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Yes, We Can Know God!

*Opening talk at one of the Self-Realization Fellowship
Convocations: a week of classes, meditation, and spiri-
tual fellowship held annually in Los Angeles*

Tomorrow the classes begin, and I am remembering the time in Salt Lake City, many years ago, when I first took such classes from our revered guru, Paramahansa Yogananda. What a tremendous impact he had on my life!

From my earliest years, I had an unceasing desire to find God in this lifetime. It was in my seventeenth year that I met Paramahansaji. My body was very ill at that time. I was suffering from blood poisoning throughout my system, and the doctors could find no cure for it. One eye was swollen closed, and I had three bandages on my face. Those bandages were actually a blessing, because I stood out rather like a sore thumb even in that large audience!

In those days Master would give several lectures, introducing his teachings, before the classes in which he dealt with the deeper aspects and methods of yoga. After the last of the public lectures, he would invite the congregation to come forward, and would greet them individually. I approached him with legs shaking; I was so very, very shy. When I stood before him, he looked at my disfigured face and asked, "What is the matter with you?" After my mother, with whom I had come to the lectures, explained my health problem, he said,

“Come back tomorrow to the classes,” (of course I was coming anyway!) “but remain afterward.”

I spent the next day in eager anticipation of personally talking with the Guru again. That night he spoke on faith and will power. He so inspired me that as I sat and listened to him I felt it was definitely possible to move mountains with faith in God.

After the meeting, I waited to be the very last to greet him. During our conversation, out of the blue, he suddenly said to me, “Do you believe that God can heal you?” As he said that, his eyes were alight with divine power.

I replied, “I *know* God can heal me.”

He touched me in blessing between the eyebrows, at what we call the Christ or *Kutastha* center.* Then he said, “From this day forward, you are healed. Inside one week the bandages will no longer be necessary; your scars will be gone.” And that is exactly what happened. Within one week the condition cleared, and has never returned.

Harmonious Development of Body, Mind, and Soul

The teachings of Self-Realization Fellowship are based on harmonious development of body, mind, and soul. If we are wholly engrossed in the problems of this body, if physical pain absorbs all of our concentration, it is impossible to know God. It is also impossible to know God if the mind is filled with worry, fear, doubt, emotional problems—because we cannot then give to Him the attention necessary to find Him. Therefore the yogis of India say that an important adjunct to seeking God-realization

* The subtle center (*ajna chakra*) at the point between the eyebrows; seat of the all-perceiving spiritual eye and the universal Christ Consciousness in man; and center of will and concentration.

is to follow certain methods whereby you can keep the body strong through simple, daily care; and learn to develop your powers of concentration so that the mind, made restless by the ups and downs of this world, will not be able to disturb you when you sit to meditate.

The “how-to-live” guidance of Paramahansa Yogananda and the techniques* that you will receive over the next week are based on these principles. They will help you in the development and control of the body and the mind, and will enable your consciousness to go beyond physical and mental limitations to the realization that you are made in the image of the One Cosmic Beloved.

You will be given a key; but, as Guruji used to say to us, it is up to you to use it. If you come, take these teachings, are temporarily inspired by them, go back to your homes saying, “That was a very refreshing week,” and forget them—then, my dears, they are of no permanent value to you. One must practice diligently and regularly, with concentration and enthusiasm, in order to achieve success with the *Raja Yoga*† we teach.

The Divine Purpose of Life

We are on this earth for a definite purpose—to reclaim, as Christ taught, our lost divine heritage as children of God. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”‡

* Reference to the Kriya Yoga science of concentration, meditation, and life-energy control taught by Paramahansa Yogananda in the *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons*.

† The “royal” or highest path to God-union, *Raja Yoga* includes the essentials of all other forms of yoga. It stresses scientific meditation techniques, such as Kriya Yoga, as the ultimate means of attaining God-realization.

‡ I Corinthians 3:16.

We have all heard this before, but who among us has realized it? There is a difference between theoretical understanding of the science of religion, the science of the soul, and the direct perception of God—actual communion with the Divine Beloved that every human heart (and I know I am speaking of each one of you) is craving.

We are all hungering inwardly for something beyond this world. Even God feels some lack, some longing. He has everything in the universe, with one exception: He is crying for the love of His children—you and me and all of us. And He will never be satisfied, can never be fully content, until He knows that we are out of this terrible mess that we have created for ourselves. When Master first said this to me years ago, it set my whole being aflame, and I determined to devote this lifetime to seeking God alone.

Think of the tremendous problems mankind faces in this world: hatred, prejudice, selfishness; some have plenty and others insufficient for their needs; the struggle between this “ism” and that “ism,” each group feeling that its “ism” is better than another’s. Why did God create so many different human beings, why did He make so many different mentalities? If we are all children of the one God, what is behind our differences?

Cultivating Stillness and Clear Perception

All of the scriptures of the world say that we are made in God’s image. If this is so, why don’t we know that we are taintless and immortal, as He is? Why aren’t we conscious of ourselves as embodiments of His spirit?

Guruji used to compare the mind to a lake. When the water is still, the moon is reflected clearly therein. But suppose I toss a handful of pebbles into the lake.

You will then see a distorted image of the moon, because the ripples caused by the pebbles have disturbed the smooth surface of the water. In the same manner, man's mind is rippled constantly by pebbles of emotions, moods, habits acquired in this and past lives*—which make it impossible for him even to think clearly, let alone behold clearly the reflection of God that is within himself.

You will say, "Is it impossible, then, to know God?" Again, what do the scriptures say? "Be still, and know that I am God."† "Pray without ceasing."‡ People come to me, here and abroad, and say, "How is it possible for you to sit motionless in meditation for so many hours? What do you do during those periods of stillness?" The yogis of ancient India, who developed the science of religion as no other people on the face of the globe have done, discovered that by certain scientific techniques it is possible to so still the mind that there is not a ripple of restless thought disturbing or distracting it. In that clear lake of consciousness, we behold within us the reflected image of the Divine.

By regular practice of yoga with steady attention, the time will come when you suddenly say to yourself, "Oh! I am not this body, though I use it to communicate with this world; I am not this mind, with its emotions of anger, jealousy, hatred, greed, restlessness. I am that wonderful state of consciousness within. I am made in the divine image of God's bliss and love."

* A reference to reincarnation, the doctrine that human beings, compelled by the law of evolution, incarnate repeatedly in progressively higher lives—retarded by wrong actions and desires, and advanced by spiritual endeavors—until Self-realization and God-union are attained.

† Psalms 46:10. ‡ I Thessalonians 5:17.