

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	vii
Daily Living	1
Relationships.....	25
Non-Doership	47
Anger	79
Control	85
Death.....	93
Spiritual Paths and Practices	107
Devotion to God.....	133
Meditation and Witnessing.....	141
Prayer	147
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	153

INTRODUCTION

This book comprises questions and answers culled from talks given by Gautam at his residence in Mumbai and other locations, as well as his answers to emails.

The reader will find that Gautam constantly directs all answers to peace of mind in daily living. The message is always the same, as the teaching is a reflection of the Buddha's famous words: 'Samsara is *dukkha* (misery), Nirvana is *shanti* (peace).'

When Gautam's spiritual guide Ramesh Balsekar used to be asked why he kept saying the same thing again and again in the daily talks he gave at his residence over many years, he replied by saying that the ego, encrusted with years upon years of conditioning, needed constant hammering to break the shell. The words he uttered were new conditioning that could gradually transform the earlier conditioning. In some cases, the transformation could be immediate.

And when he was asked by spiritual seekers and devotees as to why they kept coming back to his satsangs in spite of knowing that he said the same thing day after day, Rameshji replied by saying that the teaching became like one's favourite song, that one loves to hear again and again.

May the simple understanding presented through this teaching guide your boat across the seas of life's journey, through all its ups and downs. And as you, dear reader, go through this book, may you take a dip in the waters of peace.

DAILY LIVING

'To know that you are not living your life
but rather, life is being lived through you,
by the Source, is living the teaching.'

Can you give some pointers or a sort of checklist that would apply to day-to-day life?

It is actually a very natural process because if you honour ‘what is’, what comes up in the moment, you will do precisely that which you are meant to do, and so will the other.

Suppose you feel bad about something, ‘feeling bad’ is a natural aspect of the human experience, for you are not doing it on purpose. If you are sensitive in nature and someone says something that upsets you, the thought that ‘I should not be upset’ will not arise if there is an understanding that you are made precisely the way God has made you. You would then have a total acceptance of who you are. To fight that natural inclination is, in fact, ‘doership’. This is the only pointer—nobody truly does anything.

But since this understanding stays at the intellectual level, all these uncertainties or dilemmas keep cropping up. Everything is precisely as it is, the way God has designed it.

Why do you place so much importance on peace of mind?

Rameshji would say, 'What everyone is looking for, whether they know it or not, is peace of mind.' When Ramana Maharshi was asked, 'How does one know whether a sage is a genuine sage?' he replied thus, 'By the degree of peace you feel in his presence and the sense of respect you feel for him.' The Buddha has said, 'Samsara is dukkha. Nirvana is shanti.' So it is not just I who places so much emphasis on peace of mind. It is at the core of all spiritual teachings.

Peace is one's natural state, one's true nature. Almost everyone knows the peace of deep sleep. You don't have to find peace, but rather, strip away that which has got layered and encrusted over it.

Should the goal of life be peace of mind, or an absence of conflict, instead of happiness?

It is happiness through peace of mind that is 'true happiness', not the happiness that depends on pleasure, because pleasures come and go. Life will keep bringing you back to this lesson, until you realise that the happiness that depends on 'something good happening to me' is a cheat. Peace of mind in daily living is true happiness, because this happiness does not depend on something happening to 'you'. Peace of mind, true happiness, is your birthright.

I find peace only when I am alone, away from the city, feeling safe and close to nature. This, however, is very hard to sustain because one needs to earn money to live, and one also desires contact with other human beings. How can this be addressed or dealt with?

Yes, peace is found more easily when one is amidst nature or when one is alone as there are no others to deal with. That is, no other ‘egos’ to deal with. However, daily living does involve relationships with others—be they friends, relatives or strangers. And peace of mind in daily living is what is desirable and sought, and this is the precious gift of Advaita.

As you have rightly said, one needs to earn money to live and one also desires contact with other human beings. I would encourage you to go back and take another dip in the waters of daily living, rather than isolating yourself, since you have been gifted with this teaching.

The focus of this teaching is on acceptance. Does that mean we are not to reject anything, or is even rejection a part of acceptance?

Even rejection is not your ‘doing’. With the light of awareness, the understanding is that everything ‘happens’. Rejection was meant to happen, so it happened.

I have a problem of stammering due to which I fear to speak with anyone. I am a medical student who is expected to be a fine speaker. Stammering is leading me to depression. How can I 'accept' my stammering and have peace of mind? I got interested in spirituality after reading 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. I have also watched your videos.

'Accepting' your stammering means accepting that it happened because it was God's Will. This does not mean not doing whatever you can to help you with the stammering.

It is only natural that stammering leads to fear and a sense of depression. There are many causes of stammering, and they can be traced by professional psychotherapists as well as speech therapists who can then see how best to help you.

I get bored very easily. Can you say something about this?

Boredom is natural, else one wouldn't get bored. If that is destined to happen, it will happen. Who is it that gets bored? Sit with your boredom for once. Don't avoid it by becoming engaged in other things. One type of boredom is an 'energetic boredom' where the body needs to walk, exercise, and expend energy so that the feeling goes away. But more often than not, boredom is in the mind. And one tries to engage in other activities so that one does not get bored. In a sense, one is running away from just 'being'.

For example, some people have a hard time sitting in meditation with their eyes closed. They get bored. That is because they are

habituated to being engaged in something or the other—they are externalised. Then there are others who just close their eyes and are lost to the world. No one gets bored in meditation—it's the mind that gets bored. Why? Because the mind wants to survive, it does not want to die. In meditation it dies.

Real meditation is Consciousness contemplating on Itself. Thoughts are witnessed just like traffic moving by. There is no attachment to these thoughts, which normally translates into thinking. Thoughts will arise, because that is the nature of thoughts. You can't block a thought. Here, thoughts are not the issue, but rather, thinking is. It is the stretching out of a thought in the duration of time that is the issue.

When you're comfortable with just being, you will realise that you don't have to be 'doing' all the time. Boredom could be a sign that the person is habituated to the 'doing' mode all the time. You could not 'do' if you were not conscious. And, as said earlier, meditation is Consciousness contemplating on Itself. Meditation is making one realise that Consciousness is one's true nature.

How do I hold on to the peace I experience in meditation, in the waking state, during my daily routine?

Sri Aurobindo said that it cannot be that spiritual evolution can happen only through meditation, because sitting in meditation is an internal journey while life is mostly about the externals, and therefore—the work becomes the meditation. Daily living is about

working, being engaged during the course of the day, for most people. The point is whether this engagement is a total engagement of the 'working mind', or if one is constantly distracted by the 'thinking mind' that goes into the dead past or an imaginary future. There is a difference.

When one has experienced peace through meditation, the natural desire is for it to permeate one's daily living. But it cannot happen if you want to disconnect from daily living and just be with yourself, at peace while you sit at home in meditation. They must merge, because your life is one expression from birth to death. It is not splintered or compartmentalised into segments such as 'when I work', 'when I am at home', 'when I am in meditation'.

True meditation is living the understanding that God's Will prevails at all times. This means the total acceptance of 'what is', including something you may not like. This includes the total acceptance of people the way God has made them, and the total acceptance of yourself the way God has made you. In other words, the total acceptance that nobody is the 'doer' of their actions—'God is the Primal Doer'. Living this understanding translates into living a life of peace and equanimity.

What should one do to imbibe the teachings in everyday life? There is such a big gap in the teaching I hear and in the life I live; in the choices I make. It is difficult to keep the teachings in your head and to move about engaging in the activities of daily living. Sometimes,

I wonder about what should be guiding me when I make choices and take decisions in my day-to-day life.

It is the teaching that guides you. What the ego does is that it grasps the teaching and makes it a tool with which to start operating your life. This leads to the matter of keeping the teaching in one's head all the time. But this is not needed. Don't do anything. Let the teaching do its work. Just be as you are.

To know that you are not living your life but rather, life is 'being lived' through you, by the Source, is living the teaching. Gradually, this understanding sinks deeper and deeper, during the course of one's daily living, until what was previously an intellectual understanding now settles in the heart.

So the teaching is to just be as you are!

The teaching is that—everything is as it 'Is'. As Ramana Maharshi said, 'Your job is not to be this or that, but to just be.' The teaching is not asking anyone to bring about change as an active process. Transformation happens, change happens, when it, the teaching, starts sinking deeper and deeper.

People would ask Rameshji, 'You keep talking about nobody being the doer of their actions, which we understand intellectually. Nobody including myself is the doer of their actions. But what do I have to do to have the total understanding that I am not the doer?'

Rameshji would answer by saying, 'Have you heard your question?' Your question is, 'What do I have to "do" to have the total understanding that I am "not" the doer?' The answer is very

simple and obvious—nothing. If you are not the doer, there is nothing you can do. It can only happen!

It is very difficult to accept that.

Because the ego is designed that way. The ego can even take the ownership of ‘non-doership’ and use it as a tool. It is not willing to accept that things can happen without its doing.

Everyone is looking for a purpose. How do you do what you are programmed to do, but without looking for validation?

The understanding creates the disengagement. Validation is a need. A need to feel good, to feel important. There is nothing wrong in it, it is a part of the way we are made. The problem is that we ‘pursue’ validation. This is what drops off, with the understanding. You will no longer be constantly looking for validation, because you know that ‘you are not the doer.’ That is why the enlightened masters are just being themselves, they are not looking for validation from others. They are living a simple life with peace of mind and equanimity.

It is quite incredible. We can look at everything we do and it will reveal so much to us. But we don’t look, because we are too involved and engaged in our drama. This question you have asked is excellent. Now look at your own life and at the situations in which you feel you were looking for validation. Then go deeper, and try and understand why you were looking for validation. You will consistently reach the conclusion that it is because of

something you ‘did’. When you know that you are not the doer, the constant looking for validation drops.

My job is very stressful. I wonder whether I should continue working with so much friction. I don't even have a strong ambition as before. I want to pursue something more meaningful, but is this a form of escaping? Any pointers will be helpful.

Yes, what you have described is not just related to work but it is the journey of life, where comfort cannot be found in what happens in life (where there is a lot of ‘friction’ and suffering) but rather, in one’s attitude to life. Then, the purpose of life becomes the living of it.

It is the pressure that dampens the ambition and enthusiasm over the course of time. And the wish arises for a simpler way as this one seems arduous. Or perhaps, a wish to pursue something else that is entirely different.

What should one do in such a situation? The answer lies in the financial dependence on the job. If one is totally dependent on it, then acceptance of ‘what is’ (including not liking it) brings one to establish a certain peace with the job. If one is not dependent on it, then by all means one can explore the option of pursuing something different as the job is no longer fulfilling.

This brings us to a third scenario—what if one is totally dependent on the job and yet, one cannot function in it anymore? Should one still leave it? What would be the consequences of such

a decision? If the job is unbearable and distressing, and could not get any worse, then one could consider leaving it and be open to what the universe has in store. This, of course, takes courage.

In my experience, allowing things to unfold themselves without 'me' taking an active part in the process has been the prudent course of action, as seen in retrospect.

I am a devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba, who lays emphasis on Shradddha (faith) and Saburi (patience).

I have been unemployed for years despite all efforts and keep the faith that one day Sai will bless me with a wonderful opportunity for my desire to be fulfilled. Yet the opportunity never comes and I have huge bills, including my son's education fees, to pay.

Could this be Sai's wish—keeping someone unemployed for years? Is this in my best interests? This, I am unable to understand.

Sorry to hear about your predicament. Peace in such situations can be found only in the acceptance that we could not be placed here unless it was God's Will. And, we can never understand the basis of something so vast and complex as God's Will with the puny human intellect. My teacher Rameshji would say, 'A created object (we) cannot know the will of the Creator (God). A painting can never know why its painter painted it.'

God is the 'Totality of What Is'. True faith is the acceptance that whatever happens, whether we like it or not, is God's Will. In such cases, all we can do is surrender to the will of the Divine,

and ask God to give us strength to deal with the challenging situation.

This, according to me, is the deeper meaning of Shradha and Saburi.

The feeling of separation dissolves, then comes back. Most of the time, the story is one of suffering, or seeking, or fear. Tonight, I resided in the land of peace. Tomorrow is unknown.

Yes, that is exactly the point. No one knows what the next moment brings, sometimes pleasure and sometimes pain. While we have a preference for pleasures inbuilt in us, the running away from pain is what stops with the understanding. It is accepted (and we don't have to like it) as a part of the movement of daily living.

The feeling of separation dissolving and reappearing is what my spiritual teacher referred to as the 'flip-flop'. Nothing can really be 'done' about it, except the witnessing of it. The seeing is the only doing necessary.

Almost everyone's story is one of suffering/seeking/fear. And most of our thoughts are fear-based thoughts. The fact that, as you mentioned, 'The feeling of separation dissolves, then comes back,' and 'Tonight I resided in the land of peace,' means that you have been showered with Grace, without which even this much would not have happened. Why not consider your glass half full and not half empty? Leave it to Grace to open up the heavens for you.

Every session with you has a magical effect and transports me into a different world filled with peace and harmony. This time it felt like I was getting pearls of wisdom, but the joy was short-lived as I misplaced those pearls.

I could see that I get affected and react to everything around, though the teaching literally screams in my ears. It makes me feel that ignorance is bliss and wisdom is misery.

Don't worry about misplacing the pearls; they cannot be. They are not an 'object' that can be misplaced. Let the teaching do its work how and when it is meant to. Sometimes it takes a while for old patterns and conditioning to change or get erased, so to speak. The teaching is fresh conditioning that may alter or transform the earlier conditioning; it is meant to. There are many who are not even aware that they get affected and react to everything around.

Who is it that is aware that they get affected and react to everything around? My spiritual teacher said, 'Consciousness in action is understanding; understanding in action is witnessing.' He did not say that understanding in action is 'doing'.

How can we know ourselves? How can we analyse our journey's progress while we are on it?

There is only one measure—by the degree of peace that you feel. There is no other criteria. And it is the job of the thinking mind to take one away from that peace. The thinking mind, which is the ego with a sense of 'doership', is very good at that. The moments

of deep peace that you feel are something to be so grateful for, because many people don't feel that. But the mind tends to only focus on the moments when you do not feel at peace. That is the nature of the thinking mind. To ask questions after questions after questions. That is why I say, thank God for your deep sleep.

How can we erase/clear a painful memory?

Who created memory? Did you create it? Memory is a part of the mechanics of the human brain. You cannot erase memory. You would not be alive without memory. For example, once you put your hand in the fire, you immediately withdraw it lest it burn your hand. Now, the memory serves you well to know not to put your hand in the fire again. During the course of one's life, there are moments of pleasure and moments of pain that get registered in the memory. The remembrance of pleasures makes us want more of them, and the remembrance of pain makes us fearful that they might arise again. This, then, becomes the burden of memory; the burden of our conditioning through which we view life.

To clear a painful memory is to accept it; to accept that it happened because it was God's Will. The memory does not go away, but all the compulsive thinking associated with it does. A large part of painful memories are based on what we feel someone has done to us, or what we have done to someone. When we accept that no one truly does anything and that God is the only doer, then the painful memory does not get cleared, but is healed.

A painful memory makes us feel sad. The memory does not allow one to disengage from thoughts of the pain felt, and this in turn hinders one's capacity to work in daily life. It is futile to try and disengage from thoughts of pain, push them aside or brush them under the carpet. If you try to disengage, you are in fact, creating further engagement and strengthening the memory by resisting it. You are adding to the original burden of the memory.

The end of 'doership' is the end of that additional burden. The end of considering others or oneself as the doer is the end of blame, condemnation, malice, hatred, jealousy, envy, pride, arrogance, guilt, shame, and so on. When the mind no longer carries this load, it stops going into an imaginary future or the dead past, and then one rests in 'being'.

If a button was pressed and your entire memory wiped out, what would be left? The sense of being. You would still know that you exist, but you would not know anything beyond that. But right now, the person who does not want the memory is still there and is asking the question. If that person were not there, who will be left to enjoy the absence of memory? Even the question would not arise.

When a deer sees a lion, it is afraid and automatically runs away. Isn't the deer afraid of death?

Of course it is. The deer is programmed to be afraid of biological death, so it runs.