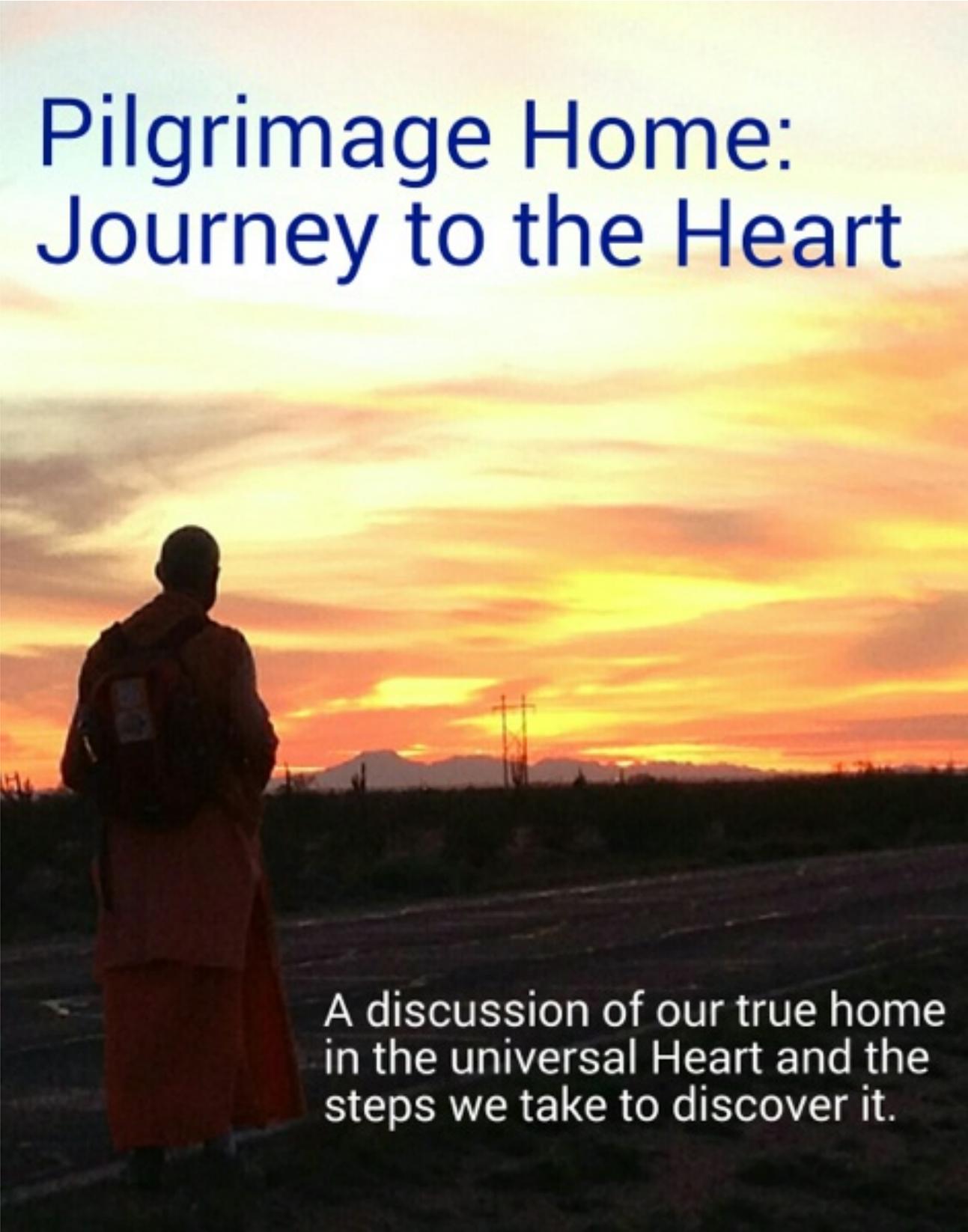


Pilgrimage Home: Journey to the Heart



A discussion of our true home
in the universal Heart and the
steps we take to discover it.

With the deepest gratitude

Thank you to all of the teachers. Thank you to: Swami Sivananda Ji for your steadfast and direct guidance, for never giving up on me. Peace Pilgrim for your steps showing us the way to Peace. Jesus for showing the Life eternal, the Christ, in us all. Dearest Amma Ji for showing the beauty of this world through your love and thank you dear God for granting us salvation through Your own Light, showing us the way to you.

And thank you, my dear friend. I walk for you and with you while you humble me with the kindness you show wherever I go. Thank you for your kindness, thank you for sharing your stories and especially for sharing your smile. You have an amazing smile. Thank you, I love you, and I pray that you will be successful in every endeavor and that you will know Peace. I will do my best to help you. Om.

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Introduction

Not so long ago, I felt a relentless inner urge to change my life. To change the way I behaved, and more profoundly, the way I thought. But how to do this? I'd never really thought about it, and this is both funny and a revelation. Our thoughts, after all, are what we "think" we are. We hold them sacred while simultaneously trying to address what is far from us, that is, all those things in the world, over which we have no direct control. We do this instead of focusing on what is nearest to us, the one thing we can actually control, that is, our own thoughts. At some point, I realized this was what my journey was about, as all journeys are.

I was being driven to change, led to know it was critically important, but not given any map to show me where to turn. My mind flailed about, providing various ideas. I followed each suggestion, only to learn that each one ended only in pain. In desperation, finally, I tried a completely new direction, not consciously aware of where it might lead. Yet I followed. What I found, in every way, amazes me.

As I started this journey, I had no conscious thoughts about God, or of becoming a monk, or of walking across the USA on a pilgrimage for peace. Certainly it's safe to say none of this ever crossed my mind. And yet here we are, chatting about these very things. Amazing.

What started with no goal other than happiness finally led to achievement of the only worthwhile goal; that which once found ends the urge to continue searching. And achievement of that goal, as we shall discuss here, was actually the end of "me". I realize now that I had always been searching, as we all do. Not knowing our goal exactly but seeking happiness, we journey in this world.

With this book I tell a story of my journey; what finally became a story of learning about and then serving the world. Is it a true story? Well, it's all documented and it's in no way my intention to mislead you. I will do my best here to share some of what has inspired me, some of my experiences, interpretation of these experiences, and finally, lessons learned from the journey.

I pray this will be beneficial for you. Though some philosophy is touched on, this is not a book of philosophy; there are much better books for that and I am happy to refer you to some of them. This is a conversation, and I hope that we may have a great, insightful talk.

Many asked me if I kept a journal on this pilgrimage. In fact, I used Facebook posts to journal, sometimes daily, sometimes more frequently, sharing openly with those whom I've had the gift of meeting along the way. These posts and a selection of the photographs I was allowed to take have been used to tell much of the story of this pilgrimage to date. To these I've added commentary to help with perspective. Likewise, I share insight which has come since the time of their initial writing.

Welcome and Namaskar.

May all know Peace.

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1. In the Beginning

"This world is your best teacher. There is a lesson in everything. There is a lesson in each experience. Learn it and become wise. Every failure is a stepping-stone to success. Every difficulty or disappointment is a trial of your faith. Every unpleasant incident or temptation is a test of your inner strength. Though you cannot see the reason for these experiences now, it will be revealed to you. Therefore nil desperandum. March forward hero!"

Swami Sivananda

All I ever wanted was love, and yet I did not know where to find it.

I turned instead to being successful and having fun. I did have fun, and I achieved what the world calls success. Try as we may however, the fun always runs out. You see there is no choice to this. The nature of everything in this world is impermanent, and try as we may even fun has an end. The good news is that there is more to life than fun and after the fun stops we can find it.

I took birth nine years after World War II had come to an end and was a quiet child, very much in love with my parents and with Jesus Christ when I was young. My parents loved to tell their friends and me that I spoke my first words when I was eight months old and then I said no more for the next two years. They said they would have been concerned except that I had already proven that I could speak. They told me that I was mild mannered and kind and I tended to play alone. They said they, along with the other kids plus the driver on the school bus, were in shock when I beat up a kid who was known as a class bully on the ride to school one day. I was in the second grade; I was told that the boy was bigger and older than me, that he was picking on another boy and I beat him up pretty badly.

Of course I remember none of this. I do remember waving goodbye to neighbors while my parents held me in their arms. I'm told that I was six months old at the time and we were moving from downtown Indianapolis to a suburb. Also I vividly remember flying in my dreams. I don't recall where I flew, but certainly I felt unencumbered and free.

That's pretty much it until I was seven or eight years old, and there are not so many memories even from that time. They were unspectacular I'm sure. I was learning about life.

I remember writing of my love for Jesus in poems starting around this time. Mostly I shared the poems with my parents, sometimes they gave them to the church and they were published in the weekly church flyer. I also enjoyed Edgar Allen Poe and wrote scary stories inspired by him.

My parents both worked and were completely loving of my older brothers and me; they took wonderful care of us. My mom had a lot of anger in her, it stayed hidden inside mostly but when it came to the surface it was very hot. I remember once she barely missed dad with a frying pan hurled across the kitchen towards his face. Even then he didn't seem to get mad though. It seemed that he must have always smiled; he was so friendly and helpful. He didn't say much but had an easy laugh.

I don't recall thinking about money back then. We lived in a house, I had my own room, and we drove to a lake in southern Michigan as a every year for family summer vacation. Once we drove to the Grand Canyon on Route 66. In looking back we didn't have much; I guess we would have been called lower middle class, but we did spend time together. I enjoyed fishing. At four and five years old I'd stand with my little fishing rod at the end of the dock in front of our simple cabin for hours, catching little fishes and putting them in a bucket next to me. After some time I'd ask my parents to come and see the bucket, then would pour the fishes back in to the lake and continue on. Of course as time went on I was motivated to catch larger fish, to go fishing in the middle of the lake in a boat instead of standing on the dock. I reflect back now on the dock and the bucket and the glorious smile pasted on my face as I reeled in those poor struggling little fishes.

My parents divorced for some time and then remarried, my brothers left for the army as soon as they could but were not assigned to Vietnam, and somehow I fell out of love with Jesus by the time I was thirteen or fourteen. The tales I heard of Jesus did not square with what I saw in the world and I didn't know anyone that really seemed to know much about Him. I attended a Jesuit college prep school, leaving late in my senior year by pretending that my asthma was far worse than it was. I was told that the Jesuit priests were the best customers at the local liquor store.

I enjoyed science and technology and spent much of my time during school days with amateur radio, taking a summer job in the young technology business with the intention of finishing up work required for my degree and attending college in the fall. I had a scholarship to Arizona State University and intended study to be a pharmacist. I was promoted twice before the end of the summer and never attended college. I loved learning but hated school. In later years I always claimed to be a college graduate with a marketing degree; I was never called on it. I was very good at lying when it seemed beneficial.

I worked in the same industry for more than thirty years, taking many different jobs with several companies and moving around the U.S., always advancing in my career. I had a good aptitude for technology and leadership, learned quickly through experience and worked hard, I was most always working. I was able to think logically, focus, and visualize goals. I generally thought positively about the outcome of whatever I was working towards. Speaking was a gift and I had a pleasant, optimistic personality. I genuinely cared for those I worked with and wanted for them to succeed. Having said this, let there be no doubt that I worked in business; I wanted to get ahead and ultimately I always put myself first. Most whom I worked with would say that I was fair, they would call me a visionary, and they would also say I was very competitive and quite successful.

At sixteen my brothers had already moved out of the house and I felt a strong urge to go. I moved out within a year of starting that summer technology job; it was 1974 and I was nineteen. I rented an apartment with a friend in Speedway, Indiana for some months, then got my own place, moving again in another year or so, then taking a large apartment on a popular lake north of Indianapolis for two years before moving to California in April of 1978.

I drank. I remember drinking a lot some times. I'll tell you a story about one of my drinking experiences from my nineteenth year; I had often wondered how I had made it through that night unscathed. My employer held an annual Christmas party; this was my first with them. It was December of 1973. I drove my new car there, a Chevy Monte Carlo. As I recall this was my third car, with something over fifty more cars ahead of me as the years unfolded.

I loved women, pretty much all of the women that I found attractive I fell in love with. I became weak around them and wanted to be with them. I had already fallen in love several times but this was always one way, for I didn't know how to act strong with them and any resulting relationship would last no more than one or two dates. I wanted to hold, to be held, to be quiet, to kiss. I maintained romantic notions but was by no means a conversationalist nor was I particularly attractive.

At the party were women, and there was dancing, something I had little experience with, and alcohol, which I typically drank alone or with just a few friends. But this night I danced, I drank, and I got sloppy. I recall literally falling on my face on the dance floor. I was told that I was a hit; that I didn't get angry but was "cute". And very drunk.

When it was time to go home I got in the car, started it up, and drove. It was cold, snowing and windy; there were a few inches of snow on the ground already and it was coming down quite hard. I was about thirty miles from home, which was due north of where the party took place. I remember leaving the party and wandering aimlessly in the car, seeing accidents here and there as people slid across the median or off the road. I did the same, unintentionally jumping across the median with a loud "bang", but the car still seemed fine and I continued on.

I was so drunk that I didn't know where I was or how to get home from there. I saw a police car and decided to follow it. The thought that came was, "he must know where he is going, I'll follow him." I did, and he did; after close to an hour he turned off the road and by then I knew where I was and where home was, so I continued on.

I pulled into the driveway, put on the parking brake (the parking brake on the floor, it was engaged with the left foot) and went inside to bed. In the morning I went out to the car. I noticed that the hood was up. I had not put on the parking brake; I had pulled the hood-opening latch! And the plastic inner fender was hanging down on the left front corner of the car, touching the tire and the ground. This was obviously the result of the median crossing. I looked for some time, marveling at the sight, and went back inside to sleep more. I was suffering from a terrible hangover.

Life became a mixture of working hard and playing; working itself seemed a type of play for me so I devoted to it completely. I was constantly rewarded for hard work with promotions and more money. If promotions didn't come fast enough for me, and it seemed that nothing was ever fast enough for me, then I'd switch companies in order to advance faster. This was the case several times prior to moving to California, and from there promotions typically came every year or two. My talents were in demand; I didn't have to search for jobs, as others would often let me know that they wanted me to join if I became disenchanted with where I worked.

For play there was water skiing and sailing, cars, drinking, drugs and sex. Experimentation with many drugs was on tap; the money was there for them and many were quite pleasing. Cocaine became my drug of choice. Marijuana often caused an old injury to throb so I did not allow myself to smoke pot often. My friends mostly smoked during leisure time so it was often around; I would take a little and stop before the throbbing started. LSD, mescaline and magic mushrooms were all enjoyed at various times over a few short years but cocaine use continued for several years and it created quite a financial challenge for me. I kept making more money but also continued to use more cocaine and at one point I was spending the mortgage money to purchase cocaine and lost a house to foreclosure. I was still very young, and losing a house did finally cause me to stop the cocaine after some time.

Mostly I worked. Work was exciting. By that time I was in positions with some import and my income was variable based upon performance. I liked making money and liked the recognition that came with it as well as the nicer and nicer cars. Business success became my drug of choice after some time.

Always I was learning how to be successful at whatever I wanted. Always also there were the thoughts about what was next. What would be the next car, the next trip or the next business deal. As soon as I had any of these, or anything for that matter, my thoughts quickly turned to what was next. And to be successful I had to act; I needed to be good at acting. The more I acted the better I became at acting and the more I seemed to be the role that I played.

In business it is necessary to exaggerate in order to be successful. Products and services are exaggerated, though one has to be careful not to go overboard. Some exaggeration is expected but in excess it earns one a bad reputation. Aggressiveness is rewarded in business, as is competitiveness, and also acting. This acting of course is a type of a lie, though it is not called this, and of course the exaggeration is also. Just the right amount is finesse. Not enough is naiveté, and too much is crooked dealing. One must get the formula right to be successful, and I did. I kept getting better and better at this, made friends and gained admirers, I worked hard to not damage my reputation and to always benefit the people and companies I worked with.

At the same time I improved on my personal act. I learned what people respond favorably to and to what they do not. I wanted to be liked, loved in fact. I wanted friends, to be accepted, and of course I wanted a wife. I wanted to fall in love and to stay in love forever, to live happily ever after. And I had learned that I needed to act a certain way in order to get this, just like anything else that I wanted. I found that this happiness and ever after love must be won, and that success was important in order to have it.

I became a very good actor. Inside life had an odd quality and I often felt confused and lonely, but I learned that if I remained busy this feeling was hidden even from me, so I kept very busy.

After some time I met a wonderful woman who fell in love with me, and of course me with her, and I promised to love her forever. I took such wonderful care of her in the beginning; I loved to show her love. I was not making a lot of money yet but I spent what I made on dining, on travel, and on cocaine. We both found it to be quite enjoyable, in particular in conjunction with sex. We married after three

years and remained married for twenty-five. We did much together, she supported me valiantly, and I tried to be good to her, most of the time. We had no children.

The sex drive continued so strong. We had a lot of sex and when I travelled on business I'd see prostitutes from time to time, and porn, online porn as it became the thing, also was a big part of my sex life. I did not know where the sex drive came from or why and didn't even think about that. Always I was evaluating any women or girls that I saw, undressing them in my mind, imagining how the ones that fit my personal attraction profile would be in bed.

Always there were lists of desires catalogued in my mind. Cars were on the list; I subscribed to all of the car magazines and studied the upcoming cars, picking out what would be my next one. Sometimes, in later years, we had three or four cars at once for the two of us. Mercedes, BMWs, Audis, Cadillacs, even an MG, a Jensen Healy, a Maserati, all made the list of cars bought and sold over the years. Cars were always exciting. The fastest car that I had was a Mercedes AMG SLK55; it was specified at 4.1 to 4.3 second 0-60 depending upon the publication that had rated it. I had debated getting that or a new Corvette, which was a little quicker 0-60 but less luxurious and exclusive. Such was the way that I thought. Oh my, was that car fast; I used it to impress many people.

Boats were on the list. It took some time before I could organize this; there had been recurring thoughts of boats since I had lived on the lake in Indiana. Finally I needed to get to New York's Long Island and a high paying job as VP of Marketing for a company there in order to get the first boat. It was 32 feet long, cost \$75,000 and within two years had been traded up twice, finally to a 45-foot twin diesel aft cabin motor yacht that was well over \$500,000. Still, even then, I was investigating the next boat. By that point I was receiving and reviewing most of the yachting magazines in addition to the car magazines.

Travel was on the list. I had travelled to most of the western European countries and much of Asia on business, and by the time that I was promoted to President of the New York based company I was traveling most of the time. Three weeks out of four and sometimes more were spent flying and meeting with suppliers, employees, customers, press, etc. Of course with more success came the opportunity to upgrade travel, also the frequent flyer programs provide many opportunities to fly business or first class, even internationally, and to pay for vacation travel pretty much anywhere in the world. I logged more than two million miles of flying on American Airlines and an additional three million miles combined on the other airlines in total. This was accrued over twenty years of regular flying with most of it during an intense five-year period.

Travel was compelling; I always felt the need to move. To change up jobs, to change the way that I worked, to move homes; every home got old after some time and it seemed that I must move on to find the next place that would be better, the next experience that would bring joy. There was more to travel than just leisure, it was fun and there was something that seemed to touch me deeply as well. We enjoyed snow skiing by this point, a lot. We lived in Colorado for several years and took it up there, so weekends were often spent in the mountains. I'd count the number of days skiing each year, as many friends did, and reached thirty-eight in one season. We skied the Alps in Austria and in Italy. We ate and drank in the shadow of Monte Bianco in lovely Courmayeur. We drank ice-cold schnapps at ten

thousand feet on the slopes. We ate at the best restaurant in Paris, where the tab was nearly \$3,000 for two couples.

We both found cruises to be enjoyable. We cruised the Mexican Riviera on our honeymoon, and in later years cruised at least once per year until our own boats came. I enjoyed planning all of the details of the cruises in advance in the same way as I would plan the next car or the next boat, or the next meal, or the next bottle of wine, or even the next sex. It was always exciting to plan (whatever I was planning) and it seemed completely natural to do so. There seemed no better way to have a pleasurable experience than to plan it, to research the best places, and it was a bonus that planning was so much fun also.

We cruised the Mediterranean, the Greek Isles, Alaska, the fjords of Norway, the Caribbean, Central America, and Asia. We had planned a cruise of the Hawaiian Islands but that didn't happen; it remained on the "list". The cruise ships and the accommodations kept getting more exclusive and deluxe. A suite became normal, and then a larger suite when possible; we had a large balcony sweet on the aft deck of the ship that we sailed on through the fjords, complete with butler service. Finally our preferred cruises were on small luxury all-inclusive ships with two to three hundred crewmembers and the same number of passengers. We took a quite memorable seventeen-day cruise from Hong Kong to Singapore with stops in Vietnam after two weeks spent touring China with all of the liquor, champagne and wine that we wanted. We wanted, and we consumed, a lot.

In travel we met many people around the world, and this was always wonderful. We had taken a trip to the Dominican Republic and I had rented a motor scooter there to explore one day. I don't know that I had ever ridden a motor scooter before, to my recollection that was the first time. The two of us went in to town from the resort to purchase jewelry; we had a great time picking out beautiful pieces and then negotiating the price, finally ending up with a package of necklaces and bracelets that we were both happy with. She liked the pieces and felt good wearing them; I felt good being able to get them for her and to make her happy in that way. I was proud that I was able to take us there and that I had the ability to purchase them; I was proud of my love for her that I would want to give these gifts. Mostly I just felt good, we both did, and there was indeed a lovely glow to that afternoon. As we returned towards the resort we passed a gasoline station, and as we went by I realized that we should stop to fill up the scooter, avoiding an extra charge upon its return. The scooter was black and shiny, brand new and very cute.

The station was on our right. I pulled off the road to that side and waited for traffic to clear; as it did we crossed the road and circled back to the station but still needed to cross once again in order to enter it. We waited for traffic to clear one more time. There was an opening, and in a moment of bravery I gave the scooter the gas to quickly cross the road. As we neared the centerline I noticed that there was a drainage ditch in the center of the road! It was about the width of the front tire on the scooter and I knew in that moment that if we hit that ditch at speed something bad would happen. I laid the scooter down. It is amazing that I had the presence to know to do this, with no experience on a scooter. Grace. I laid the bike down on its left side while still moving fairly quickly. The weight of the bike, and the two of us, went on the handlebar, and on my left elbow.

Cars coming from both directions stopped. We got up and looked at each other; we both were fine. The bike was another matter. The mirror on the left side was broken, the bike was scratched and the handlebars were out of alignment. We were not going to be riding it back to the resort. My thoughts turned to how upset the people that rented us the bike would be, and how much this would cost. I had heard stories of incidents like this in the Caribbean costing a thousand dollars or more, and that seemed a lot of money to me at that time. The day was not so bright any longer.

The people in the cars got out, and came up to us and were asking us what happened, if we were OK. My wife spoke Spanish; I knew only a few words. They were so kind, so sweet. They had almost nothing and their cars were tiny and beaten up. The houses on the island were generally shacks with tin walls and tin or grass roofs. And yet these people were so nice; they didn't just ask and leave us, this event had become the most important thing in their lives at that moment. They cared deeply, and there was nothing more important to them than making sure we were OK.

I learned after a little time of telling them that we were both fine that I was really not. I had pulled the bike up off the ground and was trying to push it and realized that I had no power to push it with, not with my left arm anyway. I looked at my arm, at the elbow that had sustained the weight of us tumbling down, and it was gone. It was missing, not in its normal place. That seemed quite odd, I didn't understand where it could have gone. There was a scrape, a little blood, but no elbow.

I still felt no pain but it was about to come. We discussed this and it seemed pretty obvious that I was going to need to go to a hospital in order to have a professional locate my elbow and see what to do about putting it back where it was supposed to be. So, we accepted help. And there was so much help that came. I was placed in a car with a taxi driver who shuttled me off to the hospital. My wife stayed and another one of our new friends walked the scooter back to the resort with her.

The hospital seemed a mess. The beds were rusting and I remember a rooster next door (just outside a residence, or perhaps in it, in one of the many ramshackle buildings next to the hospital); he was crowing loudly. I was quickly taken to one of the beds, a doctor came to see me and he and the taxi driver had some conversation. Shortly after I was taken to be x-rayed on what must have been a thirty-year-old machine. The x-ray pictures were taken and the doctor brought one in to show me before it had even dried. He held it up in the natural light and pointed to it, showing me that my elbow had relocated nearer to my shoulder than its old home mid-arm. It was clear that it was going to need to be relocated back to its proper home in order for me to use that left arm again. The taxi driver took the x-ray and the two of us walked outside to wait for my wife's arrival.

She came along shortly with the same friend who had helped her to return the scooter. We stood outside the hospital and the taxi driver gently waved the x-ray in the hot breeze in order to let it dry. As she approached he put the x-ray up in the sunlight for her to see, and with a broad smile he pointed and told her "el roto, el roto". She translated for me, "it's broken, it's broken". This was of course old news to me by that point. I asked her about the scooter, how much would it cost? She said nothing. They didn't charge for the damage or even for the gasoline that we used. She told me that they were most concerned about me, about how I was.

We spent a day on the beach, I drank to ease the pain, and the next day we flew back to the USA and to a modern hospital where my elbow was set and a screw inserted to hold it in place. Of course it healed and only rarely set off the metal detector when I flew.

I could never forget the kindness we were shown from sweet people who had nothing. Grace, again. This continued as we travelled. In China we met two guides who also had so very little and were so kind to us, so sweet. Grace, again. In fact it always seemed that it was the people who had the least who were the kindest, and our travel was continuing grace that we might see this example.

Wine was on the list, along with single malt scotch. I had seemingly always enjoyed wine and as my pace picked up speed so did drinking. There were business dinners every night when I travelled and wine was always a part of that. Good wine. I drank to do business and I drank to escape. What was I escaping? Well I didn't think about it at the time; I just felt the need to let off pressure. A typical night saw my wife and I drinking more than one bottle of wine between us and always once one wine was tried I wanted the next one to be better. It wasn't always better of course, and some disappointment was felt when I had to settle for something that was not as good, so great wine was usually the order of the day.

Good business dinners typically included at least one bottle of wine per person. I was often given the honor of choosing the wines for the dinner; I was admired as someone who researched and knew good wines at reasonable prices. Besides that I was fun. I liked finding wines that not a lot of people knew about, and always liked to get a "deal", whether it was wine or anything else. Lots of time was spent researching what deals were on offer on whatever it was that I needed. I needed a wine cellar at home, it always seemed a great idea when I visited friends that had one, and finally I had that. It was a small cellar and I was stocking it with Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Chardonnay and Champagne at a rate a little faster than we could drink it. I'd purchase nothing less than 90 point rated wines (out of 100, and I was certain that I could taste the difference between a 91 point rated wine and a 93). Every week or two at the office new bottles of wine purchased online arrived. I found that great wines could be purchased for between \$30 and \$100 per bottle, and after some time most purchases were in this range, with some topping the \$100 per bottle level.

Watches, jewelry and furs were on the list. Watches for me; at one point I had nearly fifty watches and something like \$50,000 invested in them with a few very expensive ones, but this was nothing compared to collections that friends had, some well upwards of million dollar collections. Swiss watches of course. White gold, pink gold, yellow gold, automatic and manual. There was not a battery-powered watch in the bunch. Jewelry for my wife. Diamonds, gold, a large sapphire, on and on. I was making online purchases and typically had something new for her when I returned from a business trip. Seven or eight furs for her, one for me. And always the "next" fur. Once I had upset her with overstaying a business trip and she went out and purchased a \$5,000 fur without telling me. I remember that I was upset because I had wanted to use the money for something or another, but she did look beautiful in it so I got over being upset pretty quickly.

Sex was on the list. As my wife and I got older she looked less attractive to me and I found myself more attracted to women that were younger than me, where some years prior I had been attracted to older

women. I did not pursue having a girlfriend initially but many that I knew by this point had done so. In the position I had attained there was some notoriety, there was a personal aura of power, and there was money. I had become glamorous. As a good actor I was always friendly and knew what to say in a given situation, and yet I was so involved in business, travel and so on that instead of taking on a girlfriend I saw prostitutes from time to time when I was on business travel and I also enjoyed online sex. This was my way of satisfying the sexual variety that my mind kept telling me that I needed. Of course this activity was never discussed with anyone, I knew that it could not be a part of my external act.

Business was on the list also, of course. It was the center of everything for me, my success as a person radiated from my success in business, for this is what enabled everything else.

I had led much of the company's expansion globally, the market was trending that way with manufacturing and design moving out of the USA at a rapid pace, and the company needed to expand internationally very quickly and effectively or die. Expand we did, we put together great plans, presented ourselves well, hired great talent in leadership roles, and we grew fast, profitably, and expanded from a USA only business of \$200 Million in annual sales to sales offices in fourteen countries, more than 50% of our sales coming from offshore, and nearly one billion dollars in annual revenue within less than ten years. We expanded from two hundred employees to nearly eight hundred, and most of these reported up to me. We had a lot of friends and supporters; there was a wonderful buzz in the industry about us. It was all quite exciting; I'd talk with friends about the seeming adrenaline flow that helped me to maintain this. Of course almost all of my friends were "business friends", and many of them subject to the same adrenaline flow. The technology industry is very fast paced, with technology changing nearly overnight, and subject to tremendous fluctuation and change. We would joke that we could not imagine doing anything else because we were addicted to it. This was of course completely the case.

There were many who attributed our business success to me. I acted humble about this but in fact this recognition was the best drug I had ever experienced. It felt so amazing, I craved the attention and respect.

No matter what idea I entertained, business and business success was intertwined with it. I was never away from the business; it was the center of my personality. I always talked about it, always thought about it, always ideas would come regarding some opportunity or how to approach some deal, or how to make someone that we needed "on side" to be interested in us. Wherever I was I could not be away from email or the phone, I recall only one vacation during these many years where I was away from both phone and email for more than a day and this seemed a terrible torture!

My wife and I had settled in to a routine together. Since I travelled most of the time we saw each other less and less as the years went on, our time together became more event focused. She had her friends; I had my friends, my business and my aspirations. When we were together we watched movies a lot at home or out, we took frequent vacations together. We shared the interest in cars and to a lesser extent with boats and both enjoyed travel so our conversations would typically be about these. We talked a lot about places to visit, about our last vacation and about cars. We had also started to talk about

retirement, where we would retire, and how we should begin to make plans for this. Near the end of our relationship we were travelling together, either on the boat or flying somewhere in the world, about six weeks per year plus a handful of boating weekends during the summer. We had a beautiful million dollar plus home on Long Island. We belonged to a yacht club and went often to parties, for the first time in our relationship we had "couples friends".

At the yacht club we had gotten to know new friends who had much more money and success than we did. I felt a bit jealous, they had better stuff than us, went to more interesting locations, and some had more time off to enjoy life. One of them had a one hundred thirteen foot boat, another had a fifty-foot Turkish made "picnic boat" that I loved to look at and investigated for some time. Now I was in the company of multi-millionaires and this helped motivate me to become still more successful.

I know that this may seem to be an exciting life; excitement is a good word for it. Fulfillment is not. It is certainly what is called success; I attained effectively everything I had ever wanted. It was also fun, much of the time. And yet, even though I said at the time that I was happy, I never slowed down enough to know if I was happy or not or to reflect on anything other than how to obtain some whim of my mind. Whatever I obtained went on some mental checklist as "complete" yet it was invariably to be replaced by the next and better item on that same checklist. Along with the next item came research on what would be still next. In spite of the stress that came with never having enough money to purchase all of the things that I (felt I) needed on the various lists, there always seemed to be progress. Someday there would be retirement in some beautiful place. On the water. With a small boat. My wife and I talked of this. We spoke often of the future and all of the wonderful things we would do in the future; we'd take time, relax and be comfortable.

We talked about going to church from time to time but never went. There was a Unitarian Universalist church not so far away from the million-dollar plus house that we owned; invariably whenever we saw it one or the other of us would think about it. My relationship with God, the great love which I had felt for Jesus, had been reduced to a "just in case" prayer which I said every time that I got on an airplane. I'd take my seat and before takeoff recite the Lord's Prayer, and then talk to God and ask that He take care of everyone on the plane so that we could all arrive home safely. And then we'd take off. The prayer must have worked; in spite of several shaky flights we landed safely every time!

Nothing was ever enough. I had seemingly become the character that I played, but inside was still that boy that just wanted to love and to be loved. All of this motivation for success, all of the lists, all of the thoughts that came, all of my plans to achieve, all of the actions I had taken had seemingly come from that, the desire to love and be loved. I was never comfortable; I had no idea how to be.

I had confused excitement for happiness. My act was to always be "up", always in charge, always with a great vision and a way forward. Instead of having a great vision though I felt completely trapped; blinded by the walls that I had built. I could not see anything. I was too caught up in everything, too involved, moving always too fast to see. Always there was pain in my belly, always stress and an overwhelming desire for more, newer, better.

I did not reflect much, for it was so very painful to reflect. And then, thank God, the cracks started to come in the walls of my existence, in my very character.

2. Cracks in the Wall

"And men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, yet pass over the mystery of themselves without a thought."

Saint Augustine

I felt at once relentlessly impelled and hopelessly trapped. It seemed these massive walls of commitments and responsibilities, of being always "in character", were closing in on me and I had begun to suffer incredible stress and pain. Emotional pain, to be sure. I felt completely alone in spite of all of the friends, the pace, the achievements, and the success. This did not make sense to me, it didn't seem it should work this way, for I was still under the illusion that successful people were the happiest. They were never alone, always surrounded by friends, always popular, always having fun. I felt alone nonetheless and there was an odd feeling that the more people I had around me the more alone I was. There was also great physical pain as the stress was manifesting itself in various illnesses and injuries.

As is the natural way regardless of how successful one is there is never complete success. There are always barriers and forces that work against the ideas and goals in one's mind. Achieving, whatever is to be achieved, is a struggle. Two steps are taken forward yet one is taken back. As long as this is the pace, two forward and one back, at least progress is being made. But invariably at some point the forces working against our goals start to turn the tide, at least for some time, and then it will seem we take two steps backward for the one forward. Of course we'll rationalize this, holding out hope that this will change, and yet finally we'll begin to accept that perhaps the goal in our mind is not achievable, or maybe it will be so difficult to achieve that there is a reasonable question as to the value of actually achieving it. This is the way of the world, and this also is grace at work.

There are both ups and downs, there is pleasure and pain; there is what is beautiful and what is ugly. There is gain and there is loss, there are good times, and there are bad times. Our mind will tell us that these rules need not apply to "me", and yet this is delusion, a universal quality of the mind. For me, the bad times were coming as were events that would cause me to start to think more deeply about what is life and what is its meaning.

This was a question that I had never asked and I had made fun of others when I heard that they were "searching for themselves". I had thought, "How could you lose yourself to begin with?" It seemed so clear for so long that success was the way to happiness, and life seemed all about being successful.

I had never seriously contemplated death either. That changed when the sixteen-year-old daughter of close friends died in a terribly tragic car crash. She passed in their arms while they waited some forty-five minutes for an ambulance to arrive. Perhaps you can imagine the terrible pain of experiencing

tragedy such as this. Our friends were devastated, inconsolable. These were our closest "couples friends", they were neighbors and we had enjoyed much beautiful time together. I had no idea what to do; we were there but we observed as they both, the man in particular, sunk rapidly. Their life force seemed to be draining away, and of course this was not a surprise. It was simply horrible.

The daughter was outgoing, gifted, loveable, and greatly loved. Her entire school class came for her funeral, as well as much of the school. At the service so many talked of her and her magical gifts. She was a gifted artist and writer, she seemed to care deeply for everyone, she was always fair in her dealings with others. She was a very good person marked with the potential for greatness.

After a short time something strange started to happen; their daughter began to communicate with both of them. The communication was through signs, and there were many signs. Papers from her would appear in mysterious ways, one of them explaining that she was OK where she was, another a contemplation on death which seemed to have been written from the other side. There was much more, suffice it to say that many stories were shared with us and the occurrences were not in any stretch of the imagination random. Her engagement with them was as real as talking with someone in front of you now. This was completely at odds with our general beliefs about life, but there was no question of it. Our friends brought in mediums, something that they would have never imagined doing, and at first met frauds but then one that was clearly able to help them to communicate with their daughter.

They stepped up their search and met scientists who research "continuation of consciousness after bodily death". I learned that there are many scientists researching this subject and there is much rock solid objective and subjective evidence both about us continuing on in some way after death. Although there is not so much money spent on the research, as death is a topic not many really want to think or talk about (we mysteriously ignore the concept of "my" death though it is an absolute certainty), there are many brilliant and dedicated people working in this area.

Our friends started a foundation to provide support for people who lost family members and other loved ones; they provide such beneficial support through counseling, friendship and loving kindness, scientific research and help in communicating with lost loved ones; it is truly a great work. The organization, named Forever Family Foundation, now has thousands of members. My wife and I attended an annual conference and some local ones, I got to know some of the people involved in the effort, and this spurred me to begin to alter my view of what life is and what this world is, even what I am. It was no longer obvious.

At this same time frustration and an odd dreamlike quality about life had grown to an abiding discontent with it. Although I was investing little conscious time thinking about this one veil had lifted and it had become painfully clear to me that I was not happy. I was also starting to understand that I was not going to be happy continuing in the direction I was. It seemed that the basis for whatever little joy I had was crumbling and I was starting to feel depression.

The technology business is cyclical, and the downturns were becoming more painful. My income had peaked and was declining with an extended downturn. With the decline in income I was thinking more about the need to dispose of things I liked and less about acquiring more. Boating was over after an

accident ended that. I was getting older, even though inside I felt no older. My health was deteriorating. My wife was becoming less attractive to me and we were not close any longer, I was feeling a relentless urge to find a younger woman. Everything around me seemed to be in decay. I began to drink more and the first strong thoughts of suicide came.

My actions became more frenetic. Over the next few years I pursued young women, separated and then divorced, moved to New York City, quit my job in a very awkward and public fashion and I entered the entertainment business, funding and managing a quite gifted young singer. I was going to the clubs, meeting some of the movers and shakers in the music business, dying my hair to look younger and donning a new wardrobe.

What I tell you now is amazing. From the perspective of many who knew me my actions over these years looked frantic and crazy. From the inside, though, they seemed to make sense. I was, as always, being motivated from a basic desire to make friends, to love and to be loved. I was following the ideas of my mind, the desires that it brought forward to me. I didn't question them. I believed in myself, had always been successful, and believed that I'd be successful in my endeavors then. And, in fact, I did achieve a modicum of success, although there was no money to show for it. I had begun to adapt and was presenting a new act to the world. I was studying the business including what it is that underlies success in it. After several very embarrassing actions I was learning, and some influential people were starting to believe in me and in my potential, and very much so in the singer's. There was, in some small but influential circles, a buzz beginning around us.

Ultimately however there was no real success as measured with money, and there was never more than a moment of happiness in this new direction either. I found the entertainment business in parts both exciting and disgusting, and am so thankful to God that I did not become more successful in it, for my involvement in it was dragging me even deeper in to the crevasse of addiction to my most base desires. Behind the veil of glamour in the entertainment business are countless thousands of trapped souls being always tempted to trade their bodies and anything that they have of value for opportunities at success, and I found myself adapting to this paradigm.

My money ran out and I hit the wall. I learned what it was like to be hungry and not to have the money to eat. Grace again. I lost the Brooklyn apartment and had a car repossessed; I had taken to hiding my second car so that the bank would not take it. I had lost much of the sterling reputation in my old business but I finally turned to that in order to try to get a life back together. I drove back to California and stayed with a friend who fed me while another gave me money for gas so I could look for work. Then grace, once again, through an extraordinary series of events as finely scripted as a great Hollywood movie. I was at the point of further desperation, contemplating suicide more often, and was wearing out my welcome with my friends while considering where to go or what to do next. At precisely this moment I received a call and an offer to become a consultant for a particular project, I was back in the technology business. It was an apparent miracle.

I put my old act back together and it fit me easily. I still had a few of the Italian suits and loafers from my past and I donned them once again. Against what seemed to be very steep odds and in a public fashion I

was completely successful with the assignment. The consulting deal morphed to a long-term job offer and I regained credibility along with money for food and a nice apartment in San Francisco, a car, and a future.

Instead of complete relief, however, I began to feel the need to investigate life and what the world is, why it is the way it is. And finally I began to look at the desires that kept coming from my mind and to begin, just begin, to see the craziness of at least some of them. Certainly I did see that I was not happy, that in spite of my best efforts I had never been happy for long. Even when everything was going my way there was always another deal to do or another car to buy before I could be satisfied. There was a thrill about getting back in the tech business, about the potential with that, there was some hope, but there was a very odd quality to life at this point that was palpable. Somehow it felt like a story, not completely real.

I continued to work on rebuilding my position and reputation in the technology business, and after a year I was offered a great job that had the potential to quickly lead to the Presidency of the company I had joined. I took it. I was dating, I met a few wonderful women who were younger than me but much closer in age than had been the case in New York. I stopped dying my hair. Still the dreamlike quality to life persisted and I was driven to find out what this world is. I turned to science.

For two years I used most every spare moment to investigate alternatives to my old view of life. I was given a scientific mindset that had always served me well in the technology business and I had loved science when young so I started researching what the leading physicists and cosmologists say about the nature of the world. Last I had known Newton had an apple fall on his head and discovered gravity, and Einstein was talking of "space time" and "the theory of relativity", but I had lost interest when my annual income went north of \$20,000. Now I was back for the latest news.

The latest was and is mind-boggling; it is not at all what one believes by looking at the world. I studied using some of the most recent books and videos and learned about such things as quantum physics, Heidenheimer's principle of uncertainty, the dual-slit experiment, entanglement of sub-atomic particles (what Einstein called "spooky action at a distance"), string theory, x-ray cosmology, black holes, dark energy, dark matter, the arrow of time, infinite parallel universes, ten (or eleven) dimensional reality, and hologram theory. I studied the works of leading physicists Stephen Hawking, Brian Green, Leonard Susskind, Paul Halpern and more.

When last I had checked it seemed that the scientists were wrapping up the last little details of the mapping of the human genome and the mapping of the universe. The big bang theory had been accepted as truth and many were talking about the impending death of both philosophy and science because all of the mysteries of the world would be solved. Now, however, this is known to be far from the case.

Not being an expert (in anything!) here I'll summarize a little of what I gained from this and provide a reference to a few videos including a great NOVA documentary series that you must watch. Also I'll reference a wonderful book. But first:

Quantum physics, Heisenberg principle of uncertainty and the dual slit experiment: These talk to the quixotic and strange behavior of sub atomic particles. Atoms are the building blocks for all matter, including you and me. There is nothing that we see or touch not made of atoms. Matter, as we observe, is solid as opposed to energy, which is a wave. Light, sound and radio waves are examples of energy while cars, trees and people represent for matter. And yet it is known that these sub atomic particles, the basic building blocks of all, are actually waves of potential until they are observed. They become matter only when they are observed, and when not observed they are waves, or rather the **potential** to be something. So a tree is not a tree until it is observed? Well, at a sub atomic level, this is the strange behavior that is observed. This is confirmed, known, put it in the bank. None of the scientists understand why, but they don't question any longer that it is so. Why does a tree appear to be a tree then, or any matter appear to be matter? This, my dear, is not known by the scientists but they are working to find the "unifying theory", or the "theory of everything" in order to explain it.

Entanglement: Introduce two sub atomic particles in a certain way and they become entangled forever as far as we know. Move them to opposite poles of the universe and excite one; the other reacts in an equal and opposite way at identically the same time. This defies several of the known laws of the universe (telling us they are not laws after all), and yet is also now proven to be the case. This effect has been observed in experiments.

String theory, infinite parallel universes and ten dimensional reality: OK, please do sit if you are not familiar with the meaning of these. These are current unifying theories that are in vogue. It is not known yet how to prove them physically but the math formulas are in place to support them and the math does prove out; most of the leading cosmologists are proponents. In this theory invisible vibrating strings form the basis of both energy and matter. Although they cannot be seen nor sensed they exist throughout space (there is now experimental proof that space is not empty!) and all objects. According to the theory they are the foundation of the universe, everything comes from them. They constantly vibrate, flitting back and forth seemingly at random across ten (or eleven) dimensions. We know of four dimensions (three physical plus time), so what are the additional dimensions? They comprise every possible scenario for the past and the future. What are the additional universes? They are the places where all possibilities in the past and in the future exist, in the same way that you and I exist, in the same way that the car in your driveway exists. According to this theory anything that can happen does happen somewhere in the infinite parallel universes. Set a playing card on its side and it appears to fall towards you or away from you as if by chance, but according to the common interpretation of this theory in fact it falls both ways, you only saw one. At the time it fell a new universe came in to existence where it fell the opposite direction from the one you saw. And, in this new universe, there is also a new you who watched the card fall in the opposite direction. There are according to this infinite "you(s)" throughout these infinite parallel universes. I'm not making this up; please check it out if you've not already.

The arrow of time: Why does time only go forward? Physicists don't know, they will tell you that as far as the math demonstrated time does not exist and they certainly don't know why it only goes forward. Einstein famously says, "Past, present and future is just an illusion, no matter how persistent."

Black energy: Something is pushing the observed universe apart and the speed at which all of the galaxies and solar systems are racing away from each other is speeding up instead of slowing down. Once again this defies logic (which says that gravity will cause the speed of expansion of the universe to slow down in time). The scientists now observe the existence of an energy which cannot be seen or sensed in any direct way, and which is the cause for this ever-increasing rate of expansion. This force is called "dark energy", and it is calculated to make up the overwhelming majority of the observable universe.

Hologram theory: As a potential unifying theory, this one is recent and has been gaining substantial support over the past few years. You can find much information about it on Google, YouTube, etc. Paul Halpern spends time with this in his book, "Edge of the Universe", referenced below, also Leonard Susskind talks about it in the NOVA documentary based upon Brian Green's book "Fabric of the Universe". This theory tells us that the entire three-dimensional world is unreal, that it is simply a hologram (a three dimensional picture), and that the only reality in the universe is information.

Let's take a little more time with this seemingly paradoxical theory as this provides us with a very important clue as to what would then be the absolute Truth. Hologram theory is a natural progression of work taken to understand how black holes function. It is understood that the majority of the mass in the universe is comprised in black holes; these are typically believed to be dead stars that have fallen in on themselves becoming so dense that their gravity pulls in everything around them. They continue to increase in gravitational force and therefore grow such that they become like giant rapidly expanding vacuum cleaners in the sky. It is postulated that eventually all solar systems will be vacuumed in by black holes. The question was, "does what the black hole consumes cease to exist, or does it still exist inside the black hole?" This is a beautiful question, as it is certain that the appearance of the thing consumed is gone. It no longer appears, for light cannot escape a black hole. But does the thing exist even though it cannot be seen?

The physicists know that information exists, even when objects no longer appear to us. Here we can use the example of a digital camera and digital photograph. When you take a picture with a digital camera the picture then exists as information in the form of binary computer code. This is a series of "ones" and "zeros", or binary bits, organized as "words" of code. Although in the most correct sense the picture does not exist, and that picture you took never existed nor will it ever exist, the information that defines it does. This information is contained in the memory card of your camera. You can transfer the information to your computer, to your printer, to a friend, you can upload it to the cloud computer servers which Facebook or Instagram maintain, etc., and through this information, with the proper program to convert it to an image, you may always see the same picture. As long as the information exists and is not corrupted the picture that you took may always be identically reproduced. It is not really a reproduction though; it is the original picture. It is not a copy in any sense of the word although we naturally call it that. It is the original. Of course it is not the scene that you saw with your eyes, but it is the picture that you took. That original exists not as a picture but as information. So, the picture that you took of your mother will always be the same as long as the information is retained in computer memory somewhere. It exists as information, and the information defines the picture. The information is real; the picture is not. The only reality that the image we see projected or printed as the picture has is

relative to the information defining it, so we may say that it is "relative" reality alone. As long as the information exists the picture can be seen with a program and some medium in order to see it (a computer monitor, a television, a printer, etc.)

And here this concept gets more interesting, because the scientists further understand that the information defining that picture always exists. It is never not existing. Yes, the computer memory may be lost, but the information still exists. The chip or disk drive etc. may become broken, but then even though you cannot access the information it still exists. It may be erased, but erasing computer memory is accomplished through the process of "re-writing", or writing new information into the same memory sectors. It is understood though that the original information itself continues to exist. The re-write process changes the electrical charge in the individual memory cells but even though the information is removed from the memory chip it is then observed dissipating into the environment as heat. It is still information and it does not "end". Dissipation is not the end of something, it is rather dispersion, so here the information is simply entering the larger sea of information from the computer chip in which it was being contained. The heat that your cell phone, camera or computer dissipates is information in the form of electrical charge being released to the environment during this writing/rewriting process. The information may be lost to you, but it is not lost to the universe. We might then ask, where does it go? And here we can imagine it to be in the akasic record (space itself). It cannot be seen, it could never been seen of course, but it exists and always exists.

Further, the scientists know that you and I, and everything in this universe, can be completely defined by information, down to the last cell and atom in our bodies. You, that body of yours with all of its organs, all of the delicate cells of the brain, can be thus defined, and they can thus be duplicated in the same way that that digital photograph can be duplicated. Not a copy but an original, exactly the same as per the example of the digital picture above. This understanding leads scientists to the logical conclusion that it is the information defining you that is real, and not the apparent "you" itself. As you can imagine there is much research work underway in this area, and three-dimensional printers are a good conceptual example for us here. Tools, toys, etc. are being "printed" in that same way that we had printed term papers in the past; work is ongoing with the printing of replacement body parts.

Work with black holes has led the scientists to the widely accepted conclusion that objects entering a black hole are not, then, destroyed. They have simply disappeared from our view by passing through the "even horizon"; the point at which light cannot escape the gravitation force of the black hole. Yes, the object is compressed, yes, it is subjected to incredible apparent destructive forces, yet the information defining it continues to exist and therefore the object itself still exists as information alone. Co-incident with this is the conclusion that the information *itself* is what is real and that this information lends the image its reality. In other words the image that is seen is not real, it is only ever the *information* that is real, and the information is always real, in all states of time.

This, then, takes one to a statement of hologram theory; it goes like this. The universe is unreal, it is only apparent, in the same way that the digital picture used in our example is only apparent. The information underlying the image we see is the reality, the only reality that has ever been. Where is the information defining you and me and this entire universe? We may again say the akasic record, as it cannot be seen.

The physicists and cosmologists imagine the information to reside in a two dimensional reality at the outer edge of the observed universe.

Although all physicists do not yet accept this hologram theory as the truth of this universe it has become the leading candidate for the "unifying theory" of the cosmos. This much is agreed by all of the scientists involved in these efforts; the world is not at all as it appears. So if this is so, then what of the information defining the Universe? How did it become organized the way that it is, or is it completely random? And what of the life force itself, that which causes apparent animation or movement in time? What of consciousness, how do we think? These are all still a mystery to science.

It became quite clear that I was not to find the answer I was looking for in modern science, although looking back I can see that the clues are certainly there.

The video/documentaries I referenced are "What the (Bleep) are We?" and NOVA's "The Fabric of the Cosmos" based upon Brian Green's book of the same name. The former is entertaining and philosophical, certainly it has an agenda, and the latter is a fascinating and eye opening (mind boggling) documentary that is pure science with no attempt made at philosophy. The book that I recommend is Paul Halpern's "The Edge of the Universe". There is also a great video of Leonard Susskind explaining the Hologram Theory which is currently on YouTube that I'll recommend to you as well.

I watched the NOVA series a few times over an extended period. As I studied a book or research a particular theory I'd come back to the documentary and find my understanding expanding. I had also started the practice of Yoga by this point and was being exposed to the teaching of Vedanta, specifically "Advaita Vedanta", and the scientific view were merging.

And yet, I could not square this all away. What I was hearing and beginning to understand was that the world was not at all as it appears to be. Yes, I say this a lot. To understand this is pretty important in the scheme of things, yes? Further I knew that in spite of having a good income again I was still doing the same things that I had in the past. I felt that I was circling, repeating the same actions over and over, and it was not logical that I would find happiness this way since these actions were already tried and found wanting. There is this wonderful saying, "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results", and this seemed clear.

Then there was a dream.

I found myself lying in a tiny room on a small wooden bed with a thin mattress. I was sleeping on my back. Sand started to fall on my face. First a grain or two came, and then more, soon there was a slow drizzle of sand falling on me. I awoke and lay there, looking. Some pebbles started to fall as I gazed up at the ceiling for the source of the disturbance. A beam of natural light streamed in through the ceiling, it was the sole source of light in the room. As I lay there watching the pebbles became larger and the ray of light more brilliant. Large rocks were beginning to fall around me.

I got up and walked outside of the room in order to investigate further, and I found the room to be in a tremendous cathedral. The cathedral was in fact a facade; it was completely empty on the inside though

I knew it to be massive, with great stained glass windows and an extraordinary presence. The cathedral was becoming brighter inside as daylight streamed in from many sources. The ceiling towered over me and rocks were dropping all around. There was a roar as the walls cracked and the ceiling disintegrated above me. I stood and watched as the rocks turned to stones and then boulders, completely covering the floor around me, and then finally covering me as well.

I was dead. I had heard that if you die in your dream you are dead. Perhaps you have heard this as well? And yet there is no mistaking that I died in that dream, I was completely aware of the stones pummeling my body, raining on my head, my body falling in a crumpled mass on the floor and being completely covered up with stones. I was aware of my breath ceasing.

And then I awoke, casually, with no fear and no anxiety. I felt at peace, and this was unmistakable, as it had been so long since I had felt this refreshed.

This dream of course stood out, and it became so beautifully meaningful for me as I reflected upon it at various points on this journey. This again was grace, the beginning of the knowing of the death that gives life. The crumbling of the facade.

Through all of these experiences and the path of discovery which I had unknowingly begun, I had started to realize this most important knowledge: I did not know anything. Not only that, I came to know then that those whom I thought knew also did not know. Of course it didn't seem like such a wonderful gift at the time, it seemed quite inconvenient! Later I came to understand that the first required step to learn what cannot be seen is to listen and observe. To listen we must genuinely know that we do not know, and we must sincerely put forth our questions. I had become ready to listen, and I had questions. Finally I wanted to know, "what is this world?"

3. The Fire of Dispassion

"Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold and with gold We test Our servants."

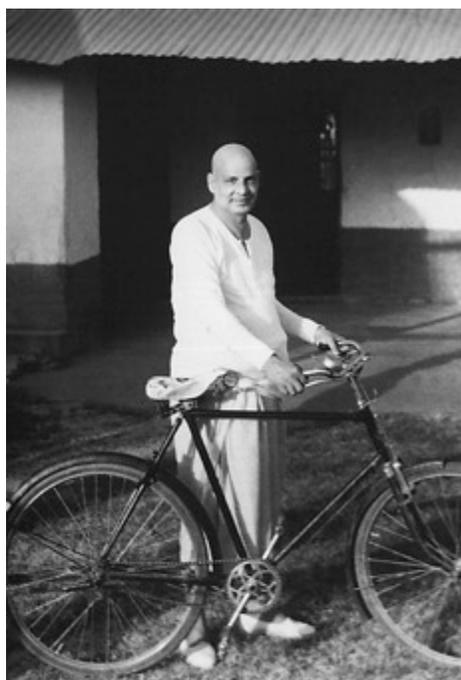
Baha'u'llah

The world didn't make sense and I did not want to live in the way that I had any longer. In fact, although I was not yet planning the details, I did not want to live at all and was coming to the unspoken conclusion that my only way out would be to end my life.

I found later that this extreme dispassion for the world is called "Vairagya" in Sanskrit, and amazingly enough this is also grace. It sure didn't feel like it at the time though!

At the height of my turmoil Sri Paramahansa Yogananda stepped in to my life in a big way. I felt a simple desire to go to his "Lake Shrine Temple" in Pacific Palisades,

California. I knew nothing of him and as far as I knew I was looking for a park to visit, but that temple came up in my search and I decided I should go there. In a few weeks I did so. It is a place of paradise on earth and it resonated with me as more paradise than earth. I walked the grounds in awe. I came to the small temple and sat there quietly. I looked at Sri Yogananda Ji's image in the temple and his image came alive to me; his eyes met mine and followed me in the temple. I felt an otherworldly sense of calm.



Swami Sivananda Ji

Not long after this I felt an urge to practice yoga. I'd practiced Bikram yoga and found it a wonderful exercise in a tortuous kind of way but didn't want to go back to that. Google told me that there was a yoga center just a few blocks from the apartment I was renting in San Francisco. Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center. I went and loved it. The practice of yoga felt so right though I was terrible at it, so I thought. It took me a year to achieve my first headstand. But it felt proper in what seemed an improper world.



Paramahansa Yogananda Ji



Swami Sitaramanda Ji

One weekend I attended a two-day "beginner's Vedanta" program presented by Swami Sitaramananda from the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm in the Sierra. This was my first exposure to Vedanta philosophy and it penetrated my thick shell also. As I mentioned earlier Vedanta sounds very much like the "unifying theory" that scientists search for.

Meanwhile I had met a woman whom I had fallen in love with, seemingly overnight. It took her a little longer but she did the same with me. She was beautiful, several years younger than me, and had two wonderful daughters that started calling me "dad". It was all just as I had thought that I had wanted. The job was going well and soon I was to be offered the President job I had wanted so badly as my validation on life's comeback trail. And yet this did not change the odd feeling I had about life; it got stronger instead of weaker.

I searched for balance, trying to find a way to work fewer hours while making less money and allowing for family time and the pursuit of my new spiritual endeavors. I kept saying no to the President job and yes to new family. I purchased Sri Yogananda's "Autobiography of a Yogi" on audio CD and for more than two months I listened to it every day for at least two hours per day, I must have gone through the book a dozen times. I read works of Sri Swami Sivananda and began to study Vedanta. I bought a bible, I think it was the first I had ever purchased, and read the New Testament cover to cover. I read Leo Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is Inside You", and was beginning to crave spiritual reading material. I found myself being inundated in something that made sense in a way that nothing had before. I heard the concept that underlying this apparent world is a central unseen bedrock, that which all of the various religions have called "God" in one name or another. I heard that we are neither these bodies nor minds, and that we are each souls in the process of learning. I heard that there was only Love, that we are always safe, and that the ultimate goal of life is to know one's Self. I heard that Yoga is the science that helps one to delve inside in order to help us find what each of the great teachers and traditions point to. All of this resonated with me.

Here was an ancient philosophy and system which was in synch with all of the modern scientific discoveries and theories as well as the other faith systems, which was consistent with all that we see in the world, which teaches Truth is to be reached from inside and upon finding Truth one finds Peace, Love and Happiness. In other words it teaches ideas that I had dismissed without review as sheer craziness. Now I found them enthralling.

Yoga Asanas, Pranayama and Meditation practice were bringing a sense of peace and hope that I had not felt since I was very young. I was attending weekly Satsang at the yoga center, beginning to chant Kirtan, introspecting critically and beginning to find causes for my unhappiness inside instead of always thinking that I needed something else to be happy.

My attempts to find balance were failing, as had always been the case, but this time the strangest thing happened. Instead of desires of work, travel, wine or sex I found that a desire for Yoga, Meditation and deep contemplation was coming first. I stopped taking alcohol, meat, and fish, stopped thinking so much about suicide, and started thinking about God. I started doing good deeds, began to make some healthy vegetarian meals every week and take them to different homeless centers. It was small, but it felt

amazing to be doing something to help people I did not know. All of these were again apparent miracles. My bad drinking and eating habits had been contributing to depression and terrible physical health, and I had not done anything good for anyone who I didn't want something from for a long time.

A seminal moment came the third time that I watched the "Fabric of the Cosmos" documentary. When Leonard Susskind talked of Hologram Theory I blurted out, with no one else in the room, "son of a bitch this is all God!" Suddenly God was back in a big way and I was beginning to grasp the concept of God as that information which according to the hologram theory is the only real truth in the universe. This was astounding.

I put myself on a crash course for it seemed to me that I must dedicate myself completely to the effort of knowing what the truth of this universe, and of me, is. I joined Bhagavad Gita class, studied various great Yoga books including the amazing thousand-page manual "A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya" from Bihar School of Yoga, and read my first Upanishad (Isha). Here I must recommend a great western compendium of Advaita Vedanta philosophy and the various methods and teachers of the eastern tradition named "Back to the Truth: 5,000 Years of Advaita" by Dennis Waite.

In the absence of drinking and with this emerging practice and study startling clarity came. I realized that nothing I had ever done had brought happiness and that it could not. I had tried everything that my mind could dish out. I had not just tried but I had achieved almost everything I had wanted! I found that what I was experiencing, this emptiness resulting even from success in the world, is consistent with the core teachings of Vedanta. I also realized that I had never felt motivation to do for anyone other than myself. My life had always been about me. My success and my desires were all that had seemed important. My ego was always in charge in every endeavor, and this felt disgusting. I lost faith in my mind and I resolved to no longer blindly follow it. God became all that I wanted to study; all that I wanted to hear about or talk about. There seemed only one possible direction to find the happiness and love that I'd always been looking for and that was inside, beyond my mind. I began to know also that service of others was important and that it was my ego I needed to kill, not my body. I came to know service, love, and acceptance were required.

I started to research saints in the Indian tradition. I was quite skeptical and there are always stories of those who are called saints that are clearly not, that get involved in some very bad stuff. The book on Advaita that I

mentioned helped, as did Google. I read of saints of the past and of today. In my research I came across Amma, the "hugging saint", and started to study her. I learned that she was



Amma Ji

coming to the USA on her twice-annual tour the following week and would be in San Rafael, California, only a ninety-minute drive from me. Grace once again.

I met Amma in San Rafael. I waited for eight hours for my hug from her and this hug, which could not have lasted longer than thirty seconds, shook me to my core. I took a mantra from her that night and in return for this gift of God's name I promised to respect and love all. I took this commitment seriously; I decided that this commitment would be the one I would keep regardless of whatever else happened.

Again I saw her in Los Angeles the next week, this time taking Darshan from her at six in the morning after having arrived at seven PM the night prior. There is truly no logical explanation for Amma except that she is, as claimed by her followers, a God-realized soul. She is a living saint, in the flesh. She was on that stage in both San Rafael and Los Angeles, ministering to her children (all of us) for something like eighteen hours both times. She chanted, she talked, she hugged, and she smiled a divine smile that was never lost during her time on stage, not for a moment. She did not eat nor use the toilet, she took no break nor did she even rise once to stretch. She showed no signs of being tired; she did not yawn. She looked in to the eyes of thousands of people who had come for her hug, her love, in both locations, never failing to deeply connect with each person who came to see her. It is, in a word, impossible, according to our mind that is. And yet I saw it, experienced it, and she made me to know that there is God, that divine love is real, that it has the power to shake us to our very root. I was inspired in a way that nothing had ever inspired me.

There was nothing else that had the potential to satisfy me any longer. I wanted only to know God. At this time I chose to dedicate my life in search for and service of God with every bit of the same twenty-four hour per day seven day per week zeal I had applied to success in the world.

I decided to go to India for as long as it took. Find God or bust. Of course I reflected upon the many commitments that I had made including the new job, pending marriage and new family, my ex-wife, my friends, and my creditors. My many outstanding commitments included money and time and I didn't know how to unwind them. I made some attempt at trying to satisfy some of them, but it was overwhelming and it was clear that I had to either go or stay. I knew that if I remained I would be even more ensnared, just like a bear trying to get out of a bear trap. Of course I knew that if I went I would disappoint and upset many. Frankly this choice to break all of my commitments is not without ramifications and responsibility and I cannot recommend it lightly. It is, however, preferable over suicide and the more socially acceptable escape of drinking and drugs. Having just prior to this decision watched a documentary on the life of Guatama the Buddha, who had left his wife and baby daughter in the middle of the night on his journey to find truth, my plan moved forward.

Gone was the idea of finding balance. I came to know there is no balance; there is simply a choice between two starkly different paths. One was a repeat of my past; the other was where hope lay, with God, with Swami Sivananda, with Amma, with service and with respect and love for all as I had gratefully promised.

Over a four week period I registered for yoga teacher training with Sivananda Vedanta Yoga in Uttarkashi, India, obtained a ten year visa, booked flights, researched Ashrams and saints, sold or gave

away all of my possessions, and finally I was ready. My flight would depart on the 20th of July 2012; there was now no going back.

Many will say that it was completely wrong of me not to fulfill all of the commitments I had made, and I understand this completely. I did, finally, what I felt I must do. When I found the ability to begin to look at the ideas in my mind, to analyze them, to be able to exert some power over them, I made choices. Perhaps I was making choices for the first time, for in everything prior to that I was simply following whatever idea was in my mind. I had always moved towards what I liked and away from what I didn't like. How was it that I liked one thing and didn't like something else? I had never considered that, even though the evidence was all around me. The very fact that we all disagree on so much is perfect evidence of an internal, not external, cause for this disagreement.

I know that there are those who will say it is wrong of me to blame my bad actions on my thoughts, that I was just wrong and I should take responsibility for them, and I understand that too. In fact we have no choice but to take responsibility for what we do in this world. This is the Universal law and all actions within the world are based upon this law. When we do bad, bad comes back to us, and when we do good, good comes back. In the most real sense possible we can say that there is no shirking of responsibility. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, because this is exactly what happens to us. We end up being treated exactly as we treat others. It takes us time to see this, but eventually we each will.

And about blaming the mind, or not, well this point cries out to be made here.

Now it makes sense to me what us people do, and why we do it. We simply follow what is in our mind. The mind says that we like left and that we must turn left, so we turn left. It seems so obvious to turn left! Why would anyone ever turn right? It tells us that we must be married to be happy, so we get married. The mind tells us we should have a baby, so we take actions to have a baby, and so on. There seems no daylight between what we think and what we feel compelled to do; we constantly think then do without deeper consideration. After all, what basis would we use to consider, except our own thoughts? Our beliefs? They are nothing more than persistent thoughts; there is nothing independently solid to beliefs.

The appropriate saying here is, "There, but for the grace of God, go I". The robber has within the mind a predisposition to steal, and does so. The murderer has the recurring thought to kill, and does so. The priest has a predisposition to be a priest, the governor a governor, and on, and on. All, it turns out, are following the likes and dislikes, the desires, or we may call it the program, in the mind. Conditioning.

How did it get there? Well that is a great question! We put it there, of course, over a long, long time. We can call it DNA, we can blame it on our parents, on the neighborhood we grew up in, or friends, whatever, but we put it there. It is our memories, our habits. Whether you can agree with this or not is actually irrelevant for now, because the thoughts are there in the mind, regardless of the reason! And being there, in our mind, we follow them.

This is the nature of this world. Billions of life forms walking and talking, some picking up rakes, others bouquets of flowers, others guns, all acting out the nonsense which is in our minds. One of us eats potatoes, one fish, another buffalo, all believe it to be proper and that other diets are wrong. All believe what is in their minds to be true and none agree with each other because the program in each of us is different. We are all in prison and the jailer is in us, it is our unruly mind.

How then can we not have compassion for all in this world? Whatever others are doing is because they are imprisoned by the desires arising in their minds. We should know this about others, as this is exactly what we experience.

My desires had caused so much pain for others and for me. I needed to take control of my mind. According to the teaching this was both the key to finding peace and to finding God inside.

"Not to do what you feel like doing is Freedom." ~ Swami Chinmayananda

It was time. Magically all of the tools and connections that I needed to make this trip to India and have baptism in God were in place around me. God's grace was amazing, incredible, and I began to know awe.

On the 20th of July I left for India. I didn't tell anyone; I simply did not show up for work that day nor did I return to the apartment that evening. I burned every bridge back to my old life. It was sinking in that I knew nothing of value and that there was nothing for me in the past. I could not imagine a backup plan and I wanted none.

I had only one desire remaining. All of the desires for a great job, recognition, money, travel, cars, sex... all were less important than this one, and that was to know the Truth. From this perspective I now understand that this desire to know Truth is the same as the desire to know God or to be desire-less and that all three lead to the same.



My bag with all of my remaining possessions, India bound.

Desire is our motive force in this world. Whatever we desire most in life comes to pass. Perhaps it will take a lifetime, perhaps longer, but in the fullness of time what we want most comes. The universe provides. I was to learn that the same is true if one has the desire to no longer be ruled by one's desires.

4. India - Dawn of Surrender

"Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will rule over all."

Jesus Christ, Gospel of Thomas, Saying #2

I came to India with a single-minded desire to learn and a fresh commitment to not just love and respect all, as I had promised Amma, but to be of service, to be beneficial in some way. I no longer wanted to put my mind first. I arrived with questions, not answers, but I had finally met someone with the answers. Amma Ji. In her silent loving embrace was the answer that I needed. Swami Sivananda. He had died fifty years prior and yet I was learning the same answer was being pointed to by his dedicated disciples. I believed there were more with the answer in India, though I didn't know where or how to find them. My friend Google had by then steered me to Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda and Amma but it didn't seem to be as helpful finding realized saints in India that might take me as their student. Of course it turns out that was grace as well. I arrived with very little planning other than the first two steps, which is completely amazing in and of itself.

Of course there was a plan, there is always a plan. Often I'm asked when I walk, "where do you plan to eat, or to sleep, or to end up tonight?" to which I'll reply with a smile and a wink, "oh there is a plan for sure but I don't know it yet, I'll just see how it develops". I watched in wonder as the plan began to unfold.

From Delhi I travelled by rail to Madurai in the south. There was the Sivananda Vedanta Yoga Meenakshi Ashram where I would start preparations for a new life and for the yoga teacher-training course in one month's time.

Most Ashrams are different in schedule and practices. Swami Vishnudevananda initiated this particular teaching; it was inspired by and named for Swami Sivananda and it is a kind of spiritual boot camp. The Ashram schedule looks like this:

- 5:30AM Wakeup Bell
- 6:00AM Silent Meditation, Chanting and Spiritual Reading
- 7:45AM Tea
- 8:00AM Two hour Yoga Asana and Pranayama class
- 10:00AM Brunch
- 11:00AM Karma Yoga (work around the Ashram, cleaning, etc.)
- 12:00AM One hour Lecture
- 1:00PM One hour Independent Study
- 2:00PM One hour Chanting Workshop
- 4:00PM Two hour Yoga Asana and Pranayama class
- 6:00PM Dinner
- 7:00PM World Peace Chanting for one hour
- 8:00PM Silent Meditation, Chanting and Spiritual Reading
- 10:00PM Lights Out

I devoted to it, doing my best to listen carefully to the teaching and to apply all of my heart, mind and soul to every class. I arose each day at 5AM, took mouna (silence) for much of the time there and began

to learn how to listen. I had been shown not long prior that if we sit facing the teacher with our hands open and palms up that we are more awake and alert, more open to the teachings shared with us. This seemed to work, I was fascinated with all. I fasted one day per week. I stopped thinking about what I'd do the next day, for the next day would be the same schedule. My incessant planning and consideration about all of the details started to fall away and a natural smile came in its place.

The first week came and went, then the second. Always my focus was just on doing the best I could, on being alert and aware, on learning. I studied the books I had brought during any spare time and avoided socializing or chatting. I washed my clothes every morning in a bucket and hung them out to dry. I showered in the early mornings, there was no hot water so the showers were cold and refreshing. It was monsoon season and the weather was hot and wet most every day. The clothes didn't always dry, nor did I, but none of this bothered me. I found quickly that it was a joy focusing on and performing these simple tasks every day. I engaged in constant silent repetition of the mantra given me by Amma and this generally kept my mind occupied as well as reasonably quiet.

Late in the second week I was given an incredible experience and over time since then I was shown how deeply remarkable it truly was.

There were only ten or twelve guests at the Ashram most of my stay. One day a young man arrived, and he seemed quite odd from the start. The Ashram is a "no kill" area; ahimsa is practiced throughout. This meant no bug spray, no fly swatters, etc. It was monsoon season so the mosquitoes were thick. Mosquitos had always liked my blood and Madurai was no exception to that, but the mosquito netting kept them off at night (except for the very creative ones that found a hole in the net). Besides that I felt like I was in heaven compared to the stress I had left and it seemed that no amount of mosquito bites or jet lag or sore muscles were going to upset that.

Our new guest brought bug spray and within moments of his early afternoon arrival he walked in to the men's dorm, picked out his bed, pulled the mosquito netting down around the bed, and sprayed the entire area. Of course the windows were all open, with no screens in them, so outside of killing and maiming some bugs his dosing was of no lasting effect. Perhaps he thought some killing would scare the others away. It was odd and so funny at the same time. He suffered terribly so I worked to find compassion for him but this was not easy. It was easier to find compassion for the bugs he was killing. It was quite upsetting. Some of the staff and guests talked with him about the bug spray, he said that he was just getting over the flu and was allergic to mosquitos; he also was very concerned about getting malaria. He told us he had just left another Ashram further north and was certain he had become sick there from insect bites.

He went to bed for rest shortly after in order to recuperate from his illness. He joined us at dinnertime and seemed to be feeling better though he showed symptoms of a bad head cold. He rested for most of the next day; joining us at teatime and at meals. During every break he was close by, sharing with us his coughing and misery. Always he would inject himself into our conversations of yoga practice, and that's about all we ever talked about. He was intent on showing us how much he knew. Quickly all of the guests were annoyed with him and he had to nearly chase us down to engage in conversation with us.

At the breaks he would look to find where two or more were having conversation and in a flash he would be there, listening for long enough to learn the topic of the discussion and injecting himself in the middle of it until the group would get tired of him and walk away. Then he was on to the next group, until class time, then ambling back to the dorm and bed rest.

This went on for a few days. He never seemed to be well enough to attend yoga classes but he was always well enough to complain to whoever would listen about how ill he was and how terrible the bugs were, or the heat, or whatever. It was so annoying but I didn't want him to feel bad. I was considering if there might be some way that I could help him but I had no idea how.

The next day I was walking to the morning yoga Asana class from tea break. He was there as usual, and I was thinking about him. I asked inside, "why is he so concerned about impressing everyone?" Then, just on the heels of this question, came another, "But wait, you are the same way (I said to myself), why are you always looking for validation?" Amazing. This was the big question, and it came, just like that. In fact I was much more polished than him, much more professional and discreet, but I was always looking for validation in one way or another as it was validation that made me feel good, like I was worth something. I was constantly looking for that. This is the human condition; we are always concerned about how we look, or act, or whatever, and what others think of us. We need to hear we are meaningful, we are loved, or even hated... it seems that we need to hear we *are*. And here was this question, "Why?" I did not have to wait long for the answer.

During the Asana class there is first Pranayama (breathing practices), then the Asana series, and then a final relaxation, which body and mind are ready for. At the start of final relaxation the body and mind are led through a series of relaxation commands, and during this process it is possible to enter a deep meditative state. I was out of my body, in fact there was no body nor thought of a body. Two experiences came. First there was an overwhelming feeling of bliss. My impression was that I was being held securely, and that all was absolutely perfect. There was no time, there was no place, it was divine and there were no thoughts of needing or wanting anything. I felt completely complete. Perfect. There could have been nothing to want. It was as real of an experience as could ever be imagined; it was not dreamlike nor remote. It was not foggy; it was crystal clear. Secondly came emptiness. I had the impression of being in the world, completely and desperately alone and hopeless. Replacing perfection was a feeling of emptiness and desolation that was so much deeper than I could have ever imagined. It was as if life itself, whatever had provided joy before, was sucked out of me, and I had no idea how to get it back. And then I was again aware of my body and surroundings, lying on the floor in savasana. Tears were streaming down my face but the experience was over, just vivid memory remained.

At the time I equated the experience with first being held in the arms of my parents and then being released from them and on my own, though since it was out of body I had no physical point of reference. Subsequently I've related this to be our experience of Ananda (absolute bliss), and then that of taking birth in this world. Of course we see that babies are quite unhappy when they enter the world but with this experience I can tell you that it is far worse than that, that the baby being born is experiencing sheer terror and unimaginable aloneness. Perhaps this is why none of us have any memory of our birth.

This then was my answer. I had been looking for what I had lost at birth. I had lost completion and was striving to be complete again.

Grace had shown itself again and I understood two points:

1. All of our thoughts and actions about validation, about wanting another person to "complete" us, about gaining wealth, fame, progeny, are all about finding the completion that we have lost. We do not have a conscious memory about having it nor about losing it nor do we consciously know where it may be found, but there is a silent voice inside us telling us completion exists. This voice motivates us inward.
2. All of our questions have answers inside; there is no question without an answer. If we empty ourselves enough and ask a question with a genuine desire to know the answer will come.

A few days later a special guest came to the Ashram for a Sunday Satsang talk and several from town came to hear him. He was a direct disciple of Swami Sivananda Ji. Master had many thousands of followers around the world and was revered throughout India. He gave initiation to hundreds of monks though there are precious few still in their body and teaching in the world. The teaching now thrives through the next generation of followers and monks as several of Master's direct disciples also became renowned as great Saints.

His talk was simple, he spoke mostly in English about life at the Ashram with Master, and he shared beautiful stories. He did this with humility and grace and with a wondrous smile throughout the talk. I met him after the talk and he immediately asked me to come to see him again; we met at his weekly Bhagavad Gita class at the Divine Life Society branch office in Madurai. He asked me also to come and meet other Swamis that were to join a conference in Madurai in December. He took his time with me, listened to me, answered all of my questions, and he asked for nothing.

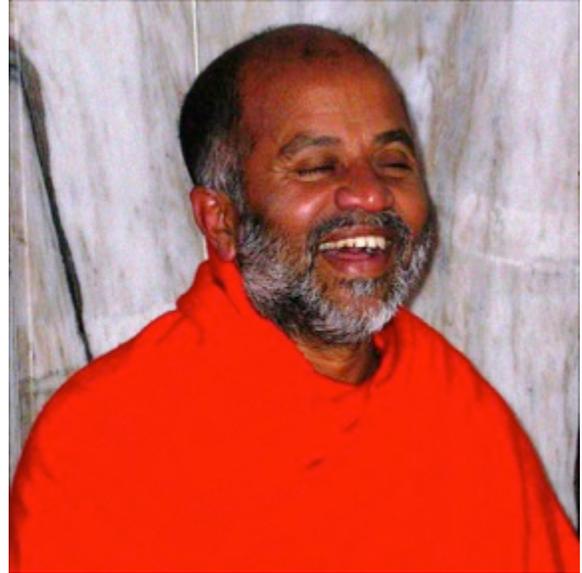
Divine Love is otherworldly and our mind cannot understand it, yet it is said to be the underpinning of this entire world and to be on display in purified souls. This was what I experienced that afternoon and in our following meeting; love and support without any condition or expectation.

Contemplation and reflection became the order of my time in India. One question that recurred was, "why did I make everything so complicated?" and its sister, "why do we all make it so complicated in this world?" The answers to this come as well, and in my case it was coming through the classes, the scriptures and talks, the practices and the way that these practices affected me and brought some peace. It was sinking in that joy is to be found in simplicity, not complexity.

I was becoming more peaceful and happier in the Ashram environment, but it was different when I left Ashram. I went to Madurai city twice in order to purchase some supplies, and I noticed that my mind started to race once again. It was evaluating everything. Do I want this, or that? Is that girl pretty, or nice? I looked at the cars and motorcycles and considered which I might like to have. I saw a cute small car, and the first that I thought was, "I like that car. How much does it cost, could I afford it?" That same old habit was there. What had changed was simply that now I saw the thoughts and they were annoying, in the same way that you might imagine a child pulling at your shirt saying constantly, "mommy, look at

this, look at that, it's so pretty, how much is it? Can we buy it?" is annoying. I wanted to be done with those.

Next was a small village near Uttarkashi in the Himalayas, near the border with Tibet. I arrived two days before the teacher training was to begin, and saw a friend who I had previously come to know at the San Francisco center. He asked me to join him at an Ashram a short distance from where the training would be held. Both of these Ashrams were named after Swami Sivananda by disciples of his.



Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji



Swami Premananda Ji

There I was introduced to Swami Premananda Ji and Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji. The first is a direct disciple of Swami Sivananda and the second of Swami Chidananda, his spiritual heir. I attended Swami Premananda's daily class on the Yoga Vashista (a "shastra", or scripture) and was able to spend more time with them as well, and I was in awe. Once again here was the same inexplicable kindness and care. They told

me stories, offered me their kindness and attention, and invited me to come back to visit them whenever I had time while in the teacher training. Fridays were the day off from the training, and I visited them each Friday.

I would be at their feet, basking in their love and knowledge, for the next fifteen months.

I was diving in deeper and there seemed to be no bottom. The teacher training itself was, in every aspect, incredible. I pushed myself so hard, and the rewards came for the work with a better understanding of my mind and makeup, how to take more control of thoughts and life itself. The hard work contributed to a greater sense of peace. Between the daily classes there and the weekly time with Swami Premananda and Ramaswarupananda I was being taken further into the teachings and myself; everything just made sense.

One Friday I was walking along the Ganga River towards Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji's place and he was walking towards me. He smiled as I looked at him and said, "you would look good in orange." And of course, I had the same idea. I had by then come to know enough Swamis to know that I was consistently in awe of them; I was finding that I aspired to that level of love and detachment. I didn't know what to say though, and perhaps mumbled out a "yes" or "that would be nice", something like that, and I

considered several times over the next weeks how to make sure that he knew that I wanted this. Of course in time this came. I was being shown the pathway and I could not have been happier than to follow it.

He later told me he saw me in orange as I walked toward him that morning, and this seemed natural so he was commenting that I looked good in orange.

Both knew of my commitment to serve and desire to know the Truth of this world. Swami Premananda Ji and I discussed this one morning; he listened lovingly and said, "God bless you, I pray that it will happen according to God's will". He invited me to stay at his Ashram for as long as I wished completely free of charge, told me that I always had a home there, that I need not worry about anything, and that he wished only for me to focus on my Sadhana. I had been given the teachers I had flown to India in order to learn from. Thank you dear God.

I surrendered to them and asked them everything. I had so many questions, an accumulation from so long of not asking anything, and I held back nothing. All that they shared made sense. There was no quibbling and no relativism. Whatever I had done in the past was of no matter, money was not important. I was not asked to work; I was encouraged to take time in mouna and to be in solitude, there was always guidance about practices but no pressure on them. The pressure for practice, for knowing, was from within and it was nonstop. They cared only that I find what it was that I was looking for, and they devoted themselves to help me, whatever it took. I was once again being held.

There was a game which developed with the Yoga Vashista class of Swami Premananda Ji. Each day I'd reflect upon the teaching of the day, and such teachings they are. The text is extraordinarily scientific and detailed in nature; it is based upon dialogue between Lord Rama and his guru Sage Vashista. It is said that in this dialogue everything in the world (all of the worlds) is discussed, certainly the topics that I was still interested in from scientific study are covered in great depth. Vedanta (specifically "Advaita Vedanta", the core philosophy and teaching of Yoga) is deep, straightforward, and deals with every single phenomenon that we see in the universe and in our daily lives. There is no scientific theory that is inconsistent with these teachings nor are they inconsistent with what Jesus Christ has shared, or Mohammad, or Gautama the Buddha, or Baha'u'llah, or any of the great prophets, saints and sages. Of course the language is different, the culture different, the times different, but as one follows the teachings instead of talking about them the inner meanings are learned and these various paths all meet in the same place. For one who is ready to learn, the teaching of Vedanta (shared by one who already knows what is to be known) provides the road map that we need to answer any question that we have. Each day I'd come to the class with a new question from the prior day's contemplation, and each time this new question was answered. This was so whether I asked the question out loud or not. Finally, after some months, all of my questions were answered satisfactorily and I had no more. Now this is not to say that I understood everything, far from that, but I knew where the answers resided with complete confidence and knew that with my work they would be fully revealed according to God's grace.

In one of Swami Ji's classes he took time to teach us of the Indian tradition of Namaskar. This is the practice of prostrating before another. He explained that knowledge flows in the same way that a river

does. He talked of Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge according to the Indian tradition, who came to earth as the fabled river of that name. He had us visualize a river of light, or knowledge flowing from a high point to a lower point. In the tradition one prostrates to another in order to ask for and accept this flow of knowledge. He then asked us what it is that we might not be able to learn from. Can you learn from an elder? A child? Even a baby? A cow? A tree? A rock? Upon consideration of course we realize that it is possible to learn something from each.

We talk of surrender often on the various spiritual and religious paths, and this is what surrender is. We must make room for knowledge to enter us, and we make room by lowering ourselves, our ego, and in this way we create an opening to accept the knowledge. We must make ourselves small, lower than that which can teach us, and there is nothing which cannot teach us.

This teaching was again through grace alone, at the perfect time. It was complete and perfect. My ego had always been so strong, and here was a way to help make it smaller. Before the teaching my prostrations were weak, after they became sincere, a conscious act of surrender. It is always possible to prostrate in the mind even if it is not done physically, and this became my practice; one or the other. As I walk in the U.S.A. the prostration is inner, and I exhibit it outside with a smile, a wave, and a mouthed "hello" to those who drive past me as I make my way along.

I was offered the name "Sankara" in mantra initiation during the training course, and I gladly took Sri Swami Sivananda Ji as my master. The trainers and the Swami leading the course all called Swami Sivananda "Master" and Swami Vishnudevananda "Swami Ji" and I was happy to do the same; for me this was not just a name though, it was an acknowledgement that I'd strive to follow his example of Divine Love in this world, that I'd bow always to his teachings through those who carry on his tradition. I asked him to carry me and I chose to place my trust with him, in fact with God in the personage of Master.

And thus I began to slip free of the chains of the past, with a sincere intent to surrender to God and to the new life that I longed for.

5. A Persistent Thought Comes

"Even the smallest thing that we do for the sake of others can bring about a great transformation in society. We may not get to see the change at once, but every good action certainly has its rewards. Even a smile is extremely valuable and a smile costs us nothing."

AMMA

India requires tourist visa holders to leave the country every six months in order to maintain valid visa status, even with long-term visas. While I was there a regulation was enacted requiring foreign visitors to depart for at least one month prior to return, this has since been scrapped. It was nearing time for me to depart; also it was time for me to start serving in some way. I reached out to Swami Sitaramananda Ji to ask her if I could help for some time in Vietnam and she accepted. There was due to be a yoga

teacher training course there in March and she asked if I would teach yoga classes at the Ho Chi Minh City Sivananda Yoga center and help out in other ways while I was there; I was quite happy to do so.

I took the train to Bangalore for a short time first to visit with Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji who was spending the winter in the south. More magic came. There was the most adorable little park near where I resided; I discovered it one afternoon while walking a back street. I ducked under the limbs of a tree as I made my way to the entrance. I attempted to miss the branches but still brushed them as I passed underneath. On that touch I was taken back to the place of bliss. Once again I was out of my body and in the perfect, complete place, held and secure. It was an identical experience as in Madurai some months prior, but this time I was not in Meditation of any kind, I was simply walking to the park.

After coming back to my body I visited the park and took some time to reflect. The realization dawned on me that whatever I was experiencing is in that tree just as much as it was in the yoga hall in Madurai. I knew it to be in me, but also in that tree, and therefore in everything. I was being given direct experience once again, and the clear message this time was, "I'm here, I'm everywhere, see Me!"

The next day I decided that I must walk under that tree again, just to see what would happen. This time the thorns of the tree scraped my head and neck, grasping on to my shirt as I passed under its branches. I had not noticed the thorns the previous afternoon, but there they were!

I knew then what has resolved itself in me now. I knew it but it was yet to unfold, in fact it still unfolds every moment. God is in all and is never far away, not just aware of every thought but listening closely to all that we think, all that we say, all that we do. God is immanent, imminent, and infinite. God is both personal and transcendental. God is the all in all, the alpha and omega.

And if She would reach out to me through that tree at that moment to show me Her infinite love for me, the least I could do was to return the same. I resolved then to find God in all and love God in all, no matter what happened.

After a short time in south India I continued on to Ho Chi Minh City and my service there.

Teaching yoga is about surrendering to the great teachers and asking them to teach through you, not about doing it yourself. We say a prayer (mantra) at the beginning and the end of class and we ask for Master to teach through us. Teaching yoga in this way is a deeply mystical experience. When we are at our best, and this means when we have surrendered completely and become an instrument, we watch the teaching come through us. We become simply a channel for it, assisting instead of interfering. And when it is done in this way it is a joy for both the teacher and the student.

Participating in Sivananda Vedanta's yoga teacher training course is life altering for students and it is the same for those who teach it. The students attending the course in Vietnam were so dedicated and kind; it was a deeply heartwarming experience to be a part of it. Likewise teaching Yoga Asana and Pranayama class at the center and helping out there helped so much with my goal of becoming small.



Buddhist Monastery – Dalat, Vietnam

A few weeks after I arrived there a special guest who visited the city Yoga center. Swami Sita had met him not so long prior and had invited him there; he was a venerable Buddhist monk from Dalat, the temperate and alluring central mountain region of Vietnam. The region was spared extensive damage in the war, at least compared to much of the rest of the country, and is home to several Buddhist temples and shrines and one very large monastery hosting hundreds of monks. This special guest was the head monk of the monastery. He was so beautiful, his beauty radiated from inside. He was likely in

his 70s or 80s and slight of build but with a commanding presence. He had come to Ho Chi Minh City for a talk, and when he visited the center he had an entourage in tow. A young initiate, perhaps seven or eight years old, in his yellow robes accompanied the Buddhist master in his brown robes, plus perhaps 20 followers.

This amazing monk looked at me from across the room. He was near the front and me near the back of the hall. He looked at me not in the eyes; he looked at me squarely in the center of my heart. I was of course looking at his noble and penetrating eyes so I knew where his gaze went. He smiled and walked towards me, I took this as encouragement to walk to him. He put out his hand and we shook hands in the middle of the room, with everyone looking on quite puzzled. Handshakes are not the customary greeting in Vietnam, certainly not for a monk. After the handshake I bowed deeply to him, he bowed to me as well. His group came closer to us, following him after some delay, and he said something to them in Vietnamese. This was translated to us as, "I know him. He left to become a successful business man, and now he has come back to his spiritual path."

That was all that he said of this. I was in awe. I got it. I didn't need to ask him any more, or to see him again, though it would be a sweet gift if I do. After this meeting and my service with the center I was able to visit Dalat for a day, and went to the monastery where his picture is on display. The monks that I saw that day were so sweet and dedicated. Many loving smiles were exchanged in my time there. Amazing grace indeed.

A short trip to Cambodia's Angkor Wat followed. Humans are always building monuments, and the monuments we build are always consumed by nature. Angkor Wat is a great tour for one with dispassion. Observing the sunrise over their ruins invariably leads one to contemplate the nature of this world and of



Ruins and new birth – Angkor Wat, Cambodia

mankind's efforts upon it. There is nothing we can build that sustains in this world. Everything ends; this is not the place for one to put down roots. We are just passing through and all that we can plant that takes root is love.

Sadhana had taken hold, and my thoughts were calming. I noted that I was not nearly as disturbed by them when in the village which has sprung up near Angkor Wat. The area has turned in to quite the tourist attraction with a hundred plus tourist hotels, western restaurants and bars and a four or five square block area not easily distinguished from any other tourist resort shopping and bar district anywhere in the west. I walked it one night and though the temptations were visible it was quieter inside me than it was outside; this was a treat.

Upon return to India and Sadhana the focus was on deepening my practices, I also wanted to serve more but it was not clear how. I had been offered the opportunity to go to the USA and teach at one of the Ashrams there but I felt that I was not ready for that yet, that there was still more work to do in India with my own teachers there, and with my Sadhana.

An amazing grace came one day through the simplest experience imaginable. One day I was with Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji in Haridwar. He chose a sloka from the Bhagavad Gita and read it for me in Sanskrit, asking me to then read it in English. After the reading he began to explain it. I do not recall which sloka we read; what I cannot forget is this.

As Swami Ji explained the sloka I separated from myself. I found myself completely detached as observation itself instead of as the person sitting in the chair in front of Swami Ji. I was watching, and what I saw were my thoughts with the knowledge that they were in me. The concept that they were me was gone. Not only was that concept gone, all concepts were gone, without a trace. I was simply watching.

The events would have looked completely normal to any outside observer, and to me they seemed normal as well, although it's not the same normal that we think about. Nothing was different, the experience was simply *perceived* differently. This was normal but without any attachment to thought, to body, to anything. I just was. And the conversation continued. I watched and listened to Swami Ji as he continued to explain, I watched myself thank him and in the same way I watched myself leave the room. Now there was a me I had never realized before. There was no longer one of me with two forces at work within (lower and higher), there was now a real me just watching and another me (what I had always thought of as me) thinking and acting out. I no longer played a role; I saw a role being played.

This shift in awareness has never shifted back. I recall what it was like before, but only through memory. The experience of the prior awareness cannot be duplicated. Again, experience is the same, it is not a new experience; it is a shift in perspective alone. The best parallel I can provide to this remembering of my prior perception is with our experience of pain. When you experience pain you are *in* pain; you are merged with the pain. After the pain is over you can remember it but you cannot experience the pain from your memory. You simply remember that you had pain and that it was severe, that it was in your arm, or whatever. This is the same. I remember that there was another perception and I also know that it was always rooted in a misunderstanding. This shift was followed by unfolding and this continues.

There were multiple physical challenges that came and these also led me to greater understanding and deeper commitment to this path; to the goal of becoming small and simple, of knowing God.

I had noted severe chest pain on my left side since starting practice in Madurai. It came only while seated during Meditation and Yoga Asana / Pranayama practice. It became more severe as time went on. I considered possible physical causes, including a few broken ribs from years prior, a possible diaphragm injury, etc. I also knew that ultimately this pain was of my mind with some purpose of disturbing my practice, and I didn't want that to happen. Every time I sat for Meditation or Yoga practice the pain came; it subsided only when I lay down. When seated in Meditation posture nothing I could do made it better, in fact it kept becoming more severe the longer I sat, and I was sitting longer as I went deeper in to the practices. I discussed it with a doctor who had joined the teacher-training course for the anatomy portion of the course and he seemed baffled. He suggested two possibilities, including a diaphragm that was becoming detached, but was not able to offer much advice.

Finally I told God, in my mind, that I surrendered, and whatever happened was OK with me, I would accept it.

There was some relief that came from the practices themselves as the senses start to be brought under control and this includes pain; tolerance of pain increases. I began to expect the pain though, and this didn't help the situation as expecting pain invariably brings pain; just as expecting any negative thing invariably brings it. My words of surrender became stronger and more urgent. I resolved not to let pain take me away from the commitment that I had made to love, to respect and to serve, nor to do all that I could to find God in my heart. My resolve to take the pain strengthened and I bore it no matter how strong it became.

One day in Meditation practice the pain seemed to bring me its worst, it was such a struggle to sit straight up and I'm certain my face wore a grimace. Suddenly and with no warning it changed from being an experience of great pain to an experience of great pleasure. There is a very interesting contemplation here about this if you choose. Our body feels neither pain nor pleasure; it instead sends signals to the brain. It is our mind alone creating the sense of pain or pleasure based upon that signal or perhaps even just based upon a thought. The latter is the case with phantom limb pain in those who have had limbs amputated. In that moment I understood there was no difference between pain and pleasure; they are of the same stuff. The "pain" was "pleasure" for the rest of the day during practice, and it was intense, I could not help but smile during the class. Since then the chest pain has not returned and I've been able to practice seated Meditation, Pranayama, etc pain free.

In Vietnam and then in India I experienced severe lower abdominal pain and high fever on two occasions. I recognized what came as some years prior my bowel had ruptured from undiagnosed diverticulitis resulting in a severe infection, very high fever and near death. That landed me in the hospital with ten hours of emergency surgery, a colostomy bag worn for several months, and the removal of half of my lower intestine as it was put back together again by the surgeons. That pain was the worst I had ever experienced until these two occasions, and on these occasions the same pain came. At first I thought that the rupture had repeated, and of course at first I thought that I should go to the hospital. In

Vietnam, when it first came, the pain was preceded by a meeting with a young woman who was in severe emotional distress. She wanted to have a baby with her husband and she had experienced a prior miscarriage. The doctor had told them that it was unlikely that they would be able to have a child, though not impossible. She wanted only to have children, to be a mother. I felt her emotions so strongly and we cried together for quite some time. I said that if I could take away her pain I'd. That night the pain visited me.

I surrendered it, and my body, to God. I asked God to take me completely and told Her that whatever happened I would willingly accept. High fever came as I sat up most of the night doubled over, followed by extreme cold as I shook violently in chills while wrapped in blankets.

I sat in continuous mantra repetition and in surrender, talking with God nonstop. I refused to ask Her for help with the pain and persisted in words of love and gratitude with the intent of full surrender alone. "Take me God, do with me as you will, I am yours." To me this illness was a test, and I would not fail it, regardless of what happened. It is not that I wanted physical death any longer but I knew by then that I was not this body and that it is God who is in charge of this body, not me. If God chose to take the body that was God's choice. The choice had never been mine. Whatever had happened to this point, any breaths that I had taken were taken or steps I had walked were through God's grace alone. After some hours I was given sleep, and I awoke at midday feeling refreshed, with all symptoms gone.

Approximately two months later, after I had returned to India, the same happened again. The abdominal pain was accompanied by a spiking fever with headache and vomiting followed by extreme chills. My torso, neck and head shook violently with the chills, my teeth rattling as I tried to hold my mouth shut. Again I spent the night up in communion with God in mantra repetition and telling Her that whatever came was OK with me, thanking Her for Her love. I cried so hard that night. After sunrise the chills stopped and I slept, once again until midday. Since that last event to today I've not again been ill even for a day.

One day sitting quietly in Meditation practice the idea of walking across the USA came. I let it go.

Meditation practice, in any of the varieties taught, is about focusing the mind inwardly to help it to rest on a single point. Thoughts arise and we want to "watch" them instead of getting involved in them. In this way we take the prana (energy) away and they have no power over us, allowing us to find ourselves at a deeper level than the surface thoughts.

At first I just let the idea go, watching the thought rise and fall as a wave rises and falls in the ocean. But this thought kept rising, over and over, day after day. Soon it occurred to me "why not?" I knew that it was not practical to stay in India forever. I felt at home in India when I first arrived but I did not know the language and had never possessed the gift of language. Although I had carefully burned all of the bridges back to my old life I knew at some point I must return to the U.S. and do something there. Calm had come to me through the dawn of the understanding that I needed none of the stuff my mind had been relentlessly telling me I needed. I had learned to sleep just fine on a thin mattress on a simple wooden bed and knew that I could even sleep on the floor or on a pile of leaves as Swami Premananda had in his years as a forest monk. Simple food was just fine; gone was the craving for sushi or some such

food every day. I knew that I wanted to devote to service and with such simple needs I had no need to make money. With a commitment to serve and understanding that money was not needed a world of opportunity had opened up with layers of stress melting away. There was so much opportunity to be of service in fact that there was no need to even think of what I'd do any longer; this understanding had allowed me to focus on Sadhana.

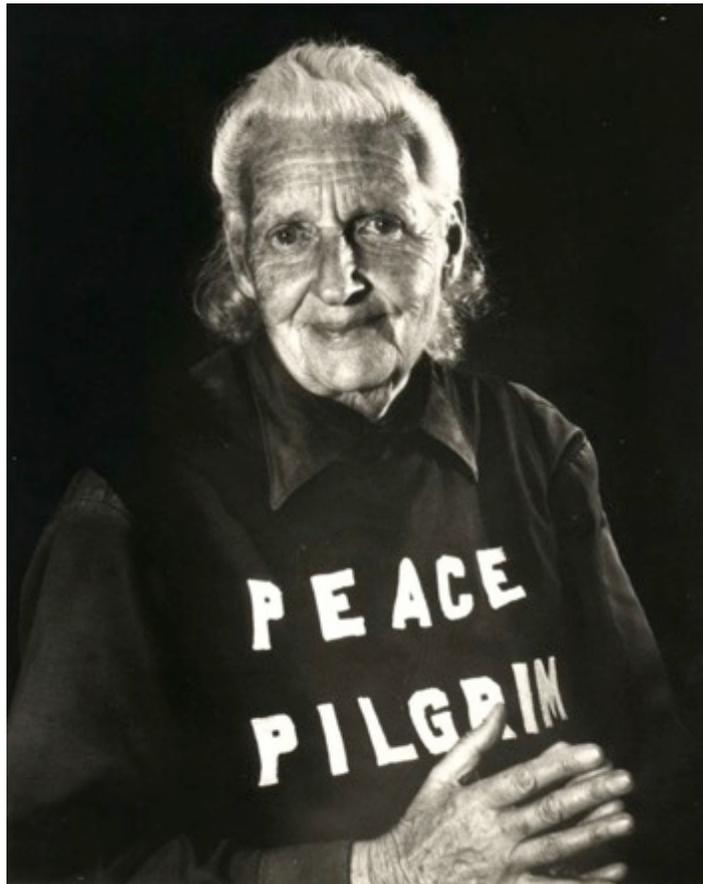
After a few days I Googled "Walk across the USA", and pages of search results came. I had no idea about this other than somehow knowing I could do it. Even at this early stage there was no significant doubt about being able to make the walk although there had been no obvious preparation for it. In initial research I saw options of how to walk across the country. What gear is required? How much water and food should one take? Is the gear to be carried in a backpack or is a cart to be used? Is a pushcart better, or is it better to pull a cart? How much money is to be budgeted? I purchased an eBook on the subject and it was full of more of the same.

I started looking at gear but somehow this didn't seem right. I had renounced the old life and commercialism, yet now the consideration was regarding how much stuff to take, how to take it, and how much it would cost. There was much talk of sponsors. There was no clear consensus but I was thinking about a cart, a hundred and fifty pounds of gear including water and food, and a budget of \$3500 for the walk. That seemed like a lot, yet the idea kept coming. And why would I do it? What was the cause to walk for? This was not clear at all. I put it away for a week or so and tried to watch the thought rise and fall once again. I could teach yoga, or care for people in a nursing home, there was no need to be concerned.

Swami Ji had suggested that I consider taking a Vipassana Meditation course, the one given by Dr. Goenka's organization Dhamma.org. He said that he had taken it and it had been very helpful. I signed up for it.

Since the idea of walking across the country had not gone away I went further in my research and saw something of Peace Pilgrim. I was inspired by what I saw of her; over the next weeks I endeavored to study everything that I could find about her online.

If you are familiar with Peace Pilgrim you know her story, if not I should share



Peace Pilgrim

something about her and her pilgrimage here.

Peace was an American saint. She walked throughout the US in the cause of peace from January 1, 1953 until she left her body in a car accident in 1981, twenty-eight years later. It is estimated that she walked well over 50,000 miles during this time. She didn't push nor pull a cart nor did she carry a backpack. She carried only a comb, a toothbrush and a pen in the pockets of her blue tunic lettered "Peace Pilgrim" on the front and "Walking for Peace" on the back. She asked for nothing and she told anyone who asked that she had no visible support. "I walk until I'm offered shelter and fast until I'm offered food, and I'm always offered these. Aren't people amazing?" She said that she walked in faith; faith in the goodness of mankind and in God.

Peace walked in the cause of peace and in constant prayer for peace for all. She started walking during the time of the Korean war and at the height of the McCarthy era and what was called the cold war. She shared the way of peace, "Overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth and hatred with Love". She said that this is the only way to know peace. She talked with anyone who asked, whether an individual or a school or church group, or the press. Her cause was "the whole peace picture", from world peace to peace between neighbors and "the very, very important inner peace". She said most of the questions people asked her were about how to find inner peace, and she shared with anyone who listened a beautiful direct teaching called "Steps Towards Inner Peace", which was subsequently published as a pamphlet and translated into over 30 different languages.

The common view of pilgrimage is a walk to a holy site. Peace shared, "a pilgrimage is to a place or for a thing. I walk for a thing, and that thing is peace." This, pilgrimage, has been a part of the tradition of all of the great faiths, and I was to understand why. Peace met and talked directly with hundreds of thousands during her pilgrimage and touched so many more, inspiring and helping so many to find hope and to work towards their own peace as well as that of others. I've now had the opportunity to meet and to talk with many of these through my short time walking and there is no doubt of the impact of her work and the shining light which her work provides in the world. We will talk more of her later, if you don't make it that far please go online now and request the book, "Peace Pilgrim, in Her Own Words" at www.peacepilgrim.org. Reading her incredible story will no doubt help you to find peace and happiness in your own life.

The examples were now clear. Swami Sivananda was a peacemaker, Swami Vishnudevananda, known as the "Flying Swami" had flown in to trouble spots around the world with his "peace plane" dropping flowers and peace pamphlets, directly and indirectly teaching millions around the world the practice of Yoga specifically brought to the west as a tool to find peace. Swami Premananda Ji had led a simple forest life and walked for several years, and then Peace Pilgrim came as a shining example.

I chose to follow Peace Pilgrim. She inspired me and it seemed a wonderful goal to walk across the country for peace. I knew that I was by no means ready to walk with only a pen, comb and toothbrush for this requires absolute faith and fearlessness. Though I was not there yet I resolved, with God's grace, to get there.

I researched everything that I could find on the web from or about Peace. She shared a little about her original route and her common sense approach to the walk. She said, "I walk south in the winter and north in the summer." I talked with two of her friends who were involved in the Peace Pilgrim book project and in the group, "Friends of Peace Pilgrim". They were so kind and helpful but also short on details about the route she had taken her first year of walking. This much was known; she started on January 1, 1953 from the Rose Bowl Parade route in Pasadena, California, and reached the United Nations building in New York City on December 31. She walked south to San Diego and through the southern desert to Yuma. One of her stops was Oklahoma City and she walked in both Mexico and Canada for some time during that initial pilgrimage. Beyond that I would learn that the details are always provided for and we don't need to worry about them the way that we always do.

Next up was Vipassana (from Pali, "to see things as they really are"), and again this was God preparing me for what lay ahead. This course can be called a type of Meditation torture; it's a ten-day course



conducted entirely in noble silence. No talking, no hand signals, no head nods. The student is asked to pay nothing for room, board or the teaching and told that if they wish to make a donation at the end to help other students to attend that this is welcome but not required. They do require a signed commitment from the student that one will stay the course for the full ten days no matter what. This is because after the first day of this course many want to leave. The desire to leave gets stronger for the next couple of days, only subsiding after

day three or four. There is nothing wrong with the course; the cause for this is in our own mind. From Dr. Goenka of Burma, we are told that this is the Meditation technique that Gautama the Buddha used, exactly as he unveiled in his thirty plus years of teaching after enlightenment.

The course consists of ten hours per day of seated Meditation plus two hours of instruction. The days start at 4:30AM and ends at 10PM; there is one main meal per day with a light second meal for first time students only. The sessions are each two hours long and the student is expected to learn to sit in Meditation with no movement for the full two hours. The teaching is dry, technical and serious; the organization is staffed completely of volunteers and many students come back to volunteer as staff after their course in order to help others to learn the technique.



Through a series of techniques that successively take us deeper one is led to an inner viewing of one's self. A student who is ready and who submits completely to the teaching learns to "see" with inner eyes of awareness that which underlies this body of flesh, blood and bones, and this seeing brings a deeper clarity about life and the world. If this seems interesting to you please check www.dhamma.org.

After the course I saw Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji again, he was returning to the mountains and I met him in route. I went for a walk, and walked nearly eight hours that day, feeling always drawn to walk further. It had begun.

I booked a return flight to the U.S. for October 2, 2013, but first it was time to walk a short pilgrimage in the Himalayan mountains. I would walk from Haridwar through Rishikesh to Utarkashi, about 180KM each way. I started up on the 7th of August during monsoon season. From here I'll share some of my posts on Facebook as well as a selection of pictures taken along the way. I hope you enjoy the journey.

6 Aug 2013

Planning to start walking from Haridwar to Ganeshpur along the holy Ganga in the Himalayas tomorrow morning. With grace the trip should take four days, it will be beautiful



Rishikesh

and interesting for sure. Will try to post a couple of updates along the way.

Peace and Love

8 Aug 2013



Day 2, beginning of the mountain journey.

Rishikesh now behind me, walking with the birds, butterflies and nature's green carpet.

And Master. Every step with, for and in Master.

Love you.

9 Aug 2013

4:30AM Day 3. Wow what a beautiful trek. Yesterday left Rishikesh behind, met pigs and lots of birds, waved and gave pranams to several people, shared apples with cows and these girls, and started wrapping my feet.



Found a wonderful place to rest under the stars (monsoon season so the stars were another treat) and got started again a few hours ago. So peaceful, walking to the sound of the Ganga every step of the way.



10 Aug 2013

8 AM Day 4, the stars turned to raindrops by this time yesterday, then to sheets, then buckets :-). Walked in to Champa at 1600 meters elevation, nearly half way to Ganeshpur, stayed overnight. Yesterday so wet lol, forget umbrellas, the rain just soaks everything. This little friend apparently took a wrong turn in the river and ended up on the road! You can see what two months of rain do for the greenery; I walk inside a verdant green paradise. Oh, if you strain you may see another friend in that tree... a gorgeous eagle.



Even with, or perhaps because of, the rain the



feeling of oneness prevails. Every smile, every green leaf, every bird's call is inside God with you and me. Finally you and me are not separate at all and all is One; the perfection is observed as incredible diversity and beauty. There is only love, it is the motive force which resides in the heart of all beings. Not just humans, every animal, every plant, every rock is that same perfection. Part of, yet complete at the same time. As I walk I spread love which radiates through

me and feel it in return, it is magnificent and it is shared with you, it is you.

Well now I'm clean, dry and well rested with the sun warming the day, let's see what marvels today has in store!

Bless you, Love you.



12 Aug 2013

7AM Day 6. If it's God's will I shall arrive in Ganeshpur tonight. Uttarkashi is 33KM further, Ganeshpur 8 beyond that.

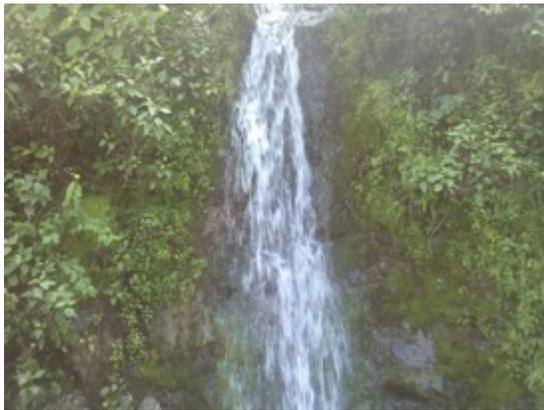
More friends from yesterday including a beautiful 93 year old former freedom fighter.

Perhaps rain today, perhaps shine. More smiles and wonders await. I take you with me as you have me in your heart. The Ganga is our traveling companion today and whatever happens we cannot fail.

Blessings, Love, Beauty



Taking a rest from their hard labor, these women were more than happy to pose as I walked by.



This man, above, was 93 years old when I met him and a former freedom fighter in India's battle for independence. He was the "royalty" of his village and it was quite a treat hearing him tell his story.

14 Aug 2013

9PM Day 8, made it to Ganeshpur a bit after midnight last night. Another amazing day yesterday including a particularly pure moment hanging off the side of a cliff with shrubs and rocks thirty feet below and only a tuft of grass in my hand while laughing! Go figure.

Slow connection, will try to post more later.

Living is experienced in the journey, not the destination. Thank you for joining me on this one, love you!

Now I should tell you a little more of the story from the posting immediately above. Monsoon season started in the Garhwal range of the Himalayas (the range in which Rishikesh and Uttarkashi et al are located) on the 15th of June in 2013. The monsoon rains were particularly strong that year and they caused tremendous damage through flooding and slides. More than 25,000 people were killed in the villages throughout the range. Slides damaged the roads in so many places and many had been trapped in their vehicles or houses as slides took the roads or the structures down the mountainsides and into Ganga Mata. I was on a bus that day returning from Haridwar to Uttarkashi and we never made it. Two monks on the bus who spoke both Hindi and English befriended me and we spent three days together in a small village about 30KM away from Uttarkashi. We were lovingly cared for by villagers and finally able to return to Rishikesh after three days through a combination of cars and walking.

Finally on the 7th of August when I started this walk back to Uttarkashi the rains had let up a bit but the roads were still subject to extensive damage and there were still slides occurring in treacherous areas nearly every day. As I neared Uttarkashi by foot I reached one of these.



As I came on the scene a large slide had just occurred, perhaps only an hour or two prior to my arrival. Cars, motorcycles, scooters and pedestrians were lined up on both sides of the slide, which had extended down a hundred feet or so in to the river. There was a bulldozer working to clear debris and cut a new roadway into the side of the mountain in order to allow the traffic to pass (shown here). The slide kept slipping from time to time as the work went on so it was taking quite some time.

After a few hours some of the pedestrians who were

lined up were becoming impatient and someone said they knew of a pathway up the side of the mountain that would allow us to circuit the slide area, coming back down on the other side of it. A group of twenty-five or thirty started to walk up the mountainside and I decided to go with them. They seemed to know what they were doing and I felt good with the group, so off we went.

We walked up at a steep angle making a path as we went. I wondered where the pathway that had been discussed earlier was but since there were many in front of me the grasses had been trampled down somewhat and there were trees to pull myself up on through the particularly steep patches. We walked for twenty minutes and had climbed a couple of hundred feet when the leader of the group shouted something that was quickly translated for me. "The path ends, there is no way to continue!" Everyone promptly turned around and started the trek back down.

Having no experience with this sort of thing I quickly learned that walking up the side of a wet and slippery mountain path that was not a path and walking down it were not the same thing. Others took the lead; I was content to follow though there were still a dozen behind me as we picked our way down.

About halfway down I was found myself on a soaked mud trail only six or eight inches wide on the side of a cliff. I lost my footing and slid off the cliff. It was a straight drop down about fifty feet or so and I was on my way down. As I went over the edge I reached my left hand behind me and grasped a tuft of grass and shrubbery which amazingly enough held my weight. I found myself dangling by one hand over a straight drop with only rocks and pointy trees far below me. I further found myself to be laughing uproariously. I seemed to be having the best time! I was watching this scene from inside with no fear whatsoever, I knew that I was fine whatever happened and it was so funny, fun too.

A man behind me was quite concerned and he tried to pull me back up. I extended my right hand but instead of taking it he grasped my backpack and was trying to pull me up. Not only did this not help, the leverage from him pulling me was causing my left hand to begin releasing its hold of the grass. This of course would have left me with nothing to hold and I'd have finished the fall down to the rocks below. This also was funny, my laughing continued. I remember the man having an odd expression on his face, I was quite sure that he was not just scared for me but was also trying to understand why I was laughing.

After some time he either my English words, "take this hand" or saw the right hand that I was waving in front of his face and he took that instead of the backpack. In a few moments I was back up on top of the trail thanking him for his help and still laughing. It was time to get myself down the rest of the way and I decided to use the muddy and slippery path down as a slide. I let the rest of the group behind me pass and I sat down, sliding all of the way to the bottom. I slid fast, it was so much fun. I felt like a small child on a play day and in a few minutes finished the jaunt back down the mountain to where the pedestrians were all milling around looking at me with bemused expressions.

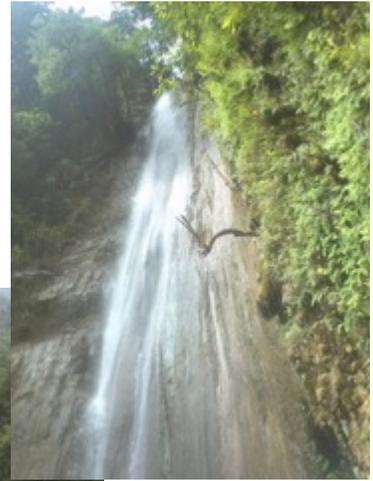
I was welcomed back to base camp where I brushed off the best I could. The back of my pants and kurtha were completely caked in mud that never completely came out in spite of my best scrubbing. The sides, as you see here, were less caked. I posed for one of my new friends and in about thirty minutes a pedestrian path was opened through the area of roadwork. We all walked on and I continued my trek to Uttarkashi.

Fear had left me, although caution had not. We normally think that caution is the result of fear. My experience is that this is not so. Caution is beneficial, part of consideration. It helps one to choose a wise course of action. Fear is without value, it is tied to expectation and identification with unreality (as in "I am this body", which is not so). Caution helps one to experience life; fear covers life. Caution is to be honored and fear is to be transcended. Fearlessness does not mean throwing all caution to the wind; it does mean that once one takes consideration for action whatever result comes is accepted completely with lightness, love and gratitude.

I remained in Ganeshpur for the next two weeks, attending daily class with Swami Premananda Ji, returning back to Haridwar the first of September. I prostrated to Swami Premananda Ji and said goodbye, not knowing whether or when I might see him again. I often refer Swami Ji as "Santa Claus" for he has the physical build and the jolly temperament to match. He had given me the greatest gift that I could ever imagine, and for this there were no words. There was just a hug that I had hoped would never end, tears of joy, and my prostration to him as his baby. Certainly I had become a child once more.

Here I'll share a few of the photos from the return trip which will speak far better of the beauty than my words.







When I arrived back in Haridwar with Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji we looked through the pictures and talked about the walk as well as the visit to Ganeshpur. Swami Ji had left a few weeks after the monsoons and flooding started. We chatted about Swami Premananda Ji as well as the roads, repair efforts under way, etc.

As we paged through the pictures we came to the last one shown here; the dog patiently sitting and looking intently at you. It was the first time I had looked at this picture since I had taken it two days prior. I was amazed as I looked at the picture and zoomed in close. I described this to Swami Ji. I had been walking south along the river and came around a bend in the road to see this dog sitting looking at me. As I came closer I decided to take my phone out and snap a picture of him. As soon as I did this the dog started fidgeting, moving from side to side



nonstop. I tried to calm him, to get him to sit quietly, and whatever I could do didn't work. He would not look straight at me again. I took three pictures of him in succession and each time he was looking away. He looked above me, to the left of me, to the right. He looked at his family, shown here, in one shot. I saw the pictures as I took them, noted that he was getting more excited, laughed and put the phone back in my pocket. We said hello to each other, he let me pet him, then I moved on.

Three pictures, I was certain of it. I remembered the shutter snapping three times and seeing the shots as they were taken. As I looked at the pictures with Swami Ji there were but two. Both were as you see here, with our friend perfectly posed.

We visited for the next two weeks and I researched more about the coast-to-coast walk as well as Peace Pilgrim. I purchased some gear for the walk and made arrangements to have it shipped to a friend in the USA. I continued my daily practices. On the 15th of September I took my vows of Sannyasa and was given the name Swami Sankarananda.

The ceremony was simple and perfect. I took my vows in Ganga Mata. I took three dips in the swollen river as She held me. On each successive dip I renounced my old life and my body. First I renounced the physical body, then the astral body and finally the causal body. I took off my clothes, folded them, and gave them to Mother. I donned the new orange kurtha and dhoti, took my vows and committed to serve God through all, then sat for some time in Meditation on the bank of the river.



One of three dips in Ganga Mata, offering the old me to Her

When I got up to leave after an hour or so I went to pick up my sandals and noted that someone had relieved me of them. I found this to be perfect, had a good laugh about it, and walked back to the Ashram barefoot; a newborn.

We made a visit together to Rishikesh on my last week in India. I said goodbyes once again, this time to Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji. Once more prostration and a hug of a lifetime accompanied with tears of joy. He and Swami Premananda Ji had been four arms of one divine being for me in my time in India, and they remain so. Two different personalities, different styles of teaching that complemented each other perfectly. I didn't know if I would see either of them again, for what awaited me now was the USA and pilgrimage for peace.

I had found the peace that I had travelled to India for in the silence of my own being. Of course what I had looked for was not in India, it had been in me all along. Gone were the angst and anger, the fear and trepidation. Gone was the need to be validated by others and the identification with the character I play in the world. The character had changed also, from the very thoughts out. What had once been a stormy sea of thought about passion and sex, money, cars and boats had become placid and focused on inward reflection. My thoughts had become quiet and contemplative, kind and compassionate in nature. I strove to see God in all and this had begun to happen without struggle. I had finally learned the meaning

of success; “satisfaction”. Satisfaction is what is obtained when one completes their quest and has no more questions, no more desires.

I had considered staying in India on a number of occasions while I was there. Life in India is sacred and beautiful, my mentors were there and there was great opportunity to study and to develop my new character. I had never had interest in scholarship though, and the desire to study Sanskrit and the Vedas full time never came. It is noble work; I’ve met many scholars and theologians and they fill beautiful roles in the world. For me, who could remember only a few words of French after four years of study in high school, the thought of learning Sanskrit or even Hindi so that I could navigate in society seemed like torture. I’ve been told the Hindi word for “hello” so many times but it will not stay with me. God’s names stay. Hari Om stays. Key concepts in Sanskrit stay. Hindi ne (pronounced “nay”, this is no. As in “I don’t know Hindi”, the only Hindi phrase I seem to remember). Always my learning had come through my work, and this was to be the case now as well. I was new in the world, with a new reference point (the silence at the center of me) and an abiding faith in God at the center of all including me. I would not yet call it absolute faith, for this was to come, but I knew that I was safe regardless of what happened to my body.

It was time to return to the USA and to begin the pilgrimage that I had been planning. God willing I would spend the next year walking across the continent in prayer for peace for all, learning how to serve simply and to simply serve. My sole desire was to see God in all.



Delhi Station

1 Oct 2013

5AM Tuesday morning, today I leave mother India, for now. But she, all of the aspects I have experienced of her, will never be apart from me.

Every single aspect; every beautiful person, every cow in the road, every mountain and flower, every morsel and so much more, each with their varied magnificence... And with each the great Teacher reaching through to provide guidance and love, there is only ever that. So much love!

Far, far less of me leaves India than what came. What is gone has vanished in to the ether, a sacrifice to consciousness, mother of all. What is gone was never real and there is no loss. Love has burst through from every cell and it has been learned both that is what is and that is all there needs to be.

Thank you God, thank you all, for the incredible gift shared!

Now a new act begins, the curtain rises, and wandering in the USA will start. If it is God's will I shall walk from coast to coast sharing the Love and Peace of what is with all who wish to share. Inspiration for this walk comes from both the eastern tradition of Sannyasa and the western saint Peace Pilgrim, and of course from the Master of all. All is in honor of the love within and this love is shared with all. Walking resumes Saturday

Peace. Love.

6. The Shakedown Walk and First Impressions

On the 5th of October I began walking from Monterrey, California to near San Diego, a distance of approximately five hundred miles with the route I intended. My goal was to complete the walk in five weeks and I planned to attend the annual Forever Family Foundation conference that was to be held in mid November. From there I planned to spend the month of December at the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm in the Sierra Mountain foothills finalizing preparations for my first coast-to-coast walk. I intended to start that walk on 1 January at the Rose Bowl Parade in commemoration of Peace Pilgrim's first coast-to-coast walk for peace which she began on New Year's 1953 in that same place.

I needed to learn how to walk a peace pilgrimage and I could not copy Peace Pilgrim. Yes, I follow her but copying is not possible. The roads are different, people are different and times are different. I knew that I'd start with the core of her pilgrimage, and that is walking in prayer unceasing for peace for all. I would follow her practical suggestions such as walking south in the winter and north in the summer, but beyond that I needed to walk, observe, learn and adapt.

Peace had carried only a comb, a toothbrush and a pen on her magical journey for twenty-eight years, and I knew that I had not yet plumbed that depth of faith. This was where I wanted to be, but there were so many practical lessons I needed to learn, such as how to wean myself of baggage, how to develop deeper faith and how to serve meaningfully each day. As discussed earlier although fear was gone caution remained, and this means that our learning needs be step by step instead of in one giant leap. With each step we take we must survey where we are and where we want to go all over again, for there is not time to walk the wrong direction once we have decided upon union with God as our goal.

In this spirit and with this goal I started walking from Monterrey, intending to travel south along Highway 1, the California coastal highway, and then inland as required to reach San Diego.

5 Oct 2013

...Today I start walking to San Diego via



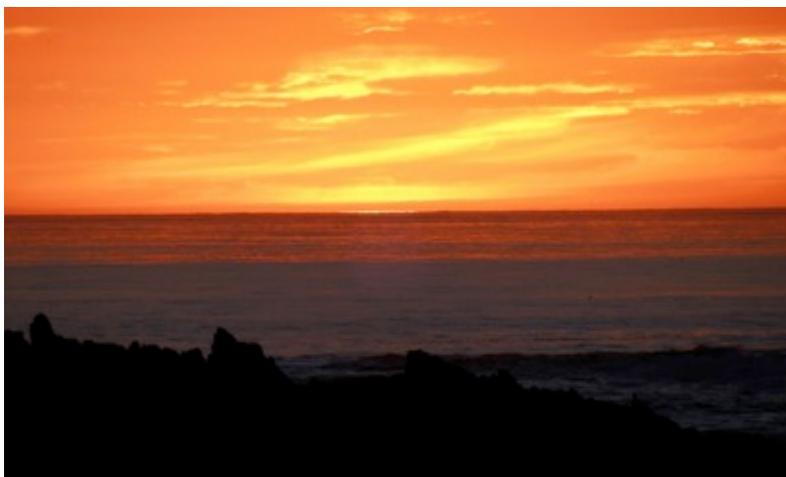
California's coastal route, starting from Monterey where these pictures were taken yesterday. Then, with God's will, I'll turn east early in the New Year and walk coast to coast,

crossing the U.S. and joining the annual celebration of the saint Peace Pilgrim's works in September at Egg Harbor, New Jersey.

I walk in honor of the goodness, the divinity, in all and will do whatever I can to help any one who wishes so that they may take a step to find that, their inner peace, the center of our existence. I walk for peace, for love, for you. If God wills it I shall wander in this way, as a servant, until I can walk no more...

7 Oct 2013

10AM day 2 of the trek to San Diego. Walked 17 mile drive yesterday, spent the night under the stars and having coffee this morning in Carmel. ...well the Orange cloth solicits more curiosity here than in India but there is striking unity in the response. Love is felt from every heart and seen in all eyes. I've been given wonderful opportunities to share divine love with animals and people alike. A fun discovery was how well the Orange works to stop traffic! The lovely deer you see wanted some help crossing the road...



10 Oct 2013

Day 4 morning, Big Sur now. Probably off line the next few days, the next 50 to 60 miles is quite primitive with no cell coverage.

Amazing afternoon yesterday. In the U.S. most all journey in their cars. So how to affect them while walking? To help them feel good for a moment so that they might ponder why they feel good... or



even better that they might stop thinking for a moment and feel what is there between thoughts?

At first I walked, smiling. Some are distracted, look and smile back, some wave. Then I started waving, you know, the hand at shoulder level with a loving smile. A little more response. But what to do to get them out of that

I wondered what she might think of her relatives in India.

shell for a moment?

THE wave. You know, arm extended as high as you can, hand held high, waving. Big grin. Wow, it works. Most smile, genuine, wave back... Imagine eight to ten cars in a row, all waving back with drivers and passengers showing huge smiles on their faces. Imagine your feeling. Shoot, you can do better than that lol, go take a little walk and try it. Don't worry about people thinking you are crazy, the whole world is that. Try putting your hand way up, waving at passers by and see how it feels!



Amazing.

Right: This friend was riding from Seattle to San Diego, surfing along the way. We shared a meal and a campsite, sleeping on the beach for the night.



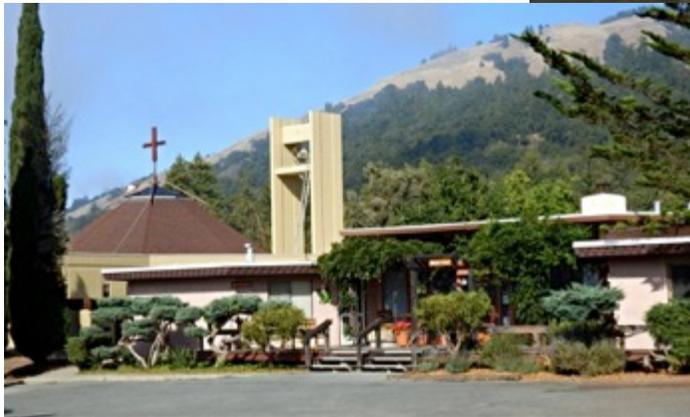


Campsite for the night – star gazing through a canopy of giant sequoias



On the 12th of October I walked to the New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur and was offered shelter there. With this visit I initiated a practice of visiting monasteries of all faiths along the way wherever practical and wherever I was invited.

Later we will discuss God and religion, here I'll share that my experience from pilgrimage is that all monks' jobs, regardless of faith, are the same. Our job is to know and to commune with God in all, to serve God in all, to help all to find



New Camaldoli Cathedral



Organic garden on New Camaldoli grounds

God in their own heart. The Buddhist monk will say that the job is to know one's own Self, and this is exactly the same; only the words seem different. There is no difference at all between your highest Self and the Absolute Truth of the Universe, which most religions call God. Of course the details will vary widely as some will be seen in caves in the mountains, some walking on pilgrimage, some in monasteries, some teaching, some singing, etc. Some will say that they are different than another monk, some will say that they are the same.

As a practical matter not everyone will see it this way. This is natural of course. As a result I find that I'm completely welcome in some monasteries and traditions and in others I'm not. This is fine, I find and honor the same in you, in a monastery or a church, in a forest or a stream.

New Camaldoli Hermitage, as it so happens, is one of those monastery/retreats where I am welcome and I felt this from the moment I walked up the long, steep and winding drive up in to the coastal mountain range of Big Sur. Not only am I welcome, you are, all are. During my visit there was a Buddhist lay teacher at the monastery giving a class about

Buddhist teaching to the monks and they were all quite interested.

Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji had introduced me to the legacy of Father Bede Griffiths. Fr. Griffiths was a Benedictine monk from England who spent most of his years in India and for the last twenty-five years

of his life (leaving his body in 1993) he headed a Christian Ashram in Tamil Nadu state named Saccidananda Ashram (also known as Shantivanam). Fr. Griffiths not only studied the other religions of the world, he honored them as all coming from the same root, Truth itself. He took a rare step with vows of Sannyasa from Swami Chidananda of Divine Life Society and as a result he was recognized as a monk of both the Catholic and Hindu faiths. This speaks to the observation I've shared above about the parallel work of monks in all faiths. Fr. Griffiths would not say, however, that he was a Catholic and a Hindu. He would, rather, say that he was a lover of God in all forms. He wrote extensively on the common heritage of all faiths in his latter years and is quite well respected among Catholic scholars and by many monks in the Benedictine order.

I was given the gift of a visit to Shantivanam on Swami Ji's recommendation. I spent some time in Fr. Griffiths' personal study and in his library, which is open to all visitors of the Ashram. There I spent a few wondrous afternoons reading of obscure religions in various parts of the world, all of which beautifully point to the same lustrous Truth as the basis for all.

Here, in New Camaldoli, Fr. Griffiths is known and his work studied. He had visited and was in close contact with the priory of the monastery while he was still in his body. I had a beautiful visit with one of the monks who knew Fr. Griffiths; we talked of him for some time. He had also met and revered Swami Chidananda.

I visited for two nights and one full day, continuing on with a full belly, a wonderful rest, new friendships and deeper faith to propel me forward.

16 Oct 2013

2PM Day 10; passed through Cambria this morning, about 230 miles north of Los Angeles now... Sharing a moment from this morning; I was at a small family restaurant enjoying pancakes, juice and coffee for breakfast, sitting at a table. Just next to me was a middle-aged man with his mother who he said was 91. He was talking with the waitress and asking for the bill. His mother had her back to me and was drinking her coffee and doing crosswords in the newspaper. She didn't say a word.



A few minutes later the son got up and stood next to his mother and, rather gently, started to cajole her to move. He was asking her to hurry and finish her coffee etc. but she continued taking her time and for all appearances was completely ignoring him.

The son turned to me and made a joke about his mother never listening to him. I looked at her again and said to the son that it appeared to me that he was not listening to her. It was clear that she was telling her son to relax and slow down, that's what I told him. Of course he didn't see this, he waited very impatiently for another ten minutes, becoming more and more stressed out.

Finally his mother finished her coffee and crossword and turned her chair around slowly to get up. I saw her face for the first time and as I did she lit up with the brightest smile you could imagine, the smile of an angel. She commented to her son that she liked his friend. We touched and held hands for a moment of incredible sweetness and love, we both positively beamed, then they left.

This very same angel is behind your eyes and every set of eyes, in every heart. Always be aware and always prepared to connect with it for a moment of grace.

*...here's the sight that I see most often on this walk;
people waving back at me from their cars. Amazing!*

It's interesting, I've observed that people in America have a much different personality when they are in their car versus when they are in public. They are lighter, more aware, more open. Perhaps it's because the "bad, bad world" that they see on the news cannot hurt them when they are in their cars?



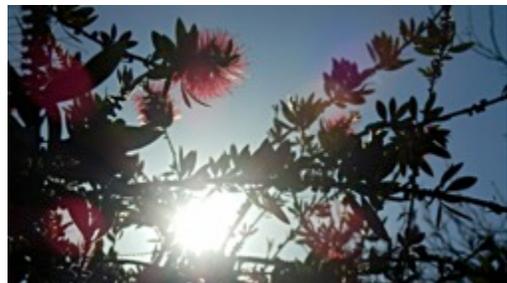
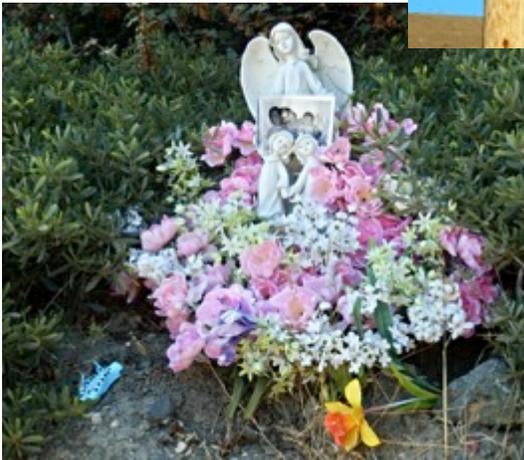
Each day it is my special treat to see big waves, bright smiles, astonished and joyful faces. It seems that each moment my feet, my right arm (the waving one!) and my smile grow stronger.

Thank you God. I walk for Peace, and Love comes. The same Love which is in your heart, in every heart.

You are walking with me. Feel the Love.



Above and next pages show scenes from Monterrey coastal area through central coast





25 Oct 2013

7:30AM, Day 20

It seems I had lost track of a few days here and there lol, they were hidden by the moments.



Sunburst Meditation Center

Yesterday I spent the day at Sunburst Meditation Center near Lompoc, founded by Norman Paulsen, a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda (author of Autobiography of a Yogi, the best selling first hand spiritual book ever). Beautiful day, beautiful place, beautiful friends! What a gift.

Today I start the Santa Barbara leg, then on to Los Angeles.

A thought for the day. Religion and Reverence have different intentions although both are part of our paths. Life is truly lived when

we find our reverence, for reverence is all encompassing, all unfolding. We may even, and hopefully will, be irreverent in our reverence. Having fun with life, joking about it, understanding what it is and loving all as part of the whole every moment. Find your reverence and you have found your imperturbable joy, you cannot be disturbed!



Reisling without the bottle ;-)

And if you are ever passing a vineyard in late October, after harvest, try a dinner of hand picked grapes. Dinner of chardonnay followed by desert of Riesling is quite lovely!!

7. Excess Baggage

"It's dark because you are trying too hard. Lightly child, lightly. Learn to do everything lightly. Yes, feel lightly even though you're feeling deeply. Just lightly let things happen and lightly cope with them. So throw away your baggage and go forward. There is quicksand all about you, sucking at your feet, trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair. That's why you must walk so lightly. Lightly my darling, on tiptoes and no luggage, not even a sponge bag, completely unencumbered."

Aldous Huxley

Most of the walk coast to coast I carried a small backpack with a sleeping bag, a spare dhoti, a poncho, a camera plus a smart phone, battery pack, charging cables, a one liter bottle of water and toiletries, as

well as often carrying some food for the day. To most people this seems remarkably little for a walk across the USA but to me it was always too much. Peace Pilgrim shows us what is really required through her example, and the answer is faith alone.

When I arrived back in the USA I had this goal I mention, and yet I had a lot of gear and an even larger backpack. It was a kind of wackiness of my mind; I had purchased so much micro gear. A tiny tent, tiny cooking gear, pills to make lake water into drinking water, two plates and cups, two full sets of silverware, a 2.5 liter water pouch which fit in the backpack and connected to a drinking straw so that I could sip water as I walked, an extra dhoti and two extra kurthas plus underwear and a sweater, a rain slicker, etc. I had thought that when I ordered everything it would come to only about twelve pounds, yet when I reached the USA and got the gear from a friend that I had it all shipped to, when I put it all in the backpack, it was something like twenty-five pounds!

I started walking two days later. Although even this was so much less gear than most who do this walk take, when I put on the pack that was no consolation. The first day I walked stunning 17-mile drive through the coastal mountains to Pebble Beach, and that pack was so heavy! The next day I started giving away or throwing away gear. At the beginning it was easy. The days of walking were long and I was always so tired at the end of the day. I was too tired to put up a tent, too tired to cook. So, the tent and the cooking gear were all gone within two weeks. First one plate went, then the other, the silverware, the bowls, then the cups. The clothing went, bit by bit, except for the spare dhoti. Then the large water container with the sipper went; in favor of a one-liter bottle.

Always the goal was in front of me to get to Peace's depth of faith and everything I gave away was seen as a step in deeper faith. Never was I forced to suffer for anything I gave away, it was always the opposite. Of course I could have suffered; the level of commitment to accept suffering was always required. When I started the walk, even this six-week walk from northern to southern California, I put my "life" on the line and knew this full well.

The world began to reveal itself more the less baggage I carried. So many beautiful and fun stories played out. Always the bag I carried felt too heavy; always Peace's example was in my mind along with the desire to serve and know God, and this always motivated me to reduce the weight, to get rid of baggage. The correlation between what I carried and mental baggage was not lost on me, I see no difference between them.

Here, from the 26th of October, I talked of this in my Facebook posts.

26 Oct 2013

6:30PM day 20, near Santa Ynez, Ca.

Well I picked my bedroom for the night (the one with the trees), how do you like it? There are so many rooms in this castle, it's endless.

As we lighten our load in life

We brighten our view.

I still have lightening to do. My goal is to emulate Peace Pilgrim, she traveled with only the clothes she wore and was completely reliant on the hands that hold us dear. You see there is a direct relationship between faith and baggage. The more faith the less baggage and vice versa. Peace and all the great teachers tell us we need no baggage, that every moment we are safe. I see it, know it, the view has brightened so much... just have more baggage to drop!

People are amazing, I've said that. As I drop stuff from the backpack God replaces it through loving hearts. I've stopped carrying food now, and yet you see the fruit bounty I'll enjoy tonight and tomorrow morning, along with some Cliff's bars gifted from a friend at Sunburst.

Truly amazing. Not surprising, loving. That's the best word, truly Loving.

Thank you, sleep well, Love you.

29 Oct 2013

Noon, Day 23. Santa Barbara

I'm reducing the weight in the pack a little each day, now carrying less water.

Yesterday I finished walking up the pass early and the rest of the walk was down the pass in to town, total about 15 miles for yesterday's leg.

I ran out of water about halfway down, no big deal. About an hour after that I was getting a little thirsty and wondered about how some water might be provided. But then I realized that a soda would be a wonderful treat, that I'd not had one since I had left India.

About 30 minutes or so later I stopped to rest for a bit and after some little time I noted a young man who had come and wanted to talk. We said our greetings then he asked me what I was doing and I told him about the peace pilgrimage. We talked a little more, he was pleased and started back towards his car. He asked if I wanted some water, I said yes please and he started looking. After going through the car he told me, "I'm sorry I thought I had water but I don't, just a soda...". Magic.

30 Oct 2013

Beautiful morning, on the way to Ventura today.

Yesterday one of the gifts was to meet this young man, riding a bicycle towards me. We obviously have the same couturier as you can tell by his vest He started riding five months ago in Sardegna (Italy), which



I was sitting next to the road under a tree, a friend drove up, got out of her car, and handed these to me

he claims as home, and has ridden across eastern and western Europe plus the Caucasus, now east to west across the US, then on 15 November he departs for Tokyo and plans to ride through Japan, China, Southeast Asia. He carries the flag of his business that markets bio sustainable foods.



Beautiful.

2 Nov 2013

Several pictures from the past few days. Note the memorials which appear often in my posts, I am attracted to these as I walk past, I tend to them and take a photograph. In fact no harm comes to us, for we are neither body nor mind, but of course it's understandable why we feel fear of the unknown, particularly bodily death. These memorials, as their counterparts across the world in India, are beautiful gifts to God from those who love.



We are never alone, we are never apart from those we love, always their presence is with us. These memorials are part of that loving presence.

Enjoy. Love you, now let's pack up and enjoy the magic that is called Malibu!



15 Nov 2013

Walking again. I departed San Diego and the amazing Forever Family Foundation's annual conference Tuesday AM westward bound, towards the ocean and Encinitas, then Corona and today Oceanside, arriving at Prince of Peace Abbey late afternoon. It's so lovely here, the Peace within is observed without.

My load is so light, sometimes it feels that I walk on air. These days since the conference are communion, constant communion. Please let me share an open secret with you. Open to all, secret only because mind tries to hide it.



Faith is the end of all suffering. This is absolute.

Faith may not be achieved by belief; the

doubting mind will not allow it. It may only be reached through introspection, utilizing experience and teaching we are given. Faith lies beyond belief and is reached through suspension of belief coupled with awareness and love and respect for all. It is our gift, our birthright.



Prince of Peace Benedictine Monastery and Retreat

Peace

17 Nov 2013

Can we see life?

Or do we see evidence of life?

Our greatest scientists and doctors do not know exactly what life is yet they study evidence to learn, so it is the latter, correct? Are you life or are you alive? The latter indicates that you are somehow animated by a mysterious force that no one understands, a force which appeared



in you at birth then leaves you at death so that you are life-less. Is this logical in any way? Clearly then you are life, correct? It is one or the other, there is no other option.

So, when you look in the mirror, what do you see? Do you see yourself? Or do you see evidence of yourself? Does this sound the same? Or can it be all the difference in the world?

Love



Friends in Corona preparing to “gong” me. Wow.

From mid to late November I retraced my steps, walking back from San Diego to Riverside, where I visited with friends for a few days. I walked through orchards and enjoyed fresh fruit nearly every day. I slept outside each night, invariably next to an orange or avocado tree. The vistas were amazing and I met the sweetest and kindest people that you can imagine. From there I took Amtrak to Sacramento, joining Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm in Grass Valley between Thanksgiving and the end of December.

Thus ended my first California pilgrimage. I had been shown nothing but grace every step of the way and I had seen that my trust in God and the goodness of mankind was well placed. Nothing bad had happened, on the contrary there were only amazing experiences. The backpack was traded down from a thirty-three liter pack to a fifteen-liter daypack and although I was not yet ready to walk with only the three items Peace carried I felt that I was indeed ready to walk coast-to-coast.

I used the month of December for communion and for yogic practices. I focused on Pranayama to build the energy required for the upcoming trip and seated Meditation for a minimum of two hours per day. I planned how I would approach the walk both mentally and physically and finalized the rules to which I'd commit.



Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm

I had no doubt that I'd be able to complete the upcoming walk across the USA, and was resolved to accept whatever came along the way with gratitude.

I flew to Los Angeles on New Years Eve day and overnighted with friends in Riverside. I was driven to Pasadena and the Rose Bowl parade route early the morning of the 1st. Preparations were complete and the estimated three thousand seven hundred mile walk, ending in the 21 September Egg Harbor, NJ celebration for Peace Pilgrim's works, lay ahead of me.

8. Coast to Coast Peace Pilgrimage Begins

"Nature loves courage. You make the commitment and nature will respond to that commitment by removing impossible obstacles. Dream the impossible dream and the world will not grind you under, it will lift you up. This is the trick. This is what all these teachers and philosophers who really counted, who really touched the alchemical gold, this is what they understood. This is the shamanic dance in the waterfall. This is how magic is done. By hurling yourself into the abyss and discovering it's a feather bed."

Terence McKenna

Peace Pilgrim, along with the various wandering mendicant traditions of the world, provides the basis of my inspiration for both resolves and rules of the pilgrimage. Peace set the standard for both purpose and austerity and I continue to hold her example as I strive to be beneficial with this pilgrimage.

First, here are the resolves to which I committed myself:

I would walk in prayer unceasing for all to know peace. I walk for all kinds of peace; from world peace to inner peace and every type of peace in between. Peace Pilgrim calls it “the whole peace picture”. Inner peace is the center of all peace, as one who is at peace inside is also the one who knows peace outside and the one who can most effectively work for external peace. As a practical matter most of my attention is focused on inner peace and most of the talks and discussions that I engage in start with this. We must also address our warring ways at every level so all are important. This prayer unceasing is accompanied by continuous mental mantra repetition. The world peace mantra “Om Namo Narayanaya” is constantly repeating in my mind whether I am waking or sleeping and through this my awareness is always focused upon the goal of peace for all. At the beginning of the walk I carried a petition that I intended to deliver to the United Nations, but after a short time it became clear that the pilgrimage is not about delivering a petition, rather it is about sharing peace and love.

I would start each morning with an invocation for the day. As I begin to awake I bring my full awareness to God and repeat this. “Dear God, may all of my thoughts, words and deeds this day be inspired for the benefit of all. May my service this day help all to know the peace and divine love that is at the center of each and all. May all know peace. Om Shanti Shanti Shanti”

I would acknowledge all with a smile plus a wave where possible, beneficial thought always and kind words as the situation allowed. As I walk along the roadway typically I can both smile and wave towards all who come my way, I mouth “hello” as I look into the eyes of drivers and passengers both. I hold you in my heart and wish for you to know whatever you desire, and most of all for you to know peace.

I would stop at each memorial along the way, take a picture of it, and honor the disembodied soul on their journey with a prayer for them and their loved ones. I would also stop at cemeteries and share the same prayer. The prayer is for safe passage and peace for all soul’s continuing journeys.

I would walk fully “open” to whatever and whoever comes, in full acceptance. I would greet anyone who wished to stop and talk with complete acceptance and listen to them with full attention. I would not rush them and would share anything with them that seemed to be of benefit. This resolve applies regardless of who wishes to talk, whether it is an individual or a group, regardless of appearance or apparent intent.

I would walk softly with kindness always in my heart and in my thoughts. My feet would touch the pavement lovingly, I would talk with the sun and the stars, the wind and the trees, the grasses, the birds, the insects, all of the creatures great and small. I would be aware of and considerate of all of them, looking for any opportunity to serve in the moments regardless of the name or form that I might serve. I was fully resolved that I would come to know God in all, regardless of what this took. If I needed to die in the desert in order to do so then die in the desert I would.

Secondly, there are rules. Peace stated, “I fast until offered food and I walk until offered shelter.” and she observed that food was offered most every day and shelter was always provided when needed.

Sometimes she walked through the night, sometimes she slept on a concrete floor, sometimes in a church or a private home, and she said that this was never a problem for her. In this spirit I committed:

I would ask for nothing, including food, water, shelter or money, and would accept whatever is offered along the way with gratitude. Not asking means not doing so with words or signals. If someone asks, "do you need anything?" I would say, "no, thank you." This is true, for faith in the Absolute is all that I need, and this I have. If someone asks, "would you like some water?" or food, shelter, etc. of course I say yes with a smile and "thank you". I've been given many opportunities to "re-gift" wonderful items that I've been lovingly offered along the way and this is always a magical opportunity.

I would carry only food that was offered. Shortly after I began the coast-to-coast walk I restricted this to no more than what I could consume in the same day. I would carry no more than one liter of water. My goal was to further reduce this as the walk continued.

Rides would not be accepted to make forward progress on the coast-to-coast walk. I would accept rides when offered to a place of rest or speaking engagement, etc. If a ride were taken where forward progress was made I'd ask to be taken back to the pickup point afterwards.

My route plan was to walk south along the coast to Highway 78 in northern San Diego county, from there I'd walk east through the California desert and then towards Yuma, Arizona.

I had a few hundred dollars remaining from the trip to India and knew that this would be gone soon. I had surrendered myself completely and was committed to the resolves and rules no matter what happened. Of course the great teachers tell us that this is exactly what we are to do, that we are to surrender ourselves to the Love Divine and accept whatever happens with gratitude, but we don't do it. Fear and desires always get in the way. "Yes, but" is our operative phrase, we answer every great teaching this way. "But that is philosophy, this is the real world!" we say. With this pilgrimage I put the philosophy to practice and in this way learned whether it is just philosophy or practical teaching. Is it just a book or is it the way to live life? Let us see together.

I was going to either transcend fear and desires completely or die in the desert trying. There was no third option and there was no going back.

With this I began. Peace Pilgrim had joined the Rose Bowl parade in 1953; she walked behind the bands and floats. This day there would be no such opportunity. In the early afternoon I started south towards Long Beach. I walked twenty-seven miles that day and reached a city park in Long Beach at 1AM on the 2nd. New Years Day 2014 had been an amazing day, and I slept like a baby under the stars that night.

From here let's resume with some of my Facebook posts to help tell the story of this nearly nine-month pilgrimage from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts.



Friends in Riverside ready to send me off.

1 Jan 2014

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself."

Jesus the Christ, quoted in Matthew 6:34.

Sharing God's blessing for the happiest and most beneficial New Year. May you revel in the moment without need of planning for tomorrow. May you see God in all and serve God in all.

Deepest respect and Love!!

2 Jan 2014

Happy New Year!

The Peace Pilgrimage continues. Tuesday I departed Ashram for Riverside and stayed overnight with Maggi, Donna and their two sweetheart doggie friends. Wednesday the 1st started with a drop off at Pasadena to resume the walk.

I walked the parade route a bit, saw some beautiful sights, commemorated this walk to those who inspire me. Peace Pilgrim, who started walking 61 years ago on January 1 from this spot. She walked, in peace and for peace for all, for 28 years. Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Sivananda, so many more. Thank you, bless you, your light is alive and burns in me. It is the center of each of us. Jai Gurudev!

Walked to Long Beach last night, met Peace Carlos on the way and many other friends; two legged, four legged and rooted etc. Last night in the park, now on with day 2. 28 miles (45 KM) behind, about 3,472 ahead to the United Nations headquarters in NYC.

Peace is hard to see in the world. Let's each find it and share it, it is to be found and the source is ever overflowing.

Walking on, with you. Let's adventure, one step at a time...

...Day 2 of the coast to coast walk, 36 miles (55KM) walked



Rose Bowl Parade route



"Peace" Al

and many to go, step by step, one moment at a time.

Yesterday I met a young man with his daughter; guessing his age at 30 something and her at 6 or 7. They were interested in the walk and we visited for a bit, we talked about peace being a natural state but how we cover it up, about there being so many aids to help peace while government and other leaders do not discuss them. No money goes to study of the effect of or promotion of Meditation; countries build bombs and weapons instead of feeding the hungry, etc. Yet the goodness of people is intact so it helps to talk, to motivate awareness.



El Segundo

We had a very sweet and lovely visit. He wanted to buy me dinner so took his daughter next door to the grocery. When they returned he explained briefly to his daughter what we had discussed, then he asked her what he had told her is the most powerful force. She answered, "LOVE"!

Earlier in the day I had met a lovely man with some demons haunting him. He calls himself a marine, says he has killed many and now he is an alcoholic. His words. He was shocked to see a monk walking his way; he had just awoken and was walking to find food. We had a good talk, I told him I love him, we went on our ways.



What is the value of a human? Is there relative value? Is a monk worth more than a marine? Vice versa? Or an alcoholic? A little girl? A black, a white, Hispanic or a Jew? What is the value?

May we recognize what mind does? The silly and deceitful game it plays? It is the age-old game of division and multiplication. It is only a game though.

You are the same whether you wear the costume of the girl or the marine, the monk or the father. However you dress up, you are the same. You are Love itself. You are what we see behind the eyes we see, you are what beats in the heart. You are Love itself, pure and true. Let us strip away the costume and know what is underneath, for that is our pure essence.

Love you... now for another step.

3 Jan 2014

Good morning, day 3, now at 48 miles (80KM) on this coast-to-coast pilgrimage. Now in Santa Ana, stayed with friends last night, walking towards Laguna shortly.

We see evil in the world and the mind thrives upon it. Revolting sights come in to view and the mind often focuses upon them, believing them to be independent and something to be afraid of, to run from.

In fact there has always been evil on display alongside good. Both are expressions of the same though, it is the nature of nature itself that in order to display good, bad must also be displayed. If there is to be love then hatred must also be known. All here is relative. Yet the substratum of all is the same, in the heart is the center, independent reality, Love. It is seen behind all eyes.

Inside us we each have compassion for all, Love for all, not pity. We have peace, we have truth. We may react to evil with fear, pure animal instinct, or we may dig deeper and react with love and compassion to relate to the source inside the evil expression.

We may also choose sources of inspiration for the mind. There is darkness and indeed these times seem dark when we watch the news and look at what goes viral on the internet. There are also always points of bright light which we may focus the mind upon.

Peace Pilgrim is one such bright light, a source of inspiration. I thank her for inspiring me to this walk, to lighting the way along with so many other expressions of light.

Love always.

4 Jan 2014

It's day 4 of this coast-to-coast walk, I've stopped to enjoy this beautiful sunset with the moon shining bright. I'll stay here for a while, this park looks like an amazing bedroom! Just 11 miles today so now at 70 miles so far. You could drive it in an hour.



I have the most amazing job, as I write this I'm completely in awe, yet it's hard to imagine how I became worthy for it, or even if I am. And yet for most it seems a crazy existence for sure, and so boring! Go figure, what fun. Let it not be said that God does not have a wonderful sense of humor!!

So, today, here goes. I spent last night with Analia Corrales' parents Miguel and Stella. Lovely, thank you! Great meal last night, we used Google translate some to chat, breakfast with



them this morning, blessings shared then petition signed and off for the day's walk.

Then a few hours later the most amazing smile! I was crossing the street at a light, saw a man on the other side, probably 70, smiled at him and started walking his way. He seemed cemented down to the corner, he did not move. A grin formed, then his eyes brightened, then his smile widened as he came aglow. Really, like that. Imagine the most radiant smile you can, it was on his face and in his eyes. I crossed, prostrated to him and he did the same. We shared "God bless you" then in another moment he began to walk on, as did I.

Later I was spotted by a man who wanted to ask about meditation and I was able to share a technique with him, asked him to try and call me. He signed the petition after telling me he was a felon and asking if that was OK. Lol I told him of course, as far as God is concerned all are equal and that's good enough for me. Shared "I love you" then on.

Shortly after I came out of a grocery store with a carton of milk and a young man getting out his car asked me if I am a monk, he said he was interested. He wanted to know if I had a brochure, I gave him a card, asked him to call or email me with a couple of questions and said I'd do my best to answer.



Finally a short while ago I walked past an apartment where a girl was very upset and yelling, cursing at someone very loudly. I stopped, closed my eyes and asked God to help her find



peace inside herself. I stayed for a bit to let healing energy radiate through then walked on. In between there were so many beautiful flowers and trees to greet... and some very cute doggies too.

Oh, and a highlight from yesterday. I met a man who said he was homeless. We chatted for a while and he agreed that we are not homeless, we are



indeed home wherever we are. He offered to buy me something to drink, he showed me that he had \$3. That's all of course, and he was offering to spend all of his money to buy me that drink. I told him thank you for the gift and asked him to buy himself one instead. Can you imagine the feeling of having someone you have just met offer all of the money they have? Honestly, people all have amazing hearts, we don't have to go so far to find them. There are new friends waiting for us in every moment, at every corner.

Thank you for sharing. Now let's enjoy a crisp night together and see what's ahead in the moments. I love you.

The heart is always in prayer, when the mind is quiet we hear it and are one with it...

6 Jan 2014

Om Om Om, starting walk for the day, intending to simply be with God all day and being quiet, receptive, loving and accepting.

Have a beautiful day, join me in your heart if you would like, love you.



7 Jan 2014

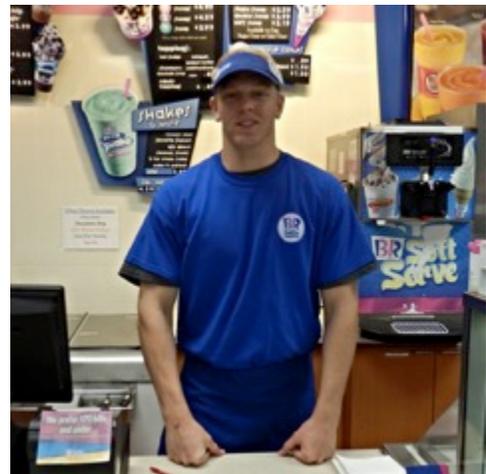
Om Om, writing from San Clemente, now on the 7th day and about 80 miles (130KM ish) out from Pasadena on this leg.

First a big THANK YOU to those that suggested I wear something obvious about the walk for peace, and thank you to Jodi for giving me this big poster for peace on my sweater, and of course thank you God for all, including the fact that people coming towards me now have more of an idea what we are up to! Early reviews say it helps, a lot.



And the young man pictured here, a special acknowledgement! Here I am walking around the country in these bright orange monk's clothes, and most people don't bother to ask what's up :-)!

And do you know what? It is completely understandable, it is the way of our mind. My mind, and therefore my personality, was the same for most of its years, almost all are. Even though we have all these clues telling us that the world is NOT as it appears the mind looks the other way. It categorizes what it sees and if it knows no category it sends a message of fear or maybe anger, maybe just curiosity, but it wishes to maintain its belief that it knows the world. Therefore it typically asks no questions, unless it already thinks it knows the answer and wants to show off!



But this boy asked, even before my walking billboard. God bless him, amazing! I was able to tell him the same.

Are we bad or stupid because we don't ask questions? No, far from it, but our mind is doing what it does. It is embarrassed that it does not know something. In fact we eventually receive the gift of learning that it does not know much. Yet in the eternal display that we are not the mind, we may override it, and ask the question! This is what we do when we ask, we literally overrule the lower mind, and enjoy the moment.

I continue on, in awe of the core goodness of humanity, and the love of God, but also in the understanding of the flaws in our lower mind and the pain when we let it rule our life unchecked. We have the power to change, any time.

Love and Peace, Let's keep walking!

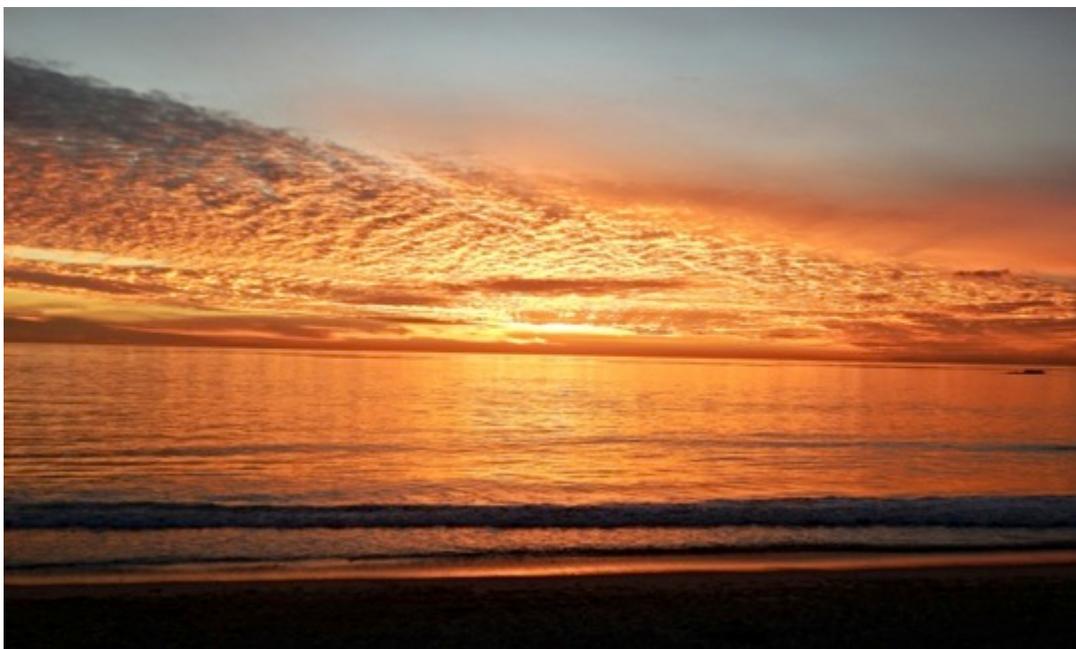
8 Jan 2014

Om, warmest greetings!!

*Today is day 8 of this coast-to-coast walk for peace!
Here is evidence of one coast touched.*

*Now 67 miles north of Chula Vista so about for days to
the big left turn towards that other coast. Step by step.*

One love, love is what is. Here we go!



10 Jan 2014



Om Om Om warmest greetings!

It's the morning of day 9, approximately 110 miles (180KM) traveled, 25 miles north of San Diego, and today is the day for turning east.

God willing the route will take me first to SRF's (the

organization Paramahansa Yogananda founded) Hidden Valley Ashram tomorrow evening, then onward through the California desert, past the Great Salton Sea then on to Yuma, Arizona. I should arrive in Yuma in two weeks, give or take and then, if God is still moving these feet, on to Phoenix and points east.



Love binds every species together

This morning I pray simply to be God's channel; for peace, for love, for what is to come. I ask for complete acceptance and wish only to serve well, always in the moment and with love. I'm in awe looking at the map, the pictures, feeling God's love and knowing that whatever happens is from this same love.

Thank you God.

Now let's start walking

11 Jan 2014

"That which ends us, completes us"



On the way to SRF Hidden Valley Ashram

13 Jan 2014

Om Om Om, good day! Was offline over the weekend at SRF's Hidden Valley Ashram, a little more about that later! Met these friends there.



Please join me as we watch these beautiful hummingbirds. Let's look very closely, no need to think of anything else for now. What do we see?

First each is so beautiful and unique. The coloring is so bright in the sunshine, they show off neon hues. Here's one with gold on its head, there is one with green wings, a red neck there, bright yellow on the back, there's a flash of blue! Different colorings, different sizes, even differences in personalities. One willing to share its perch while another does not. One graciously moves aside to let another feed while we also see those that exhibit greed and stay put.

We see their nature too. They live life in fast motion. Look at that one, its wings move so fast we can still see the head of another just behind it. Their motions are so fast; they eat fast, fly fast, all of their movements are fast, their lives are fast, every one the same in this way.

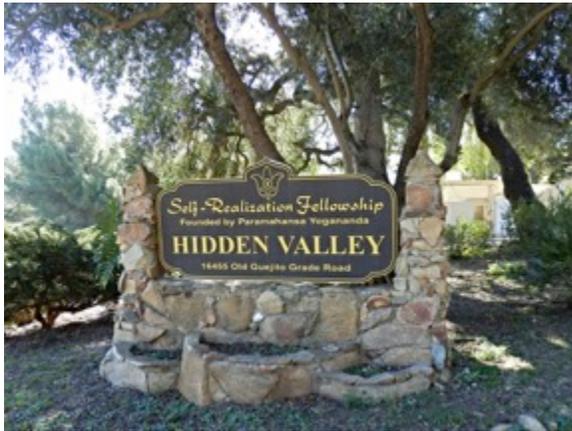
And as we study we see more. We see that each have intelligence in their independent functions but we also see a single intelligence at work. Of course we see this in their design, their utility, their beauty. But there is more, as we study we see that higher intelligence is still at work in their dance. We see that in a group a rhythm emerges, a dance, a flow. It is choreographed. The way that they exchange places in

midair, how they swerve and swoop, it is clearly not independent action, rather we are watching a playful intelligence at work; as we study longer we are certain of it!

Amazing, right?

It is the same with us. Every single person is beautiful and our dance together is amazing. We are both the dancer and the dance itself, we are never separate from all of these lovely creatures nor are separate from the One who makes the music and the dance. You are That.

Hari Om Tat Sat



13 Jan 2014

Om Om Om, warmest greetings!

Now at 150 miles on the coast-to-coast, we'll be in the California desert soon, probably tomorrow, continuing east being carried all the way. Will likely be offline for extended stretches, will update as possible.

Spent the weekend at God's Ashram, Self Realization Fellowship's Hidden Valley. This is the organization founded by Paramahansa Yogananda when he arrived in the USA in 1920. The teachings seem true to Paramahansa Ji, it's a

beautiful place, photos shared here. For more please read Autobiography of a Yogi or Google it.

We are each thankful in our own way, it is such a beautiful trait. We are thankful to loved ones, we are thankful to those who help us, we are thankful to God.

The great teacher Swami Sivananda teaches us to broaden our thankfulness as a way of realizing the truth. I would like to share with you. Perhaps you do all of this, perhaps not, thank you for whatever you do!

This walk helps to clearly see God in all. All is in fact provided by God, verily all is God, yet most of what we see including the people we see, even our own mind, does not yet know this. The single most important



purpose of life is to realize this, and of course all need help! Thankfulness always helps.

How can we broaden thankfulness? One great way is to be thankful to those that make life possible and so enjoyable. Thank the sun, the stars, the moon. They are here for us every moment without fail so that we may live this life, they are your highest Self, just as you. Thank the air for letting you breath, the water for letting you drink, the space itself for helping the universe be what it is. Thank the birds for the joy they provide, the

bees and the insects, the flowers for their fragrance and beauty, the trees for their shade. All do an amazing job, always there to give us life and joy.

Does it sound silly? I know. But life is in all, God is in all, even when it is not known. Your thanks, your loving intent, it's felt and understood by all. All that you see has the power of feeling your positive energy, of being lifted by your positive thoughts and words. And if people laugh at you, well thank them, love them and wish upon them your highest blessings to learn what they are, to find the love and peace at their center.

Try, just try, and see what happens. Broaden some, keep broadening.

Love you, talk soon! Highest blessings shared.

9. Our Conditioned View of the World

"What appears, is not, and what does not appear, is."

Adi Shankaracharya

We think that we see the world properly, but if this is the case why do others see it so differently from us?

As I walked east towards Julian this smiling police officer stopped to visit and check me out. He asked how I was, what I was doing, and we had a wonderful visit. He offered me water, paused for this picture, and then was on his way.



This was the first of what must have been at least two hundred visits with police officers during the coast-to-coast walk. On occasion I'd not see any police for a day or two but typically I was visited at

least once per day. I quickly realized that although my orange clothing signified renunciation in India in the USA the color signifies a different kind of renunciation. Orange is the official color of most of the prison uniforms in North America; I believe that this is the case for all but one of the states that I walked through.

I'd chosen the orange in order to honor my teachers and the lineage. It is the traditional cloth for the Sannyasin (Swami) in India yet in the west there are not so many Swamis and they tend to wear street clothes when they go out in public. Knowing this I considered the choice, I asked a couple of friends for input and contemplated it. One friend suggested that I might be confused with Hare Krishnas and that might be a negative, but all are brothers and sisters regardless of path so that did not bother me. It did not occur to me, however, that this color is also the color that most prisons use for their inmates. Of course it's not a secret, I just never thought of it! Until the walk that is.

As police stopped to visit I reflected. The visits were always cool. Each has a different personality and this is on exhibit when they stop. Some smile, some are stern, some gruff, some official, some chatty. Some read my shirt before talking with me and some did not. Some asked for my identification and some simply asked questions. Always they asked what I was doing. "I'm a monk, I'm walking coast to coast on a pilgrimage for peace in prayer that all may know peace, from world peace to inner peace and all in between." Most would tell me, "we stopped because we got a call..." And the call was invariably from someone who had driven past me and been concerned that I was an escaped prisoner. Sometimes one police officer came, sometimes one each in two cars, and once there were three cars.

Almost always, regardless of how the police person initially greeted me, we said goodbye with a smile and a wave. Often we shared a handshake and sometimes a hug. They had a story to tell and most seemed happy about that, of course I did my best to listen to them and to perhaps plant a loving seed.

You will note that the clothes that I wear, although orange, are nothing like the style of a prison inmate's. Also I always wear a smile, this is not so common with escaped convicts. Regardless of this clearly there

were at least a couple of hundred people that saw an escaped convict when they looked at me. Many of them were obviously scared, I was told this in detail by a few of the police officers as we chatted.

Each person sees something different. What we each see is according to our own mental conditioning, not what is actually there. We hear this from noble teachers in the various traditions, yet right here, in front of me over these few hundred days, was all of the evidence required to know this with no doubt.

Some, who had seen a Swami before, saw me as a Swami. Some saw a Buddhist monk because they had familiarity with that. Some saw a religious man. Some saw a woman. Some saw a lunatic. Some saw something that their mind could not process. And some saw an escaped prisoner. Perhaps the latter had just seen something about a prison escape somewhere in the world on the news, or had a bad day, or whatever. For those whose minds did not fill in an answer I'd hear from many later on Facebook. The typical comment would be something like, "Wow, I wondered what you were doing when I saw you, I've been thinking about it ever since".

There's a teaching technique in Vedanta called "snake in a rope". It goes like this. Consider that you are walking on a trail in the evening and you see a snake on the trail in front of you. Perhaps you will jump, perhaps you will run, perhaps you will investigate closer. Whatever you do has nothing to do with what you actually saw; the reaction is based upon what you thought you saw. If you run you will never know it was actually a rope that you saw. Even if you don't run and you investigate further to find a rope you still responded to a snake, not a rope. Odds are that you will not investigate further.

We accept the image or the answer that our mind provides to us. It is often wrong. In fact we could say it is always wrong. Take the example above, my experiences with this walk. I am not what can be seen. I am the one that chose to take up the cloths of a monk, the one that chose to take this walk. I'm far deeper than what can be seen, and this same is true for you. Our experience, though, is that we all judge simply based upon appearance, and when this is the case we are always wrong. We only touch the surface.

More deeply, our experience of the world is so limited. We look for what we want to see, we taste what we want to taste, we listen to what we want to hear and we touch what we want to touch. From childhood we have worked hard to avoid what we do not like and to surround ourselves with what we do like. What we find is that we are so full of conditioning, of expectations and desires, we cannot look or listen openly. Our judgment is always operating, whatever experience we take in we immediately grade as "good" or "bad", "pleasant" or "unpleasant". Always the mind is searching its database of prior experience so that it may compare this experience to a prior one. In so doing we are not in this moment any longer, we have moved from a brief "now" experience to the past. We choose our friends, we choose our conversations, and we choose our neighborhood. We even choose our sources of news, which we say tell us what is happening in the world. One watches CNN, another MSNBC, and another FOX. Each advocate a different view of the world so of course when we accept them our view of the world itself is biased, not open. How can we know what this world is when we are closed to it?

When I reached adolescence the Rorschach test was the rage, everywhere it was possible to see these images as shown here. It's called the "inkblot test". Please look, what do you see?



What you see is one thing and someone else looking at the same will see something quite different.

We think that it is our eyes that see, and certainly without eyes the inkblot itself will not be seen. Beyond this, though, we see something in the inkblot. There is nothing different in it for one person versus the other, the inkblot is the same. And yet it is seen differently by one versus another. What is the difference? The difference is only in our own mind, it is our conditioning, our likes and dislikes, our desires... ultimately our memory. This is the only difference. The same is so of the world. Of course this effect is magnified exponentially in the world. The inkblot is small, limited, and there are patterns within it which themselves are limited. Many results will be seen but not unlimited. In the case of the world what we see is expansive, with infinite potential. As a result everyone has a far different perception of what they see.

Yes there is something that we see. Beyond that there will not be agreement. We do not see "the" world; we see "my" world.

When we consider this we may know that we see only according to our own mental conditioning. This is always subject to change based upon our beliefs and experiences, our desires and fears, etc. What we see is our "worldview", not a "world". We think it's the world and call it that but this is obviously not correct. There are 7,000,000,000 people in the world; therefore there are 7,000,000,000 different worlds. Each is quite different from another. Some of these worldviews include monks walking through the neighborhood and some include stalking escaped convicts. Of course we cannot all agree, of course we are constantly in disagreement about what is good and what is bad, about perceived problems and solutions, we don't even see the same world.



The world is not as it appears. I invite you to consider based upon your own experiences, and to see where this leads you.

15 Jan 2014

Om Om Om, now near Julian, California. Today is the 15th day of this cross-country pilgrimage, it's now at 180 miles for this leg and approaching 800 miles since reaching the U.S. in October. We are now at 4,200 feet (1,300 meters) elevation.



Friends who offered me a wonderful meal, a place to sleep, and joyful conversation on the road to Julian

Jesus Christ tells us in Luke, "People believe that I've come to save the world, but I've come to burn the world, and I pray it is already on fire."

There are so many pleasures in the world, so much beauty, if only it could all be beautiful and pleasurable! Christ wants us to know our nature and the nature of the world. We are spirit, not of this world, yet it is so easy to attach to it, to search for pleasure in it, to become ensnared by the nature of the sense objects that the world is made of. Christ further tells us nothing here lasts and by burning it, by showing us a world in flames, he is calling us to turn inward, to find the kingdom of God inside each of us. It is the Lord's call to

serve the highest, not the world.

He asks us to burn our worlds as well.

What is left when the world is on fire, when we may not attach to anything in it? God alone. The world is still seen, but as the divine. It ceases to be a scary place; pleasure is replaced simply by gratitude and love. And everyone we meet, everyone offering us the gift of their company, is seen as the divine.



Tomorrow it appears this ascent will continue, to over 6,000 feet (2,000 meters), then coming down to 300 feet below sea level as we walk through mountains and then the desert. Winds were up over 50 mph today and may continue, it is a warm wind called the Santa Ana.

It's all so beautiful! Let's enjoy it... preferably detached.

Thank you!!



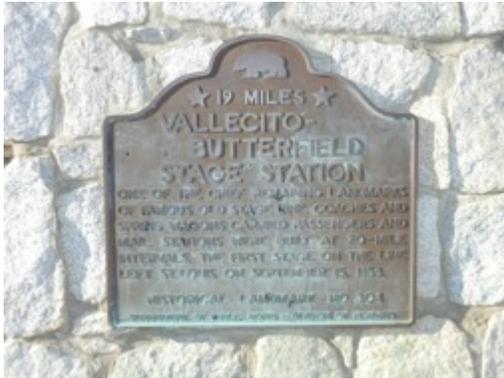
Julian's Yoga Center ☺



Cresting at the peak approaching Julian was this amazing bakery, with fresh apple cider on offer!



Luscious landscape leaving Julian towards the Desert and Salton Sea



Leaves gave way to cactus as I continued eastward from Julian. 16 January.



19 Jan 2014

Om Om Om, about 80 miles (130KM) from my last update, now in Brawley, these pictures are from the vicinity of Julian, both going up the last few miles plus coming down towards the desert.

I have the most amazing job! There's no pay but room and board in a million star hotel is included and the fringes are amazing! I'm able to spend my time in nature, as one with it and God brings out the best in all right in front of me. Oh my, the beautiful smiles and laughs, big waves of greeting, the stories and the generosity! I'm able to experience the absolute best in people, their essence as it shines through. And to tell people, to tell you, how great you truly are! How amazing, the power that you have, that you are! And I'm not required to expect anything in return, I can share this love that pours through and feel it coming back with no restriction, with no society, nothing in the way of it. There is no sales pitch.

Thank you. I am in awe of you.



Left: Typical Brawley landscape: Irrigated farmland surrounding the town center

10. Death and the Desert

"For each and every person, our Lord and Master provides sustenance. Why are you so afraid, O mind? The flamingos fly hundreds of miles, leaving their young ones behind. Who feeds them, and who teaches them to feed themselves? Have you ever thought of this in your mind?"

Guru Nanak, Sri Guru Granth Sahib

My desert crossing began on the 16th of January as I walked down from the near 6,000-foot peak just east of Julian. The lush greenery and green mountain vistas of the mountains quickly gave way to hues of brown as I reached three thousand feet in elevation. The brush continued to thin as I walked east, and from there I was completely beholden to the magic of the desert. I was to walk in the desert for three full months, finally entering the high plains in eastern New Mexico during mid April.

20 Jan 2014

No one is ashamed of the desert, yet it is true that far fewer people come here to visit than the mountains or the seashore. It is hot and dry, and on first glance barren with its leafless trees and sun scorched cactus.

On closer inspection the desert teems with life; all struggling to exist and grow in the challenging environment, and all exhibiting remarkable beauty, even intricate delicacy, through it all. All life originates from the struggle we see here. A tiny desert flower rivals any lush wetlands bloom, the arid landscape remarkable when viewed next to the green mountainside... And when the rains come and the desert blooms, oh my what a sight!

Verily it is hard to say that the desert is more beautiful or less beautiful than this or that for it is beauty itself.

We humans are the same. We are the source of life itself and in our display, our character, we have our wetlands, our mountain splendor and our deserts. Every single part of us is beautiful, we have nothing to be ashamed of, yet we often consider our desert a deserted wasteland and refuse to visit it. We try to hide it away, even from ourselves, and pretend it does not exist.

This desert, though, is as diverse as any. It holds important seeds to our fulfillment as humans, to our becoming complete and divine, as is our nature. We must explore it and know it well, we must love it equally with all parts of our character, we must respect it and help it to develop as we do the rest of us. It is part of the mirror of our soul which when polished lets us see and be our perfect source, our own Self.

Do not be ashamed. We do not live for society, there is no need to conform to society's standards. None. We live for our highest Self only, we are children of God and we are loved by God equally, desert and all. We are already accepted. We have unimaginable power in us, every single one of us. Let us take what we have, all of it, love it, nurture it, and lovingly serve mankind with it. We have nothing to hide. Love all with all, for all.

On the 21st of January I left Brawley, continuing eastward. Although I'd been walking for three weeks by that point and all had gone as smoothly as one could imagine I'd never been more than a day away from a convenience store or a restaurant if it was needed. Up until that point I still had some money to purchase food here and there, and of course water was readily available. Although I carried only the one-liter bottle I had kept it filled most of the time and I was typically eating two to three times per day. Many had offered food or water by this point but I also stopped to resupply from time to time if nothing had been offered.

Now this would all change. I knew all of my commitments would be tested and that I would begin to see what Peace Pilgrim might have experienced on her walks through the desert (or die trying). I knew that the easy days walking through the populated areas of California were behind me and that for the next several months there would be gaps of a day to three or four days between towns, even between facilities where I might get water if needed. Of course I was not thinking about the next few months, I was thinking about the next three days. Yuma, Arizona was sixty-eight miles away, or three full days walking for me, on a mixture of paved, gravel and dirt (sand) roads, and there were no restaurants or shops of any kind prior to Yuma. All of the traffic through the southern desert travels on the interstate, and the interstate is off limits for walking.

I could fast for days if needed, this was not an issue. Peace had talked about this, she had fasted for thirty days prior to starting her first walk, and fasts of two or three days are not significant. I had taken up fasting for a day every one to two weeks while in India and my body had not experienced any issues. Water, however, was a different story. Even four or five hours without water in the desert can cause dehydration to begin. Where would water come from?

I arrived in Brawley on the 19th and stayed in a motel room overnight. I had intended to depart the morning of the 20th but my mind was in disarray. It had been so calm up until this point, I had been fully committed to the walk, but starting the night of the 19th my thoughts uncontrollably turned to the three-day walk ahead and how, or whether, water might come. I thought about all of my commitments, about how I would not ask for water, and my mind was none too happy about any of this. Myriad thoughts and ideas came. I saw myself dying in the desert of dehydration. Thoughts even came about dropping the walk and going back to my old industry to get a job. This was craziness, for I knew that there was nothing worthwhile for me in going back; I knew the benefit of the discoveries I had made but my mind wanted to set all of that aside. It wanted to set aside the discovery of God, the teachings, all of my experiences, all of the introspection. Oddly enough I didn't feel fear but certainly trepidation was heavy in my mind and thoughts had rushed back into my life in full force. The thoughts were very dark.

I chose to stay an extra day, further depleting the little bit of money that I had left, in order to deal with this challenge. There was no way that I was ready to start walking to Yuma on the 20th. During the day of the 20th I pulled out every one of my yogic practices, they had been sidelined with the walk. I practiced seated Meditation for a couple of hours total although I could not say that I achieved Meditation for even a moment. Pranayama, Asanas, Yoga Nidra, plus I rested for hours. The practices gave me great relief as my mind quieted substantially. The tenor of my thoughts remained dark, but I was committed and finally the mind had fallen back in line with my commitment. It raised reservations and concerns, it

still showed me dying in the desert, but I knew full well that would be preferable to going back to the way I had lived before. I also knew that to find inner peace pilgrimage was required. I knew that I had to risk my physical life to find what I knew to be infinitely better. I knew that I must pass this test, and my mind grudgingly went along.

Sleep did not come quickly the night of the 20th, though I had made it through the day without seriously considering cancelling the walk or recanting on my commitments. Finally I slept and experienced dark dreams. On the morning of the 21st I rose late, put in an hour of Pranayama and seated Meditation practice, had breakfast at the motel, and finally pulled myself out of the room at precisely 11AM, checkout time.

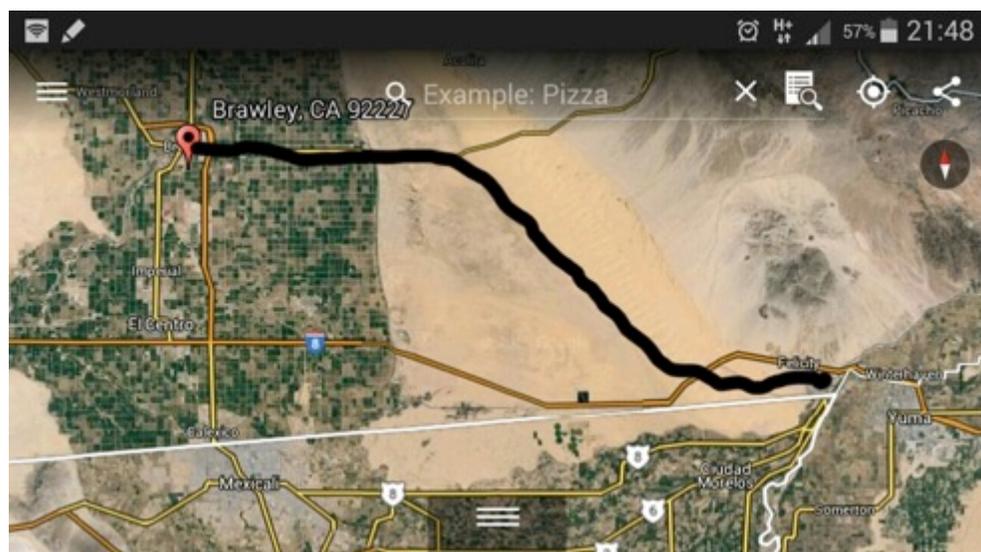
I stood in front of the motel, just able to motivate my feet to walk towards the roadway. It was eerily quiet. The day seemed dark although the sun was out and it was warm already. To my right, westward, was the town center and to my left was that three-day walk through the Imperial desert to Yuma. My mind, which had been reasonably quiet so far that morning, started up again. "OK, if you are not going to carry extra water let's at least go to the market and fill up the pack with apples and oranges for the next few days." No sooner had my mind spoken its piece than a different inner voice came with these words. "Did I not tell you to let the morrow worry for itself?"

This stopped me in my tracks. I knew the words of course, and the source. Jesus the Christ; in a beautiful teaching about how God always provides for us if we just have faith. I had reconnected with Jesus and His teachings in the Ashram over the Christmas holidays; we hosted a five-day long workshop session on Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" as viewed through the teachings of Vedanta, and I had been asked to help with it. I discovered that through the gift of this workshop these key teachings finally resonated with me, and I found Christ in my heart after all of this time. Amazing. And here, now, this morning, Jesus Christ had come to answer my mind, to put it in its place.

My mind folded, it gave up. I recall even hunching my shoulders a bit, like I had been caught at something bad, and my mind said to

that voice, "Yes. OK." I turned left and started to walk. Of course from that moment for much of the next several hours my mind presented the recurring thought, "will water come?"

Brawley is a sprawling farm



Map showing approximate walking route from Brawley, CA to Yuma, AZ.

town on the southern tip of the Salton Sea. Hay and sod are the primary crops grown. There is little rainfall so the entire area is irrigated; an irrigation canal surrounds Brawley extending approximately twelve miles east from the town center. As is shown on this map to the west of the canal is farmland and to the east is desert as far as one can see.

I continued on highway 78 east from town. The terrain was completely flat, and every few hundred feet there were dirt roads crossing the highway. The farms are factory farms, the roads seemed to be used primarily to maneuver the heavy farm equipment around, and on this Sunday the farms were all quiet, no one was on the farm roads and there was very little traffic on the main road. I stopped every hour or so for a drink of water and a short rest; in the early afternoon I ate the remaining food that I had carried.

At two PM or so I noticed a feedlot that I was soon to walk past. I'd never walked past a feedlot before although I had some experience driving past them in the central valley in California years prior. On



those occasions the smell from the ammonia and other noxious compounds (products of the urine and excrement of thousands of cows confined to a very small area) stayed with me for several minutes. I knew that the olfactory experience of walking past them would last for much longer, and more importantly than that these are torture chambers for the poor loving cows. There was not much that I could do other than walk through, and as I did I brought the cows in to my heart and prayed for them. I stopped and talked with them from the roadway, telling them that I was so sorry for their suffering, that the people who did this to them did not understand, and told them that they would not suffer for long and then they would be OK. It took me nearly an hour to pass the first feedlot, and then I smelled the second before I saw it.

I repeated the same routine and again took some time to pray for and talk with the suffering cows. Oh, there is so much misunderstanding in the world; it is certain that we humans would behave dramatically differently if we understood the way that causing the suffering of others, regardless of whether they are people, animals, even plants and inanimate objects, also causes us to suffer. We are not separate from the animals; we are not separate from anything or anyone in this universe. We are here to serve, not to take, and when we take without serving we create so many challenges for ourselves. These challenges go far far deeper than the obvious physical ones. Even without this deeper knowledge I'm quite certain that if more people simply knew the nature of these lovely animals and the level of suffering that they experience in order to feed us we would take steps to improve their lot. This world is as it is, however, and as our starting point we must accept and serve versus reject and fix, for "fixing" the world is what has gotten it in to the mess we see now. Always people are trying to fix, and as discussed everyone has a different idea of what needs to be fixed and how to do it. Let us learn instead how to walk lightly, how to not cause distress to others, how to accept all and to serve lovingly to our best ability. In time we do each learn and we need inspiration and love in order to find our highest nature. We are far better off loving than we are condemning, and in this spirit I shared love with these gentle animals and then continued on my way.

It was nearing four PM and sunset was coming soon. I saw a concrete culvert on my left and stopped to sit for a few minutes and to drink the last of the water. One of the dirt farm roads was immediately in front of me and the culvert was at the intersection of that road with the main road. My mind had finally calmed some about the water situation and amazingly it was not complaining so much. I was in a somewhat dark mood though; this had continued most of the day. I still smiled at all who passed and sent beneficial and loving thoughts to them, but I had suspended waving at the passing drivers. I felt tired and my arm felt heavy, especially after the feedlots and the noise of my mind the prior day.

I sat, drank the last sips, and pulled out my phone to check messages. My mood was lifting somewhat, I was covering a good pace and a beautiful sunset was coming. Then the most amazing thing happened.

I looked up from the phone and saw a white pickup truck stopped directly in front of me. The driver had rolled the passenger window down and he was motioning me over to see him. I smiled at him, said "hello", got up and walked to greet him. I reached out, as did he, and we warmly shook hands in greeting. I noticed he had a plastic bag on the seat next to him; he picked it up and handed it to me. "Wow" I said, "thank you so much!" He said nothing; he was calm and quiet. I said, "thank you" again.

He looked at me and then he pointed to the desert, which started just a few hundred feet ahead. He said, "that's the desert." I agreed, "yes". He then matter-of-factly said, "that desert is going to kill you." I didn't know what to say so I was quiet. Again he said, "that desert is going to kill you", looking at me and pointing towards the desert in front of him.

He seemed to know what he was talking about. I took him to be a local and he was both direct and self-assured in his statement. I said all that I could think to say; "thank you" came forth from my lips once again. Inside though, in my mind, there was complete agreement with what he was telling me. It was as if my mind was saying, "see, I told you so!" And yet here I was holding a plastic shopping bag containing food and drink so perhaps that death would wait for some time.

We said goodbye to each other, I said "thank you" once again, plus "God bless you", and he continued in the direction he had been driving, following the farm road south. I took the bag and sat down on the culvert to take an inventory of the contents of the bag. What I found inside was astonishing.

As you look at this picture you will see a one liter bottle of both mineral water and vitamin water, a banana, three oranges, an apple, a Ziploc baggie full of shelled walnuts, and if you look hard in the bottom of the sack you will see peppermint candies. There were a dozen or so of these in the bottom of the bag, and they were peppermint barrel candies, not mint discs. Perhaps you have had the barrel candy, if not it is softer than the disc, you may either suck on it or chew it easily. Often a combination approach is employed, first sucking it for some time, then chewing a little to break the candy in to a few pieces, then more sucking, etc.



I knew the approach to eat them because these candies were the favorite candy of my childhood, and to my recollection I had not seen them for several years. It was such a sweet and considerate touch to put these particular candies in the bag; in fact all of it was so incredibly kind and sweet.

After I inventoried the contents I sat on the culvert considering what had just happened. Where did he come from? Although I had not seen him drive up he had clearly come from my left, north. I looked up that road as far as I could see and there was nothing remarkable. Specifically I saw no buildings. Where did he go? He continued along the same farm road driving to my right, south, until I lost sight of the truck. I saw no buildings that way either, just farm equipment in the fields. This was a mystery.

How did he know I was here? I could not tell, although I considered that if he had been following me he would have come from behind me. Was this prepared for me? The bag full of food was clearly a gift for someone. I suppose it could have been a gift for someone else, but why? It was a balanced diet for a day,

this was clear. Healthy fruits and nuts with vitamin water of all things. And those candies. It was for me; there was not another viable choice. So how did he know I was there? This event clearly was not random and yet having visited me he didn't proceed along the main road nor did he turn around to return from the direction he had come. I considered that perhaps he or his wife had seen me in town earlier and made up the package, considered that perhaps his wife had sent him off with it to find me. If this were the case he would have come from the main road though, as without doing so he could not have known at which farm road I had stopped. He was literally driving past me, but clearly not at random. He knew exactly where to find me, and he also knew exactly what I was doing (intending to walk through the desert). It was as if he had been guided, both with the preparation of the food and with where I would be when he arrived on the scene. This contemplation also ended in mystery, though there are many clues.

I asked, "how did he know" about so many things and so many possibilities, and I was in awe as there was only one answer for each question. Although the answer was not a surprise it was amazing. What he had brought me was food for the morrow, this cannot be denied. It was not just adequate but perfect. It fit in the empty space I had in the backpack. The words that the day had started with, "did I not tell you to let the morrow worry for itself?" had been fulfilled here, hundreds of feet from passing the irrigation canal. Where did he come from? He came from God, as do we all.

A great weight had been lifted from me and the day became bright though it was sunset. I started laughing and I laughed so hard that I cried and tears streamed down my face. God had been so kind; so quiet, so direct and so considerate through this lovely person. The handshake was strong but not possessive. He wished me well when he left, and that was sincere. I had his full attention while he was with me, he was not thinking of anything other than me. He had not told me about dying in the desert to warn me off, rather he was informing me. It was what I had wanted, after all. I wanted to see the Truth, the essence of life, in all, nothing other than that, and to do that I knew that my sense of individual self must die. I didn't want physical death but had chosen to accept it if needed, in the same way I had chosen to accept all; completely, with gratitude. He was right, of course. I did die in the desert.

From that moment the walk took on a new character. It had given me its worst; it had thrown everything at me with the specter of a terrible death in the desert. Snakes and scorpions, birds of prey, dehydration and starvation had all visited me in my mind and I had imagined all of them to carry me away, and yet I had continued and now I saw the face of love. I was being cradled as a mother cradles her child, none of my struggles had ever been unknown nor I uncared for. I knew that whatever happened it was OK, that I was OK, that you are OK.

There is always unfolding, there is never an end to life nor an end to experience. Faith was building now though, and my experiences held a new vital flavor, they were seen completely differently than they had been in the past. Faith was not complete and absolute, from here it would build and it must build for faith is not magic, it must be gained through deep examination of the inner nature of the world and ourselves, not the outer. It must be gained through our own experience, using our own intuition and our own intellect. We must overcome what holds us back from faith in order to have it, and all that holds us back is inside of us, not without. No one can give us faith. Faith, when gained, changes everything.

I had been shown the inner nature of the world, and this was duly noted with deep awe and gratitude. I still needed to see it, though, time after time, in order to have absolute knowing and trust in this true nature. This need also would be fulfilled, for still the three-month desert crossing lay in front of me.

My Facebook post that evening:

21 Jan 2014

Om Om, about twelve miles east of Brawley, stopped to take a break and God just pulled up in a white pickup truck and offered me Prasadam (an offering of food)!

Thank you for the grace always!

Om Tat Sat



Imperial Dunes, part of the vast Imperial Desert, just south of Death Valley.





Here shown is the final leg of the walk from Brawley to Yuma. "Sidewinder Pass", what the locals call "the End of the World".



"Before you can find God you must lose yourself." ~ Baal Shem Tov

23 Jan 2014

Om Om Om, writing from Yuma, Arizona. California, you are always in my heart, now meeting friends in Arizona.

68 miles from Brawley to Yuma over the past three days, now at 928 miles since October and 328 of those from Pasadena on the first of January. Many more to go, one step at a time!

Peace Pilgrim started her first coast-to-coast peace pilgrimage 1 January, 1953. She walked to San Diego then east

along a roadway that is now replaced by Interstate 8. She would have walked past the Coronado Motor Motel shown here, this roadway is the very small part of the original that she walked. Walking I-8 is not an option, I crossed on state route 78, about 30 miles north give or take. Seeing this hotel and walking this bit of roadway gave me some images of her first walk today, what an inspiration she is! 28 years walking for peace, so dedicated and completely on faith!

Interstates have been such an advance, right? Oh my. They are commensurate with the end of walking from town to town, with the end of many small towns, with commercial trucking which allowed us end local farms in favor of factory farms, and so much more!

Well, the past is but a dream, all we can do is learn from it. And every moment we have a new opportunity to do just that.

Love! Jai (victory to) Peace Pilgrim, Jai Swami Vishnudevananda, Jai Gurudev!

24 Jan 2014

Fun observation from the day. Yesterday as I walked into Yuma I walked across the bridge shown on the right. It's been gussied up since this pic, it's beautiful. Built in 1914 it has a single traffic lane and two pedestrian lanes, you can see them here.

Sidewalks are rare these days, so most of my walking is in the road, facing traffic, as far left as I can be. Usually it's outside the marked lane, sometimes in a bike lane, sometimes the oncoming lane because it cannot be avoided.



I get honked at a fair amount of times, usually accompanied by a big smile and a wave or a peace symbol. A couple of times I've been honked at for another reason, and I can hear the difference in the honk lol. This afternoon was one of those. Completely understandable, a stranger in orange coming your way in your lane after a bad day with his boss yelling at him lol. But really, lighten up! Smile, laugh and smell the roses. They are for you, they made themselves beautiful and fragrant just for you to smell them!!

And let's walk a little more, those pedestrian walkways should make a comeback.

Love always. We have three more miles to a new friend's house and some rest for the night, let's go!

26 Jan 2014

The concepts most of us humans have of creation are perhaps the greatest human folly. First of all, under what remotely possible law does something, anything, come from nothing? A universe? Nothing that we experience is random, clearly there is a creative force. Einstein understood this. And if there is God (or we may say supernatural power, the same), which through any fully logical investigation we find must be so, what is it that creation can come from other than that same God-stuff? What could be better to use than that? And after creation somehow what is used stops being God-stuff or God somehow dies after creating? This "creative" process yet continues, ad-infinitum; it's clearly not over! Under no logical explanation can or would anything cease to be God-stuff; God is constantly evidenced in this continuing creation.



Arizona's Gila River

All is God-stuff, always has been and always will be. It appears to be something else, but this is appearance only.

You are not what you think. Thinking is inside you, you are what makes thought possible. Your power and Love are amazing. The great masters of the east and the west both tell us this.

To quote Sri Swami Sivananda, "Serve. Love, give, purify, meditate, realize." That is realize your Self for what you are and be that through this scientific approach. It is our gift of love from Love, our salvation.

Om Om, our break is over, let's take another step together!

28 Jan 2014

It's a little after 10PM and I was just shown a beautiful place to spend the night. About 22 miles today, what a lovely day walking. Tomorrow morning, God willing, I'll cross the 1,000 mile mark since starting to walk for peace in October. I intend to celebrate with some dates in Dateland.

The desert crossing from California is now at ten days plus and I need to comment on how well supplied I've been kept with food, shelter and especially water. This is an incredible faith building exercise, in God

and also in the goodness of humankind. Yes there is plenty of confusion, misunderstanding and fear in the world yet there is also no lack of love and I experience this every day. Oh my, the glimmer in the eyes when I'm handed a bottle of water is the most magnificent sight!

My sincere and most humble gratitude to God and to you. Hari Om Tat Sat.

God bless you, good night!

11. Silence and Acceptance

"We live in succession, in division, in parts and particles. Meantime, within man, is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Night in the desert is amazing.

Walking along a deserted road in uninhabited desert as day turns to night there is silence. No birds call, no insects cry out, there are no horns honking nor is there glow from city lights. The only sound is the sound of your footsteps and your breath, and when you stop to look at the sight and listen... not a thing answers.

If you sit and just be aware, the night's show unfolds.

First the North Star emerges from the red sky. It is only a pinpoint at the beginning but as you look it brightens for you. Then a few more stars, one by one and two by two, sparkle in to view. The red of the desert sunset peaks and then fades, and as the last of the orange hue fades from the sky a blanket of stars is revealed.

Darkness descends without warning; it does not bide its time. It is as if a new world has come in to view. Your eyes have adjusted, as have your ears. Your awareness expands to encompass the silence and the darkness, and the stars emerge in all of their glory. Where moments ago there was just one now you see the sky is filled with them and there are stars behind stars, behind stars. They seemingly extend on forever; there is no place where a distant star does not add its pinpoint of light to the display.

No moon will rise this night, only the stars. As we walk again the starlight shows the way. Footfall on the sand road, this is the only external sound. Walk silently, calmly, lovingly, and the sound becomes music for the soul. Om with the left foot, Om, with the right; inhale, exhale. Be. This is all that there is this night, moment after moment. Countless galaxies extending out to the furthest reaches of the universe

light up the night. Walk. Keep walking. Breathing with fully open awareness step through this night. Walk until the sun's first rays challenge the supremacy of the stars, then lie down to rest under that tree just ahead.

There are many kinds of silence, starting from external silence leading to silence of our own mind and then finally "Maha Mouna" (absolute Silence, or Truth), both our source and our end which can be known when our mind is silent. The Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads speak volumes of silence as a virtue, as a practice, and as our source. During the ten day Vipassana course I had practiced what is called "noble silence" in the Buddhist tradition. This silence consists of both not speaking and not signaling. In typical mouna practice one will write or make signals to others; in this deeper practice there is no communication whatsoever to be attempted. Of course in these practices we initially "hear" our own mind even louder as the constant thoughts of the monkey mind are no longer covered by outside sound or by attempts to speak. This brings our awareness to our thoughts themselves, and with this awareness along with control of our diet (not just food, everything we feed our mind is our diet also) we may begin to deal with the real source of all of the noise in the world; our mind.

The monkey mind is our greatest enemy; it is the source of all our enemies and our suffering. The twin forces of desire and attachment power its oscillations. In desire we think, "if I had this, or that, I would be happy", so we want the thing that we desire. Desires build upon themselves and grow, until we forget the reason that we desire (to be happy) and desire alone remains. We get, we feel a moment of peace, and then we want more or something else. Desires of avoidance (keep me away from this type of experience) are the same. Attachment is to wanted results and to our body. Any result, even our body, is momentary. We own our effort alone but we want a particular result and this is why we "do". Always we strive for a particular result, in fact in the West we live in a "results oriented" culture and we think all that counts is the result, no matter what we must do in order to get the result wanted. This is completely opposite to the way of silence and peace, and so we feel no peace, no silence.



It is with observance of the Golden Rule that we find a pathway to peace and happiness, not the Rule of Gold that we believe in. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is the way, for in fact we experience exactly what we put out. Only love can make a positive difference in our world, hatred cannot. Unknowingly we constantly sow the seeds of our own discontent; we are always weaving the cloth of this terrible noise in our mind. All of this noise and dis-ease, our lack of peace and this seemingly impossible task of finding quiet, all stem from the same; desire and attachment alone.

In walking through the desert deep silence descended. As each new day came the understanding that God is the all in all grew stronger, and I was given the ability to see this even in what I had previously

thought repulsive. With each passing car, with each smile or wave, with each kindness, each flower or cactus, and each snake or scorpion I began to see the same life force pulsing. Even the wind came to life as I watched. I came to know it as the breath of the desert; just like us it breathes in and breathes out. My remaining desires lost energy and I came to know needlessness. Who was I to know what was needed anyway? I had never been correct about that, through deep contemplation I knew that it was ever my highest Self that had been looking out for me, and that every painful experience had been grace alone. They were all gifts from the silence within the center of my soul calling me home.



I accepted whatever came and found all to be satisfactory; in fact perfect for that moment. A tiny plant struggled to emerge from the sunbaked earth, culminating in a single flower, and it was perfect. Scrawny cactus fought for years simply to exist in this moment; perfect. A jackrabbit scampered across the road and this was perfect. A coyote howled through the night; it was perfect. This disfigured tree, that landscape, the sunset and the sunrise, perfect. This person who has stopped to visit, however they look or whatever they say, they are perfect. What, in fact, could not be perfect?

It was in full and complete acceptance, the gift of pilgrimage through the desert, that silence came. This silence has remained, wherever I walk.

In silence the moments are lived and the days happen. The moments are about nothing other than acceptance and love. Nothing is needed, even the basic needs of the body are provided to the silent pilgrim. There is no need to think of the next meal or the next place that we must reach, for any place is heaven when there is silence. Always there is opportunity to serve in the moment, for we serve through beneficial and loving thought, our sweet words, our gentle actions including our touch and our step. When someone stops to talk we listen, completely and compassionately. When it is our turn to speak we listen as the words form and come forth. When we walk past a tree, we touch it and say hello. When a bird comes we listen to its song and sing back if we get the tune. When the sun rises we greet it, when it sets and the moon replaces it we say hello also the moon and the stars. In silence there are none but



Open road ahead extending as far as we can see



Enjoying a date shake in Dateland, AZ

friends, for no thought otherwise presents itself. In silence there is no better or worse, there is only beauty and its source. In silence there is no suffering, nor a thing to suffer from. In silence life is simply lived and the moment revered.

My Facebook posts were less frequent in February and March, as my silence extended to all activities during this time. These months were a time of regeneration and rebirth as I walked constantly in awe. Also during this time I began frequent use of the word "we" instead of "I" in my posts to signify that we walk together on this pilgrimage, that I take you with me and that I am also with you, in the most "real" sense that can be imagined.

29 Jan 2014

Matthew 5.48: "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father who art in Heaven is perfect." This is Jesus' final statement in the Sermon on the Mount, His closing instruction for His disciples. Yet it is readily dismissed and the common conclusion is that we cannot be perfect so He must have meant that we are to strive for perfection knowing that we can never reach it. Do we even strive for perfection? And what is perfection anyway?



This week I was gifted a visit with a group that calls itself "Children of Light" in Agua Caliente, Arizona. It was a magical visit, such a pleasure and such grace to have received this! Thank you to Darin (Yuma) for the

introduction! This group was founded on the principal of living a life of perfection as Jesus Christ demonstrated and talks of, and from all indications that is exactly what they do.



They shared stories of their founding and I participated in a bit of their program while I was their guest. We prayed together, we ate together, we sang together and we worked together. Their commune, on an eighty-acre parcel in a remote patch of southern Arizona's desert, is a veritable

oasis, in every possible meaning of this term; an oasis from the hot, dry and barren desert in this area and an oasis from the ways of the material world. A short story:

Founded in 1949 when their leader, at the time a Pentecostal pastor, was given a vision to do exactly this, they first roamed the U.S. countryside in a trailer for twelve years until they were told to stop and to take up



residence in this area. Their leader was shown the words, "Agua Caliente" in burning letters (appropriate for this area!) and they set their path to purchase the 80-acre parcel and to start organizing what they call God's commune, with the land and all property owned by and deeded to God. In the vision they were told that there would be plenty of water for their site, yet while agreeing on the purchase of the land they were told that the prior owner had hauled his water in to the property for forty years as there was nothing there. In fact the local Agua Caliente hot springs resort that had been used by the Indians for hundreds of years had by then dried up as a result of local irrigation for farming draining the area's aquifer. None of the local properties have water. Yet upon closing their purchase they had a well test performed and of course there was fresh clear drinking water in ample supply! More than fifty years later there are two wells on the property, one drilled to over 200 feet, the other to 150 feet, and the water tests to a 24 foot level, meaning that under this property, alone, there is boundless water for all of their needs.

This includes watering of the beautiful landscaping, the Olympic sized pool (which is symbolic, "Go off the deep end for Christ") and their beautiful producing date palm orchards. Not only can true Faith move mountains, we see here that it creates a bountiful oasis in the desert!

From the original group of sixteen who founded the group, three original members plus new members and guests continue on welcoming all who visit with a welcome meant for God. Stay an hour or a lifetime, you are welcome to stay as long as you wish. It makes no difference what baggage you carry, you are simply

encouraged to shed all baggage and to live a simple life of Love and Loving in service of the one God. Meals are simple and wonderful, it is an all vegetarian diet as they understand Jesus Christ to have partaken as well. At each meal we say a prayer and sing a hymn written by the group and in their hymnal. In the evenings there is a social gathering with more singing and discussion of God. Truly I heard not a single negative word except for the ways of the world, and these only in the vein of God providing salvation for all. They respect all including respecting all religions, all creeds, in simply Loving. In every way visiting there I experienced and observed Jesus Christ in life through these, his loyal and worthy disciples.

They tell of living on miracles continuously since their founding, and of living in Heaven on Earth here. Indeed, this is what I felt and my heart is now with them as they are in mine, I'll forever carry Children of Light with me and through this the God with infinite names and forms grows ever stronger in my heart.



Olympic sized Pool symbolizing, "Go off the deep end for Christ!"

If you are in Arizona and wish to visit an oasis, if you wish to experience Jesus Christ in the flesh, if you wish to live a life of perfection, never separate from God, by all means do look up Children of Light and visit them. Or stay. Please ask me and I'll happily provide additional information as well!!

Thank you God. Thank you all.

11 Feb 2014

Om Om Om

Sharing photos of memorials from the desert crossing so far.

You might ask why I stop at memorials and take pictures. I've mentioned before that I feel drawn to stop, straighten them up if needed, say a prayer and take a picture. Why?

Well, you see, we don't really understand what death is. We are spirit, neither the body nor the mind are we. We are Life itself, Love itself are we. We continue on our path to learn this, to understand and be the unity that we are. We do not die. Only the body, what Peace Pilgrim called the clay shell and what the Vedas call the food sheath, drops away.

Yet until we realize this unity we have associated with the ego/lower mind and we feel separate. When the body drops off we still feel separate. We experience the higher worlds yet are still on our journey to find unity. This passage is a beautiful part of what is called "life" yet the journey is not over.

The prayer is for safe passage, for the soul to find its unity, its eternal happiness and love, which, in truth, we are.

Please enjoy these pictures of love and celebrate the life of all.

Hari Om Tat Sat





Desert Memorials – Symbols of Love

In early February a friend joined me in Casa Grande, south of Phoenix and we walked together to Tucson. Often friends (all are friends, I do not differentiate with this word) talk about joining me for a day or longer and I always say, "yes, please!" This was the only time so far that someone took the next step and joined.



We experienced amazing magic together every day; we talk often and the week's walk was a moving experience for him.



He has gone deep into a practice to find God in all and his reverence for life has bloomed. There is no replacing pilgrimage, as the unseen support for life and this world

must be experienced free of worldly baggage.



St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery

As we walked south we visited the Casa Grande National Monument (Native American ruins) and St. Anthony's Monastery (Greek Orthodox). Both are beautiful to experience, but neither have anything over the Cow Show that we were treated to on our second day of walking together.

We had left St. Anthony's about noontime with two loaves of bread was offered us there, and the bread, along with some fruit, made a wonderful lunch in the shade of trees at the monastery. We reached an area with several dairy farms a few hours later, and we stopped across from a small one to sit and rest, taking the remaining bread and water to snack on.

As we sat the cows that you see first came to the fence to look at us; then they gathered and concocted a plan. There was one bull and perhaps a dozen cows. As the bull continued to watch us a few of the cows turned from us and walked towards a mound of dirt, perhaps eight feet high, and began to dance and play. They butted each other sweetly, kicked dust up on each other, and they constantly took glances back at us to make sure that they had



The girls; lined up and ready to give us a show!

our attention. More cows joined.

They ran, jumped, mooed, and as far as we could tell they laughed. They looked at us and shook their heads; they ran towards the fence and then back to the mound. It quickly became clear that they were putting on a show for us, and an amazing show it was.

The girls played for perhaps twenty minutes, constantly looking at us to see if we were enjoying their antics. Certainly they could tell that we were, tremendously so.

Finally it was time for us to continue on south towards Tucson, to find a site to rest for the night, and then to meet new friends with whom to share the magic of the desert.

God's grace. Om.





Southeastern Arizona Desert. Walking through the desert from one name to another name the changes are so subtle. These various named deserts are such a beautiful example. "The names are many, but the desert, and the Truth, is One."



Mother cactus protecting her baby so that she may grow big and strong



17 Feb 2014

Om Om Om

We were given a clear sign to turn south, turning right onto Arizona Route 80 at Benson, Arizona. We had just walked a rare remaining portion of the old National Highway, US 80, which was the primary east west highway prior to the Interstates and came to a "road closed" sign. We will now continue through the towns of Tombstone, Bisbee and Douglas which lies in both the US and Mexico, and then God willing we'll continue on New Mexico 80 through high desert and walk towards Deming, NM.

It's a beautiful route, have met great friends so far and the weather is mild. Holy Trinity Monastery in St



David is about an hour ahead; I intend to update more from there.

Taking a short break under the shade of a big tree. Perhaps pecan, there are many here, I don't know types of trees, only God in them. It's beautiful anyway, and it's doing an amazing job of keeping me in the shade! Do you recognize its name?

OK, let's share this orange that a friend gave us this morning and then continue to the monastery on this wonderful day.



Have you ever seen a turtle pose and smile? Now you have!



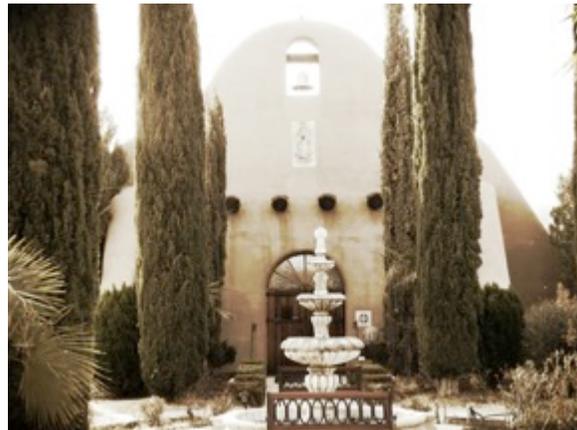
19 Feb 2014

These are pictures from the Holy Trinity Monastery in St David, Arizona. The Monastery is of the Oliveto sect of the Benedictine Catholic order; the sect was founded by St Bernard Tolomei in the 14th century.

Beautiful; a loving experience here, of course. It's a small and simple community and retreat.

And lest we be confused with the sects (the normal state of the mind!), of course the monastery honors the one God, Love, in all. All separations, all sects, are illusion, play things of the mind. We are that Love, nothing less than that. All Ashrams, all Monasteries, all paths and all of nature honor this Love.

Now let's start today's walk to Tombstone!



Wonderful fresh monk-baked bread from Holy Trinity, filled with love (and fresh dates)





ON THIS SPOT THE EARP AND CLANTON FACTIONS MET ON OCTOBER 26, 1881, TO SETTLE THE WEST'S MOST FAMOUS FEUD. DO HOLLIDAY STOPPED ON FREMONT STREET A FEW FEET FROM WHERE INDICATED HERE. FRANK AND TOM McLAURY FINALLY DROPPED. ON FREMONT STREET, BILLY CLANTON DIED WHERE HE STOOD. VIRGIL AND MORGAN EARP WERE WOUNDED.

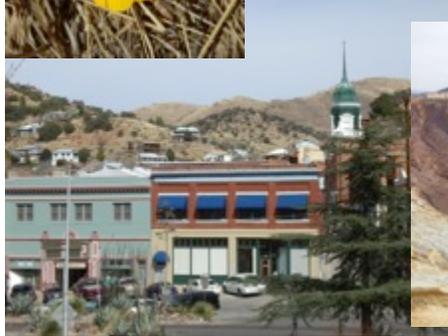
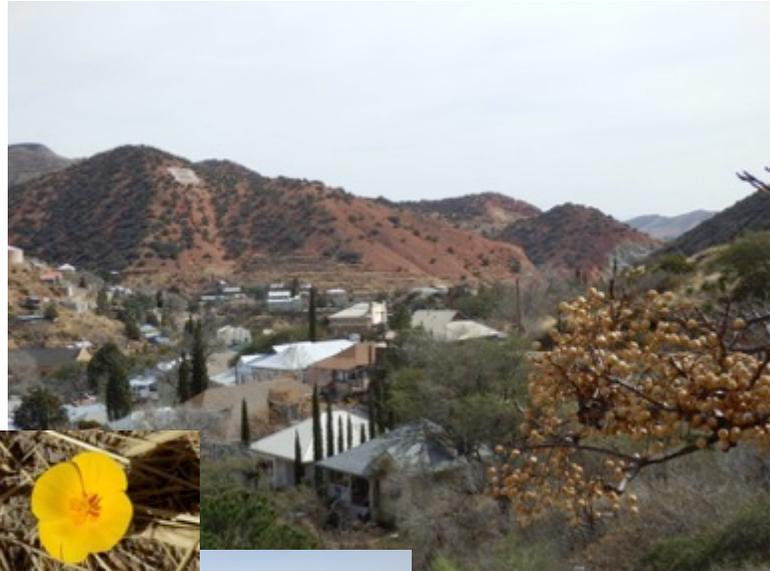


Tombstone, AZ is said to have once had more churches per capita than any other town in the USA

23 Feb 2014

To and from Bisbee, Arizona. I'm told it's supposed to be a magic place with all of the copper in the mountains there. Perhaps, it's certainly a lovely setting... mother nature smiles beautifully on Bisbee.

About magic, well this all is magic! A couple of fun examples for you... those flowers! As I walk I'm always aware of landscapes and also of the small. There is incredible delicacy and beauty to be observed in the small. Flowers are observed so often, what a loving gift flowers are! Yet I was aware coming out of Bisbee that I had not seen any for a couple of days. When this awareness came I turned to my left, and there directly in front of me was this simple bouquet! And do you know what? I'm pretty certain that I did not take a picture of it; that I simply enjoyed it and walked on. Yet in review of pictures from Bisbee, there it is! Magic lol.



And then there is Belle Star. She's magic, just look at her! Walking out of Bisbee I met a man riding a bicycle. He stopped, gave me a very curious look (I know that look well lol!) And after we talked for a few minutes he suggested I meet Belle and talk with her, that her place was another six or seven miles ahead. And so it was. Perhaps we'll talk more about her soon.

Now in Douglas, on the Mexico border. I'm crossing shortly to Agua Prieta where I intend to spend the day in quiet prayer for peace. There's a special kind of confusion in residence along the U.S. Mexico border.

Love you. Now let's go together and share our peace. And enjoy the magic show.

Hari Om Tat Sat

New friends, oh my the animals are loved so deeply! Humans too, but never forget that God is in all!

This is so sweet, and I love you so much, I hope you enjoy, enjoy all. God bless.



24 Feb 2014

Today I crossed the border from Douglas, Az to Agua Prieta, Mexico and spent the day walking the town and in prayer for peace. There's been much violence,



flaring up again recently, related to the drug trade over the border with the USA.

What's a border? Is it anything more than a line on a map? Please contemplate this, it will help to understand the folly of the mind.

Swami Vishnu-Devananda is a great inspiration and spent much of his energy working for peace. He speaks quite lucidly about this folly in this beautiful video, please enjoy it if you can find 30 minutes!



The prayer I'm saying is this, "blessings and love for all. Please help those involved in the violence and those who are struggling by clearing away their veils of ignorance. Let them experience the deep Peace and Love that is in their center. Let them become Peacemakers instead of Peace breakers. Om. Amen." Please join with this prayer if you feel it.

The experience? The people I met are heart forward and loving. So many smiles and waves... I was greeted with open arms and some curiosity as

you might imagine. My Spanish is limited to words like, "amigo, la pax, ola"... lol many with good English wanted to talk though. I was told a few times to be careful, but honestly observed nothing to be careful about. The streets were quiet; it is Sunday, yet it was very quiet. The very nice houses had fences topped off with razor wire... but there were only a few of these. Yes, the more we have the more we have to be afraid of losing!

I didn't observe fear with the people I met,



though there is an air of some concern.

It was a joy to be there and share. Much love was felt, much shared. It was fun hearing music on the streets! It was fun seeing so many smiling faces, and the beautiful look of surprise. Home. Always home. Thank you God.

Yet now I cry, it's just that confusion is so deep. That border wall is over a thousand miles! To protect a line drawn on a map. By politicians. Oh my. And the results, well perhaps some people feel safer but honestly I feel fear north of the border, not south of it! It's just silliness, honestly.



USA – Mexico border fence

Meaningless silliness, a way to keep the people focused on the drama around us instead of finding peace inside. Honestly, this is backwards.

Let's together send love now. If you can find a few moments now to close your eyes and feel love, let it vibrate, send it to those that need it, it will truly make a difference. And the prayer if you can.

Thank you so much. God bless. Love you.



25 Feb 2014

I must tell you a story here about the modern Belle Starr, a character of great significance whom I've had the opportunity to spend a little time with. This is a story within the story that we call the world, and it's a particularly enigmatic one.

A few days ago I was walking southeast from Bisbee towards Douglas, still not certain why I was routed this direction though it was pretty clear that spending a prayer day in Agua Prieta was least part of the plan. The walk was downhill with the wind at my back and I was being carried at a very rapid pace. A couple of hours outside of Bisbee I saw a bicycle and rider coming my way. I



waved and said hello as Rick approached and his response was quite interesting, you might call it odd. He had no idea what he was looking at and was more than a little upset at being interrupted in this way. He asked what I was doing there. I told him walking coast to coast for peace, which elicited even more confusion. I then told him that he is spirit as he tried to follow my words lol, and after a couple of



minutes of our strange conversation he suggested that there was a woman six to seven miles ahead that I should meet, he said she would like to talk with me. Fun. I agreed at once, we exchanged details, and went our ways. Rick towards Bisbee for the night, and me towards Belle.

In a couple of more hours being carried at a rapid pace I arrived at Silverado Ranch, Belle's historic abode. It was 8PM and she had retired but in a moment Scott welcomed me. He prepared a place for me to roll out the sleeping bag for the night. He offered me food and water, a habit he continued every time I saw him that day and again when I came back yesterday afternoon. I had told Belle that, God willing, I'd stop back to see her again after the day in Mexico.



*Belle's story started in northern Kentucky where she grew up and remained until aged 65. She is 3/4 Native American, from 3 tribes on both sides of the family. Married three times and never happily for more than a year or so she played many characters. She sang and acted professionally, traveled the world, played a mean piano, had one child (girl) and served a five year stint as a DEA agent (!) along with much more. She says she did **everything**. Perhaps.*

At 45 she legally changed her name to Belle Starr after her distant relative the outlaw and fellow majority native American Belle Starr of Missouri, who turned to the notorious side of this story after her twin brother left the body in a civil war ambush. Belle was finally shot in the back after a robbery and left her body at age 42. The modern Belle learned how much she had in common with her predecessor including the outlaw streak. No banks robbed that she told me of but she has hosted and fed as many as 50 illegal aliens at a time as they came north through her ranch.

When she turned 65 she sold some of her Kentucky property and gave the rest to her daughter. She took her million from the sale and purchased the Silverado Ranch property, a 40 acre parcel of the historic original Box Hook Ranch, a 40,000 acre ranch which was part of the Spanish land grant when the Arizona territory came to being. Her land includes the original early 19th century ranch house, shown here, along with other original out buildings.

Belle's dream was to take this land and make it an oasis from the world, an escape from daily



problems with the character of the old west. Her vision was and is to help others in their spiritual growth. She is in touch with her center and shares this in the way she cares deeply for all. Her own belief system is a cross between Native American and western, but what is not mixed is her deep love and respect for all of nature.



She built the oasis and hosted campers and travelers on a donation basis only. With as many as 18 prize horses, burros, birds, fishpond, flower gardens, her wolf Lobo, bees and butterflies it became a beautiful respite from the daily grind.



Yet the story took a dark turn as she experienced some of the worst the world show could dish out. Some hands maneuvered away prize possessions, her health turned bad and the property got out of control for her.

When I met Belle first she told me that she has MS and her body will get no better. Yet her mind is a work of art, her love and the fun outlaw streak very much intact. She loves life and has no fear. She still has her dream and is hard at work to bring the property back. She and Scott are making good progress at this in fact, but help is needed.

I'm writing and sharing this because if you have a little time and you like to work hard odds are that devoting some of your time to this project would be a life changing and awakening experience! Seriously. It's Karma Yoga for sure. Money is tight but mostly what is needed is help, as in organizational and labor. I cannot imagine that you would regret a decision to call Belle to see how you might chip in!



Her goal now is to bring the property up to make it a loving retreat, with spiritually uplifting weekend events like concerts, native American healers, shamans, yoga practice, etc. She's committed and focused. They've put in three full RV hookups, are sprucing up the cabins, yet there is a long list ahead. Goals include more cabins and a 12' x 24' yoga/event hall on the back of the property and putting in an organic garden, offering healthy vegetarian food.

Scott has construction background and expertise. Help need includes construction supplies, tools, gardener, etc.

There's much more. Belle is a great storyteller! God willing I'll be back to spend some time after getting to the east coast.

1 Mar 2014

We are now in Rodeo, NM, just across the border from Arizona.

Here's a quick story to share with you today. As you know I carry one liter of water. I drink water as needed while walking and my experience has been that when the water bottle is empty it does not stay so for long. So far it's not remained empty for longer than two hours.

As I walked in to the outskirts of Rodeo on Thursday night I finished the last of the water. The weather was changing with winds picking up and clouds emerging over the mountains, making for another beautiful sunset, our first in New Mexico. The forecast called for stronger winds Friday and Saturday with rain on Saturday.

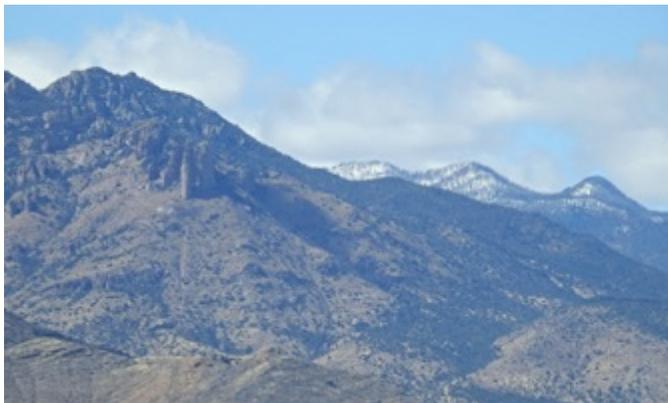
About ten minutes after finishing the water a car rolled past, turned around and pulled up next to me. The driver rolled down his window and said, "what the heck are you doing out here?" or something close to that. Five minutes after that I was in the lovely home of Marge and her son Rod with the offer of hot food, a comfortable bed, shelter from the bad weather passing through and communion with wonderful friends. I could not have imagined a better scenario, thank you God, thank you Marge and Rod!! I'm sitting here now at the computer writing this update and looking out at the dust being blown about. A lovely sight from this side of the window!



God willing we'll continue eastward tomorrow AM. The forecast is for the storm to pass later today. We'll take route 9 towards Columbus and then Deming, likely towards Albuquerque from there.

I'm online today, odds are I'll be out of range for the next five days give or take until Deming; I intend to post an update with pictures then. And to swap over to new shoes that are waiting for me there.

Thank you God, thank you all!! Love you so much. Let's enjoy this storm together and put those walking shoes on in the morning.





8 Mar 2014

Writing from Deming, NM. I've rested the body here for a day and shortly we begin the ten or so day leg to Albuquerque.

We've now completed a bit over 1,500 miles as well as the first pair of shoes, which are now resting in a trash bin in front of the Walmart in Deming. Thanks to a dear friend you see the second pair now ready to jaunt. Thank you God! Thank you all!

Friend Brian Beker drove through this just completed route, NM Route 9 from Rodeo east with wonder dog Roo. He calls it desolate, perhaps the most difficult segment in the U.S. Indeed! I don't know about the most difficult but desolate is an appropriate word. And yet remarkable is also a good word for it.

The trek from Rodeo was a bit over 100 miles, or five days at the typical pace of 20 miles per day. Animas, a one stop sign town shown here, was one day away where Rita and Charles offered me a lovely oatmeal breakfast and an incredible serenade.

From Animas for the next four days the only signs of civilization were two ghost towns, the random beer bottle by the side of the road and the incessant border patrol vehicles passing by every half hour or so. In much of the world we see the sign of civilization encroaching. Here we see it receding, having given up the ghost as it were, in favor of nature's stark reign.

The only place I can recall that is as quiet and peaceful as this is Ashram. Indeed this is nature's Ashram. The occasional song of the insects and birds, the beautiful howl of the Coyote at night along with that occasional vehicle provide the only hauntingly beautiful refrain in this expanse of high desert.

From Animas I fasted for nearly three days though water was provided regularly through loving hands. The mind and body complained a bit the first day but then fell in with the rhythm of this. The fast suited the terrain; they went hand in hand in the experience. There is no question that my mind did consider the possibility of flagging down a border patrol officer to ask for food yet did so quietly and accepted the cardinal rule to take only what is offered, regardless of consequences. Acceptance. And when on the fourth day a cherry coke and a handful of pastries were indeed offered it was sweet on several levels.

This desolation is a beautiful allegory to St John of the Cross' life work, "Dark Night of the Soul". In this amazing book he tells of his path of achieving union. He describes passing through successive layers of desolation in the individual soul as room is made for the Unity to fill the chalice of the Self. Desolation is experienced when taking the succeeding step. The step is always taken in faith, faith alone allows for it. We walk into the desolation, experience the deep dark night of emptiness, and observe the sweetness of fullness that begins to take its place, until no layers of untruth remain, only fullness.

This desolate segment was such a dark night.

This walk is perfect for a baby renunciate like me. Faith, deep unrequited faith, is to be cultivated. It cannot come on its own. I can say now that we are each given the tools, experiences and teachers we need as we evolve toward our eternal beginning, yet we must put them together. We must take the

successive steps; we must walk in to the dark night in spite of what the mind tells us, with only faith that it will end up all right. We must completely trust the unseen, the deepest Self, to take us over in order to be free. This process, like all, is completed one step after the other.

With each step faith builds. With each step Love for you grows. With each step this continuous prayer for Peace, peace of every kind, becomes yet deeper.

Thank you God, thank you all, I love you so much. Thank you for joining this journey, for touching my life in this way, for joining my heart. I am in yours, with you, always.

This desolate and dark night is now over forever, there is another ahead yet today is a beautiful sunny day as we put on these cool new walking shoes and start towards Albuquerque. Let's go!

10 Mar 2014

Now in Hatch, NM. All good.

Here's a question for you. About two weeks ago in Benson, Arizona I met a young man who was driving back to El Paso, Texas, where he is based. He's in the army but that's not so relevant.

We talked a bit and then he asked me, "How long does it take to become comfortable with yourself?" As in, "for me to be comfortable with myself..."

What a great question!! How would you answer this? If you would like I'll come in a little later with how I answered.

Om Om, Love from under millions and millions and millions of stars. What a beautiful night!! Close your eyes and enjoy it with me

Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji saw this post and answered in his direct style, "WHEN YOU KNOW YOURSELF FULLY."





Southern NM vistas and friends

12. Faith, The Magic Water Bottle and The Nature of the World

"The Lord showed me, so that I did see clearly, that He did not dwell in these temples which men had commanded and set up, but in people's hearts . . . His people were His temple, and He dwelt in them."

George Fox

We have talked of the world, that it is not at all as it appears and that it appears quite different to each person. What, then, is the true nature of the world? What is faith and what can I have faith in? If we want to know what life is, what "I" am, these questions should be near the top of our list.

As we have discussed I came to know silence while walking the desert in surrender to whatever happens. Through being silent inside I began to observe more broadly and openly. Silence is emptiness, it comes through emptying ones self of ones self, including all of the desires, notions and beliefs. I'd like here to share a beautiful quote from Thich Nhat Hanh about listening, which speaks to this:

"There is a Bodhisattva, whose name is Avalokitesvara, in Vietnamise we call her Quan The Âm, in Chinese, Quan Yin. It means: 'Listening deeply to the sound of the cries of the world'. And listening deeply is the practice of mindfulness. But if you are full of pain, full of anxiety, full of projections, and especially full of prejudices, full of ideas and notions, it may be very difficult for you to practice deep listening. You are too full. And that is why to practice in order for you to have space, to have freedom within, to have some joy within is very important for deep listening. Avalokitesvara, Quan Yin, she practices deep listening to herself, and to the world, outside. She practices touching with her ears."

This listening, or as he so beautifully states, "touching with the ears", is observing openly, with full and complete acceptance, without personal belief obstructing how this or that result should be.

With silence, without the incessant noise of our own mind churning out its desires and judgments one after another, listening happens and answers can be heard and observed. It is in this state, with acceptance, openness and desire to serve, that I began to observe the true nature of the world.

I'd like to share these observations with you now; I call them "Faith and the Magic Water Bottle".

18 Mar 2014

Faith

There are rules for this pilgrimage, rules that became clear first as I walked in India and then from Monterey to San Diego. My intent was to walk in the spirit of Peace Pilgrim, with no visible support and in complete faith. Faith in God and in mankind, as she elucidated so beautifully. Yet initially I carried a 30-pound pack and went through the process of whittling that down to what I carry today; a sleeping bag, razor and shaver, toothpaste and brush, a bar of soap, an extra dhoti and pair of socks, a jacket, a phone and camera, a headlamp. Add perhaps some food for the day and a one-liter bottle of water. It's now a manageable ten pounds total including the water. Still it is more than Peace carried, still her depth of faith is my goal.

I walk in faith that whatever I do not carry will be provided, that when the water runs out I'll be shown more or it will be handed to me through other's hands, or that whatever happens is in accordance with God's will and is therefore just fine. One of the rules is that I do not ask for water, food or shelter, they must be offered.

It is now nearly two months that I've walked through the desert, nearly 1,000 miles. Often towns and stores or shops are days apart from each other. Mostly I've walked quiet back roads, many not paved and areas where cars are hours apart, yet through all of this time, whenever the bottle of water has run out it has not remained empty for more than two hours. Not once.

Often it is filled before it runs out, yet when it does run out it does not stay empty. I don't guzzle water yet I also don't conserve it, when the body is thirsty I drink.

There are many amazing stories about this, and how it is refilled. Actually all are amazing yet none surprising. I recently shared that, when walking in to Rodeo, NM Rod stopped to offer me a warm meal and a loving place to ride out the storm five minutes after I took the last sip.

Here's another fun one. It was cool walking from the town of Truth or Consequences north and I was not drinking much. Late in the day a state patrolman stopped and asked if I needed anything; I still had half a bottle of water and said "no thanks". He offered to give me a ride for 20 miles to get more water yet we both knew that would be cheating, so we chatted for a moment, wished each other well, and he went on his way. It was a long day of walking, nearly 27 miles, and I slept by the road. The following morning I prepared, had some water and started out. A few hours later I drank the last of the water, still two hours or so from the rest stop and more.

Literally five minutes after this I heard a car behind me pull over to the shoulder. I looked and walked back to the couple that had stopped. They offered me a ride and I said no thank you, explained I was walking in prayer for peace. The lady said, "wait", looked around a moment and then handed me a bottle of this wonderful strawberry infused water from Mexico. We said our greetings and all continued on. I laughed out a big "thank you God" as they drove away.



Two months, 1,000 miles in the desert with a never-ending one-liter bottle of water.

This is part of the magic of this journey. In fact the water comes because of faith and surrender, acceptance of whatever happens. I'm not special in any way; certainly I am no different from anyone else. Yet faith itself is, as is that which we may have faith in, our highest Self.

The word faith is used often yet achieved rarely. It is absolute trust, not mere belief; It is beyond the mind although it requires the mind's trust. It is not different than surrender to the supernatural power that is both within us and all around us.

We learn quickly that we cannot have faith in another person or thing. As a baby we have faith yet one day our cries do not bring us food and we begin learn the uncertainty and impermanence the world. In turn we are both rewarded and then disappointed when we have faith in another person. Faith can only grow when it is always rewarded, thus it does not grow and we believe that there is nothing that one can have faith in.

Then we are told to have faith in God. We've learned not to have faith in other humans so we are to have faith in something outside of us that we do not know, and of course we are not able to do this. Perhaps we say, "yes I have faith... in Jesus, in Buddha, in Krishna, in Guru", yet this is not the case for while we say one thing the wandering mind continues to look elsewhere for solutions to its perceived problems. Our words are simply ego putting up a defensive shield. Without absolute proof that a thing can be trusted the mind will not do it. It will not allow blind faith!

So, we live without faith, in fear and feeling alone. And we plan so that we'll never run out of water... or anything else. We feel that there is nothing that we can trust completely.

Yet there is; it is inside each of us. Our own highest Self. It is the quiet place with no fear, the place that provides all, which is source of all that we need, the hands that always hold us. Faith in this place is always rewarded, yet without faith it is not known. So what to do?

Teachers say simply, "trust in your own Self". This trust, faith, is well placed. It must be learned, developed. We can develop this faith in small steps or big; once developed this faith changes all. We are left amazed yet not surprised to see how the world truly works, we are allowed to know our unity, we are shown the Love which is and we become fearless.

Each of us may develop this faith, yet we must do it ourselves. We are given the tools we need and the experience we need; we must put them together.

As said before this walk is an amazing faith building exercise. It's not possible to walk this way without seeing clues to the ways of the world, the true laws of nature. You are with me and also always welcome to join for part or all of it and be amazed! There are also many other ways to build this same faith without walking, though some sort of pilgrimage is required. It is our gift, our salvation, waiting for us.

Hari Om Tat Sat. Thank you God for the tools and support, for your Love, guidance and teaching. Thank you all for your support and joining this pilgrimage!



19 Mar 2014

Let us love Love itself.

A bountiful prayer, beautiful desire

To take us home.

There is no need for an object

Signs of Love abound.

Every being a sign of Love,

The budding branch in spring

Last snow flake as it falls

Sun rising moon setting

Stars filling the sky above

The flower blooming,

The blade of grass

All signs of Love

Lovers holding hands

Sharing a kiss goodbye

A dance

Each melody

Bird's song of morning

Coyote cry for the night

Signs of Love

A memorial of Love

Cross by the road

Even the sorrow of lost Love

Never lost, merely misplaced for a time.



To re-emerge and turn towards Love

That it may perfect itself

Let us love

Love itself.

Jai Gurudev

Thank you God

21 Mar 2014



On Faith, part two.

If you read the post about faith, the water bottle picture, please continue. If not I suggest you might want to read that first, it's on my timeline. Here's another "never ending water bottle story", from today! How fun, so soon lol.

I walked NM 116 north to Belen, 18 miles today. It was warmer and I was drinking more water. I'd walked 26 miles yesterday and the body wanted a few breaks along the way. No problem.

The route is mostly farmland, in the Rio Grande valley, irrigated, lovely.

It was cold last night and the water froze like a rock so I didn't drink the first couple of hours. I met a young man at that point; he's preparing for a kind of iron man challenge... a 27 mile run through the desert with a 40 pound pack. Phew. No matter, of course he can do it, we had a cool talk about the walk, about the power that he has, that he can do anything as long as he visualizes it and takes it "one step at a time". Wonderful moments.

He offered some water yet the bottle was full. It was melting though, so I drank some of mine, perhaps a third or half.

As I continued through a couple of small farm villages a four people stopped and we visited, again a wonderful chat, quite moving all around. They offered water and I said, "thank you so much but I should be fine to get Belen with this." I'd walked five miles, thirteen to go.

Another mile or so and a Catholic priest stopped, we had a lovely visit. He's the pastor at a few of the village churches in the area. He offered me a ride to Belen. "No thanks."

As I continued it got hotter and the body wanted water. OK, cool, I drank. And at mile 12, six more to go (two and a half to three hours walking... remember the comment about the bottle never being empty more than two hours), I stopped and finished the last of the water in the bottle.

Hmmm. Well, said the mind (quietly), "you had two chances to take more water and did not, now look." "Relax, said I, water will come." Someone would stop or there would a shop where more would be.

I continued. Every now and then a thought crossed about water, the mind being a little impatient but it was not a big deal... The body was well hydrated and not really thirsty.

I passed mile marker 15, a bit more than one hour. No one had stopped since the priest, a few hours back. All good though, but of course the mind reminded me. "It's been over an hour." "Relax".

One mile later, not quite one and a half hours now, I saw a shady area and stopped to take a break. I sat about ten feet off the road, on the sleeping bag roll, cross legged, facing the roadway, and took out my phone. I powered up and checked messages. There were a couples of messages regarding an Ashram I intend to visit north of Santa Fe. I was responding to these and after about fifteen minutes not one but two police cars pulled up.



I smiled. The orange. It happens, we have talked about this before. Sometimes people see the Orange and their mind says, "escaped convict" instead of "monk". It's cool, I'm not in a hurry and I have lovely visits with police officers when they come to check me out.

The policemen both seemed very concerned, unusually so, and they told me why. It seems that the person calling thought my face was orange

too (that's pretty much the color of the tan with this body, always has been). The caller told the police that some vandals had visited me and that I'd been painted orange from head to toe!! Oh my. Well in a way I have been lol.

I was trying to have a friendly chat with the officers, explained that I walk in prayer for peace, I'm a monk, I'm walking coast-to-coast, etc. This time, apparently because of the spray paint comment, they had made a call to have me physically checked out. Perhaps mentally also 😊. Oh my.

"That's not necessary, I feel fine", I smiled. The senior officer of the two said, "Well that's good but I've already made the call. You can decline with them but not me." Hmmm. We kept chatting.

A few minutes later the ambulance came. Now there were two police plus their cars on my left plus the ambulance, driver and assistant on my right. I was still sitting in Meditation posture with my phone in hand trying to finish my email. This was quite a picture I'm sure; many people were checking us out as they drove past.

The ambulance driver walked up, putting on his rubber gloves, as did his assistant, and he told me that he had been called to check me out. I said, "I'm fine. The officer here says I can decline, I'm declining". "OK, first let me ask you a series of questions." "But I don't want to answer a series of questions please, I told you I'm fine, I'm just declining this checkup. I don't need it, it's a waste", I smiled. "If you don't answer these questions I'm taking you to the hospital." At this point the driver took his radio and called the dispatch, giving them a code which I assumed meant that he might have to take me against my will.

Of course I didn't wish to be a problem for anyone, so I told him of course I would answer whatever questions he had.

"What day of the week is it?" Hmmm. I must tell you, that's not something I normally pay a moment's attention to! Yet, it came. I remembered the day from the emails that I had just been answering. "Thursday". Phew. "Who is the president of the U.S.?" Oh my, I really don't have any reason to care about that, I had not had a thought about the president of the U.S. for well over a year. Thank goodness one of the policeman asked me a question about why I became a monk, so I dealt with that while I was fumbling through possible answers inside for the ambulance driver. Clinton? Nope. Bush? Oh heck no, I said to my mind. Finally it was time to go back to the medic and answer him. "Barack Obama". Wow, thank you God! Then they got easier. "How many quarters in a dollar?" "Four." Aha. "Is Mickey Mouse a cat or a dog?" Laughed out, "how about mouse?" Actually I could have answered an illusion and been technically correct, but he was waving that "trip to the hospital" card so I chose to answer in this way.

I passed, apparently. The driver called dispatch and gave them another code which must have meant that I passed and was not coming to the hospital. Conversation about the walk ensued. The ambulance driver was particularly interested; the rubber gloves came off and the mood turned collegial. We talked more, perhaps a seed or two were planted, paperwork was filled out, hands were shaken, smiles and laughter exchanged. "God bless you" was also shared.

Then, just as all were packing up to leave, the medic asked, "are you getting enough water?" "yes". A policeman asked, "do you have enough now?" I said, "no, I just ran out a little bit ago."

Shortly after there were three bottles of water in front of me, plus two granola bars and a can of V8 juice.

I looked. For a few moments. Then it hit me and I could not help it, I cracked up laughing. The ambulance had left. I took this picture of the police cars, they left a few moments later. I got up, filled up the magic bottle, put the V8 and the bars in the pack, took a big sip of water from the extra bottle, and continued walking north.

One hour and fifty minutes, the magic water bottle was full again.

Know the Divine at your center and we know the very source of all humor, of laughter itself. Not just Love in the soft sense, but Love in every sense, including the Love to laugh. At anything. Life is. Always. There is nothing here that can hurt us.



28 Mar 2014

Om Om Om

For the past week we have experienced the joy of visiting with friends,



Ashrams and Monasteries in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Taos and surrounds.



The pictures are more or less in order of the communion. After walking to Belen, just south of Albuquerque, we stayed a day in Bernalillo with Padmini Mataji, then on to...

Santa Fe for sightseeing and a communion with friends that evening, hosted by dearest Rose Mataji and her sweet loving puppies. We also visited KSK Buddhist temple (Tibetan tradition) and met with the

resident Lama there.

Espanola to visit the Ashram there. Siri Yogi Bhajan is the guru of this holy Ashram and the beautiful Sikh community which has grown up around it. We joined friends Gurujot Maharaj and Gian Mataji for an incredible Sunday service together and then the



Sadhana early the following morning. The community and the services are so full of Life and Love, do visit in person when you can. We also toured the compound of Yogi Bhajan, and later the Sanctuario in Chimayo. Amazing place, the home of miracles and an annual pilgrimage.



Then on to Taos and a beautiful quiet day with Hannuman at Sri Neem Karoli Baba's Ashram, joining the daily Arati and other celebrations. And lots of Chai lol.



From Taos we returned to Santa Fe and Zazen practice at Upaya Zen Buddhist center and a visit with Brian Maharaj and Rooki, who were driving cross country, hosted by Rose Mataji and her babies. We also stopped by the Loretto Chapel, home of the amazing two story fastener-less spiral staircase.

Then back to Bernalillo to meet Padmini Mataji and finally a day walking through Albuquerque, from northwest to east, then south through the "war zone" and then downtown. Met some amazing people along the way, including Tim of Tim's Place. Tim dreamed of having a wonderful restaurant and now he does. A day of prayer for peace, shared in walking through the center of much of the violence in Albuquerque. A day



of Love, as all.



Today we will continue on. Afternoon train to Belen then we resume the walk, one step at a time.

I thank God for this opportunity to enjoy communion with friends and to honor all the various paths through participating in the various services and prayer. And I thank our friends for hosting me, for feeding me, sheltering me, for the love and caring. This is truly an amazing place with all of the holy places of so many paths, and people who honor them all. Thank you God, thank you all!



Respect all, Honor all, Love all, Serve all. Hari Om Tat Sat.

Now let's take that next step

together

So, what is the world? Peace Pilgrim calls the world a mirror, she says that if you smile at the world it smiles back at you, and she further says that she always smiles.

Amazingly, this is it. The world is also the golden rule. It does unto us as we do unto it, and we must go first. I had learned that there was nothing dangerous about the world as long as we pour love into it and accept whatever comes. This, my dear friend, is one of the most important lessons that I could possibly share with you. There is nothing bad about the world; it is a perfect mirror of what we put in to it. It is also a "pug named Louie", as I'll share with you a little later. The world is ours to serve (serve, not fix), it is ours to enjoy, it is ours to love. When we love it, when we love all in it, it shows itself as lustrous,

bright and amazing. When we expect something from it, anything, the world shows itself as foreboding. Drop all of your expectations and accept whatever comes for whatever comes will be magical. There is no need for fear my dear.

We can look at this also in a different way.

My consistent observation through pilgrimage is this. I serve what I can serve, however I can serve, in the knowledge that simple service is every bit as important as complex service, and further with knowledge of the power of positive thought. What is my service? Prayer, a wave and a smile, beneficial thought, kindness and communion towards all who come my way. I include all in this, whether there is a tree, grass, an insect, an animal or a person in my path, all are worthy of my acceptance and help if I may be of help, and I strive to do so. This is, if you will, what I “put in to the world”. It is my output. I can thus say that I “serve what is in front of me”.

And yet invariably when I’m offered water, food, shelter or whatever it comes from “behind me”. Literally this is so with water, which has been offered to me hundreds of times through my pilgrimage. Typically the person who offers has come from behind me, not in front, and usually they have not read my shirt, “Walking Coast to Coast for Peace” nor do they know anything about the pilgrimage. How, then, do they know to offer something to me? This seems a great mystery until we start to understand our unity. We appear to be different, yet the very same supernatural force connects all of us. There is no “in front of” and no “behind”. There is just connection.

After deep investigation this can be the only answer, and it is completely logical although our thoughts and beliefs block us from this understanding. Regardless of what this world appears to be there is no separation between you and me, or between us and anything else or anyone else. There is also no separation between us and our highest Self, or God. Only this can explain the synchronicity that we observe.

There is only One. Whatever we do to others we do to our own self, there is no choice but for our every action to affect us. Love and we know love, hate and we know hate, be selfish and we know selfishness, be selfless and know That.

Here I suggest to you Swami Sivananda Ji Maharaj’s great formula, stated below, to help us to know the true nature of this incredible world.

"Smile with the flowers and the green grass. Play with the butterflies, birds and deer. Shake hands with the shrubs, ferns and twigs of trees. Talk to the rainbow, wind, stars and sun. Converse with the running brooks and the waves of the sea. Speak with the walking stick. Develop friendship with all your neighbors, dogs, cats, cows, human beings, trees, flowers, etc. Then you will have a wide, perfect, rich, full life. You will realize oneness of life."

Swami Sivananda

13. Rising in Love

"Then, overcome by joy, I cried, 'Jesus, my love. At last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and then I will be all things."

St. Therese de Lisieux

Rising in love? Not falling in love? I had intended to talk here about how, as silence came, deep all encompassing love also came. I recently spoke with Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji about "falling in love" as I walked across the desert, and he immediately corrected me. "Not falling in love", he said, "rising in love!" And, of course he is correct, this is a much better way to discuss what happens to us as desires melt away.

As we search for truth in a steadfast manner we observe first Dispassion, the feeling that "what I want (happiness) is not to be found in the world." Typically this dispassion already has taken root in us prior to consciously beginning our search. Secondly there must be purification, which is the bringing of the mind to Sattva (purity) and when the mind has been purified it quiets allowing us to begin to control it. Third is Introspection and discrimination, which leads to discerning the real (permanent) from the unreal (impermanent or transitory). Next is acceptance, which I've called here also silence. These are the same; the silence is thought itself dropping away along with worldly desires in complete acceptance of whatever happens. Next our true nature begins to express, no longer encumbered by persistent thoughts of something we need in order to be happy. This true nature is love. Love of all, or more correctly love of the One, which is all. This is the love born of acceptance, or pure unconditioned love. It is as if it rises within us, welling up inside and seeking expression. In fact it is us; rising in the love that we are, and displacing all of the false thoughts and attachment to images which had covered us up.

There are infinite paths to knowing God, or the Absolute truth of the universe and of you, just as there are infinite names and forms in the world. Each path is to be honored as none are wrong. These four basic steps apply across them; we must break our attachment to the false in order to know the truth. Once truth is known there is no further separation from it, for separation was always in our imagination alone. There is only truth and false is never true. We simply do not perceive the truth; this is our problem. We have blinders on which need to be removed, or a "beam in our eye" as Jesus tells us. Finally, when the truth of this world is perceived the state of ignorance is over, and the false is gone as if by magic.

What is the vocation of one who knows only love? Loving. This is my job, and it is an amazing job, it is the best job in the world. And this I'll share; it is your only job also, it is all that you need do. The only responsibility you have in this world is to love. This is all; there is nothing else. Let us all rise in love!



Here then, let us talk of rising in love, and how one begins to observe the world when love for the One in all has begun to bloom.

The Facebook posts pick up here, from the 1st of April, continuing eastward from north central New Mexico via route 66.

1 Apr 2014

Om Om Om



Here are pictures from the past few days, walking from Belen east through Mountainair, Willard and Encino. The towns are small and spread apart, the terrain continuing to change as we walk east. High desert, we slowly climbed 2,000 feet to Mountainair (6,500 feet) and will gradually come down in to the plains over the next days and weeks. Shown here:



Friends (so many not shown, oh my what a blessing, all are friends!)

Symbols of Love

Oh get this! Those swastika symbols. Sacred beneficial symbols in the east, all over Buddhist and Hindu temples. I've walked for nearly five months now and this is the first time I've seen them in the U.S. And here they are on a vintage 1920s hotel and restaurant in



Mountainair, NM. The man who had it built used sacred native American symbols throughout, and I was told that the swastika (Sanskrit) is one of those. Interesting? Lovely.

Prasadam including water for that magic

never empty (for long) water bottle.

Glorious sunsets including a progressive series from two nights ago. This was the first day of big winds, even bigger today!





Grass as far as the eye can see...

A bouquet for you!!

*Small towns dying. So many throughout the southwest, victims to "progress".
And yet,*

Shelter. The last dying town shot is from Encino. One more with every business shuttered. Most buildings are abandoned. But when I walked to the town hall for water and a short rest I was so lovingly offered food and shelter for the night, in the village's community center! It's ours for the night! Shelter from the 50mph winds of the evening, electricity to charge the phone, coffee with evaporated milk (mmmm...). The town may be dying but it's in our heart, what a beautiful place.



Hari Om dearest friends, thank you for all! Thank you God!

After some Facebook time and a good night's rest we are off to Vaughn then appears we'll take a left turn Santa Rosa and start walking east on Route 66 from there. Are you ready?

2 Apr 2014

We are nearing Vaughn, only a couple of hours or so ahead.



Oh my gosh, the wind today, again, day four! The millipedes, which seem to be everywhere here, are being blown off the road! It's a no fly zone for the grasshoppers and birds, except for a few cheeky crows which seem to be enjoying facing in to the wind and going nowhere... bobbing left and right, up and down as the wind gusts.



And us.

And do you know what? It's fun! Truly magnificent! I'm playing in it



like a kid. Trying to walk a more or less straight line by leaning in to the wind as the gusts come. Holding on to the makeshift hat so that I don't have to run as fast as it if it blows off. Perfecting a new motion of waving with the right hand and then swiftly putting that hand on my head and leaning back left when the semis pass so as not to get sucked in to the vacuum they create when they pass. Guessing when and how hard the next gust will hit when I first hear it howling loudly through the grasses to my right and behind me. Whooshoooo.

A blast. For now of course lol.

How about joining in? Whatever you are doing, whatever is there in front of you, play in it and with it. Be that kid that we are. For now.

Om Prem, Om Love, Om Joy.

3 Apr 2014

My dearest friends the dark in the world is the shadow required in order to see the light. This light is the essence, it is what we are in Truth.

We seem on the outside a world full of people wanting to be right. The right color, the right weight, the right diet, the right age, the right job, the right home, the right friends, the right partner, the right religion.

Yet none of this counts. Being right, being wrong, that's simply drama. What counts is what takes us home. What takes us home is what got us here. Love. Compassion. Caring. For all. For the planet, for nature, for others, for our Self. Our true Self, what we are deep inside.

Truly the religion is Love. Whatever the name, this is all that counts. Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Atheism, no matter. Let us Love. Let us not be distracted, let us simply Love.

Hari Om, blessings all.

Amen

4/08/14

It seems that I'm asked every day if I'm walking this pilgrimage alone. The answer, of course, is no. I am not alone for a moment, I'm carried from step to step and you are That force that carries me. Thank you, thank you God.



Stairway to Heaven



You help in so many ways. Water, food, shelter are the obvious ones but a smile shared with a stranger, a prayer for the benefit of all, help far far more deeply than most yet understand.

God bless you, I love you.

9 Apr 2014

We are now in Tucumcari, NM, rested the body and feet today and wandered the town. It's a veritable time capsule of the 1950s and 60s. I'll post a few pictures and thoughts about that shortly, God willing. Did you ever notice that we make a big deal of putting things in to a time capsule but opening them up is never so interesting?

I would like to share another fun experience of the "never empty water bottle" series. This one has a very cool twist to it. I hope you enjoy it, if you read it please do share what lessons you get from it. Thank you!

It was 54 miles from Santa Rosa to Tucumcari and I had the urge to walk it in two long days, so we did! Day one we walked 32 miles, had plenty of food and drink at the start of the day and were given more mid morning. All good, beautiful walking day, wonderful! There was some thunder hail but the poncho came out for the first time and kept me partly dry. The sun came back out and dried off the rest. More rain late but it didn't last long. The smell of desert rain... oh my if you have had the experience bring it in to your awareness now and enjoy! Beautiful.

Yesterday's walk started at 8AM or so. The sun was warm yet the clouds and rain came back from time to time. The magic one liter water bottle was about 2/3 full and there was no food but that was all fine.

I finished the water about noon with fifteen miles or so to go (six hours or so). I had some visits on the road after. Two truck drivers stopped to offer a ride and a state patrol officer stopped during another round of hail, also offering a ride. We shared thank yous and blessings all around, had some wonderful visits. No offers of drink though. No problems, it had only been fifteen or twenty minutes.

Shortly after they all left I saw a big signboard proclaiming, "Stuckey's 4 miles ahead". "Aha", spoke my mind, "that's the water! And I'll have a hot lunch too."

Sign after sign advertised their specialties! Do you remember Stuckey's? They were all over Route 66 in the west, I had such fond memories of them from family vacation trips west. They were mandatory stops on these drives. My mouth was not watering but for sure my mind was looking forward to the visit!

My mind thought, "I've not seem a Stuckey's in so long, this will be fun!"

Then a funny thing. As I was less than one mile away, after maybe six or seven "Stuckey's!" signs passed, it came in to view on the hill and intersection ahead. It looked so nice. Freshly painted, white with red and yellow trim. Shell logos. A 1950s and 60s time capsule all prettied up and ready for my visit.

At that moment a car pulled of the road directly in front of us. A sweet couple and dog were in the car, the man got out with a bottle of water and an apple and walked toward me with a beautiful smile.

We had a very nice visit and I accepted their offering with Love. They were driving to Washington, DC for a new job, moving across the country. As they left the mind did it's thing. "Why the water? Stuckey's is right there." Then, "well this is cool, I'll drink the water now and fill up the bottle there. And the apple will be desert." So as it went in to the backpack I drank the whole bottle of cold water. Ahhh...

I continued walking. Odd, there were no gas prices posted. "Are they open?" "Sure they are, it looks open." Closer, "is it open? I don't see cars." Arrived. The big, beautiful, freshly painted Stuckey's with the letters "C L O S E D" scrawled in white paint across the windows, one of which had recently been broken by someone looking for treasure inside. The last of the Stuckey's closed? Oh my.

Then a replay and a huge laugh. That apple was sooo sweet! And thus the picture.

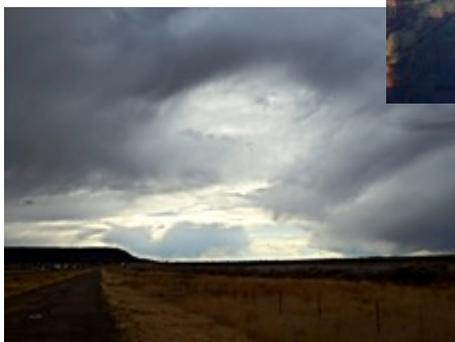
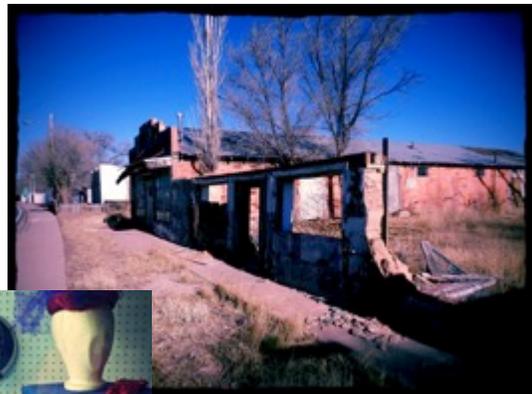
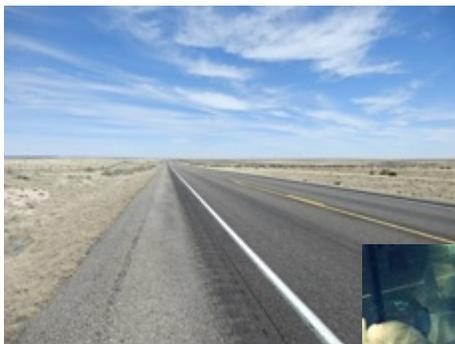
A beautiful lesson in faith at several levels. I am in awe of it.

I'd love to hear what you get from this, if it resonates with you. Amazing.



Love you, Love God, so much. Have the sweetest night or morning possible. Love is. All.

Thank you!



Tucumcari, New Mexico and environs



10 Apr 2014

Pictures from Encino to Tucumcari. From bright skies to thunderstorms and hail, from preserved time capsules to the re-emergence of grass taking over dying towns.



It's interesting how beauty is always in nature, any moment, any place. At one place or time it's flowers. At another the landscape. At another the sky. People think, "this is pretty, this is not", yet we are constantly engulfed in beauty, never

away from it. Only awareness and the ability to adapt our perspective is required for constant union with it.

I hope that you enjoy these. Get plenty of rest, tomorrow we take the next leg to Amarillo, Texas. God willing that should be about six days full of beauty, friends and amazement. And Love, of course! Always that.

Om dearest, thank you so much!

11 Apr 2014

Om Om Om

Singing with the birds. I must share.

I'm so often serenaded by beautiful bird song on this walk. The mornings and evenings in particular are beautiful with the inspired singing yet they may come in to our awareness at any moment.

Often in response I sing back. Often I'll find the prettiest voice available to me at the moment and sing "Om Namō Narayanaya" three times with the intent of soothing and thanking my avian friend. I understand this to be enjoyed and it is certainly enjoyable for me!

Now, your mind will likely want to dismiss this as so much silliness. Either "that bird does not have the intelligence, hearing or consciousness to appreciate a human's song" or "I'm not going to stoop so low as to sing to a bird" or whatever.



I invite you to consider for a moment that perhaps your mind is wrong about that, in the same way that it was wrong when it told you this or that potential partner was going to make you happy forever, or this or that acquisition... whatever.

And perhaps your mind will just consider the thought of singing to birds crazy. Consider if you will if this craziness is more or less beneficial than the craziness of your mind stressing out about your hair or your weight. And if you were to break out with a performance for birds in front of friends would you be inspiring them in a positive or negative way?

I'm aware that some of you already partake in this craziness. For the rest of you, care to give it a try? You may find it quite rewarding.

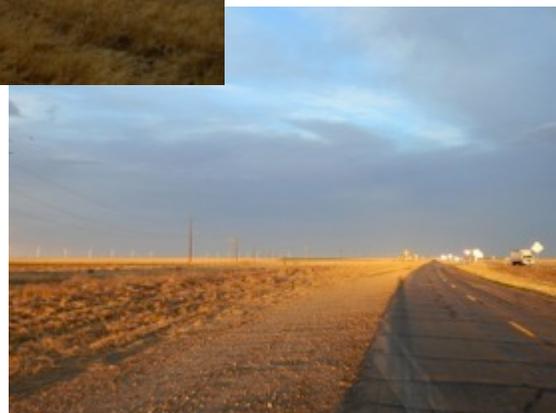
Hari Om, praise to song!

I should note that in response to the above post many people told me that they sing to the birds also! Ahhh, what a beautiful practice. They love it, of this we can be certain.

13 Apr 2014

That which dies never lives

That which lives never dies



14 Apr 2014

Om Om Om

Tucumcari to Bushland, Texas.



I must just let this magic speak for itself.

Writing from the warmth of a lovely ranch house in Bushland where I was invited in from the building storm for food, shelter and to

share love with amazing friends.

I sit here now in awe of God and of you dear friends. Hari Om Tat Sat. Love is. Thank you.

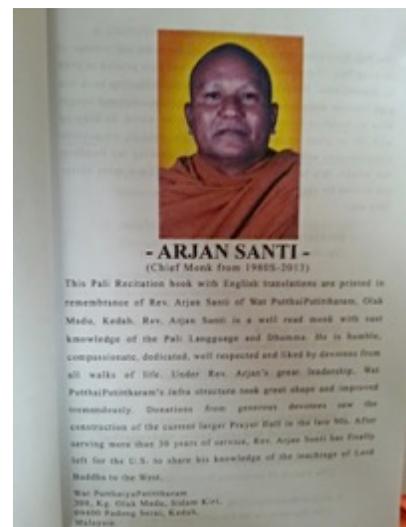


Walking through east Amarillo, a few miles prior to the below, I walked in to a Laundromat to wash my clothes and met this amazing friend. We had such a wonderful visit and shared lessons from the walk, she loved the stories. She refused to let me wash the clothes, she took care of everything, and we snapped this shot just before I continued east. Amazing, thank you.

17 Apr 2014

Oh my. I walked only a few miles east and saw a sign, "Burmese Theravada Buddhist Fellowship" and knew that I must honor the temple through a visit. I knocked on the door and was meet by a lovely man that, it turns out, became a rebel fighter against the Burmese military junta after the takeover and student massacres of 8-8-88. He spoke enough English to tell me that a monk was on the property and asked me to walk to the house on the back of the property to meet him.

This is how I met the venerable U Zawtica Tin Aung (also known as Arjan Santi). As I walked up to the door he took me by the hand and brought me inside the house. I paid homage to the Buddha through



the temple in the house, and then we visited. I know so little about Burma other than the little about the military government and the continuing popular rebellion there against it, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and an awareness of the depth of Buddhism there prior to the government takeover.

And now I know my dear friend. He left Burma as so many refugees did and he is welcome back only with the acceptance of a jail term. He lived in Malaysia until last



year and came to the US less than one year ago. I'm told that there is a community of approximately 20,000 Burmese refugees Amarillo, second only Fort Wayne the US with approximately 50,000. In one month he leaves for Houston and will take residence there.

He's asked me to stay while he's in Amarillo, I thanked him deeply and will stay his guest until the morning. What an amazing treat!



On Sunday there is a big celebration for New Year's Day, you see the preparations here. There are expected to be perhaps 1,000 attending. Rehearsals are in process for the performances to be given then. Plans are also in process to expand and build with a new temple planned for next year.

If in Amarillo please do stop by and visit this lovely and loving place!

Beautiful. I'm in awe. Always lol.

Thank you God, thank you dear friends.

19 Apr 2014

Om Om Om Happy Easter!

Each year we celebrate our salvation through Jesus Christ's crucifixion and then His resurrection three days later, what we call Easter day.

Indeed resurrection is our salvation. Being born again within the Christ Consciousness is our birthright; our gift of awakening in eternal love, and this gift waits for each of us to open it.



Jesus told us time and again that we are all children of God as is He, and that we are capable of all that He did (and more). Indeed this includes being born again, or resurrected. We are invited to join Him in this way, partaking in the eternal life, in Love for all, in the end of all pain and suffering.

When we tire of the search for happiness through impermanent objects of the world we may indeed enjoy happiness by finding what is within, what we truly are. This is taught in all traditions. We are not separate from this happiness and peace, we must simply unwrap it.

Jesus speaks to this Universal Truth here, followed by excerpts from Paramahansa Yogananda. I hope that these are meaningful for you.

With greatest Love and respect, thank you. Happy Easter!!

Excerpts from the New Testament, King James Version:

Matthew 6.33

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Luke 17.20/21

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

John 3.2/3

The same came to Jesus by night and said unto Him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, unless God be with him."

Jesus answered and said unto him, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

The following is excerpted from Paramahansa Yogananda's "The Second Coming of Christ":

"Behold thine immortal Self resurrected with Christ in the illuminating Light of Christ Consciousness, present in every soul, every flower, every atom.

When we open our inner eyes of soul wisdom, we behold the omnipresent Light of God. Within this Light is the consciousness of Christ, the "Son" or pure reflection of God present everywhere in the universe. This Christ Consciousness, the Infinite Christ, is God's intelligence and love knocking on the closed eyelids of our souls, urging us that all we have to do is look to this Light within and we shall see all ignorance and diversities vanish. To him who has opened his inner eye, everything is One.

Resurrection means that the universal Spirit present in all creation as the Christ Consciousness is constantly being resurrected – awakened or manifested – in everything. Whenever you do away with ignorance and think good thoughts, Christ is being resurrected within you; that is, the Christ Consciousness that was fully manifested in Jesus is awakening within you.

Resurrection is not the power of Spirit in the body of Jesus only; Spirit is in everyone. Nor does man have to die in order to resurrect Spirit. The physical resurrection of Christ was only part of the lesson of his life. Every time you give up a weakness and feel happy in being good, Christ is resurrected anew. You can bring Christ Consciousness within you right now.

Resurrect your calmness from beneath the soil of restlessness; resurrect your wisdom from the enshrouding earthliness of ignorance; resurrect your love from beneath the sod of mundane human attachment – with its limited love for family, society, and country – to divine love for all."

Hari Om Tat Sat

20 Apr 2014

I was honored by the invitation to stay with friends at the Burmese Buddhist Temple in Amarillo through the big New



Year's celebration today, and after a short reflection it was obvious that I should say YES. Dearest Rose Mataji helped me with this too... and she was not alone suggesting I stay. Thank you!



It has been an amazing visit and once again words fail me. I'm so deeply touched, have met so many wonderful friends and learned something about the large Asian communities in east Amarillo.

Yesterday we visited four additional temples in the area - a second Burmese temple for the Karen minority peoples who are badly discriminated

against by the government, two Lao temples and a Vietnamese one. Today was the big celebration here. It was beautiful, and fun!

I pray that you will enjoy these pictures, they are but a tiny reflection of the moments today.

Thank you God, thank you all! We move on tomorrow morning, towards Panhandle, Pampa, then in to Oklahoma, God willing.





Awe. Feeling inspired - by a young man that I was fortunate enough to visit with this morning.

He came by the temple to visit before going to work, on Easter Sunday and Burmese New Year no less.

He became a refugee from Burma at age eleven after a fire fight at his school and its closing. He and his grandmother escaped to Thailand and lived in a refugee camp there, with little food, no work, no income, until a visit by George and Laura Bush. He says that George W was overwhelmed by the plight of the

refugees and immediately made arrangements to bring them all to the U.S. (proving that whatever we may think people are not either all good nor all bad).

Now in Amarillo ten years later he has assimilated, speaking both Burmese and English fluently, working full time at a meat packing plant (the sole growth industry in Amarillo it seems) while going to school to become an architect. He has 33 credits of his required 56.

His plan after he gets his degree? To go back to Burma (Myanmar) to take work there as an architect and rebuild his school, and help to rebuild his fractured land.

I'm honored to know him and to be friends. And honored to be friends with you. Each have this same, whether it has manifested yet or will do so in the future. In awe. It's amazing, isn't it?

Thank you God!

14. God or Not?

"God is a metaphor for that which transcends all levels of intellectual thought. It's as simple as that."

Joseph Campbell

Is there a God?

Let's face it, through no fault of Her / His own God is not so popular these days. Whenever I refer to "God" in my posts on Facebook the "likes" and "comments" drop precipitously. Let us then speak of truth for some time then circle back to the above question.

All that we see in this world is changing and yet there is a core truth of the universe, a changeless fabric that forms the basis for all that changes. Change itself cannot be and is not this fabric; change cannot be truth but it can point to it.

This truth hides under the surface of the entire universe in the same way that silk thread hides in a beautiful sari. The sari does not exist without the silk thread but once the sari is woven we see only the sari. We see the beautiful colors and the vibrant design; we see all of the varied saris on display yet we no longer see the silk thread. Likewise In this world we see stars, the sun, the earth and all of the forms. Although they are all made of the same fabric the fabric itself is not seen by us as our focus is only on the sparkling individual forms.

Make no mistake though, the fabric is there; the fabric itself is the underlying and eternal truth of all. Throughout time countless human beings have pondered this and committed themselves to find the truth of our existence. Truth is one but the perspectives of what that truth might be are many.

The scientist looks objectively at the world and searches for what he calls the "unifying theory" to define ultimate truth, publishing his results in a scientific journal for all to see. The philosopher looks subjectively, delving inside in order to find ultimate truth, and tells of what she observes from this

inward view. The religious or spiritual one sees the ultimate truth as supernatural and calls it God in one of countless names, telling us the qualities of her God. The atheist may or may not accept that there is one truth but is convinced that, if there is, the name for it cannot be God. The agnostic wants to live their life, at a given point in time, without caring about whether there is truth or what it might be.

There are perfectly valid reasons for all of these positions, for every position that anyone might take on this subject. Truth, whatever it is, is not obvious. If it were everyone would not hesitate to agree upon it.

There is, nonetheless, truth. In our debate over various names we lose the point that we are all bound together by one truth and that we are best served to get on with our work of finding it instead of arguing about what it might be called. The name is not relevant yet knowing the truth (of “me”) is completely relevant. There is nothing more important than knowing who we are.

In spite of all of the wonderful inventions that they have provided to the world scientists have never been able to completely understand the fabric of ultimate truth. Many have been finally led to investigate subjectively, stymied by the impossibility of finding this absolute truth objectively. In doing so they have become philosophers instead of scientists, for science is maintained to be objective only. Countless philosophers, prophets and sages have told us they have found the ultimate truth, and so many have shown us through their life and teachings that in fact they did. They tell us truth can be known but that it must be sought subjectively, not objectively, and when found the objects themselves are understood.

I moved from objective study in my quest for truth to subjective study; I share with you that through subjective methods it is possible to realize the ultimate truth. It is possible to find inside what cannot be found outside. Interestingly the most modern scientific studies do point to and support the subjective findings, but still subjective study is mandatory for no objects are independently true and therefore the substratum cannot be found through objective study alone.

Now let's take a leap and I'll tell you that it is not important for you to believe in God or in any particular myth related to God. In fact our belief in God often holds us back because we are likely to attribute qualities corresponding to our belief and stop searching before we find what we seek. **Search for truth is far more important than belief in God, for to find truth we must desire to know it, whatever it is, and be willing to accept it absolutely, without preconditions. We must be open.**

It is on this point that Gautama the Buddha spoke and taught. God was also very unpopular when he was on the earth teaching; there were hundreds of sects and beliefs and in his view none of them were independently true or to be believed. The Buddha knew that only truth itself is true, that it is silent (not to be found in words) and the individual must directly perceive it to know it. He had found truth and he shared his successful technique for directly perceiving truth with others so that we could know what is to be known, thus putting an end to our state of suffering. This practice he called Vipassana, spoken of earlier.

The Buddha chose not to speak of God one way or another. A story from one of the Buddhist scriptures tells us that one day he was asked by a follower, “Oh great one, is there a God?” to which he responded,

“did I say that there was a God?” The follower then asked, “Then do you mean that there is no God?” To which the great teacher responded, “Did I say that there is no God?”

Gautama the Buddha was quiet on the subject of God; this was quite a wise choice. He chose to ignore the subject entirely and to focus people only on their state of suffering and the way out of it; direct perception of truth. To this day there are many who think Buddhism a godless religion and yet it is simply mute on the subject, focused instead on spreading loving kindness and the method for direct perception of truth. Once this truth is known any name for it is fine.

We have said it before here, I’ve provided you with many examples and you have so much evidence of your own, but I feel it important to say again now. This world is in no way as it appears to be. The truth, what you will find if you commit to a quest of Self-discovery, is supernatural. The word supernatural sounds odd and mystical, but it is perfect here. It means simply “superior to nature”, and this is so. You will find that the ultimate truth underlies all of nature and is completely superior to it. Whatever happens in nature does not affect truth in any way. Truth is a supernatural force (force being used only as a descriptor here) and it is all-pervasive.

Truth is also without qualities in one way of saying, but in another we can say that it does have the qualities of love, of patience and forbearance, of wisdom, and of existence. As a sign of the pervasiveness and the nature of this most subtle and absolute truth these qualities are consistently demonstrated through the examples of the wise ones, the seers of truth. A study of Amma’s nature will help to see this, though there are countless examples on display in the world.

Once the truth is known any name that you choose to call it is perfectly OK.

Personally I tend to call this universal truth God, although I accept and honor any name, using many of them. I often call the absolute truth Love, for Love permeates our being when we know truth. I call it Peace, for when we know truth we also know peace absolute. And, of course, I call it Truth. Only Truth is true in all of space and time, only Truth is true in all conditions. In the Vedic tradition, called Hinduism in the west, the term Sat-Chit-Ananda is used, translating to “Existence absolute, Knowledge absolute, and Bliss absolute”. This is a wonderful name as well. Honestly any name is fine; used with the intent to honor the truth it does so.

Likewise any religion is a pointer to the same truth. Many people misunderstand their religion and yet this fact should not be held against the religion. It is not Jesus Christ’s fault that people who call themselves Christian do not follow his teaching, in the same way it is not Mohammed’s fault that those who say they follow him do not, nor Gautama the Buddha’s fault, etc. There are countless examples everywhere showing humanity’s misunderstanding of the ultimate laws that life is governed by and yet these are not examples of the great teachers failings, rather of our own incompleteness. We have not yet finished our quest, and we need to keep looking until we find. We must not give up.

It is easy for us to get hung up in the myth of religion. All religions consist of both myth and teachings of ultimate truth along with instructions about how to directly perceive that truth for oneself. Our lower nature will focus on the myth and pick it apart instead of following the teaching to find the ultimate

truth. In this day it is quite easy to pick apart myth. There are so many beautiful stories that seem so improbable now given our limited time bound view of the world; as a result we understandably dismiss the myth out of hand.

In fact it is not required that we believe the myth, as the myth is just the capsule, for the universal teaching. This capsule serves the same purpose as the capsule that contains medication for a headache. When we have a headache we reach for our capsules and a glass of water. The capsule is used in order to maximize the efficacy of the medication (so that all of it reaches our stomach in the proper way) and to make its initial taste more palatable. When we relate to the myth it is the same as this; the myth helps us to take the medicine of religion. When we follow this prescription to the end it is found to be the real cure for our suffering in this world.

In this age all of the great myths have either lost their societal relevance or are being defended irrationally in a way that causes terrible distress for so many. The great Joseph Campbell talks at length about this challenge caused by the loss of myth in our life. So many have given up on the various myths as they no longer seem to hold together, and as a result so many have also given up on the following of religion and the wise precepts that are taught. On the other end of the spectrum we have those in each faith system who are defending the myth and trying to turn back the clock, ignoring scientific discoveries which when not ignored but understood actually support the proposition that you are spirit not matter. They are so strict in adherence to the myth that they cause great suffering in the world in the name of religion. **This is the opposite of what all of the religions teach; all are rooted in tolerance and love.** In these cases the myth alone is defended and the core teaching completely ignored and dishonored. It is through these actions, rooted in deep confusion, jealousy and anger, that religions and God are given a bad name.

Without myth there is no capsule for the teaching. Without the capsule the initial taste may be found to be bitter, requiring that greater tolerance and perseverance is observed to take our medicine. The cure, our salvation, is the same however, regardless of myth. If myth needs to be set aside please do so, but do not give up the prescription due to your inability to swallow the capsule.

Now let's have a practical discussion about the above.

As I walk I meet so many friends and all are amazing. Some call themselves Christians (or Catholic, Baptist, Mormon, etc), some Buddhist, some Islamic, others Jewish or Unitarian, some say they are spiritual, some say Atheist or agnostic. I see no difference between them; I love them all. We impose these labels and they are limiters, they are not what we are in reality. We are spirit; we are not of this world. We experience it. We have the power for greatness in us and it may be unleashed at any time, in any moment. I've seen it happen and perhaps you have as well. There is infinite love in the hearts of all, and I experience this love from you, each of you, moment after moment.

Try this, please, at least try it conceptually now in your mind. Accept all and walk. Ask for nothing; carry nothing of value other than a smile and a warm and loving heart topped off with beneficial thoughts for all. Who can you imagine would want something from you other than your smile or for you to listen to them? And if you care not how they look and want nothing from them, if you have no fear of them that

might be felt as they approach, how could you possibly be perceived as a threat? My experience here is pure and absolute. Anyone that you meet openly in friendship without being either threatening or threatened, without wanting anything or having anything that entices desire in the other... is a friend.

Some think me a Hindu monk and have concern that as I walk through parts of the USA which have a heavy Christian fundamentalist population that I would be disturbed or harassed. This has never happened. In fact in these areas I've been treated so sweetly and lovingly that it is beyond our ability to comprehend.

I say that some think me to be a Hindu, and perhaps this causes you to question, "aren't you"? I do not see myself as either a Hindu or a monk. I wear these clothes to honor my teachers and the teachings that have helped me to find peace, but I am just me. It really is this simple. I do not subscribe to any limiters. I honor and respect the tenets of all faiths; I strive to live in accordance with them in every way. There is no significant difference between these core tenets; in every case we are told to love and respect all as our very self, to be humble and austere, to have compassion for all, to forgive all and to accept all. This applies without exception, for a very good reason.

I mentioned earlier that I do my best to visit Monasteries, Temples and Ashrams of all faith systems along the way. I do not refuse an offer to go to church with whoever asks, regardless of faith. It is not just this, I see God in all of these places, I worship God in all of these places, I love God through all in all of these places. There is not a place of worship where I do not feel God's love, where I do not feel at home. Regardless of name true Love is the same, and it may be known anywhere.

All of these holy places, every one of them, signifies a different and gloriously beautiful way to honor and love the one truth in all. I do not see them as different though; they differ only in appearance and are all uniquely wonderful ways to love the one God. This is the same as the myriad rays of light refracted through a diamond; they are unique only in appearance as they are in no way separate from their source, existing only in conjunction with it. The rays may be traced back to the diamond and so also the various religions may be traced back to their one source.

This is indeed so about all of the people that I meet, and certainly there is a divine quality in those who truly love or want to love God or their own highest Self, regardless of the name they use. Those who propagate hatred in the name of religion are terribly lost and confused; this is not what any of these systems teach us.

What is the common teaching? If you quiet and control your mind you will know peace. You will know silence and you will know truth. You will know through direct experience the very ground of being which is the basis for this entire world. "Be still and know" is told to us in all of the faiths, and when we still our mind completely we know what is to be known.

It is natural to think that the mind cannot be quiet, that it could only be quiet in deep sleep, in a coma, in death. If one carries this further there will be the perplexing thought that if your mind could be silent when you are awake then you would simply not be, that you would not be able to see or sense the world, that you could not communicate. Amazingly enough this is not so. And yet this mind, which

seems so important, which seems to be our entire existence, is our tool to find the Truth. It is in no way, however, truth itself.

Amazingly, there is life beyond thought. Life does not exist in thought. Thought exists in life.

My best guidance to you on this subject of God is this.

It is fine to follow the path of science, but if you follow it please go all the way. Don't stop at the surface observations as Newton did. Keep looking for the unseen fabric; don't let yourself believe that things are as they appear. If you follow religion, likewise go all the way. Do not stop with the surface teachings, the myth alone. Spirituality, the same. Don't just practice meditation; inquire. Follow the thread that leads you inside. Dive in and find the source. Find what Jesus Christ calls the "Kingdom of God". Whichever path you take follow the path to its end. Don't stop seeking until you find. If you do this you will come to know the great truth of your Self.

Find within you the compassion and love, acceptance and patience, to look beyond all of these names and forms and see the one truth that shines in each and binds all. Whatever you call yourself, whatever you believe, do not stop with your beliefs. Find your source. Love all, accept all, respect all. Treat others as you wish to be treated. What I call God you may call whatever you like, my wish for you is only that you find truth inside you, that you know it. I want you to know truth, to know peace, this is all. The name is of no import.

15. Deepening Faith

"Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God — this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need."

Swami Vivekananda

What a wonderful contemplation Swami Vivekananda has shared for us. Earlier we talked of the nature of faith and how we may take steps to develop and deepen faith. We discussed that in order for faith to exist it must be in what is inside of us, not what is outside. Faith ultimately must be in our own highest Self for God can be found only in us, not outside of us.

In pilgrimage we rise step by step, alternating in a deepening of faith and love as we go. We take a step deeper in to love, and from this deeper faith results. As we step deeper in to faith deeper love results. These two, faith and love, seem also to be two sides of the same coin.

I cannot tell you where these steps end for I've not reached an end to them as yet. I can in fact imagine a limit to faith, for it can finally be absolute and unquestioning. I cannot, however, imagine an end to

love, for it seems to continue unfolding. What I can do here is share with you my posts from late April through early July to help illustrate this deepening of both in turn, step by step.

25 Apr 2014

Faith and the water bottle - "The Quick Draw"

Oh my, I've got to share this one!

It's been a little while since this magic water bottle has been empty, after leaving the desert I've been near shops or in shelter often enough to refill it. Or, of course, in the lovely Burmese monastery for three days. This changed yesterday.

We are now in Wheeler, Texas, approximately 100 miles east of Amarillo and 150 miles or so west of Oklahoma City. Monday night we reached Panhandle and met great friends there. Tuesday just south of Pampa and breakfast there. I'll share more about Wednesday soon, God willing.

It's 45 miles from Pampa to Wheeler with lots of grass, trees, cows and horses in between, but no shops or restaurants. Two days. Thursday morning was cold with a northwest wind, I was getting a beautiful push along. By early afternoon it was warming and the wind had abated.

I had half a bottle of water to start the day. I drank most by 1PM or so. All was good.

At about 2:30 I was thirsty again. I knew that I would finish the bottle. Instead of stopping to sit and rest for a few minutes as I normally do I reached back and loosened the straps that secure the bottle. I removed it and took the cap off, then smiled as I put the bottle to my lips, knowing that soon the magic that fills it would show itself.

In the exact same moment that I put the bottle to my lips I saw a silver pickup truck crest the ridge ahead (shown in picture) and slowly come towards me on the side berm. My mind said, "oh my God, you are kidding!" I finished the water and my grin got bigger. I waved. The truck did a u-turn, turning away from me. Mind, "they are leaving?".

The truck came to a stop on the other side of the road. A woman stepped out with a big beautiful smile and two bottles of water.

Her, "would you like some more water?"

Me, "oh my, thank you so much, that's amazing."



"I've been watchin' you walk."

"Oh wow, thank you, God bless you."

"God bless you."

That was the exchange, conducted with the most loving smiles you can imagine. She got back in her truck, we waved, and she drove off. I grasped the camera and took these two pictures, one with her driving back in the direction from which she had come and inset is the empty magic bottle next to refills.

"I've been watchin' you." Please consider this. How is it that she was watching me so closely as to know the precise moment when the bottle was emptied? Or is that in some way random?

Your mind will find a meaning for it, so will your deep heart or intuition. Your intuition is always right.

We are always being watched. We are truly never alone. Never. We may relax; we may surrender to the arms that never let go.

Thank you God. Thank you all. I love you.

26 Apr 2014

God's fingers reaching through the earth

Dancing with delight

God's breath blowing lightly

In God's filtered sunlight

God's aura filling my awareness

Sight, smell, sound, touch, thought

God's heart anointing me

Giving life to me

Never apart

From Her fingers, Her breath, Her Love

Caressing me

God's mind

Bringing me back home





27 Apr 2014

I'm often asked where this pilgrimage will end. There are multiple good answers, one being "at the beginning", another, "Egg Harbor, New Jersey in September for the annual celebration of Peace Pilgrim's works". Of course I don't know the end of the physical walk but that celebration is a signpost that we will reach, God willing.

According to that latter answer we are halfway there. Including the October-November leg from Monterey to San Diego and the coast to coast leg starting January 1



in Pasadena we've now walked approximately 2,200 miles together over five and a half months. A direct route to Egg Harbor is about 1,500 miles yet I intend for us to continue North to Detroit, east through part of Canada and upstate New York, then New York City to touch the coast, then Egg Harbor over next five months, dear God willing.

One step at a time.

A reflection then, at this "halfway" point.

First, during this entire walk so far not one bad thing has happened to me. Not even being called a peace protester; frankly I'm quite honored to be in the company of great peace protesters! And, as far as I know, I've not met one bad person. In fact what I observe is completely the contrary!

I will unequivocally say that there is nothing and no one bad in my world at this time.

One might say that I'm quite naive or completely crazy to say that, yet it's correct.

Yes I'm aware of the news; some of it anyway. Yes I've seen signs of bad things. I walked past the Tyson slaughterhouse a few days ago and have seen plenty of feedlots, etc. There's animal torture and for sure various torture of people in towns that I pass through. I pray for all those affected, for all, sharing Love with all. Not just the people.

Yet I'll say it again. Not one bad thing has happened to me and I've not meet one bad person. Confusion yes. Many don't really know what's good and what's bad for them. They look at the examples we see in life and are misinformed, sometimes very badly. But at any moment they can have a stroke of insight and change. It happens all of the time.

Specifically here's what I've observed.

Not one person has been threatening to me in any way. No one has been obnoxious or disrespectful in person, not even the least bit rude.

I've seen no fights or serious arguments. No screaming, no yelling in anger, no faces red in consternation. I've heard no gunshots other than in a firing range I passed.



No one has rushed me or slowed me down. No one has cut in line in front of me. No one has kept me holding on the phone, though I admit I don't make many calls.

Whenever I ask anyone a question it's been listened to and then answered carefully. Whenever I've been asked a question I've been heard and allowed to finish.

I've eaten a lot of food; in restaurants, homes and monasteries, by the side the road. I eat and drink everything I'm given. I've never gotten ill from any of it, in fact nothing has even tasted bad!

I've met many dogs and cats. Dogs bark but none have bitten me nor has a cat clawed me.

No snakes or wild animals have threatened. Although I'm sure I've had some insect bites I've had no bee stings and no infections. I've encountered no bedbugs.



I've not been ill at any time during the pilgrimage.

Now, full disclosure, I've experienced some disagreeable smells and my own body has done some obnoxious things but nothing I could not laugh about.

In these moments that nothing bad happens I've experienced so much beauty, kindness and awe, it is just amazing. I experience such deeply moving moments with people, with animals, with nature... shoot sometimes even with insects!



Each day I'm in awe of what I experience. Each day I'm touched deeply by that which is in all. I see the heart and the acts of kindness and consideration. Not just for me, for what is all around. The signs of Love for others, for all!

If you've been following this pilgrimage you already know

that, on top of this, whatever I need is provided as I walk. I've been offered shelter on every severe weather day or night.

It's not that something bad happened and I did not write about it, it's like this.

Of course it is possible for something that appears to be bad to happen at any time, but in these five and a half months, so far, it's not.

Now, you may say that this is an incredible string of luck, yet your intuition would tell you that it's not.

Perhaps you see this as a miracle. It does often appear to be and I feel the awe that would correspond with miracles, yet I would tell you no.

Instead of these I'll say that the world that I experience all operates according to the natural laws of the Universe and that this is completely consistent with what the great teachers tell us. I thank these teachers so much; I bow to them, to you, as well as the teacher inside.

Amazing, truly amazing.

I want for you to experience this same, if this your desire. It is all I want, it is what I pray for as I walk, as we walk together. May all know Peace.

Thank you so much. Thank you God.

29 Apr 2014

This morning we walk through a patchwork quilt of Life. Colors of the kaleidoscope. Azure sky with textured blankets of clouds rolling in, co-mingled with the golden light of the sun. Fields of green, calves celebrating their first spring. Trees dot the landscape everywhere. And we are blessed with the wind at our back, pushing us forward through this display, stirring all to greet us with a wave as we pass.

You are this Life itself! You are none other. Close your eyes and bring your awareness here, with me. Join with me, with Life through all that we see and sense, not separate. Be this, aware and free. Celebrate what you are, what is, give and receive of this circle.





Western Oklahoma

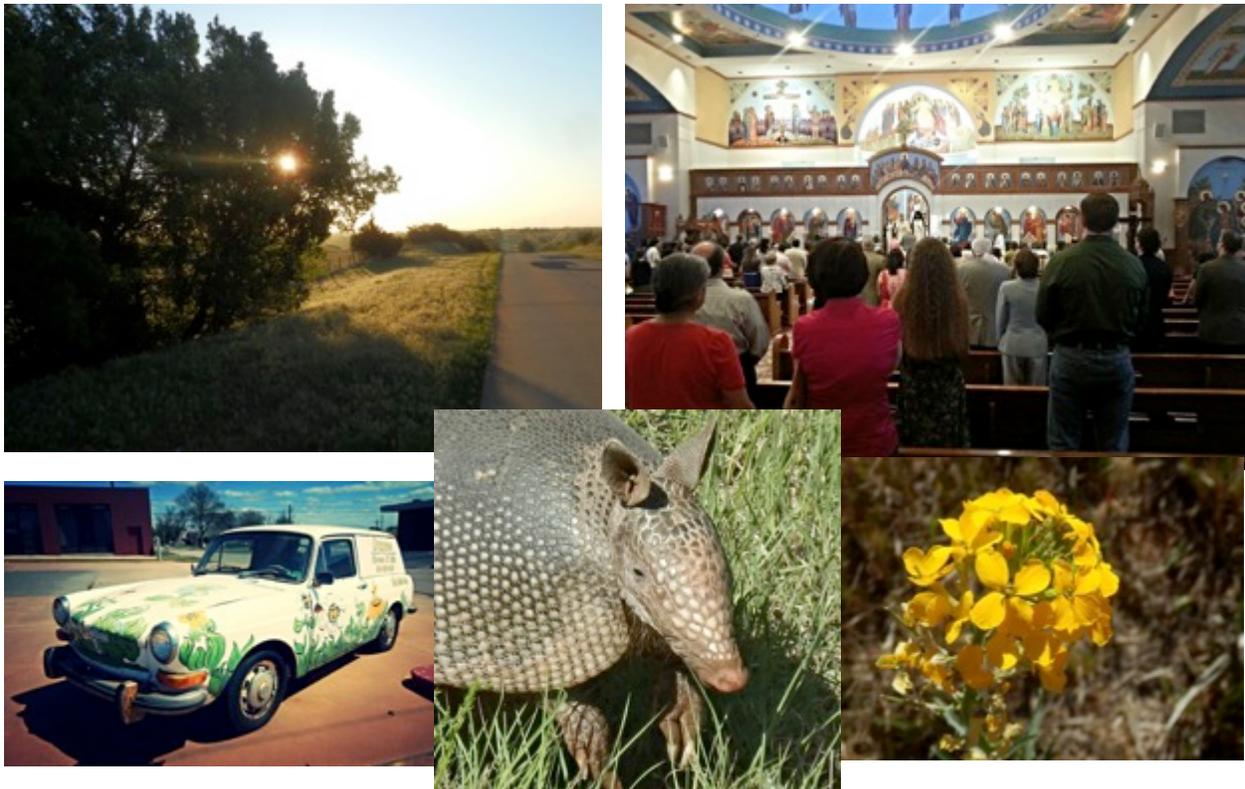
30 Apr 2014

Expressions of Love are in the moment only. Each is a gift to be savored. The mind wants to find them in the past or to plan on them in the future yet when we give our Self over to the mind in its endeavor we miss the new expression.

If we can experience openly, without expectation, we'll be aware of and bask in the expression of Love every moment. This applies to every relationship, it is one of the open secrets of the universe. Open, because it's on constant display. Secret because the mind hides it through expectation and fear... creating drama where there is not.

Life is in the current moment. Love is in the current moment. Always. Only.

Om Namō Narayanaya



Oklahoma City and vicinity

6 May 2014

I stayed one more day in Oklahoma City resting the body and mind. We are now northeast of the city and intend to continue on Route 66 towards Tulsa, God willing.

In one way this next leg is much different than the last. I had intent towards Oklahoma City for the past couple of months, now it is towards Detroit. The cold days and nights along with winter storms are a

thing of the past now, replaced by heat and spring/summer storms. The desert is behind us and lots of corn is ahead. Rolling hills, wildlife, more people.

I've just made the switch to basketball shorts under the dhoti instead of long underwear!

And of course in another way, the deep reality, there is no difference at all. My job and intent are the same. Prayer, peace for all, desire for the Divine Light and Love to shine through in any way possible, trying to learn, adapt, accommodate, adjust and be a better Sannyasa in every way.



As I've watched my mind over the past few days it has wanted to focus on the differences, yet interestingly enough it's not provided much value in this regard. I see it wanting to compare, wanting to incite fear where there is none. It says I must prepare for this change, yet it does not know how!

As I've watched the body though I've seen a change. It is now taking in less food but more fluid. It has healed the pains that had come in the last walking leg. The intelligence in the body is amazing! We think it's the conscious mind but what we see is intelligence in every cell, a quiet competence that is constantly preparing the body for its work as our temple.

As I am aware of my higher Self I observe the same confidence that has existed from the start. There is no question, no fear; in fact it is the source of a quiet voice saying, "come on, let's go, all is OK. Focus on the benefit for all. Smile, wave, bring joy. Let anyone who wishes to provide support do that, it is important for them." It continues to inspire.

And so it goes. I've placed my faith in my higher Self, in God. The steps have come; the awareness focused on the Divine in all, the transition from winter walking to summer walking seems nearly complete. The body is prepared, and the mind fretted a little yet went along with all. And it did contribute the idea for the basketball shorts!

I do love my mind yet I know what it is capable of and what it cannot do. It is so good at taking mental pictures, at storing beautiful memories, and now that it trusts the highest Self it is quiet and peaceful.

We must not, however, trust the mind to lead us through life. It is not the proper instrument for this and becomes a never-ending source of fear, frustration and suffering when we empower it in that way.

10 May 2014

Oh my gosh, let's have some fun!

Here we are in Oklahoma, approaching Tulsa.

Close your eyes and be with me. Completely. Picture this. We walk the left side of the two lane route 66 through the rolling hills. Green, trees, wildflowers, birds, butterflies, bees. Hot sun. Traffic is spaced out, a car every minute or so on average. Well trucks mostly, pick-up trucks.

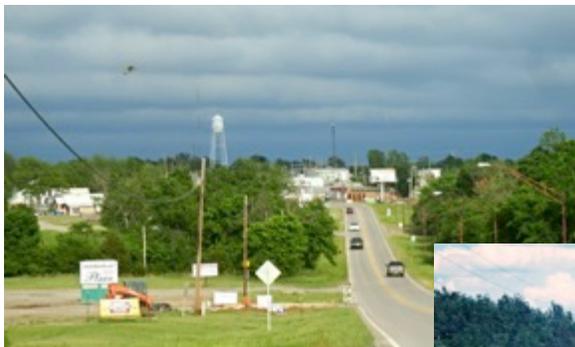
Now put your entire heart in to this. Look at every driver and passenger coming towards you, find their eyes. Smile deeply and wave. To each one of them. Feel the smile. Say "hi" as you contact them. With all of your intent wish them well, for them to be happy, to find peace. Give them peace. Give them joy.

Now, as you look, see them brighten. See characters that look like good old boys with cowboy hats smile. See men and women, boys and girls wave. Some just put up a finger, some wave as hard as they can, clearly excited. See that dog in the back of the pickup wag his tail and bark. Look at the peace symbols, hands up with two fingers spread. Every now and then see the semi truck driver reach up and pull their air line, and hear that loud horn resonate through you.

Oh my, Oklahoma.

Be here now. Side by side.

How does it feel?





"Few souls understand what God would accomplish in them if they were to abandon themselves unreservedly to Him and if they were to allow His grace to mold them accordingly."
-St. Ignatius of Loyola



14 May 2014

Osage Forest of Peace

Om Om Om

Dearest friends, it has been an amazing gift to be able to spend two full days at Osage Forest of Peace, located about 20 miles west of Tulsa. What was once a monastery is now a full time retreat inspired by the teachings of Father Bede Griffiths, it is a place of love and peace.

The soul thrives on peace, the mind on conflict. This retreat is a place for the soul. It is one of the most peaceful places that I have ever been, outside of the Self itself. I cannot recommend it highly enough.



Between Sisters Maryann, Jane and Sheila along with the rest of the staff, the guests and the population of animals, trees, flowers and such, and the thrice daily Meditation, quiet time, food, Sunday service and communion, this is indeed heaven on earth.

Please find a way to spend some time here and listen to the beautiful silence, outside, leading you inside.

Love

17 May 2014

"Love is the Absence of Judgment"

~ HH Dalai Lama

Om Om Om

This is a beautiful quote from the Dalai Lama. Please consider taking time in contemplation of this.

As you likely know, his Holiness' quotes are both direct and insightful. This particular quote is very interesting due to its depth, it may be understood at two levels. First we'll read it as something like, "love without judgment", in other words telling us to set judgment aside and love all. This, of course, is a lovely invocation and we are asked to do this by all of the great teachers. "Love and respect all." "Love as a mother Loves." "Love thine enemy."

Yet this is not the quote. Instead, his Holiness is telling us what Love is, and therefore how to Love. Indeed.

"Love is the absence of judgment." In other words, Love is what exists when we go beyond judgment. Where is judgment, that is, what judges? How do we go beyond judgment? How may we, then, Love all?

Thank you dearest!

Hari Om Tat Sat

19 May 2014

Sharing an amazing experience from this weekend.

On Friday we had walked to Chelsea and slept out, taking an early start towards Vinita Saturday morning. It had been cold overnight, was a crisp morning and the pace was good. Beautiful. I had met a few people in the morning, some lovely chats in between the steps with an amazing display of greenery, wildflowers and birdsong forming the background for the walk and prayer.

I was nearing the town of White Oak and was met by a man driving up to see me in a pickup truck, he greeted me and invited me to the family home for a meal, told me that some of the his family had seen me walking and they would like me to join them. Their property was just a few miles up the road. Of course, yes, thank you.

I arrived at Nicki and Martin's property just before noon Saturday, meeting Nicki and several other family members. I learned that Martin had left his body on Thursday and the family was gathering for his memorial service. The family is Native American, I learned on Sunday that Martin and other elders in the family had been heavily involved with the American Indian Movement's activities in the 1960s and 1970s. He had always instructed his family to be kind to strangers and to wanderers in particular; it was for this

reason that they, and he, reached out with the desire to host me for weekend, to invite us to participate in their ceremonies and to bring us in to their hearts.

The weekend, then, was in honor of Martin in services that were conducted in the traditional way.

We participated in such a beautiful outpouring of Love; it was and is so incredibly touching. Of course I have a different perspective of bodily death from many and will tell you that nothing dies. In their tradition they were aware of Martin being with them through the ceremonies and then picture him moving to the spirit world, to heaven.

I'm not familiar with the faith systems of the Native Americans, I expect some of you are. I was so honored to participate and to know a little, to have this large family as part of my heart and to share love with them. I'll say that, from the little that I knew and from observing and participating, the understanding of the unity of all is the core of the ancestral teachings. Ceremonies are focused on bringing awareness of this unity and the sharing of respect and Love.

The sweat lodge in particular is such a ceremony. It was incredible participating in this. Perhaps some of you have? If not, and if you ever have the opportunity to, I suggest that you do. It's a sacred ritual yet there are some good descriptions of it online if you are interested and wish to participate for the traditional purpose.

Of course what transcended the ceremony and the faith is Love itself, the universal Love that is through all, which is inseparable from Life. This weekend was a pure sharing and celebration of this Love and this Life. Smiles and laughter, sadness and tears. Grief with the physical loss of a brother, father, grandfather, partner, friend. There is no question that the mind does not know what this thing called death is, and it cannot know, so it struggles with the concepts

mightily. Yet Love transcends and this has been an amazing sharing of Love.



Construction of sweat lodge

We carry this extended family with us now; the hearts and the traditions both. And we are with them, with our Love and with our prayer, with our intent that they may pass through grief and know the living Martin always, that they may find the ways to have him always in their hearts, that they may continue beautifully on their paths to the Understanding of the Divine which is always, and to knowing and being the Peace and Divine

Love which are at the center of all.

Much of the tradition of the Native Americans is passing. The medicine men and the great storytellers are gone. This is the case for many of the great traditions in the world. Great misunderstanding, confusion, has taken them, not to be returned to the earth. Now many experience struggle as a result of this loss of these beautiful traditional ways. Yet the Grandfathers (the Spirit) are always, and are never separate from us, in the same way that the Father is not, that Jesus Christ is not, that Buddha, Krishna, Brahman, Allah, etc are never further from us than our own heartbeat.

The traditions help us to find our way; they are all pointers to the great Truth inside and help us to uncover the Truth. The Truth is not lost without the tradition yet the path becomes even more difficult. Help is always needed. Grace is always yet help is needed, and this help comes in the form of compassion and Love. Our compassion and Love, for those who struggle, for all.

Please join me for a moment in silence today, and bring your intent to this. Let us chant Om Namō Narayanaya or whatever you feel in your tradition, let us do this together. With our positive intent let us recognize and help:

All in grief

All suffering with loss of tradition and support

All

And let us thank Martin, Nicki and all of our family and friends through them for bringing us in to their hearts and sharing all with us. Let us thank them for being beacons of Love in this world.

And we thank the Grandfathers. We thank God in all names and forms.

And let us now continue on towards the Missouri border, one step at a time!

Such a wonderful gift. Thank you all!



This young man was on a mission to ride his bike around the world; starting in Korea he had already reached Tulsa.



First Steps.

On the 22nd, continuing east still from Martin and Nicky's, I came upon this scene. In this world there is always death, always new birth and first steps. They are two sides of the same coin, both sides are the show of the magnificent Truth. Nothing comes, nothing goes, all is repurposed. The expression of Life eternal. Beautiful.

Amazing.

26 May 2014 Memorial Day 2014 in the USA

Om Om Om

As I walk today I'm deeply aware of a somber mood, I've taken it to share today as well. Many are in prayer on this day for those whom we feel we have lost.

As we walk for Peace we know that many are not yet aware of the Peace which is. We walk in awareness and respect together for them, with them, in prayer always together, never separate in Truth.

Memorial Day in the U.S. provides for remembrance and awareness of those who left their bodies in less than peaceful circumstances. Although we do not wish battle we recognize that it is the path of many to participate in battle on their way to finding their Peace. Much pain and suffering results from this, of course.

In Truth nothing departs, nothing dies, yet this is not how it appears. Only with the deep understanding that Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna and all of the Mahatmas lead us to do we know. Until we know our Self we may take solace in them. On days like today this solace is very strong, creating a shelter for all who feel the deep hurt of loss to reside within.



Let us please join together in Meditation and prayer today to recognize all who struggle with this feeling of loss, both those who left the body in battle of any kind and their loved ones who deal with the effects of this. In Meditation and prayer we help strengthen the shelter, help add to the Love, and help each toward their own inner re-discovery of the Peace which is at their center. We also help to bring awareness of our unity with those we thought lost, and with all.

I would appreciate it so much if you could close your eyes in silence and join me for this now. In the silence and Peace of our heart.

Please, if you have a prayer today for others you wish me to join make me aware of it and I shall, as will more of our friends I'm sure.

God bless, we are blessed. God is Love, we are Loved. God is all, we are all. By any name, or no name, the Truth is and we are never separate from That.

Thank you so much. I bow to you in deepest respect. Namaskar.

Om Namo Narayanaya

Let us decide on happiness and love... come whatever may.

Love

27 May 2014

This morning we are ten miles west of Springfield, Missouri. God willing we'll be walking through the city this afternoon.

Thunderstorms are predicted, it's a beautiful cloudy morning, no rain yet. Yesterday we saw a very large storm (pictured here), so much rain. I got wet but not drenched, God through a sweet little dog saved me from that getting drenched. Fun story, maybe later we can share it.

Remember when you were a child and you loved to walk in the rain? How about if we become children again today and enjoy this? We can smile, laugh, wave at people, maybe kick a few puddles? While we share our Love? What do you think, ready to go?

Hari Om

Now, about the little dog who saved me from getting drenched and perhaps more.

On the 26th I was walking north from Carlin with the intention of walking through Girard and then on to Springfield. I had started early in the morning with the intention to walk about twenty-five miles for the day so that I could arrive in Springfield to meet friends mid-afternoon on the 27th. There were storms forecasted for the afternoon and the morning walk had been in sunshine, it was quite hot.

The walk to Girard was nearly fifteen miles and the terrain was all farmland. There was no shelter along the way; my only protection from inclement weather was my poncho until I reached Girard. As I neared Girard the sky was becoming dark and the air was cooling; it was about two in the afternoon. I looked to see what shelter was on offer in the town and I saw just a few structures that might be possible. First, just coming in to clear view on my right ahead was a used car lot with a metal awning extending from a small building which served as the office. That offered outdoor shelter; clearly there was not an opportunity to go inside there as the lot appeared to be closed.



I was about ten minutes away from the lot and about ten minutes or so further ahead I saw one more structure on the right which looked like a gas station, that seemed to be a better option as I'd likely be able to go indoors to wait out the brewing storm. I didn't see any restaurants or markets but perhaps there was something else further on.

I had picked up the pace as the storm seemed to be gathering. It appeared that I'd be able to reach the gas station before the rains came. Although the sky was darkening there was not yet any lightning or any distant thunder. I set my sights for the gas station and walked quickly.

As I neared the car lot a small dog came up to me on the left side of the road and seemed to want to play. I was about a minute away from the car lot when she came to visit. She wagged her tail, pranced and looked at me with bright eyes that captured my full attention. We played for maybe three or four minutes, then I petted her and talked with her, she was very happy.

Suddenly she crossed the road, at a middling pace and without looking. She seemed to just set her sights on the other side and go, ignoring the cars coming each way. I walked with her to wave off the cars, helping her to cross without being hit or causing an accident. As soon as we reached the other side the skies opened and an absolute downpour began. I looked after her for a moment but then she scampered off and I ran under the awning.

As soon as I got under the awning the storm picked up intensity. The winds came, they must have reached forty or fifty miles per hour, perhaps more. The rain came at a torrential pace. The rain quickly turned to hail, pea sized and a little larger. The hail was "pinging" loudly on the asphalt, structures and cars. The clouds became black but lightning strikes lit up the sky while thunder rumbled. I had seldom seen storms like it. The cars on the roadway stopped and pulled off, visibility for the drivers was gone. One car pulled in to the car lot but the rain was coming down so hard the driver didn't even roll down his window. Lightning seemed to strike directly overhead several times and the awning shook with thunder rolls co-incident with the strikes. The winds changed directions. Used cars for sale were parked under the awning and I was taking cover using them to block the rain. I walked around the cars for shelter each time the winds shifted. I thought about trying to get underneath one of the cars but the asphalt under them was so wet by that point it would not have helped.

The worst of the storm was over in perhaps forty-five minutes, I was told later that there was about six inches of rain that during the period and there was extensive flooding around the area. Mostly I was able to keep sheltered during the storm, but a dhoti is like a cotton wick. When the bottom of it gets wet the moisture travels upward, and eventually all of my clothes were wet. Within an hour the rain was finished and I continued north.

As I walked past the gas station on my right I saw that it was closed, and it looked like it had been for at least a year or two.

My friend, that adorable little dog, had grasped my attention, walked me towards the shelter, and then disappeared when the storm came. Had I continued walking without seeing her or without stopping I'd

have been five minutes away from both shelters, and I'd have taken the brunt of the storm... hail included.

There is simply no question that her work was both divinely inspired and sincerely appreciated.

28 May 2014

"I accept all religions that were in the past and worship with them all. I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form. I'll go to the mosque of the Muslim, I'll enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix. I'll enter the Buddhist temple, where I take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I'll go in to the forest and sit in Meditation with the Hindu who's trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of everyone. Not only shall I do this, but I'll keep my heart open for all that may come in the future."



Sri Swami Vivekananda

Oh my, unity in diversity is always on display! So beautiful! Not one is more or less yet each is unsurpassed! Yesterday meeting with brothers at the Vietnamese Buddhist temple here, tonight intending to attend service at a local Unitarian church, God willing. What can be better than celebrating the Divine Life in us all, that extends through all, in all of its myriad ways?

Om Om Om, Love you, thank you!



3 Jun 2014

Om Om Om

Peacemaking and Leadership



These pictures were taken as we walked from Springfield to Lebanon, Missouri. Just a few of the amazing sights and friends we've met along the way.

It's time to share some reflection about peacemaking and leadership, observations from this journey. I hope that this will be meaningful and beneficial.

I started walking October 4, upon my return from India. You have been with me every step. Initially we walked from Seaside, near Monterey, to San Diego, all in California. We enjoyed the last week of November and the full month of December at Sivananda Vedanta Yoga's Yoga Farm Ashram in Grass Valley, then began this coast to coast peace pilgrimage on January 1 in Pasadena, walking south, then east, then northeast.



We've walked for nearly seven months and have covered 2,600 miles of terrain including seascapes, mountains, plains, desert and

much in between. The goal of touching the east coast and reaching Egg Harbor for the annual celebration of Peace Pilgrim's works is 1,500 or so miles and a bit less than four months away. God willing we'll continue from here towards St Louis, and onward through Springfield, Illinois, Indianapolis, Toledo, Detroit, southeastern Canada, upstate New York, through the city, then continuing towards southern New Jersey.

We've walked in prayer that all may know Peace, from inner peace to world peace, now. We've connected with many thousands of friends along the way one way or another, perhaps with a smile and a wave or perhaps a meal together, perhaps communion together in a church, temple or under a tree, perhaps an overnight stay. We've met every kind of friend from plants and animals to humans, of course all rooted in the One unity. We will, with Grace, commune with many thousands more. And then celebrate the great Peace Pilgrim's works together!

Yet in this world peacemaking, in whatever form it takes, is never done. By its nature it can never be complete.

When I started walking I carried a petition for the United Nations asking that its "Peacemaking Committee" be re-chartered and refocused. From the start the petition was a bit of subterfuge, for it became clear that no UN commission would play a meaningful role in bringing true peace. In short order I stopped talking about the petition effort and discarded it. We as individuals can do much more than the UN can in this effort.

There is a notion that politicians are motivated to find peace, to use peaceful means. Other than very rare exceptions, and in the last century Teddy Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandiji stand out as such examples, politicians foment conflict, not peace. It is their job; they represent our own mental conflict so they must. There is a further notion that those whom we elect to hold office, representatives and ministers, prime ministers and presidents and such, are our leaders. This could not be further from the truth, for in fact we lead them. Each of us are the leaders, the only leaders that the world may ever know. It is our own choice how to lead, yet know that we lead, that is we set an example, regardless. We set an example of laziness or hedonism, or of compassion and loving, but whatever we do make no mistake that we set an example, thus we lead. We do it with our family, with our friends, with animals and nature, with any one we meet. We do it in a park, in a church, we do it on Facebook. We lead by smiling, we lead by frowning. We lead by thinking positively, we lead by thinking negatively. We lead by screaming or through a sweet voice. We are the leaders; any one we elect is following us. Any corporate head is following us. Not what we say, but what we think and what we do. We are the market that they serve.

Peace is our natural state, yet we don't see it. In the world Peace may only be found by fighting for it. If we try to rest, to "do nothing", as some who today call themselves teachers would profess, we do not find peace, we find non-stop conflict instead. Yes, at a level we may say that everything is actually OK and that if we can just "be" then we know happiness, bliss, Peace. So just "be"! Yes, of course. But how? Well, one must work for it! How can we just be with this incessant need to eat, to breathe, and the nonstop mind's desires for "stuff"? Well, we must "do" to "be", we must fight for Peace in order to be at Peace.

So what do we do? How ? The tendency of our mind is to see sources of conflict outside. We see certain people as enemies and perhaps we fight them. Other peoples, countries, perhaps we see "bad people" heading companies and organizations. Perhaps we just see "bad people" eating meat, or railing on and on telling us not to eat meat. Or we see "bad people" making money from fracking for oil, or we see "bad people" trying to take our livelihoods away by demonstrating against oil fracking. It goes on.

Who then must we fight in order to have Peace?

People are not the problem. The dark forces are what cause conflict, and they are observed in each of us. No person is either all good or all bad. These forces are what cover the Light in each of us (they reside in our mind) and cause our pain, our own conflict.

Fear. Anger. Hatred. Improper discrimination (thinking a different person, due to color, sex, philosophy, etc is somehow separate from us). Avarice. Misunderstanding. Desire for Fame and Riches. Perverse Thought (obsessive desire to cause harm to others for example). These are common enemies of each of us and are the enemies of Peace. This is what we fight against in order to win Peace. We must fight them wherever we find them, and we must find them and defeat them inside in order to effectively fight them outside of us.

We have experienced many great examples of true peacemakers, such as Gandiji and Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, and countless others doing their work either in the open or silently. In fact because of the "big names" we think that we cannot do the same, yet the opposite is True. Peace awaits each of us.

Grace exists for each of us. We merely need to take on this battle and to fight for Peace in whatever we do, with the strongest possible desire to win! We don't need to take on a new job, for peacemaking is not about the job we do but how we do it. Leadership for Peace is in our smile and our greeting, in our beneficial thoughts, words and actions.

Let us ask for the highest guidance so that we may see and know our true enemies, inside and out, and let us fight against them together and enjoy complete victory. Let us do this together; let us be great peacemakers in whatever we do. Let all know Peace.

You walk with me and I walk with you. Nothing separates us.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

3 Jun 2014

Om dearest!

We have reached a small grove of stately trees next to a lovely church and will take this offering of a room for the night.

It's 9:30PM and the sun set about an hour ago. Since then we've been walking through the woods in the moonlight. For some time, I know not how long but it seemed near eternity, we walked with no cars, only the sounds of the crickets, frogs and cicadas chirping, through the dim outline of myriad trees and tall grass, with the scent alternatively of grasses, various wildflowers and honeysuckle. Fireflies dance, flitting here and there bringing bright flashes to accent the scene. It's a warm night with a faint cooling breeze, we breathe in warm moist air and breathe out silently, at Peace and in love with all.



Please close your eyes for a moment, inhale deeply and be here now. Bring it all in. The moonlight, the shadows, the warmth and the breeze, the smell of grass with sweet honeysuckle highlights. Enjoy all.

What a beautiful night for a walk.

Ooh my dear God, thank you. Thank you all!

Love you.

8 Jun 2014

"I love you so much, I wish only eternal happiness for you. I would do anything for you to be happy.



In fact I have. I've already given you this happiness. But you look in the wrong places.

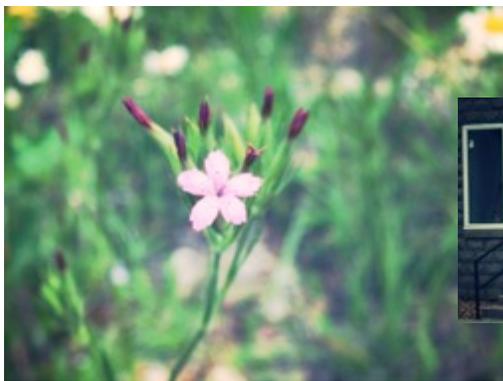
"This happiness cannot be found in anything of this world because all must be impermanent. It is for your enjoyment but instead you attach to the unreal and forget about the real.

"You may see me, the real, behind the eyes of every creature. You may see me in the vibrant colors, you may smell me in the honeysuckle, you may hear me in the birdsong, feel me in your beating heart. I am



the permanent essence of all the impermanent, the Light behind all lights. You may know me in the silent voice behind your mind, speaking Truth to you. You call me your intuition, find me there.

"Attach to me my child, please know my Love and hold tight to me. Know me as the Truth of the world and never feel alone again. Find me in all and know the gift of eternal happiness I've given you. Find me and know your very Self and the True, eternal nature of all."



13 Jun 2014

As human beings we are completely incomplete. We are amazing at something, and that something is critically important, but woefully inadequate at everything else. Within the universe is everything needed for us to be complete.

As we find our way to fully open our heart, to have compassion and respect for all, regardless of race, religion, thoughts or deeds, we find that the universe fully opens its heart to us. From this point, exactly what we need is provided, at exactly the proper time. The universe completes us.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti



15 Jun 2014

Oh my, I'm so deeply touched I must share this. The past few days it seems that effectively all of my experience, my awareness, has been linked through MABA, the Mid American Buddhist Association in Augusta, MO, which we had visited for the day on Thursday. Here I'll include the names of friends associated through MABA that I remember at this moment, I know there are more and I'm sorry for forgetting these names though your face and your heart are indelibly inked in me. Tracy, Stacey, Bret,



Toni, Nancy, Eileen, Chloe, Gage, and many more.

Friday we walked on the KATY (a bike/walking path) from Augusta towards St Louis, but before taking the path we were on the road for a while. Stacey stopped and we had a lovely visit. Later that day I got a text from Bret. "Where will you be tomorrow? Do you need shoes?" Lol, that was a wow because the latest shoes had only lasted a few hundred miles or so and rocks were already starting to poke their way through the soles. Then yesterday.

Tracy sent me a message in the morning that there was a group coming and that she wanted to meet, later in the day. The group, eight smiling faces and



loving personalities, drove up to me early afternoon and brought new sandals and some provisions. We had a beautiful visit. Then the fun kept going... as I continued walking towards St Charles a very sweet young woman, I believe named Gretchen, stopped with her boyfriend to visit. She said she was aware of the group coming but didn't know where I'd be, then she saw the Orange. I continued an hour and stopped at a coffee shop, there a man introduced himself and we had a wonderful conversation. He was writing a book, he had taught comparative religion at a local university and had attended the initiation ceremony of

the center eighteen years ago, one of the monks there had also attended his class ten years ago. Continuing, Tracy came and we had a fun visit. I received a message from Stacey asking if I needed a place to sleep, it turns out that she was four miles ahead of me. Then half way to her place I met Jack, one more who is practicing at the center. He told me that he had seen me the day before walking in Augusta and again yesterday, then he felt that he must stop. We also had a lovely visit. Then to Stacey, a fun evening with friends, then rest.

You are following this, right? The group, all together. Tracy, of course. Then three more, seemingly at random lol. We are talking about a total community at MABA of a hundred or so active practitioners, and a



With friends at Mid American Buddhist Association



couple of million people in the St Louis area. It's like walking through the big city and meeting only people that you discover attended your school, and that school only ever had a few hundred students. You may think about it.

So what would I like to share? First such deep gratitude for the sharing, the Love, the heartfelt gifts. The provisions will carry me for a bit. The Love for longer. Thank you friends! Thank you God!

Next, the string. It's another beautiful example of the Divine string that connects all. We think that events are random, disconnected. This is only the mind. All is synchronous. One reason that awareness is so important is this, that we may see the string that runs through all events. Nothing is random or disconnected.

Third, the lesson of Love. Am I in some way deserving of all of this attention and outpouring? In my mind I'll tell you no. Honestly I'm so simple now. I walk, I pray, I meet people and wish them well, I commune with nature, I take what is offered. I'm in constant Meditation and awareness of the Divine, I wish all well and focus on being beneficial in some way when we meet. This is my conscious existence, just this. There is much more under the surface, this is so with each of us. Inside is the creative force, the Loving force, the connection to all. So what is it that I do that is deserving? No more or less than anyone. That's just it. When we quiet the unruly mind, when we focus on the beneficial and just do our best, the universe takes care of us. It loves doing this. It is truly amazing. Here I try to describe what cannot be described so I'll just say this. Love is. It is eternal. It is before our limited self, it is after it. It is inside it, it is outside it. Omnipresent. I must weep as I write this; it brings me to my knees in awe and gratitude. And it is never separate from me, or from you. It is you, the True you, and when given the opportunity you live to show it! Wow.

All that is left here is to say that this experience, which seems so bizarre at one level, is natural, it is our True nature. It is here for all. Unburden the mind. Free it from its worries. Have a Meditation practice, in this way the conscious mind learns of the presence of the Divine in us. Eat properly. Learn how to breathe, how to watch and control the breath. Serve others, few or many. Read stories of saints for inspiration, surround yourself with wisdom and a community such as



MABA or one of many

churches or yoga centers which practice what is called mindfulness in Buddhism, and know this. A little or a lot.



We will talk more about the mind. For now this is enough words. Let's put on the pack, we have a ferry crossing to make together in a couple of hours, let's cross the Mississippi River together! And perhaps we can contemplate this lesson as we walk together.

Love you so much, I am in awe of you and your Love, your gifts, your presence. Thank you!

16 Jun 2014

Om Om Om

Back to the magic water bottle for a moment lol, this must be shared because it provides an expanded perspective of how we serve and are served. Many of you know the water bottle stories of faith through the desert, they are on here you don't would like to look, they amazing.



Today it's hot and humid, we are taking shorter steps and breaks every hour give or take, yet moving. The town of Shipman is six miles away and the water just ran out. There was one sip left.

I was resting next to a tree just now, and a man pulled up in his car. We greeted each other, he got out with a bag that he handed me two bottles of water and a sandwich.

He said he had driven past me three times today and that God had laid upon his heart to bring me water and food. Of course I thanked him, he said that I should thank God because this is why he did it. He said that this was the third time he drove past, just now, that God laid on his heart very strongly so he went to the station, got these, and came back.

So, now we'll enjoy some cold water and keep walking.

Contemplation here is this. We think that the thoughts in our mind are ours. Where do our thoughts come from? Our beneficial thoughts, about serving others, about loving and caring for another, what is their source? Please consider the source of these. We are never separate from the Divine.

You know this of course, it is just a beautiful story and contemplation. We are always in the arms of the One, never separate, never not loved, always Love itself.

Om Om Om



Springfield, IL

22 June, 2014

St James, Missouri to Springfield, Illinois.



Magic, Love, Friends, Beauty, Satsanga at the lovely and loving Hindu Temple in Springfield, Bliss. Thank you God, thank you dearest Donna Mataji for organizing the weekend activities, thank you to all for this amazing journey we are taking together! Thank you for your sharing, for your kindness, for your smile, for our steps together.

Please enjoy these lovely stories here, stories that reflect your True nature.

This morning we continue on together towards Bloomington, Illinois. We will be in Satsanga at Main Street Yoga there on Tuesday evening at 7PM.



*Love you.
Peace. Hari Om
Tat Sat*



Springfield, IL Hindu Temple

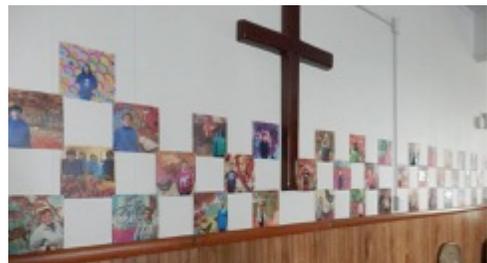
25 Jun 2014

Om Om Om

Desire and Suffering

There is a high teaching that correlates our desires and their fruits and is often interpreted as, "desire is the cause of suffering". In other words, with this

interpretation one must eliminate all of their desires in order to know Moksha or Ananda (liberation, bliss. One may also say the end of suffering). Is this so?



Lexington, IL, Church of Christ
Uniting

It is so that we may say desire is the cause of the world. Desire is the motive force of the world. When we desire something, such as a new job, new car, a boyfriend or girlfriend, etc., we observe that it invariably comes to pass. One's thoughts and actions are completely focused on it and at the same time subtle forces in the universe go to work to bring the thing we desire to us.



Although we get the thing we desire we learn, in time, that it does not provide the joy we expected. In the case of a boyfriend or girlfriend, for example, we have this expectation that attaining this desire will in some way complete us, that life will become beautiful with this new perfect loved one. The issue is that the attainment of one thing, even a

wonderful lover, never completes us. It is not possible as we'd need the entire universe to fully complete us. So, in turn, our desires are seen through as not providing our answer and perpetuating or exacerbating our state of suffering.



So, if I control and stop desire I stop suffering?

It's not possible. In fact when we attempt to comprehend this we view it as so far from the realm of possibility that the mind cannot even deal with it. We can shut down the senses in Yoga, we can enter Samadhi, yet is not this practice the result of desire?

This is just the point. Gautama the Buddha became a Buddha through desire for enlightenment. Once enlightened he desired to share this gift with the world, and this was his life's work. Saint Therese, the Little Flower, said, "God would never inspire me with desires which cannot be realized; so in spite of my littleness, I can hope to be a saint." If one wants to help others it is a desire.



So what's the difference? Expectation of the fruits of the desire. Let's say that Little Flower wanted to be a saint and expected it, say, tomorrow. If tomorrow she observed behavior not fitting she would be upset. Gautama, under the tree, would have gotten up if he had not enlightenment after a certain time. But he committed instead to remain, knowing it would happen or the body would shrivel and blow away, and accepting either scenario as of equal merit.

This is the point then. It is the expectation of a certain fruit of desire that chains us, not desire itself. We may desire, in fact we must desire. If we want Moksha we may desire for the highest we can dream of, and accept and trust the results with no agency.

If we desire a thing purely for the benefit of others, all others, and if we do our best for this, with beneficial intent, we shall have our Moksha, our Ananda, in due course. There is no question of this. It is the way of the universe. It is the Divine way. It is your way.

Hari Om Tat Sat

25 Jun 2014

Om Om Om

Loving you.

The common point of confusion is to associate Love with a thing or a person instead of Love itself. It is independent of all things, it flows freely through all. It's observed to flow through children, or a flower, or a butterfly, or a piece of music... Yet it's never those, it is simply and purely Love, your Love, not separate from any image, the very force which creates and animates all images including what you call yourself. When we do not see it flow through a particular thing in the moment it is flowing through another.

We are simply to drop expectations of one thing, one person, or another, to know always this Love as our own Self reflecting, flowing, through all.

Hari Om Tat Sat

27 Jun 2014

Thank you God

For taking what I thought was me

And giving me

You

30 Jun 2014

Om Om Om

Leap of faith.

Nearing Chicago it is time to go deeper in faith for the balance of this walk. The backpack, sleeping bag, poncho and a few other items have this morning been sent away for donation and now, God willing, there is just this baggage for the remainder of the walk to New York City and then Egg Harbor, NJ.

This is always our decision in the moment. How much baggage should I carry? Our inner knowing is that we need none, that we are secure in our highest Self, in God, In Jesus, in Allah, in Buddha, however we choose to think or say it. We have within us the very source of Self reliance and no baggage is necessary. We need no attachments to things, to ideas, to beliefs, to fears, to people. We need but one attachment and with this we may enjoy all as from That. Verily all is That.



The new pack.

Yet what we call life is the walk of faith. We are shown that the world is not as it appears, that we are not as we appear, in order to find faith, in order to train the mind, in order to know what is and to be at Peace, in Joy, in Love with all as of the One. We find it impossible to have complete faith all at once, so we may drop baggage along the way to test our burgeoning faith, to know that we are OK, in fact that we are lighter, we are more complete, by forgiving the unforgivable, or by deeply evaluating what we need, or by surrendering our stress and worry, our need to plan all. That we might Live.

Thank you God for your mercies, for what you have shown me through all of your Loving hands, eyes and mouths. Thank you for this opportunity to express deeper faith in you. Thank you for always Loving me, always holding me, always forgiving me, as you do all. Thank you for your teachers, the saints, who have walked this path and known you, that help us know that there is always a way, that we may always have hope and inspiration.

Hari Om Tat Sat

2 Jul 2014

Om Om Om

Finally we know this... whatever we are given is sufficient! We may have the entire Universe through doing our best with what we have, and surrendering it with Love of God.

On return from India I had a backpack and some gear waiting for me to start the California walk; we have talked about this. Initially there was about twenty-five pounds or so of gear and bit-by-bit I gave items away until I could put everything in a 15 liter day pack weighing in at about ten pounds including my magic one liter bottle of water.

This gear stayed with me until central Illinois, and I knew by then that it was time to go deeper in faith and give away more of the gear. I wanted to be free of the backpack and go to a waist pack. Peace Pilgrim's example still motivates me, I'm sure that it will as long as I am here. A comb, a toothbrush, and a pen. Amazing, still amazing.

How to do this? When I had dropped gear in California it was easy because I simply gave away what I didn't use regularly. Now I applied the same rule but I needed to go further; I needed to give away items that I used regularly. I often slept outside and that sleeping bag got a lot of use. I never got stuck outside in a bad storm but I regularly got wet when the rains finally came so the poncho came in very handy as well. I liked to keep my head clean so I shaved regularly. You get the point; everything I was carrying was in regular use.

I contemplated this for a few days. I noticed as it was raining more nights than not I was being routinely offered indoor lodging and had not been using the sleeping bag regularly any longer. The sleeping bag

would go. Other items would go also, there was a list coming together. The poncho, though, was vexing. I used it regularly but it would take up a lot of space in a waist pack.

One day I was walking on Route 66; the old road parallel to the newer freeway. I was often close enough to the freeway to see it, and as a result most of the traffic was on the freeway and there were only a few cars where I was. The weather had been wet and on this day big storms had been predicted.

A dance began. I normally carried the poncho inside the backpack but on this day it seemed that I'd need it often and I had always gotten wet fumbling around with the backpack to find the poncho in the past (consider this, we typically put on a poncho when it rains, not before!). So this day I placed it in an outer pocket on the backpack where it would be easily accessible. The sun had been out in the morning but then clouds came with thunder and lightning and the rain started. After getting a little wet I reached around and took the poncho, slipping it on quickly. A few minutes after this the rain stopped and the sun re-emerged. It got hot, and I was steaming inside the poncho so in some time I took it off and placed it back in its pocket in the backpack.

It was not long before the clouds returned and shortly lightning, thunder, and rain came. I got a little wet again, and on went the poncho. The same act played out once more. It was only a few minutes before the rains stopped, the sun emerged, and I was once again steaming inside the poncho. I laughed. This was so funny; it was clearly a game. And yes, it played out once again, exactly the same. This time I looked up at the sky with my biggest smile and said, "I get it". Off came the poncho, with a commitment to not put it back on that day regardless of how hard it rained. After all, Peace Pilgrim had talked about this and she never carried a rain slicker or umbrella. She said that rain did not melt her and saw no need to carry such. In that moment I decided that I would drop the poncho also.

For the next five hours I walked in alternating sunshine and cloud cover with dark clouds, lightning and thunder seemingly always just ahead. The roadway was wet for most of the walk, as if it had just stopped raining wherever I went. I was meeting up with someone who had offered me shelter for the night and she called a few times to check on me because it was storming heavily where she was, a few short miles ahead.

So, the list of gear to give away was complete. The sleeping bag, the poncho, the extra dhoti and the rechargeable shaver were all surplus; and a couple of days later I reduced from two half-liter bottles of water to one for the rest of the trip. I purchased a waist pack and sent away the backpack along with the rest of the gear for donation, and with that also committed that I would no longer carry food, even for the day (food would be carried in my belly only!). If I had to fast that was fine. The pack was now down to about five pounds fully loaded.

This, then, was the baggage that I carried for the balance of the coast-to-coast walk, which completed three months later. My route for the next three months would take me through northern Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, central Pennsylvania, northern New Jersey and New York City finally to southern New Jersey for the Peace Pilgrim celebration. As it so happens these three months were to be some of the wettest on record for these areas. We will talk about this experience a little later.

16. Forgiveness

"Forgiveness is the greatest weapon."

Neem Karoli Baba

Forgiveness as a weapon? Indeed, forgiveness is a most powerful weapon against our own lower self. It helps us to control the mind's tendencies towards differentiation and judgment, and in this way it helps us to quiet the mind. It also works as a weapon for Love in the world, as it is a divine quality and through forgiveness a loving example is set.

The mental tendency to judge and condemn stems from fear and also from our seeming need to self-validate. In order to be an individual the mind must possess standards. "What are my standards, my beliefs?" Ego wants these standards to be protected; it is after all fighting to protect its very existence (which is a sham). It fights hard.

When we want something and do not get it we become angry. When we have something and feel that another is trying to take it away we become angry. When we think that we have an intangible thing, such as "knowledge" or "beauty", etc. and we think that someone is undervaluing it ("disrespecting" us), we become angry. When the same happens to "one of ours", such as a wife, a child, a friend (always "one of ours" is an extension of us, it is "me" by proxy) we become angry. When we feel that someone is hurting us or will hurt us we become angry.

All of this is because of the misunderstanding that we are these physical bodies and from the resulting fear of death, or loss of "me". It is natural as long as we take ourselves to be what we are not. The pattern does, however, need to be broken in order to know our highest Self and to be free of the illusion that causes us to suffer so terribly.

OK, this is philosophy, how to make this practical? Here goes. What good has not forgiving someone ever done for you? Did it fix something? Did it make you feel better or did it help you to live a better life? What about not forgiving your own self? Does this help you to feel loved and does it help you to grow? If someone has been upset with you, has not forgiven you and is not talking with you... and then they finally forgive completely, hug you, apologize for holding the grudge, promise to always love you and to not let that judgmental tendency of theirs ever get in the way again, how does that feel? Does being forgiven in this way help you?

This is the crux. Carrying a grudge against another, even not forgiving our own self, has no benefit whatever and causes only harm inside and out. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is a divine quality that, when employed, magically helps us *and* helps the one that we have forgiven.

Of course mostly it helps us, for carrying a grudge always hurts us more than the one we carry it against.

Judgment and grudge carrying is endemic and not forgiving others or oneself is a great disease. It must be treated by looking inside and by practicing forgiveness always. Let us not miss an opportunity to forgive. "To err is human, to forgive, divine". This is literally so.

There are so many stories of this from pilgrimage, below is one. This was inspired through a meeting that happened shortly after I crossed the Mississippi River, in southern Illinois.

23 Nov 2014

Forgiveness

As I walked through a very small town in Illinois I was greeted by an enthusiastic dog who was jumping, barking and wagging her tail, "HELLO!" from behind a chain link fence; running back and forth from the yard to a wooden deck, first one way and then the next. I was talking with her, telling her how beautiful she was and what a good dog, and a woman emerged from the house to check out the situation.

I greeted her with my brightest smile, we talked about the lovely dog for a little while and then she asked what I was doing. I told her a little of the pilgrimage for peace that I walk and she was intrigued. She offered me water, asked if there was anything else that I needed. I accepted her offer of water and she filled up the magic water bottle.

She wanted to talk more and I listened. She shared that she "should not be talking with me" because her husband was very concerned about strangers, she said that she normally was as well but that she felt like talking with me. She cried as she said this. I just listened and smiled in compassion. She went on to say that she was not a happy person, that her father had done some very mean things to her when she was young. There was clearly so much pain from the association with these memories that she replayed in her mind; it was so deep in her being.

She said that she had cared for her father before he died, while he was in hospital, and that she wanted to forgive him, but that she could not. She said that on his last day she knew that she should forgive him, that she should say something to him, but that she did not and he died shortly after.

This, after all, had become the source of her suffering. She had not been able to forgive her father but what replaced that was that she could not now forgive herself for feeling as she did, for not forgiving him.

Oh, the ego centered mind and emotions, how they work their best to enslave us. We talked about forgiveness, about how to forgive her father and herself. We discussed that it is never too late to do so, that even now if she forgave her father he would know it and the hell which she lived in would start to lift from her. It was so clearly necessary for her to do both in order to move forward, to find her happiness. She said that she wanted to do so and asked for help, "how?"

We took a moment then, I asked her simply to close her eyes, to take a few deep breaths then relax her breathing, and then to repeat to herself inside, "I forgive myself". She did this for just one minute and the relief was palpable, clearly visible. I asked her to do this every day, to take one minute or so and consciously repeat these words of forgiveness. I further asked her to pray for the strength to completely

forgive all including her self, for God to remove all that blocked her from doing so, that she might serve more fully. Finally we talked about finding thirty minutes of silent time each day so that the inner work could be done, that her highest Self would help clear this block for her and give her strength for forgiveness. This is necessary, as forgiveness does not happen in sleep and it does not happen when our mind is occupied with things of the world. In her case we talked about taking a daily walk in the beautiful nature of her area. She said that she would.

This issue is of course endemic. When our egoic mind feels wronged it does not want to forgive. Of course this is not rational or logical for it is not possible to forget. If we do not forgive then we imprison our self. We must forgive for if we do not we are a slave to our emotions. Forgiving our own self is even more important than forgiving others. We must.

These three techniques work. If we practice them life will begin to unfold to us, our prison doors crack open.

- 1. Close your eyes, breath deeply then relax. Say, "I forgive such and such, I forgive myself". Repeat for a minute or a few.*
- 2. Pray to your highest Self or to God for release from non-forgiveness. Ask for the power to forgive all including yourself. Do not think this a selfish prayer, for it provides benefit to all.*
- 3. Take at least thirty minutes per day, every day, in receptive silence. Make a routine of this. Take a nature walk (keeping awareness inside, do not be passionate or excited on a walk) or have a seated Meditation session, or both. The inner work happens during this silence.*

Forgiveness; complete forgiveness, is the greatest gift that we can give to the world and to ourselves. Finally, only through the active, constant and complete practice of forgiveness, the need to forgive ends. The mind's tendency to judge and condemn is replaced by acceptance, and from this springs forth the Love Divine.

17. Observations on Truth Telling

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony."

Mahatma Gandhi

We live a lie in order to pursue our desires. This lie and our attachment to it is deeply rooted; it is a primal cause for our suffering.

The lie is the effect and ignorance is the cause. We don't know who we are; this is our ignorance. Since we don't know who we are we identify with the role we play and this identification with our role is the lie.

Our desires are our life's shopping list and we act out, pretending to be the role that we play so that we may fill our shopping cart with the items we desire. It is as if we are in the supermarket with a lengthy list for an upcoming party. We painstakingly assemble the list and then on our supermarket trip we walk with our cart from aisle to aisle scanning what we see yet taking great care to acquire each of the items on our list, placing them in our basket. We check off the items on the list as we acquire them. Perhaps we pick up a few more items, or maybe several more depending upon our nature and how we feel in that moment, but we are certain to take the items that we came for. It is not a successful shopping trip unless we return home with these.

When we take birth here we already have a shopping list. Some will say that the list is acquired after birth, some will say before. Some would attribute the list to our DNA, some to our heredity, some to our childhood conditioning, some to reincarnation, some to cause and effect. We can say for the sake of our discussion that it is not even relevant where our list came from. We clearly have one. Our shopping list is our subconscious storehouse of desires and tendencies. It exists, we cannot deny this and we cannot deny the power exerted on us by the need to acquire the items on our list.

Fulfilling our desires is very important to us. As long as we are under the sway of ego-mind it is the most important activity for us; for fulfillment of desire is the purpose of our ego-mind. The ego-mind and body form our vehicle for pursuit of what we think will bring us happiness. Through a basic misunderstanding (what some will call "original sin", and in the Vedic teaching is called "Avidya") the thought exists that "I am this body and senses" and therefore that "I must find what I need outside of me". Therefore we walk about with a deeply embedded thought that acquiring all of the items on our shopping list of desires will provide happiness.

Our seeming purpose to attain what we desire is the cause for the lie that we live; the lie is how we express ourselves to the world. Instead of being true to our self we act in ways we feel we need to in order to obtain what we desire. Our thoughts, words and deeds are not in alignment, and this means that we are hypocrites

The word hypocrite holds such negative connotation that you likely felt a pang of anger or resentment reading that, though I can assure you that the statement is shared from a purely beneficial intent. The reaction you might have felt is ego, nothing but false pride. You need to hear this; certainly I did. God's grace resides in these words and in coming to grips with how this constant lie affects us, how it prevents us from being content in our Self.

We put on an act. From the time when we are children we start to understand our desires and we also learn how to behave in order to attain them. We like cookies so we sit quietly in order to get a cookie. We like praise so we study for our test, hoping to get an A so mom and dad heap praise upon us. We want Billie to be our friend so we give Billie toys, we don't care about Sally so we don't give them to her. As we grow we act for recognition, we act for relationships, we act for a good job, we act to win a contract, in fact we do nothing but act.

We get lost in the act. If you can reflect back to childhood you might notice that as a child we are not so caught up in our act. We know that when we sit for a cookie that we are acting a certain way in order to

get a treat. As we grow these acts become so varied and complex that we forget we are acting. The act has become so intense that we dissolve into it in the same way that a great theater actress becomes one with the character she plays. We think we are the doctor, or the lawyer, or the husband, the wife, the father or the mother. It is still an act though, and with reflection you will see that. Who are you really? Behind the act, the actor herself, who are you? Where are you?

We defend the act. We build walls around it to protect it. Perhaps we take pains to say and do only what is helpful that we may achieve our desires, and yet inside our thoughts are a cesspool. This, also, is human nature. All thoughts come through our minds until we are able to wrest control of it, and of course we tend not to express the ugly thoughts that come. We want to be beautiful and share only the beautiful thoughts, the beautiful words and actions. We want to protect our character at all costs.

The issue is that we are not in alignment with that character. It is just a character, our expression; it is not us. We act as multiple characters, not just one. We act one way with the girls or guys at the office, another way in a dance club, another way on the bus, still another way with our wife or husband, with our children, with our boss, with our community leaders. We have built up all of these acts and are completely trapped by them. How to remember which way to act with whom? At a point our complete attention and focus is about maintaining the various characters. This becomes what passes for our life; a complex act that we hide behind.

The lies start and build easily enough. I'll share a story here. In southern Illinois I was walking through a residential area just east of a small town. The properties were large and the houses simple, each had lawns and as I was walking past one a small dog came running to the street to greet me. We played for some time. There was a young man out mowing his lawn with a riding lawnmower who saw us and came over to call the dog away, apparently thinking he was disturbing me. Of course he was not; the opposite was true and I was quite enjoying his playfulness and doggy love.

As the situation developed the young man asked me to stop to join him for a drink, offered for me to unroll my sleeping bag on fresh mown grass under an oak tree, and we sat through the evening chatting. He told his story. He had been in the army and had been posted in the Middle East. He had been married with three children; the oldest a girl of fifteen, and his ex-wife lived in a town across the border in Missouri seventy miles away. Their divorce had been recent and ugly. His wife had a new relationship and he dated from time to time but was not in a relationship.

Of course he shared perspective from anger and hurt, from shame as well, and these are just temporal emotions, none of which belong here. He then told me something that I do want to share; I had often contemplated sharing this during the walk but had not done so previously. It is the story of all of us, not just his.

He loves motor vehicles, he's passionate about them, reading and talking a lot about them, in much the same way that I had years prior. He has a car, a boat, a motorcycle and a lawnmower and he is passionate about all of them. He told me his daughter shares the same passion and loves to ride on the back of his motorcycle while he drives. He said that he does not allow her to drive, and made a point of saying that many parents do allow their children that age to drive but he views this as wrong behavior.

His daughter loves to ride on the motorcycle with her father though, and she had done this several times.

His daughter recently told her mother about riding the motorcycle she became very upset, telling her daughter never to do so again. She told her that she would be grounded if her mother ever heard about her riding the motorcycle with her father.

Of course this situation is completely understandable; one parent likes motorcycles and wants to share a passion that his daughter shares as well. The other parent sees this as dangerous and wants to assert herself for the defense of her daughter, to keep her safe, and perhaps there are other considerations as well.

The daughter reported the situation to her father, and they discussed it. The daughter told her father, "I can still ride the motorcycle and not tell my mother about it."

From here there are several possibilities and I do not know how the story ends except that it is likely to end in a lie. It seemed that the daughter was going to continue to ride with her father and simply not tell her mother about it.

Is it a lie not to tell? Yes, of course. Is it a lie to ride and tell her mother that she has not? Yes, again. It's the same. The only way for her not to lie was to stop riding the motorcycle, and this would require denial of her desire to ride.

The point here is that these lies we live seem to start so innocently, and they build on each other one after another. Finally we have crafted our character and it is a lie. The character consists of lies; it is rooted in misunderstanding and confusion. We have accepted lies as our basis, and we likewise expect lies to be the basis of all. In our limited view of the world we are a mercenary and so are all; as a result neither "I" nor others can ever be trusted completely.

And still we expect that we can be happy! Well, we cannot. It is not possible. The lies have to end, the false character has to end and we must bring our self in to alignment in order to be happy.

How to end the cycle, how to bring ourselves into alignment? Tell the truth. This is so simple but so incredibly hard at the same time, because this idea that "I will always tell the truth, the highest truth that I can find inside me" is inconsistent with "I want that new car and I will be happy when I have it."

Finally, the answer for us lies within. Our subconscious mind is a nest of nasty tendencies and habits that have accumulated over such a long time. Alignment means to be in alignment with our highest light inside. If our mind is not in alignment with this highest light there can be no alignment between thoughts, words and deeds. This is our work; to listen to our inner wisdom and to purify (body, mind and ego), coming in to alignment through the process.

First we need to see. We need to look inside at our thoughts and their nature as well as the act that we present outside. If we look closely we'll see our inconsistency and imbalance. From here we can see the pain that this causes us and others whom we claim to love. We can rationalize and say that we act a

certain way for the benefit of others but this is not helpful; we are able to be happy and to share happiness and love with others only when we are our in alignment with our authentic Self.

St. Augustine ends his beautiful prescription for us (quoted here in an earlier chapter), “Love, and do as you will”. He is telling us, “be in alignment, with complete unity of love (heart, our highest light) and purpose (duty)”. When we do this hypocrisy is put to an end and one lives the real life. All of the details take care of themselves, or we can say that God takes care of all of them, when we are in alignment.



18. Life in the Blanks

"My heart is open to all winds

It is a pasture for gazelles

And a home for Christian monks,

A temple for idols

The Black Stone of the Mecca pilgrim,

The table of the Torah

And the book of the Koran.

Wherever God's caravans turn,

The religion of love shall be my religion

And my faith."

Ibn Arabi

I was walking in northern Illinois one day on a lovely bicycle/walking path and a young man who was riding his bicycle came up to me. He told me that in a few weeks he was planning to walk the thousand miles or so from his home in northern Indiana to New England. He asked if I had suggestions for his walk.

I asked him to "walk in the blanks". We discussed the way that the mind fills in every experience based upon its beliefs and tendencies, and that in doing so we literally miss the experience that is in front of us. I said that his walk would challenge his beliefs, whatever they were, and his mind would search for new beliefs... I asked him instead of allowing this to happen try to remain as open as he possibly could, to live "in the blanks".

We discussed other practical suggestions, but this one suggestion is as practical as it comes.

His personality is so kind; he was committed to his walk and was leaving the next day to return to his hometown in order to let his family know that he had made his decision to go (of course some were trying to convince him not to do so). He soaked up our discussion and resolved to apply himself to remaining open. I'm quite certain that he had an amazing experience.

If we can live in the blanks this world transforms into the most amazing place. Fear drops away and synchronicity is seen as a golden thread woven through each person and experience. The one great absolute Truth is bound to be seen by one living in the blanks; through accepting all that comes in actively receptive awareness.

Let us enjoy life in the blanks.

4 Jul 2014

We each know that the world is not as it appears; yet of course the conscious mind does its best to reject this knowing. We have so many experiences that tell us that the mind is wrong yet it remains strong in rejecting our own experience. Let us then at this moment say it again. The world is not as it appears and we know it.

Depending upon our tradition we may accurately say that the world exists only in the Lord, in the Self, in the no self, etc. Verily this IS That, never independent and always resplendent, and we are not separate from That. Ponder that perhaps there is nothing wrong with the world, that perhaps there cannot be, and that instead the defects we see are in the conscious mind, or in the eye. As Jesus Christ says, "remove first the timber from your own eye". Perhaps our issue is simply that we do not understand. In fact we are told in every tradition that we must find Truth in order to know what the world is, and that this Truth is reached inside each of us.

What are we to do? Think for oneself instead of copying others. Trust our experience and let it help us to inquire deeply about Truth. Set beneficial intent for all. Be aware. Smile. Love. Give. Meditate/Pray. For all, for the entire universe.

This then becomes our independence day, the day that we know our Self as independent from the conscious mind, the very moment we know this . Independence comes from teaching the mind about its dependence upon the highest that we can find within us, the divine Love which in Truth we are. We are that Source, the Lord is not outside, not apart from us.

Today, therefore, let us celebrate the real Independence Day. We may celebrate this every moment with constant awareness of the Lord and the knowledge that we are always in Her arms, that we may create any world we wish with the power of the Lord in us.

Let us Love this world as our child, let us Love all in it, let us know our True independence.

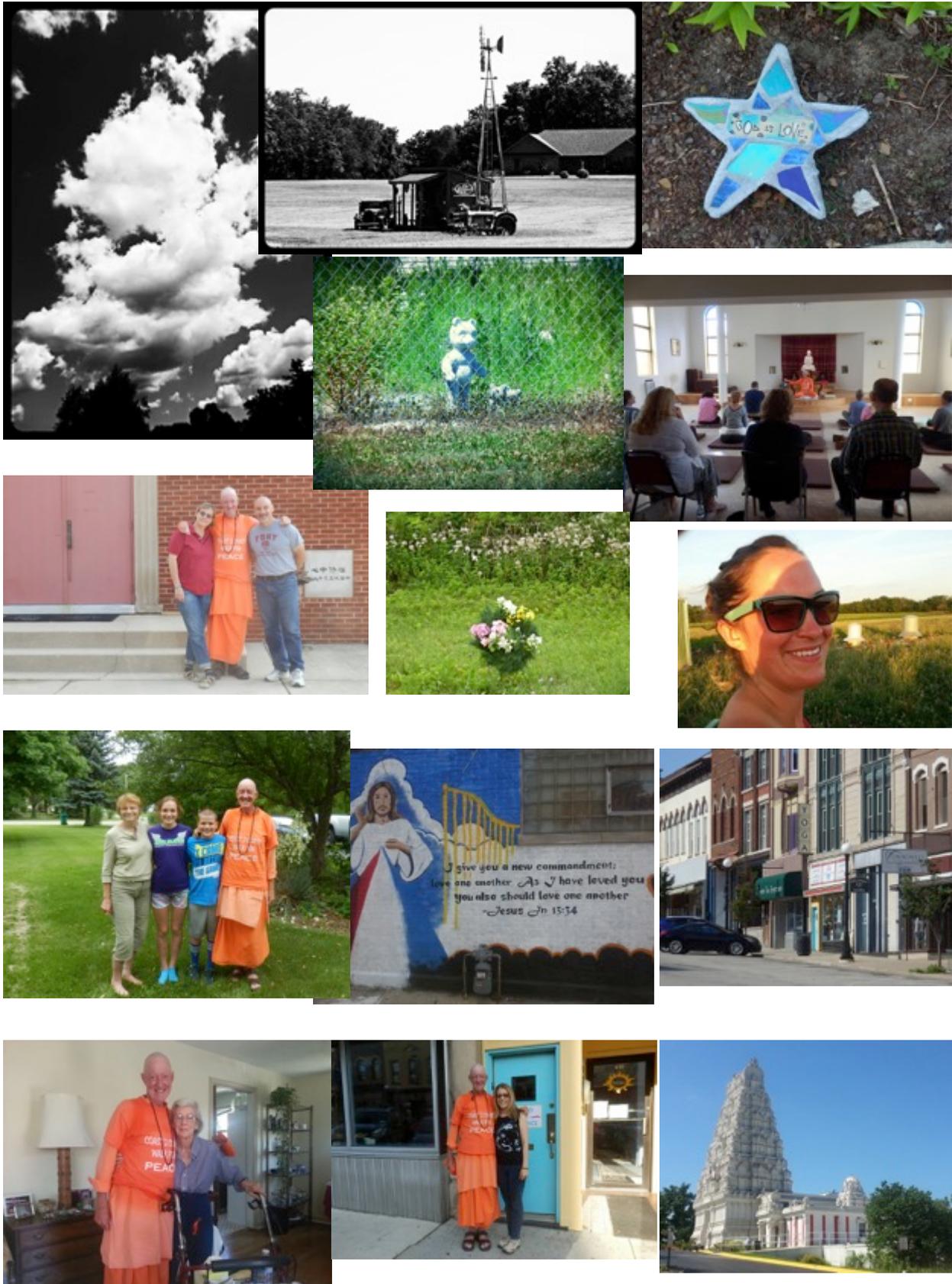
*Om Shanti Shanti
Shanti*

Peace be with all.



Emancipation is greatly misunderstood. Let us strive for independence from our ego-mind, for then we are with Christ (highest Self) and our divine nature shines through!





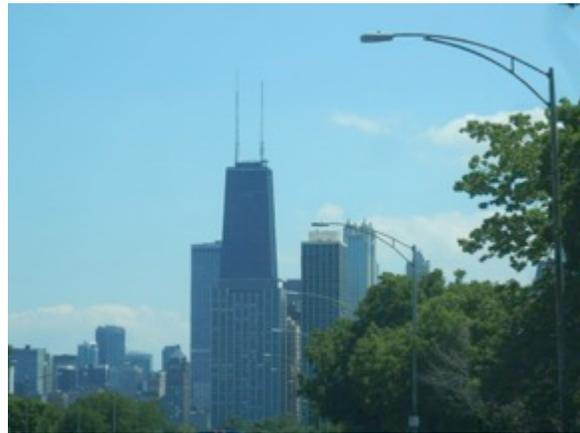
This page and prior, Bloomington, IL to Chicago.

7 Jul 2014

Om Om Om

These photos are from our walk continuing north from Lexington, Illinois to Chicago.

Amazing. Friends, all are friends. This is key; it is true for each of us. No person is perfect, only the completion of the universe is. People are incomplete, imperfect yet are each centered in Love. If we don't feel it we need only to delve deeper and find our compassion for all through the knowledge that the fear, anger, hatred we observe are simply manifestations of confusion and suffering. We've suffered; we know what it's like. In our center we are free of this. Our voyages are all about uncovering, recognizing all that covers our True Self for the impermanence and false image that it is, and stripping this away to find and be purity of the heart. Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realize. We cannot help but be friends.



Chicago Skvline

We enjoyed beautiful visits and then an amazing 4th weekend in Chicago with two Satsangs yesterday, first at the Little Village Buddhist Meditation Center then the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center. Thank you so much to all of the friends that joined us and to those who could not. I so enjoyed being with you and sharing!

Thank you to Ellen, Rev. Jan, Matt and Hillary, Lalita, Christopher Mataji s and Maharaj s for all of the help with arrangements and for hosting me, it has been so joyful being with you! Of course I always am, as you are with me. Thank you God! Om Om Om

Now let's resume walking, today we walk towards Hammond, Indiana, God willing. It's a beautiful day for a walk!

Om Namō Narayanaya

I Love you

8 Jul 2011

Om Om Om

May we consider in this moment the possibility that there has never been an accident nor a mistake. Consider that perhaps we have never made a mistake. That every single experience, small or large, "good or bad", has occurred in order for us to learn something that we don't know yet. Something so amazing about ourselves that, when we know, our lives will never be the same again and we will live in awe of all. And that the teacher, the one that keeps giving us these lessons, is our true mother and completely loves

us, would do anything for us and simply wants us to learn what she is teaching so that we live the amazing life that she offers us.

Please, let us just consider this.

Love always.

Om Om, we stayed with a wonderful friend last night, let's continue our steps a bit south then east, towards Merrillville, Indiana. From there the intent is to continue on highway 30 east towards Ft. Wayne.

It's a beautiful day for a walk! Ready? Let's go.

9 Jul 2014

"Why can't we all just get along?"

Our mind continually presents us with the answer. "It's because of them."

Our work here is to know our mind's ways and to train it. When we reach complete acceptance of what we see we know also what it is that we see. From here we may change the world in any way that we wish.

Om



An amazing evening with friends in north central Indiana



10 Jul 2014

Om

Living in the blanks

Left to its own devices our mind always fills in blanks. It naturally assumes that this is its job.

When we see something it does not recognize it compares it with other experiences, finally cataloging it. Or perhaps the experience is so far afield that it continues to look for a category in which to place it.

When a belief dies the mind looks to replace it with a new belief.

When you wish to be quiet the mind fills the silence with planning and comparing, remembering or stressing.

It is always trying to fill in the blanks.

Do your best not to let it. We experience Joy in the blanks. We live life in the blanks. We are as a child discovering the world in the blanks.

Thank God for the blanks. Let us retain them so that they may be filled only by Love for all.

10 Jul 2014

We are constantly tested

Yet along the way we are also encouraged.

The untrained conscious mind sees individuals and individual actions. The heart knows all are one.

Every smile is encouragement from the One. Every kindness. Every loving experience. Every moment of Joy.

All are from the One, the central Divine Truth, tests and encouragement are the same. Verily this is That.

11 Jul 2014

As I walk I see that, at every step, I place my feet where others have placed their feet before me. There is no new ground. All is alive with the presence of the great teachers and of God.

Thank you all, thank you God!

It's a beautiful day for a walk. Are you ready?

Om

We have stopped here at this lovely little spot off the highway for a short break. Perhaps you can see the tiny blackberries? The flickering sunlight filtering through the gently moving leaves above us? Or if you close your eyes you can hear the sweet birds talking to us?

Last evening we walked late in to the evening. Oh the moon, clear sky... and then just after sunset the fireflies, seemingly everywhere, turned their amber lights on.

As we watch them we see that they all turn the lights on apparently at exactly the same time. And then each fall in to their own rhythm, no two alike. We may see two blink together and then their timing separates, each moment one is lit, the next moment



another. Apparently random yet, picture after picture, snapshot after snapshot, harmony and diversity both. Harmony in diversity. One show; at once beautiful and surreal. We see perfection through their very imperfection as they light up the night.

A few more deep breaths on this break to take it all in. Let's breathe together. We breathe in fresh grass, blackberries, memories of the firefly show, all are present and we take them all in. We breathe out stress, worries, fears. They are all false. Together here, now.

Now let's take this next step together.

Love. Is.

12 Jul 2014

It's easy to talk to God.

She is directly in front of us every moment.

We may speak to Her with our thoughts, words or deeds, She understands all.

We have Her full attention, She is not busy with something else.

She loves us completely and wants to hear all that we have to say.

Om Namo Narayanaya, Love

12 Jul 2014

There are no random events. We tend to sleepwalk through what we call life, with awareness focused only at objects that the mind is interested in (girls, guys, cars, etc.) and temporarily towards interactive events (someone calls us, a project demands our attention, a car accident, etc.). In this state we observe events as random yet it's actually our awareness that is random.

As I walk I'm aware. This is a gift, I'll say it is a gift for all and all may practice it. I have no plans for tomorrow (or five minutes from now lol) that I'm focused on, no particular interest in this thing or that thing. I'm aware of the grass, the trees, each grasshopper as it flies up from the side of the road, the bird's song, each driver and passenger in each car or truck coming my way, each insect that lands on me... I'm aware of the patterns, which casually appear to be no pattern.

An example. I've walked hundreds of blind curves. This was refreshed just an hour ago with a blind entrance ramp from highway 31 on to highway 30. There is often traffic, cars or trucks moving through the curve. When I reach it no cars come, and they do not resume again until after I clear the blind area. Every. Single. Time. Of course I do not assume that no cars will come, I would never want to cause an accident, so I'm completely aware of any possible exit routes for me if needed. They are never needed.

I'm often told, "good luck" or "be careful", "be safe". To these I reply with a smile, "have faith" and "be aware". Without awareness events constantly happen to help remind us to pay attention. With

awareness we are always safe (we are not the body), with awareness we see the patterns of life and thus we begin to view the loving life force itself.

May we all know the supreme gift of awareness.

Hari Om Tat Sat

12 Jul 2014

The most beneficial belief is in the unlimited potential of one's own Self.

Ultimately this is found to be not belief but Truth.

13 Jul 2014

People are not evil. Evil is evil.

What we call evil is completely temporal; it exists only in time and only in the mind. An evil act starts as a thought, which is repeated over and over and then acted out. With each evil thought and action association with evil strengthens. At any point this pattern may be stopped, yet it must be stopped inside.

Through confusion we attach to the mind, we associate with the thought that somehow I am that thought, that I am that mind. We may attach to evil thoughts in the same way as beneficial ones. When we attach with this, when others tell us we are evil or even think that we are these thoughts become stronger and more frequent, finally taking over the personality we display. The mind literally repeats this thought, "I am evil" and we may become locked down, imprisoned in that thought.

We know the power of other's negative thoughts on us; we have all experienced this. Our negative thoughts, thoughts that others are bad, have this same effect.

This cycle must be broken inside and it is broken in the knowing that "I am good", that "I am not the mind".

The potential of each is unlimited, yet when the mind is in a rut we are completely identified with our terrible thoughts and there seems no way out.

So how do we help others break the cycle? Or even our own self? Through positive and encouraging thoughts, words and deeds. Through reminding others of their greatness, reminding them that, though their action was not beneficial, they are not that action and they may stop at any time. By letting them know the power that they have. By letting them know of their great natural Self, by helping them to find it if we can. And by doing our part to stop the cycle of calling others evil, even in our mind.

Let us help to change patterns, through showing the way of Love and Respect for all.

All are Maharaj (King, Christ) and Mataji (Divine Mother). Every body hosts the Divine itself, hosts goodness itself, Joy itself. Confusion covers it. Let us help to clear confusion.

Love always.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

14 Jul 2014

There are but few nonbelievers in the world, for it seems that every person has beliefs. Of course these beliefs form the difference from one person to another, we fly the flag of our beliefs high, taking pride in them.

We may say that the content of the beliefs themselves is not relevant as invariably all beliefs are superseded at some point. All beliefs, whatever they are, are made of the same stuff. All may be accepted as relative truth, for when we find their wellspring we will observe them all relative to that.

It is in complete non-belief that we find silence, and in this silence the knowing of all that we need to know.

Ultimately we are given the power of discrimination to know not the difference between one belief or deed and another but to know the difference between belief and non-belief, or non-truth (Asatya) and Truth (Satya).

In accepting all beliefs we accept all people, all of nature. In accepting all we Love all and know Joy.

All Paths lead to Compassion. Compassion leads us to Peace. Peace leads us to Joy.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

14 Jul 2014

There is no wrong place to be.

You are at this moment in exactly the right place.

You know all that you need to know for this moment. You are perfectly prepared, you are loved, you are forgiven for anything you think is bad. There is only one question.

What do you do in this moment? What thought do you cultivate? What action do you take from here?

This is all that matters.

Om Om

Love is. In each moment.

16 Jul 2014

What can we do?

Last night at the program in Kalamazoo a dear soul asked this poignant question:

"With the terrible tragedy playing out in Gaza and Israel, what can we do? It weighs so heavily upon my heart."

Indeed, we see so much strife and suffering of our fellow human beings around the world, through all creatures in fact. Torture, cruelty, inhumane treatment, so much is seen and felt. Some seems far away yet some very close at hand. What can we do?



Bodhananda Ashram, Kalamazoo, MI



We can always help. We are not powerless as the mind often tells us, we are so powerful! Each of us, in fact, change the world. We constantly affect the world in so many ways.

Part of our challenge in knowing this is that our conscious mind is always looking for concrete results, yet the results are difficult, impossible really, to see. We can visualize this in at least a limited way though.

When we smile at another person, the other person feels a lift. This much we know. We are also aware that when another feels a lift something positive happens. Perhaps their thoughts become higher. Perhaps they smile at another; perhaps they perform a beneficial action for another. Here's where we lose track of the string of results from our action, we cannot know. Yet we can know that there is benefit. In the same way a frown causes ripples. We can imagine results from our actions as waves. They do not die off immediately; they continue to move, from one to another, often picking up strength they go. The start of the wave is not easily seen, nor is the end, but make no mistake that each of us do start waves.



Thoughts are the same way. When we enter a room full of dark thoughts we feel it. We associate with these thoughts and think that they are ours. When we enter a quiet place, such as a forest, we feel the thoughts quiet. When we enter a holy place we experience uplifting thoughts. We do not just receive, we



transmit. When we intentionally bring positive, beneficial and uplifting thought in to our mind we benefit all. Conversely when our mind is a nest of negative thinking this is also felt by others.

Our words work in the same way. A sweet voice is like a smile. Positive and encouraging words help others to find their source of inspiration, from here encouraging words also continue in the same wave. Angry voices cause fear in all creatures.

So, what can we do? So much! Perhaps we have direct influence in a situation, of course if do we should use it and do our best. If we do not, we can do this:

Set positive, beneficial intent. With our will let us set our intent that all may know Peace, let us ask that our works help others, all others, to experience Peace, Joy and Love.

We may cultivate positive and uplifting thoughts inside. We may think of saint's works, of those who inspire us, we may focus on examples of peoples working together effectively in the cause of peace. We may cultivate inner peace in oneself.

We may speak sweetly and encouragingly to all, we may tell others of how important they are, how much they are loved, of their great potential.

We may smile always and be kind, considerate and respectful in all of our actions. We may help others when we see an opportunity to help.

All of these indeed change the world in amazing, incredible ways. Let us not let our mind get away with telling us otherwise.

We may do great works; we have this potential through our smallest possible actions. Big actions are not required, for the big comes from the small. It is the small that counts. We can bring Peace inside and thus bring it outside, we have this potential. The world is not a terrible place, it is a place of wonder and of course it can always be a better place through our own thoughts, words and deeds. There is no cause for hopelessness, there is cause to do what we can, and this we can always do, in whatever walk we are walking.

Thank you so much, Love you.

Om Namo Narayanaya



Mother's Trust Ashram in Ganges, MI.
Mother, a disciple of Swami Bhashyananda Ji (Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda lineage), talking with a friend. Great works here.

17 Jul 2014

When we intend no harm to the world,

The world intends no harm to us.



19 Jul 2014

*All people are God's chosen people. Every single one.
Every tree is God's chosen tree, every blade of grass
God's chosen grass, every atom God's chosen atom.*

*To think, "I am chosen and you are not" comes from
deep confusion in the mind. We are to know "I am
chosen and all that I see and sense around me is
chosen also". All. I am to Love and Respect all.*

*I am not to accept the position that my mind and ego
take, "I am right and they are wrong". I am to overrule it. I am strong, I am the Maharaj or Mataji, I am*



the lion in the jungle, I am the ruler of the mind. I'll not accept its confused positions, I'll master it and love all as my very Self.



20 Jul 2014

It is not the content of the mind that is important. This thought, that thought... meaningless for all are temporal, subject to change at any moment and a constant source of disagreement and disharmony. There is deeper content in us, harmonious content, underlying the rambunctious mind.

It is the way of the mind that is to be known. What it is, how it works, how to silence its constant rambling and planning in order to know the beauty

of the present moment, to know the Joy which we are. In observing thoughts, learning their origination we may know this deeper Truth. This is the knowledge that leads one to freedom.

22 Jul 2014

I just came upon a beautiful scene and would like to share it with you as best I can.

On this roadway, just several hundred feet back, I saw the physical body of a small animal, let's say a groundhog as this is what it appeared as to me, which had just been run over and had left its body. Another groundhog walked out in to the road to be with it as I watched.

It walked around the body, touched it with its nose a few times, then sat quietly next to it for a few minutes. One car came from each direction as this scene played out and I was given the honor of gaining the drivers' attention and getting them to slow down and avoid hitting her (just a word, him or her). She noted the cars passing and of course did not move away from the scene until she had completed whatever she was doing, or saying.



Once complete, in a few minutes, she walked away. I passed then and checked back a few times to see if she had returned. Of course she had not.

There is much we can learn from animals. She clearly knew that her friend or mate was still close by for a bit. Her actions were deliberate and respectful. Then she knew that he was no longer in that body, let's even say that she knew he was then everywhere. The last of course is not from observation, the rest is.

This play, her actions, were completely consistent with the stories we hear from near death experience survivors as well. It may tell us much if we listen. It is indeed beautiful because it is one of many fingers pointing to Truth, what we see in this is Love itself, respect itself.

Thank you, and thank you to our friends the animals, the trees, all which is in front of us at any moment. Thank you God.

Om Om

23 Jul 2014

Dearest friends, let us always remember this.

We may do anything we envision, we may make our character into anything we wish if we take it one step at a time.

We are not limited, we have the power and the full support of the universe and God. It is only our conscious mind that says no, and it is not correct.

Om, Love

25 Jul 2014

The world is a Pug named Louie.

Om. I had an amazing visit with Jay Rinsen Weik and the Heartland Buddhist Center in Toledo on Tuesday night and Wednesday! What a wonderful, lively spiritual community. Rinsen invited me to stay at his farm; his wife and daughter were away so I visited with him and these adorable pugs. The pugs are three, Louie, Ella and Dizzie.

When I arrived at the farm Tuesday night with Rinsen the pugs greeted us. Of course they were very happy to see him but unsure of me, so they barked. A lot; for a little while. They did allow me to interact with them, to touch and talk with them.

They were excited, not at ease, but interested. As the evening progressed they kept checking me out and barking as we went along. They all allowed me to pet them, a little, and they became a bit more comfortable with me. I went downstairs to bed and as I was preparing they came to the top of the stairs and barked at me again. Just to make sure that I knew. Something.



Louie!

Wednesday morning I went outside and sat while they were still resting, I came back inside mid morning. Rinsen and I exchanged greetings and the pugs greeted me too, with their barks and wagging tails. I sat on the kitchen floor and focused completely on interacting with them, on giving them all love. They stopped barking once I was at their level and we played a little, petted a lot, and kissed each other. Dog kisses seem to be on the top of many lists for obvious reasons. Two of the pugs kept their distance, would come in for forays and then leave, come back. Louie, who had been noticeably closer to me Tuesday night, stayed. I petted and petted, talked with him softly, and finally he just lay down, pushing against me as hard as he could, in complete surrender to my unconditional Love, and he gave me the same.

We remained there for a while, I don't know how long, enjoying this sharing with no separation. Amazing. Finally I got up, went downstairs for a bit. As I came back upstairs I was greeted by all of the pugs. Two of them barked and yet Louie did not.

Let's take a step now. What am I interacting with when I interact with Louie? Is it his body and mind? Or is it his nature? Let's say here that I interacted with Louie nature. What is that? Unconditional Love covered by some conditioning which is intended to protect the body and other stuff. They may be observed as two separate elements of his nature. In this interaction I gave unconditional Love at every level, from thoughts to words to actions. Louie nature is of course aware of all of these.

Most reading this have some familiarity with dogs. We observe that, even if they may not know the contents of our thoughts they know the nature of them. They stay away from or perhaps even attack people that have evil thoughts percolating. When we are in a foul mood they sulk away from us. When we have bright thoughts they are near us, it's as if our thoughts are a magnet for them.

They watch, and listen, so intently. If, when establishing a relationship, we give unconditional Love this is what we get in return. We can be aware and see the conditioning, the shield or productive layer, breaking down. And then it's gone. And when it is gone the dog gives unconditional Love. He or she becomes united with us, and as long as we don't screw it up it remains this way. And, if we screw it up, we can always get there again by again surrendering. We apologize. And we show unconditional Love. Eventually trust and the bond comes back. This is Louie nature.

One more step. This is not just Louie nature, we may say that it is dog nature. Each of them have different conditioning yet, when we surrender completely to them, when we provide unconditional Love to them, when we care completely for them, the shell eventually drops away and we are bonded, in unity, in unconditional Love. People who have adopted or worked with abused dogs are particularly familiar with this. Of course we still see the dog's personality on display but between these two friends all of the conditioning related protection has been set aside and the unconditional Love is there. Here. And this, as we note, is the same for every dog.

Louie does not care what my job is, what my color is, if I'm fat or old, and has no idea of my religion or beliefs. I give unconditional Love, I get it back.

One more step. Every thing in the world is the same as this. A protective shell on the outside, unconditional Love once we surrender to it and give unconditional Love. The only difference is the shell,

the conditioning itself, for the center is always the same. OK perhaps you will object about the mosquito and the snake, but the fact is you are not ready to surrender to a mosquito so you can not fairly judge. Some do with snakes, and will describe the same. But go with what you know from personal observation and from credible stories. We see the same nature with cats. With elephants. With cows. We see it between animals, even different breeds. Consider even the research with rice kept for long periods of time, the containers talked sweetly to stay pristine, the ones talked meanly to take mold and decompose. Those who work closely with plants see the same. Flower blooms are bigger and brighter when we provide unconditional Love. And we see it with people, of course, though often the conditioned layer is quite deep and it's easy for us to start judging and mess up the bond.

So now let's take one more step and say that this Louie nature I interacted with is nature's nature.

As I walk I smile and wave at drivers and passengers coming towards me. Invariably though, when someone stops and offers me something such as food or water, they are coming from behind me. Typically they are not the same people that I've waved and smiled at. Interesting, correct? This points to the nature of the world.

I often say that the world is not what it appears to be. We all see evidence of this in every moment. What is the world? It is a Pug named Louie. It is Louie nature.

What would happen in my relationship with Louie if I petted all of him except his right front paw, and instead of petting that I pinched it every time I could? How would Louie react? He would treat it as something strange, correct? He might tolerate it for a while but also he might just bite me. Would I, in turn, think it strange that he bit me? I mean I was very loving to his mouth, I only mistreated his right front paw. If anything is going to respond negatively to me it should be only that, correct? And let's say that I love everything about Louie except that I just hate his curly tail. It's so ugly! Would Louie come running to me? Perhaps he would but he would leave his tail behind?

Next step. We think that the world is a lot of individual stuff, but it is not. Even science, completely objective study, tell us this. Everything we interact with is 99.9999999% space. Not matter, space. Every person's body, water, rocks, air, all the same. Scientists used to think that the space was nothing, now they know it's not. They observe living



Evening visit at Toledo's Great Heartland Buddhist Temple

qualities in all space. Literally all. Teaming, thriving. According to

commonly accepted String Theory it is thriving with countless "strings" which have infinite potential to be anything. Interesting? From intuitive research, personal deep Meditation and observation coupled with the teachings of the great teachers and sages, we may know that there is no separation, that this entire world we see, the entire universe, is one body. Space is what may be seen to connect stuff yet all is really

that same space. It is one nature. The body might be called the body of Christ (Paul in the Bible), the body of Krishna (Bhagavad Gita), or just the Universe(s).

But it's not a bunch of different stuff. It's one body, with one nature. This nature is variously called Buddha nature, Allah nature, God nature, the nature of nature, etc. Louie nature. There is no difference; it is the same. There is a crust of conditioning to provide protection then unconditional Love underlying that. Once we surrender to it, provide our unconditional Love, we get unconditional Love back. Again we can say that we are not interacting with the world, but with world nature, or Louie nature. A nature with untold numbers of curly tails, mouths and front legs.

Looking at the world as lots of different things is our big mistake, our confusion. Natural due to our mind's conditioning, but wrong. It is One nature.

We get what we give. When we love parts of the world and hate others, we get a confused response. We pet some parts and pinch others, it bites us. We wonder why we are not loved first, well we know this from our interaction with Louie. We must go first. We must surrender. Or continue to get bitten.

The world nature does not care what we do or what we believe. It cares only what we put in. It knows us by all of our thoughts, our words, our deeds. What we call God we may call the world, what we call the world we may call God. There is no concern of our religion. We interact not with a thing, we interact with a nature that is pervading all things. If we put in surrender and unconditional Love we get this in return.

There are many steps we've taken here, yet we can each prove this based upon our own experiences. When we do good, good invariably comes back. From the same person? No, from the same world. When we pinch or hit something we invariably get pinched or hit. By the one world. Punishment? No. Teaching? Yes.

So what are we to do with this knowledge? Surrender and provide unconditional Love to the world through whatever is in front of us in every moment. We may do so regardless of whether it is a pug, a person, a tree or a flower. Through our thoughts, words and deeds. Completely. Learn to love all and to accept all, not as individuals, but as part of One loving nature for this is what are interacting with. If we cannot do this all at once we keep taking steps. In doing so we experience the defenses of the world crumbling. At a point there is no more barking. No more biting. Just Love. And we make the world brighter for all. By showing unconditional Love, by accepting all in the same way we accept Louie's curly tail, we help the world to feel better. We help its nature, we help it to calm. This wave ripples through the entire world and we make the world a better place for all.

Thank you Louie! Thank you God. I say the same both times.

Love

27 Jul 2014

Whatever we do,

Wherever we are,

God is less than a moment away.

Do we need to do something special?

A unique incantation?

No.

We may just say "Hi"

Perhaps "Thank you", "I love you"

And take comfort in Her.

Now. Any moment, every moment.

The Truth is not distorted and cannot be distorted. It is the mind itself which is distorted. Mind plus ego are conditioned in a way that do not allow for the Truth to be known in the individual, yet it is always there, always unstained, always True.

Through purification, taking full control of the mind and surrendering it to the highest Self, and renouncing the ego Truth is known. Truth= God.

Even if the individual can not yet directly know Truth, that is the individual is not yet Self Realized or Enlightened, the highest Self, God, knows us. We are never apart yet it seems so. We may talk to God, She knows us and loves it when we sweetly say, "I Love you.", or even "Hi".

1 Aug 2014

Fear, hatred, stress, divisiveness, the feeling of separation, are all but illusory images of the mind. They have no independent existence. How to manage them?

Watch the mind, always. Ultimately the conscious mind, along with its friend the ego, is like a child's toy, a top. It stands only when it spins. If we quit winding it up it falls to its knees, the rightful place. All of these illusions are seen through and fall with it.

Om Shanti

Right: downtown
Cleveland in sight.





Great Teachers. I carry the image of Swami Sivananda at lower left.

Friends. Cleveland and Aurora, OH. Wonderful programs at The Studio Cleveland, downtown Cleveland Yoga studio and more, and the Spiritual Life Society and Yoga Center, Hudson town square. Again, please go, amazing people and places. Through God's grace alone are there places and people like this to help us to know Love, to find our Self and achieve our amazing potential. Thank you God, thank you all.

2 Aug 2014

If there were such a thing as death, how is it that there could ever be communication with the dead?

The simple fact that there is this communication is all of the proof required that you do not die. Any concept to the contrary is simply fear mongering in the mind. You may stop associating with this and in so doing be free of all fear.

Let us see through these common misconceptions. Let us be aware and examine closely what is in front of us, what is in us. Let us know Life itself, let us know Peace.

Our own practice is the way to know Truth. All have a practice. All have the ability to make it a conscious, intentional practice, one intended for the benefit of all.

Let us each start our own wave of Peace and Love.

5 Aug 2014

Who owns results?

We commonly see the world as "results oriented". This is a natural view for human beings yet there is benefit in examining this for a moment today.

We think, or rather the mind thinks, that the attainment of goals will result in something. "If I get married I'll be happy.", "I'll look so hot in those shoes.", "Life will be so much better if I can have that new job.", "I'll be a much better person when I complete this Yoga Teacher Training Course.", whatever.

And, of course, from this thought we set a plan in place and strive to attain the desired results. If we attain them we feel a sense of accomplishment, if we do not we feel a sense of failure. Perhaps we blame this failure on someone. A friend, an enemy, a spouse, the weather, even our own self.

Yet who truly owns results?

Do you see anything else in nature that seems to be disappointed when it does not get what wants? Does the tree pine away when it does not accomplish or does it just do its best to grow and accept what comes?

When you do your best to attain something is it not your best? And if you do not do your best do you not know this? Perhaps there is a feeling that, "if I'd have done this, I would have been successful." That's fine, there is a teaching there for you. But you are where you are and that's fine, perfect even. You tried, you learned something.

What we ultimately learn is that it's not about the results after all. It's about how we approach the journey and what we learn, about how we affect those in front of us on the journey.

How can you possibly own results?

If you cannot own results why get upset with yourself over them? Or with others? Is this not just so much excess baggage?

Do your best then release. Let go of expectation. Be aware of what comes, whatever it is. We are being taught, always. We are the students. This world is a school, we are here to learn. When we are aware of the teaching this is a meaningful result.

Breathe in fresh air, breathe out expectations of this result or that result. Do your best. Be aware of your thoughts, words and deeds and put your best in to them. Be aware, loving and respectful of others. Continue awareness, pay close attention to what you put in and what comes out. Always forgive yourself and others when results are not as you expect or want, release expectations and observe, lovingly. Watch your mind through this entire process, watch your breath and use it as your tool to focus the mind. In this way we may learn our role in this amazing universe, and we may know Peace. In this way fear fades away and we find Life beyond fear and expectation.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

5 Aug 2014

Contemplating "Good Luck"

It seems that I've heard this thousands of times through this walk so far, and it was not so many years ago that these words regularly proceeded forth from these lips as well. Of course the funny thing is that

luck does not exist on any level. The concept of luck streams forth due to random awareness, which presents the impression that events are unconnected.

This, along with many other phrases, is part of a habit that we form, it becomes part of our character and is so deeply embedded it just springs forth, as if it's alive. We may say that it is a "hole filler" of the mind. An unconscious and meaningless answer to the question that used to be asked, "what do I say now?" But, once it is a part of our character, this question is no longer asked.

Through awareness of what we say we begin to come alive, to wake up from the boring repetitive dream that has dominated our existence so long.

How often do we hear something truly meaningful, truly beneficial, in normal conversation? How often do we say something that is such? Something that is truly intended for the benefit of another, not just from our mind's conditioning or to show the other how much we know, or to tell them a story about when something just like that happened to us?

If we stop for a moment and don't rush to fill in the hole, perhaps we can say, "be aware". This can be beneficial as it is a reminder to both us and the one that we talk with that we have control of our character, not some magic power called luck. Or we could say something which relates personally or even ask a question. Or say "thank you", or say nothing, listen fully, and give our most loving smile?

Let us be aware. Let us know that, whatever we are in front of, at any moment, we may provide benefit through thought, word or deed. Or just by completely accepting and loving.

So, here and now in this moment, I remind you that there is no luck. We may strike it from our thoughts and vocabulary. We may be empowered, we may be aware. We have the power!

I love you, thank you!!

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

6 Aug 2014

Acceptance

The same life force, called by many God, Allah, Christ, etc is in all forms. It willingly chooses and abides in each and every form. When we choose to accept (thereby Loving) some and not accept (thereby not loving) others what is it that we are not accepting?

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

7 Aug 2014

Our thoughts are our gift to the world.

In Vedic lore there is teaching that tells us that in the not so distant history of mankind communication occurred through thought alone. Of course this may seem quite odd to many, yet there is much evidence for this all around us.

We see within animals what clearly appears to be communication without spoken language. Not long ago I posted an observation here about communication between two groundhogs, one of whom had just departed the body. Perhaps that seems farfetched but I see evidence of this thought communication all of the time and many of you are aware of examples also. Please feel free to share them here!

Here are some common examples to consider. How do birds in flight communicate who is to be where in formation? How do nearly "voiceless" animals such as rabbits communicate within family units? How do dogs know to be leery of some people walking past or to the door and not others? How do ants and bees communicate and coordinate their actions?

There is much research being done today on plants, trees, etc. Intelligence and communication both are observed. How?

For any one who has experienced communication with those who have left the body, is this not thought communication?

Closer to home we may consider our own experiences. When we enter a frantic place, such as a bustling city, a casino, a frantic workplace such as a stock brokerage, or a dark place such as a prison, do we feel this mental activity? Do we notice our own thoughts take on the character? Or a light place such as a forest, a retreat, an Ashram or Monastery, do we notice the character of our thoughts change? Any observations here?

Of course with the predominance of our ego we take credit for all of these thoughts but please consider that these "bonus" thoughts were not "ours". They are other's thoughts, and they are only interpreted as ours by ego. Please note here how susceptible we are to others thoughts. We are, in fact, aware of them but we think them our own!

I'll share an example from Ashram a few weeks after I arrived in India. I was standing in an open area next to another man, a householder. Suddenly I experienced thoughts of killing my wife. They were quite strong, I knew them, rather thought them, for mine. Yet I was not married, there was no one in my life that would fit this description. Logically, clearly, these were another's thoughts. Do you have an example such as this?

It appears that humans have lost the ability to differentiate where thoughts originate, but it is also known that, through close observation and quieting one's own mind, this capability may be recovered to a great extent.

Finally let us consider how thoughts take physical form. Thoughts, persistent thoughts, always tend to action. The thought "I want ice cream" repeated over and over becomes action to get ice cream, then finally it becomes ice cream itself. In the same way the thought "I want red shoes" becomes red shoes.

The persistent thought "that person is causing me terrible pain and I must kill them" becomes murder, the thought "I am in misery, no one understands me, I must kill myself" becomes suicide.

In the same way, the persistent thought "I wish to help others" becomes helping others and "I wish to know God in all" becomes union with God or Yoga.

What if these thoughts started with another? How would we know?

Now we may look outside. Since clearly others thoughts impact us, we may also know that our thoughts impact others. This effect runs far deeper than one might imagine, even with these examples above.

Thoughts have a frequency. They resonate. Our own thoughts not only determine, completely, how we perceive the world, they also become the basis for how others relate to the world. We may visualize these thoughts as waves that operate beyond any perceived boundaries. For thoughts there are no boundaries, except for our own ability to discern and to cultivate particular thoughts.

And, as we note, each of us have the gift to be able to cultivate thoughts. We may cultivate fearful or angry thoughts, we may think of how others are wrong, we may think of separation. We may also inspire in oneself higher thoughts, of harmony and service, of being at peace with all. Our practice, whether it is engaging in gossip or reading stories of the saints, helps inspire thoughts of one type or another. But make no mistake, we own this power to differentiate and to cultivate the thoughts we want. And know that these thoughts literally change our perception of the world, and other's basis for the world they perceive as well.

Please consider this point carefully. We are not our thoughts. Our thoughts are, literally, just our thoughts. We are not limited by them unless we choose to be; they are what is limited. We give birth to them, we nurture them, we change their nature as we wish.

Our thoughts are our gift to the world. Let us make our gifts beautiful and bountiful.

Hari Om Tat Sat

19. Every Experience is the First Time

Walking through western Pennsylvania one day I found myself on a quiet two-lane road winding through the hills. Everything was perfect, and it was a beautiful overcast day. I came upon the sound of running water and as I looked for the source I discovered a pristine waterfall.

The thought came, "Wonderful! This is the first time I've seen a waterfall since..." And then my mind began searching through its catalogue of names and images looking for an experience to compare it to. You know how



this works.

I stopped it. I asked it to stay with just this thought, "Wonderful! This is the first time I've seen a waterfall." I knew the trick that I was playing on my mind, I laughed and smiled about it, yet the mind did as I asked and I enjoyed the experience of a waterfall as a child would, for the first time. It was truly amazing. Instead of being locked down in a search of memories and relative judgment I was just there, absorbed in communion with the divine through that waterfall.

I invite you to try this trick when your mind starts searching through its catalogue for "the last time". In this way you may be in the moment completely focused on your amazing experience, as the child.

8 Aug 2014

Miracles

Om, here is something that you might wish to ponder as we walk through the hills of Pennsylvania this beautiful day!



Friends offered this overnight home,
just east of the Allegheny River

In the western tradition saints are recognized by the Catholic church as those who dedicated their life to service and are known to have miracles associated with them, as in "they made miracles", or "God made miracles through them". Though different terms are used there are these saints in all traditions.

Have you ever noticed that these saints never say that they perform miracles; rather they call them simply "acts of faith"? The writings of saints are all amazing reading, all are recommended. They provide deep insight in to our true nature.

We may say this about miracles. There is one, certainly, and this is Life itself. Not what we see, rather what courses through all, continuously thriving and displaying itself in all. Further we may say that it is indeed miraculous that each and every one of us are so deeply and completely loved that we have been given ability to know this miracle of Life, to know our very Self as not separate from it, to pass through all fear and suffering, and to know miracles as acts of faith. Through our own practice, from our own control.

Love always, may all know Peace.



Friends from Quiet Creek Organic Herb Farm. Amazing place, do visit if you have the opportunity.



Beautiful weekend stay and program at Leela Matha's Peaceful Valley Ashram in Sligo, PA. Do visit if you have the opportunity.

13 Aug 2014

Sharing a reflection this morning upon the death of Robin Williams. Certainly the movies that he acted in are beautiful and are his living legacy. They were, and are, so amazing.

May we consider that, when we set expectations for others, others strive to fit in to them. The same is so for each of us of course. When mom says, "I expect better if you" we take this as criticism, as it is apparently intended, and we correct the character we portray in some way to either meet mom's expectation or perhaps flaunt it.

You see, we are actors and we portray all of the characters that we see in the world. As is the case with Robin, we only see the external character, we never see what he truly is, in fact perhaps even he did not. At the end of the day only the highest Self (that which we call God or "I am", Allah, Buddha nature, Christ, the Universe etc depending upon our particular perspective) sees the actor completely. Through union we may achieve this same perspective ourselves in order to fully know our Self, finding Peace.

Yet in society it seems that only the character counts, not the actor, not the Truth of us inside. If one portrays a great actor and stars in big box office movies, giving people a beautiful impression of the character, much money and fame is bestowed. Society calls this success. And the actor, that which portrayed Robin Williams, does its best to meet society's expectations. After all this is just payback to those who have bestowed these huge rewards. "People expect me to be a certain way, so I try to give them what they want."

Alas, this path leads only to dissonance, not happiness. The reason for this can be easily seen. When we play the character that is expected of us instead of the one with which we are naturally comfortable we are, in fact, destroying what we are. We are covering it up more and more deeply until we have no clue what we are. And then the character gets older, falls out of demand, and whatever we do to reinvigorate the character goes for naught. Society is done with that character. And we, the actor, are now completely trapped in the prison that we made while trying to adapt the character to whims of others instead of getting know who the actor is. Time is up; we missed it. Of course it is never too late for anyone yet the higher the prison walls the tougher it is to escape. And finally it may seem that the only escape is to do away with the body.

There are two clear lessons for us in this sad story, the same story of suffering that we observe playing out on the theater screen of the world every day.

First, let us know our Self, the actor, and not be concerned about whatever role others want to see us play. These external desires are all about what others want and others never can know you the way can you know your Self.

Secondly, let us stop expecting this or that of others. Let us simply accept them and encourage them to first know them selves. This, along with Love and complete acceptance, is the highest service we can ever provide to another person.

These are tall orders, yet in our service we each have this ability, we have this awareness. We must just watch the mind and correct it knowing the Divine power of acceptance.

May all know Peace. Let us intend this for each, for all, with our highest intention. Om

15 Aug 2014

God's gnats.

Om, well this time I've decided to just relay this story along with a question or two and let you draw your own conclusions. A couple of deep breaths first please, open that mind.

The first day in Pennsylvania, about ten days ago, I walked in to Sharon about 7PM. It was a reasonably long day of walking, it was warm, and I was marginally sweaty, the face in particular. By a little after 8PM I was with my amazing hosts for the night, a beautiful family including husband, wife, teen age daughter and a very sweet and not so controllable small dog. All amazing, all!

We were having a fun conversation and the dog wanted my attention and loving, which I happily gave. After a little while she got up on my lap and started kissing me, and the kisses turned in to a veritable lick fest as she went a bit wild over the sweat on my face. She clearly enjoyed licking it off and was becoming more than a little frantic. Dad had told me this would happen but I said, "it's OK!" lol, and she was having a great time.

In ten minutes or so there had been enough of this behavior, adorable as it was, and I asked her to stop. She did, and she got off my lap. We had a lot more fun though, and a rambunctious play time the next morning. After this, breakfast and goodbyes to dear friends, I continued on.



Walking through west central

Pennsylvania forest shortly before I was met by helpful gnats

Two days later I was walking toward the Allegheny river and a town named Foxburg. Again it was a bit of a long day with a walk of 27 miles planned for the day and it was warm but not hot. Up and down hills lol. About seven PM I was suddenly joined by several gnats. What was attracting them? The same slightly sweaty face that attracted our dog friend. What did they want? The same thing she did. They hovered near my face enjoying the salty concoction and stayed with me for a while. I laughed, reflecting on the time with the dog.

Now, for your consideration, what is the difference between the dog licking my face and gnats doing the same? Why is it that we classify one as adorable and the other disgusting? Why do we laugh and pet one behaving in this way and attempt to kill the other? Is it not exactly the same behavior? Are these not both creatures of nature who deserve to live? They were not biting. They were just enjoying. Yes, one flew in my eye and another in my nose. Am I to punish them for this?

So, I walked, laughing, and finally asked them to stop. Well, they didn't. Not immediately.

I continued on and just committed not to let them bother me, every now and then I waved in front of my face to scatter them.

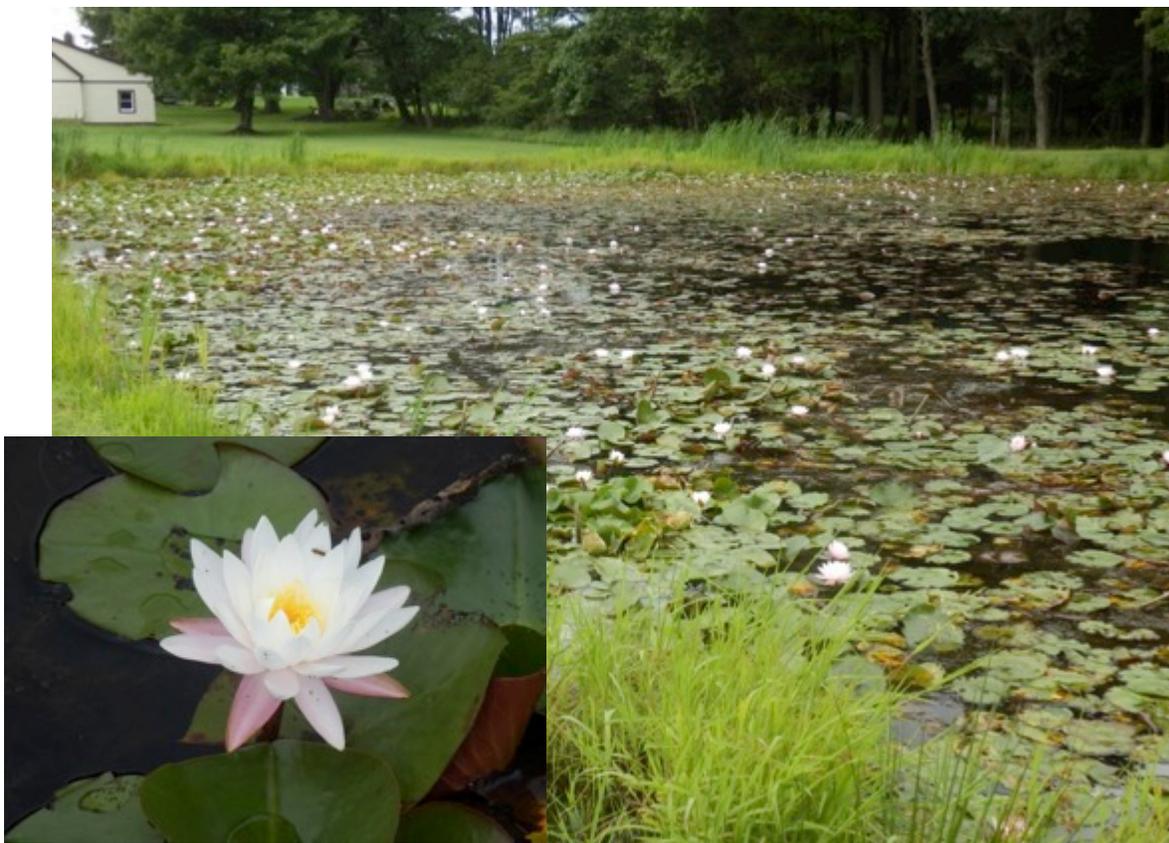
Now the story gets very interesting. My upper back and lower neck were sore. I had noticed a little earlier that I was walking with my head down somewhat, an old habit which had not re-emerged on this walk, in response to the hills and very uneven road shoulder. I knew that this had caused the pain and I endeavored to lift my head but was not so successful. I consciously did it again, "head up".

And do you know what? As soon as I lifted my head up the gnats left my face. After a while my head went down again and one came back immediately! And then, oh my, this dance continued. Lift up, gnat gone. Head down, gnat back. Really. Several times, now it had become a bit of a game, apparently for both of us. Finally I kept my head up the rest of the way to Foxburg. And I thanked my friend, that one gnat that helped me to be aware. I thanked God as well for this uniquely fun reminder.

And now, well for the past week I keep my head up while walking, regardless of the terrain. I'm aware of that gnat as I do it, you can imagine me laughing as I think of him. No neck pain, well at least almost none.

Life is amazing.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti



17 Aug 2014

If there is something which we don't like about the world we may change it through our own effort.

1. Through Meditation or quiet receptive/reflective time we may reach our deep intuitional Self. Through this we may learn the nature of what is bothering us as well as navigate through the challenge free of fear, anger, doubt and stress.

2. By cultivating beneficial intent and thoughts, along with a bright smile and mindful, loving kindness for others we both initiate and strengthen healing waves which work their way through the world.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

May all know Peace



Visiting with friends and going out for a walk. What an amazing job I have. Thank you God, thank you all!

18 Aug 2014

One of the basic confusions we have in our worldly activity is related to pay back for our efforts. "Look, I am doing so much for this person or that, and they are not doing for me. They are not grateful." Resentment comes from this and it is natural. The world seems a giant marketplace; we are always trading favors. "I do for you, in return you do for me." "I gave you money, a gift, time, whatever... And if you do not give to me then what good are you?"

In this marketplace we can never be completely happy because we are always comparing what we give versus what we are given.

The path to happiness lies in giving with no expectation. When we do this the world adopts a new flavor. At this point it is no longer a place where expectation is never met, but one of the Joy of loving service. Magically, we find one's own Self to be the one served. For when we give with no expectation, from the heart, we see that each gift is received in our own heart as well. The world begins to sparkle and shine.

Om Namō Narayanaya

May all know Peace

19 Aug 2014

Ultimately all beliefs are simply rungs on the ladder to Truth. Let us not allow our feet or hands to become stuck upon a rung that we may continue climbing.



Above, right and next page: Friends. State College, PA eastwards through Amish country.



20 Aug 2014

Our relationship with our own mind is the most important relationship we will ever have.

Every other relationship we have, our relationship with the world itself, is experienced through our mind alone.

We are responsible for our mind's care and feeding, for inspiring it, for showing it the Truth behind the world so that it may be an ideal partner in this life.

We may properly care for our mind with kindness, awareness and loving correction of non beneficial thought, Meditation and cultivation of positive thought practice.

We may feed our mind through reading stories of the saints, Satsanga, devotional activities, proper exercise and rest, smiling, selfless service and continuous prayer or Japa. Television, newspapers and movies are junk food for the mind.

A well cared for and inspired mind is the single key to a happy life without fear and stress. It is our "lifeline", we have full control over its condition and contribution.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

May all know Peace



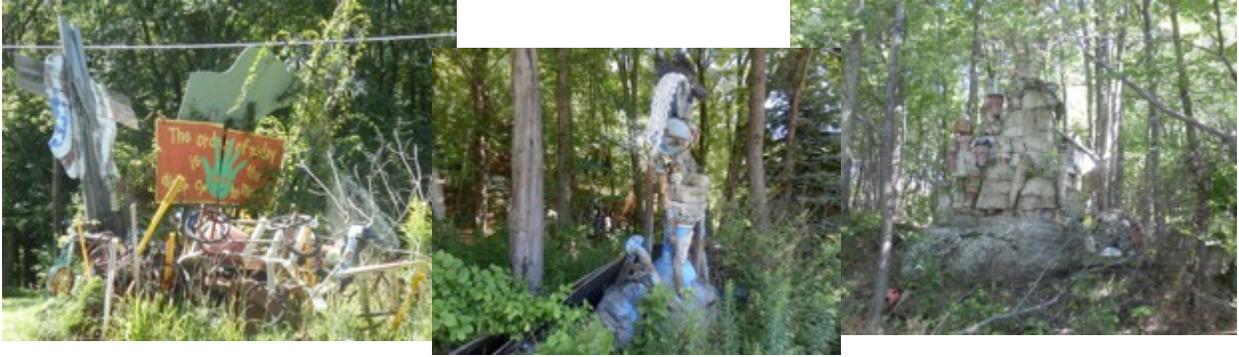
22 Aug 2014

*Greetings! An evening walk towards Danville, Pennsylvania.
Please close your eyes, take my hand, and join me. I won't let
you fall.*

*Om Namō Narayanaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti*



A Pocono Mountains vista



A disordered, and very creative, mind at work. Amazing.



In this world, wherever there is up there will be down. Poconos. Up and down... repeat.

25 Aug 2014

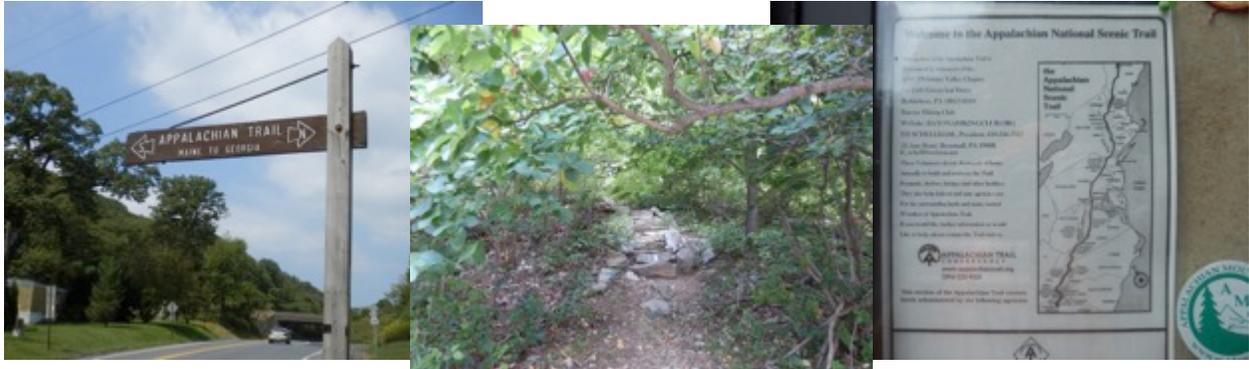
Om, today we are walking through the Poconos towards Lehighton. We are about 120 miles due west of New York City.

I'm intending to walk to Arsha Vidya Pitham Ashram in Saylorsburg tomorrow, then towards Monroe, NY and Ananda Ashram there, then south towards the city. Please join in.

It's a beautiful day for a walk.



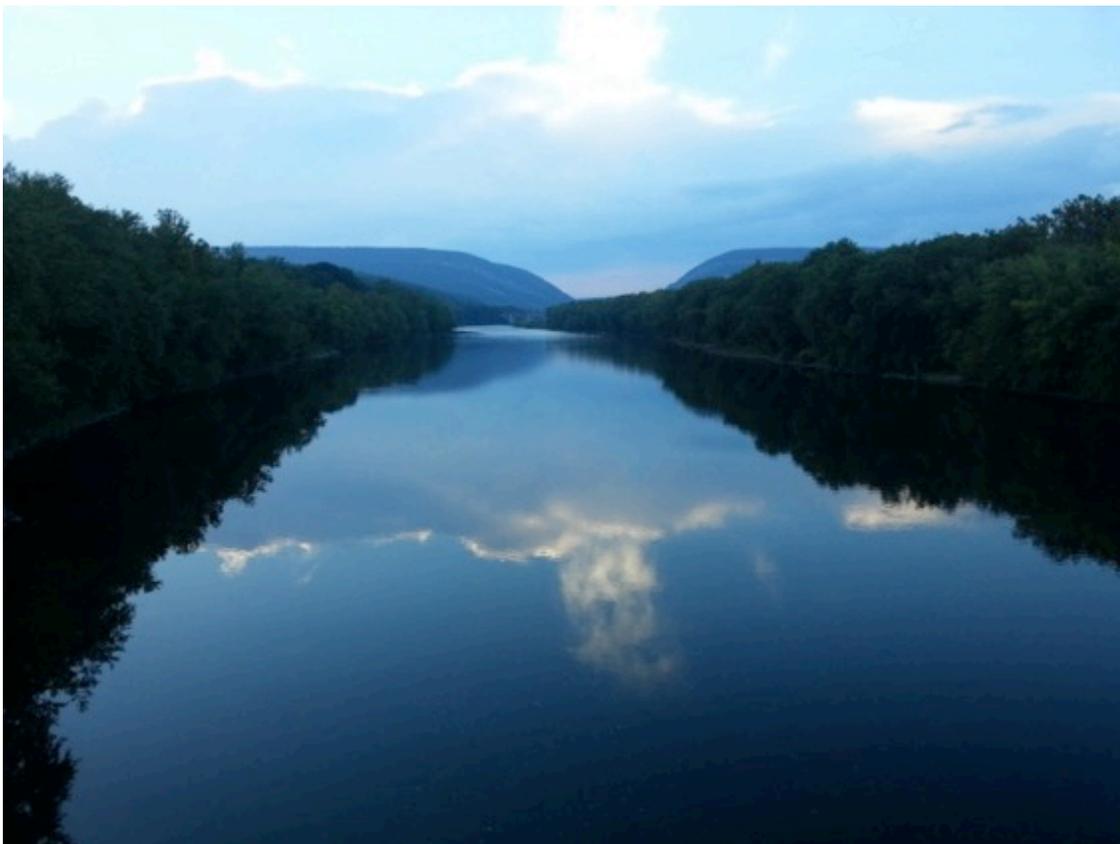
Friends; Arsha Vidya Pitham Ashram in Saylorsburg, PA. Of Swami Dayananda Ji (and Swami Chinamayananda Ji) lineage, this is likely the best Ashram in the USA for the study of Advaita Vedanta, the core philosophy of Vedanta and a key aid to understanding the true nature of our Self (God).



Appalachian Trailhead; Peace Pilgrim was the first woman to walk the entire length of the trail in 1952; from Georgia to Maine, as preparation for her first coast-to-coast Peace Pilgrimage.



So beautiful, I've never seen this before or since. The elders of a small town (not sure the name) near the Delaware River had painted their sidewalks with inspirational sayings from saints of many paths.



27 Aug 2014

Om, Delaware River looking north. Thank you Pennsylvania, you've been amazing! Thank you all dear friends for your kindness and Love, hello New Jersey! All are friends.

Thank you God.

31 Aug 2014

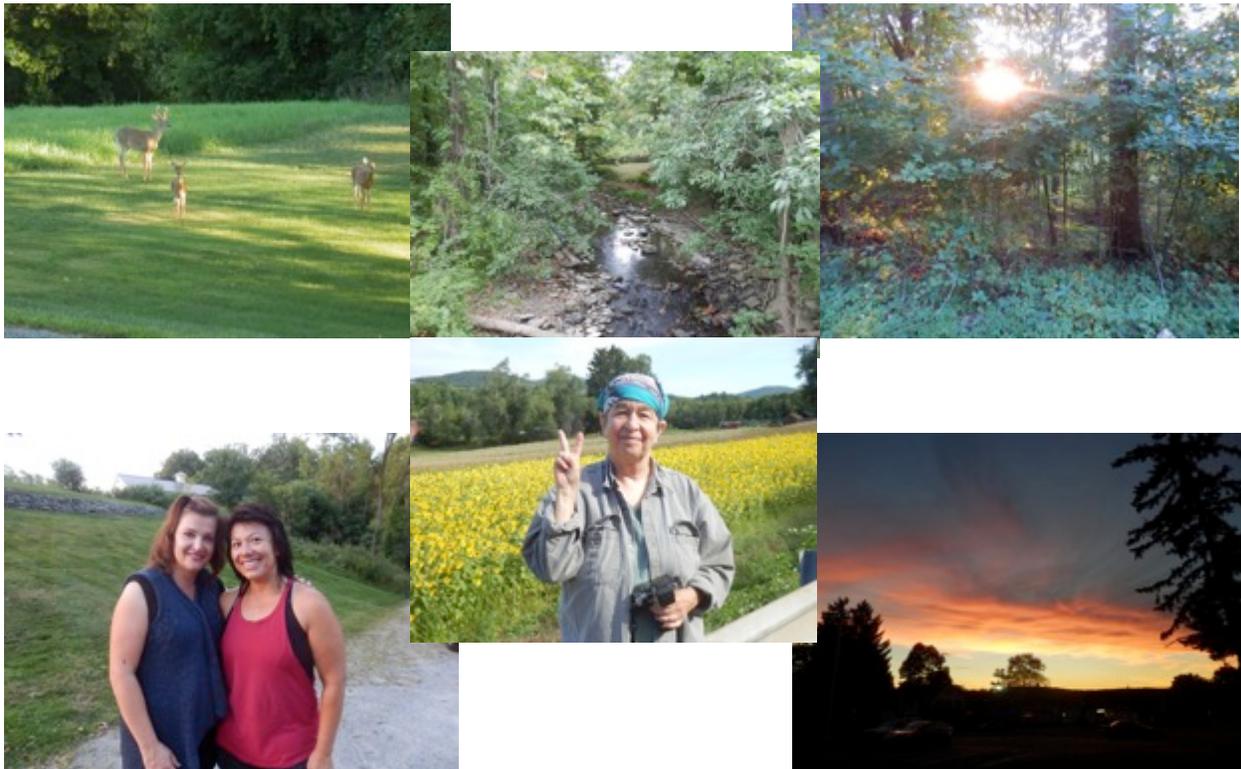
Om. Let us accept all and love all. We are not separate, we are all are brothers, sisters, children.

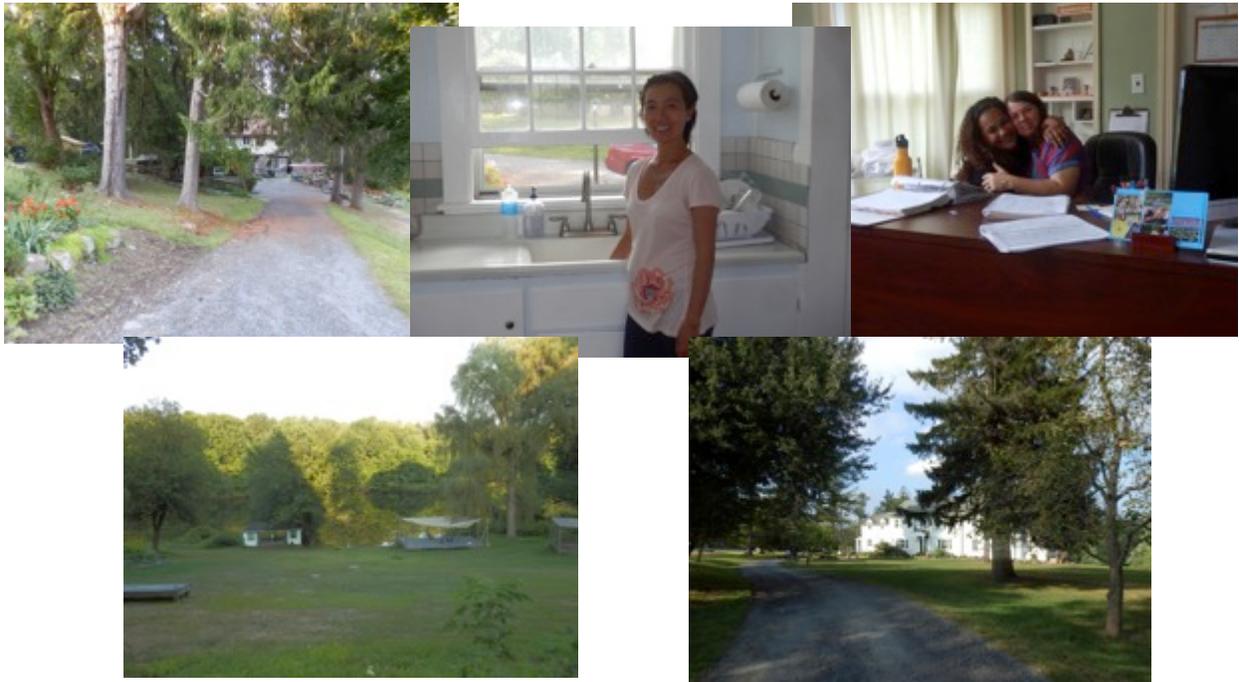
With amazing friends at Ananda Ashram this weekend! You are each amazing! Thank you.

Om Namo Narayanaya, may all know Peace



Above and below: Friends. From northern New Jersey, crossing in to upstate NY towards Ananda Ashram in Monroe, NY.





Friends at Ananda Ashram in Monroe, NY. Beautiful and deeply loving Yoga and Vedanta retreat just over an hour's drive (or a three day walk!) from NYC.

3 Sep 2014

For much of our time on this earth we accept what is in our own mind and serve our self. We thus study the world outside in order to find what will please us while rejecting the rest.

This is all well and good, for in this way we learn the impermanent nature of the things of the world. We experience pleasure but also much suffering and pain through attachment to, and then the resulting loss of, images and stuff of the mind. We come to know pleasure to be fleeting and elusive.

Finally we may know the path to sustained happiness, which is the reversal of this flow. Here we accept and serve all in the world except for our own mind. We study the nature of our mind, thus breaking our attachment to the stuff of the mind. With this flow we attach instead to the golden thread of the eternal and glorious Self, which binds and is all.

Om Shanti Om Peace Om Shalom

May all know Peace

4 Sep 2014

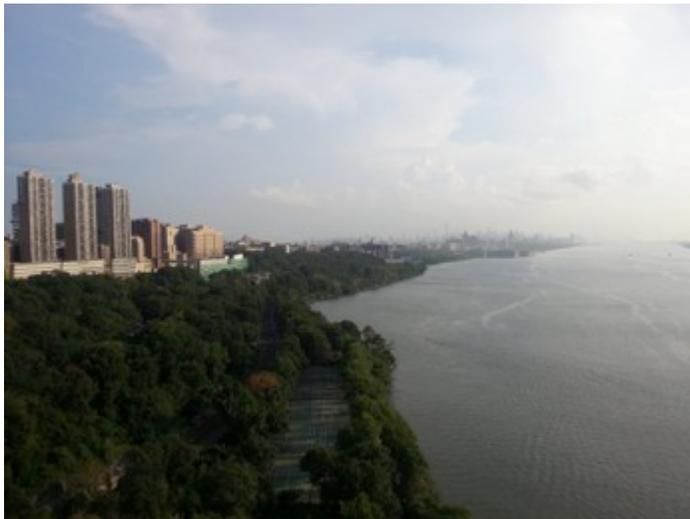
Your past is your own reservoir of experience. It is not to be forgotten, but of course it cannot be changed and must therefore be accepted. You must completely accept and forgive your self for all in the past. With each new moment the last one is past.

As you achieve new levels of perspective you will be able to explore this treasure trove of experience again and again, learning from it. With each change in perspective, as your vision becomes more all-inclusive, you will be able to learn more from them. They are invaluable. All of them. Do not attempt to forget memories, file them away and be thankful for them.

No memory can harm us. Leave them as memories so we may live in the present, revisit them as needed to learn more about the magic NOW.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti

May all know Peace



View from the George Washington Bridge crossing from New Jersey to New York (we need signs to tell us this ☺). Looking south.

5 Sep 2014

Om

From the George Washington Bridge

Pasadena - Manhattan

248 days

~3,500 miles

Zillions of smiles

Infinite amazement

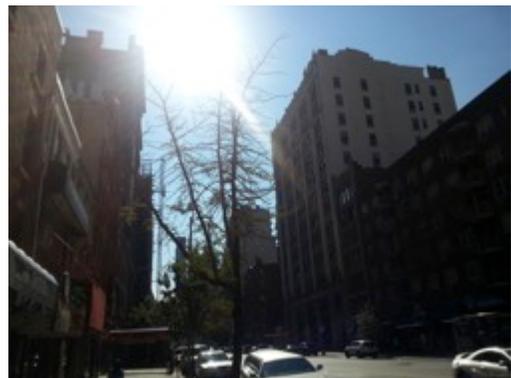
14 days to Egg Harbor and the celebration for Peace Pilgrim's works, God willing.

Thank you to all!

6 Sep 2014

The key to a healthy and enduring relationship is not physical love, for this is love of an image. It is complete and abiding acceptance. Acceptance, or love without condition, alone survives the test of time.

I reached Manhattan on the 5th of September, 248 days after setting out from Pasadena. Along the way I left myself; little by little, step by step. I stayed at the Sivananda



Vedanta Yoga Center in south Manhattan for a few nights, on the 7th I walked across the Brooklyn Bridge, to Coney Island, to set foot into the Atlantic Ocean, thus completing the first coast-to-coast leg of my continuing pilgrimage for peace.

20. On Reaching the Atlantic Ocean

"Peace begins with a smile."

Mother Teresa

09/07/14

Coast 2 Coast

Please know that you can do anything.

Set your intention.

Smile, and go forward one step at a time.

This world is yours. Don't let the mind stop you. All fears, all barriers, are only there. They are not independently real.

Thank you all! Thank you God!

Om Shanti, Om Shalom, Om Peace

May all know Peace



Crossing the Brooklyn Bridge



The Atlantic Ocean



Coney Island

9 Sep 2014

How is it that someone else may harm us or bring us anger?

Is it not simply our reflection upon the matter that does so? Our thought, after the event, not the event itself? The concept that "I have been offended" or wronged in a certain way?

Who is it that is in control of this?

Today let us intentionally observe "no one can make me angry" day. Just watch the mind, if anger starts to come bring in a funny thought, laugh at the concept of getting angry for no good reason, bring in a tender thought, whatever. You have this control, let's try it. Let the world test us, send all anger away this day. Better yet, just let it stay outside of "me".

"He has done that wrong, being subject to anger, should I too follow him, making my mind subject to anger? Is it not foolish to imitate him? He harboring his hatred destroys himself internally. Why should I, on his account, destroy my reputation?"

"All things are momentary. Both his mind and body are momentary too. The thoughts and the body with which the wrong was done to me are not now existing. What I call the same man now are the thoughts and physical parts which are different from the earlier ones that harmed me although belonging to the same psycho-physical process. Thus, one thought together with one mass of physical parts did me some wrong, and vanished there and then, giving place to succeeding thoughts and material parts to appear. So with which am I getting angry? With the vanished and disappeared thoughts and physical parts or with the thoughts and material parts which do not do any wrong now? Should I get angry with one thing which is innocent whereas another thing has done me wrong and vanished?"

Gautama the Buddha

10 Sep 2014

If we truly wish to reflect upon what we are, who we are at the deepest level, we may know, and what we find will amaze us, it will bring us Peace and Understanding, Joy without end.

What we find can not be found through words, a book, a teacher, only in our own journey. No God nor Buddha nor Self Realized one can provide this knowing without our own effort. Every experience we have offers value in this search, as does all of nature itself. The great teachers offer help, inspired books as well. Finally, though, we may know only through our intense desire to know, and through our own steps, through our own commitment to take these steps, through our own selection of our highest light as our internal guide, through our own practice.

All that separates us from complete Peace, Love and Understanding is in our view and in our control when we choose for it to be. We have the power, destiny is ours to choose.

11 Sep 2014

Love is alive in every moment, and only in the current moment. The past may be reflected upon, this is why we have memories of the past. It should, however, always be analyzed by our current lens, in this

moment, in order to accept new learning from the past as a gift in this moment. Thus may the past come to Life, this is the only way.

In this way also may we know that all who have ever walked this earth still walk it for us, the seeker after Truth. Presence is always present. It proceeds and follows, it is eternal as are you.

13 Sep 2014

Peace begins with our own simple smile. A loving smile shared with one we meet, along with a beneficial thought, create an unstoppable tidal wave which moves us and the world around us "Peace-ward".

16 Sep 2014

Karma and Destiny

I was asked a beautiful question on Friday night about karma, the universal law of cause and effect, and whether we are bound by it. There is a common misconception that, yes, we are. This is not the case, but to change its hold on us we must assert and oversee the mind. Swami Sivananda talks to how we may change habits and destiny in this simple way, "Sow an action and reap a tendency. Sow a tendency and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny."

There is no question that if we choose not to assert and cultivate new thought patterns we will remain in the sway of karma, or our programmed conditioning of the mind. There is also no question that we can change this, and changing this changes everything. This is the salvation that Jesus speaks to, that is spoken of in all traditions. The following are excerpts from the Yoga-Vasishta, the great dialogue between the sage Vasishta Ji and Lord Rama, which Swami Sivananda uses to speak to this point:

"There is nothing like destiny other than the effect of our previous efforts (II-6-4). Our previous efforts are called our destiny (II-6-36). Our achievements are determined by our efforts. Our effort is therefore our destiny (II-6-2). Our previous and present efforts, in case they are in contrary directions, are the two rams fighting against each other. The more powerful of the two always overthrows the other (II-6-10). Whether they are the past or the present efforts, it is the stronger ones that determine our destiny. In either case, it is man's own effort that determines his destiny by virtue of its strength (II-6-8). Man determines his own destiny by his thought. He can make those things also happen which were not destined to happen (V-24-28). The soul of man is powerful enough. Only those things happen in this world which it creates by its own free efforts, and not others (V-24, 35, 36). One should therefore overcome one's unfavourable destiny (the effect of one's past efforts) by greater effort in the present, gnawing his teeth (II-5-11). There is nothing in the world which cannot be achieved by man by right sort of efforts." (III-96-8).

You may think as you choose, and when you accomplish this you will speak and do as you choose. The entire universe will bend to your will, in this it has no choice. You are the mighty lion, if you choose to roar. Roar my dear, break the chains of Karma and be free!

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

May all know Peace

18 Sep 2014

We may Love without attachment, with complete acceptance. When we Love in this way we find what we Love is all around us, inside us and outside us. It is in every eye, every touch, every movement, every heart.

21. Peace Pilgrim's Expanding Reach

"This is the way of peace. Fight evil with good, falsehood with truth, hatred with love. It is the only way."

"The path of the seeker is full of pitfalls and temptations, and the seeker must walk it alone with God. I would recommend that you keep your feet on the ground and your thoughts at lofty heights, so that you may attract only good. Concentrate on giving so that you may open yourself to receiving; concentrate on living according to the light you have so that you may open yourself to more light; get as much light as possible through the inner way. If such receiving seems difficult, look for some inspiration from a beautiful flower or a beautiful landscape, from some beautiful music or some beautiful words. However, that which is contacted from without must be confirmed within before it is yours."



Statue of Peace Pilgrim, Peace Pilgrim Park, Egg Harbor, NJ

Peace Pilgrim



I wrote of Peace Pilgrim earlier and now have the privilege of doing so again. What to say? Peace is Love, literally. She walked for each of us, as an inspiration to help us see what our mind says is not possible, to help us suspend these ideas that our mind has of what is possible and what is not, to help us suspend judgment. She walked for Peace, in every sense of the word, that we might know Peace.

Known to her friends and

followers simply as "Peace", she started her continuous walking pilgrimage for peace on January 1, 1953, during the height of the Korean war and the inquisitions of the McCarthy era. She walked in prayer for peace for all and in full faith, carrying only a toothbrush, a pen and a comb in her blue tunic emblazoned with "PEACE PILGRIM" on the front and "Walking for Peace" on



the back. Penniless, Peace asked for nothing and told all that she walked with “no visible support, with full faith in the goodness of mankind and in God” during her 28-year continuous pilgrimage.

People often ask, “is it possible to have peace in this world?” and Peace Pilgrim is such a beautiful example to support the resounding answer, YES! One look in her eyes answers the question. In watching one of her interviews or talks (there are several on YouTube), reading the book, “Peace Pilgrim, Her Life and Work in Her Own Words”, or in meeting one who has been inspired to reach inside and transform themselves by Peace’ works you will know the answer to this question in a moment.

Peace inspired me to this work, pilgrimage, and for this my gratitude is boundless. She, along with the other saints who reached through my veil, helped me to find what was always inside of me, which I myself had hidden. Through me Peace smiles and waves at all that I meet, through me Peace helps others to find their hidden Self and to touch the reservoir of Joy and Love which is inside.

I had talked with two of Peace’ friends prior to starting



Helene with some of the “Friends of Peace Pilgrim”



Helene at their childhood home, telling us stories of her time shared with Peace Pilgrim, then named Mildred.



John Francis, “Planet Walker” with more friends of Peace Pilgrim

the coast-to-coast walk and was struck by the openness and their completely selfless support. Consider for a moment that the book, mentioned above, was produced from Peace’ words but that she did not write it herself. A group of people inspired by her, as service for all seekers in this world and for God, pulled together her writings and put together transcripts of her talks, assembling the book and completing this important part of Peace Pilgrim’s works as if through her own hands. Consider further that from the start of offering these inspirational and direct teachings, nearly thirty years ago now, the

book has always been offered completely free of charge. Perhaps this just begins to touch the dedication of the people who call themselves “Friends of Peace Pilgrim”, but I fear that it does not.

In Egg Harbor I was given the opportunity to meet these amazing people and to be inspired by them in person. Just as Peace Pilgrim reaches through me she reaches through them. I met Peace herself through them. What’s more, a few friends whom I had met on my pilgrimage joined for the event as well and also took Darshan from Peace Pilgrim through her friends assembled there.

There were many deeply touching stories shared. I would like to touch briefly on three.

Her now 100 year old sister Helene walked the two mile Peace Walk on the 21st with all of those who attended, and I was able to join her, hand-in-hand, for much of the walk. Helene shared an interesting perspective. Helene and her older sister Mildred (later to change her name to Peace Pilgrim) were close when young; they played together and enjoyed the country. Peace talks about the value of growing up with “space”, and we walked to that home that she had grown up in. As they grew older Helene followed Mildred in many ways, including taking the job at the local winery that Mildred had vacated. Mildred introduced Helene and suggested her; Helene was to work there for thirty-six years. Helene did not, however, follow her sister in her work for peace nor in her early association with the Quaker church.

Helene was surprised by Peace’s decision to walk the pilgrimage for peace, though she was not surprised that she could do it nor at her level of commitment. She said that Peace had always been headstrong and followed through on whatever she committed to do.

They didn’t see each other through the twenty-eight years of Peace’s pilgrimage. When Peace changed her name and began her pilgrimage she left everything behind, including her old identity. She knew the way that people are, that many would want to focus on her prior story instead of the Peace picture that she represented, so she left the old story and started creating a new one. She was of course completely successful in creating the new story and her legacy as a great American saint. She left behind Egg Harbor, never to return, in favor of her work and her commitment to helping us find peace inside of us, and to affect the peace picture in the world.

Helene forwarded Peace’ mail for her through those years and she says that she always heard from Peace via a sweet postcard on her birthdays and on holidays, but that other than that they didn’t talk and she was unaware of Peace’s work and her impact.

It was only after Peace left her body that she learned. After the car crash many were moved to action to maintain her legacy. “Friends of Peace Pilgrim” was formed. Many reached out to Helene and she began to hear the stories of many whose lives had been touched by Peace in such amazing ways. Some of these stories are shared in the book; of course these are just a small tip of the iceberg. Peace met and directly touched many hundreds of thousands and indirectly hundreds of millions. As Helene heard from these friends she was inspired to dedicate the remainder of her life to the cause of peace and specifically to talk with schoolchildren about Peace Pilgrim’s works, sharing her teachings and legacy. She became closely involved with the Egg Harbor school district in this way and also travelled the country doing the same. Recently her travel has been reduced but she is still a notable and respected

figure in the Egg Harbor community and she loves to talk about Peace with anyone who would like to listen.

I also met John Francis, who calls himself “Planet Walker”, another inspired by Peace. John had attended several of these annual events in honor of Peace Pilgrim, and had led the Peace Walk in last year’s event. John tells his story so beautifully on his TED talk, I recommend you to go there and listen; you may find it easily by searching “John Francis + TED talks” on YouTube. He was in complete mouna (silence) for seventeen years. Over the period he obtained a college degree, a master’s, his doctorate, and was in high demand as a teacher at the University of Wisconsin for several years, all in complete silence. Can you imagine that? He has walked across the USA and much of the world sharing his inspiring stories and lessons.

Maurice, a wonderful young man who runs the Friends of Peace Pilgrim book distribution center in Oklahoma City likewise has learned of Peace only after she left her body and he now also shares her light with many through his kindness, compassion and dedication. If you are inspired to request the book via the website www.peacepilgrim.org you will very likely be in contact with Maurice. Please give him my warmest regards and love.

In his Yoga Vasishtha class one day Swami Premananda Ji talked about presence, he told a story to help illustrate his point; the story goes like this.

One day the prime minister of India made plans to visit Gangotri, a small and very holy pilgrimage site on the Ganga river high in the Himalayas. Never before had a prime minister visited Gangotri and this was a high honor for the village.

It had been a long time since the village had seen a good cleaning. The streets and sidewalks were dirty and in need of repair, there was garbage piling up in several visible places, even the temples and monuments were in need of a good cleaning. Gangotri’s elders met and discussed this; the prime minister’s visit was still two months away and they came up with a plan to make Gangotri sparkle. The streets were cleaned, monuments polished and banners hung in anticipation of the prime minister’s arrival. The entire town was made to glow. All of the residents cleaned up as well; they washed and pressed their clothes and there was a buzz through the town as all prepared.

On the day of the planned visit the word came that the prime minister’s must cancel; he would not come at that time and it was not certain if or when he might.

This leads us to the point. Even though the prime minister did not come his presence did. His presence was felt for the entire two months prior to the planned visit, his presence caused the town to become clean; his presence caused the villagers to clean and press their best clothes, etc. In fact even on the day that he was to come the village was aglow with his presence! His presence was there before the day, on the day, after the day, even though he was not there. It is so that your own presence both precedes you and follows you. It is wisdom to know the power of your presence and to use it to good effect, as the prime minister did with Gangotri.

This is the story of Peace Pilgrim. People talk of her dying, yet I'll tell you that in no way is she dead. I met her. I talked with her. I communed with her on this entire weekend. I met her through a hundred pairs of glowing eyes, I listened to her through beautiful and varied voices, I communed with her through friends and with God, I was with her and am with her now. And now, my dear, if you have read this far you are with her as well.

If I can share one lesson with you about Peace Pilgrim's teachings and this point of her presence, it is that you are great, that your greatness simply needs to be uncovered. It is worth doing the work to uncover it, this work is the only work that is of value in this world. Your presence is always present; it is what you send ahead of you and what you leave behind you wherever you go. You always touch others; you cannot help but do so. Please then touch them with love and acceptance, for in this way your presence grows. And this. You are not alone. In every sense of these words, may Peace be with you.

20 Sep 2014

Om, what an amazing day today at Peace Pilgrim park in Egg Harbor City, NJ for the day's celebration of Peace Pilgrim's works. Some friends from the Pilgrimage joined in person, we met Helene, Peace's 99 year old sister who participated in all of the days program. We also met Planet Walker, John Francis, many who know Peace Pilgrim and many from the area who simply came to commemorate her works and have fun.

A deep Namaskar and thank you to all involved in putting this wonderful event together. Amazing.

More pictures and update tomorrow, God willing.

Thank you all.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

May all know Peace

21 Sep 2014

"Praying without ceasing is not ritualized, nor are there even words. It is a constant state of awareness of oneness with God; it is a sincere seeking for a good thing; and it is a concentration on the thing sought, with faith that it is obtainable."

Peace Pilgrim

Peace exists. It is, and may be found, in the heart of all. It is to be found inside, then it may be known outside and the very world becomes brighter for all. One who finds it inside their life becomes all about shining their light upon the light of each seeker of Light, of Peace, of Love and Truth. Peace Pilgrim is such; she shines for all seekers.

Seek and you shall find. Know by the examples shown us that inner Peace may be found. Let us today celebrate the Peacemakers. Mahatma Gandhi. Martin Luther King Jr. Peace Pilgrim. Jesus Christ.

Gautama the Buddha. Mohammed. Krishna. Baha'u'llah... All of the saints, all of those who take small steps for Peace inside or outside, there are so many. This world is not as it appears on the television news; it is not even as our own mind sees it. Bright examples shine all around us. Know that, if one genuinely seeks a thing like Peace or Truth, it may be known, and this very process of seeking brightens both seeker and world.

Let us today honor and thank our teachers and let us genuinely resolve to come together in the heart, to seek and know that we may find that which we seek. We need only set this goal and to take our steps, one after another. Let us take a small step together.

Om Shanti, Om Peace, Om Shalom

May all know Peace

Thus ended my first coast-to-coast pilgrimage for peace. It ended magically in conjunction with an amazing event held to honor the one who inspired it, that Mahatma (great soul) Peace Pilgrim. Certainly this was not the end of my pilgrimage nor the end of walking for me, and every additional step, every additional smile, is motivated by her, in her honor, and is dedicated to God through Her spokesperson, Peace Pilgrim, as well as all of the teachers God provides us with.

Thank you Peace Pilgrim, I love you. Thank you God, I love you.

Om, Amen, Amin

22. Goodness in All

"Brothers, have no fear of men's sin. Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love, and is the highest Love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand of it. Love every leaf and every ray of God's light. Love the animals, Love the plants, Love everything. If you Love everything you will perceive the Divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come to Love the whole world with an all-embracing Love."

Fyodor Dostoevsky

If there is one message about this world that I can share with you, the overriding lesson of this pilgrimage, it is this. **Without a single exception there is a core of goodness in the heart of all.** This goodness is the fabric of the universe; this statement applies to all whether human, animal, plant, inanimate matter or the supernatural personages. It is our center, our home, and it is what we live to find in ourselves and in others. The greatest work that we can do in this world is to find this, to know this, and to help others to know it in themselves. There is no greater work, and this work requires only that we accept and love. It does not require that we plan, that we stress or that we judge. It requires of us only our heart; that we give of our heart.

22 Sep 2014

Reflections on a coast-to-coast Pilgrimage for Peace

Om dearest friends, yesterday in observance of the International day of Peace and in celebration of Peace Pilgrim's works, at the weekend event held in her honor, I closed this chapter called my first coast-to-coast Pilgrimage for Peace. You have been with me every step of this walk and I thank you for this, for all of your support. Of course I am also with you, in spite of any appearance to the contrary we are in constant communion.

This walk has been dedicated to my teachers and sources of inspiration. Some of these names include Swami Sivananda, Swami Chidananda, Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Sitaramananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Ramaswarupananda and Peace Pilgrim. All of the great teachers and saints in all traditions. Every single name and image of the divine, this of course includes you.

There are two great messages that I bring you from this walk. These are messages which all of these teachers and traditions share, now I can say that I've come to know them myself from this amazing experience and affirm them in this way:

1. That which beats in the hearts of all is Unity, Love, Peace and Joy. It is covered yet it is to be uncovered. This is our life's work. All have perfection at the center of their being, evil is only a state of mind, a thought. However persistent it may be each person can transcend it. We are separated only by our conditioning. Our beliefs, our fears, our desires, our looks and sounds seem to divide us yet this is only appearance. We are beyond this appearance, what we are seeing is our unity expressed as diversity.

This core goodness, this divinity, has sustained me every step of this walk. Friends I had never met before supported me with anything and everything required along the way, without me even needing to ask! Thousands and thousands of smiles have been exchanged. All want to smile, all want to love, all want to be loved. Our problems seem deep but they are on our surface, our goodness is deep and abiding, our bonds together eternal.

2. Peace is always at hand and we can know Peace in our lifetime. Do not think it impossible, it is completely possible, it is your birthright. The thought that it can not be is part of what we must transcend. Peace must start with you. Not someone else, not somewhere else, you. You have the power for this, if you will it strongly enough you will know Peace, and in the process will bring Peace to others the world. You may do anything according to your will and this includes having the greatest gift. You are able to control your very thoughts, and in this way you may change your destiny. This is all that you need for Peace.

Have hope but do not stop there. Each of us walk and whatever walk we take may be a walk for Peace. Only one step at a time is required.

Your next step on this walk, at this moment, can be to intentionally bring a smile and to share this smile with all. To look every person that you see in the eye with respect and to give them the gift of your beautiful smile, expecting nothing in return. Every one, not just the ones that you like or the ones that look nice. This seems like such a small step yet it will transform you and the entire world. If you back it up with beneficial thoughts, prayer or Meditation and kind words for all the waves you start become tidal waves of Peace.

Over the next weeks I'll share more insight, stories and examples to help illustrate the practical aspects of these observations, God willing. My intent over the next few years at least is to continue to wander with these messages, to visit wherever I am invited and share in all forums that are offered. I am completely open to all suggestions and invitations, it is my desire to honor all.

If you wish to stay in touch I'll continue updating here and will perhaps bring on a blog soon. All according to God's will of course.

23. Being a Peacemaker

"The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Taka (the Great Spirit), and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us.

This is the real peace, and the others are but reflections of this. The second peace is that which is made between two individuals, and the third is that which is made between two nations. But above all you should understand that there can never be peace between nations until there is known that true peace, which, as I have often said, is within the souls of men."

Black Elk - Oglala Sioux

We want peace and happiness, we want to be satisfied. How? Amazingly enough we spend very little of our time in this world asking this question in a serious manner and far less of our time, perhaps none, listening for the answer. Why is this? Our mind cannot provide peace and instead of asking the question we follow our mind. This can never lead us to what we want.

When we ask and listen we find that there are countless messengers who give us the answer, and the answer is always the same. In his core teachings known as the Beatitude (Sermon on the Mount, Gospel of Matthew) Jesus Christ says this: "Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called Children of God."

We may have the supreme Peace for which we search when we commit and apply ourselves to being Peacemakers. Truly this is so.

How to be a Peacemaker? It is not required that you walk coast-to-coast ☺. Being a Peacemaker is not about doing big things; it is about doing small things and putting your heart in to them. You may be a Peacemaker by following these six steps:

1. Accept, Respect and Love all without exception, without even the slightest judgment or hesitation. Our very act of judging another, even in our own mind, reinforces the negative thought that they are already burdened with. They need relief from these thoughts, not for them to be strengthened. When you know the power of your thoughts you will never think a bad thought again. When we judge vocally we amplify this negative thought wave even more.

2. Smile and bring a beneficial thought towards all that you meet. In this way you brighten the world and help others to know the kindness that is in the world and in their own heart.
3. Listen more than you talk. Listen for real, not the kind of listening where we are just waiting for the opportunity to talk again. Listen compassionately; look into the eyes of the person who is speaking and hear not just their words but their intent. Feel them.
4. When you speak, speak only truth and only what is kind. Make whatever you say constructive and back it up with beneficial intent. As you speak have the intention that what you are saying will provide benefit, or don't say it.
5. Make all of your actions those of kindness and compassion. Walk softly, keep your ego in check always and do not make a show of yourself. Strive to always be considerate of people, of all creatures and of the earth itself.
6. Strive always to see the unity of all underlying the physical images. There is unity in diversity, look for it in every moment, continue to remind your own mind to look for it. As you begin to see the one Life force in all the above points become easier; finally they become part of your nature.

Whatever you do with the genuine intent of providing benefit to all does indeed provide benefit to all. It is important that you know this. You need not see results as you do not own them, though with grace you will be shown some results. Beneficial intent is the common denominator of all of these steps.

If you apply these six steps you are a Peacemaker. You will be known as a child of God and as a lover of all. You will not only bring peace to others you will know it yourself. There is no question of this; this is in accordance with the Universal Laws. These steps will carry you homeward.

27 Sep 2014

It is said, and certainly we talk about it here, that Peace begins with a smile. This is, at every level, true. Both inner Peace and external Peace are fostered in this way.

Yet we may ask, "but what if I don't feel like smiling?" And it will be said, "then smile anyway."

Many will argue with this as it goes against the conditioning of our minds. This is exactly why we should do it. Our habits are deep and we need to change them in order to find peace. Our tendency is to repeat whatever is our custom. Our habit has become our character and our character has become our destiny. What is our destiny? It is not mysterious or separate from our thoughts and actions; it is no different than our character or our habits. If our habit is to eat three meals per day our destiny is to eat three meals per day until we die. Will we marry? Perhaps, but we'll still eat three meals per day. If our habit is to smile only at those we know and only when we are happy, our destiny is to be this way until we die.

Yet we can change our destiny. Why just accept it and ask astrologers what it is? Why not make it amazing? How? By changing our habits. Is it easy to change habits? No, of course not. It does not come naturally; we must exert ourselves to do it. Sometimes it's very hard. We can do it though, if we want to. We know this.

So, why force a smile for every person, even when we feel sad, angry, etc? Why make this our new habit? Because this simple act is perhaps the most powerful act to change both our own mental patterns and to lift others, to brighten the world. The simple act of looking others in the eye, accepting them, smiling at them changes everything!

Is this not worth some hard work? Is this not part of the character we want? To be a lift for others? It won't remain hard, we will see and know the benefit of this constant acceptance of others quickly and it will become an enjoyable habit.

It is the simple acts performed with love that bring Peace. Let us start these with a smile.

World Smile Day is coming Friday, October 3. Don't worry, God willing I'll remind you.

May all know Peace. And loving smiles.

14 Oct 2014

Let us strive for lofty goals

The wise consistently share with us this guidance; "respect and love all as one's own Self." This teaching exists as the highest pillar of each great tradition and each sage and saint. This is expressed not just as a goal but as our very purpose.

This guidance is never intended for others, it is always intended for each of us to employ in our own relationship with the world. It is never limited; the imperative is that we are to apply it to every single being, whether perceived as friend or foe. There is no wiggle room here, we are each clearly instructed to learn this and apply this. Completely.

Of course this goes against many of our natural tendencies, yet it is the bar which all of the greats have set for us, which our own highest light has set for us.

Why? Because in so doing we find our deeper nature and become free from what causes our pain and suffering. Because in so doing we release our Self from our self. Here is found Happiness, Peace, Joy, Life itself.

Let us not strive for small victories, for the fruits of small victories are also small. Let us strive for this, to become a shining beacon of Respect and Love for every creature. Not just humans, animals, plants, the world itself. Regardless of beliefs, behavior, associations, looks. All.

How? Through constant monitoring and comparison of our very thoughts, words and actions against our own highest light and this simple ideal. By putting our mind, our heart and our soul in to all of our thoughts and deeds, whether small or large. We have every tool required.

We may have what we wish in this world, and this victory is within our reach. Let us do what is in our control; this is. Let us Love and Respect all.

Om Shanti, Shalom, Peace

May all know Peace

24. It's all about the Mind

"The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts. Think only on those things that are in line with your principles and can bear the light of day. The content of your character is your choice. Day by day, what you think and do is who you become. Your integrity is your destiny - it is the light that guides your way."

Heraclitus

Can you imagine your thoughts being recorded and played back for others to hear? Perhaps posted on Facebook for the world to know?

This world that we see is based upon confusion and a lie. The confusion is evidenced in the crazy thoughts that we each suffer with; these thoughts in toto form the basis of the world. The lie is the external pretending that we do not have the thoughts that we do. Imagine if you will that we all admitted the state of our mind openly, that we all shared openly all of the thoughts that we see inside of us. Every one ;-). What a laugh we'd all have together!

Let us have compassion for all as all suffer with this same affliction. Our goal is to transcend this thought state. Peace lies within, not without. It lies underneath the thoughts. We are not alone in any way, shape, or form. We are not alone in our struggle; we all share this same struggle. We are not alone beyond the struggle either, for at the end of the struggle we find the same Truth holding us all; we find that we abide in It as It abides in us.

Let us smile in this knowledge. This common ground is the real brotherhood and sisterhood. Be kind, for in kindness, we receive kindness. Accept all, for in acceptance we receive acceptance. And laugh, for in laughter our true nature is known.

The most important spiritual practice, in fact the most important life practice, is overseeing our mind. No relationship will ever be more important than the relationship we cultivate with our own mind.

Within each of us are two forces, and we know them both though we typically do not see them as two forces from the opposite poles of our existence. There is the subconscious mental force, which is a conditioned force consisting of desires, fears, aversions and tendencies. It is known by the nature of our thoughts and exhibited through the character that we display in the world. Deeper inside is a silent force that we may call the heart or the intuitive force (also highest Self, God, or countless other names). When we say "heart" here we do not talk of emotions, rather the core loving nature of our being. It is our silent and steady existence, our "moral rudder".

These two forces, which can also be called our "lower nature" and our "higher nature", invariably pull us in different directions and present our choices in each moment.

Our lower nature pulls us toward what it believes to be pleasurable activities based upon our habits and conditioning. The lower nature is a storehouse of the past. It is made up of memories alone; always these memories haunt us in various ways. When we sit by a stream these memories take us to streams past, when we eat food they take us to food past, when we sit with a friend they take us to past friendships or past conversations or even past arguments, pulling us out of the present moment as if the past were more real than now. This is of course not the case, yet constantly this pull is to comparison with the past, recreation of moments of the past, fears of loss of the past, and on and on. This lower nature is always exhibiting through our thoughts; it is the "noise" of the mind.

The lower nature is what we see in the world as long as our lower nature dominates us. We have discussed this earlier with the example of how various people with various conditioning see an orange clad character walking past them. Your mind will tell you what you see is the world, but what you see is in fact your own nature reflected back to you. If you are dominated by your lower nature you see that. If you have surrendered your lower nature and taken a firm grip on your higher nature, if you have become self-less, you will see the world in a completely different way, and there are infinite variations in between.

Our higher nature is silent; it does not exhibit itself through incessant thought but rather through a quiet and persistent pull. It is of a completely beneficent nature, it cannot do harm to us or to others. It adds luminosity to the current moment, it draws us to nature and to the deepest desire to love and be loved, to be happy. It knows us, constantly listens to us, forgives us all deeds and is always available to us with answers to whatever problem with which we deal in the moment. It is the most humble force imaginable and it emerges only when we quiet our mind and ask for its guidance. It is patience itself.

The goal of our spiritual practice, the goal of our life, is to reside in our higher nature always. At first we may know very little of this internal higher nature (our intuitive Self) but we all do experience it from time to time. It may seem that it comes from the outside, as an angel or a friend, and yet it is us.

The more we oversee our mind, the more we study the nature of our thoughts and in doing so cultivate first positive thoughts and then quiet single pointed focus (the meditative state) the more we know the silent higher nature. The more we serve others, the more that we practice kindness to all, the more that we tolerate others and correct our own mind the deeper and more vibrant we become. Amazingly the entire world is seen to change its nature.

There is nothing in our mind that cannot be undone. There is no fear, there is no stress, there is no addiction, there is no pain or suffering which cannot be unwound and left behind. There is no terrible memory that cannot finally be understood and put in its place and there is no hurt that cannot be forgiven, even all of our self-hurt. Indeed there is no enemy that cannot be made a friend.

It starts and ends here, with overseeing the mind. We are not our mind; the mind is within us. It is ours, it is not us, and this difference is all of the difference in the world. Applying this knowledge allows us to be free of all the forces in this world that drag us down and cause us to suffer. We have the power to watch it, to change the thoughts that come, to change the mind's very nature from a ghost haunting our days and nights to our best friend; stress, fear and anger free. All of its harmful tendencies can be

replaced. The subconscious mind cannot do this on its own, left to its own devices it will always take us in a circle. But you can. You can resolve to take control of your mind, and it starts with the desire to do so. Change must start here, in the subconscious mind. When we resolve to oversee the mind and commit to change its ways we awaken our higher nature and we begin to know the peace that lasts. All of the tools required are in you, you will know your power if you call it forth.

Below I share an observation and a practice in perspective that might provide benefit. Before that I want to add this thought for your consideration.

Our untrained mind is so unhealthy for us that by the time we reach the age of twenty-five the vast majority of us have seriously considered suicide. Many have tried and some have succeeded. Perhaps this thought leaves us in our middle age but it often returns in a quite persistent manner again in our later years. Societally this thought as well as the practice of suicide as an exit plan for the world has become much more accepted as science has advanced and the “comforts” in the world have become more prevalent. This fact should tell us something. We can rationalize it and say that people are living until older ages now and therefore there will be more tendencies to want to exit through suicide, but in fact this is odd, isn't it? We pay so much money to extend our lives by any means possible and then, when the world is too much, we think that it is OK to take some pills and exit. We file lawsuits against doctors that we do not feel have done a good job of extending our life or our pleasure and we file lawsuits against doctors that will not help us to commit suicide. This trend, and these suicidal thoughts that we experience, are signs of a real mental illness that we must at some point come to grips with.

Prescription mood elevators, the candy of the masses, treat only the symptoms of the world, they leave the cause untouched. The cause is in our ego-centered mind; it lies in our deep-seated tendencies and in our attachment to them. The longer we leave the cause untouched the more deeply in trouble and pain we find ourselves. There will be the thought that “I'll take another pill when my pain is too much and end this life”, but this is not logical at all. This physical life is not the real life and physical death is not the end of you. The signs for this are all around you, you will be well served to investigate death and your concepts of it before the time comes.

So, if there is no final death, then what happens when one leaves their body? What of the one who is in terrible pain and commits suicide? Well, not only do we continue (in our more subtle form) but our state of mind continues for quite some time as well. Happiness continues. Sadness continues. Pain continues. God intoxication continues. There are words for these states referred to in the scriptures; east and west. Happiness, the real unshakable happiness, or God intoxication, nirvana or whatever word chosen is also called heaven. Sadness, emotional pain and terrible suffering is also called hell. These states that are the nature of one's existence in this world are carried in to the next world as well. Hell is not so easy to escape; if we are in it here we are in it there. Here, this physical life, is where we may deal with the state of our mind and climb out of the lower mental states.

Deal with it we must. We must; for if we do not deal with it now we'll have to deal with it later, and later it will be harder.

Physician, heal thyself. This is our prescription. We must be our own physician, our own psychiatrist, we must go inside with the tools on offer to us and take control of our mind, thus taking control of our life.

28 Oct 2014

An exercise in perspective

We have an amazing mastery over the mind when we choose to exercise it. For millennia the common thought in the world was that the sun rose and set. Not that it appeared to rise and set, rather that it rose in the eastern sky and set in the western sky, only to reappear the following day in the east. This is, of course, as it appears to do. In time mankind observed that the world was not flat and that the sun did not rise and fall, rather that the world was round and rotated upon an axis around the sun. It was then understood that the sun simply appeared to rise and set, and that these shapes and rotations were the cause behind the appearance. Although there have always been those that understood this, and even deeper causes such as the cause for all appearance in the universe, the population was stuck in the notion of a flat earth and the sun rising and setting. Finally, only a few hundred years ago, the masses moved to the new paradigm. Now this paradigm of a round earth is known widely and surely there are only a few people remaining on earth who believe the world to be anything other than round and the appearance of the sun rising and setting to be caused by anything other than the rotations of earth.

Did the visual experience change? No, of course not. The understanding that underlies it, what we call our "perspective", is all that changed. Now, simply because of this change in perspective, all of the population on earth see their relationship in the world differently than was the case only five or six hundred years ago. Can you imagine for a moment what it was like to visualize the world as flat? Can you taste the fear that sailors might have had when setting sail on such a perilous journey that they might fall off of the earth?

Our worldview has changed in many ways but we still see the world as a world of things. We see separation; multiple objects. We see people outside of our own self as "others". Many of us say that we subscribe to various concepts of unity, of not being separate, yet consistently when it counts for us to see the world as one or another (union or duality with billions of separate things), we go with the image provided by our eyes. We see the flat world and have no personal basis with which to see it otherwise.

Unspeakable value will come from becoming consciously aware of this, from searching for and seeing (with our intuitive eye) the invisible connections. They are all around us yet if we are not aware and looking we'll not see them, our mind will cover them up. When walking I experience the "never empty bottle of water" and have shared many stories of this, it is one unavoidable experience of the connectedness of all. There are more, each of us are given them, if we intentionally look for these signs we will finally see them and, in time, we'll be able to develop faith in a new perspective. When we know that we are not separate everything changes. This shift in perspective is life changing, or rather life enabling. Life without fear, life lived in awareness of the connectedness of all is truly life.

Here's an exercise in perspective that you might find beneficial.

Imagine yourself as an island. A beautiful small coral island in an azure blue sea somewhere in the Pacific. You have stately tall palm trees which blow in the trade winds, glorious pink and white sand beaches and the sun radiates its warmth on you day after day. Luscious grasses grow fed by your

decaying coral and the tropical rains that come every night. Please close your eyes and imagine this. It's beautiful, yes? It must be supremely pleasant.



What you might further imagine now is the feeling that comes from being this island. First, you are alone. There are islands close by but the ocean rings you and separates you from all of them. Despite your beauty you don't see many people. The waves that come every day each take a little bit of you away, you see yourself rearranging and getting smaller. Please now imagine this. Desolation might set in if you go deeply in to this view.

Now look at the picture here once again. Can you see the problems of this island?

One day as you contemplate yourself you decide to contemplate your depth. You've been on the surface until now, everything we've talked about here is on the surface. But you decide to go down and see the view from there. You go under the water and look at yourself, all of the amazing fish that swim around you, you look at the coral reefs that rim you full of life. And you go all of the way to the bottom, to the ocean bed. Please go there now.

What do you see there? Are you alone? Indeed, from this perspective you look up instead of out. You look up to the left, to the right, ahead of you, behind you... and you see everything connected to you, in fact you see that "you" are far more than you had ever imagined. You are now rooted in the sea floor and you know yourself to be the very earth. You look around, you are you as far as you can see. It's all you! You are the host to the other islands, verily they are not islands, they are just you. You provide shelter for the fishes. All trees in the world grow in you, they need you to survive, you are not separate from anything!

Now, once more, please look at this picture. Does this poor eroding island look the same as it did?

This dear friends is our journey. It is all about perspective. Knowing ourselves, knowing the Self itself, is about exploring your own depths, going to the ocean floor, and knowing what you are. It is no different than this. Contemplation is required, as is awareness, spiritual practices help, there are so many tools. You have the experience and the tools to do this if you choose. Please explore.

Love always.

*Om Shanti Shanti Shanti
May all know Peace*

25. Dark Nights

"Before the divine fire is introduced into the substance of the soul and united with it through perfect and complete purgation and purity, its flame, which is the Holy Spirit, wounds the soul by destroying and consuming the imperfections of its bad habits. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit, in which he disposes it for divine union and transformation in God through love. The very fire of love that afterward is united

with the soul, glorifying it, is what previously assailed it by purging it, just as the fire that penetrates a log of wood is the same that first makes an assault on the wood, wounding it with the flame, drying it out, and stripping it of its unsightly qualities until it is so disposed that it can be penetrated and transformed into the fire. Spiritual writers call this activity the purgative way.”

St. John of the Cross

At the end of each day the sun sets. Is it gone?

In the same way on our spiritual journey, as we evolve and grow as souls and wend our way home in the eternal heart, night comes. Day comes again after the night. There is no day without night and there is no night without day.

For us to know what we are in toto, to truly plumb our depths and find Truth, all that we thought that we were must be destroyed. We must offer our very self on a silver platter to our highest Self, the eternal Truth.

Our offering is always accepted. Grace exists always, but we become naturally concerned and impatient. God always accepts our offering to Her on Her terms and in Her time. Regardless of how long it may take our offering is always lovingly accepted. When our offering is accepted God gives us Her very Self in return and in exchange we become not separate from Her.

For this union to be complete our house must be shaken to its very foundation. A great earthquake must come and we must endure it. A fire must burn down all that we know, all that we think we are, and we must light the match and start the fire. In fact we must use a flamethrower as much of what we carry is so deeply rooted only a massive fire will do.

Lest we miss this point, here we'll also note that the earthquake is God, the match is God, the flamethrower is God and our very desire to find our highest Self is God. Our desire to seek shelter is God; for this world exists that we may take shelter in God. All is God's grace alone, and yet we often feel completely alone as we go. No friends or family take this journey with us, though all support us in various ways seen or unseen, known or unknown. This journey to find Truth is one we must take alone, and at times we feel so alone that we weep, we scream, we feel great pain and emptiness such as we have never experienced. We do not know what to do.

Literally everything must crash down, for our attachment to the false images of this world must finally be broken in order to find what we have come here searching for. We are, though, honestly never alone. It just seems that way.

So as we go at times we will experience this dark night. As we go deeper the nights will get darker, and at the same time we may say that the days will become brighter and more full. The nights are what will shake us, the days will give us strength and this strength must be spent to endure the night.

Endure it. There is nothing in this world that lasts, there is nothing that can provide you with what you want. Serve, love, give completely of yourself. Go deeply and then go deeper still. You can be assured

that your dark nights will be so dark that you will feel you must die, you must give up. When this happens take it all for union and offer it all to God. Take it, bear it, accept it gratefully. Embrace the dark night, for the dark night represents your pending liberation and the brightest light which cannot even be imagined. All shadows and all darkness will finally be eradicated in this bright light of Truth.

Empty your cup, empty it completely, brave it, be patient, and your cup will be filled to overflowing.

In this way will the dark nights come and then pass away forever.

26. On Fear, Courage, and Fearlessness

“Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you living in better conditions.”

Hafiz (Khwajeh Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafez Shirazi)

There is much talk about fear, courage and fearlessness, and it is beneficial to put these concepts in proper perspective. If you have read the experiences that I’ve shared you note that I speak of these concepts, and specifically fearlessness, often.

Fear is so completely basic to what we think that we are that we feel we must have fear. We protect our fear, having chosen it as our companion not knowing that we have far better choices. We do not remember a time when we did not have fear, in fact we feel that fear is necessary and that it somehow protects us. Interestingly enough, I can share with you that fear and caution are not the same, that one does not require the other. I am fearless, for I know that I am not this body nor mind. Still I exert caution. Even though I am not afraid of the cars driving towards me, not even a little bit, I do not intentionally walk in front of them. To do so would cause many complications; it would be terribly inconsiderate and is a kind of himsa (intentionally causing harm). Therefore caution and fear are clearly not the same; they do not even come from the same relative point of origin.

It is caution that protects this temple of body and mind. It is caution that, when exerted, protects your child or the things that you are the steward of. Caution is tremendously beneficial, for when properly focused it prevents us from exerting in ways that are not helpful for us or for others.

Fear, on the other hand, provides no benefit whatsoever. It is worth-less, value-less and point-less. It is to be destroyed, and only with fear’s destruction can a truly happy life be lived. Regardless of what you try, it is the nature of this world to continue bringing to you whatever you fear until you have dealt with its cause. Fear is your greatest enemy. It makes your body shake and your mind tremble. It prevents you from doing what you know to be right and it leads you to do what you know to be wrong. There is no power outside of you that is stronger than the fear you have inside.

When watered by desire and fertilized by selfishness fear takes root in us and grows to become a massive, all encompassing black weed, giving rise to all of the negative emotions. Anger, jealousy, greed, avarice, hatred, possessiveness and lust all spring forth from this combination. Fear is to be rooted out

entirely. Fear prevents us from seeing clearly in this present moment, and this is a great pity for when we see clearly we cannot help but love what we see.

What is it that we fear? We may fear heights, or needles, or pain, or enclosed spaces. Some fear open spaces. Some fear insects and snakes, while others fear people of a certain color, complexion or energy (perhaps they are perceived as “dark”). Some fear dogs, some cats, some monkeys. As I write this I’m in Ganeshpur, Uttarkashi, India and there is a monk here who is afraid of monkeys. He carries firecrackers and sets them off when he sees the monkeys encroaching on whatever he is afraid that they will damage or take (or perhaps he is just afraid that they will attack him). So, from time to time the sound of the Ganga River wending her way through the mountains is punctuated by what sounds to be a rifle shot! Speaking of this, some are afraid of guns, others are afraid not to have a gun. Fears are literally countless, there are so many to go around that each of us share in them. There are plenty of fears, this is certain.

These various fears reside in our subconscious mind as latent tendencies and are expressed when just the right (or we can say just the wrong) event transpires. Fears are from our memory; they are protective devices that have manifested from experiences in this or prior births. Ultimately though each of these fears have one basic fear in common, and this is the fear of not being, or what we can call fear of death. We have this thought that under some circumstances we will cease to be, and our will to live is so strong that these conflicting forces (the will to live forever combined with the thought that there will be a point in time when I’ll no longer live) give rise to every kind of fear.

Fear itself then is rooted in this basic confusion. We are completely confused about what we are (spirit versus physical/mental bodies). Fear comes from not knowing, or ignorance of what we are.

The solution, then, the way to root out and destroy fear is simply to know what we are! Honestly, it really is this simple. I don’t say it is easy, but certainly it is simple. When you know yourself and have complete faith in your highest Self your fear is gone. Caution remains but fear is gone.

The path to fearlessness is the same path that we talk of here; it is also the path to Yoga, also the path to happiness, also the path to Life eternal or being born in the Spirit. The path leads through courage, and certainly cultivating and using your courage is required to move forward in Self-discovery. One must exert great courage and determination; one must be willing to forsake much in order to find Truth and to be fearless. When fearlessness is known, however, all that we have forsaken comes back to offer itself to us on our terms instead of theirs.

Our mind will tell us that courage and fearlessness are the same. Many call me courageous for walking across the countryside alone with no visible support, and to these I’ll say that I do not feel any courage nor do I feel fear.

One should always use caution, or take care. Care should be taken on our path; we want to step forward with alertness, “mindfully”. We must be aware and alert, we must contemplate and consider everything. Being careless is akin to sleeping; whenever we are careless nothing of value is achieved. Being careful is

related to waking; when we walk forward on our path with care we accomplish what is of value. In this way caution is our friend and fear is our enemy.

Our journey is about unloading, unpacking, unburdening in order to be in our natural state. Fear is part of our baggage and it is to be jettisoned.

Fear is the cheap room in this world and you deserve the best room. Let it go, let it end, be free of fear and Live.

27. Addictions

"We are addicted to our thoughts. We cannot change anything if we cannot change our thinking."

Santosh Kalwar

Shortly after I returned to the U.S. and began walking I observed that my experiences came in waves. We think that they are random but as discussed earlier they are not. They are not individual and are clearly interconnected; the loving fabric of the universe has Her fingerprints all over every experience that confronts us individually.

What I observed is that these experiences would come as lessons. I clearly had much to learn as I had committed to service but did not know how to serve. So, lessons came.

The waves continued and continue still. Through pilgrimage I've met those that suffer from various afflictions, whether physical or mental, and in each case these experiences have come in waves. I have always been offered multiple opportunities to correct my response and bring it to where it is beneficial for the one suffering, and of course this is always my sincere intent. With sincere intent we are given these opportunities, and we are given all of the tools required to fully love, to fully listen, and to fully support. Of course once again we do not own results, but we need some "trial and error" in order to learn how to do our best in a given circumstance. By participating in the process and applying ourselves with fully beneficial intent we have no choice but to learn what we must learn.

One of the first lessons had to do with addictions. People with drug addictions kept coming to me in one way or another. In each case I was given an opportunity to listen to them fully and then to open my mouth to see what came out. In the first meeting I observed what came out and upon reflection I decided to make some changes for the next time. The next time came in a day or two, and once again I listened fully then opened my mouth and watched what came out. This continued a few times until I found that I was able to genuinely connect with the person suffering from drug addiction, to demonstrate the compassion that I felt, and to help them unburden. As part of this we would talk about the stigma of addiction and societal preference of one versus another and the "big" addiction which when cured cures the others.

Some of us are addicted to painkillers, some to drinking, some to heroin. Some of us are addicted to work, some to sex, some to reading, some to movies, some to hearing wonderful things about ourselves.

Some are addicted to being pretty, some to being ugly. Some are addicted to gambling, some to harming themselves physically. Yes, some of these are socially acceptable forms of addiction but each of them has exactly the same effect on us. They hide our deep nature by diverting our view; they distract us from the amazing Truth of us.

Some of these addictions will land you in jail and others will not. This goes with being socially acceptable or not, but what is the real difference between sex addiction and heroin addiction other than this? Both of them require one to live a lie in order to feed and maintain the addiction. Sooner or later both need to be dealt with, or we just push the problem forward where it will be harder to deal with.

Addictions are to be ended, not hidden, for we can never be happy hiding them. Every other day we see stories of this person or that being publicly outed for their addiction and we may know from this the suffering that they live with. When the press gets the story the suffering becomes obvious, but it is always inside. Suffering is inherent in our addictions and is only worsened by our attempts to hide them.

Here, a beautiful and direct quote from Swami Premananda Ji, *"You can cheat the whole world, but can you cheat yourself?"*

This always ends up being our problem. Whatever addiction we struggle with we eventually feel its effects regardless of whether someone else does or not. We alone must live with whatever action we take, whatever thought we think and whatever word we say.

I wish to tell you clearly that each and every one of us suffers from addiction and that there is not one kind of addiction that is better than another. Yes, some are socially acceptable and others not, but it is the inner effect of addiction that causes us problems, not the outer. We should not be looking down at someone else because of their addictions, we should look inside at our own instead. What a great show of hypocrisy we see playing out when a famous politician, one who has been vocal about the need to penalize drug addicts instead of showing compassion towards them, makes the news headlines for his or her sex addiction and money that they have paid to cover it up. We must clean our own house, and we have plenty to clean.

Of course here I can say that I understand this first hand, having lived with various addictions and trying to hide them even from my own self. At any moment I could have been "outed" for one or another and seen possessions of various types damaged or lost as a result. The reputation that I had so much pride in could have been completely dashed at any time. The inner pain and suffering from this was far greater than just admitting the addictions to myself and others, understanding them and their causes, and getting on with the work.

Finally our addictions are all the same, they start in exactly the same place. We are attached to a false image of ourselves and we are addicted to our body and mind. This addiction is the real problem. With this addiction our entire life is about worship of the body and mind, about adorning it, feeding it, exercising it and extending it. We go about always pretending to be something when we don't know who we are to begin with... so we can really say that our addiction is to confusion, and we protect the knowledge of this addiction from all. We cannot admit to anyone, especially ourselves, that we don't

know who we are. You are not the body and you are not the mind. They are in you; they are not you. You just think that you are these, and this thought is an error. By learning who we are we cure this addiction, and from here all other addictions are cured.

The tools for this cure, and for the cure of every lesser addiction, are in Yoga. Meditation is of great benefit where medication is of no use. Prior to meditation Yamas and Niyamas must be observed. Practice of the Yamas alone begins to put us in control of our thoughts and thus our life; this alone is a strong beginning to the cure. The four paths of Yoga, discussed shortly, work together to help one to gain the upper hand over every addiction. The practices that AA and other organizations use to help deal with these lower addictions are all derived from the Yogic practices.

There is hope for cure of addiction, but no pill will do it. There are in fact natural herbs that have been shown to also have beneficial effect but these I have no direct experience with. The cure from Yoga, and Pilgrimage, I can speak to. Taken together these work completely. It is not easy, in fact getting to the bottom of these addictions, in particular the big one, is in one way is the hardest work we have ever done (and in the other the simplest, it is about letting go). We must introspect, look inside our self. We must admit that we are completely incomplete as an independent human being and find our fullness inside. We must learn to accept whatever comes and still do our best to grow out of our affliction of selfishness towards selflessness. We must let go of all hypocrisy, of all hiding, of our show. We must give our very self over to God, and allow God to do the work.

Practice Yoga, find Yoga (union), take pilgrimage (drop the supports of the world and learn the true supports through direct experience) and you can, truly you will, eradicate the control that any addiction has upon you. You will be free.

28. Making Choices

"Lovely days don't come to you, You should Walk to them."

Rumi

On this path you will invariably be exposed to statements about free will (or "self effort") and destiny. You will no doubt contemplate this as you observe more and more of your experiences to have been predetermined or synchronous instead of random and unrelated. Perhaps this is already the case.

Some who state that they know the Truth and claim to teach it will say that every experience is predestined and that there is nothing that you can do to change it. They will say that all you have thought or done is merely conditioning, a program, and that you have no effect on the program.

Under this line of thought what then is an "enlightened" one, such as them? They will say "awakening" comes through pure chance or pure grace, with no "personal" intervention or role in the awakening. The logic is that in this infinite world there is every thing and every thought, and this then must include one

who is enlightened, who has awakened from the dream and knows the Truth. Even this, they say, was predetermined. They just happened to be the one who was destined to wake up.

A purely materialistic scientific view leads us to this same place. We may say that we believe in science but the top scientists have come to string theory and hologram theory as the "unifying theories" of the universe. These views leave precious little room for the concept of free will. We have discussed these early on, if we revisit for just a moment we see that in both theories the universe is thought to be part of vast and infinite multiverse, with an infinite number of parallel universes, each of which are also infinite just as is our universe. According to the theories in this multiverse anything that can happen does happen somewhere.

Again this means that every individual event or person that we observe is an infinitesimal part of the infinite universe(s) of countless names and forms. According to the philosophy that accompanies string theory your form and predisposition are random; not only this but there are infinite "you(s)", each perhaps just a little different from the other. Under a popular (amongst quantum physicists and cosmologists) concept of this there is a new universe and a new "you" with every single choice. No choice is really made, it just appears to be and both possible results happen (one in this universe, one in another). Playing out hologram theory leads us to a similar place, except that the names and forms are images only and the information defining them is the only reality. As a reminder, of course, this is the point at which I blurted out, "son of a bitch, this is all God", started to practice Yoga and departed the USA for India.

These ideas seem quite farfetched but with a purely materialistic view they appear to be the only logical explanations for what we observe. As Sherlock Holmes said, "when you take away all of the answers that are impossible the remaining answer, no matter how improbable, is the truth."

As a practical matter you may consider something like this. You think that you have free will. How do you exercise your free will? Let's say that you think that your choice of a meal is free will. You order a Greek salad. How is it that this choice is free will? Have you considered that the choice of Greek salad is already in your subconscious mind? You think it's free will, but that thought is part of your program. You say, "I have not had Greek salad in some time and I hear that they have a great one here." So, how is this choice free will?

Through introspection and analysis of all of our thoughts and actions in this same way we'll see that most every thought we have and most every decision we take is a low level programmed decision. We made the choice because we were destined to; it was not a choice.

This argument is so eminently logical that the great Saint Augustine fell for it many years ago. Before he Self realized he played the role of a bad boy and was quite caught up in it, as he tells in his book "Confessions". He was drawn into a cult in which the belief was that every thought and every action in the world was predestined. With this line of logic there is no sin and everyone is simply acting out their own nature. According to the logic there is nothing wrong and all is to be accepted, including all of your own thoughts and actions. Not so many years later, however, he did see inside at a deeper level and he

found Christ in his heart. From there he taught of choice and free will although with a deep understanding of what the term "free will" actually means.

So many want to know their fate. "Will I be married, will I have children?" "Will I be a millionaire?" "When will I die?" We turn to astrology, palm reading, tarot, etc. in order to know our destiny.

On the other side of the spectrum is the concept that all have complete free will. Under this concept any action is chosen of one's own free will and through self-effort. If one sins they should know better, therefore they own full responsibility for their action.

Based upon deep objective analysis of our experience this argument does not stand up in the same way that the predestination argument does. It is not, for example, consistent with what materialistic science observes and this concept should also be considered against what we see in our own mind.

Our mind is not a blank slate. It is clearly predisposed to certain desires, thoughts and beliefs that are unique from the desires, thoughts and beliefs of others. We like some things and dislike others. Others like what we don't and don't like what we do. Taking the time to understand the actions of a murderer we see that there was repetitive thought about murder prior to the act. In society this is called pre-meditated murder. The thoughts may have originated many years prior, or even further. Another person has no such thought and therefore does not commit murder. Thoughts, then, are the culprit and the cause of the act. One has such thoughts and another does not. Both persons act out their thoughts; the difference between them is in the nature of their thoughts.

Why does one have murderous thoughts and the other not? This has to do with their character, and again character comes from our thoughts, conditioned by past experience.

Clearly, then, there is some aspect of predestination, or at least a strong predilection towards a particular thought or action. The question about the murderer, for example, can move from "why did he/she commit murder?" to "why did he/she have recurring thoughts about committing murder?" This line of inquiry is fruitful, although in our rush to judgment it is rarely pursued.

Those who perpetrate heinous acts do so because they are locked in a prison of heinous thoughts. From the outside it is not so clear how these thoughts became prevalent, in fact it typically does not appear that the perpetrator intentionally brought them in to their mind. The predisposition existed prior to the thought. Certainly, at a minimum, the tables are turned towards some predetermined fate.

So, is there really self-effort or does there just seem to be?

As I write this I note that for the past four days the topic of Swami Premananda Ji's Yoga Vasishta class has been destiny and self-effort. I share his teaching now and share that this is completely consistent with my own experience and what I observe with others. I view it as being as true as anything in the world can be.

First, clearly there is destiny, and it is a powerful force. The entire universal show is a play of destiny. Everything and every force has its direction set and will continue on its course unless and until the

course is changed by an even more powerful force. The course continues through apparent birth and death; both being apparent doorways through which all of these infinite characters in the world make their entrances and exits. Destiny is cause and effect playing out. Every action has a cause and there is nothing “random” in the world.

Thought, word and deed are the forces that set actions in motion. A persistent thought becomes word, then action, and then an action has repercussions (reaction). From the action comes again thought, and from the new thought action once again. The two dance continuously intertwined, first one moves and then the other, never separate.

We see this, and we have talked about it above in the example of the murderer. If you look at your own thoughts and actions you will see the same. You think that you will look better with a certain hairstyle. You look in the mirror and the thought is reinforced. It continues in this way until the thought manifests as action, and then you have your new hairstyle. Diet is the same. You think you are fat, or skinny, or need to work on a particular aspect of your body. The desire for a new job is the same. You think you need a new job for such and such a reason, the mind continues to bring the idea back and re-enforces it with thoughts about your current job making you unhappy for this or that reason. You don’t have enough money, or enough respect, whatever. Finally the thought fructifies and you take action on it. Thoughts are all powerful; they are the creator of the actions we observe and participate in.

The force of destiny, then, is seated inside your mind and all minds including the cosmic mind, from which your mind is not separate. The seed of destiny is the tendency that exists within your mind. Tendency is a preset reaction towards a certain experience when circumstances call the tendency forward. An example of this is that you walk past a Greek restaurant and a tendency within your mind calls forth a thought. The thought may be, “I got sick the last time I went to a Greek restaurant”, in which case you will then think, “I’m going to keep walking”, or you may think, “that’s the only time I’ve gotten sick from eating Greek food and I love it, I should go again”. Whatever thought comes next is as a result of the tendency in the mind only. It comes, it plays out as action.

Where did the tendency come from? This is a wonderful question, for this leads us back to the concept of self-effort. It came from your memory; habits that are deeply engrained. It came from past actions and choices that you made. Scientists will say “DNA”, psychologists will say “childhood” and Vedantins will say, “your repeated choices, thoughts and actions over countless births including this one”. All of these thoughts come from previous experience, going back to sources long past. To think that someone else is the cause of pain, or that someone else punishes us, is misunderstanding. Whatever happens to us we ourselves caused in time past.

We can change destiny by changing our thoughts. You see, you have the ability to catch the thoughts as they come, to recognize them, and to take a different course of action. It is not easy, but your intellect gives you this power. The subconscious mind will bring forth ideas as per your program; it is simply a storehouse of tendencies. On the other hand the intellect allows one to analyze and through analysis it is possible to “see” the acting out of tendencies, from here one can make changes. Change the thought and the act changes. Change the diet the mind is fed and the thought is bound to change. This last,

regulation of the diet of the mind, is known as the practice of Yoga. Once the thought is changed the action is also changed and a new destiny plays out.

We can of course ride the wave of destiny. It carries us; it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Every thought carries us to the next thought; the thoughts carry us to the next action. This is the world that we see, it is made up of these thoughts fructifying (becoming action) and continuing on as a wave. This is called the wheel of Samsara, or birth-and-death. It goes on and on, it is never ending. Father time (destiny itself) carries it.

But, as it relates to you and to each individual, destiny can be changed. We spoke earlier of Swami Sivananda's saying about tendency becoming thought, thought habit, habit character and character destiny. Through self-effort, applying our effort at the very root of the tendencies, we can change our destiny. We must start at the root, the cause of the particular thoughts that we have, if we wish to change our character and our destiny. In this way we can do it, we can also say that this is the only way to do it. Here we speak of taking control of one's life, which is to be done by taking control of one's own mind.

Destiny and self-effort, then, are opposing forces. Destiny is the force of the past and self-effort is the force of the present. Prior self-effort is what brought you to this moment; current self-effort is what will carry you forward. Choosing to follow only the thoughts of the mind, to "ride with destiny" is a choice, and choosing to change your course is a choice. Choosing whether to exert and exercise free will is a choice. Make no mistake though; following the river of destiny is a bumpy and terrible ride. You have much evidence of this already. It is far better to exert, to strive to awaken and to find our source for in our source there is rest and joy. Our source is heaven, attachment to the terror filled road of Samsara is hell.

Here I share a lovely quote from yesterday's class; "A man is measured by his thought process."

In the battle between destiny and self-effort whichever is stronger will win over the other. It is important to note that fate, or destiny, is not constant. Sometimes it is strong and sometimes it is weak. This is what we see in the world; continuous change. First hot then cold, first good then bad, first strength then weakness. Our minds are the same; they are the source for what we see. In turns we feel happy then sad, aggressive then passive, angry then apologetic. We all see this restlessness; a turning from one state to another. Our minds are this way and the world is this way. A continuous force applied to a discontinuous object always wins, and this is the key for employing self-effort.

Our own effort must be continuous. It must be regular, every day. If one is to practice meditation it is far better to sit for even ten minutes every morning than it is to sit one day for four hours and then not again for a few days or a week. Pranayama practice, if it is taken on, should be every day. A yogic diet will help to bring the mind to a more controllable state (Sattvic, or purity), but for it to work it needs to be maintained. Abidance with scriptural injunction, such as Yamas (Ahimsa, as an example) and Niyamas is incredibly beneficial, but it must be continuous. If one does take a day off from their practice one must immediately come back to it. If we do not do so destiny wins this particular round of the battle and our challenge becomes steeper.

Continuous self-effort works wonders and there is no impossibility with continuous self-effort. Jesus Christ tells us that the one of steady faith (which is gained only through continuous self-effort) can say to the mountain “move” and it will move. This same concept is taught in all of the traditions.

Swami Premananda Ji again; “If one does continuous self effort there is nothing in this world which cannot be done. Even if you do very little but do it every day it will have effect. Continuation is a greater force than effort which is strong one day and weak the next. With continuous effort you will achieve. If one fails to achieve their goal discontinuity is the cause for failure. Continuity is the cause for success. Do not stop for even one day.” If one’s goal is to know Truth, to be with God, to be forever happy and balanced, the way is the same. The paths are many, but the gate narrow at the end of the path. To make it through the gate one must finally be continuously focused on the Divine. In the Christian tradition this is called “prayer unceasing”, in the eastern tradition there is continuous mental repetition of Mantra (“Japa”).

Whatever you wish to do you may accomplish through applying this method. If you want to change, if you want true happiness, if you want to know God, you may do so. Self-effort is the way. It will be a battle though; do not be surprised about this. Old thoughts and old patterns will crop up and old behaviors will continue because of them unless subverted in the subconscious mind. In your life there have been so many seeds sown and these seeds sprout and grow, manifesting with great power. Do not fall in to the belief that nothing can be changed however; all can be changed through the one’s self-effort.

Since self-effort is harder than riding the wave of destiny, why not wait for some time until circumstances are better? Time marches on, our bodies get frail and the longer we wait the steeper our challenge becomes.

On the grand road to union, to happiness or heaven, it is best to start beneficial self-effort even from childhood if possible, from the earliest that we know of proper behavior and the power of positive thinking. The earlier the better lest destiny continue to pile up more and more mass and be harder to change. It is of course never too late to start or to come in to alignment with the Love Divine told of by the scriptures and the great teachers; your own home. The only way to walk through the desert is to get up every morning and take more steps. If we don’t take our necessary steps suffering continues, it is this simple.

Is there no end to self-effort? Will we always have to work in this way? Yes, there is an end to self-effort. When the end goal is reached self-effort is complete. Action continues, but the self-effort spoken of here is over and relief is known.

There are four keys to success that apply to any situation, to any challenge faced and to any goal one has:

1. Patience. Do your absolute best; then wait as long as is required.
2. Renunciation. Absolve yourself of the results and accept what comes.

3. Self-confidence. Know that you can do whatever you choose. Keep in mind the sayings of the great teachers.
4. Regularity. Be continuously engaged towards the goal.

Self-effort, then, is quite literally the reprogramming of one's own mind. There is a program in it from birth and we have continued to add to the program since we took this birth, typically in unintended ways. We do not know what will be the impact of what we think, say and do. It is the program that is acting out on the world stage; to change actions, reactions, patterns and destiny our sole recourse is to change the program. If we want positive results (happiness) we must exert intentionally with full understanding of what we are feeding our mind and why we do so. We must do it with full awareness and beneficial intent (for ourselves and for others).

In this way you can do anything, this is the consistent message of this and of all of the great teachers. It is not easy, this is so, and you will be tested along the way. You can do it; there is nothing outside of you that will stop you. Set your goal high; choose peace, choose love, choose happiness. Then, through your own self-effort, walk towards it. Be consistent, be patient, and you shall have what you desire. If you want to know peace and you strive for peace then you shall know peace. Destiny need not stand in your way.

In the words of Sri Swami Sivananda Ji Maharaj, in this way "March forward hero, nil desperandum".

29. Yoga, Satsang and Japa

"What is actual Yoga?"

"Yoga does not consist in sitting cross-legged for six hours or taking asana pose after pose without rest. It is not about stopping the beatings of the heart, or getting oneself buried underneath the ground for a week or a month. These are physical feats only. Yoga is the science that teaches you the method of uniting the individual will with the Cosmic Will. Yoga transmutes the unregenerate nature and increases energy, vitality, vigor, and bestows longevity and a high standard of health"

H.H. Swami Sivananda Ji Maharaj

The common view of Yoga around the world is that it is a physical exercise and that the practice of Yoga is all about the physical culture, specifically about having a strong and lithe body. As the practice of Yoga Asanas has exploded across the world scene this same view has come with it, even coming back to many in Bharata Mata (India), its mother country. Of course indeed this is a benefit of the practice but this view of Yoga in toto is far off the mark for the benefits of Yogic practice extend deeply to the core of our existence. The actual Yoga spoken of above is at the same time both far simpler and far more involved than this common view.

The word Yoga itself has several meanings; as it pertains to the ancient science and teaching we can speak of two. First, Yoga is the end goal of life, often translated as "union" in English, and secondly Yoga is the applied science for attaining the end goal of life.

Yoga is one of the most ancient sciences of Mother India. The ancient seers (as in “see-ers of the Truth”) had a deep understanding of the governing laws of nature and of the human psyche, through which they developed this most wondrous science. Many branches of Yoga have been developed over millennia, and accordingly, many accepted shastras have been composed. The milk, the very essence of these shastras is the Bhagavad Gita. In order to illumine our discussion we will refer to two slokas here.

First, in discourse 2, verse 48, Lord Krishna says –

*yoga-stah kuru karmani sangam tyaktva dhananjaya
siddhy-asiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga-ucyate*

“Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in Yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called Yoga.”

In discourse 6, verse 23, the Lord further says –

*tam vidyat duhka-samyoga-viyogam yoga-sanjnitam
sa nishchayena yuktavyo yogo ‘nirvannachetasa*

*“Let that be known by the name of Yoga, the severance from union with pain.
This Yoga should be practiced with determination and steady open mindedness.”*

With these two discourses the Lord has first defined Yoga the goal (evenness or equanimity of mind) and secondly told us of the practices (that free us from our union with pain and suffering).

What is our suffering and the cause of it? Each person is constantly being tortured by tapatraya, the three types of afflictions – adhyatmika, adhibautika and adhidaivika. Adhyatmika tapa means self-affliction; our own body and mind cause us so much pain and sorrow. Most of our sufferings come from our own mind! We worry, get stressed, angry, frustrated, etc. Adhibautika tapa are afflictions from the natural world. It may be very hot in the summer, and one may suffer from a heat stroke. The recent earthquake in Nepal is an example of adhibautika tapa. Adidaivika tapa are afflictions that come from sources beyond that our rational capacity, such as astrological effects.

Lord Krishna tells us that we may transcend these so-called afflictions; that we need to, and how to do so (practice of Yoga). As long as our focus is on our suffering we have bound ourselves to a limited identity created by our own mind and we are not allowing ourselves to connect to our higher Self. One must learn to *be in the World but not of the World* by dealing with what life presents to us, but not taking it too seriously. We must see it as a passing show, as a play full of characters and drama but without independent reality. We must deal with and let it go, not giving things too much importance. Hence this is not running away from life, but dealing with it fully. We should see ourselves as custodians, not owners; this makes our task much easier.

This, ultimately, is what the practice of Yoga is all about. It is a science, not a religion or a theory, which when practiced with determination releases us from our suffering. It is not just a science in fact, it is a

lifestyle, and if taken as a lifestyle it provides one the benefits of both optimal physical and mental health while bringing alignment with the soul and leading one home to union with the divine Truth.

Any of the various practices of Yoga put one on the path to finding their ultimate Truth, to the equanimity of mind of which Lord Krishna has spoken. Anyone who has experienced even Asana practice alone in the hands of a gifted Yoga instructor has felt this magic of Yoga begin to penetrate their soul. Unlike other physical exercise such a practice leaves one not tired and sore as after a trip to the gym or a long run, but rather feeling alive, energized, and refreshed. Likewise a person who has experienced even a ten-minute “time out” or “quiet time” practice has observed some of the benefit of Meditation practice, another of the eight limbs of Raja Yoga.

Not one of these practices comprises the totality of Yoga, however, and not one of them on their own will take one to the final goal. Each of these practices are as a puzzle piece in a wondrous puzzle, a puzzle that is unique for each individual soul until the attainment of the final goal of Yoga itself. This is a key point for the Yoga practitioner to understand. Yoga is not limited and within the greater scope of this science of Yoga each individual is able to find exactly what they need in order to know satisfaction, happiness and the true life eternal.

The shastras speak of four paths of Yoga practice leading to emancipation. In no particular order these are Bhakti Yoga; the path of devotion, Karma Yoga; the path of selflessness through service, Jnana Yoga; the path of Self Knowledge through introspection and study, and Raja Yoga; the “royal” path or the mystical path of Meditation and Samadhi. Within these four primary paths are untold numbers of individual paths and practices.

Yoga Asanas and Meditation are but three limbs (“angas”, as in Ashtanga, or eight-limbed) of Raja Yoga, and each of these limbs provide great benefit through their practice. Yamas (restraints or controls) and Niyamas (observances) constitute the first two limbs and through their observance the power one has inside starts to take hold. Only through the practice of these may one gain the full benefit of Asana or of seated Meditation practice.

Yoga is not limited in practice and application. There is Yogic diet, Yogic relaxation techniques, Yogic exercise, Yogic culture, all of which support each other to bring us to our goal. To name just a few of the practices that are not well understood in society there is Nada Yoga; the Yoga of sound (Meditation on sound), Yoga Nidra or the Yoga of sleep, the more well known Kriya Yoga of Babaji, Kundalini Yoga, etc. In fact Swami Sivananda authored a wonderful book on the “Yoga of Music”.

With the understanding of the interrelationship and support that each practice provides to the other and the overall benefit provided to the Yoga practitioner, Swami Sivananda taught not one specific doctrine of his own as the “cure for all”. Rather he propounded what he called “Integral Yoga”; this is what he sent his disciples around the world to expound.

To help to promote this approach he composed a rather simple but beautiful little song, which he himself sang in the Mahamantra tune at every meeting he addressed, especially during his All-India-Ceylon Tour in 1950.

hare rama, hare rama, rama rama, hare hare
hare krishna, hare krishna, krishna krishna, hare hare
Eat a little, drink a little;
talk a little, sleep a little.
Mix a little, move a little;
serve a little, give a little;
Work a little, rest a little;
study a little, worship a little.
Do asana a little, pranayama a little;
reflect a little, meditate a little,
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little,
write mantra a little, have satsanga a little.
Do all these, little, little. You will have time for all

So the subject is broad, but as mentioned it is also simple.

Yoga is not competitive; it is co-operative. Yoga is not tiring; it is stimulating. Yoga is not about learning much new; it is about forgetting what we must in order to find happiness in simplicity. Yoga is not about suffering pain; it is about freedom from suffering. Finally Yoga is about Being, not doing. It is about knowing and Being your own Self, simply this. It is the great science, the great tool, to help you to be you. You; without limits. You; in all of your glory.

What is important to know about the practice of Yoga? Four points here will suffice:

1. Yoga is a science that exists in order to sever your union with suffering.
2. The proper Yogic practices, if taken seriously and practiced with determination and a desire to know Truth, will indeed open up life's true potential for you.
3. Anyone can practice and will gain benefit if practiced properly. There is something for everyone.
4. In order to practice Yoga properly you need a good teacher to help you. Only with a good teacher are you able to learn how and what to practice.

The fourth point is key for anyone intending to either start a Yogic practice or to go deeper in their practice. As is the case for anything in the world there are those (people and practices) that will help us to get to our goal and there are those that will impede us. Ideally one should keep in mind the potential of Yoga to bring complete alignment between spirit, soul, mind and body and begin or deepen their practice with this as their goal. Even if only one benefit is desired, such as physical exercise, it is still beneficial to keep the potential in mind when selecting a studio, a practice, a teacher, a lineage, etc.

In this vein here are key points to keep in mind:

1. Yoga is holistic, integral. Your teacher should understand this and be able to provide you with access to not just Asana and Pranayama practice but also share the Yamas and Niyamas and philosophy. The teacher should have a good understanding of and share the practices of Bhakti, Karma and Jnana Yoga in addition to Raja Yoga. Diet also is important. A vegetarian diet, though

not absolutely essential to start a Yogic practice, is highly beneficial and it is best to select a center and teacher that understand this. Be patient, take one step at a time, but this is a goal that one should strive for as it becomes key as you go in deeper.

2. Stay away from fast Yoga; there must be relaxation between the postures in order to allow the muscles and subtle body to recover. Greater benefit, even purely physical benefit, is obtained through an Asana program that incorporates Savasana (prone relaxation posture) versus all “power” movements.
3. Even if you are just starting at a minimum you should select a center and teacher who includes the teaching of Pranayama (breathing exercises) and Meditation. These are required partners of the Asana practice; full benefit of Asanas is only known with them, at a minimum.
4. Select a studio that has regular Satsang (readings from Yogic shastras or meetings with senior teachers), and ideally one that invites guest teachers and lecturers, as this variety of exposure will be quite beneficial for you.
5. Your teacher should be certified and you should confirm this. The Sivananda Yoga Vedanta International organization has trained and certified many thousands of teachers worldwide and the holistic approach is part and parcel of their core teachings. There are other organizations that do so as well, and many of the Yoga teacher training courses in India are structured in much the same way. Talk with the teacher about Yoga and their understanding; more importantly attend a class or two.
6. Know that the best Yoga teacher is selfless. The best is the one who teaches in order to help others, and who surrenders to his or her master prior to teaching, inviting the master to teach through him or her. This is not rare but it is a very important point. If the teacher you have met is puffed up and proud, move on. Watch, listen, practice, and if you do not find the teacher or studio to offer what we have spoken of here, keep looking. Seek, and ye shall find.

When a basic foundation has been achieved then the real practice of Yoga starts. Yoga has become famous around the globe due to Swami Vivekananda and many others, such as H.H. Swami Sivananda Ji’s disciples who have propagated Yoga worldwide. Due to the universal applicability of these teachings, as all humans have to deal with these same three afflictions regardless of which country they live in or in which period, the seeds scattered by these pioneers have taken root around the globe.

Various organizations, such as Kaivalya Dham, the Bihar School of Yoga, SVYASA and Aayush have done research that proves this point. The scientific validity of Yoga is not just in the physiological effects of the practices, but also the mental, emotional and spiritual. Learning to be still by balancing our energies and mind naturally makes one gravitate towards higher ideals and goals in life.

Finally on this topic I would like to bring special highlight to Satsang(a) and Japa.

Satsang is discussed briefly above. The word Satsang translates to “in company of the wise” and in this application “wise” means an enlightened one (a saint). Satsang is important for it inspires us, helping us to see our own great potential, as it helps us also with guidance on how to do so. There is no better way for one to be inspired to love all, and to learn how to do so, than to have regular direct company with a saint. Perhaps the concept of living saints seems odd to you, but I assure you that there are many in this

world. I have personally met several and this has not even scratched the surface. Saints do not advertise though, not in the traditional way, but still they can and will be found when you want to find them. We will discuss this topic more in the next chapter.

In the absence of regular Satsang with a living saint it is still possible, beneficial and highly encouraged to have Satsang using alternate methods. Early in one's spiritual path (which often means when you don't know that you are on a spiritual path) **inspiration is the most important single factor in finding the salvation that the great teachers speak of.**

Alternate methods for Satsang include study of scriptures and reading the works of saints of all traditions. There are many great books that are either written by the saints or that are derived from transcripts of their teachings. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's "I am That" is the latter and it is a modern classic. We have talked earlier about Peace Pilgrim's "Life and Works in Her Own Words". Several talks are hosted on YouTube and these are also a good source of Satsang as are some movies closely based upon the lives of saints.

Study of scriptures is a very important part of one's spiritual path; it goes hand in hand with Satsang and is very close to being an absolute requirement. Which scriptures? This is not relevant from a universal perspective; study what is culturally appropriate for you.

Scriptures are indirect, symbolic and indicative. Truth resides inside you (all) and can only be found there. The scriptures, all of them, indicate the Truth by pointing the way to it.

Repeated study of the scriptures creates a tendency in the mind; this tendency works to purify the intellect. Scriptures and the pure intellect work together with practice of the scriptural injunctions and help one to rise ever higher step-by-step.

The masses will deny the value of scriptures or say that one particular faith's scriptures are valid and others are not. The issue that those who decry the value of scripture have is with the myth; this was discussed in the "God" chapter. The issue that those who say that the scriptures of one "faith" are correct and others are not comes from not yet understanding the inner meaning of the scriptures that they put forward.

Satsang and study of scriptures should be daily; we need constant inspiration until our spiritual flame is glowing brightly.

Japa is repetition of Mantra, either out loud, mentally, or written. Mantra is supernatural power wrapped in sound and Mantra repetition is an extremely powerful practice. I speak of my own example; certainly continuous mental mantra repetition carried me through several experiences that might have otherwise derailed me in my practice and in pilgrimage. I am also aware of several beautiful stories from friends whom I have met along this journey which point to the power of Mantra repetition in their life. Constant repetition of Mantra focuses the mind on the divine, purifying the mind and helping us to achieve Meditation. Through grace Japa works wonders. I recommend Japa to all seekers; from my experience there is no one it does not suit and to whom it will not provide benefit.

Mantra can be taken individually, you can choose Mantra yourself by searching the various options to find what feels appropriate for you, or you can take the universal Mantra “Om”, or even “Om Ma”. My Mantra, “Om Namō Narayanaya”, is the Mantra for world peace and inner peace; it is also very powerful. You can take Mantra initiation where you will be given a Mantra by a teacher. Amma offers Mantra initiation at all of her events and she is a wonderful source for Mantra. There are several great books extolling the virtues of Mantra and Japa, for one I highly recommend Swami Vishnudevananda’s “Meditation and Mantra”.

Find the actual Yoga and be free. It is inside you; find it there. You have the potential for greatness, the science of Yoga exists to help you to unlock all of the barriers, all of which are internal and therefore ultimately under your control. These barriers have until now prevented this greatness from flowing and you from being satisfied, happy, in Love with life and with all. Yoga provides you with the key.

30. Meditation / Contemplation

“Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self... We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves. Contemplation is not and cannot be a function of this external self. There is an irreducible opposition between the deep transcendent Self that awakens only in contemplation, and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. Our reality, our true Self, is hidden in what appears to us to be nothingness... We can rise above this unreality and recover our hidden reality... God Himself begins to live in me not only as my Creator but as my other and true Self.”

Thomas Merton

There are a great many wonderful books on meditation and various meditation practices. I recommend two that I’m familiar with (see references) but there are hundreds of great choices. Since this is so I will keep my comments on this topic to just a few that you may derive benefit from considering.

First, just as people commonly think of Yoga as the practice of Asanas (alone) so also there is great misunderstanding of the term “meditation”. Meditation is thought of as a practice, as in “I’ll sit and practice meditation for fifteen minutes”, yet this is only partly so. There is meditation practice; the practice exists for one to experience meditation (the meditative or contemplative state). The word is the same but the practice is only preparation and meditation (or contemplation) itself is the goal.

Many practice meditation in order to “take the edge off” of life. Our lives in society are so terribly stressful and full of suffering; meditation practice can help us to cope with it. This, though, is not the real reason to practice meditation and there is potential for negative effects from meditation if care is not taken in order to prepare properly for it. The practice of meditation exists that we might connect with our highest Self and give ourselves over to That. It does not exist to treat the symptoms of life in hectic society; it exists to provide us with the cure.

Mystically, “you” sit for meditation practice but when the meditative state arrives “you” are no longer. “You” have disappeared into a sea of awareness. We may sit for practice, we may focus our mind on an object of contemplation, but meditation itself is a gift; it comes through grace. In the meditative state time and space are transcended, body awareness drops away and one simply “is”. The individual “I” has no control over the result; we own only the practice and the preparation for it.

There is no denying that when meditation finally comes it is in no way a “common” experience. Meditation is extraordinary; it is supernatural. Meditation is direct experience of the Divine bliss that is within you. Meditation is not to be missed.

So, should everyone practice meditation? Yes and no. Yes, when you are ready and no, not until you are ready. One must be prepared to meditate, and this requires much more than sitting quietly.

There are two major potential pitfalls that await the one who practices meditation without being properly prepared for it:

1. Our minds have many dark characters buried in them, and for one who is not prepared these can hijack our experience and take us to a scary and destructive place. In this case one may give up on meditation having never really experienced it, or far worse.
2. Improperly prepared and practiced we are likely to strengthen our ego instead of weakening it, and this works against our goal. Here we speak of the “spiritualized ego”, which is characteristic of one who thinks, “I am a great meditator”. To this practitioner meditation is more about how well they meditate or how good it makes them feel instead of making room for the highest Self.

The practice of meditation that we see so widespread in the world today is descended from the Vedic tradition and described in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. In the Yoga Sutras the eight limbs (Ashtanga) of Yoga practice are described. These correspond with the “eight-fold path” in Buddhism and teachings in other traditions as well. These include:

1. Yamas (Controls)
2. Niyamas (Observances)
3. Asanas (Posture)
4. Pranayama (Control of Energy)
5. Pratyahara (Sense Withdrawal)
6. Dharana (Concentration)
7. Dhyana (Meditation)
8. Samadhi (Union with highest Self)

There is much said about all of these and I would love for you to go further with learning to apply them. The Yamas and Niyamas in particular should be understood and practiced by all as key steps to liberation. Chief amongst the Yamas is the Ahimsa, which is the practice of non-injury (in thought, word and deed) towards all creatures. There is both outer and inner meaning to each of these practices, and there is such incredible value for each of us in study and implementation of the practices.

The order that these steps are listed in is important, as this is how they will unfold. This does not mean that we must wait to practice meditation until we have perfected practice of Yamas, Niyamas, Pratyahara etc. It does mean that we should be aware of all, have at least a nominal understanding of the principles and be working towards them. Our practice should include the awareness of and striving towards all. Then we can start a fruitful practice of meditation.

Swami Sivananda's mantra "Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate and Realize" applies here. This also tells us how to find the jewel of meditation. Serve (instead of fix), accept and love, give of yourself to others (kindness to all is one of the greatest gifts that you can give!), purify the body and mind, and then glorious meditation is possible. Follow your highest internal light and meditation will be your highest Self's gift to you.

We are in such a rush for everything in our society; no one has patience. As it relates to our spiritual pursuit, however, there is no shortcutting of the process. If we wish to be free we must take all of the necessary steps. If we commit and apply ourselves it is fulfilling in a way that nothing else can be. If we try to skip steps we will fall down and this falling is terrifyingly painful and destructive. Like any other pursuit our desire, intent and self-effort is what speeds up or slows down the process. Instructions, such as the Yoga Sutras or the eight-fold path of the Buddha, etc. exist as our guides; this is so of teachers as well. We should follow them, and if we do not we take on great risk of not achieving our goal.

If we want the real meditation, and the real meditation is worth any amount of effort, we need to follow the steps and make the practice of meditation a part of our holistic practice.

When I came back from India I recommended that all take on a daily meditation practice. Now I do not; I recommend instead kindness as the most beneficial practice for all. Kindness always has beneficial effect, not just for the one to whom the kindness is given but also for the one who gives it. One's selfless kind acts always have immediate beneficial impact throughout the entire world. There is no choice to this. Kindness, along with forgiveness and acceptance, is a supreme Divine quality which brings out the best in all and which prepares you for meditation. Kindness invariably leads you to meditation while meditation practice does not always lead one to either meditation or kindness.

Do not rush headstrong into meditation practice. Certainly ten minutes per day will not cause you harm and there will be some benefit, but this also will not bring you to the goal of real meditation. The gem of real meditation is worth investing the effort required to learn it properly. Each of the steps which co-exist with the practice of meditation benefit the other, all help you and help the world with which we co-exist.

The practice of meditation itself is empty of merit. Merit accrues from the motivation or intent underlying the practice. Whatever one's intention, whether it is benefit for all (e.g.; world peace meditation), or themselves (desire for pleasure, for example), or of union with Truth, results will accrue accordingly.

The state of meditation, where one has come in to union with one's own highest Self, is ever the goal. The practice of meditation is but one of our tools to achieve this. All of the tools work together.

Kindness, listening, giving, purification, acceptance, applying faithfully; these are all tools that must be employed along with meditation practice. Use all and “let” meditation come, for there is no forcing it. It will gladly come to you once you are ready.

The qualifications of a Yoga teacher above apply also to a teacher of meditation practice. Selflessness is a key attribute in any spiritual teacher, in any of the practices.

If you listen, learn and apply you will find how to solicit and to accept this amazing gift.

"A calm mind is the storehouse of answers to all of the questions."

Sri Swami Premananda Ji

31. Spiritual Teacher (Guru)

"Guru is the Self. Sometimes in his life a man becomes dissatisfied and, not content with what he has, he seeks the satisfaction of his desires through prayer to God. His mind is gradually purified until he longs to know God, more to obtain his grace than to satisfy his worldly desires. Then, God's grace begins to manifest. God takes the form of a Guru and appears to the devotee, teaches him the truth and, moreover, purifies his mind by association. The devotee's mind gains strength and is then able to turn inward. By Meditation it is further purified and it remains still without the least ripple. The calm expanse is the Self. The Guru is both external and internal. From the exterior he gives a push to the mind to turn inwards. From the interior he pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in the quieting of the mind. That is the Guru's grace. There is no difference between God, Guru and the Self."

Ramana Maharshi

We are so completely jaded that we have lost the ability to trust, and this is quite natural due to the course that our life has taken to this point. This is very much so in the west, where society is founded upon the principles of competition, self-survival and pursuit of material pleasure. We pursue but what we obtain does not result in satisfaction. We have discussed this point; success (which is what we strive for) is not the same as satisfaction (which is what we want).

What is needed to be at peace is self-surrender but we strive for the opposite of this, we strive to puff up our self. We are trying to give our self what it is not possible to give it. We may try as hard as we like but we cannot make the self independently real. We may look for as long as we choose in this world but we cannot find what it takes to complete ourselves. It would take the entire universe to complete oneself, for the universe is inseparable. Completion is, it is not something to be added, and as we do not understand this yet we look in all of the wrong places. It is like combing through a graveyard for the living person. We keep opening coffins but no one ever moves.

At some point on our journey we become so fed up with our inability to find that which completes us or makes us happy that we look in a new direction. We long for peace and can not find it. We may feel that

we need to find our Self, Truth, God, or whatever is greater than us. We may feel disconsolate or desperate and feel that we want to die. The world may seem odd or unreal and unfulfilling to us. It seems that we have tried so much by this point. We have likely tried the obvious methods to find success, we've also probably used alcohol, various drugs including mood elevators and such and perhaps we have contemplated or tried suicide.

When any of these transpire we are being called inside. These experiences, however they express to us, are grace. Our very self is cracking; we are being given an opportunity to find what is not separate from us that never cracks. We are being given a chance for completion, and it is time for us to find help.

From this point we are, possibly, finally ready to admit that we have been looking in the wrong places, that we don't know (anything), and with this we may also be prepared to genuinely solicit and accept help. As Sri Ramana Maharshi says so beautifully above the help that is required is inside us; it is our highest Self, but the Self is as yet veiled from us. Enter a spiritual teacher or guru (one who takes us from darkness to light). If one wants to find liberation (from the terrible patterns of our ego-mind and our suffering) or wants to find God it is necessary to have the help of someone who has done so.

Here let's borrow a wonderful writing from Sri Paramahansa Yogananda:

"When you are moving blindly through the valley of life, stumbling in darkness, you need the help of someone who has eyes. You need a guru. To follow one who is enlightened is the only way out of the great muddle that has been created in the world. I never found true happiness and freedom until I met my guru, he who was spiritually interested in me and who had the wisdom to guide me.

Within your heart cry constantly for God. When you have convinced the Lord of your desire for Him, He will send someone — your guru — to teach you how to know Him. Only he who knows God can show others how to know Him. When I found such a one, my guru Swami Sri Yukteswarji, I realized that God doesn't teach through mystery, but through illumined souls. God is invisible, but He becomes visible through the intelligence and spiritual perception of one who is in constant communion with Him. There may be many teachers in one's life, but there is only one guru. In the guru-disciple relationship a divine law is fulfilled, as demonstrated even in the life of Jesus, when he acknowledged John the Baptist as his guru.

He alone who is God-realized, and who has been commanded by God to redeem souls, is a guru. One cannot be a guru merely by thinking he is. Jesus showed that the true guru acts solely at God's behest, when he said: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." He gave all credit to the power of God. If a teacher is without egoism, you may know that God alone resides in his body temple; and when you tune in with him you are in tune with God. Jesus reminded his disciples: "Whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me."

The teacher who accepts personally the adoration of others is merely a worshiper of his own ego. To find out whether a path is true, discriminate according to what sort of teacher is behind it, whether his actions show that he is led by God, or by his own ego. A leader who has no realization cannot show you the kingdom of God, no matter how large his following. All churches have done good, but blind belief in

religious dogma keeps people spiritually ignorant and stagnant. Many times I have seen vast congregations singing God's name, but God was as far away from their consciousness as the distant stars. No one can be saved just by attending church. The real way to freedom lies in Yoga, in scientific self-analysis, and in following one who has traversed the forest of theology and can lead you safely to God."

I have shared my experience, how I was introduced to my teachers. There is no question that the primary role that "I" played in finding my teacher was my single-minded desire to know God along with my effort towards the same. From there Divine magic carried me.

This is also the way for you to find your teacher. This world operates in this way; whatever we desire most comes to us if we are single minded and patient. If we apply the four steps discussed in chapter 28 we are always successful regardless of whether our goal is to make money or to know God. Desires are what carry us; until finally our last desire takes us to the desire-less state of union.

It is possible that you will be provided with "your" teacher in the way that Sri Yogananda Ji describes, or in the way that I described, yet it is also possible that you will have choice and need to review choices to make a decision. The rest of what I share here is to help in this event.

Let's talk then of two steps. First is "guru shopping", or selecting a guru from multiple choices, secondly is how to behave with a teacher once you have selected one.

Points to consider in "shopping" for a guru:

1. A guru should not be "for profit". The teaching that we need is offered freely, those who have it are not to charge for it. Donations are one thing, certainly you should offer donations as appropriate, but your donations should be commensurate with your ability to donate and not with desires of the teacher. If there are high fixed fees keep looking, for this indicates that the knowledge you seek does not reside there.
2. The guru should be selfless, as stated for a Yoga instructor above. Research them, observe them. If they wear ostentatious clothing or jewelry, if they are proud of their name (e.g. they call themselves "guru", "Satguru", etc) then pass on by.
3. Consider their lineage but don't make this the make-or-break decision point. Lineage is important, and there are several great lineages such as Sivananda, Chinmayananda, Chidananda, Krishnananda, Dayananda, Maharshi among many others. For teachers of Advaita you might want to read the book, "Advaita: Back to the Truth" mentioned earlier as they have a great section on the various teaching approaches and teachers with lineage "maps" as well. There are also untold great teachers in the Islamic, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh and other traditions. I suggest that you be open about lineage.
4. Interview your prospective guru(s) thoroughly. You should have one-on-one time with them and ask whatever questions you have prior to committing. Listen carefully to what they say and also observe their bearing, how they are with you. Attend a few of their classes.
5. Look at their track record. How have their students progressed? Are there enlightened students? Do their disciples demonstrate selfless tendencies? It is important that they have

other students who have attained to the goal you wish, or at a minimum that they are tied closely to lineage that does have this track record and with which the teaching is consistent. There are many “spiritual” teachers that present “new age” concepts that are not demonstrated to be efficacious. It is better to hew towards the classical teachings. Although you are what you are in Truth and have always been That your thoughts must change and your mind quiet before the timeless wisdom flows through you.

6. To the point above, avoid any teacher that says anything about “instant enlightenment”, also those that commit to a timeline. It is not possible to know timeline. Also avoid those that say that the guru can give you enlightenment through a touch or a mantra, etc. This is not possible, the prize is won only through continuous self-effort and surrender.
7. Be both persistent and patient in your search.

Many will argue with what I say now, but this is so important. Under no circumstances should you let your mind be your guru. Do not decide, “I’m going to go it alone and select the practices that work for me”, for if you do this you are just following your mind once again. That is what got you into this mess to begin with, how is it that you suppose it will get you out?

Resist this urge. There are countless Self-realized teachers in this world that fit the qualifications listed, hold out until one of them emerges for you. Be patient but vigilant in this regard. Yes you can and should have practices in the meantime but it is far better to spend your time on introspection and looking at the folly in your own mind. Learn to practice the Yamas and Niyamas, this is a great place to start before the teacher comes. Learn how to practice external and then internal Ahimsa. This will lead you towards greater desire for Truth, and this desire is the most important requirement for one to find peace.

Now, once you have found your teacher, what to do? Once you have shopped and answered all of your mind’s questions about a teacher you must commit to him/her, taking a vow of complete obedience. This vow you must honor, regardless of what happens. Serve, honor, respect, adore, devote and comply. Do whatever they say in the knowledge that they know you better than you do. Obedience is the highest divine quality. Peace is obtained through obedience. The mind needs to be quiet, not restless, in order for us to find Truth, and in disobedience peace is simply not possible. If we are not completely obedient to our teacher the teaching cannot take root.

How can we call obedience the highest divine quality? Is it a quality of Truth, of God? Yes, if we look closely we will see that it is. The nature of God, on display throughout this universe, is to give to us regardless of what we have thought and done. Forgiveness is absolute, as is acceptance and love. The universe always bends to whatever we want; always whatever we want us possible and can be attained by the one who fervently applies himself or herself.

This is evidence of God's surrender and subservience to us. God is so humble and accommodating, so loyal to us that whatever we want and pursue with single-minded determination is provided. This continues ad infinitum, regardless of our intent. God is said to be long suffering and by the same token

God is obedient to us; finally giving us union with Her own Self when this is all that we want. When “I give myself to God, God gives me Her Self in return.”

On this pilgrimage I completely surrendered to the teaching. I walked towards the desert and in Brawley, California I was required to make a decision to either follow the teaching (following the teaching meant to walk through the desert without sustenance, trusting in God to take care of me) or to turn around on my commitment and the teaching. I walked, prepared completely to “die in the desert”. What I found at the end of that first day’s walk was God holding me through the form of a man in a white truck with a bag of goodies including my favorite childhood candies. I found I was held securely by these same arms every step of the remainder of my first coast-to-coast and I feel them wrapped around me every moment since. There is no longer any separation from Guru.

Your mind will say “no”, but on this point the teaching is consistent and I’ve done my best to share with you why this is so and how it can work. Surrender is necessary; it is the only victory. You are not of this world; you are in it. You are spirit my dear friend; not matter. You are complete; you need to uncover your complete Self. You seek happiness; taking a teacher is one of the amazing steps you will take in order to have it.

32. A few Words about Experiences

“Do not seek to bring things to pass in accordance with your wishes, but wish for them as they are, and you will find them.”

Epictetus

I've shared experiences with you here in order to bring depth and clarity to our discussion; as illustration and example. I pray that it will also help your conscious mind to open a little to the Truth that lies beyond it.

You will have mystical experiences if you do not look for them and do not cultivate them. In fact you have had many already, you are likely just not aware of them as your mind has dismissed them. We are tempted to make a common mistake and copy what we see instead of being inspired by it and following it. Our minds are patterned and conditioned, always dealing with memories by categorizing and visualizing them.

What we learn in the world we learn through a process of memorization. We can say trial and error, but in fact it's like this: Whenever we have effort we watch for the results. We remember what we tried and we remember what resulted, from there we judge whether it was good or bad, and then we store the results away in our subconscious mind. The entire experience including the effort, the results, and the judgment of good or bad, has thus become a part of our conditioning. Only the effort was original, the rest is whatever force owns the results of actions, the balance memorization. We then make our best efforts to repeat what we like and not repeat what we don't like, getting upset when the results do not meet our expectations. The mind applies this pattern to all experience whether considered as worldly or spiritual.

If we are looking for something new our mind will look at the desired results first and the mental tendency will be to try to take on other's conditioning as our own. In other words, someone else did x, y or z, and we want to do the same. Our mind breaks down their achievement into various efforts we perceive they took, thus resulting in their attainment. In this approach we try to copy their actions, copy their behavior, perhaps even copy what they said and what they wore. We look for the same experiences they told us about. This is the natural way of the conscious mind, but it will not get you where you wish to go.

Following another, for example following Master and Peace Pilgrim as I do, requires analysis of what they say and do along with introspection utilizing our intellect to understand how to apply their teaching in this time and place, with our own mental and physical skills. It also requires devotion. Devotion is the next step in inspiration; it is what sustains us on our path. Through devotion we keep our vision on our goal and on our example, we continue to do the work required in order to properly follow.

Following but not copying also means that you must not look for the experience that another had, for yours will be different. They will be optimized for the time and place, and for your skills. They will be perfect; for you alone. They will help to motivate you and they will open doors for you. All mystical experiences are of God, our highest Light, alone.

In fact all experiences may be considered either as mystical or not mystical. There is no difference between walking on the sidewalk and walking on water other than our conditioned view that one is possible and the other not. The conditioning is very deep and yet it is just that. Jesus tells us that if we had the faith of a mustard seed we would see that all things are possible. Only in our mind is there an image of what the world is or what it should be. The world is in fact unlimited potential to be whatever can be imagined.

The problem with looking for the same experience that another had, or even in repeating the same experience once again, is that we miss what is in this moment. Always our mind covers up the moment, and in the moment is the experience that is to be, in the moment is the joy that is, in the moment is Life itself. Any expectation is a veil covering Truth, and all veils must be removed that we may see Truth revealed.

The wisest course is to not expect experience, resisting this temptation in your mind. Do not look for any particular experience; including what another says is "Samadhi" or "heaven", or whatever. Do not harbor the illusion that this path is about achieving some sort of experience that has a name; it is rather simply about Knowing, Loving and Being. Be, and you will Know. Be, and you will be Love itself. In fact you already are, it is just that all of this expecting and trying to be that is veiling what you are. Be. Love.

33. In Reflection

"I have only one desire now: to do God's will for me. There is no conflict. When God guides me to walk a pilgrimage I do it gladly. When God guides me to do other things I do them just as gladly. If what I do brings criticism upon me I take it with head unbowed. If what I do brings me praise I pass it immediately along to God, for I am only the instrument through which God does the work. When God guides me to do something I am given strength, I am given supply, I am shown the way. I am given the words to speak. Whether the path is easy or hard I walk in the light of God's love and peace and joy, and I turn to God with psalms of thanksgiving and praise. This it is to know God. And knowing God is not reserved for the great ones. It is for little folks like you and me. God is always seeking you—every one of you.

Peace Pilgrim

Not my will but Thy will my Lord, not my will but Thine. Please help me to accept Thy will completely, to merge myself into Thy will, for in this world it is Thy will which is ever done, not mine.

In the chapter entitled "Making Choices" we talked about self-effort, free will, and now I write here that in this world it is always God's will that is done. How can this be? Truly this is straightforward although it may seem paradoxical.

Our individual effort, our will, is not separate from God's will; it is rather a subset of God's will. We think that we are alone; we think that we need to do everything, and as long as we think this... we do. We think we do that is; but ultimately it is God who is directing this world play and we cannot be separate from God's will. God is the puppet master expertly twirling the strings and we (what we think ourselves to be) are the wooden puppets gyrating upon the stage. Inexorably the strings are pulled in order to call us back, to provide us with the unique experiences that we need in order to desire ultimate Truth instead of falsehood, to see through our conditioned worldview and to seek the "Kingdom of God" inside. We are invariably given what we strive for, whatever it is, but this attainment is of dual purpose. It is a fulfillment of our will and of God's. It fulfills ours because we strove for it and now we have it; it fulfills God's because once we have it we are on our way to learning it is not what we really wanted after all. In this way we are led inward.

As long as we do not see the one Truth behind the play self-effort is required. Until we surrender fully we must exert. Without self-effort nothing is possible; with self-effort anything is possible. The ultimate success is assured with continuous properly focused self-effort. We may choose to sleep; but nothing is accomplished in sleep. We may pray to a "God" to do our bidding for us but that "God" that we visualize as doing our bidding does not exist. We are the ones that must come around, not God. We must self exert in order to purify and prepare a proper instrument; we must come in to alignment with the highest light which is in us. We must surrender "me". Then, and only then, can we find home.

In this surrender lies complete freedom. This is what Peace Pilgrim knew. She walked 28 years with only a comb, a toothbrush and a pen. She did this because she did not need anything more than that; this was her understanding and her faith. Many would call her crazy and others brave, yet she knew that she needed nothing and this knowledge gave her not just peace but it also made her free. She was free to walk, to pray, to advise. Free to do God's will, free to be her Self, free of any cares or worries, free of all of the baggage that we carry with us in this world.

This is what God wants for us, it is always about this. Through attachment to God we know absolute and complete freedom from all of the worldly cycles. When we drop all that we carry we are carried by God alone.

Many of us ask, “what is God’s will for me?” “Does God want me to be married, to have children, to be wealthy and successful?” “Is God’s will for me to live here, or some other place?” The answer is simply that God’s will for us is to know God! God’s will is for us to know of our union with God, to know ourselves as Spirit, to know that all is fine. God wants us to be home. The material things are all fool’s gold; there is nothing permanent, nothing of value in them. Nothing. This life is and has always been about finding (remembering) our great Self and being That. All that matters is spiritual pursuit. The spiritual life is the only real life; it leads to the only reality and the only happiness that lasts.

Once we have come into alignment and our surrender is complete there is no longer a question of difference between God’s will and our will. With complete surrender comes life as a perfect instrument of the Love Divine.

The great teachers inspire us to cultivate the divine qualities and to drop the negative qualities centered around the ego self and our insignificant desires for this reason. When we cultivate and exhibit the divine qualities in our thoughts, words and deeds we are walking towards union; when we cultivate the selfish qualities we are walking away from union. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is truly the Golden Rule, for in applying it we know the real gold. We know the gold has never been apart from us.

You can find God if you will only seek—by obeying divine laws, by loving people, by relinquishing self-will, attachments, negative thoughts and feelings. And when you find God it will be in the stillness. You will find God within.”

Peace Pilgrim

If you want to be happy work to make others happy. Be a peacemaker. Bring a smile, bring a beneficial thought, word and deed. Bring kindness. If the mind does not want to do so then redouble your effort and do it anyway. If you need to force a smile in order to smile then by all means force it. In time the smile will come naturally with no obvious effort.

This I can share from my own experience. My mind was in the gutter and this is no longer the case. My actions were self-serving and now I walk for peace for all. I was always stressed and worried, now I have neither a care nor a worry. I had constant dis-ease, now I am at complete peace. I didn’t know happiness then, now I live it. I do not say this as puffery; I share the example to state the power of aligned, focused and continuous self-effort. In both cases I was still “me”, but the character was changed from the inside out and destiny changed with it. Even the concept of “me” changed.

For inspiration of the change that we can effect through self-effort, let us listen to these words of Lord Krishna as He describes a Brahmana, one who knows the highest Truth. The exquisite “Amrita”, or the “Nectar” of the Bhagavad Gita starts in the 12th discourse sloka 13 and continues through the 19th sloka. Here it begins:

adveṣṭā sarva-bhūtānām maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣamī

santuṣṭaḥ satataṁ yogī yatātmā dr̥ḍha-niścayaḥ mayy arpita-mano-buddhir yo mad-bhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ

One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me — such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me.

This is our work in this world. We are here to find how to Love. Yes, it is a fight to learn this, but this fight is inside, not out. We are equipped for the fight; we have what it takes. We are here to know and live the Truth; we are here to unwrap our glorious birthright as Spirit and to let our brilliant light shine throughout the universe.

That which is called the process of “awakening”, “union” or “Self-Realization” is (apparently) of three parts. First the aspirant seems to be an apparent whole, separate from others but in union inside. From our perspective we are aligned with our thoughts and ego and we mistakenly take our thoughts to be “me”. From here we also think our senses and body to be “me”. Our position seems secure, our identification with this body and mind is strong and we attach also to objects, suffering horribly. It may seem to us that some external power or perhaps fate alone got us into whatever situation in which we find ourselves and that the cause for our dilemma is outside. It further seems that self-effort will go for naught; perhaps we will feel powerless against the great forces of the world. This is a kind of blindness; we took our birth in this world afflicted by this blindness.

Next, something happens and we inexplicably perceive “two” inside. We then “see” our thoughts. This is a sudden shift that is not necessarily accompanied by anything else. This shift is amazing grace. How it comes is mysterious, though clearly it comes from both self-effort and grace. Once we see our thoughts the process of untangling our identification with them can begin in earnest. When we see our thoughts we are no longer completely beholden to them and we can change them. Yes, initially the thoughts still have much apparent power, but when they are seen we intuitively know that we can change them. This, the knowing that we can change thoughts, is of course correct, and this very fact has changed the game for us completely.

Of course it is possible for us to see our thoughts and to choose to let them remain in charge of us. We can sit back, still identified with an individual “me”, and not take advantage of this opportunity for union. We may even choose to continue behaving terribly while justifying our actions with words such as “oh, that was just my character, that’s not really me. I’m the observer, I’m free”. At every step on our paths it is possible to step backwards, even here. These choices can be made, but none of them are beneficial.

From the point in which we become an apparent “two” an unfolding process will begin if we choose it. Self-effort is paramount now; it is all that counts until the end. The unfolding is the process to “manage” or “control” the mind. For those who take objection to the term “control”; well I can say that control is a proper concept and it is required. It is popularly taught today to watch the mind, over and over this is told to us in the various spiritual paths. Why? Because we can do nothing of note, nothing that will

directly lead us to freedom, until we see our thoughts. We must constantly hear this guidance and constantly strive to “watch the mind” until we do.

Once we see our thoughts we can do anything; it is as if our higher power has been enabled. Watching the mind is not the end, but it is the beginning of the end for the motivated and dispassionate student.

Self-effort applies before and after this shift of perception, of course. Before the shift self-effort is all about acquiring what needs to be acquired so that grace is revealed to cause the shift. After it is all about control and perfecting one’s surrender to the Absolute.

The next step is exerting supremacy over one’s mind. This must happen. Negative and selfish thoughts are to be banished, there is no place for them in one who wishes to know God. Thoughts must finally be brought to God alone (the same God that is in all with no reduction or separation!) Perfection of surrender has then begun. We can talk of surrender all that we want (and I do often), yet it is only possible when one’s thoughts are seen and the mind is controlled; when you are finally the master of your mind instead of it being your master.

This, then, results finally in the end of the process. Perfect Surrender is the end of the “I” concept. It is the death of the “individual personage” yet at the same time it is birth in spirit; the real Life.

No person becomes enlightened in fact; there is finally no Self-Realization. There is, instead, surrender. In surrender the small and limited is first controlled and then given away; through a final grace the unlimited replaces it. The drop of water is never anything but water; for it reunion is the end of its identification as a drop. The person does not become anything; attachment to the personage ends and only Life remains. There is no longer a thought of “one” or “two”, there is instead silence and the understanding that pervades and co-exists with the silence. And, from this point, Life goes on. From the outside no one knows that something has changed but from the inside peace alone reigns supreme.

When we see the truth of us we know that there is no question of separation. We are no more separate from each other than rays of light are separate from the sun. Just as all of the waves of light, visible and invisible, emanate from the one sun so to do we emanate from the one Truth. Just as the rays have never existed without their source and can have no existence separate from it so also we, this entire universe, exist not without its one source. The rays are simply a beautiful expression of the sun and are never anything but the sun. In this same way are we. Never separate, never alone, never anything but Truth. Eternal Spirit, not flesh, not bound by limitations other than in our own mind.

We started our discussion here talking about the four steps to our Pilgrimage Home. Let us close in the same way by talking of acceptance.

What is the difference between belief and acceptance?

A belief is to be fought for and defended. Acceptance simply accepts.

Belief speaks loudly for all of the world to hear. Acceptance listens to comprehend.

Belief is the fullness of ideas, acceptance is silence of mind.

Belief is bold yet must finally surrender. Acceptance meek yet abides any storm.

Belief finds conflict as its home. Acceptance finds peace as its own.

One thinks acceptance to be easy and weak. And yet when we try it we know that it is the hardest thing we could ever do. This, then, clearly is the struggle to be exerted; for we know by now that no other struggle we have fought has come to beneficial fruit. We further know that it is this; acceptance and love of all as our own self, which all of the great teachers have guided us towards.

Perfect acceptance does not mean being passive; it is a great mistake to think this. It means to love and serve all, to always be kind, considerate and loving to all, regardless of one's beliefs, and to always do the good deed in front of us. It means to always think the kind and loving thought and always speak the considered and sweet truth. To practice acceptance no one else need do anything or behave in any particular way. In fact the more varied the experiences that we have, the more our acceptance is tested, the more we are given the opportunity to perfect it. Perfect acceptance is perfect service and perfect love. It is not separate from you; you are not incapable of it. It is in your very heart now; it is the heart's beat behind the beat. It is the goal that each of us may step towards, we have every tool we need with which to practice it.

"Father, I am within you, and you are within me. What a great mystery."

Padre Pio

"The abolition of the conceit 'I am'—that is truly the supreme bliss."

Gautama the Buddha

"Die before you die."

The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)

"Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form when within thee the whole universe is folded?"

Baha'u'llah

34. Living our Life as a Pilgrimage

"There is a well-worn road which is pleasing to the senses and gratifies worldly desires, but leads to nowhere. And there is the less traveled path, which requires purifications and relinquishments, but results in untold spiritual blessings."

Peace Pilgrim

A pilgrimage is a journey to a place or for a thing. Our entire physical life can be, if we choose, such a pilgrimage. How?

First, we may take the highest goal for this pilgrimage of life. We may choose to be a pilgrim for Peace, or Truth, Love or Justice, or union with God, for these are simply different words for this highest goal.

Next, take each day as it comes. Say hello to God in the morning with a smile. Set your intent with a vow for the day. Get up and do your work. Work gently, contemplatively and compassionately. Reside neither in the past nor future; be fully aware and alert in the current moment. Don't look for the big, look for the opportunity to serve and love through whatever is presented in the moment with no differentiation of big or small. Bring your thoughts to your highest light, accept whatever comes your way with gratitude and serve it through beneficial thoughts, kind words and benevolent actions. Fill your day with this. Take whatever comes through the day with gratitude. Finally, review your day and consider how you may do better tomorrow. Forgive yourself and forgive all for any perceived transgressions through the day; release the day into God's arms. Thank God and let repetition of God's name carry you to sleep.

Just this is enough to know happiness and peace.

For me, this pilgrimage for peace will continue for as long as it is God's will. I completed the first coast-to-coast late last year and then travelled to northern New Mexico for some time, and from there on to the Sivanananda Ashram Yoga Farm to serve until the end of February 2015. I had sent an open invitation to ask who might like to go on a Yoga Vedanta pilgrimage to India and a small group of friends that I met on the coast-to-coast walk put up their hands. We completed the pilgrimage, I have now completed this writing project, and now I return to the Northeast USA to walk more. I've been able to join Sri Swami Premananda Ji and Sri Swami Ramaswarupananda Ji for Darshan and they have shared many gems that have found their way in to this work. I leave one pilgrim in India, she continues her studies and practices, and tells of great changes that have taken place inside of her. India and Ganga Mata (the mother Ganga River) always have that effect on us if we let them 😊.

Scheduled is some sharing at the Ashram in September and also the end of the year, perhaps I'll be able to walk pilgrimage for four months between the summer and the fall. I intend to once again walk coast-to-coast in 2016; starting in January in southern Florida and walking west this time. My new shirt is emblazoned "Walking 10,000 Miles for Peace", and for this there are at least 5,500 miles, and untold smiles, ahead of me.

My intention is to be available to support seekers in any way that I can. I have slimmed down the baggage one more time for the next walks but I'll have a smartphone in my right pocket and a camera in my left. I'm reachable on Facebook, through website www.steps4peace.org and via email; ompeaceandlove@gmail.com. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me; I'll do my best to respond in a reasonable time and to be of help.

Let us take pilgrimage together. Let us hold the world in our arms and pray that all may know peace, let us be always doing what is of benefit with our thoughts, our words and our actions to bring peace to those around us and to ourselves. Let us develop our divine qualities and transcend the ones holding us back. Let us be a pure instrument; let us be known by our love. Let us know our own immortal Self.

Finally, I want for you to know this. You belong. You are safe and you are loved. You are forgiven, for all. There is no limit to you; you are complete. This fairy tale does have a happy ending and there is forever after. You can do anything, including finding home.

Thank you for all. God bless you always; indeed you are blessed my dear friend. I love you. Om.

Postscript / Steps 4 Peace

person (Online Etymology dictionary)

early 13c., from Old French *persone* "human being, anyone, person" (12c., Modern French *personne*) and directly from Latin *persona* "human being, person, personage; a part in a drama, assumed character," originally "mask, false face," such as those of wood or clay worn by the actors in later Roman theater. OED offers the general 19c. explanation of *persona* as "related to" Latin *personare* "to sound through" (i.e. the mask as something spoken through and perhaps amplifying the voice).

Shakespeare: All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts.

You are spirit, not flesh. You are in this world and yet not of it. The "person"; the name and form you are identified with, is the character you wear in this world. The body you feel so attached to is your expression; it is not you. You are imperishable, eternal; you come to this world to experience and to learn, to grow in order to achieve your full potential. Your potential is unlimited and your existence unbounded.

I am not the first to tell you this and I'll not be the last. What I tell you is not a secret and yet it seems to be. We never speak of it and we typically don't even think of it. We live life without finding the source of life, without knowing what "I" am. We live in such a way as to cover up life instead of uncovering it; we live as if life is a routine and a struggle instead of the great and glorious mystery which it is.

You are not as you appear to be. This entire world is not as it appears to be. The appearance is skin deep, it is only the shell; the truth is what underlies and permeates the shell. You are that Truth.

As long as we assume ourselves to be the bodies decorating us and take the drama of the world to be independently real we suffer terribly. We are bound to both the pleasure and the pain of it, and to the tragedy in which great drama must always end. We are tossed about as a ship in a great storm, never able to find the comfort of our homeport.

When we are caught up in the drama we are ever discontented and we leave unexplored the simple fact that the drama being staged is not true; it is not who or what we are. Our wrong view of life is the cause of our discontent. We view it externally, never taking the required steps to understand its true nature, and our true nature, from the inside.

We are constantly given experiences to drive us inside in order to explore our true nature, but typically instead of doing so we take on external change. When we feel the urge to explore inside we may choose to take a new job, a new house, a new partner, or to visit a new place. Perhaps instead of exploring ourselves we try to escape through drinking or drugs, in drowning ourselves in a relationship or our work, or in attempts at suicide.

This urge to explore inside is of our highest intuitive nature and the tendency to resist this call, or not to try to understand it, is of our lower mental nature. We can simply say for now that we are of two parts; one is deep, silent and rooted in truth, the other is surface level and noisy (evidenced by constant conflicting thoughts), and attached to drama.

We are a battleground. Our intuitive nature is calling us inside while our mental nature calls us outside. These two natures are in conflict, with two diametrically opposed versions of what is the truth of the world. Time after time the mental view is demonstrated to be incorrect and yet our tendency is to continue following this view. Patiently our intuitive self waits and calls, urging us inside. Experiences happen and each time a choice is presented as to which path to take; inner exploration versus outer gratification. Each time we choose.

Only one path can be taken at a time. We may walk the mental path or we may learn to walk the intuitive path. Every moment we may choose the latter instead of the former, but we must choose it, for making no choice is in fact a choice to remain on the former. As long as we follow our mental nature we cannot find peace, we can know only drama. As long as we follow our mental nature we'll be buffeted by every storm and separate from our true unlimited nature.

Following, finding and becoming rooted in our deep inner nature is peace. The one who has found this intuitive self and follows it is at peace and in alignment with the universe, in communion with his or her true nature and potential.

This inner journey to the highest intuitive self is begun with a decision to explore inside, and from this decision steps are taken, one by one. Once this decision is made and one dedicates to it help is provided. It is not an easy journey; it is a pilgrimage and it is walked without external visible support. Support does come, however. Whatever support is required comes to the committed pilgrim in search of inner peace. To the one who is dedicated and patient all answers are provided and the true nature of you and this physical world is revealed. Such a pilgrim is always home, no longer bound to the drama.

Here I call the one who has chosen this inner path to be walking a Pilgrimage Home, and I call the home the universal heart. Any name will do in fact, for this home is common to each of us. Also common is our need to finally find peace, and for this we must take this pilgrimage.

My intention with my own pilgrimage and with this book is to remind you of your true nature, to inspire you to explore it, and to help you in any way that I might. I am your friend and partner; in spite of any external appearances you are never alone.

My pilgrimage is by foot, but it is not necessary to literally walk. One may take ones own steps towards Self-discovery in many ways; there are several well-worn paths to choose from. One may dedicate and follow fully the Eight Fold Path of the Buddha, the real Ashtanga Yoga (including the critically important Yamas and Niyamas), Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the inner Haj, or any of the countless paths that are given by the greats. All of these provide the opportunity for our pilgrimage home.

We must know and come in to alignment with our intuitive Self; this is all that can ever satisfy us. We must experience it directly. Step by step we must drop the baggage that we carry in our mind in order to know what is finally to be known. We must drop our preconceived notions of “us”; for these are our sole barriers to knowing the great truth that Gautama the Buddha, Jesus the Christ, Mohammed the Prophet and all of the great teachers know.

This pilgrimage home is taken in four steps. These are not in a particular order, though inspiration is consistently the start. They are repeated as we continue our journey. As you reflect on these and read this book you will likely find that you have already begun:

1. Inspiration (Aspiration). The amazing, mind-boggling examples of the great teachers and saints in this world are here for our inspiration. Read, contemplate deeply and be inspired.
2. Purification. We must cleanse ourselves of all of the beliefs and images that cloud our view. Purification is necessary at the physical, mental and spiritual levels. This is accomplished through sincerely following the real Yoga, the Eight Fold Path, etc.
3. Examination (Introspection). Looking closely inside and outside utilizing our intellect in order to peel away all false images.
4. Positive Self-Effort. Beginning with our own thoughts, our words and our deeds bring our focus to that which is positive and beneficial, striving always to serve. Through sustained self-effort we may change the nature of our thoughts and it is this that helps us, and all of those around us, to know peace.

The pilgrimage home is not for the faint of heart; it is not easy and yet it is all that satisfies. Those who finally want to know the truth of “me” and this world take this pilgrimage. The knowledge gained through this pilgrimage is the Truth that shall set you free.

Let’s join hands and walk.

Reference

Recommended Books

A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya, Bihar School of Yoga

Back to the Truth: 5000 Years of Advaita, Dennis Waite

Be as You Are, the Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Bhagavad Gita, Swami Sivananda

Edge of the Universe, Paul Halpern

I am That, Dialogues with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Meditation and Mantra, Swami Vishnudevananda

Peace Pilgrim, Her Life and Work in her own Words

Perfect Brilliant Stillness, David Carse

The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga, Swami Vishnudevananda

Thought Power, Swami Sivananda

*The Fabric of the Universe**, Brian Greene

* The NOVA documentary series of the same name is also recommended

Recommended Websites

Yoga and Meditation

Ayush; <http://ayushportal.nic.in/>

Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar; <http://www.biharyoga.net/>

Calm Chicago, Chicago, IL; www.calmchicago.org

Divine Life Society Book Downloads; <http://www.dlshq.org/download/download.htm>

Divine Life Society Forest Academy, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand; <http://www.dlshq.org/yvfa.htm>

Garden of Healing Yoga and Wellness Center, New Brunswick, NJ;

<http://www.agardenofhealing.us/>

Global Chant (weekly), Tucson, AZ; <http://www.actonwisdom.com/global-chant/>

Great Heartland Buddhist Temple, Toledo, OH; <http://www.buddhisttempleoftoledo.org/>

Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Chicago, IL; <http://htgc.org/Home/index.php>

Hindu Temple of Greater Springfield, Springfield, IL; <http://www.springfieldtemple.org/>

Integral Yoga; <http://www.yogaville.org/>

Kaivalya Dham; <http://kdhamusa.org/>

Main St. Yoga, Bloomington, IL; <http://www.mainstreetyoga.com/>

Sivananda Vedanta Yoga International, Worldwide; www.sivananda.org

Spiritual Life Society and Yoga Center of Hudson, Hudson, OH; www.aum.org

SVYASA; <http://svyasa.edu.in/>

The Studio Cleveland, Cleveland, OH; <http://www.thestudiocleveland.com/>

Vipassana Meditation, Worldwide; www.dhamma.org

Retreats (includes Monasteries and Ashrams)

Ananda Ashram, Monroe, NY; <http://www.anandaashram.org/>

Ananda Sanga (Worldwide); www.ananda.org

Arsha Vidya Pitham, Saylorsburg, PA; <http://www.arshavidya.org/home.html>

Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand; www.sivanandaonline.org

Hacienda de Guru Ram Das, Espanola, NM; <http://www.espanolaashram.com/pages/>

Mid American Buddhist Association, Augusta, MO; <http://www.maba-usa.org/>

Mother's Trust Ashram, Fennville, MI; <http://www.motherstrust.org/>

Neem Karoli Baba Ashram, Taos, NM; <http://nkbashram.org/>

New Camaldoli Hermitage, Big Sur, California; <http://www.contemplation.com/>

Osage Forest of Peace, Sand Springs, OK; <http://www.forestofpeace.org/>

Prince of Peace Abbey; Oceanside, CA; <http://princeofpeaceabbey.blogspot.com/>

Sambodh Society, Kalamazoo, MI; <http://www.sambodh.us/>

Sivananda Yoga Vedanta International (Worldwide, Yoga Centers and Ashrams);
www.sivananda.org

Sivanand Seva Ashram, Ganeshpur, Uttarakhand;
<http://www.sivanandsevasamiti.org/index.html>

Support Organizations

Amma; www.amma.org

Bahai Worldwide; <http://www.bahai.org/>

Chinmaya Mission; <http://www.chinmayamission.org/>

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); <http://disciples.org/>

Forever Family Foundation; www.foreverfamilyfoundation.org

Ramakrishna Vedanta Society; <http://vedantasociety.net/>

Vivekananda International Foundation; <http://www.vifindia.org/>