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Important Life Questions with Swami Parthasarathy

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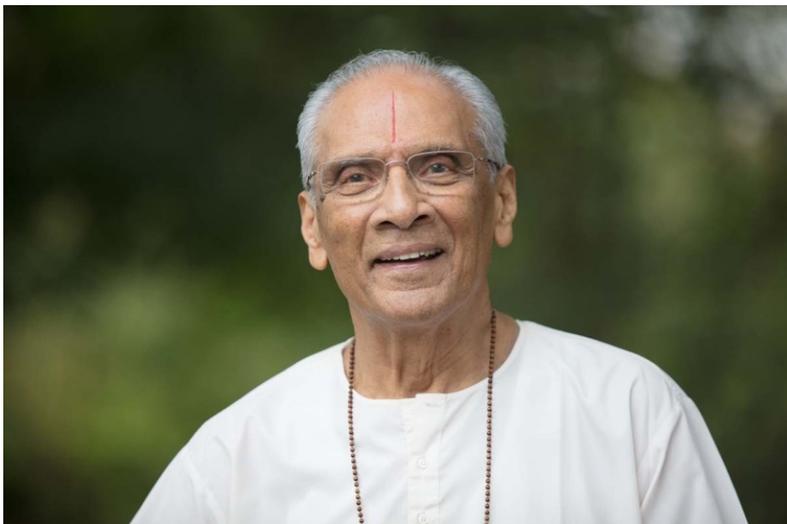
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In the Summer of 2016 I took a spontaneous trip to Los Angeles with my best-friend Priya Gosain. It was one of those trips where the only thing we had planned was our flights. On the 2nd day of our trip, the [Calamigos Ranch](#) reached out to me via Instagram. Fast forward to the 3rd day, Priya and I are sitting poolside of the stunning [Calamigos Ranch](#) nestled in the Santa Monica mountains (I know this sounds like a dream) with the Director of the Vedanta Institute, Joseph Emmett, having an in-depth discussion about overcoming the daily mechanics of life.

Joseph had suggested that if I am ever afforded the opportunity to, I should meet his Swamiji, Swami Parthasarathy, who is acclaimed as the greatest living exponent of the Vedanta (Ancient Indian Philosophy). He has addressed organizations such as NASA, World Economic Forum, World's Presidents Organization and Harvard University to name a few. Months later in the Fall of 2016, I was given an opportunity to interview Swamiji and learn about his journey as a leader, his understanding of Vedanta (Ancient Indian Philosophy) and his perspective on difficult subject matters like Spirituality vs. Religion, the existence of time and tools to transcend the agitations of the mind. As we start 2017, I share some of these powerful questions and answers with you.

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Swami Parthasarathy

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the word of Vedanta? There was no such defining moment in my life. And no transition. As far as my memory goes, I was an introvert from the very beginning. I remember my father telling his friends that, at the age of nine, I used to ask him certain uncomfortable questions which he could not answer: Whether the chicken came first or the egg? Whether the tree or the seed? Who is my father's father's first father? As I grew up I was determined to dedicate my life to the study and research of Vedanta, the ultimate knowledge of life and living. Soon after I finished my education I mentioned to my father that I would not be interested in getting into our well-established family business in the shipping line. Having freed myself from any business commitment, I could completely focus my dedication to learning and spreading Vedanta to the world.

2. What urged you to start your own Academy? As mentioned above, my focus was on unearthing the profound knowledge that was embedded in subtle Sanskrit literature. I was not inclined to start an academy. But a few well-wishers approached me to build an Academy as they felt that my followers, having multiplied, could not converge to my home all the time. One businessman purchased the land and the second provided the initial finance. Thereafter it grew into the present Academy which runs residential courses on Vedanta philosophy for students from all over the world. I was unconsciously following the maxim: The way to gain anything is to leave it alone.

3. For a new student of Vedanta, how would you describe this movement? Whether new or old, having been born in this world you should know the very purpose of your life and living. What are you doing here? Where did you come from? Where are you going from here? How do you conduct your life? What is the ultimate mission in this world? Without having a clue of all this you rush in to the world with your blinders on, not knowing what you are doing, where you are going and what you want to really achieve in life. This should appeal to any thinking person. Such persons fall under a very small percentage of people in the world. If I find a person in that category I would recommend or introduce him/her to introductory books. For keener persons I would recommend an E-learning course on Vedanta.

4. If you are to know the very purpose of your life like you suggested, does that mean that you believe that every single human being is born with a purpose to fulfill here on earth? Every human being is incessantly pursuing peace and knowledge. But hardly anyone knows where to find them. So, they are all grabbing what they can, not realizing that there is no end or culmination in their pursuits. One tries to find peace and satisfaction in the external world and develops various types of addictions. Yet, none of them have found what they want. Similarly, people are pursuing knowledge externally. As the great poets have said time and again, the external pursuit of knowledge is like trying to reach the horizon. The nearer you go, the further it recedes. The answer to this question is within you. One can find peace and knowledge only within oneself, nowhere else. You need to go inward and find your

highlighted in all religions as your inner Self. Some examples of this can be found in various religions.

Old Testament: The Voice of God declares, "I am that I am." New Testament: Jesus Christ affirms, "The kingdom of God is within you." Quran: Prophet Mohammed asserts, "The greatest jihad is that for the conquest of Self." Bhagavad Gita: Krishna pronounces, "I am the Self in all beings." Upanishads: The Rishis (Enlightened Sages) avow, "Self is God."

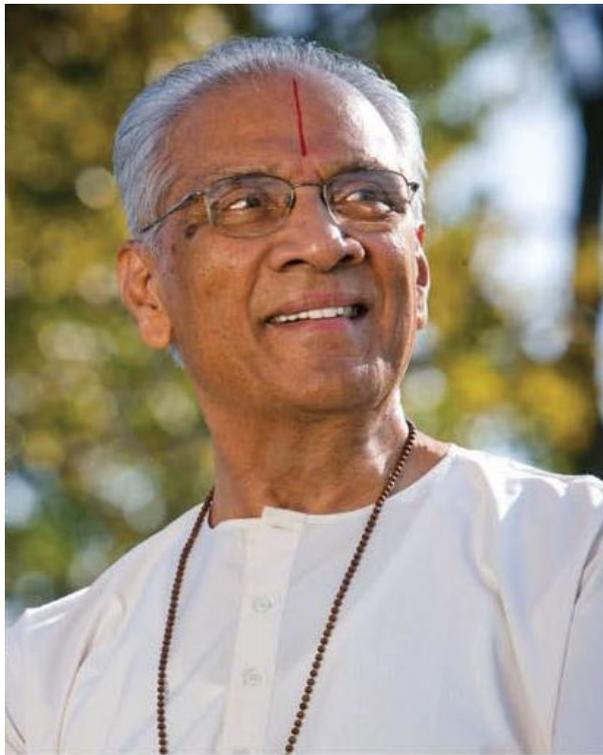
5. In your opinion, what is the definition of Spirituality vs. Religion?

Both Spirituality and Religion are meant to direct your attention from your mundane existence to the transcendental reality. Religion has two aspects. One is the subtle literature which contains the essential philosophy guiding you to the ultimate reality designated as God. The second is ritualistic practices. The philosophy in all religions is one and the same but ritualistic practices differ from religion to religion. The ritualistic practices, being easier to follow, were given only as a package to preserve the philosophy therein. But the sad state of religion today is that people have stuck blindly to the non-essential ritualistic practices with no clue of the essential philosophy it holds. In effect, the essence of religion is hardly practiced anywhere in the world. Hence, there is a need to highlight *philosophy* in a contemporary language that reaches the average thinking person.

6. In your book, "Thesis on God" you write extensively on

transcending mind. Can you explain to our readers how one can transcend the agitations of the mind? The agitations of the mind are caused by unfulfilled desires. As long as you were a child your desires revolved around the toy world. Your unfulfilled desires for play things you wished to possess agitated your mind. When those desires were fulfilled your agitations ceased, only to be confronted with more and more desires for other toys. The solution to the problem lies in rising to the next level of understanding through knowledge and wisdom. When you entertain teenage desires, your child-like desires for the toy world fall away. But then, teenage desires will cause agitations in the teenage mind until they are fulfilled or sublimated. These desires cease when you grow into a more mature person with knowledge and wisdom. Thus, you must rise to the highest state of Self-realization, a state free from desire. With the absence of desires you reach the sublime state of mental equanimity, free from all agitations. Until you attain the state of Self-realization, you will be inflicted with desires and your mind will remain agitated.

7. In your opinion does time really exist? Time is the interval between two experiences. Just as distance is between two points. There is no distance at any one point. Scientifically, you need two points to measure a distance. Similarly, you need two experiences to evaluate time. There can be no concept of time at the first experience. Perhaps, that is why the unit of time is called second. In deep sleep your experiences cease.



Lastly, if you had one message you would like to leave the world, what would it be? The message for humanity is that you must discover your real identity. You know not who you are. You believe at the moment to be a conditioned individual that you are. Your mission in life is only to get over the conditioning and find your real identity. The problem is that one knows not that one is conditioned. Do you realize that a mad man knows not that he is mad. He feels he is alright. So, do you feel you are the conditioned individual? You must rise above your external world and recognize your real *Self*. You are not your body that you believe yourself to be. You are not your mind that you believe yourself to be. You are not your intellect that you believe yourself to be. You are the immaculate *Self*. You must find that *Self* and release yourself from the confinement of the body, mind and intellect. To do this, you need the knowledge. Knowledge that will lead you towards the your true *Self*. That knowledge is known as Vedanta. Veda means **knowledge**. Anta means **end**. So Vedanta means the end, the *culmination of knowledge*.

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For seekers who are interested in gaining more knowledge of Vedanta, a complete structured course is run by A. Parthasarathy at the Vedanta Academy in Malavli, India. The same is available as an e-learning course on www.elearning.vedantaworld.org. For any reason, those unable to take the e-learning course may study the four books in the following order: The Fall of the Human Intellect, Governing Business & Relationships, The Holocaust of Attachment and Vedanta Treatise: The Eternities. For further inquiries contact Ritika Jain at info@vedantausa.org or visit the website www.vedantaworld.org