

Swami Nachiketananda Puri





Usually, when asked for a message, Swami Nachiketananda Puri speaks about the people in the ashram, thanking them, telling their stories of achievement, difficulties and courage. And if you speak to these very same people, each one of them looks upon Swamiji as their guru. This is what makes Swami Nachiketananda Puri so unique. Radiating his love and energy on to others, he places them in the limelight. Seva and yoga come together in Swamiji's life and work. Whether he is working shoulder-to-shoulder with volunteers, or teaching children, Swamiji shares his learning and wisdom with others—by example.

Swami Nachiketananda was born on the 19th of September, 1965 in Dhanki, Maharashtra. He was the third child to his parents, Sucharita and Vasant Rao Thate. His mother named him



“Vishwadeep” after a character in Rabindranath Tagore's *Kadambari* ... light of the world. He was then raised in Yevatmal,

Maharashtra, gained exposure to the life of common folk, and showed a natural inclination for generosity and service. In 1996, Vishwadeep joined the Vivekananda Kendra as a life worker. It was in 1999 that the Nachiketa Tapovan Trust was started, with Swamiji's guidance. Swami Nachiketananda took sanyasa diksha on Maha Shivaratri 2011 in the Dashanami tradition at Haridwar.

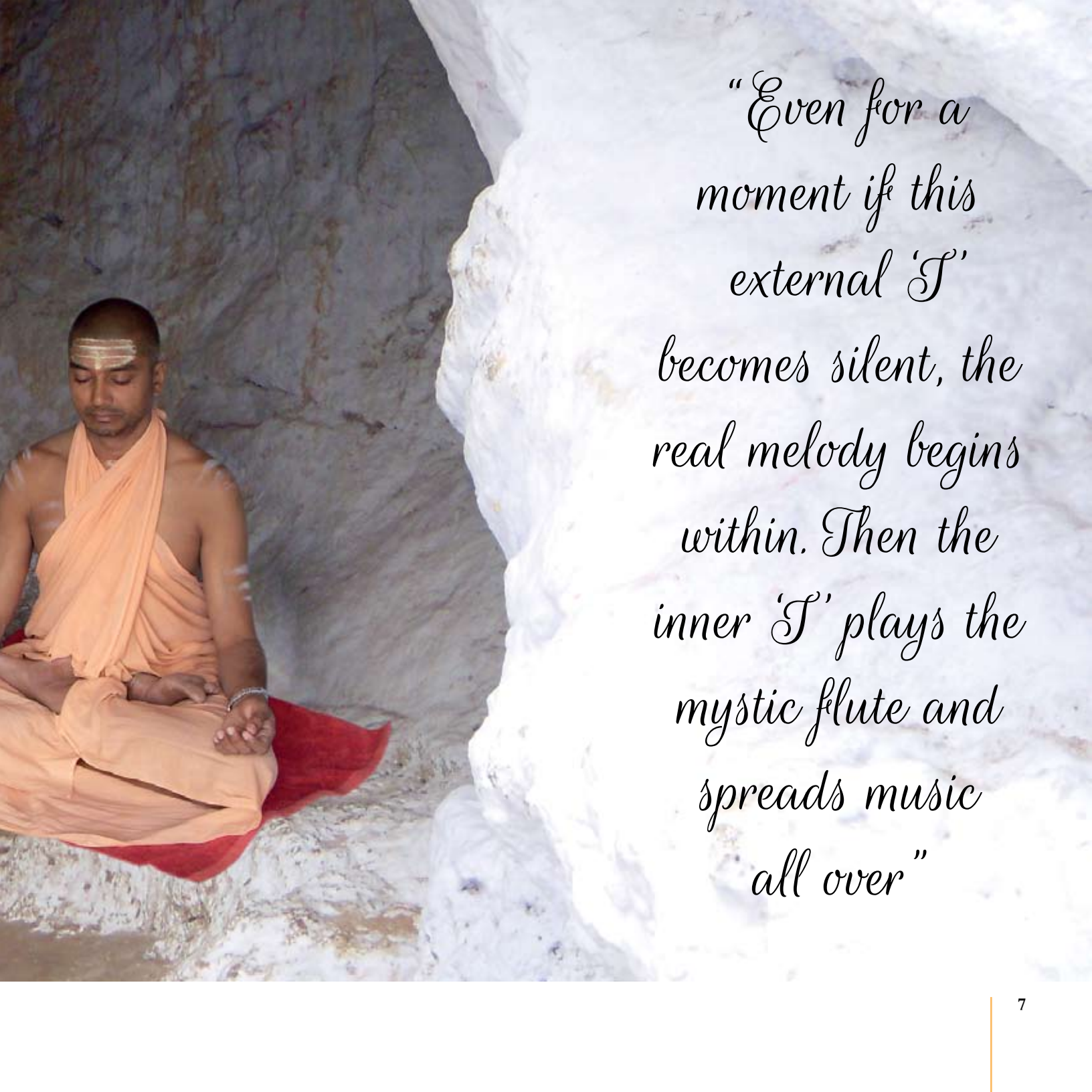
Although an adept in yoga, Swami Nachiketananda does not flaunt his yogic practices, capabilities or extraordinary experiences. Nor has he any campaign nor mission to spread a particular message, Swami Nachiketananda cuts past religious and cultural boundaries to embrace human values.

*“Preparation
is crucial for
Sadhana”*









“Even for a moment if this external ‘I’ becomes silent, the real melody begins within. Then the inner ‘I’ plays the mystic flute and spreads music all over”

Sadhaka: What is the difference between spirituality and religion?

Swamiji: For me, religion is like a wild flower and spirituality is like its fragrance. Religion might be received by the senses, spirituality can be perceived only by the heart. Religion is read, spirituality is assimilated. Religion is preached, spirituality is practiced. Sages who contemplated life knew about the nature of spirituality; however, for the sake of humanity they presented spirituality in the form of religion. In fact, religion is a by-product of spirituality. Spirituality is the subtle expression of gross religion.

Sadhaka: I feel inspired by some gurus, but influenced by so many others! So many recommendations! How can I discriminate, whom do I follow?

Swamiji: There is a very thin but distinct line between inspiration and influence. Inspiration is more important in life than influence. Inspiration may initially seem like bondage but you will soon find that it liberates you from the bondage of this mundane world and gives you immense happiness. On the other hand, influence initially gives you happiness, only to turn into sorrow and unpleasantness later. Inspiration lasts forever whereas influence is temporary. Influence demands external changes whereas inspiration asks for internal change. Inspiration can be derived by anybody from anywhere without following a trend or a person. Unfortunately, most people are drawn to influence rather than inspiration.

We have heard about following the footsteps of great souls, but that does not mean we should blindly follow them in every way, from attire to hairstyle! That is what happens when we are influenced by someone. By contrast, inspiration never demands that we make external changes. It is difficult to know whether we are truly getting inspired or influenced.

But if you look within you can know very well whether it is inspiration or influence, whether it is genuine understanding, or a magnetic pull from the other side.

As leaders, we should aspire to be inspiring, not influential. An inspiring person does selfless service whereas an influential person has selfish motives. Remember, we are the best judges of ourselves. It is our moral responsibility to make sure that we should not influence anybody. Inspiration transforms people, influence tries to convert everyone and is never satisfied with the number. We are not here to convert people but to transform without discrimination of gender, caste, creed or religion.

When we get inspired, we will follow the philosophy of the person, not the person... we will follow the doctrine not the religious books... we will follow life, not livelihood... we will follow the 'self,' not ourselves... we will derive inspiration, not become influenced...!

Sadhaka: Why is 'sandhya samaya' important for a sadhaka?

Swamiji: 'Sandhya' means union... union of two opposite poles, union of 'Prakruti' and 'Purusha,' union of soul and Supreme soul, the place of spiritual explosion and internal integrity. It is Nature's natural cycle and the best time to explore our inner world. Even if we forget everything, nature silently does all that is necessary for one's spiritual growth and pushes one into a meditative state. This is the best time to do sadhana as both our nostrils will be working simultaneously. That shows that both the hemispheres of our brain are working simultaneously. This is the best time to do meditation. Utter silence can be experienced in twilight. The right hemisphere has understanding, holistic experience, intuition, poetry, emotion, feeling and passiveness and the left hemisphere has analytical thinking, rational approach,

logical mind, languages, mathematics, activeness, etc. If both get combined then the output is totally beyond human comprehension. This is the perfect divine time beyond time... perfect space beyond space... faultless play beyond play.

Sadhaka: Is marriage a hurdle to sadhana?

Swamiji: Sage Vyasa was married and had a child. Janaka was a king who exhibited divine qualities and made everybody happy. Age, marriage or any other type of situation in life is neither a criteria nor a hurdle while treading the spiritual path. It is all in the heart.

Sadhaka: Why is it important to be a vegetarian, when the soul doesn't get affected by anything?

Swamiji: If bodily impurities have nothing to do with the soul, then why did Sri Adi Shankaracharya, a great scholar and an enlightened Master, enter into a King's body to know about married life? If he was enlightened and reached that stage where nothing can affect the soul, he would have experimented with the same body, but he didn't do so. The reasons might be many, and scholars can debate on this topic, but I strongly feel there is a lot more to this than what we can discover using logic and reason.

Do you know, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa said, "Naren can digest anything and everything" but the same was not conveyed about other direct disciples. That clearly indicates that what might be applicable to Swami Vivekananda may not be applicable to others. Therefore, diet cannot be a universal principle, applicable to all. People who are indulging in all sorts of practices in the name of tantra-sadhana should refrain from doing so. Tantra is not a license to lead a peculiar life. Tantra is an ancient, spiritual

science that demands the highest disciplines in life. When Sri Ramakrishna was initiated into tantra-sadhana by Bhairavi Brahmani, he had to taste everything to overcome likes and dislikes, and there the matter was closed.

Food is essential, but the kind of food and the quantity defines one's growth. Food has to be consumed like a medicine, otherwise, we may have to consume medicines like food. In most processed foods, we find some preservatives, and some of these preservatives have extracts from animals. Whatever might be the reason, whether it is due to unavailability of vegetables or other vegetarian food, or because of a culinary tradition, people may have got into eating non-vegetarian food. But, today, almost everything is available at every nook and corner. Non-vegetarianism is only acceptable in an extreme condition where survival is at stake.

Sadhaka: Swamiji, I sometimes feel that I have no choice in what happens, everything happens by chance and this frustrates me.

Swamiji: If we decide and start respecting nature, natural law, the law that governs everything and beyond, we shall then never utter for a single moment that everything is by chance but never by choice. A little bit of effort, a pinch of sadhana, pure thoughts, changed perception, and accepting life every moment as a grace or a lesson, or an opening to new horizon, or a journey that leads to divinity shall bring a revolutionary change in one's life. In fact, in divine Mother's creation, everyone has a choice.

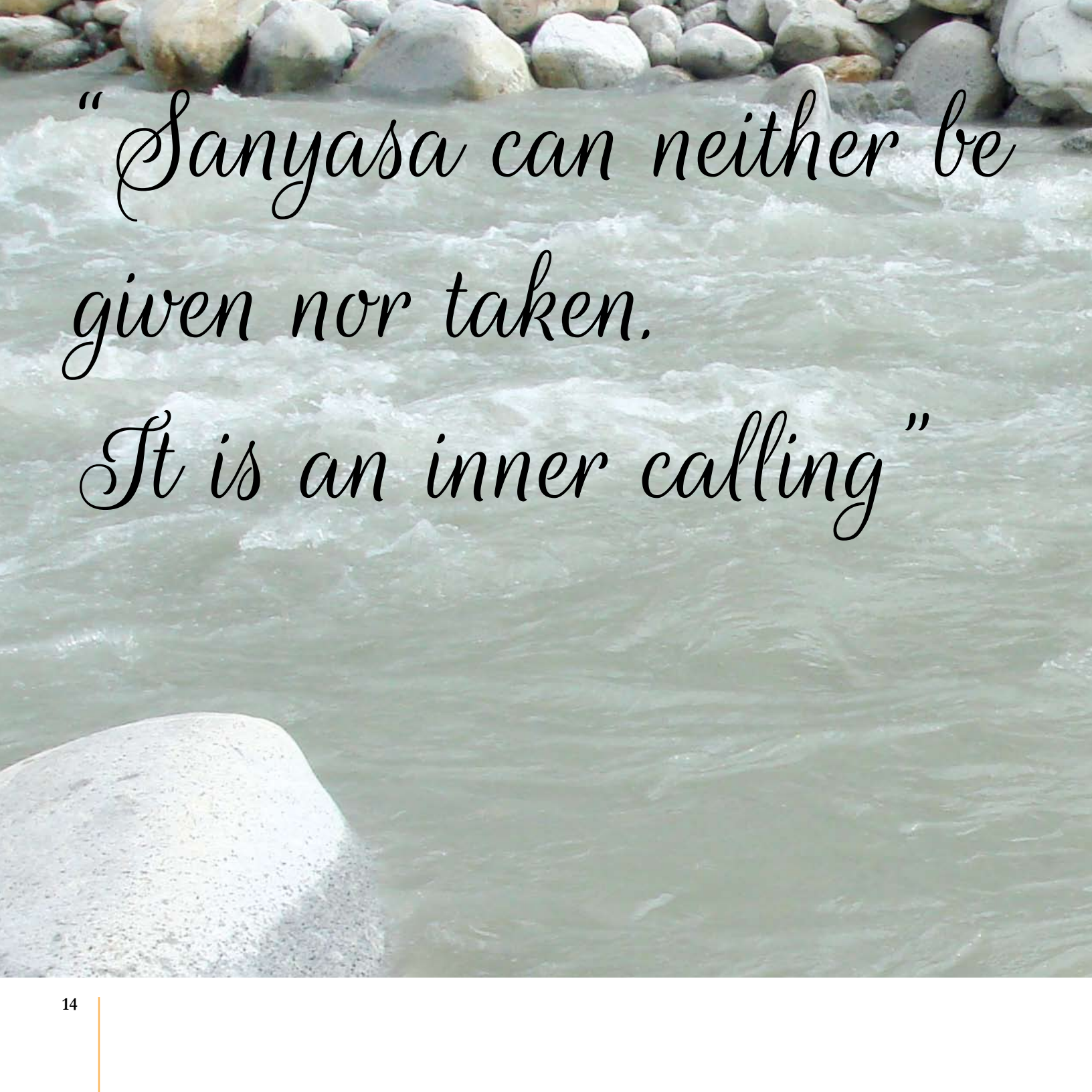


*"Thought is the
biggest hurdle
on the path of
spirituality"*



*"Experience your
own Existence"*



A photograph of a river with white water rapids. The water is turbulent and white with foam as it flows over a series of large, smooth, light-colored rocks. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the river. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

*"Sanyasa can neither be
given nor taken.
It is an inner calling"*



*“Effect follows
cause in the
way shadow
follows light”*





Sadhaka: What is worse for sadhana, less sleep (insomnia) or more sleep?

Swamiji: Insomnia may happen due to many reasons. In insomnia, one is restless, one is more worried, one is more tense...what is the reason for this? When negative thought goes deep within, it becomes a part of our life, we get caught in a web of our own making, and start losing sleep. But, if the person is not experiencing any irritation about insomnia, it can be one of the finest tools to achieve higher meditation.

If one sleeps much longer too, it is possible to enter into higher meditative states. There are many people who experience a higher state of relaxation without missing a single event from their sleep-state or beyond.

Sleep, in fact, is nothing but the absence of the waking state, it is another form of death while we are fully alive, it is a journey one takes in life, it is also an important state to return to life, it is a bridge between life and death, it is a rejuvenating state, it is a mesmerizing event. But whether one has less or more sleep, it is of no use if one is not dwelling in awareness. Sleep or non-sleep are only bodily demands and states of mind, and if one can go further, it is possible to realize that every state of mind can be useful.

Dear sadhak, next time when you encounter insomnia or more sleep, take it with the right spirit and use that time to develop more awareness. There is a simple technique that might help, called “Nachiketa Chaitanya Kriya.” If you have time and want to learn the technique, you can come to the ashram to learn this kriya, it will help you resolve your sleep-related troubles.

Sadhak: How do we recognize the difference between vacuum and silence?

Swamiji: Vacuum is a state of inertia whereas silence is a state of activity. Vacuum is ‘action in inaction’ whereas

silence is ‘inaction in action.’ Silence is like a filled glass of water and vacuum is an empty glass. Vacuum is emptiness of mind, silence is like a lake that is filled with water but without a single ripple. We should be in a position to hold on to silence rather than vacuum. In vacuum, one is in shock whereas in silence one is more balanced. How do you know if your mind is vacant or silent? In silence, one can sense or judge a situation, whereas in vacuum one is completely helpless and unaware of results. That is the time when one should be more aware of one’s state of mind. Mind brings ugly things to the surface, brings pointless fears, whereas in silence, one can understand the events in the surroundings and deal with them properly. Criminals are not only the by-product of lack of education but also because of the vacuum that they feel in life. We need to teach people the philosophy of silence, but not the teachings of vacuum. People are more critical in vacuum but not analytical in their approach, they are more skeptical but not intelligent enough to tackle situations, they are more sentimental in their actions, but not emotionally balanced. Therefore, silence is the key for a more elevated life.

Vacuum makes one blind whereas silence brings a clearer vision. If one wants to know what pristine beauty is all about then one needs to be in a state of silence, and not in vacuum. Vacuum may sometimes push a sadhak into chaotic situations. By contrast, silence brings you back to life. In vacuum one has forgotten what one has, whereas in silence one is aware of everything. In vacuum one is helpless whereas in silence one is self-reliant. The difference is clear.

Vacuum is sudden and one who is constantly engaged in activity gets scared when he encounters it. When in silence, one is at peace, at ease, even though activities are going on. In vacuum, one is in shock, since everything stops without notice. In silence, although everything is ceased, one is completely aware. Awareness and silence are interconnected.

Silence soothes the body and mind, goes deeper within to communicate with the soul, whereas vacuum jolts the body and mind and dances on the surface, making more noise. Silence sends very soothing and inspiring waves in the spine, whereas vacuum sends shivering waves through the spine. Therefore, it is important for one to know the difference. Silence makes us feel charged, vacuum drains our energies. Vacuum sucks, silence fills.

Sadhaka: Does watching breath in sadhana have any adverse effect on the body?

Swamiji: Yes! Watching breath sometimes creates uneasiness in sadhana but with practice one can overcome all problems and stay anchored in a higher meditative state. ‘Watching’ is a thought and unless it is transformed into witnessing, breathing becomes more and more shallow. The connection between breath and thought is like a husband and wife, mother and child or day and night. That’s why our sages have prescribed ‘pranayama.’ Pranayama helps one recognize the thought within and becomes the bridge between breath and thought. Pranayama is a state like twilight in which breath and thought get dissolved, and what remains is a deep, meditative state. In the initial stages, watching causes a lot of irritation but as one practices and understands what effortless efforts are, then slowly ‘watching’ remains and ‘thought of watching breathing’ gets dissolved into witnessing.

Sadhaka: Where can I train in spirituality?

Swamiji: There may be many training schools for various fields but there isn’t one school for simplicity, love, inner discipline or spirituality. It has to be learned in the school called life. Our investment is life and the best output is

life. Our struggle for life is life. Our mantra for life is life. Our satisfaction for life is life. Our contentment for life is life. Life is everything and once we start investing in life, we simply enjoy the highest state of being. From real spirituality everything descends like the grace of Mother, equally on all and from all directions.

Life is the best friend... mentor... guide... teacher... preacher... practitioner... and obviously a training school... People are there to share their views, opinions and experiences but the best thing that we can enjoy in life is our own experiences about life. Thus have faith in yourself... have faith in life... have faith in the Almighty... and then enjoy your life to the fullest...

Sadhaka: How can I be a good shishya?

Swamiji: You are the guru and you are the shishya. In other words, you have both guru-tattva and shishya-tattva in you. You have an external guru and an internal guru. You are ready to accept the external guru but are perceiving the internal guru through ego and shadripus (six enemies – desire, greed, anger, pride, attachment and covetousness).

Shishyas have waited for years to receive knowledge from their guru. Do you have that much patience? When you contact a spiritual person you might want to explore yourself with the help of that person. But instead of exploring, you will exploit him or her. You will demand many things. In pure love, there is no demand or command. When you find a guru, serve him or her without any expectations. Just have the patience to receive anything from him. A good shishya is humble and honest.

*"Nature
speaks
if you
Listen"*







*"Your worth will not be measured by
your speech or your followers but by the
simple acts that you perform"*



*“Channelizing
all your actions
effectively is
Sadhana”*









*"We create two
different worlds,
'God's world'
and 'Our world.'
Because of this
false identity
we are not
experiencing God"*

Sadhaka: These days we hear about sanyasis who have gone against dharma ... how can we understand this?

Swamiji: The moment we hear about sanyasa, the first thing that comes to our mind is a person with a saffron robe and a shaven head. This is only an external identity to identify a person, not the truth about the person. One may be a sanyasi and not wear orange robes, and one may not be a sanyasi and wear orange robes. So a person cannot be identified based on his or her external appearance. The true persona behind the appearance is always hidden. That is the reason we are unable to understand sanyasa and its true expression. Due to the rigidity of our mind, we don't accept that which is real and we feel that a sanyasi has totally deviated from the guideline set by our sages and shastras.

In fact, sanyasa cannot be given nor can it be taken. Sanyasa is not something readily available in the market and purchased whenever we want. Sanyasa means not only working through hands, legs and mind but also through the heart, while giving utmost care. It is about making everyone around happy and joyous. It is about living for others. It is about selflessness and an egoless state. If we understand that sanyasa is nothing but the higher state of mind where mind transforms into heart, then our very perception about sanyasa will change. Then we will not look at the external appearance but will pay attention to internal integrity.

There are two types of sanyasa: external and internal. External sanyasa comes from a guru, tradition or satsang whereas internal sanyasa springs from within. When we take sanyasa from an external source, we are prone to create boundaries around us. When internal sanyasa takes place, the boundaries get destroyed and then nothing can bind the soul. External sanyasa demands and commands, internal sanyasa obeys and accepts.

The actual fact is that sanyasa happens, it cannot be created. And when it happens, creation takes place within. Something soothing, inspiring and elevating takes place permanently.

We find ourselves more clear and transparent. Acceptance becomes the mantra in life. Fearlessness becomes the personality of life. Selflessness becomes the signature of life.

This does not mean that there is no value for external sanyasa, that too has its role to play in one's life. Sometimes, external sanyasa can be a wonderful path to lead to internal sanyasa. In this world, everything is unique, inspiring and useful. As long as we dwell in this world, we are bound to face many problems. Temptations are as close as our own selves. Nothing appears nearer than selfishness. But this external sanyasa, to some extent, can keep us away from those temptations. And that is the time when we can follow prescribed guidelines given by our gurus and sages. What they have said has got truth in it and tremendous energy as well. Before working on others' energies it is better to work on our own energies first.

Sadhaka: Is it possible for all of us to know the divine call?

Swamiji: Yes, it is possible! Sorrow comes from emptiness whereas happiness springs from silence. So there is a wonderful connection between happiness and silence. Simple detachment from all actions will truly open the gate to silence. Ego, selfishness, attachment, boredom and expectations will bring emptiness in us. They are all identified with the body and mind. Hence we need to go even beyond this body and mind to feel the ocean of silence, where we reside as 'self.' Sometimes, when we stand near a seashore and gaze, what do we see? A gigantic ocean, but most of the time, we see waves, and only waves. That is how we live in this world right now, looking at the waves, not at the ocean; looking at the body and mind, not the 'self.' If we start looking at the ocean, the waves disappear. Similarly when we look at the 'self,' the body and mind disappear and our hearts get filled with silence. Then the divine call springs from within to take us to the depths of the ocean of divinity.

Sadhaka: I have spiritual goals, but I am unable to make progress.

Swamiji: We do have to set goals in our lives. We do have every possible support to achieve them and even invisible hands to work for us. But, what is the use, if we do not have the longing to accomplish those goals? It is said, 'goals may be many, but mission in life is one.' Desire has limitations, a mission is not limited. One needs to transform every goal into a mission. How does one do that? To accomplish a mission in life we have to have sincere desire, interest, clarity and inner strength.

Sadhaka: How can I experience my own existence?

Swamiji: It is strange but true that when everything else ceases, one can experience one's own existence. The moment we try to understand anything with our mind, the mind comes in and the 'self' disappears. Then we start experiencing the mind and soon get carried away by the mind's play without witnessing the mind. Although our very identity is 'self' we tend to get involved in the mind.

However, the mind is not simply there to create a nuisance in life, it can be used to know the 'self,' to throw more light on the ongoing journey. So one should know how to use the mind to go beyond the mind. Remember, 'self' exists beyond human comprehension. Therefore it is important to know the mind first, not the 'self.' The whole idea behind this world is to use it to go beyond it.

Here is an example of how you can conduct an enquiry that leads to 'self.' Make sure that before this enquiry you are free from your obligations at least for 15 minutes. Let us make sure that you are fresh, energetic and active. If possible have a bath or semi-bath to freshen up. Have an empty stomach or go light on food. The early hours of the day are ideal

when everything is silent. Maintain the same schedule for a few days. Preferably, wear loose clothing, there should be no discomfort.

Now sit, or lie down or you can even stand or walk. You can keep your eyes closed or opened. Focus on the body at least for three minutes, on any part or part that touches the ground or part by part from toes to head or the whole body. Slowly, either your breathing may slow down or stop for some time or it might become shallow. After three minutes, de-focus from the body and focus on the mind for five minutes. Understand what your mind is asking and how it is playing with you. Time will come when you are focused on the mind and de-focused from the body. Bodily activities will slow down, your mind will calm down and breathing will become deeper and sometimes heavy.

Now you have learnt the basic lesson to focus and de-focus. Continue your sadhana until your focusing and de-focusing is strengthened. When everything slows down, you may feel that there is something else as well. That means slowly you are developing silent witnessing as well and soon you will realize that not only body and mind but something else exists.

Now use the same focusing and de-focusing technique even for your subtle existence. Just as you were able to de-focus yourself from the body and focus on the mind, similarly, now start de-focusing from the mind and focus on your existence. It is difficult but not impossible. Soon, with practice, you shall easily understand how to focus on witness-er rather than on body and mind. Though the world remains the same, your whole perception will change. And soon you shall find your own existence.

*“There are plenty
of books and
Gurus but the
best book for you
is your own life
and the best Guru
for you is your
own heart”*



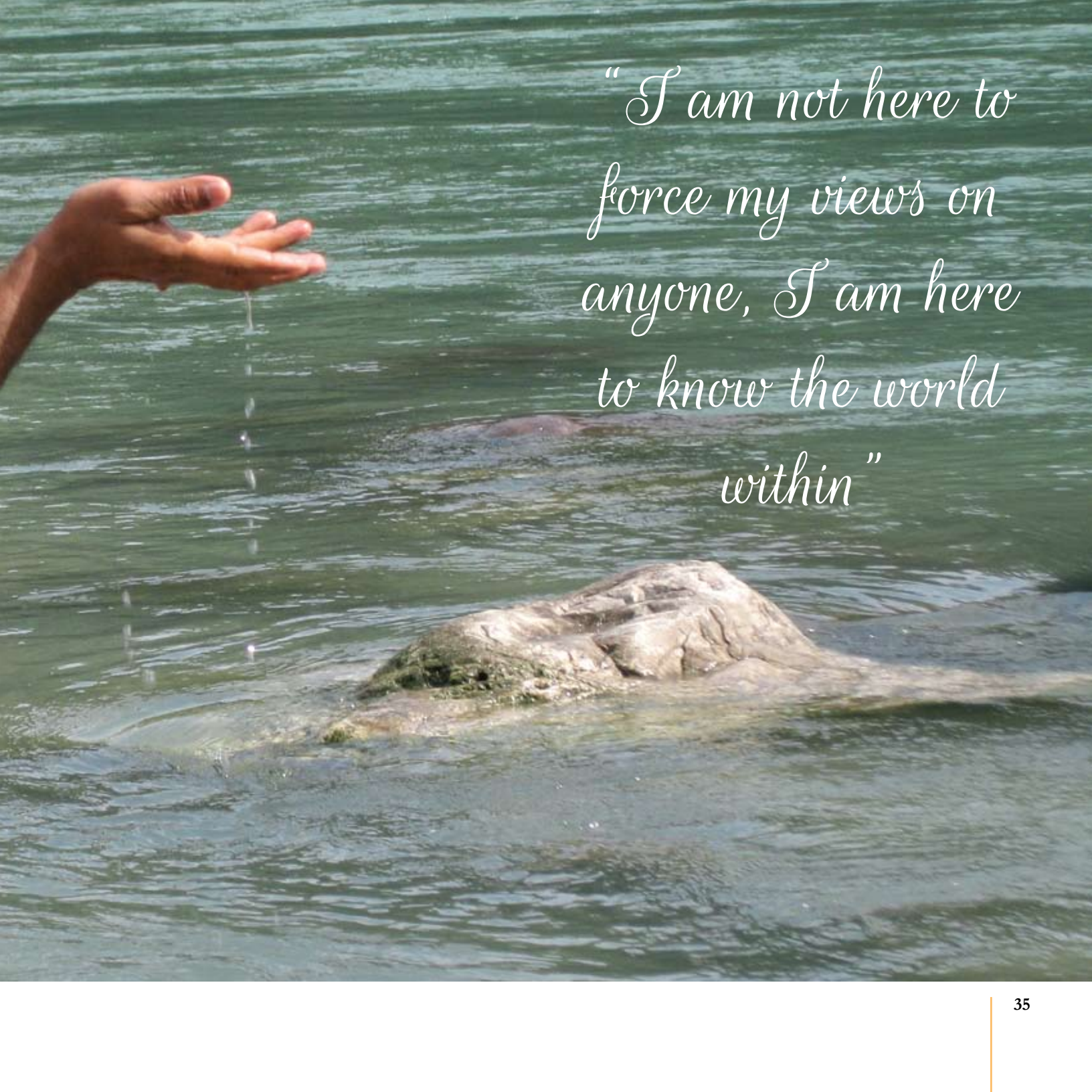




A background image showing a dirt path in the foreground, leading towards a grassy field. A tree trunk is visible on the left side. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

*“If we want to
keep the spirit
of mankind
alive then we
should drop our
identities”*



A photograph of a hand holding a small amount of water, with a stream of water falling from the fingers into a body of water. In the background, a large, mossy rock is partially submerged. The water is a deep green color.

*"I am not here to
force my views on
anyone, I am here
to know the world
within"*

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुरेव परंब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

*This book is an offering of love and gratitude
from sadhakas and followers inspired by the teachings of
Swami Nachiketananda Puri.*