolve conflicts and elevate us towards a better and brighter future must be benevolent leadership backed by benevolent intention. Leaders should be those people who have the feeling of cosmic oneness and fraternity deep in their hearts. People act selfishly because they don't feel the connection between themselves and others. They don't understand how their actions ultimately affect themselves as an integral part of society. It's only those people who feel a deep connection to others — whose hearts feel the hearts of all; who consider the welfare and happiness of each and everyone as at least as important as their own welfare and happiness — who have the strength of character to work for the wellbeing of all through their love, compassion and understanding. Leadership must be moral (selfless) leadership as opposed to the immoral (selfish) leadership we are all too familiar with. Otherwise the corruption and degradation of society is inevitable. For a benevolent society, leaders in positions of authority must have strong moral integrity, exemplary conduct, and selfless dedication to their work.

“Social control will have to be in the hands of those who are spiritually elevated, intelligent and brave all at the same time.”

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

The question you may be asking at this stage is how are we going to get such leadership? Although I am not in a position to

answer that question, one thing I can say for sure is that it will not be through our current system of political democracy, which in many respects is the primary mechanism for the social injustice of our capitalist society. Our current system of political democracy does not equate with justice and liberty for all people because votes can (and usually are) bought by big money. A driving test is not only based on age but also knowledge and ability. Why should it be any different for determining the right to stand for election and the right to vote? Instead, people of voting age are easily duped into voting for the candidate or party with the most media influence through the most financial backing. Universal suffrage is the very mechanism by which socio-economic rights continue to be denied and people continue to be exploited by immoral leaders and their backers. Political democracy may sound nice and look good from a distance, but when you get up close to it and really know what is going on under the surface, it really is not much more “democratic” than anything else we’ve had.

“Democracy is the worst form of government,
except for all the other forms we’ve tried.”

Winston Churchill

In other words, it may be the best we’ve had so far, but we can do better.

Jeffrey Sachs, an economist at Columbia University, has written, “The American political system is a corrupt system. If politicians are raising billions of dollars of private money to run political campaigns, you know that this cannot work, that this isn’t really representing the attitudes and opinions of the people. The power of the interest groups is so enormous — their hold on politics — that whatever happens is utterly transactional.”

In other words, many countries like the USA are not run by government but by big business, where the guiding philosophy is profit. That’s why we have entrenched institutions that — due

to the vested interests of their corporate bodies, suppliers and investors — prevent fair government, free healthcare, meaningful education, wholesome food, environmental sustainability and renewable energy. To obtain truly benevolent leadership for the welfare of society, the influence of big money, wherever it comes from, must be removed from the democratic process.

Economic Democracy

The term ‘globalisation’ has proven itself to be little more than a feel-good catchphrase for global exploitation, and “free trade” is not free. True globalisation not only means an exchange of goods between countries but also respect for local cultures and the empowering of local peoples and economies. It is summed up by the phrase, “globalise humanity, localise the economy,” or “think globally, act locally.”

Economic democracy means empowering localities with the self-determination to make their own economic decisions, with local people as shareholders and stakeholders in their own local enterprises, and locally produced goods given priority in the marketplace. Economic power and decision-making should be under local control because it is the local leaders and planners who have local sentiments, best understand the problems of the area, and are able to implement policies quickly and effectively, as opposed to centralised economic planning and production which is inherently inefficient and causes economic and social disparity. So rather than political democracy, what we really need is economic democracy.

Economic Decentralisation

We can see the effects of economic centralisation all around us: over-population, pollution, crime, extreme economic disparity, alcohol and drug abuse, a disconnect between family

members working in the city and those left back in the countryside. Economic decentralisation is healthiest for people, animals, plants and the planet. So we need to go from a centralised to a decentralised economy, where planners understand the problems of the local area, leaders are local people with local sentiments, and implementation is practical, effective and quick. And a decentralised economy can better ensure that the ecological systems of the Earth are not exploited beyond their capacity to renew themselves because environmental stewardship is a requisite for people who are dependent upon these systems for their own survival and wellbeing.

Regional Self-Reliance

Rather than relying on goods, services, labour and resources from far-off points of supply and distribution, imagine the world full of vibrant, thriving, largely self-contained, cooperative communities spread throughout the countryside. There would be minimum importation of raw materials and maximum processing of products for export, thus keeping as much wealth and resources as possible in each local area. This is in marked contrast to the current setup of “free trade” agreements or trade “partnerships”, which in reality represent the imposition of tariffs for the exploitation of poor trading partners by the richer ones.

In Sanskrit, the word for ‘society’ means the collective body of those engaged in social progress, inspired by the same ideology towards the same higher goal. Each region could adopt and apply this ethos within the limitations of its own ethnicity, culture, language, economic situation, geographic location and any other common factor which would define it as a self-sufficient economic area. This would be a beautiful expression of the maxim “universal in spirit but regional in application.” And being a member of a particular community would not depend on one’s birthplace, nationality, or any other limiting factor. The

only requirement would be that one should merge one's own socio-economic interest with the socio-economic interest of the concerned locality.

Cooperatives

Studies have found that the body's immune system is physically compromised by selfish actions and strengthened by cooperative actions. A healthy human society, just like a healthy human body, must also be cooperative rather than competitive. Cooperation must supercede competition for sustainability. So we need to shift the emphasis from corporation to cooperation; from corporate to cooperative industry; from Wall Street to Main Street. The cooperative model has existed for some time already, but is set to become the primary business model of the future as we move into a more compassionate and cooperative economy. To date, cooperatives have been shown to have a 90 percent success rate (based on remaining in operation after the first five years) compared with only a 10 percent rate for other business models. And because they are more likely to keep money and resources circulating within their local community, they are more effective in creating jobs and improving the local economy.

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar said that cooperatives are "the best expression of human sweetness in the physical realm," being owned and run by their members, who combine their wealth and resources in a united way, each member contributing directly to the operation and decision-making process of the cooperative and sharing in the returns of the cooperative based on their contribution of labour, capital, equipment, land, etc.

Cooperative management is best for the most efficient utilisation of land and other resources, and the optimal production and distribution of goods and services. Collective ownership means no one feels like a mere employee, each member having the feeling of ownership and oneness with the

job and an interest in the success of the cooperative for the benefit of all members, their community and the environment. The more people that work as members of cooperatives, the less people will be exploited as workers of profit-motivated corporations and the profit-motivated interests of their shareholders. Having said this, though, it must be mentioned here that a decentralised economy is important to the success of cooperatives and so the more decentralised the economy becomes then the more successful the cooperative model overall will become.

Proper Utilisation of Resources

There are enough resources on our planet to sustain our current population and more, if, that is, processes are sustainable, renewable resources are maximised, and production is according to need rather than profit. Just as in a healthy human body — or family for that matter — resources should be used properly and distributed rationally. Population growth is not the problem. Current problems are not so much of supply but of utilisation and distribution. In rampant capitalism the real problem is the exploitation of natural resources for the manufacture of goods that people don't really need, or even want, and then the exploitation of people's sentiments through advertising and the media in order to sell them those goods that they don't need or want. The problem is one of misutilisation and misdistribution.

Rational Distribution of Wealth and Resources

Rational distribution does not mean equal distribution. It means an *equitable* distribution of resources amongst those who need them, just like trees share their resources according to their needs through their root networks, or the body shares its resources according to the need of its various parts and organs — not necessarily equally but equitably. So in the case of society it

means equitable distribution of wealth depending on the needs of people and communities.

People cannot attain their highest human potential if they lack food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education. These basic requirements should be guaranteed through full and meaningful employment to every able person (or social security for those unable to work due to illness, debility or old age).

At the same time there should be a ceiling on individual wealth to restrict excessive accumulation. The psychic and spiritual wealth of the world is unlimited, but physical wealth is not. The hoarding of physical wealth, therefore, results in the deprivation of others. The health of society is measured by the living standard of the poorest, not that of the richest, and the current living standard of the poorest people in our society is unacceptable by any civilised standards. A sound building needs both a floor and a ceiling. In a sound economy there would be a floor of the basic necessities for all, and a ceiling to keep the collective wealth within the reach of all. The wealth gap between the poorest and the richest in most economies is currently in the order of millions or billions, which if you think about it is preposterous. A healthy wealth gap, on the other hand, would conceivably be around ten-fold. Parents would never allow one child to starve while the rest of the family eat their fill. And so it should also be for our larger family of humanity on this planet. The massive misdistribution of wealth in the world — amongst countries and amongst the citizens of each country — is affecting the physical and mental health of all, rich and poor. The welfare of the individual is inextricably linked to the welfare of the collective, and vice versa. To heal our world we will need to address these issues of extreme inequity.

“If a person acquires and accumulates excessive wealth, he or she directly curtails the happiness and convenience of others in society. Such behaviour is

flagrantly antisocial... If a single person dies due to lack of the minimum requirements of life, the whole society is to blame."

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

A wealth ceiling would result in a reasonable and rational wealth gap, ensuring the equitable distribution of wealth to individuals according to need, and to the collective in the form of public services and amenities, thus increasing individual and collective wealth for the vast majority of people. And meaningful employment with a living wage would ensure adequate purchasing capacity for all basic necessities. To encourage good work and the evolution of human endeavour and achievement, incentives for special merit and skills should also be provided on the basis of the social value of those skills.

Modernisation (the use of appropriate technology) in an economy where production is for need, not profit, would not only increase the quality and quantity of production, but would also decrease work hours (with increased wages for time worked) and save time and energy, freeing people up for more leisure activities. The combination of decreased profit margin and modernisation would facilitate this because the wealth would come down to benefit all, not just those at the top. Again, this does not mean an equality of wealth, but a balancing out which benefits all according to input and needs.

And through availability of goods in the market place and price control, purchasing capacity is assured, providing a decent standard of living for all people. Purchasing capacity (and not per-capita income) is the true index of standard of living. This means that as the collective wealth increases, the standard of the minimum necessities and incentives should also increase, resulting in a greater standard of living. This process should be ever-increasing, with the gap between necessities and incentives

also decreasing over time, leading to ever-decreasing socio-economic disparity and ever-increasing standard of living and collective wealth.

“Increasing the minimum standard of living of the people is the indication of the vitality of society ... In order to raise the level of the minimum requirements of people, the best policy is to increase their purchasing capacity.”

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

Social Progress

Social progress in all spheres of life should be encouraged, through the continued advancement of science and technology in tandem with freedom in expression of language, culture, art, literature, the media and spirituality. And just as a tree has the freedom to grow but also the responsibility to give fruit or shade, there should be a balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility, and between economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. Just as personal and social progress are intertwined, economic growth must not be at the expense of individual happiness, environmental destruction, or the breakdown of human values. Gross local happiness (as the Bhutanese government implemented with their gross national happiness policy) is far more important than gross national product. Business interests should be for the good of all because the development and progress of the individual is linked to the development and progress of the society. And all personal and social progress ultimately leads to the greatest progress of all — that of spiritual emancipation.

“To march towards the ultimate reality by forming a society free from all inequalities, with everyone

moving in unison... one will have to promote individual welfare motivated by the spirit of promoting collective welfare.”

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

The above outline reflects a new socio-economic model introduced by Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, which he called Prout, the Progressive Utilisation Theory. It stands for the balanced development of all potentialities (physical, mental and spiritual) of human and cosmic existence towards a truly progressive human society for the welfare and happiness of all.

“Alternative vision is crucial at this moment in history. Prout’s cooperative model of economic democracy based on cardinal human values and sharing of the planet for the welfare of everyone deserves our serious consideration.”

Noam Chomsky

“Prout is very important for grassroots groups and for all who yearn for a liberation which starts from economics and opens to the totality of personal and social existence.”

Leonardo Boff, founder of Liberation Theology

Once when Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar was visiting Switzerland in 1979, a follower asked him, “Will we see Prout established in our lifetime?” The follower’s five-year-old daughter was standing next to him. Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar pointed to him and said, “You won’t.” Then he pointed to his daughter and said, “But she will.”

Chapter Twelve

By Cosmic Grace

You may recall that in the first chapter I related the beautiful allegory of the Buddha stone and the foot stone. The foot stone had given up on the struggle of being shaped into the Buddha and had therefore had to remain in a lowly position. The Buddha stone, however, had attained its elevated position by persevering through all the struggles that it had to go through in order to be shaped into the Buddha. The moral of the story is that through struggle we can elevate our minds to the ultimate state of Buddhahood — enlightenment, self-realisation, the realisation our oneness with the Cosmic Self, the merging of our individual consciousness with the Infinite Consciousness. Life is a struggle to attain perfection, and the hardships and sufferings we undergo along the way, all the ups and downs and crises in our lives, are not in vain. They are elevating us towards a more and more elevated state of being. Just as the Buddha stone attained its elevated position in the temple, we are in the process of attaining the most elevated position in the temple of life. And as we have seen throughout this book, the attainment of that most elevated state of being is the primary purpose of human life. Our lives are a mission to elevate our minds to the state of Buddhahood and attain the highest state of being. In the process we attain our most cherished desire — that of infinite happiness, perfect peace and contentment, bliss. And remember that the mission has two sides to it: the personal and the social. Self-realisation and service to

all. As we expand our sense of being, we encompass others more within the scope of our being. As we feel the love of the Infinite more and more within us, we become more loving to others because the more we feel that we are one with the Infinite, the more we feel that all others are also expressions of that Infinite Oneness — that we are all part of the same Cosmic Family. And the ultimate realisation is that there really are no others — we are all One. Our growing feeling of oneness fosters a growing feeling of love and compassion for each and everyone, and that is expressed — through different aspects of our social and community life — in not only helping ourselves but also in helping others on their own journey. We are in this together and our own wellbeing is dependent on the wellbeing of all. Our own emancipation ultimately lies in the emancipation of all.

What I want to introduce now is the concept and importance of Guru. We have become accustomed to the word *guru* these days as being used loosely to refer to a wide variety of teachers with varying degrees of qualification in different fields of life. But the real meaning of the word is the highest teacher — the one who conveys the highest teachings and guides us towards the highest truth.

There is a story that a lioness died while giving birth, and that the cub was hanging around her body when a pack of jackals came to feed on the corpse. Out of compassion they adopted the lion cub as one of their own. He grew up not knowing anything except the life of a jackal. He thought he was one of them, and behaved just like them too. One day a fully-grown male lion came across the pack, and was surprised to see the young lion amongst them. He ran into the pack — of course they all scattered — and caught the young lion by the scruff of the neck, dragged him to a nearby pond, and put his face over the still water so he could see his reflection. The young lion was scared at first to see “another” lion staring back at him, but he soon realised that it was only his own reflection. He realised that he wasn’t a jackal after all — he was the king of the jungle.

In Sanskrit, *gu* means 'darkness, or ignorance', and *ru* means 'one who dispels'. So the proper meaning of the word *guru* is 'one who dispels the darkness of ignorance'. Although loosely used today, in the deepest sense it means an enlightened spiritual master; one who has realised oneself as the Cosmic Self; one who completely identifies their own consciousness with the Cosmic Consciousness; one who has merged one's being with the Supreme Being. In the guru, consciousness is fully manifest. As such, the guru is a direct channel of all cosmic knowledge and inspiration; a perfect reflection of Cosmic Consciousness. In fact Guru in the real sense of the term is none other than the Cosmic Consciousness guiding and teaching us, either directly or through a physical form.

So the Guru is not the physical form but the entity behind the physical form; the Cosmic Entity. Guru is the one that shows us who we really are, because just like the lion cub, we have also forgotten our true nature. The Guru's teachings stem from the deepest realm of realisation, inspiring and elevating each and everyone to the attainment of their own self-realisation. Guru is the Supreme Self within you; your Inner Self guiding you back to yourself; back to the realisation of your self as the "king of the jungle"; the master of the universe; the Infinite Consciousness; the eternal, all-knowing and ever-blissful Supreme Being. Only one who is a perfect reflection of consciousness, beyond the scope of duality, can from that transcendent state of pure consciousness enlighten others, just as the rays of the sun are the ultimate source of light and warmth. The Guru is the Inner Self. When in physical form, He is the inner Self embodied. The Guru is not a person, but the divine power of grace flowing through that person. The real Guru is, essentially, the Cosmic Consciousness.

"The Guru principle is within everyone as the inner Self, so when we pay our respects to the Guru, we are paying our respects to our own Self. The Guru is

the Self; he is nothing but Supreme Consciousness and Supreme Bliss.”

Swami Muktananda

By adopting the Supreme Consciousness as one’s teacher, one’s inner guiding light, as the Guru of the Universe, one cannot go astray on the spiritual path. You can make any mistake under the sun, but don’t let go of the Guru. Let the love and guidance of the Guru take you to the highest realisation. Remember, the only way to attain complete and permanent fulfilment is to realise the Higher Consciousness as the essence of your own consciousness; to identify with it as the core of your being; as the self of your self; to make the deepest connection with it so as to be able to experience the deepest love that we are all searching for in the depths of our hearts. Bathe in the ocean of that infinite love and happiness. Soothe your being with the waves of bliss washing up on the shores of your soul. Connect with your innermost sense of self; your deepest self. Realise yourself as the Greater Self.

Continue with all the practices come what may. Your inner journey is the greatest journey, because through it you will attain the greatest fulfilment in life. The result of your meditation will transcend all other results. When you lose all the limited and temporary things in your life; when everything else has gone; only the Infinite will remain.

To help you structure your day, and incorporate the practices into your daily lifestyle, here’s a rough guide to where everything fits in:

Morning:

- Take a half-bath
- Sing Bábá Nám Kevalam kiirtan
- Meditate with the Bábá Nám Kevalam mantra

- Do the yoga postures and exercises, skin massage and deep relaxation
- Eat a sentient vegetarian breakfast

Throughout the day:

- Follow the yogic principles of morality in your daily life
- Take a half-bath before eating a sentient vegetarian lunch
- Repeat internally (or sing out loud) the mantra during the day to stay calm and relaxed

Evening:

- Take a half-bath
- Sing *Bábá Nám Kevalam kiirtan*
- Meditate with the *Bábá Nám Kevalam* mantra
- Do the yoga postures and exercises, skin massage and deep relaxation
- Eat a sentient vegetarian dinner
- Take a half-bath before you sleep

Don't worry if it takes a while to get used to everything. Practice makes perfect. These things take time. And in particular, your progress in meditation will happen in its own time. An egg must hatch from within. You cannot force it. Spiritual progress lies under the surface. It may not necessarily manifest as an "enlightened" feeling or state of mind until you have worked through the issues you need to work through within yourself. On the other hand, someone may have an "enlightened" feeling or state of mind, or put themselves across as "enlightened", but still have to work through their issues. You cannot know. It's all very subtle and esoteric. So don't compare yourself to anyone else. Everyone's progress is different. Keep positive, have faith in the process, and practice sincerely. That's all you need to do to eventually get to where you ultimately want to be. Unless you dig the land, no seed can be sown. You cannot discover new horizons

unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore. To reach the beautiful island you must keep swimming. Take each day as it comes, but don't give up. Your spiritual practice is the most important part of life: everything else hinges on your internal wellbeing, so it's essential to get it right and make it an integral part of your lifestyle. Take the determination to succeed and you will attain the greatest goal in life.

“Having attained liberty of spirit, so precious and so greatly desired by all, [the soul] went forth from low things to high; from terrestrial it became celestial; from human, Divine.”

St John of the Cross

Faith, determination and sincerity play a big part on the spiritual path. And through your ongoing effort of spiritual practice they attract grace, because the more you transcend yourself into the Cosmic Self, the more you avail yourself of the cosmic grace. That grace is always there, like a continual rain shower. It is only when one removes the umbrella of ego from above one's head that one can get drenched by the cosmic grace. The Supreme Guru cannot help but shower His love and grace on all, just like a mother's urge to feed her child. Cosmic grace is the miracle fruit which makes all bitter and sour experiences sweet. Depend on Him completely, like a baby in its mother's arms. A king once told the people that they can have whatever they touch in his palace. A little girl came in and took his hand. Be like that little girl and put your faith in God. When, after playing with its toys all day, the child cries for its mother, she cannot help but take it up in her arms.

There is a beautiful story that during the second world war a soldier was chased by enemy soldiers past a series of cave openings. He quickly ducked into one of them before they could see which one he went into, and hid in the back of it. Then he

heard them searching the caves, and prayed to God for protection. Just as he did that, a spider came out and wove its web across the opening of the cave. When the enemy soldiers saw the web they discounted it as empty. That's God's grace. It is always there for one who might avail himself or herself of it.

Some sailors were becalmed off the coast of Brazil, dying of thirst because they had run out of water. Eventually they realised that, even though they were in the middle of the sea, they were surrounded by fresh water coming from the mouth of the Amazon. No matter what circumstance you find yourself in, God's grace is always there if you look for it.

"Liberation cannot be effected by one's own strength. It is only a greater power than one's own, from outside the range of ignorance, that can cut the final knot of bondage, and that power comes from the grace of Guru."

Kularnava Tantra

A great devotee was sitting on a bench outside a bank, absorbed in the love of God. As he was sitting there, a bank robbery took place. The robbers came out of the bank with bags of cash and suddenly heard sirens approaching. They panicked, dropped the bags next to the devotee and ran. The police arrived, arrested the devotee and took him to court. When asked for his side of the story he replied, "By the grace of God I was sitting outside the bank. By the grace of God a bank robbery took place. By the grace of God I was arrested for it. And by the grace of God I am standing before you today." The judge dismissed the case.

Develop an all-consuming love for Him, like a moth to the light. Whatever you are going through, be rock-steady in your faith and devotion, just as an anvil holds out against the numerous blows from the blacksmith's hammer. The darkest storm makes way for the brightest light. There is always a light at

the end of the tunnel. The night is darkest just before the dawn. The dark clouds soon release their water as life-giving rain.

A person matures just like a river, being at first impetuous then gradually calmer, more placid and wiser. Then, just as a river merges with the sea, becoming one with it, one merges with the Supreme Sea when one realises one's existence as the Infinite Existence. Only then do the vicissitudes of pleasure and pain merge into the one unchanging, eternal and infinite bliss. Steer the boat round the river bends, then let it run with the favourable wind to its inexorable union with the sea.

Consciousness is the ocean. Thoughts are the waves on the ocean. The more we can calm the surface of our being, the more we can see into the depths of our being. When the body and senses are stilled, we can look into the calm waters of our existence and discover our true Self, just as the lion cub recognised himself as the king of the jungle. The mirror of the mind reflects the light of consciousness. The more we clean the dust off the mirror, the clearer we can see our true reflection. The greater our realisation of "I am the Cosmic Consciousness," the more our inner peace increases, until we realise the infinite love and peace pervading the whole universe. Realisation is like smoke swirling up into the air and gradually but surely getting dissipated into the atmosphere.

"Without the realisation of God, everything else is futile."

Shri Ramakrishna

Beyond the deepest layer of the mind is nothing but the pure Cosmic Consciousness — the essence of all; the ultimate existence; complete awareness. It's here that the sense of individual existence completely merges with the infinite Cosmic existence, just as a river merges with the sea, and becomes one with the deepest layer of the Cosmic ocean — serene and still, only the total experience of Cosmic Bliss remains.

Those that have experienced this state have been powerless to describe it to others, because it's completely beyond the mind. It cannot even be thought of, let alone expressed in words. Shri Ramakrishna, a guru who lived in the nineteenth century, would slip in and out of this state all the time. When asked to describe it he could only answer, "If a salt doll tries to fathom the depths of the sea, it dissolves in it. Then who is left to report on the depth of the sea?"

After a long evolutionary journey the individual mind finally attains the merger of its limited "I"-feeling in the complete experience of the infinite and eternal Cosmic Bliss. We feel hesitant to dive into that ocean of bliss because we don't want to sacrifice our individual sense of existence. We don't realise that we would gain something far greater in return, like the saint in Chapter Ten who "sacrificed" the ephemeral for the eternal. That's a good deal — the bliss is in the eternal, not the ephemeral.

"Every mortal loss is an immortal gain. The ruins of time builds mansions in eternity."

William Blake

Whereas the surface of one's individual self is buffeted by waves of pleasure and pain, the depth of one's Greater Self is ever-blissful. Whereas mere information can be held by the surface of one's individual mind, all knowledge lies in the depths of the Cosmic Mind. Whereas the essence of mind is the feeling "I am", the essence of that "I am" feeling is the pure "I"-feeling — pure Consciousness.

"I know that I exist. That 'I' of 'I know' is the essence of spirituality... If you want to know all, know One, and that One is your own inner 'I'-feeling."

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

He is your inner You... He is your greater You... You are He. Self-realisation, the attainment of our deepest desire, lies in complete identity with that Cosmic Self. But we will have to lose ourselves in order to attain it. We have become accustomed to thinking of fulfilment in terms of gain, but in reality we have nothing to gain, only to lose. In reality, subconsciously, deep down inside, you are really not trying to gain anything; rather, you are trying to lose yourself. Because in losing yourself you have everything to gain. By losing your individual self you lose nothing. By gaining the Cosmic Self you gain everything. Try telling your mind that! This is the spiritual path — that of letting go of the mind; that of transcending the mind beyond itself into the Greater Self within which it belongs; that of letting go of the small “I” into the Greater “I”.

A lover knocked on the door of her beloved.

“Who is it?”, came from within.

“It is I”, she replied.

The door did not open. She knocked again.

“Who is it?”, came from within.

“It is I”, she replied.

The door still did not open. Then she realised her mistake and knocked again.

“Who is it?”, came from within.

“It is You.”

The door opened.

“Where ‘I’ is, ‘He’ is not; where ‘He’ is, ‘I’ is not.”

“One will have to seek with the highest love, in the innermost recesses of the heart, in the most solitary jewelcase of the mind.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

This letting go of the small self for the Greater Self — this “sacrifice” of the ephemeral for the eternal — is the blossoming

of devotion — love for the Infinite — in one's heart. And when the heart is full of devotion, one realises that the mind is like a dry desert. A life without devotion is like food without salt.

Once a devotee of God and an intellectual met in a mango orchard. While the intellectual began an audit of the mangoes, counting each one and recording their numbers, the devotee simply started eating them without even thinking twice about it. Once a guru asked his disciple, "If you came across a lake full of delicious nectar, what would you do?" The disciple replied, "I would sit on its bank and slowly sip it." The guru reprimanded him, "Fool! If you jumped in and immersed yourself in it you would not drown!"

It is said that when devotion is attained, everything is attained. The flower of desire falls when the fruit of devotion appears. When the meal is eaten, the banana leaves are thrown to the dogs. When the gold is cast, the mould is broken. Love for God is the best way to attain God-realisation. Develop a relationship of love with that Great Entity.

"When you come in close contact with the Supreme Entity, you will find that you have no wealth superior to devotion. All worldly possessions will prove to no avail. Only devotion enables you to come into close contact with Him. This is the goal of human life. This is true progress. You have been wandering through the labyrinth of a myriad of lives. You have been ever advancing toward this stage. Knowingly or unknowingly, you are being drawn unto Him. This is the summum bonum of life."

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

"Once the seed of devotion is sown, it will surely grow into a [great] tree."

Shri Ramakrishna

One of my eldest and most respected colleagues passed away in 2017. For many years he ran a free homeopathic clinic in Kolkata, serving thousands of poor people in the neighbourhood. He ran that clinic literally till the day he died. The last time I saw him was in March 2007. On that occasion he asked me, “Did you hear about my cancer?” I replied, “Yes, but only over the grapevine.” He said, “I will tell you what happened.” And this is what he told me:

“About five years ago I started feeling unwell. But I didn’t think anything of it. I just continued my work without bothering to go to the doctor. Besides, I didn’t have time to see a doctor because I was so busy seeing the many patients that came every day to the clinic.

“After some time, though, people noticed that something was wrong and compelled me to go to hospital, where after doing all the necessary tests they told me that I had fourth-stage stomach cancer, that it had spread to my liver, and that I had about a month to live.

“I went back to my work for a while, but it soon got so bad that I literally could not get out of bed. As I was lying there bedridden, waiting to die, one day a visitor said to me, ‘Now that you are going to leave us, please relate something about your experience with our guru Baba.’ I told him, ‘And you waited until I was dying to ask me this?’ He apologised and requested me again. So I recalled this story:

“In 1962 I was a young man, new to the spiritual path. Baba was due to fly in to the airport of a nearby town on a stopover, en route to some other city. So we all met at the bus station to go and see him, only to find that on that particular day there was a general transport strike. There were no buses, no trains... nothing. And no one had a car. So I declared that I would run there. I don’t know how long I ran for (it was about 15 miles) but I finally got to the airport. As soon as I arrived I asked the crowd who had gathered there from other neighbouring towns, ‘Is Baba still here?’ They replied that for some unknown reason his flight

had been delayed, that the plane had been circling above the airport, and that it was just coming in now.

“The plane finally landed and everyone rushed to greet Baba and pay their respects. As soon as he saw me he said, ‘I’ve been waiting for you. Come, walk with me.’ I started walking alongside him and his personal assistant, but suddenly, because I was not accustomed to running such long distances, the muscles in my legs cramped up and I could not move another inch. Meanwhile Baba, after taking a few more steps, stopped, looked back and motioned me to catch up with him. It took a superhuman effort for me to drag myself to where he was standing. He then turned to his personal assistant and said, ‘This boy just ran 15 miles to see me.’ Then he passed his hands over my thighs and instantly the pain vanished and I could walk normally again.

“As I was telling this story to my visitor, I cried with devotion to think how Baba had taken care of me on that occasion. Then, at that exact moment, I suddenly felt that my illness had disappeared. I felt that I had been cured. I shouted, ‘I feel better!’ My visitor replied, ‘It’s because you are remembering Baba.’ I shouted back, ‘Yes, I know, but I *really* feel better! I feel *much* better!’ As I wept tears of gratitude I realised that just as Baba had taken away my pain back in 1962, he had also now taken away my illness.

“The following day I went back to the hospital and the doctor was dumbfounded. After giving me a checkup and running some tests, he said, ‘I can’t believe it, but your cancer is about 80 percent cured.’ ... And now I have almost fully recovered.”

My esteemed colleague lived for another fifteen years after his miraculous cure from cancer through the grace of the Divine. Another story which conveys that grace is from another fellow disciple of Shrii Shrii Anandamurti:

“Throughout the 1980s I had many wonderful experiences with Baba in India, but the story I would like to share was much more recent. I was flying to New York. I changed planes in

Houston and as the plane was roaring down the runway to take off, I had a very negative thought while looking at the physical and mental condition of all the passengers. I thought to myself, 'Baba, no one is ready for meditation!'

"At that very moment the pilot slammed on the brakes, turned the plane around and taxied back down the runway to the terminal, where we were told that there had been a problem and were taken back inside the terminal. While standing in the waiting room I noticed an airport employee reading a book, and asked what he was reading. He said 'spiritual psychology.' I said 'I teach meditation.' He said, 'Really? I just asked God to send someone to teach me!' I taught him meditation and never thought negatively again."

Another example of a more direct intervention of the Guru is told in this story:

Once a devotee, Dada Keshavananda, was to travel by train to a distant city. The night before he was due to depart, he went to the Guru for his blessings. The following day, half an hour before the scheduled departure of the train, just when he was about to leave for the railway station, another devotee, Dada Ramananda, came running in and said, "Baba wants to see you before you leave."

Keshavananda was surprised. He had met Baba the previous day and knew that he was well aware of the scheduled departure of the train. To see Baba that morning meant almost certainly to miss his train. So he told Ramananda, "I just met Baba last night and he gave me his blessings already. He knows all the details of my trip. I must leave now otherwise I will miss my train."

Ramananda replied, "All I know is that he himself sent me to tell you that you must meet him before you leave."

Keshavananda ran as fast as he could to meet Baba.

When he got there Baba lovingly asked, "Are you going now?"

He replied, "Yes, Baba."

Baba said, "Okay, I just wanted to see you. Go quickly. Time is short."

He rushed to the railway station, only to find that the train had already left. He thought to himself, “Why did Baba call me when he knew I would miss the train?” Annoyed, he returned to the ashram.

That night everyone heard over the radio that the train he was supposed to catch had collided with another train. Many people had died and many more were injured. The next day, Keshavananda went to meet Baba with a newspaper in his hand.

Baba feigned surprise and exclaimed, “Keshavananda, you did not go! Very good, very good! Have you heard the news?”

He showed the newspaper to Baba, who looked straight into his eyes and with a mysterious smile asked, “Are you still angry with me?”

Keshavananda burst into tears and replied, “No, Baba.”

In April 2014 I was scheduled to give my TEDx talk. About a week before the event I came down with a fever and respiratory problems. I was completely incapacitated by it, not able to get up or eat or do anything other than lie in bed suffering. At some point I started thinking, “Will I be able to give the talk?” It didn’t look good. But I was determined to try. Early in the morning on the day of the event I mustered enough energy to ask a friend to take me to the hospital, where I told them my problem and said, “I have a TEDx talk today. Can you do anything for me?” They couldn’t give me any treatment, though, because they didn’t know what the cause was. They would have to run some tests. But I didn’t have time for that. As time went on, though, I started to feel better. After an hour or two I was relieved to find that I almost felt normal. And when I finally got onto the stage to give my talk I felt like I was floating on air. After a long week of suffering I felt liberated, rejoicing in my newfound health, and just in time too. I was not only able to deliver my talk, but also to sit through the rest of the event and meet and network with people afterwards. When the event finished I left the venue and went back to my hotel room and, I am not exaggerating here, literally

the moment I stepped into the room my symptoms returned. I was as sick as a dog again. And it took me another week to recover. I had literally been given a window of grace that was just long enough to do what I needed to do.

As we discussed in this book, it is wise to recognise and accept that crises and struggles are an inevitable part of life. And not only inevitable, but if viewed in the right perspective — in the light of our own evolutionary journey as individuals as well as the evolutionary journey of our society — we can nurture a growing faith in a grace behind all that happens to us, and a better future no matter what we are going through.

Keep in mind that, no matter what your hardships and sufferings may be, they are not in vain. They are part of the process of you being guided back to yourself — back to your Greater Self. There is a higher meaning and purpose to your life — the fulfilment of your deepest desire and the attainment of your greatest goal; the realisation of the divinity within yourself. Your life is a mission, imbued with the deepest meaning and significance, and the struggles you are going through are continually propelling you towards yourself.

Our great life purpose and mission is the same for each and every one of us, and its fulfilment is inevitable for each and every one of us. It's just a matter of time and effort. We are all on a journey to realising that ultimate state of eternal bliss, and a happy and fulfilling life means to make sincere and regular efforts towards the attainment of your deepest desire — the absolute and unconditional love and happiness we are all looking for. The total and absolute experience of that one and abiding love of all loves is your glorious destiny. There is every reason to be hopeful and optimistic about the future — for your own emancipation as well as the emancipation of all people and all beings.

I conclude with one final quote from my beloved guru, the great spiritual master Shrii Shrii Anandamurti:

“This path to attain happiness... I call absolute devotion. Carry on performing your worldly duties with sincerity, and at the same time think about the pure Self within you. The constant thought of your pure Inner Self will certainly one day establish you in your original source, and this is the ultimate aim of spiritual practice... The attainment of one’s inner self is only possible through love for the Infinite. Fill your heart with love of the Infinite and your soul will be transformed into the Supreme Soul... No worldly happiness is limitless. Dedicate yourself completely to the blissful ocean of the Supreme Soul. Then alone will you realise what happiness really is... You have come into the field of sadhana in order to enter the kingdom of light beyond the shores of darkness. May your journey to the empyreal region be glorious and triumphant. Bon voyage to you.”

Acknowledgements

I thank Reena Jayswal, former commissioning editor of Jaico Publishing House, for approaching me to write this book and for her encouragement during the writing process.

Thanks also to my fellow acharyas Dada Maheshvarananda and Dada Nabhaniilananda, who both told me that I would be mad not to use the title of my TEDx talk as the title of this book, to Devashish for his publishing advice, and to Narada and Kamala Alister for their help with the paperwork.

Above all I am eternally grateful to my Gurudeva, Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, for giving me all that I have. I am nothing without Him. If I do anything worthwhile, it is only by His grace.

About the Author

Dada Gunamuktananda is a yogi and meditator with over 30 years experience practicing and teaching meditation around the world.



More information, media and content can be found on his website: www.consciousfrontier.org

His TEDx talk, 'Consciousness: The Final Frontier' is available on YouTube.

Feel free to contact Dada to learn your personal meditation technique. Your own personal mantra will be given to you according to your personal vibration. This will give you more meditative power and accelerate your progress into the deeper realms. And it's free, like the sun and the air!

Based on the popular TEDx talk of the same name, *Consciousness: The Final Frontier* takes us on a journey of self-discovery.

Merging the esoteric and the mundane, combining philosophy and practice, tapping into ancient and contemporary wisdom, Dada Gunamuktananda explores the concept of our own consciousness as part of — indeed one with — a conscious universe; how a life lived in consciousness leads to an ever-increasing feeling of inner peace, love and fulfilment within oneself; how the outer expression of that inner peace and fulfilment can overflow into love and compassion for all people and beings of the world; and how even in times of crisis — even amidst the life challenges of today's world — it is possible to not only survive but to thrive and strive for a better self and a better world.

"Filled with inspiring reflections that lead to change and transformation resulting in personal freedom, peace and fulfilment. A must-read for anyone seeking to be more effective in any area of life."

Anita Moorjani, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dying to Be Me*, *What if This is Heaven?*, and *Sensitive is the New Strong*

