

Spread good energy - it's contagious

happinez

EXTRA
GIFT
CARDS

from the
heart

Everything is Connected

How to Say Yes & No

Back After a Burnout

Moon Signs

Surprising Insights About Sleep

"Heartful" Living Skills

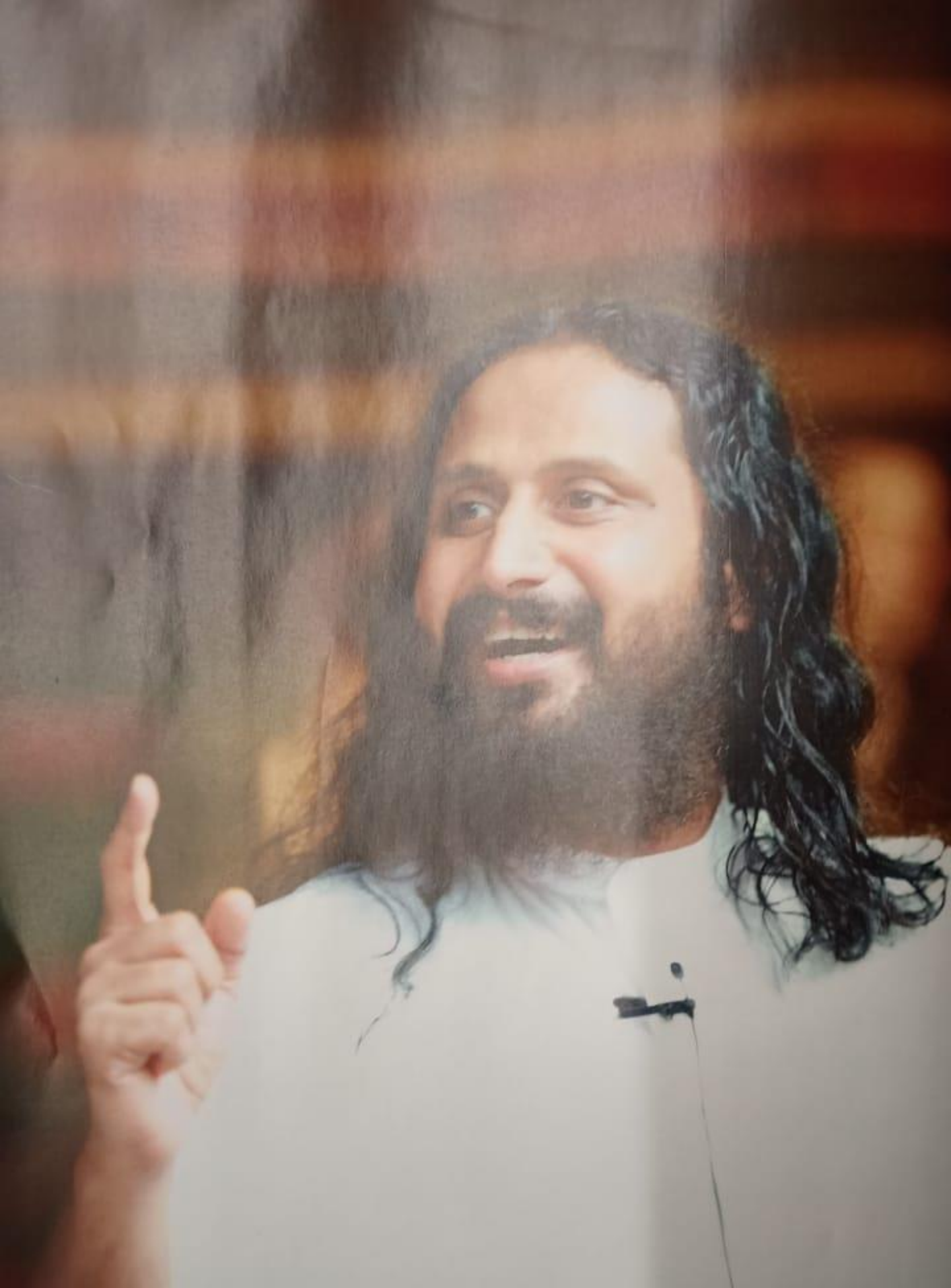
Open Your Third Eye

Swami Jyothirmayah: "Everything starts with a peaceful mind"

ISSUE 17



CA \$5
US \$7.99
CAN \$7.99
UK \$11.50
AU \$11.99
NZ \$11.99





Swami Jyothirmayah

“Everything starts with a peaceful, calm mind”

Indian yoga master Swami Jyothirmayah radiates an infectious lightness of being. His swami name, given to him twelve years ago by his guru, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, means ‘full of light.’ His favorite mantra is, *“Life is joy! Celebrate life, breathe deeply and smile.”*

TEXT **MARIJE DE JONG** PHOTOGRAPHY **ART OF LIVING**

'Whether you're having a small, intimate meditation session with him or hearing him speak in a gym to a crowd of hundreds, you can still feel his energetic presence anywhere. Whenever Swami Jyothirmayah shows up, something happens. It's not just his Jesus-like appearance, with his white robe and long dark hair, that makes heads turn in his direction. It's his radiant smile. the spring in his step and his personality—gentle, almost shy. One fine spring evening, I meet the swami for the first time in a small yoga studio in Utrecht, a city in the Netherlands. Daylight savings time has just begun, and the people outside are making the most of that extra hour of light. Inside, some fifty people are seated on a stage; the light is diffuse. The silence feels almost sacred. We meditate, sing mantras (I've never heard them before but find myself joining in after just a few minutes), and finally the swami gives us his blessings. He is so attentive and full of love that i go home recharged.

At our second meeting, just over a year later, I'm one of the hundreds of people seated on yoga mats in the large hall. Swami Jyothirmayah winds his way between the mats and onto the stage, almost dancing—both strong and vulnerable. The three hour session files by, as we move between moods of elation and moments of reserve. He likes to put us on the wrong foot—even literally, when he challenges us to form a line and hop around the room, alternating our left and right legs. Then suddenly he says, "Now lift up both your legs." As he bursts into laughter, we get the joke: He wants us to feel how light we are when we laugh and you're in the moment.

Arriving at our destination

He might easily never have become Swami Jyothirmayah. Until the age of twenty-four, he was a "left-brain person," as he puts it: analytical, rational and satisfied with his life in a provincial town in southwest India, where he lived with his parents. grand-parents and two brothers. That changed radically when he saw a poster announcing an evening meditation class. The look in the eyes of the man on the poster hit him like a bolt of lightning. It turned out to be the spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who was holding a public meditation session that evening. "I had never meditated and wasn't looking for a guru at all," Swami Jyothirmayah says. "But it was inescapable, like a voice calling to me deep inside. That moment, as I stood there in the open air listening to Sri Sri and learned about his movement Art of Living, I knew I had found my destiny. He radiates a caring quality, and his words went straight to my heart. I felt light and happy and also safe." He decided to leave his village and devote the rest of his life to the Art of Living. These days, traveling Europe and Middle East in the footsteps of the man who inspired him, he is now the one changing lives with his joy, cheerfulness and wisdom.

WHAT IS SKY BREATHING?

SKY breathing (an abbreviation for Sudarshan Kriya Yoga) is a cycle of powerful rhythmic breathing exercises developed by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in the 1990s. The full kriya includes several rounds of long, medium and short in and out breaths. Doing the exercises (or some of them) in the morning makes you calmer and more energetic for the rest of the day.

Monkey mind

The swami comes to Amsterdam after visiting Oslo and Berlin And before traveling on to Budapest and Barcelona. Wherever He goes he gives a three-day course to teach people the SKY breathing cycle developed by Sri Sri (see above), which can have an enormous impact on physical and mental health. "What wears us out is not physical exertion. but our monkey mind, which thinks around 50,000 thoughts a day." he explains. "Of course, most people's lives are very challenging. There's pressure at work, stress and difficult situations—that's almost unavoidable. But what you can influence is how you respond to those challenges. Conscious breathing is one important tool for dealing with stress. Breathing gives you vital life energy, or prana. If your prana is high, you can do so much more. Did you know that most people use only a third of their breathing capacity? Their breathing is superficial, and they don't breathe out properly, when in fact it's crucial to exhale toxic substances. "Your breath and your mood are interconnected. When you're angry, you breathe very quickly, more in than out. And when you're sad, your breathing is slow and shallow. But it also works the other way around. If you learn how to soothe your chattering mind with your breath, then you'll feel calmer. You'll sleep better and deeper and work faster. There are proven advantages, known as the four i's. You'll be more innovative. intuitive. inspired and intelligent, meaning your powers of discernment will grow sharper."

All we have is now

"Life is joy! Celebrate life! Smile!" He repeats his message with an enthusiasm that seems inexhaustible. But he's never pushy or heavy-handed, and the sessions are also filled with humor and laughter. He likes to present his life lessons in the form of practical jokes. For example, he has us dance to exhilarating Asian music, until it suddenly stops. That's how life is too, he says; you never know when the music will stop. "we on't know how much time we have left", he says. "This moment is what we have. So we'd better enjoy it." In fact, he adds. "It's not important how long we live on this planet. What matters is how we live."



Suppose you lead a miserable existence for 120 years and don't do anything to enrich other people's lives? How much is your long life worth then? "Or the other way around: if your life is short, but full of joy and confidence and you contribute to other people's happiness, then your life has meaning. There's no point in being worried and fearful. We simply don't know what the next moment will bring, let alone the next few months. It's also pointless to dwell on the past and think, 'Why did this happen to me? Why didn't I do that?' Guilty feelings drain too much of our energy, and you can't change the past anyway. You should do yourself the favor of spending less time on the past and future and living more in the now, just like a child. That leads to all sorts of good things, like enthusiasm, clarity and inner peace. I'm not saying it's always easy. But that's what meditation and breathing exercises are for."

Rippling with laughter

He smiles—just as he's constantly urging other people to do. "The source of happiness is in ourselves," he says. "Sometimes we forget and go looking for it in the outside world. That can bring temporary relief, but not anything permanent. Because nothing is permanent. Not the weather, not ideas and not relationships. But deep inside is something that doesn't change—it's who you are. Your essence, your spirit, your soul, that is immortal. The more you can be yourself, the more you'll have a smile on your face. People sometimes ask, 'if laughter is so natural, why don't we do it all day?' It's because of stress,

"What's Important is not how long you live, but how well"

WHAT IS THE ART OF LIVING FOUNDATION?

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar founded The Art of Living Foundation in 1981. This non-religious movement, run by volunteers, is involved in worldwide initiatives related to health, education, sustainable development, conflict resolution and humanitarian disaster relief. One of its cornerstone activities is stress reduction. Art of Living offers courses in 152 countries worldwide. They focus on breathing techniques, yoga, meditation and practical recommendations for daily living. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has received countless international honors for his beneficial work and ideas. artofliving.org

"Looking for happiness outside of yourself can bring temporary relief, but not anything permanent"

because so much is asked of us. But laughter is our natural state. Every one of us was once a happy, carefree child. Research shows that small children laugh more than four hundred times a day, adolescents around forty times and some adults not at all for days on end." He bursts into rippling laughter. "It only takes four facial muscles to smile. Four! But you need seventy-two to scowl or frown. So it makes a lot more sense to laugh and smile. If you get into the habit of laughing more often and know how to control your mind, you can return to a care-free, childlike state. That will naturally lead to a calm mind, even in difficult times."

Apparently, those of us in the group still look a little skeptical. because he continues to advise us: "The most important thing is not to be at the mercy of anyone else's opinions. One day someone will say something that makes you happy, and the next day someone will say something disparaging, and you'll feel awful. The more you compare your own life to other people's, the further you'll stray from yourself. So remember: your life is not about some other person's opinion. You are a unique and complete human being. Don't get me wrong—you can learn from other people, but in the end, you have to follow your own path. your own heart. When I was about seven years old, people asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. In the region where I come from, the usual answer for boys to give is software engineer. But I said, 'I want to travel the world.' Come on, they said. that's impossible. But i insisted: this is my dream. If your dream comes from within, then you can make it come true. That's how the Universe works. Of course, you have to put some effort into it. You have to be motivated, creative and willing to make sacrifices. In my case, i had to leave home, learn English, spend years cleaning toilets, read a lot and learn. Everything starts with a calm, peaceful mind.' You can work: on that by searching for the silence in yourself."

Embrace

For twelve years now, Swami Jyothirmayah has been traveling the world as a shining example to others. You become a swami when you're ready to serve society, without any expectations. With no more than fifteen pounds of luggage in his backpack, he visits some thirty countries a year. "That backpack was my apartment, I always say. Everything I own is in there. It was

recently stolen, and then I had absolutely nothing. The next day I gave a meditation workshop in a prison, where it was pretty cold. I was shivering, and I told the story of the stolen backpack. One of the men wanted to give me his shoes. Another one—a big, burly man covered with tattoos — came and stood in front of me. He said, 'All I have to give you is this.' And then he hugged me. One by one. the men came forward to give me a hug. It was so heartwarming. "Most prisoners aren't hardened criminals." he continues "Many are victims of their own emotions. At some point they lost control and hurt somebody, and some have to spend years paying for it. Not just in prison. But also in society some people don't know how to get out of their problems. They're imprisoned in their heads. Often they've tried all kinds of things, sometimes even moving to a new city. But you always take yourself with you. The only way to break the cycle is by working on yourself. Thousands of Art of Living volunteers are trying to make a difference that way." Someone in the audience asks if he still sees his family regularly. Again, that disarming smile. "Every human being is family to me; Everyone is a part of me. I am part of everybody. Even if we don't speak each other's language or have different skin colors, we all live on the same planet, we all breathe in the same air and we all feel the light of the same sun. You don't have to lead the same kind of life as i do, obviously. But we're all responsible for Mother Nature. because we arise from nature and return to it. Once you realize that, there's no time to dwell on the past. Then you wake up to reality." 