



**WHAT IS LIFE
AND DETAILS OF LIFE**

Shri Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati

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WHAT IS LIFE
AND
DETAILS OF LIFE

By

Shri Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati



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[Colophon]

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Publisher's Note

It is an inexpressible joy to have a link with this uplifting writing, **WHAT IS LIFE, AND DETAILS OF LIFE**, for it gives me a most cherished link with revered SWAMI VISHNUDEVANAND SARASWATI. He is the embodiment of self knowledge, divine **life** and celestial bliss.

Each expression in this booklet is an invitation to immerse oneself into the ocean of spiritual awakening. These teachings are a much needed universal **torch** for spiritual aspirants of all faiths, and all religions. Not only to solve the problems of everyday practical **life**, but also to enlighten their path

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to Self-knowledge and God-realization.

I was born and raised in America. Since my childhood, I have been thirsting for India's Spiritual and Artistic Culture to illumine my **life**. In 1981, at the age of 15, I came in contact with Kripalu Yoga Ashram in Massachusetts, U.S.A. Since then I have been practicing Hatha yoga, Karma yoga and Meditation under the Supreme guidance of Shri Gurudev Yogiraj Amritjee Desai Maharaj, who is the founder and director of Kripalu Yoga Ashram. Finally, in 1989, God's compassionate grace and my Guru's Blessings brought me to India to study the subtle aspects of yoga and classical Indian music and dance from Swami Anantanand (Bhomlajee). He is one of Swami Vishnudevanand's senior most disciples. I have also had the great privilege to study sitar under the renowned Professor Banwarilaljee, Registrar of Prayag Sangeet Samity,

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Allahabad.

I forever hold deep reverence and humble gratitude in my heart for all my Indian Teachers, and especially for Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati for his priceless guidance and inspiration in my life. I pray to the Almighty Lord that all who come in contact with these precious teachings, may have a glimpse of the true nature of the Glorious Immortal Self, and live a life of luminosity.

Kymerly Peterson Le Mon

January 14th, 1991

On the Auspicious 88th Birthday of

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, my revered Guru, Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati has been talking of **life**, and composing lists of definitions of **life**. In June of 1990 he presented me with a bundle of papers containing his writings on **life** to organize into a single work. The longest continuous piece was entitled '**What is Life**' and was dated '19 August, 1986 (full moon)'. A second, smaller fragment bore the title '**Details of Life**' and the date '15 Sep. 1986'. Several other papers were also titled '**Details of Life**' without date. Some were rewrites of the same material and others were

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independent. In this booklet, the material from 'What is Life' comprises the first section, and selections from the other fragments fill the remainder.

Ultimately, **life** defies description; any attempt to rigorously define it inevitably leads to contradiction. The most that can be done is to indicate some of its aspects. Life may be conceived of in two different ways. From one point of view, **life** is the flicker of a moment, a brief time between birth and death characterized by rapid flux in fortune of body and state of mind. Yet seen in a deeper sense, **life** is a universal and fundamental principle, with neither origin nor end, which underlies and sustains all else. The apparent world is nothing but a projection of this **life** force, and living beings, from gods and men down to the lowliest microbes, are but puppets on its stage.

In this succinct work, Swami

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Vishnudevanandjee shows both aspects of **life**. Again and again he stresses that **life** is a play. Ignorance of this is the root of bondage. At its conclusion, he briefly indicates the means to liberation. May it provide inspiration and guidance to all sincere seekers who peruse its pages.

Swami Paramananda
Editor

November, 1990

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I

Q.: What is **Life**?

Though the answers are innumerable, here are a few:

1. **Life** is a play.
2. The *Infinite*, acting as the finite soul, is **life**.
3. **Life** is a search for Truth.
4. **Life** is evolution through millions of species.
5. **Life** is the accretion of experimentation's experience.
6. An *Unseen Power*, acting as the phenomenal universe, is **life**.
7. The interplay of substance and shadow, is **life**.

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8. The dance of existence and nonexistence, is **life**.
9. The mysterious interconnection between the real and the unreal, is **life**.
10. Appearing and disappearing, is **life**.
11. **Life** is a struggle between external and internal forces.
12. **Life** is a mixture of enjoyment and punishment.
13. **Life** is a journey from Mineral Kingdom to Vegetable Kingdom; from Vegetable Kingdom to Animal Kingdom; from Animal Kingdom to Mankind.
14. **Life** is a combination of happiness and misery, pain and pleasure.
15. That which underlies motion and rest, action and inaction, is **life**.
16. The **Unchanging** playing as the changing, is **life**.

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17. The cycle of birth and death, is **life**.

18. The confluence of the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, the unconscious mind and the superconscious mind, is **life**.
19. The transition from gross to subtle and from subtle to gross, is **life**.
20. That which exists in both dormant and active states, is **life**.
21. **Life** is a drama of creation, preservation and destruction.
22. **Life** is in light and sound, darkness and silence.
23. Power, or energy, is **life**.
24. A primordial urge for immortality, eternity, unlimited freedom and eternal wisdom, is **life**.
25. Something existing in rest and motion, light and darkness, is **life**.

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26. That which passes through semen to body and from body to semen, is **life**.
27. The cycle of seed to tree and tree to seed, of egg to bird and bird to egg, is **life**.
28. That which acts in the waking, dream and sound sleep states, and in the superconscious state, is **life**.
29. **Life** comes from **life** and as such, is **life**.
30. The transformation from known to unknown, and unknown to known, is **life**.
31. That which exists before the beginning, during the middle and after the end, is **life**.
32. The taste of, and distaste for, all happiness and misery in dearth and abundance, is **life**.
33. The alteration of mood in successes and failures, rises and falls, ups and downs, is **life**.

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34. That which acts through thought and language, but exists beyond mind and speech, is **life**.
35. That which is in earth, water, fire, air and ether, is **life**.
36. **Life** is everywhere, ubiquitous.

37. That which is in laughing and weeping, lamentation and consolation, is **life**.
38. That which is latent in perception, cognition and meditation, is **life**.
39. That which takes form and becomes formless, is **life**.
40. That which underlies the concrete and the abstract, is **life**.
41. The procession of enthusiasm, hope, aspiration and desperation, is **life**.
42. The states of impulse, desire, desirelessness and transcendence of desire, is **life**.

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43. A drama of anger, jealousy, falsehood, honesty, love, hate and cruelty, is **life**.
44. The changing of mood among passion, dispassion and compassion, is **life**.
45. **Life** is a ceaseless effort to solve the problems of perception and cognition.
46. **Life** is an unending attempt to resolve itself through Self-Realization.
47. **Life** is a continual struggle to attain immutable happiness and perpetual peace.
48. **Life** is a performance of spirit, revealing its glory through matter.
49. **Life** is a duet of matter and spirit.
50. **Life** is a search to find **life's** very own source and the cause of its misery.
51. **Life** is the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain.
52. That which transcends both matter and

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- nothingness, is **life**.
53. **Life** is a pageant of mind and intellect, reason and the transcendence of reason.
54. **Life** is a search for permanent freedom, beyond sensual slavery.
55. **Life** is a ceaseless quest for divine delight and Self-illumination.

56. In all expansion and beyond all contraction, is **life**.
57. **Life** is an expression of, and a reflection of, the *Supreme Reality*, which will return to its source.
58. Activity through the physical senses is material **life**; activity through the individual soul, identical with the spirit, is spiritual **life**.
59. Though the truth of **life** is incomparable, we may still compare it to the radiation of the sun, the gravitation of the earth or the field of a magnet, and may call it cosmic

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energy.

60. That which acts as the tangible and the intangible, is **life**.
61. **Life** is an attempt to attain permanent peace, perennial joy, unchanging wisdom and everlasting freedom through prayer, meditation, spiritual study and metaphysical dialectic.
62. Composition, disintegration, unity, diversity and multiplicity, is **life**.
63. In the world, people may discern life and lifelessness, birth and death, but in the spiritual sense, **life** is eternal and everywhere.
64. Though the physical body may be destroyed, no one can destroy the spiritual personality; thus **life** is eternal.
65. The play of the *One* in many and the many in *One*, is **life**.
66. The amphitheatre of healing and killing,

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is **life**.

67. **Life** is in both visible and invisible, acceptance and rejection.
68. Perception and cognition through the senses, is empirical **life**.
69. Sensual **life** is both a farce and a mysterious tragedy.
70. Family **life** is a mixture of pleasure and pain, kissing and kicking, a hilarious comedy.

71. The **life** of husband and wife is a sweet and simple, curious riddle but a ridiculous dilemma.
72. Corporeal **life** is perishable, subject to ruin in many ways, but spiritual **life** is imperishable.
73. The combination of comedy and tragedy, is **life**.
74. Though **life** has qualities, it is beyond

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qualification.

75. Cohabitation with the restless, peaceless mind, is **life**.
76. The quest for *nirvana*, is **life**.
77. The struggle to reach the *Ultimate Goal*, is **life**.
78. Disciplined **life** is beneficial and elevating but undisciplined **life** is detrimental and degrading.
79. Living with the superconscious mind is **life's** divine apogee.
80. The power of *Eternal Existence* acting mysteriously in the phenomenal world, is **life**.
81. A search for Self-contentment, Self-reliance and Self-confidence, is **life**.
82. "Eat, drink and be merry", is animalistic **life**.
83. Using the brain and reason to solve the

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problems of mankind, is human **life**.

84. Evolution of the soul through spiritual meditation, is transcendental **life**.
85. Love is **life**; beyond love is **life**.
86. The urge to live forever, is **life**.
87. The earnest desire for liberation, and struggle for it with heart and soul, spending all money, energy and time, in all conditions and in all places, is **life**.

88. Desirelessness is the **life** of liberation and emancipation.
89. In talking and acting, and beyond sound and silence, is **life**.
90. Eternal silence is eternal **life**, without quality or motion.
91. The interchanging of the changing and the unchanging, is **life**.
92. That which is with mind and beyond mind, with function and beyond

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function, is **life**.

93. **Life** is *plenum* without limitation of time and space.
94. We cannot get out of us what is not within us; something cannot come out of nothing; everywhere there is something in an unseen condition which is better than the best, greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest; this All-pervading, *Unseen Power*, is **life**.
95. Behind physical activity is a divine spiritual personality that is **life**.
96. **Life** is an endeavour to discover its source, the *Infinite Eternal Existence*, which is obscured by *maya*, insentient illusion.
97. **Life** is a battle to find the source of permanent happiness, immortality, perennial peace, unchanging wisdom and eternal freedom through experimentation in this laboratory of

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phenomena.

98. **Life** is a collision between the changing and the unchanging, the mortal and the immortal, the real and the unreal, the shadow and substance, and the insentient and the conscious.
99. **Life** is a mixture of tears of joy and tears of sorrow.
100. A search for Divinity beyond animality and humanity, is **life**.
101. A quest for unchanging freedom through eradication of misery, is **life**.

102. To walk the way to Heaven from hell, is **life**.
103. A search for the limitless from the limited, for the perfect from the imperfect, for certainty from uncertainty, for doubtlessness from doubt, is **life**.
104. The cycle of smiling to weeping and weeping to smiling, is **life**.

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105. The desire for women and money, or men and money, is **life**.
106. The evolution of perception, concept, imagination and Realization, is **life**.
107. **Life** is deceptive, fanciful and hallucinatory.
108. **Life** is a span of rises and falls, ups and downs, advances and retreats.

II

1. *God* is **life**; *God* is Love.
2. Love is **life**; **life** is Love.
3. **Life** comes from **life**.
4. **Life** is a mixture of conscience, intelligence and insentience.
5. **Life** is love between husband and wife,

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male and female.

6. **Life** is divine; **life** is immortal.
7. Do not debate whether matter or spirit is first; the egg or the bird is first; the seed or the tree is first; day or night is first.
8. **Life** is a combination of bitterness and sweetness.
9. **Life** is beginningless and endless.

10. If you really wish to understand the world you should understand your own self first: What is your real mind? What is consciousness? What underlies your consciousness?
11. The drama of **life** is construction, preservation, destruction and re-creation.
12. *God* is the cause of creation, preservation and destruction.
13. *God* is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient.

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14. *God* is Blissful, Peaceful and Beautiful.
15. *God* is dwelling in the hearts of all creatures, secretly playing as the individual soul.
16. **Life** is within time and space, and beyond time and space.
17. **Life** is a mixture of anxiety, perplexity, tranquillity and equanimity.
18. **Life** is a combination of Heaven and hell, nectar and poison, misery and happiness.

III

1. The Goal of **life** is *God*.
2. The value of **life** is freedom.
3. The secret of **life** is time rightly used for elevation of the soul.
4. The Glory of **life** is balance in physical and spiritual, strength and knowledge.

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5. **Life** without Self-knowledge is barren and bankrupt.
6. The perfection of **life** is emancipation.
7. A **life** of helping those in distress, is praiseworthy.
8. The pursuit of sensual enjoyment is animal **life**.
9. The quest for spiritual elevation is human **life**.

10. The signs of humane **life** are honesty, sincerity, love, affection and charity.
11. The greatness of **life** is service.
12. The aim of **life** is Self-Realization.
13. The stupidity of **life** is absorption in sensuality.
14. The wisdom of **life** is following the paths of great souls.
15. The consummation of **life** is liberation.
16. **Life** is a mysterious opportunity to enter

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the burial ground.

17. **Life** is an exhibition of the illusory power of an infinite juggler.
18. **Life** is eternal hope with unlimited scope.

IV

Life is a play. An *Infinite Unseen Power* is playing as the finite soul. The *Unseen* becomes manifest in atomic form. The *Unseen* projects the seen and the seen reflects the *Unseen*. **Life** appears and disappears, cycling from subtle to gross and gross to subtle; from seed to tree and from tree to seed; from egg to bird and from bird to egg. When the seed grows and takes the form of a plant or a tree, its potency remains throughout in subtle form, in the leaves, branches and flowers. As the fruit

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ripen, the seed appears once more. Nothing is destroyed through the annihilation of name and form. Appearance and disappearance is only the play of the *Unseen Power*, which sustains every atom in the universe.

Life begins its creation with the ether, followed in succession by air, fire, water and earth. It first creates the mineral kingdom, then the vegetable, the animal and ultimately man.

God is the reality behind all **life**. *God* or the *Self* is *Existence Absolute*, *Knowledge Absolute* and *Bliss Absolute*. It exists in *Its* glory throughout the past, the present and the future.

Man is not only a rational being in physical form; real man is immortal, eternal in his fundamental nature. Man is the ultimate creation of the universe. He is an intelligent

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animal who must try to solve the problem of **life** through reason, and thereby pass beyond reason.

While you are watching television, on millions of other receivers, people are enjoying the same broadcast. Only a single person is dancing and singing at the station, though his image appears on numerous screens. In the sensory world, the one *Unseen Power* manifests in every name and form.

Life may be compared to water which circulates from sky to earth and earth to sky. Rain falling on the highest peaks is crystal clear, but as it flows downward it gathers pollutants and loses its transparency. Similarly, during **life**, the mind accumulates confusion and loses sight of its real nature, beauty and glory. Most rivers meander widely on their way to the sea; most lives are perturbed by multitudinous thoughts and

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activities in different times, places and circumstances. The mind is the cause of happiness and misery, birth and death, attachment and indifference, bondage and liberation.

Life subsists in the waking state with the gross body and the conscious mind, in the dream state with the subtle body and the subconscious mind, in dreamless sleep with the causal body and the unconscious mind, and in the transcendental state with the cosmic body and the superconscious mind. In this final state one becomes liberated and one's character becomes charged with Divine Realization.

A Self-Realized soul lives in this changing, illusory world like a boat floating on the water. Though immersed in the world of phenomena, he does not allow this world to enter his heart. He remains detached like a

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skillful actor in the drama of the world.

The mind is the most mysterious power in the world. Its nature can be fathomed only through meditation, through devotion or through annihilation of the ego. Thereafter, one can realize the *Inner Self*, the *Infinite Ultimate Reality* of the universe. Anyone who has realized the *Supreme Truth* through spiritual practice is free of anxiety, tension and confusion.

There is an *All-pervading, Infinite Power* in this universe which is *One*, without a second. That *One, Infinite Power*, in the hearts of all creatures, acts as the individual soul. Thus reflected, *It* plays the part of the mind. The mind has no power of its own but acts through power borrowed from the soul. The mind

is the agent of *maya*. It is neither real, nor unreal, nor a mixture of the two, but mysterious. When one perceives it, it appears real, but

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when it disappears, it seems unreal.

The *Infinite Power* may be conceived of as with quality or as without quality. The mind is the intermediary between body and soul. It creates, destroys, and creates once more. It is a most elusive power in the sensory world.

However, one may penetrate the mystery of the mind by continuously thinking a single thought or by trying not to think at all. In this way, one becomes master of one's mind and becomes acquainted with the superconscious mind. One separates oneself from the physical body and enters *samadhi*, the transcendental state.

The practice of concentration requires great mental energy. Nobody who does not observe *Brahmacarya*, sexual restraint, can attain knowledge of the *Self*, or *God*. Anyone attaining Self-knowledge is ever free from the

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lure of sensual pleasure, because Self-knowledge gives the highest happiness along with perpetual peace, immutable wisdom and eternal freedom. A Self-Realized person is endowed with Self-control, Self-contentment, Self-confidence and unbounded joy.

HARI OM TAT SAT

[Inside Back Cover]

Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati was born in a Brahmin family at Calcutta in 1904, but soon he lost his parents and grew up with relatives in the villages of Bengal. With an inner knowing that something lay beyond his meagre life, at nineteen he set forth and travelled all over India, seeking the Ultimate Truth. At the 1930 Kumbha Mela, he met his Guru, Yogiraj Handiya Baba, under whose guidance he practised yoga fervently and realized the Supreme Truth in 1934.

Since then, with good health and perceptive mind, Swamiji has been enjoying a Celestial Life, filled with deep Inner Contentment, Discipline and Unbounded Joy, free of worldly attachment.

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The website for Kali Mandir in Laguna Beach, California:

<https://www.kalimandir.org>

The Kali Mandir Satsang Podcast:

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The Kali Mandir Youtube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1_qVIQdvl1xgnFbm0EH6ZA

The blogs of Swamis Bhajanananda and Ambikananda Saraswati:

<https://www.cyberdhuni.org>

The website for Swami Paramananda Saraswati:

<http://welcomehome.org/swamip/>

The blog of Brahmachari Tejasananda Chaitanya:

<http://www.goddessdevotion.com/>