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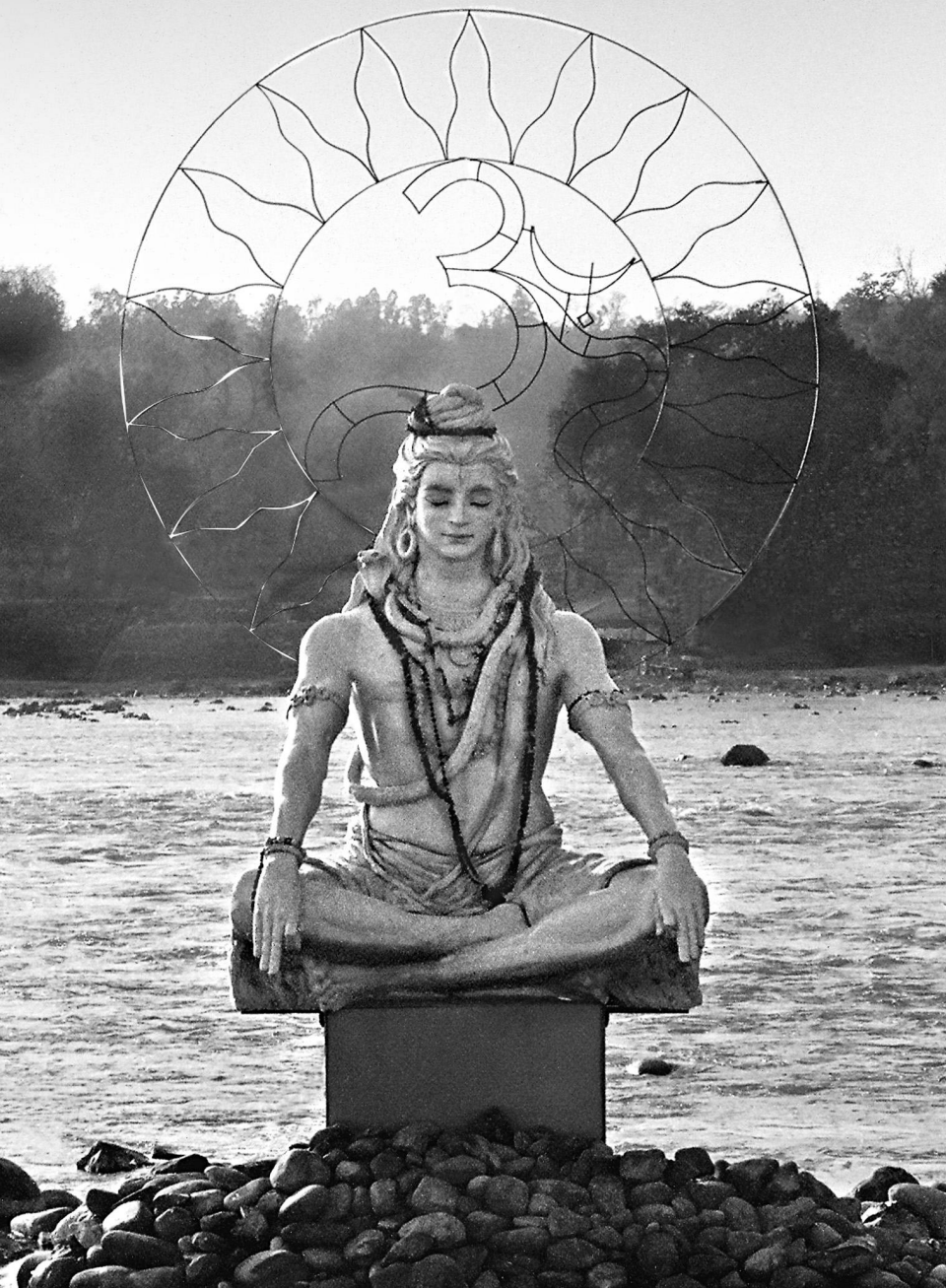
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*Why is one unhappy? One is unhappy because almost everything one thinks – and almost everything one does – is for oneself. And truly there is no one – or another.*



## Foreword

Rishikesh, lying at the foothills of the Himalayas, is the gate through which one ascends to some of the most ancient Hindu pilgrim towns and treks on towards Gomukh – which is the source of the Ganga river. From here, the Ganga hurtles down the lofty mountains till it reaches the plains – flowing gently into Rishikesh, the first of its resting places.

It was here that I gazed on the Ganga for the first time in the spring of 2005. As I stood entranced by the sight of the last rays of the sun playing upon the flowing river, groups of young brahmachari boys, wearing saffron dhotis and kurtas, came out of the Parmarth Niketan ashram to assemble on the ghat whose marbled steps led down to the river bank. These young boys, many of whom are orphans taken into the loving fold of the ashram, began the Ganga puja by chanting mantras along with their Guru, who poured offerings into the sacred fire lit to evoke the goddess Ganga.

After this ritual they were joined by hundreds of devotees, who come here from all parts of the world, in the chanting of hymns. It was truly astounding to see them singing along in fluent Sanskrit and Hindi with equal devotion and felicity. This amazing confluence of cultures on the banks of the Ganga is a sight to behold, every evening.

The chanting reaches a crescendo and culminates in the lighting of huge brass lamps with innumerable wicks that burn brightly as the Ganga 'aarti' is being performed. Facing the worshippers is a serene, larger-than-life statue of Lord Shiva absorbed in meditation while the gurgling Ganga flows merrily behind. This is Shiva as Pure Consciousness – silently witnessing Itself being worshipped by Its own creation.

What strikes one at first is that this is an aarti being performed for a living God, as embodied in a river. It is an awe-inspiring sight... this daily ritual and devout worship of what many, in other parts of the world, might consider as 'just a river'. Heraclitus said, "You could not step twice into the same river," and one only needs to realise that it truly is a different Ganga that is being worshipped every evening – alive, vibrant, continuously renewing. It is indeed this unceasing change, which is the very basis of life and living, that is being worshipped. And this is what *Let Life Flow* is all about.

## Foreword

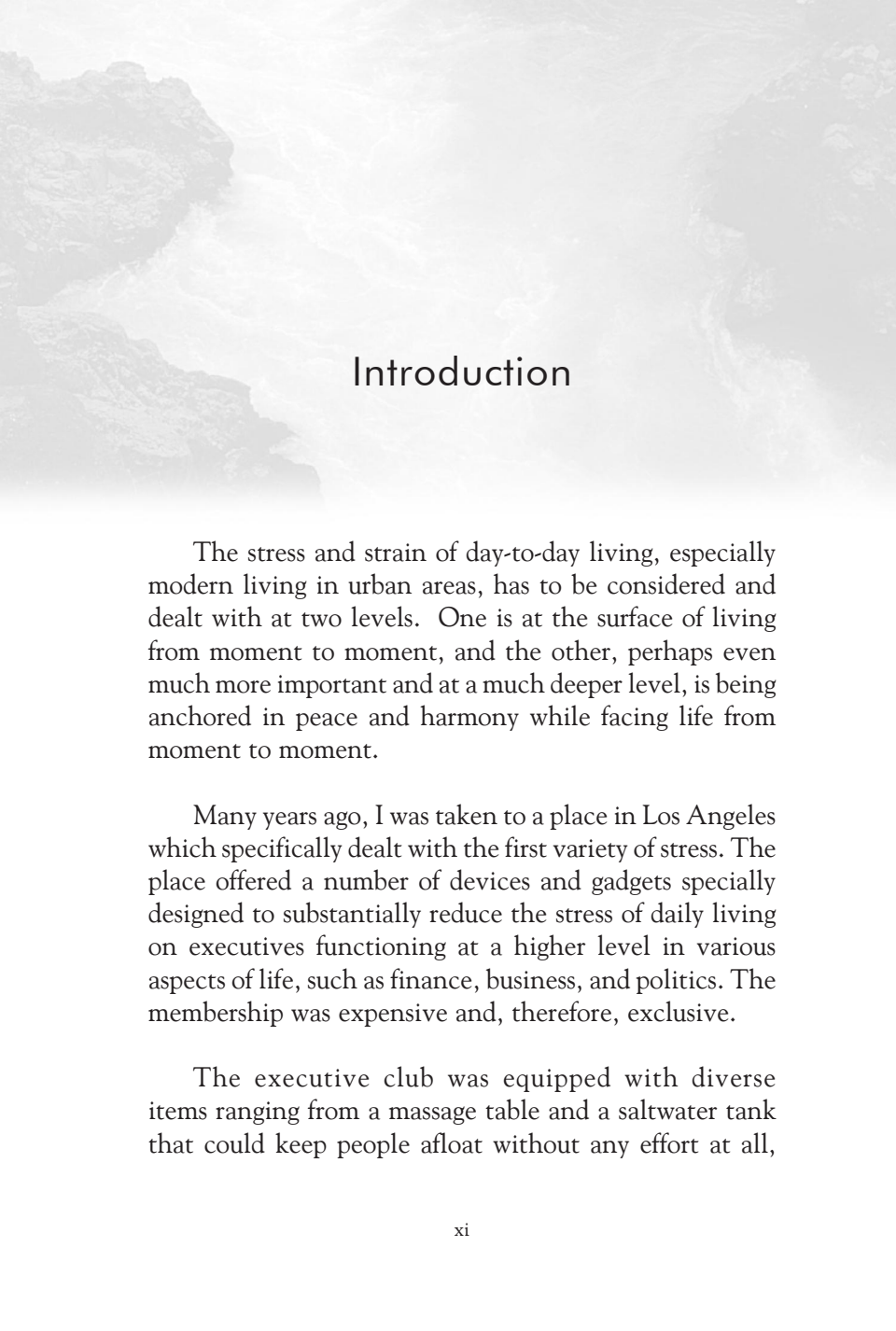
Ramesh Balsekar says that life is like a deep river, flowing incessantly, whereas the day-to-day living for most people is a preference for the security and stagnancy of the little pools beside the river. The river presents an apt metaphor for his concept that no one is a doer but, rather, all actions are happenings ordained by the One Source, who some refer to as God. To perceive ourselves as the doers is like the river thinking that it is pushing itself onwards to the sea, or the sea thinking that the tides are its own doing – totally oblivious of the fact that it is the gravitational force of the moon that is responsible for their ebb and flow.

Leonardo Da Vinci said, “When you put your hand in a flowing stream, you touch the last that has gone before and the first of what is still to come.” *Let Life Flow* shows you how to be the still hand in the flowing stream.

Gautam Sachdeva  
April 2005







## Introduction

The stress and strain of day-to-day living, especially modern living in urban areas, has to be considered and dealt with at two levels. One is at the surface of living from moment to moment, and the other, perhaps even much more important and at a much deeper level, is being anchored in peace and harmony while facing life from moment to moment.

Many years ago, I was taken to a place in Los Angeles which specifically dealt with the first variety of stress. The place offered a number of devices and gadgets specially designed to substantially reduce the stress of daily living on executives functioning at a higher level in various aspects of life, such as finance, business, and politics. The membership was expensive and, therefore, exclusive.

The executive club was equipped with diverse items ranging from a massage table and a saltwater tank that could keep people afloat without any effort at all,

to physical and mental games for the specific purpose of reducing physical and mental stress and strain. Good music would fall in this category as a great reliever of mental stress. The idea was for the members to visit on weekends, if they could not do so on working days, to reduce the stress accumulated during the week – and, one supposes, to be ready to take on the stress of the following week.

At this superficial or surface level of life, various activities could be of help: yoga, meditation, light massage, belly laughter, and various other physical and psychological treatments. But these cannot reach the deepest level to enable you to feel anchored in peace and harmony, a state in which you never feel uncomfortable with yourself or with others, while you face life from moment to moment. This is a state in which anger may arise in the moment, but would never make you feel enmity or hatred towards the person (body-mind organism) that was the cause of the anger arising as an immediate natural or biological reaction.

The only way you could have this lasting feeling of hating neither yourself nor anyone else – always being comfortable with yourself and with others – is when you are totally convinced, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that no one, neither you yourself nor anyone else, could ever be the doer of any action; that all action can never be anything done by anyone, but a happening that simply could not have not happened according to the universal cosmic law.

## Introduction

This understanding means, in effect, being anchored in peace and harmony while facing life from moment to moment. Facing life from moment to moment means accepting life as it happens, whatever the moment brings – pain or pleasure – without getting involved in it by resisting it. What it means, in effect, is to witness whatever happens, doing whatever needs to be done (knowing that that it is a happening according to the cosmic law) and, most importantly, being still. Being still means not thinking, not conceptualising in the past or future – being still in the present moment.

The state of being anchored in peace and tranquillity, while facing life from moment to moment, is indeed the result of the realisation that all action is a divine happening and not anyone's action. Such a realisation of non-doership immediately means the total absence of shame and guilt for one's own supposed actions, and also the total absence of any hatred and malice, jealousy and envy, towards any 'other'. This state of being anchored in tranquillity and repose, by its very nature, includes the acceptance of whatever happens from moment to moment in daily living, and thus, the question of stress and strain in daily living simply cannot arise.

It is a fact of life that the sting of life's slings and arrows is astonishingly short; so also, the mellow glow from a week or two of holidays will fade just as surely. Happiness, many psychologists are concluding, seems to be largely determined by the genes and not by outside

reality. However tragic or comic life's ups and downs, people appear to return inexorably to whatever happiness level is pre-set in their constitution.

The idea is similar to the set-point concept in weight-control, a theory that says the brain seems to be wired to turn the body's metabolism up or down to maintain a pre-set weight. There is also, scientists contend, a set point for happiness – a genetically determined mood level that the vagaries of life may nudge upward or downward, but only for a while. With time, the grouchy tend to become as cranky as before and the light-hearted, cheery again.

Interviews with a range of psychologists show that the idea of a biological set-point for a sense of well-being (quite apart from being anchored in peace and harmony while facing life from moment to moment) has wide support in the field. Says Dr. Jerome Kagan, a developmental psychologist at Harvard University: "It's clear that T. S. Eliot was by nature dour and Jay Leno is congenitally upbeat. But we are far from filling in the biological blanks."

The set-point idea seems to make sense of long-standing data on happiness that has puzzled researchers. Studies of happiness in several countries have found that money makes little difference in perceptions of happiness, except among the very poor. Nor does education, or marriage and a family, or any of the other variables that researchers have sought to correlate with contentment.

Each factor may make a person a little happier, but it has a minor impact, compared with the individual's characteristic sense of well-being.

Says Dr. Edward Diener, a psychologist at the University of Illinois: "We find that for events like being promoted or losing a lover, most of the effect on people's mood is gone by three months, and there's not a trace by six months." He cites data showing that lottery winners are no happier a year after their good fortune than they were before. And several studies show that even people with spinal-cord injuries tend to rebound in spirits.

All this, of course, can relate only to the superficial level of daily living. To be anchored in a deep sense of peace and harmony, while facing the various vicissitudes of life from day to day, is an altogether different matter. Such anchorage depends almost entirely on the conditioning of the individual concerned, a conditioning that reflects the total acceptance of the fact that the free will of the individual human being is, in fact, illusory. All human action is entirely a happening that simply could not have not happened, strictly according to a cosmic law, according to which everything in the universe moves – from a small object to the stars and planets in the sky.

It is a proven fact that the thought and the relevant action cannot really be separated. The thought and the act are one integral whole, and the human being has no control over the arising of the thought.





O N E

## The Essence of Life and Living

‘Let life flow’: what does it really mean? More pertinently, what does it *not* mean? It does *not* mean being lazy and not doing what one is supposed to be doing; it does *not* mean ‘slacking off’. It also does *not* mean being insensitive to other people’s misfortunes, with the attitude, “so what? that’s life.” What it does mean, in general terms, is to go about one’s daily routine with a relaxed attitude, based on the total basic understanding that nothing at all can happen unless it is supposed to happen according to one’s destiny, according to the Will of God, according to the cosmic law. In other words, one goes through one’s daily routine, whatever it is in our given situation, making our decisions as responsibly as it is in our nature to do, putting in our best efforts to put our decisions into action in the given circumstances. Having done whatever it is that one can do, what this basic understanding does is to relieve us of the unconscionable load of worry and anxiety about what might happen in the future.

Even more important, perhaps, is the fact that the basic understanding that no one is a doer – that, in the words of the Buddha, “events happen, deeds are done, consequences happen, but there is no individual doer of any deed” – in one moment, relieves us of the usual load of guilt and shame for our ‘immoral’ or unsuccessful actions, and pride and arrogance for our success. Also, perhaps more importantly, we know that we simply do not have to carry the usual burden of hatred and malice towards the ‘other’ whom we would otherwise consider to be the cause of our hurt or misfortune. The understanding is based on the total acceptance that if we are hurt, we are hurt because, for some reason which we simply cannot know, we were supposed to be hurt according to the all-pervading cosmic law that applies to everything in the universe, from the smallest atom to the largest planet or star. In other words, it would be downright stupid to hate anyone – any particular body-mind organism – through which the act that hurt us had happened, again, according to the same cosmic law.

‘Let life flow’ simply means a) accepting whatever is in the moment as something that could never have not happened, b) doing whatever we think we need to do in the moment, and c) without loading our mind unnecessarily with a load of conceptualising about what might or might not happen in the uncertain future.

A simple potter named Gora, in the 13th century in Maharashtra (India), much loved as a poet-saint, wrote a



poem which states very simply what is meant by 'letting life flow'. Gora says:

“May Thy form always be in my heart,  
and Thy name on my lips.  
The body is subject to the natural laws of  
phenomenality.  
Let it do the work assigned to it by Nature.  
Body-mind organisms can only react  
according to the way they are programmed.  
I truly accept that for the individual  
there is no other ordained rule of good conduct.  
All actions happen strictly according to Thy Will.  
Having truly understood this, I have surrendered  
at your feet all my being and actions.  
May the ‘I Am’ in this body soar into the sky,  
and not get involved in phenomenal functioning.  
Gora recites your name with deep feeling,  
without any expectation of any sort.”

Indeed, a little reflection would show us that the basis of free living is a strong, innate, unsentimental compassion for human beings unnecessarily suffering and perishing from their very efforts to save themselves. Living happens, no one to be saved.

Gora's simple, practical philosophy of life and living brings clearly into prominence the wrong impression among many Westerners that the 'Oriental mind' is mysterious, irrational, and inscrutable. What Gora says is strictly from personal experience, but the general

tendency of the educated seeker is to want proof for the concept. This attitude ignores the basic fact that 'knowledge of reality' cannot be had by cumbersome calculations of theology, metaphysics and logical inference. For Gora, life can only be understood directly and not in terms of representational thinking, which, in any case, the simple potter was not capable of!

What Gora suggests is a certain spontaneity in action and not a protest against convention. To be free from conventional knowledge and standards is not to spurn it but to be not deceived by it.

'Letting life flow' is a view that liberates the human mind from its constricting identification with the abstract ego as the doer. The doing happens, and there should really be no difficulty in knowing this because we would admit that we 'know' how to move our hands, how to make a decision, or how to breathe, even though we can hardly begin to explain in words how we do it. *We know how to do it because we just do it: because it happens.* To realise that living just happens is an extension of this kind of knowledge, which gives us a very different view of ourselves from that to which we are conventionally accustomed.

We think we make our own decisions, based on our conventional culture, knowledge, and experience. We feel that we decide rationally because we base our decisions on the available relevant data on the subject.

But we might well ask ourselves if we really know what information is relevant as our plans are constantly upset by unforeseen events. Then again, we would never know if the available information is enough or what research is in the pipeline. And, finally, after having gone through the motions of gathering information in a rational way, on the spur of the moment, just because of a ‘hunch’ – or because we are just plainly tired of thinking – we act.

The fact of the matter is that the rigorously scientific method of predicting the future can be applied only in special cases, where prompt action is not urgent. By far the greater part of our important decisions depends upon a ‘hunch’ – upon the ‘peripheral vision’ of the mind. Thus, the reliability of our decisions rests upon our natural talent to ‘feel’ the situation, upon the degree to which this ‘peripheral vision’ has been developed. When we know this from our own experience of daily living, should it be so difficult to envisage that our decision could be inextricably intertwined with such decisions being made elsewhere by others in different places, all over the world, in that instant?!

Experience in making decisions by intuition might well show that this ‘peripheral’ aspect of mind works best when our minds do not try to interfere with it, when we trust it to work by itself spontaneously, when we ‘let life flow’.

Peripheral vision works most effectively when we do not look at things directly but out of the corners of the eyes. Similarly, when we are trying to see the details of a distant object, the eyes automatically relax, not *trying* to see. So also, in order to taste our food – and enjoy it more intensely – we cannot *use* the muscles of the mouth and tongue; we must trust them to do the work themselves. The whole point is that we must relax the sharp and staring kind of sight before we can regain the powers of peripheral vision. It is not simply calmness of the mind, but, more importantly, the ‘non-graspingness’ of the mind that is of significance. As Chuang-Tse has put it: “The perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing; it refuses nothing. It receives but does not keep.”

The important point is that the centre of the mind’s activity is not in the ego, not in the conscious thinking process. ‘Letting life flow’ is what happens when the mind is allowed to function in the integrated, spontaneous way that is natural to it. Similarly, everything is to be judged not by its conformity with purely theoretical standards but by the concrete content of the experience. In other words, ‘letting life flow’ happens when the astonishing ingenuity and creative power of man’s spontaneous and natural functioning is not blocked by one’s trying to master it in terms of formal methods and technique. It is like the skill of the centipede in using a hundred legs at the same time: