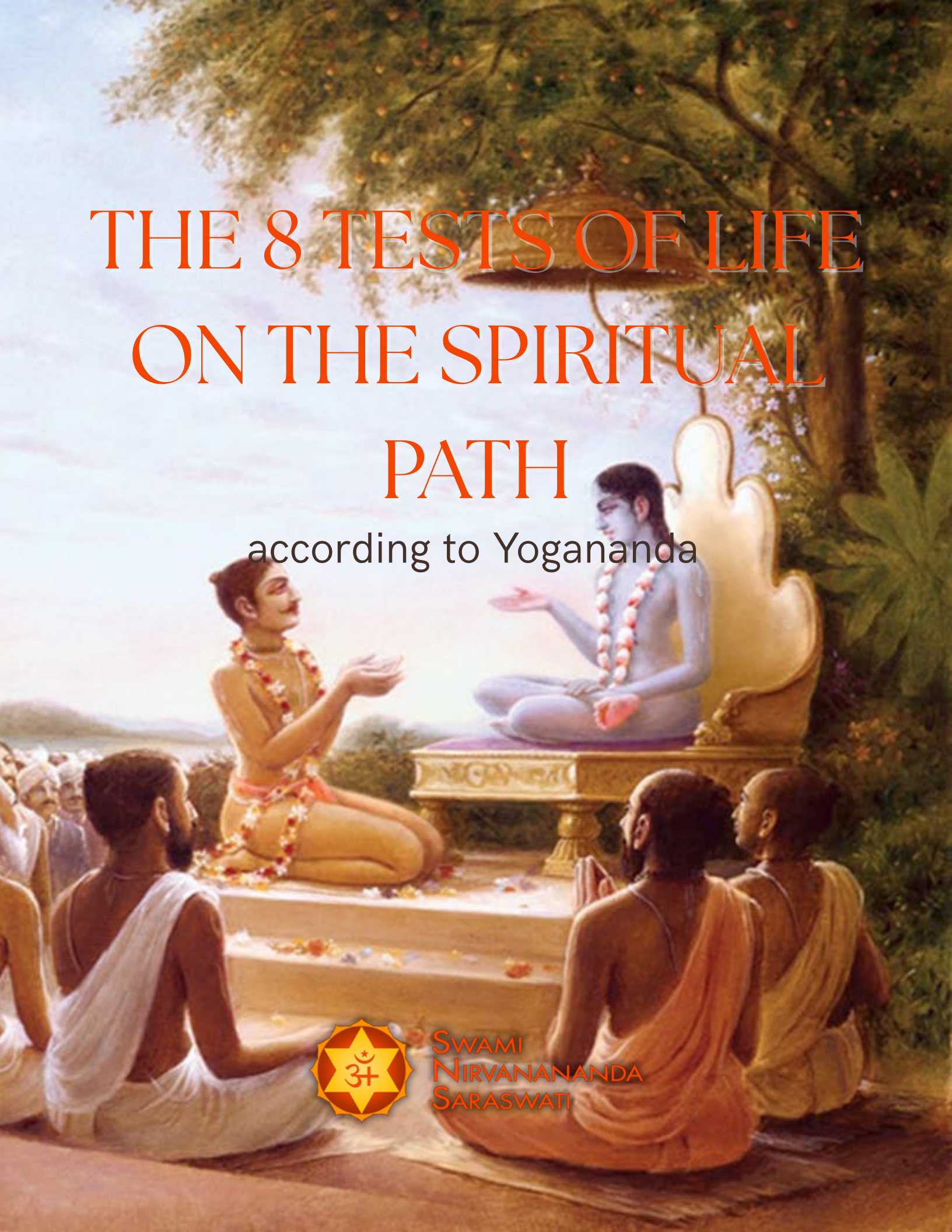


THE 8 TESTS OF LIFE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

according to Yogananda



SWAMI
NIRVANANANDA
SARASWATI

THE 8 TESTS OF LIFE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

– according to Yogananda

Many times, the tests we have to face in life seem endless. As soon as we overcome one, a new test appears in our life that is even more difficult. Sometimes we mistakenly think that they could be punishments in response to negative karmic behaviors.

But it could also be something very different: what if they were spiritual tests designed to awaken the Divine in us?

P. Yogananda said that no soul reaches its goal without having to pass tests. Tests are not accidental, nor are they obstacles designed to block us. Rather, they are like the blows of a chisel that the sculptor uses to shape his work and reveal the hidden luminosity of the soul. In fact, the path to enlightenment is not given for free, but through the tests of fire that transform us into an indestructible being.

One day a young disciple asked Yogananda: “Master, why is life filled with suffering?? Why do we have to endure so much pain??” Smiling, Yogananda picked up a stone from the ground and asked, “Do you want to remain like this stone, raw and inert in the darkness?” The student remained silent. Then Yogananda continued, “Just as gold must be forged by fire before it can shine, so the soul too must pass its tests before it can express its purity. If you seek the light, you need not fear the flames.”

Then the student understood that his sufferings were not meaningless and that his torments were not meaningless. In fact, the struggles were shaping him and improving him. So, we all must pass

tests: tests of faith, of patience, of surrender; all tests will show if we are capable of transcending the illusion of the world.

These are the 8 main tests that every seeker must pass before reaching the supreme truth.

Are we prepared to face them??

Test 1. The Illusion of Comfort and Convenience.

There is a hidden test that many of us do not recognize. It does not seem to be a great difficulty or a terrible loss. Instead, it comes in the guise of comfort and convenience. It is like a sweet golden prison that accompanies the soul to sleep. Yogananda warned that comfort is the subtlest but most dangerous obstacle on the spiritual path. The soul that seeks rest before awakening will never reach the supreme goal.

One day a seeker who lived in comfort came to Yogananda. He was rich, healthy and admired by all. However, something inside him made him restless. So, he asked Master, “I have everything I want, but I feel that something is missing. Why?”

Then Yogananda replied, “If you live in comfort without growing, then it means that you are spiritually asleep.”

The seeker was confused and asked, “Isn’t comfort a sign that I have done everything right?”

The Master replied, “Perhaps the body feels relief, but is your soul awakened? Comfort is not the goal of life. In fact, it is a great test. If you get stuck there, you will never rise. But if you use it as a steppingstone to continue, then you will awaken.”

Then the seeker realized that his peace was not true peace, but stagnation. He had confused quiet with enlightenment and relief with

realization. This is a test that many people will have to face. When life becomes easy, then your growth stops. Without growth there is no awakening, without tests there is no transformation. We are not born to have comfort as our goal, but transcendence.

(Davis asking Yogananda about all the saints he had described in his Autobiography – The Rich Man Who Asks Jesus What He Must Do to Reach the Kingdom of Heaven)

Test 2. The Storm of Doubt.

There is a test that strikes the heart of every seeker. A shadow that infiltrates just as the light is about to reveal itself. Doubt does not come from outside, but arises within us, whispering questions that shake the foundations of our faith. The real battle is not against the world, but against distrust in the Divine. Doubt is the mind that tries to grasp what is known, resisting the unknown, demanding proof of what can only be realized. This too is a test that all souls must pass before they can achieve true realization.

One evening a disciple sat before Yogananda with a heart full of uncertainty. “Master, I want to believe, but my mind is full of questions. What if all this is just imagination? And I am deceiving myself?”

Yogananda did not answer him with words, instead he grabbed a candle and gently blew out the flame. The whole room was dark and the disciple watched in silence. Then Yogananda said, “Can the flame exist without the wick? The flame is your faith, and the wick is the desire of your soul. As long as the desire for God is alive in you, then doubt can never consume you.”

Then the disciple realized that doubt can only exist if faith struggles, that it is not the end of the path, but only part of the journey.

“Now I ask you: close your eyes and ask yourself, do I believe in the Divine even without seeing the path?? Is your heart always yearning for Truth??? If so, then doubt is but a storm before the dawn. Keep walking, the light is waiting for you.”

(Yogananda telling Davis to walk without ever looking back, but going all the way, he can reach it.)

Test 3. The awakening of desires.

The world is full of treasures: wealth, admiration, and love. We chase them, thinking they will give us peace. But the more we try to grasp them, the more they slip through our fingers, leaving us empty, longing, and bound. Yogananda warned that the test of desire is an invisible chain that binds the soul to illusion. If the world owns your heart, then you are a slave to illusion.

One day a man approached Yogananda, torn between his spiritual path and the attachments of the world. He confessed, “Master, I desire enlightenment, but I am afraid of losing everything.”

Yogananda looked at him with compassion and said, “You are hanging on to a rope, but don’t you see that you are already free.”

“What do you mean, Master?”

“You think you are tied to your wealth, your reputation, your desires, but tell me, who holds whom? Is your soul bound by the world? Or are you clinging to the world and not wanting to leave it?”

Then the man realized that he was not afraid of losing his possessions, but he was afraid of losing his identity, the false sense of self

built on all those attachments. This is the real test of desires. Really they are only distractions that divert the soul from its supreme goal.

“Then I ask you: What are the attachments that prevent you from experiencing freedom? Are you afraid of losing something? Are you not realizing that true freedom is found in surrender?”

“Close your eyes. Breathe. Imagine yourself leaving everything in your heart. Then realize that you have never been bound. You have always been free.”

Test 4. The solitude on the path.

There comes a time when the seeker looks around and realizes that he is walking alone. The conversations that once excited him are now empty. The desires that once burned are now dying out. The world is moving in one direction while the soul is being pulled in the opposite direction. This is one of the most difficult tests: solitude. As you walk toward the light, many will not follow, but do not stop, for the goal is well worth the solitude.

P. Yogananda knew this test well. In fact, he left behind him the comforts of home, the love of his family and the expectations of society. His journey took him through misunderstandings, rejections and even resistance from those who could not understand his vision. Nevertheless, he continued, for the call of the Divine was much stronger than the voices of the world.

One day a disciple approached Yogananda with sadness in his eyes. “Master, I feel so alone on the path, friends don’t understand me, family thinks I’ve changed, I feel like a stranger among my own people.”

Smiling, Yogananda asked him gently, “Tell me, when the sun rises, does the moon lament that it must be darkened? You are not alone. The entire universe moves with you. The stars that light the night, the breath that moves in your body, the silence of meditation, these are all your companions. And one day, when you shine, others will see your light and walk beside you. This is the test of spiritual isolation. Not everyone will understand your journey. Many will leave you, while others will question your choices, but do not feel discouraged, the silence you feel is not empty, it’s only a space created for something greater. So, I ask you, have you ever felt separated from the world? Is your soul called elsewhere? Then know that you are never truly alone. The Divine is always with you, and on the day when the time is ripe, then you will find others who walk the same path as you do.”

Test 5. Dealing with the ego.

The greatest enemy of the spiritual seeker is not the external world but within himself. The ego does not appear as an external force, but whispers internally trying to seduce the mind with subtle illusions. You are special, you are more awakened than others, you have risen more than others. And at that moment the path is lost. The ego whispers: You are special but the sage answers, I am nothing and in nothingness I am everything.

One day a disciple came to P. Yogananda with his chest puffed out with pride. “Master,” he said, “I have meditated for years, I have read all the Holy Scriptures, I have had experiences of visions, I am certain that I have reached enlightenment.”

Yogananda smiled, saying nothing. Then in silence Yogananda handed him a broom, saying: “For a year clean the floor of the temple, clean every corner, remove the dust every day, as if you were removing your presumption.”

The disciple was astonished, expecting praise, recognition and confirmation of his progress, but instead he was given the most menial job. In the first few weeks his mind rebelled, thinking: why should I, a seeker of truth, a knower of wisdom be reduced to a mere cleaner?? But as the months passed, something within him changed, with every sweep of the broom he began to see the ego in the dust that covered him inside. When he finally returned to Yogananda, his pride was gone. He bowed deeply and said: “Master, now I understand, I am nothing and in nothingness I am free.”

“This is the test of the ego, the desire to be recognized, to be someone on the spiritual path. This is the ultimate illusion. So, I ask you, can you abandon the need to be someone? To be recognized? Then you will see that true enlightenment is not in becoming greater, but in dissolving completely.”

Test 6. The test of suffering.

There is a test that no soul can escape: the test of suffering. It comes without warning, breaking the illusions, we cling to, taking away everything familiar. It comes as a loss, a betrayal, as difficulty or pain. And then we ask ourselves Why must I suffer?? Instead, Yogananda taught that this is the wrong question. Do not ask yourself: why must I suffer, but ask yourself instead: what does this suffering teach me??

Every Master or enlightened Soul has gone through suffering. Even Yogananda himself was not spared; he had to face the criticism of those who couldn't understand him. He was also betrayed by those he believed in, he endured the pain of separation from those he loved, but he remained steadfast because he knew that suffering was not a punishment, but a test, a purification of fire.

One day a man came to Yogananda with a heart full of pain. "Master, he asked, why is life so painful? Why does God allow so much suffering?" Yogananda did not answer, instead he took a piece of coal and threw it into the fire. The heat enveloped the piece of coal and transformed it. Then Yogananda asked, "Will this piece of coal become a diamond without the heat?"

Then the man understood for the first time that pain had reshaped him into something much greater. "This is the test of suffering, the moment when life seems unbearable, when everything falls apart. But if you endure, then you will see that nothing has really fallen apart. Everything will fall into place. So, I ask you, what hardship has molded you into what you have become now? Close your eyes and review your struggles. Can you see now? The fire was not meant to destroy you, but to transform you."

Test 7. The Distractions of Powers and Siddhis. There is a proof that appears as a gift. When a seeker progresses on the spiritual path, then something special happens, new abilities awaken, intuition sharpens, visions come, the ability to send energies to influence the unseen and to manifest certain results that become real

happens. Yogananda therefore warned: “These are not rewards, but tests. Many seek the power of God, but few seek God to love Him.”

A disciple came to Yogananda one day excited about his new abilities. “Master,” he said, “I can read thoughts, I can see pictures of the future, surely this means I am close to enlightenment.”

Then Yogananda silently gave him a feather, saying: “Hold it in the palm of your hand and blow it away.” The disciple obeyed, making the feather fly in the air.

“Very good,” said Yogananda, “now, can you take away your pride so simply?” Then the disciple understood that the test of powers is a test of humility. The moment a seeker thinks he is special because of his abilities, then he has already fallen into delusion.

Once upon a time there was a man who devoted himself to deep meditation. In time he had visions, deep insights and the power to influence the energies around him, but as his powers grew, so did his pride. He began to think of himself as a being superior to others.

When he came to Yogananda boasting of his spiritual gifts, the Master said, “A flower does not advertise its fragrance, it simply exists in its beauty.” The seeker had been so focused on his gifts that he had completely forgotten the true goal, which is not power but surrender, not miracles but God.

Then he asked him: “Are you attracted to spirituality for wisdom or for power?? Close your eyes, look inside yourself, if all the gifts, all the progress were taken away from you, would you continue on the spiritual path? Then you will know whether you are seeking the truth or just its reflection.”

Test 8. The Final Test: Surrender.

There is a final test which is the most difficult. It does not come with suffering, nor with power, but it comes in stillness, in silence, in the moment when the seeker has given everything, but still God has not revealed Himself. This is the test where you have to abandon everything, even the desire for enlightenment itself. You must leave your longings, your searches, your deep self, only then will the Divine reveal Himself to you.

A devotee once came to Yogananda, his heart heavy with expectations. “Master, I have done everything, I have meditated for years, I have chanted, I have fasted, I have served and prayed, why do I still not see God??”

With infinite love Yogananda gently placed his hand on the devotee’s heart, whispering, “Why do you still think there is a ‘you’ who has to find Him??” The devotee’s breath stopped and suddenly he understood.

“As long as you desire enlightenment, you are separate from it. As long as you cling to the idea that you are a seeker, you remain separate from that which you seek. This is the final test.

Can you abandon the seeking too? Can you free yourself from the need of achievement? Can you cease to cling to God? and simply dissolve into Him?

Now I ask you: take a deep breath, let go of all your expectations, let go of all striving, let go of all ideas that there is something to be achieved. Then tell me, what is left when all is let go? If you are truly

silent, truly empty, then you will see that God has never been hidden, He has always been here.

You can look back on your life and see the trials that have broken you, moments of doubt that have consumed you, losses that have left you empty, but looking at them now with new eyes: can you see the Truth?? These trials were never punishments, they were doors. Every difficulty, every yearning, every moment of suffering was never meant to break you down, but to make you always rise higher. Every trial you faced, every moment of doubt, every loss was preparing you for something much greater.”

P. Yogananda taught that God does not put obstacles in our path to defeat us, but to awaken us. “All the loneliness you have felt taught you that God alone is the only constant. The trials you have faced have molded you into something unshakable, and now you stand here, not as a failure, but as someone who has been perfected, someone who has been prepared for something greater that you can now see.

Close your eyes, feel the weight of your journey, all the moments that have brought you here, the battles you have fought, the illusions you have cast off. Can you feel it? You are not alone, you never were. These trials are not here to stop you, but to set you free. Now I ask you, will you continue to walk to the goal? Will you believe that each trial has brought you exactly where you meant to be?”

“I myself am joy and nothing else, I myself am changeless consciousness, I myself am everywhere, I am Brahman and nothing else”.

