

Theme - Life Skills: Focused on Improving Self-Awareness, Developing Empathy, and More

Yogamritananda Swamiji joined Amma's ashram in 1990 after working for four years in marketing at Smith Kline. Since then, he has inspired individuals from college students to defense officers and corporate teams through his introduction of IAM meditation. He regularly conducts motivational sessions for students across India of various age groups. He currently serves at the Amritapuri center in Mauritius, continuing to inspire people with the message: "Listen to your heart. Have goals. Make plans. Work hard, and work with love and awareness."

Yogamritananda Swamiji shared that he completed a Bachelor of Science at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, in the first batch to receive a degree under its newly established university status. After graduating, he applied to various fields, including the defense services and management training positions, but without clear direction at that time. Eventually, he joined Smith Kline and worked there for four years before meeting Amma. After seeing Amma, he resigned in December 1989 and joined the ashram in 1990.

He described how, in the earlier years, access to information was limited compared to today. There were no digital devices, and television was only just becoming common. During his visits to colleges and institutions, he often spent long hours in libraries, reading about psychology and life skills. He compiled extensive handwritten notes, organized by themes such as awareness, stress, and personality development.

Together with a team of a few others, he began visiting schools and interacting with children. For older students, he often introduced a psychological self-assessment based on Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences - such as visual-spatial, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, and naturalistic intelligence. This helped students understand more about themselves and served as an icebreaker. He also addressed lifestyle habits and challenges faced by youth.

He shared a story he once heard during Amma's birthday celebrations. While preparing general accommodation arrangements, a guest speaker from Harvard University visited the nearby college and gave a talk. The speaker shared the example of a woman who began baking cheesecakes on her kitchen floor and, through dedication, eventually built a successful business. When asked what

contributed most to her success - hard work or product quality - the speaker said that above all, she listened to her heart.

This message impacted Yogamritananda Swamiji deeply. He emphasized to students that before choosing a career, one must listen to the heart and identify one's true passion. When the heart and mind work together, life does not feel monotonous, creativity flows, and work becomes fulfilling. He summarized success in three principles:

1. Have a goal.
2. Make plans.
3. Work hard.

Having a goal and plan is not enough without sincere effort.

He also shared the story of a neurosurgeon who confessed that although he was skilled and respected, his true passion had been painting. The surgeon succeeded, but his heart belonged elsewhere. Swamiji encouraged students to discover their true calling early, so that life becomes an expression of joy rather than duty alone.

He then introduced self-awareness as a foundational life skill. Everyone knows superficial things about themselves - name, family, background - but deeper awareness means understanding one's strengths, potential, and also one's limitations and negative tendencies. No one is perfect. Individuals may struggle with anger, jealousy, or various desires. Becoming aware of these tendencies is the first step to transforming them.

He shared an analogy Amma uses:

A floor that appears clean may still hold dirt. Only when wiped with a white cloth does the hidden dirt become visible. Similarly, through meditation and awareness practices, deeper patterns arise into awareness. This is a natural part of spiritual growth - not something to be discouraged by. Just as during the churning of the ocean in mythology, poison surfaced first before nectar, our negativities appear before transformation occurs. With patience and practice, the mind gradually learns to remain in the present moment, where concentration, creativity, and efficiency are highest.

He explained that Amma patiently supports everyone through this process, knowing that every person carries both strengths and hidden weaknesses. Spiritual practice is not for the already perfect, but for those who are growing.

Yogamritananda Swamiji continued by emphasizing the importance of increasing self-awareness. As one becomes more aware of the deeper self, genuine confidence naturally arises. However, he clarified that in this context he was speaking about psychological self-confidence, not the ultimate spiritual confidence rooted in awareness of the Self beyond body, mind, and intellect.

He shared ten core indicators of healthy, functional self-confidence as commonly recognized in psychology:

1. Clear Direction and Values

One knows what is important, what one wants, and where one intends to go in life.

2. Motivation

One enjoys the work one is doing and becomes absorbed in it without being easily distracted.

3. Emotional Stability

One remains calm and steady when interacting with others and handling challenges.

Swamiji noted that modern education tends to focus primarily on IQ, but success in real life also depends on EQ (Emotional Quotient) and even SQ (Spiritual Quotient). For example, a manager must be able to handle stress and solve problems with maturity and empathy—not merely have intellectual ability.

4. Optimism

One views failure as a stepping stone to growth. Failure is not the opposite of success but part of the process. He emphasized the need for young people to be taught how to cope with failure, rather than being pressured only to achieve results.

He observed that in many places, especially when preparing for rigorous exams, students face overwhelming pressure. If not supported emotionally, the stress becomes harmful. Optimism allows one to face challenges with resilience.

He then connected this to the work of youth groups such as AYUDH, noting that even helping one young person to face life with strength is meaningful. Amma

reminds that every single life uplifted is valuable, even if the impact is not widespread immediately.

5. Self-awareness

Understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, and potential.

6. Flexibility

Being adaptable rather than rigid. He illustrated with a humorous example of people continuing straight on a path without adjusting even when there is a clear better alternative. Life requires flexibility to adjust to circumstances.

7. Eagerness to Grow

Treating every day as a learning experience and stretching oneself beyond comfort.

8. Attention to Health and Energy

Healthy food, exercise, yoga, and proper rest are essential to sustaining confidence and clarity.

9. Willingness to Take Reasonable Risks

Not reckless behavior, but the courage to step slightly beyond one's comfort zone.

10. Sense of Purpose

Knowing why one is doing what one is doing. Purpose energizes effort and gives direction.

Swamiji then spoke on empathy, explaining that empathy is very different from sympathy. Sympathy gives from a distance; empathy feels the other's need as one's own. Empathy lies at the heart of strong interpersonal relationships.

He shared an example of a company founder who personally spoke to each of his 300 employees daily. Because he genuinely cared, the company never faced strikes, and employees worked wholeheartedly. When leadership later shifted to his son—who replaced personal connection with efficiency and formality—the company's performance declined, demonstrating the practical value of empathy in organizational life.

Swamiji gave another example from visiting a center in Ahmednagar where hundreds of children with HIV/AIDS were cared for, many orphaned. When asked what inspired the doctor who founded the center, the doctor replied that at age 14 he saw children his own age suffering without support. From that early empathy

grew a lifelong service mission that now serves thousands.
(<https://www.snehalaya.org/>)

Swamiji reminded us that Amma is the ultimate embodiment of empathy - living every moment for the welfare of others.

Next, he discussed problem-solving and the role of challenges. Life becomes meaningful when obstacles encourage growth. He illustrated this by sharing the stories of two women he personally knew:

1. Dr. Preethi Srinivasan, a national-level athlete and scholar who became paralyzed after a swimming accident. After struggling emotionally, she transformed her pain into service, establishing an institution supporting people with spinal injuries. Despite intensive physical limitations, she continues to encourage others and lives with remarkable inner strength.
(<https://soulfree.org/about-preethi/>)
2. A public relations officer who lost one arm and one leg in a train accident at age nineteen. Through determination, she learned to work again, passed government examinations, built a career, and created a family life. Her resilience inspired Swamiji deeply.

He explained that remembering such examples can reawaken strength in moments of discouragement.

He reflected on the familiar “half glass” metaphor: whether one sees life’s circumstances as half-empty or half-full depends on one’s attitude. Amma teaches that although external situations may not always be controllable, one’s attitude and response are in one’s own hands.

Talent Showcase

We had a wonderful talent showcase from Kali Devi! Kali creates both digital and traditional art. She began drawing at a very young age, particularly focusing on Lord Ganesha and Goddess Kali.

She showed her drawing of Ganesha and explained that drawing hands was challenging but she felt she had improved. She then shared her drawing of Goddess Kali, noting how she used a scribble technique for the hair and was pleased with the final result.

Kali Devi also enjoys drawing animals, especially cats. She displayed a drawing of an Egyptian Mau, which she created by sketching from a photograph she took at a cat café. She explained that her inspiration comes from her own cats and from a favorite book series called *Warrior Cats*, which features clans of cats living in the forest. She shared a drawing of the character Bluestar from that series.

She also enjoys drawing creatures from her dreams. She showed one such drawing of a figure that had chased her in a dream while guarding a vase. She remembered the creature vividly enough to draw it the next day. She also shared an original character named *Canopy*, a hybrid of a mongoose, dog, and panther. Canopy collects shiny objects and spends time in trees, which inspired his name. She explained that she loves designing hybrid creatures.

Next, she showed drawings of two characters from games she enjoys: *Sir Gilbert* from Animal Jam and *Stardust Cookie* from Cookie Run. She described her digital drawing process: first creating a sketch on paper, photographing it, and then refining and coloring it in IbisPaint. She shared a time-lapse video of the process for Sir Gilbert.

She concluded by expressing her hope to either learn animation in the future or possibly open a shop selling stickers and art merchandise.

Q&A Session

Q1: How can one know if what they are doing will make a good difference?

Swamiji responded that one should continue doing what feels right, without worrying about the outcome. When a person follows their authentic path, others may naturally feel inspired, just as Kali Devi had inspired others by simply pursuing her art. He emphasized that change begins from within, and genuine effort influences others over time.

Q2: How can we gain strength from within and become strong in thought and personality?”

Swamiji replied that strength comes from life experience. Everyone faces challenges, failures, and learning moments. These experiences shape resilience. He shared Amma’s guidance that growth is not linear — one rises and falls, but each upward movement gradually becomes greater than the last. He encouraged

being prepared for both success and difficulty, which allows the mind to remain steady.

Bhajan

Swamiji led the bhajan, Jai Radha Madhava, and we concluded the session with closing prayers.