



Excerpt

Meditation as a Way of Life

Philosophy and Practice

Rooted in the Teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda

By Alan L. Pritz

Taken from Chapter 1: THE JOURNEY OF AWAKENING

If you are familiar with children, you can appreciate how their tenacious “Why, why?” questions can be challenging. Yet who can blame them for their questions: they live in the world and want to make sense of it. Natural inquiries often become more articulate or profound with age but, despite the polish of mature intellects, remain focused on basic, meaning-of-life issues.

The quest to grasp why we are here represents a primal human need to solve the mystery of existence. Probing for answers has fostered philosophical and religious thought yet, despite extensive reflection, the search continues. The unfolding tableau of theoretical physics, near-death phenomena, and past life research has only intensified our pursuits. As knowledge of the outer universe expands, so has awareness of our inner nature. In some instances the line between physics and metaphysics resembles an ideological spectrum more than separate fields of inquiry.

Robert Duvall reflects in the film, *Broken Trail*, “We are all travelers in this world and stand between the eternities.” Eventually, everyone entertains questions about existence and feels compelled to explore life’s meaning. When people do that, they begin a journey toward awakening. Just as seeds planted in fertile soil will inexorably grow toward the light, we are evolutionarily called from an automatic-pilot existence toward one of spiritual awareness. Some come to this readily through an affinity for philosophy, religion, or natural wonder. Others seek relief from hardship through esoteric or religious study. By midlife, our stable routines often

become haunted by issues of mortality and an awareness that outer accomplishments are not necessarily the benchmarks of a life well lived.

Despite such prompts, a key question arises as to why there is *any* evolutionary compulsion in the direction of self-inquiry. The answer is a bold but defensible statement: We are hard-wired to seek connection with our Source. Consider that everyone is fundamentally motivated by a drive for fulfillment. Each of us has a conscious or unconscious desire to be happy, regardless of how that manifests individually. Epitomized by some as a spouse or family, for others it is a job, house, car, income, or power. Yet life repeatedly teaches—usually dramatically—that seeking happiness externally is a recipe for disappointment. Satisfaction arising from outer causes does exist, at least temporarily, but upon reflection it is clear that happiness is not a fundamental component of things (or people) *per se* but from our reactions to them. These reactions reflect a capacity to access a pre-existing inner joy that reveals itself when tapped by external circumstances. If joy were an ingredient of externals it would engender universal responses rather than subjective responses. For example, when splashed with water we all get wet; that is objective and universal. Our reaction to getting splashed, however, be it glee or annoyance, is subjective and is not a quality of the water itself. Thus, the sense of fulfillment we get from people or things is a relative one subject to our reactions. This temporary sense of fulfillment is prone to innumerable variables that may shift unpredictably. Enduring relationships are complexities in and of themselves and worthy of the effort, but they too must be guided by wisdom in order to last. The bold truth is that nothing outside us produces or sustains lasting joy. Even those who allegedly “have it all” eventually experience emptiness if their measures of life satisfaction are hung on temporal rungs. Joy is part of our inner domain and must be reaped from its interior source to ensure sustainability.

Understandably, we want whatever happiness we have to stay. When it doesn't, we blame a laundry list of culprits—spouses, jobs, or money—for being inadequate and complicating our lives. But existential dilemmas such as these are never fully attributable to outside factors; they arise largely within us from regions comprising our essential core. When we are disconnected from this essence and what it provides, external affairs gain power over our peace of mind. Negative mental states spawn diverse forms of physical or emotional

distress but all are fundamentally manifestations of a spiritual malaise. Such distress compels us to corrective actions which inevitably include meaning-of-life reflection. Yet, again, why are we flung into this messy dynamic? Because we are esoterically-confused creatures of paradox. Incarnate physically, we are not, as the singer Madonna suggests, material beings living in a material world. That is a delusion many succumb to and inevitably suffer from. The famed Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin, rightly declared, “*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*” His assertion testifies to a deep reality. Our essence, that which imbues us with consciousness, call it soul or Spirit, hails from That-Which-Created-It. Since we are a component part of the Divine, our souls necessarily seek completion through reuniting with It and that compels us accordingly. Wholeness or fulfillment, therefore, can never be gotten from temporal means, but solely by returning to our Source.

Why is this fundamental principle not more obvious? Why do we consistently rely on sensory or material gratification to make us feel complete and repeatedly wind up in pitiful straits? That is because of the esoteric paradox. Soul cravings are blurred by the body containers in which they are housed and, complicating matters further, the world supports this misperception. Our complex psycho-physical constitutions are such that spiritual drives get muddied when routed through body / mind channels that link satisfaction with sensory stimuli. We are motivated by various impulses only to find that many of them arise from, and distort, soul-based longings. It is a perverse system, certainly a recipe for heartache, but there it is. Take love for example. We want love and go to great lengths to acquire it, but why? On one level it makes us feel good, complete, or connected to something bigger than ourselves. Unfortunately, this search for love often leads us to “all the wrong places.” The truth is that we want love because it, too, is part of our spiritual constitution. Our essence *is* Love and, like moths drawn to light, we crave It. Love in turns produces joy, thus the soul fundamentally yearns for love and joy because they comprise the nature of Spirit with which we seek alignment. When the quest for love and joy is viewed through this lens it shifts life perspectives considerably.

Human love and relationships are not to be dismissed, but the compulsions for each are clearly not as simple as they seem. They are rooted in soul-based spiritual drives that go beyond the temporal to the Eternal.

This is why spiritual giants—Jesus, Krishna, and Buddha to name but three—uniformly warned against putting stock in the world. It won't deliver what the soul craves.

Jesus: *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”* 1 John 2:15-17.

Krishna: *“But whereso any doeth all his deeds, renouncing self in Me, full of Me, fixed to serve only the Highest, night and day musing on Me—him will I swiftly lift forth from life's ocean of distress and death whose soul clings fast to Me. Cling thou to Me! Clasp Me with heart and mind! So shalt thou dwell surely with Me on high.”* Bhagavad Gita XII: 18-25.

Buddha: preached Four Noble Truths directing people away from wrong thinking, desire, and the suffering such produce. Those truths synopsis are:

1. *Life means suffering*: Human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in; its totality is imperfect, incomplete, and subject to impermanence.
2. *The origin of suffering is attachment*: Craving, clinging to things, plus ignorance of how objects of attachment are transient, necessarily begets suffering for their loss is inevitable.
3. *The cessation of suffering is attainable*: Dispassion extinguishes all clinging and attachment.
4. *The path to the cessation of suffering is the Eightfold Path*: It ends the cycle of rebirth in the physical and subtle spheres, thus releasing one into Freedom.

All spiritual masters teach that lasting happiness cannot be gained from transient worldly means. Refuge in the Eternal is the only way to enduring fulfillment.