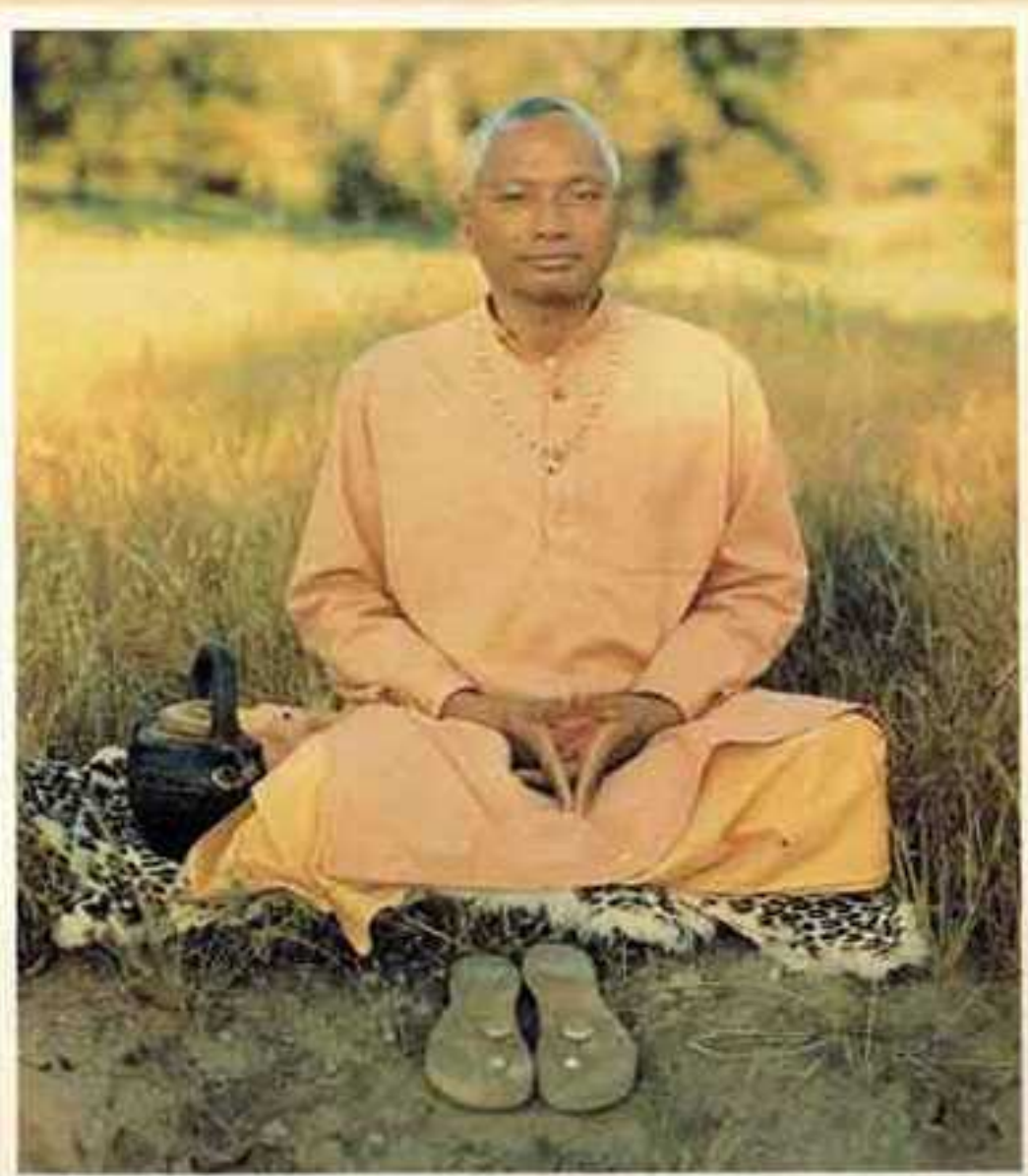
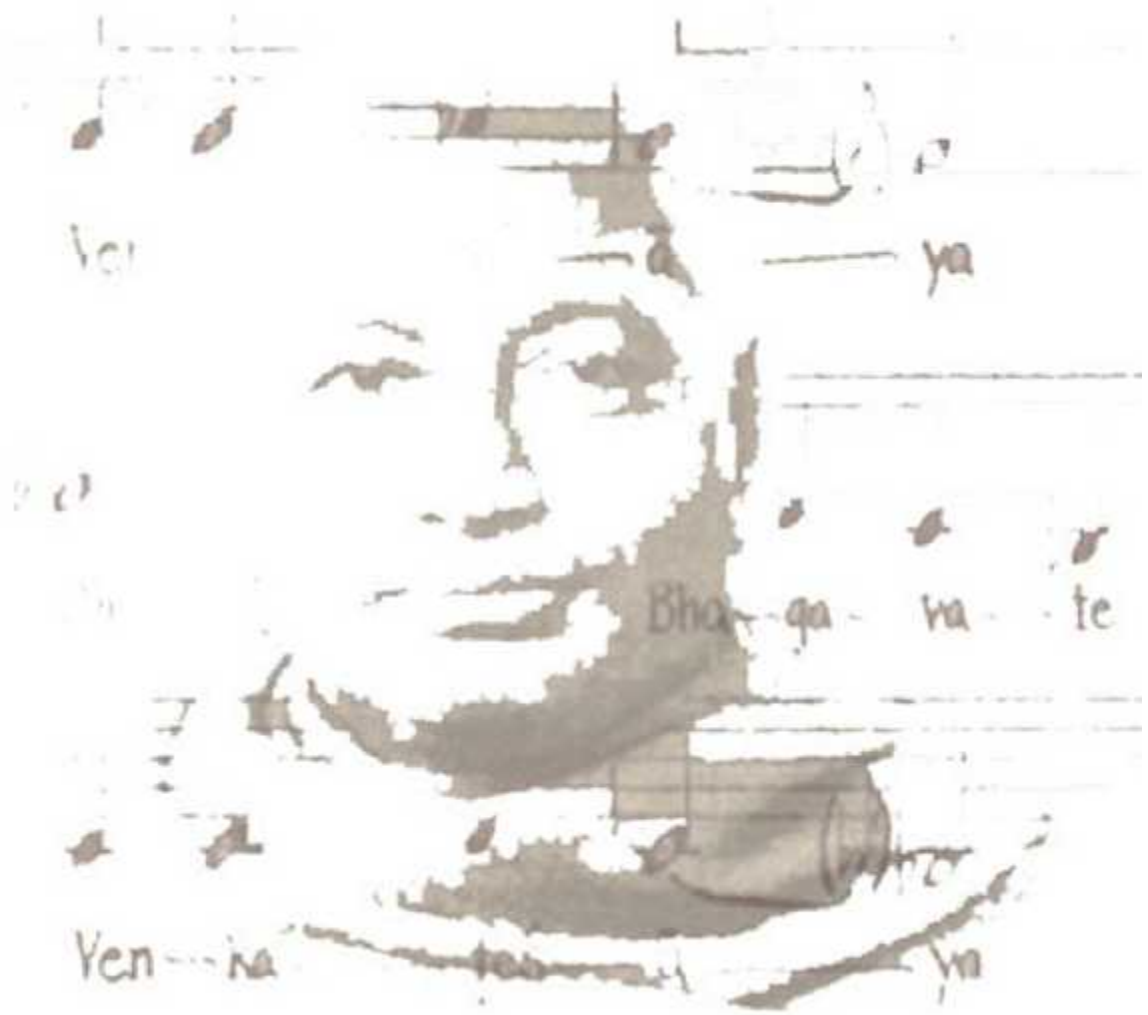


YOGA



Swami Venkatesananda



Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda

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Yoga

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During the first part of my stay in South Africa in 1961, I noticed an intense desire on the part of many Indians and non-Indians to rediscover for adoption in their own lives a saner value of life.

The impact of materialistic civilization made it difficult for them to assimilate orthodox teaching as offered in the scriptures; and they were not quite satisfied with a complete break-away from tradition into the free-thinker's bye-lanes, where all but the chosen few lose their path altogether.

For their benefit, I prepared a pamphlet "The Handbook of Yoga", explaining the orthodox principles in simpler style, without, however, deviating from tradition. The response was very encouraging.

When I was in Mauritius in 1963, I was asked to contribute a series of articles on Yoga for the 'Mauritius Times'.

I based these articles on the former pamphlet, considerably expanding the thoughts, to make them clearer.

The results were still more encouraging.

Since my return to Mauritius in April 1964, I have been repeatedly asked to publish all the articles in book form.

I have put them all together, and added a few more to make the book comprehensive, and offer it at the Feet of the Lord, who dwells in the hearts of all earnest seekers after Him.

Swami Venkatesananda.

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Introduction

In the western world today, wherever the idea that yoga is magic has been dispelled, it is regarded as a unique and unparalleled system of physical culture, which it is, and nothing more, which it is not. People who are anxious to save on doctor's bills, women who are figure-conscious, good-livers who yet want to escape from the tension inherent in their-way of life - these people practice yoga; but, they ignore the fundamental thesis in yoga, the unity of body-mind-spirit.

The yogi believes in the ideal of a 'sound mind in a sound body', but that is because he knows that body and mind are basically one, a single unit with two poles as it were, that what happens in one, inevitably reflects in and affects the other. Yet, his ultimate aim is not a 'body perfect', because he knows that the body itself is subject to decay and decomposition. It is an instrument, worth keeping in good working order while the work lasts. It is a vehicle, best to maintain well, till it takes him to his destination. The destination is described as self-realization.

The Brain

The path to self-realization has been well and beautifully laid by our ancients. To begin with, the physical body is well trained; yet, the student of yoga does not pay too much attention to the body's musculature. Yoga postures exert a profound and salutary influence upon the internal vital organs of the body. Right from here, the genius of yoga becomes apparent. Special attention is devoted to that part of the physical and vital anatomy which distinguishes man from the animal kingdom - the brain. Man possesses a highly developed and complex brain. He only possesses it, but does not always use it! Disused brain atrophies! Gerontologists have discovered that one of the principal causes of failing intellectual powers associated with senility, is decreased blood supply to the brain. Hence, one of the most famous of yoga postures, the siras asana or the head-stand, keeps the brain cells charged with energy. It is naturally reputed to arrest mental senility, to improve memory, and to preserve intellectual faculties from being impaired even in ripe old age.

Taking advantages of the earth's gravitational pull, the yogi's heart pours an abundant supply of blood into his head, re-charging the cells, strengthening the vital organs in the head, such as the eyes and the ears, nourishing the all-important endocrine glands, the pineal and the pituitary. The latter, in conjunction with the other glands of the endocrine system, is responsible for the emotional balance or imbalance of the personality; and hence, the yogi enjoys a balanced personality. Almost all of the yoga postures - loosely called exercises - are woven around the backbone, to ensure its flexibility and strength. If the backbone is supple, the central nervous system is strong, and the psychic force called prana circulates freely, preventing disease, and promoting well-being. Some postures look after the endocrine glands. Others squeeze, massage, and relax, the other vital organs of the body, like the abdominal viscera, the lungs, and the limbs.

Beyond Mind and Body

Modern psychosomatic medicine is beginning to recognize the intimate relationship between mental or emotional states and disease. A tense nervous system and hormonal imbalance brought about by stress and strain, wrong thinking, and ill-feeling, can expose the physical body to germs and viruses, whereas a strong nervous system and hormonal balance, maintained by the practice of yoga, which includes psychological and emotional order, can neutralize the effects of germs and viruses. Moreover, one who is tense, tends to grip and hold these germs and viruses within him!

Yoga promotes well-being. But, this is not just absence of illness. It is a condition that really transcends the body and the mind. This is the purpose of yoga. An athlete or gymnast exercises the body, in order to proudly display it - a yogi exercises the body, in order to discover the marvelous intelligence that is built into it. An unhealthy body houses a distracted mind which is obsessed by the malfunctioning of the diseased organ. In fact, such malfunctioning is the fruit of man's ignorance of and crime against the intelligence that fills every cell of the body. When the mind or the will does not interfere, this intelligence functions perfectly - for instance, in deep sleep - and when there is ego-interference, and consequent disturbance in balance, the adjustment that the intelligence makes in order to restore the balance, is what is popularly known as physical or psychological malfunction or illness. The yogi, while practicing yoga postures, discovers this astounding truth: this inner intelligence is beyond the mind and the ego, and he cannot 'add a cubit to his stature by taking a thought'. A healthy body looks after itself, freeing his mind for other, more serious work.

Once the yogi is established in this state of well-being, he is able to pursue his spiritual goal, unaffected by even physical illness, which may be occasioned by other 'natural' factors. His body looks after itself, and he looks towards his spiritual goal.

Perhaps, this is what 'mind over matter' means; here, the 'mind' does not refer to the thinking faculty, but to that which is beyond it, beyond the 'me'. This intelligence at once pervades the mind and the body and, therefore, transcends both of them. It is often known as the self, the spirit, the higher mind, the soul, or indwelling presence.

If the physical part of yoga has been carefully, systematically, and diligently practiced, the yogi's mind would naturally be calm and his emotions under control, yet it will not do to take these for granted. Yoga involves strict mental and emotional - moral - discipline, too. While certain breathing exercises, called pranayama, aid the yogi in his control of thought and emotion, he is advised to watch them in their own spheres. The physical practices of yoga, without the corresponding effort to control the mind and the emotions, fail to achieve anything. Because, while the yoga postures tend toward psychological and emotional order, the willful disturbance of that order in the psychological sphere

neutralizes the benefit. Unmindful of this, the student of yoga complains that he has made no progress.

When the intelligent control over the mind and the emotion goes hand-in-hand with the physical postures of yoga and the breathing exercises, the yogi very soon achieves an indescribable peace of mind. This is the very opposite of drug-induced peace. The peace of mind that the yogi enjoys, is characterized by a conscious experience of inner power, and a powerful experience of consciousness. A still mind reflects the inner spirit in all its divine majesty. The disturbed mind is opaque. The still mind is transparent; and the light of the spirit is radiated through it, without the least distortion.

Meditation

The grandeur of the spirit that the yogi senses during the preliminary yoga practices compels him to meditate deeply. Unobstructed by evil thoughts, undistracted by emotions, with the body and mind perfectly harmonized, the yogi dives deep within himself, and enjoys profound meditation. In meditation, he discovers that the spirit in him is the reality. It is the spirit that lends power to his mind, and life to his body. When body, mind, and spirit, are harmonized through yoga, the spirit functions through the mind, and body without impediment. In such a harmonized state, the yogi's attitude to his outer life changes drastically. He is able to view the world in a dispassionate, objective way. He is freed from the earthy currents and cross-currents of conflicting ideas and feelings. He is able to appreciate life better. He is able to understand others better. He is happy in all conditions, for his happiness does not depend upon others. He is peaceful in all conditions, for his peace springs from within himself. By persistent and diligent practice, he attains self-realization, which is a synonym for freedom or salvation.

Yoga is not a self-centered psycho-physical discipline to be undertaken in a Himalayan cave, in an African jungle, or in the cloistered isolation of a hermitage. It may make use of all of these. It may make use of places of worship like the temple, church, mosque, or meditation chamber. But to confine yoga to any of these, is like clenching one's fist in an attempt to capture the wind - sheer delusion.

The yogi's self is not the limited self-asserting personality, the vain ego which regards itself as a distinct entity, whose interests are constantly threatened by everyone else in this world, and which transforms life into a constant struggle for survival. The yogi's self is not an island perilously floating on the ocean called the world, but is the bed of the ocean itself, the substratum for the world and infinite individuals. The yogi's self is the self of all, a spiritual principle which knows no dividing walls.

Integral Yoga

In fact, this is the ultimate aim and purpose of even such seemingly isolationist practices as meditation. We meditate in order to discover the self. Even as this is glimpsed, it is revealed to us that this self is the self of all. If, during meditation, it shines within us, it is because we had deliberately closed our eyes upon the universe, no doubt with a valid reason. After meditation, we open our eyes, and realize that the self is the indwelling omnipresence. 'I am the self of all' is the actual direct realization of the yogi.

Thus, the yogi becomes the living embodiment of the great commandments of Lord Jesus. In fact, to me, a Hindu, the holy cross itself symbolizes the threefold commandment of Lord Jesus, and therefore the very essence of yoga. The vertical beam of the holy cross symbolizes the commandment: love thy god - god who is above, beyond the reach of the intellect, and who is below, deep within one's own being. The horizontal beam of the holy cross symbolizes the other two commandments: love thy neighbor and love thy enemy. The friend on the right and the enemy on the left are both our neighbors. Thus is our consciousness united to our god, and to our neighbor.

Hence, my Master Swami Sivananda insisted that meditation and service of humanity go hand in hand. One acts as the touchstone of the other. St. Paul declared that he who said that he loved god and who yet hated his neighbor was a liar. When the self is realized in deep meditation, it reveals itself to us as the self of all. In our daily life, this is translated as unselfish service and love. This is the acid test. If such loving service does not ceaselessly flow from us, we are still far from the goal of yoga, and the meditation is imperfect, if not actually delusion and self-deception. There still is a lot of impurity covering the heart, distorting the vision of the self. This impurity is worn out by the deliberate practice of unselfishness and love in our daily life. My Master therefore demanded that all these should be combined in our practice of yoga, and He summed up the ideal of integral yoga in His famous four words: serve, love, meditate, realize.

Inner Harmony and Social Adjustment

Yoga pays immediate dividends. The physical part of yoga improves our health, frees us from tensions and diseases, and confers a state of well-being on us. It enables us to acquire progressively increasing control over our mind and our emotions. This control, in its turn, greatly aids the social aspect of yoga, which leads to a healthy social adjustment. We are really able to understand everyone, even our enemies.

This understanding is very different from supercilious tolerance, with its air of superiority. It is different from even a higher state of social relationship, where we love our neighbors on an equal footing. It is true understanding - standing under the other person, magnifying him, appreciating his stand from a new angle. This is the divine love, which Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus, commanded us to cultivate. This is what yoga confers upon us.

Harmony is the aim of yoga. The yogi recognizes that harmony is one and indivisible. Harmony in society is possible only if the members of that society, and particularly its leaders, are harmonized within themselves. If the leader does not enjoy peace within himself, he will disturb the peace of his followers, and the entire society will be frequently churned into a turmoil.

Even in our own individual lives, and in our own domestic spheres, yoga - by generating, promoting and preserving inner harmony - confers freedom from psychosomatic disorders of the body and the mind, and ensures good adjustment. Dr Abraham Sperling, in his book on psychology, says: 'Only insight into one's true motives can ensure good adjustment. And, as insight is the best therapy, it is the best preventive.' Insight is seeing from within - seeing from within the other man, and seeing the mind from within itself.

What prevents this insight? Moral blindness, the darkness of ignorance, and the unsteadiness of our vision. Yoga is designed just to remove these factors. Yoga enables us to purify our heart and mind. Yoga teaches us the science of concentration and meditation. Yoga enables us to come face to face with our own self, which is the self of all. In meditation, when the mind is still, and does not bring up to the surface hidden anxieties and cravings, the self is perceived in its true light, as the reflection of the cosmic being or god.

There are numerous techniques for concentration of the mind and meditation. Yet, there are some people who mistake deep thinking for meditation, or who regard prayer and meditation as synonymous. The fault is not theirs. It is difficult to describe meditation. It is possible to indicate only what it is not. It is not thinking. It is not prayer. It is not absent-mindedness. It is not sleep.

Great Men Meditate

Great men in every field resort onto meditation. Poets and painters, scientists, and saints, experience meditation in their life. They declare that their masterpieces were received by them from some other source. When their minds were stilled by bewilderment, shock, wonder, or devotion, the divine within granted them a vision of truth. They had a glimpse of the majesty of the self, the grandeur of God within. This glimpse was later clothed by them in the garments of their distinctive faculties - the poet and the painter give the world their masterpieces, the scientist and the saint describe the truth in their own words.

Each of them uses his own equipment. Yoga needs no external props, but utilizes one's own inner equipment. This is the only difficulty. True, even the poet, the painter, and the scientist, have to discipline themselves to acquire the qualification necessary for them to obtain that inspiration which eventually made them great. But the discipline was partly control of instruments outside themselves, and partly inner discipline. In the case of the saint or the yogi, the discipline is entirely subjective, discipline of the body and the mind. He has to study his mind with his own mind, and yet be objective and scientific. He has to discover the higher mind within, and, with it, control the lower mind, without the aid of a psychoanalyst or psychiatrist. In this inner struggle, he may use symbols and techniques; but he should beware of turning the means into ends. He has to be constantly vigilant, and avoid the temptation to stop short of the goal. His goal is self-realization. His goal is perfect integration of his personality, integration of himself with his neighbors, and ultimately integration of his individuality with the cosmic being.

This is yoga. It destroys the very roots of disharmony and mal-adjustment, of cravings and anxieties, of sin and suffering. Physical well-being and mental relaxation, peace of mind and purity of heart, brilliance of intellect and illumination of the very soul of man, are some of the fruits of yoga. It does not disturb social solidarity, but promotes it. It does not disturb one's religious faith, but strengthens it. It demands nothing but your willingness to discipline yourself and sincere application of its psycho-physical methods of self-culture.

1. The World We Live in

Man has endeavored through the ages to live without God or the cosmic Being. Political philosophers, economists, and scientific 'sages', have assigned to themselves the godly role of protecting man's peace and happiness, while others function as religious leaders, offering easy salvation to their supporters. Politics, science, and economics, have failed. Let man now turn towards God. If the religious spirit is absent from our life, it has no value; but, once it is added, then learning, wealth, social position, political or scientific leadership, can all assume meaning and purposefulness.

The word 'dharma' means - a factor that sustains, upholds, protects, and brings together. It brings us all together, binds us in a wonderful and divine cord of love; that is what religion means. Anyone using this dharma or religion to divide society into antagonistic groups, is spreading irreligion, and doing the greatest harm to this dharma. Ultimately, dharma unites us with God; God who dwells in all beings.

Thus, our religion or dharma ought to promote the prosperity of mankind, and also ensure the salvation of man. By keeping us together in a bond of love, we are almost compelled to serve one another, and thus promote one another's interests and welfare. By uniting us with God, we are liberated from pettiness, worldliness, selfishness, and greed. Here is the greatest miracle on earth: the silent transformation of the human heart, which our dharma brings about. It reminds us that we form the one body of God, inseparably united in Him. We may have our own characteristics, faculties, and temperament; we may follow different paths to Him, but in His Love we are all united, and eventually we shall all reach His Feet. All our efforts for the betterment of the lot of mankind, fail only because we have not yet realized this.

Religion has suffered the same fate as the present era - that of distortion. The simple is made complex. Yet, we see on the horizon the dawn of the age of simplicity, and of an urge to seek for the truth in a maze of distortions. Even the word 'yoga' has been distorted. Yoga has nothing to do with miracles and magic; but it is the synonym of its phonetic cousin 'yoke', which is the essential meaning of the word 'religion'. Yoke unites two, religion binds them.

Distortion has also crept into religion, and divided mankind into opposing camps - 'your religion' and 'my religion'. True religion - yoga - ignores this disharmony, and yokes all of us together for human weal. The source scriptures of all religions say that we should love our neighbor as ourselves, and that we should love God with all our being. That is yoga, and that is religion. The two must be linked.

Understood aright, therefore, yoga can enrich our life, and fulfill its purpose. By yoking us, uniting us, and binding us together with a cord of love, it indirectly promotes harmony, peace, and prosperity. God is love. The soul yoked to God is

possessed, and led by this love. We are all bound by the cord of His love, which is the omnipresent omnipotence that creates, sustains, and redeems all.

That is theory, and theory must be translated into practice. Fundamentally, yoga is simple. It demands the curbing of our egoism, annihilation of selfishness, and effective control of our mind and senses, so that they function in tune with the infinite. In practice, however, we discover that, before we attempt to harmonize the self with society and with God, we should strive to integrate our personality, so that our thought, word, and deed, as also our intellect, emotion, and life, do not tear us into several disjointed personalities. Yoga integrates our personality by revealing our own inner nature, its potentialities and limitations.

By an interesting process of social service, worship of God, inward contemplation, and health giving physical posture and breathing exercises, yoga achieves the greatest of all miracles - the transformation of the human heart.

2. The Meaning of Life

What is the meaning of life? Why are we born as human beings? Do we merely exist until we die? What is my relation with you? Why do I suffer and why am I happy sometimes? What is the meaning of the terms 'pleasure' and 'pain'?

These and similar questions occur to many of us at some time or other in our life; but, the tragedy is that they do not arise in the mind of many people until they are rudely shaken by some shock, loss, or calamity. They were sleeping; and, hence, they were unaware of the meaning of life and the facts of existence. There are some who do not even wake up after many unhappy experiences in life!

The 'normal' man in the modern world is far too busy with the struggle for existence, to find time for such thoughts about life. He is content merely to exist, he hardly lives. There comes a stage in ignorance when it is mistaken for knowledge or wisdom. Like a long-caged bird that has forgotten its very birth-right to soar into the sky, and which fights to remain in its cage, man hugs ignorance and limitation. Even misery fails to awaken him - he changes his tactics, blames his neighbors, and endeavors to find happiness by other methods.

In this process of awakening, there are two ways open to us. If we heed the precepts of the master Swami Sivananda, we can be spiritually healed and awakened - which is the easy way. But, if we ignore His message, God has to resort to other methods to bring home to us the truth that we live in a world of pain and death, and that we cannot find real happiness here. Sooner or later - the easy or difficult way - we have to ask ourselves the great question: 'What is the meaning of life?' Hence, our Master used to sing:

Is there not a nobler mission than eating, drinking, and sleeping?

It is difficult to get a human birth; therefore, try your best to realize - God - in this birth.

It is good to keep these flaming words of wisdom ever before us, so that our life may be illumined by the light of our Master's life and teachings. Life has a great mission: it is to find god who is supreme bliss. Life, minus limitation or conditioning, is bliss. This is the meaning of life. Its discovery is yoga.

3. Quest of Happiness

In man's heart, there is an unceasing, but paradoxically urgent urge for pleasure and happiness. In fact, this is the urge to immortality; and, it is this urge that has led him up the ladder of evolution to his present human birth. But, it is not correctly understood. When there is the cry of restlessness in the heart of man, he does not always discern the right cause.

No living being is satisfied with merely living. If we merely had to exist, life would be easy. There is this continuous quest for happiness. That is the meaning of life. That is the nature of our self.

Happiness is within your own self. You fail to get it, only because you are searching for it where it does not exist. The common and universal experience of deep sleep is proof that this happiness is within us. This sleep is the only period of the day when we are really happy, free from worry and anxiety. Moreover, in sleep we 'rest within ourselves', and get new energy.

What is it that prevents us from enjoying this happiness constantly? Because of ignorance, the little 'I' is unable to find its way consciously to this inner source; and therefore it endeavors to find that happiness in the external objects of the world, which it can see, grasp, and experience.

Man has scaled the highest peak, and delved deep into the bowels of the earth. But man does not know what is within himself. And within him is God, the fountain of joy and bliss, the goal of his quest.

It is through a deliberate turning away from the objects of pleasure in this world, and by the practice of meditation, that the seeker after truth enters the inner realm, consciously, and with full awareness. But this 'turning away' should not be construed to mean 'running away'. It is like averting our gaze from a glaring object; it hurts the eye, until we put on sunglasses, when we can enjoy that very sight which previously hurt us. We turn our gaze away from the objects of the world for a little while, until we are able to adjust our inner vision, and look at the world through the eyes of god. Then the world is no longer a painful process of birth and death. Then the world is a charming field of divine activity. The very same world, seen through God's eyes, appears as it is - the body of God, which is good.

In the synthesis of activity and idealism, of dynamism and divinity, lies the secret of yoga. Yoga is contemplative dynamism. It implies neither running away, nor even turning permanently away from the world, but looking through it, and perceiving god who is the reality underlying the world.

4. The First Principle of Yoga

The deluded man is sure that his happiness is derived from the objects of the world, until pain awakens him to the truth that pain is the result of the enjoyment, whereas the happiness was derived from within himself when the mind ceased to restlessly long for pleasure.

Sleep not only gives us the clue to the great truth that happiness is within us, but also provides us with the two vital laws that govern its experience - forget the world and forget self. These are the two deep sleep state conditions. We cannot go on sleeping for ever, nor should we wake up to misery. To combine the two, we must be conscious - awake, and we must also enjoy the homogeneity that is the characteristic of deep sleep. We must be awake, and yet the ego-sense should not be awake; we must live, and yet forget the world. The unalloyed happiness that we enjoy in deep sleep can be ours if we can forget ourselves during the waking state of activity - intense activity. Desires and cravings produce stress and tension; and, it is only when these have been removed that we are really happy, for then we turn within ourselves. This does not last long. It is immediately followed by the rising of another craving and its chain reaction. This will go on till we (a) prevent the tension from building up, (b) stop the mind from craving for sense-gratification, and (c) train the self to rest in the self all the time, enjoying perpetual happiness.

The dynamism which is part of our - and cosmic - nature, cannot be stamped out. But it is possible to let the ego-sense step down from the pedestal of sovereignty it has usurped, and not to let desires and cravings, selfishness and self-aggrandizement, motivate actions. Then we live in a remarkable state, in which the intellect is in a contemplative mood, while the body and mind are engaged in intense activity.

If we constantly think of and work for the welfare of all beings, self-forgetfully, we shall derive the same happiness that we had during deep sleep. It is strange that we fail to notice that when we are least conscious of our health, we are healthy; and when we are not mindful of pain, it disappears. When we run after the shadow of happiness, it runs away from us; it is because we push unhappiness away that it seems to lean so heavily on us.

The solution lies in rejoicing in the happiness of others, and in understanding the magnitude of human suffering in this world. In both cases, we forget the self; and, that is the first condition for being happy.

Service. Serve all. Serve selflessly. Serve self-forgetfully and self-sacrificingly. This is the first principle of divine life, of yoga, of the contemplative dynamism of the Bhagavad Gita.

5. Essentials of Social Service

"You cannot remain inactive even for a moment," says Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. And the gospel of selfless social service of my master Swami Sivananda has this immutable law as its first corner-stone. Nature is ever active. We, too, are active by nature. That is the sign of 'life'.

Then, will it do if I am ever active, doing whatever I feel like, in whatever manner I like doing it? The human being does not merely wish to live, to exist, and to procreate, but to aspire to something nobler. That nobler mission is to serve all, and to do good to all.

The world glorifies a philanthropist or a social worker, but it does not bother about his motives, or about his inner nature. God is the inner ruler of man, the witness of our thoughts, feelings, and motives. Swami Sivananda demands, "Scrutinize always your motives", for God looks to our motives more than to our spectacular deeds.

Action itself is inferior to the right attitude. Hence, if we want to find our inner harmony, if we wish to commune with the inner reality, we should be good. If we are good in our very nature, we shall constantly and spontaneously do good, without the temptation of a reward or the incentive of self-aggrandizement.

Therefore, Swami Sivananda declares: "Be good, do good - these four words constitute the fundamental essence of all religions, of the teachings of all the prophets of the world, of yoga and vedanta." This, then, is the second corner-stone of dedicated selfless social service.

Here is the third corner-stone. If we want to be happy, and if we want to enjoy peace, we must transcend the ego-sense. In meditation, one transcends oneself and enjoys peace. In repeating or singing God's Names, one transcends oneself, and enjoys happiness. One cannot normally be engaged all the time in these practices. How, then, to live the normal life in this world, and yet to be happy and peaceful? "Forget yourself in the service of humanity," says Swami Sivananda. He was Himself the greatest exemplar of this doctrine. He was an embodiment of self-forgetful, selfless service.

"The wise man should do unattached what the ignorant man does with attachment", says the Bhagavad Gita. The difference is not in the external form nor mode of life, but in the inner spirit of that life. Swami Sivananda taught us that it is the motive and the inner attitude that acts either as a bondage or a liberator.

The correct inner attitude is that of worship. This is the fourth and most important corner-stone of Gurudev's gospel of selfless social service. Performed in a spirit of worship of the omnipresent reality, our service and all our actions tend to liberate us, instead of binding us to the world and worldliness.

Two aspects of this divine worship are to be constantly borne in mind. They are (1) the whole world is a manifestation of the Lord who receives the worship offered in the form of selfless service, and (2) we derive the power and the capacity to serve or to work from God who dwells within us. The first keeps us ever willing, ready, and eager, to serve and serve all, and render any service. The second keeps us away from the pitfall of egoism. We have to serve with intense zeal, and yet remain unattached. We have to feel that the Lord is working through us, and yet be humble. We have to see the Lord in all, and yet sympathize with them.

If these fundamentals are clearly understood, we shall readily see the great qualities that go to make up the ideal social worker. Then service becomes yoga. It will not bind you, but liberate you.

6. The Power of Love

Real service is very difficult to find these days. Work without our heart in it can build up tension within us, and eventually lead to a nervous breakdown.

The man who learns to love his work, serves with love. He is ready and eager to pour every ounce of his energy into that service. He is not only free from tension, but he is full of joy, peace, and satisfaction.

We are unhappy, not because someone is making us miserable, but because our heart has become so small that we want only our own happiness. Selfishness is an animal instinct. The extremely selfish man is an animal. The moderately selfish man is human. The truly unselfish man is a divine being. We live in order that we may reach that stage one day. To become divine is our goal. With God-given intelligence, we can hasten our progress to this goal.

We saw that the first universal experience of happiness is deep sleep. There is another universal experience which goes unnoticed and unreflected upon. When are we intensely and consciously happy in our daily life? When we are close to one we love. If being near beloved ones makes us happy, it is simple logic that, to be always happy, we should always love all! If it is not possible to live always surrounded by our particular loved ones, then we should love all those who are around us at all times, and thus transform them into our 'beloved ones'.

Is it possible for you to love strangers? Yes, one of them is your wife now! Later, others arrived, whom you had never seen before, and these you call your children! There is a taint of selfishness in these relationships. That is why, sooner or later, they give us some amount of unhappiness. If these and all relationships cease to be commercial contracts, and if love is pure and selfless, then we shall be always happy.

True unselfishness is not possible unless we recognize the hidden God in all. If you love your husband, your father, your mother, your child, or your friends, can you not see that you are in truth loving the omnipresence in and through every one of them? It is that omnipresence that stands in front of you as the wife, the son, the daughter, the friend. So, if you have learned to love this one person, and if you can enter into the spirit of this experience of love, you realize: 'This is the experience of love which delights my heart. In and through that person, I am actually loving God, the omnipresence.' Once you know what it is to love, expand that love, and let it cover more and more of the world in which you live.

This applies not only to the people with whom we associate, but also to the circumstances in which we are placed. Only man demands that God should adapt His gifts to man's wants, whereas animals accept God's gifts and adapt themselves to them. We must have full faith in God's goodness, and learn to adapt, adjust and accommodate to whatever God gives us, in whatever condition or environment he places us.

God is our father-mother. It is the height of foolishness and ignorance to imagine he is going to punish us, and send us terrible calamities and diseases. A bitter pill may be needed to correct an ailing body; and even the most loving mother will give it to her child. God is love. We must lovingly welcome whatever he gives us. And, we shall ever be happy. This is the attitude of a bhakta, a devotee, who practices karma yoga.

7. God is Love

God's blessings are showered equally upon all; but man is fond of depriving his neighbor of his share. Man has forgotten God. Therefore, he has also forgotten that God is love. He has turned away from God in whose image he is made. Love is divine - hatred is diabolical. God is love. God is peace. God is bliss. If we wish to enjoy this peace, we should grow in love. God has given man freewill to shape his own destiny. We should choose the path of love. Love should govern our thoughts, words, and deeds.

God is the cosmic being. He cannot be enthroned in a heart which has shrunk through selfishness. It must expand, gradually, to include our neighbors, our community, and ultimately all beings in the universe. When this love is cultivated in our heart, it will naturally express itself as service and charity. These will become part and parcel of our nature. Then we shall attain cosmic consciousness, and enjoy supreme peace, eternal bliss, and immortality. When the little 'I' - the selfish ego - dies, you will be God, full of love and compassion for all beings.

We cannot love one another truly, unless we recognize that God who dwells in our heart, dwells in the hearts of all. We cannot truly serve mankind, and work for the good of all, unless we feel that all of us together form the body of God. This knowledge and realization should come first. Only then will political systems, economic theories, and technological progress, bear fruit.

It is dangerous to pay lip-homage to this doctrine. We should sincerely pray to Him, meditate upon Him every day. We should endeavor every moment of our life to express, through loving service of our neighbor, the inner faith that God is omnipresent. We should love all. It is then that we shall truly be human beings.

This is the essence of the teaching of all religions. This is yoga.

8. Wisdom Looks at Evil

What is the yogi's attitude towards evil?

Evil is primarily within us, and it also exists in the objective universe as a neutral - tamasic - inert, ignorant and dark - factor. What we call 'evil' is for the most part a matter of opinion or tradition. For instance, when you say A is wicked, there are others who say he is good. Drinking wine may be regarded as a great sin by the brahmin in India, but it is not so to a saintly man in France!

Secondly, evil is the projection of our own vanity, selfishness, or ignorance on something outside. We find outside what we, within ourselves, want to find. If we are good and want only good, we shall find something good - God! - in the 'evil'. If we are evil, then we shall find faults even in god.

Thirdly, in God's own divine nature - the manifest universe - we discover beings of different natures. One man is affectionate, another is harsh. But, if you see the expression of love that is God in all these, your own heart will be filled with that love. Wind dries - water wets. Though of different or even opposite nature, they are all part of a single pattern - God's good world. They exist to serve Him, His Will, and His purpose, for the universe and all of us. The wise man understands them, and benefits himself. The ignorant man interferes with them, to his own disadvantage.

Ignorance of this truth leads man to the violation of the divine law. Ignorance itself is sin, and this sin is followed by the necessary corrective measure, according to the divine law. Ignorance regards this corrective measure as pain! It rebels against it, and commits more sins. The wheel of karma is kept revolving.

Wisdom consists of a threefold attitude to life: (a) evil is the dark side of nature, with its divine purpose of revealing and promoting goodness by contrast; (b) fault-finding, on the other hand, is the fruit of ignorance, which nourishes, strengthens, and perpetuates evil; and (c) pain, poverty, disease, and the like, are nature's measures to purify the inner nature, so that the roots of sin - ignorance and craving - are removed, and man's inner vision is turned to God.

Adoption of all three principles will at once give us peace and happiness. To condone evil in ourselves, condemn it in others, and reject or run away from pain, is the very opposite of wisdom. Until we uncondition our inner being, we should be wary not to succumb to evil tendencies. Until we have purified our heart thoroughly, we should avoid evil company, too. That does not mean that we hate those whom we regard as wicked, nor should we take upon ourselves the duty of 'correcting' or 'reforming' others. In this, we only succeed in adding to the evil in ourselves.

Remove the inner evil first. You will love all. And, that love will transform everyone you come into contact with.

9. A Forgotten Vital Secret

Selfless service is its own 'achievement'. If one serves in order to gain something, the service is not 'selfless'. Motives are often hidden within the subconscious; it is not easy to detect them. You may 'give up' desire for material reward, but secretly wish to be admired. You may 'run away' from such admiration, but enjoy a 'spiritual satisfaction' within yourself. An honest appraisal of the situation must enable you to appreciate that the whole life is tainted with selfishness, and as long as the mind functions and the ego-sense prevails, selfishness lurks in some corner of your personality. When this is clearly seen, and when the danger of selfishness is realized at the same time, there is great vigilance, in which there is no selfishness. Such vigilance is meditation.

Otherwise, service, though begun with pure love, often leads to the very results it is meant to avoid - either we get attached to the people we love and serve, or, if their response is inimical, we are angered, or we even dislike or hate them.

There is a mysterious power deep within us which does not allow us to love all and serve all. It generates two currents of attraction and repulsion, attachment and hatred, likes and dislikes. Helplessly we are drawn in different directions by these two currents, and do not even make an attempt to free ourselves from them. Thus, never finding harmony within, never loving and serving selflessly, we live in total dissatisfaction and frustration - all because we are unable to free ourselves from likes and dislikes, and dive deeper into our center, beyond these.

Nothing but meditation - coupled with selfless service, which is dynamic meditation - can enable us to rise above these two currents of raga - infatuation, attachment, desire, and dvesa - hate, anger, aversion. Therefore, our masters ask us to meditate daily. And if we are sincere in our approach to and practice of meditation, we must arrive at the truth that the God who dwells in our heart, dwells in all. This realization must come, sooner or later; sooner, if at the same time we endeavor to practice selfless service of humanity and cultivate cosmic love. A very good exercise in meditation is to start with visualizing an image of God in our heart - we have to fix the mind somewhere, and the heart is the center of our being. Let this image expand and enlarge, as you get nearer and nearer to God, so that eventually the original position is reversed: God is not part of me, but I am part of God. Even so, all are part of God. God is the cosmic being. We are all autonomous but interdependent cells in that body. Because we are autonomous, we can love. We are not pre-destined to hate each other. We love one another, not for the sake of one another, but for the sake of the self that is all.

When this truth is actually realized, then, to love all, and to serve all, will be effortless, and we shall then have an entirely different attitude to the world. We will love God in all and serve him in all; not as a good policy, not for any gain, not as a privilege, nor even as a duty, but because it is quite natural and inevitable. And this love never wanes; for, there is no selfish motive here to wane.

When we forget ourselves and the world, we enjoy peace and happiness, and we enjoy them consciously while we are engaged in our daily work. This is my master's divine message. This is the religion of tomorrow.

10. Yoga for Integral Perfection

Yoga or 'divine life' is divinizing our entire life, all our activities. We cannot be saints for an hour of the day, and sinners for the rest. Our masters, therefore, plead for integral perfection. They exhort us to combine all the spiritual practices in our daily life, and thus ensure that we have a 'balanced spiritual diet', which enables us to grow harmoniously into a perfect personality. Theoretically, it is supposed to be sufficient to deal a fatal blow at the ego with the axe of the yoga that is suited to one's temperament. In practice we discover it is not so. Hence it is better to adopt a concerted attack.

Even the so-called different yogas or paths to god realization are not really so different! Or exclusive! A close examination reveals that they are all interconnected. Activity - karma yoga, without love of the omnipresent God - bhakti yoga, and knowledge of the truth - jnana yoga, or the latter without right activity, is nearly impossible.

They are inseparable, and cannot be independently practiced. The emphasis differs in accordance with the difference in individual temperament. If there is God at heart, his love must flow in and through all our limbs. If there is knowledge of God in the 'head', it must compel us to love him, too. Head, heart, and hand, must respond to God-love.

The Indian spiritual aspirant is an optimist. He knows that, without purification, he cannot get God-realization. He knows that karma yoga, which implies multiplicity - a finger cannot scratch itself, and bhakti yoga, which implies duality, and jnana - direct intuitive realization of oneness, which asserts unity, are rationally incompatible, and yet he practices them together. He does not understand the Upanishads, but reads them daily. When the heart is purified through karma yoga, and the mind is steadied by bhakti-raja-yoga, then the knowledge of the Upanishads illumines his soul.

Perfection is a synthesis of all yogas. Raja yoga steadies the mind, and jnana yoga pours wisdom into it. Feeling is perfected by bhakti yoga. 'Living' is perfected by karma yoga. The instrument with which we are able to practice yoga, the body, is looked after by hatha yoga. All these together constitute yoga. They are inseparable, even as the three faculties - thinking, feeling, and 'living' - are inseparable in us.

11. Self Discovery

In this self-development towards perfection, no-one can help you, and no-one can hinder you either. There are two reasons: this perfection is already there, waiting to be discovered; and secondly, you are unique. No-one else has the exact replica of your personality.

A sculptor looking at a marble slab 'sees' the figure of Krishna or Christ in that slab. He does not add anything, it is there already. But there is a lot more marble, in addition to that figure. He merely removes the extraneous chips, and what remains is what he saw in the slab in the first instant.

First, you have to see this unique spirit that is built into you. When you do, you also see a lot of rubbish sticking to this central being. As you keep eliminating these - this rubbish, the latent perfection is discovered, and there is total development. In order to discover yourself, you must not assume there is only goodness in you. You must also be aware of what is diabolical and devilish in you too. When you thus become aware of the divine and the diabolical in you simultaneously, you know what to do!

To ascribe the cause of an inner evil to something outside oneself is immature. If you cut your foot on the coral, you immediately fix it. There is no time to blame anyone. You become one with the problem - the pain; and the pain demands immediate relief.

When you thus observe yourself inwardly, there is utter stillness of mind. It is transparent, and in that transparent mind, you can see the play of thoughts, you can be aware of the 'evil' in your personality.

You learn actively to watch the thoughts, without thinking those thoughts. When this watchfulness or awareness becomes constant and efficient, keen and sensitive, it detects an 'evil' thought even as it enters the field of consciousness, and keeps it away, because the evil thought hurts the inner being.

While cultivating this watchfulness or awareness, the question one asks concerning the thought is, 'What is this thought made of, and who thinks it?', and not, 'Why is it there?' If you ask the question in the right manner, you will know the answer, immediately and experientially, not verbally. The asking itself is the answer. The questioning is important; for, it directs the attention to the very source of thought. When an undesired or evil thought arises from this source, this attention itself neutralizes such thought.

In this self-inquiry, there are two delicate factors to be carefully and vigilantly borne in mind: (1) there is unrelenting vigilance which burns steadily within you, reducing to ashes every 'evil' or undesired thought even as it rises, because such a thought hurts you; and (2) when your mind becomes aware of similar evil outside, in others, you are extremely sympathetic, for you do not judge or

condemn.

What is that state of perfection that this self-inquiry reveals, and what are its characteristics? The Bhagavad Gita provides an inspiring answer: perfection is that state in which all cravings end. It is there all the time. But you have turned away from it. When you turn away from the sun, you see the shadow; and the shadow has all the appearance of yourself. But when you wheel around and face the light, you see only the sun, the light, and not yourself. That is god-realization, self-realization. That is perfection.

The whole process of yoga, of spiritual development, is the removal of obstacles to this realization. In order to see these obstacles, one needs a tremendously calm mind.

Quietness of the mind does not mean that there are no thoughts. There may be millions of waves on the surface of the ocean, but underneath it is absolutely calm. Can you go down to the depth of the 'ocean' within you, the depth of your own consciousness, so that even while the thoughts keep rising and falling on the surface, there is this deep calm and peace? This is the most important thing.

Disturbance in the mind goes on as long as you cling to false values, to any values at all. When you directly realize that nothing that the mind and the ego have cherished so far is of any value, there is instant, complete, and permanent cessation of disturbance; there is enlightenment.

12. Practise Yoga and love It

Yoga is intelligent practice. Swami Sivananda asks us to reflect and analyze ourselves, to understand our capacities and limitations, our hidden potentialities and lurking weaknesses, and then to formulate a spiritual plan for self-discovery.

We know a lot, but do little. Idle knowledge is more dangerous than ignorance, for it adds to our vanity. If we know a little and put that into practice, we shall liberate ourselves. Even our self-analysis and its resultant estimation are validated only by their application in practice. Based on our understanding of our need, we ought to take a few resolves. These will assume the form of a determination to grow in virtue, to eradicate evil habits, to do a little of various spiritual practices, like yogasanas, breathing exercises, meditation, study, charity, worship, japa, kirtan, selfless service, and satsanga. Then we should draw up a daily routine incorporating all these in it. Even if we do a little of each item of yoga practice, if we are regular, we can achieve a lot.

There is often a human tendency to make big resolutions, do something for a few days, and then to let the zeal cool off. To prevent this, our master gives us a priceless companion, the spiritual diary. In it, we record to what extent we were able to carry out our resolutions, and to what extent we neglected the daily routine.

Of course, none of those is meaningful if it is undertaken as a gimmick, or in obedience to the dictates of someone else, or as a proud record of one's spiritual progress. Genuine sincerity is needed for real, natural, unspectacular, progress.

13. Are We Sincere?

Only the insincere man grumbles, and finds difficulties. If you have sincerity at heart, there is no impossibility, and difficulties are accepted as necessary challenges. The sincere man converts obstacles into stepping stones. The insincere man regards stepping stones as obstacles. On the path of yoga, what is needed is sincerity; and if we are sincere and earnest, then the path is smooth. Sincerity itself is only the inner expression of the correct scale of values. We are sincerely devoted to only that which we value. Otherwise, we treat it as hard labor.

If you value anything, you want to do it, and love doing it. If you do not value it, your mind magnifies only the difficulties involved.

As proof of sincerity, the ancient masters looked for what are known as the 'four means of salvation', which every aspirant is encouraged to cultivate.

These four means are:

- (1) discrimination - the recognition of the proper scale of values,
- (2) dispassion - its adoption to daily life,
- (3) virtues which induce one-pointed application of the mind and heart to the goal of life, and
- (4) keen desire to attain that goal.

These are fundamental to all our endeavors - sacred and secular - and cannot be dispensed with. Time does not efface nor alter these eternal verities. In order to be aware of these verities, one has to realize the futility of relying upon changing phenomena and fleeting objects of pleasure, upon the elusive inner emotions and divisive thought processes, which perpetuate inner conflict, and the consequent restlessness and unhappiness. Unless we realize the danger of relying on false values, we shall not seek true values.

One who has these four means, takes to yoga as a duck takes to water. But one who neglects them, regards spiritual life as a labor or burden to be carried. The secret of overcoming this unpleasantness lies in understanding the fact that we are bound to realize the self - God - one day or the other, and it is a great joy doing so now; and also in taking a keen interest in boldly venturing into the realms of the mind and the spirit, in full recognition of the truth that the 'other path' - the path of sense-pleasure - is worthless, and is fraught with pain and sorrow. Then, yoga becomes delightful and fruitful. Occasional setbacks lose their depressing effect, but act as stepping stones to greater effort and success.

14. Your Normal Life is Yoga

If there is a change of heart, and a change of values, then our daily life itself becomes divine life. 'Normally' we live in a fool's paradise, with our scale of values tilted in favor of sense pleasures.

These evanescent objects of pleasure are often referred to as illusory. They are part of an illusion which is so, not because it does not exist at all, but because it appears to be what it is not. The world is not false, but the 'world-appearance' is false. Matter exists; and both vedanta and science agree that this matter itself is not what it appears to be, but a universal system of light-sound-waves - energy. But it is ignorant man who perceives in them, here an object of enjoyment which attracts him, and there a painful object which repels him.

Of this ignorance, the first-born is egoism - the feeling 'I am this', and the second offspring is selfishness - which manifests itself as desire and possessiveness - 'this is mine'. If a man is able to overcome these two, by removing ignorance which enshrouds the soul, then his scale of values also changes, he perceives the reality of the universe. It then appears to him as it is. At present, we see the world outside as we like or dislike. The world outside is but a projection of our own wishful thinking. A toy is a companion to a child, a marketable commodity to a businessman, and a piece of delicate workmanship to an artist. It is an item of expenditure to the buyer, and of income to the seller! These are relative, changeable values. But, hidden within, there is a real value. What is it? That is what the yogi, the man of wisdom, asks himself all the time.

When these false values disappear, the world does not disappear too. A swimming pool does not become the Himalayas to a yogi or a sage. These remain as they truly are, not as they appear to be in the eyes of an ignorant man, who perceives in them an object of pleasure or pain, profit or loss, good or evil. It is then that the animal instincts are sacrificed at the altar of truth, reality, or God, and man shines as a real human being, the crown of God's creation, made in the image of God!

This is the object of creation, and the purpose of human birth. But, this animal to be sacrificed is not outside us; it is inside us. The world of matter includes our own body; and, what applies to the objects of this world, applies to our body - which is also perishable, etc. Therefore, the yogi who knows that the objects of sense-pleasure are deceptive, also knows that his own senses, which experience pleasure in them, are also deceptive. It is only when we finally overcome even the sensations of pleasure and pain in us, that we are truly above the illusion of phenomena, and close to the reality that is God.

To the yogi who has arrived at this sublime state of consciousness, all life is sacred, all life is divine, all life is yoga. He lives in God, for God, and as God, and he sees the whole universe - including his body - as the body of God; he sees that it moves and lives according to God's Will. Such a life is called karma yoga.

Karma yoga is also a sadhana - the means - to reach this sublime goal; we shall discuss it in the next chapter.

15. Contemplative Dynamism

Karma yoga plays a vital role in the total scheme of yoga practice. But it is one of the most misunderstood of doctrines. All action is not yoga, though all action can be transmuted into yoga. The surgeon inserts a knife into someone's abdomen, and a murderer does so too; but what a difference! It is the difference that exists between a devout Hindu offering crumbs of bread to the fish in the holy river Ganga, and the modern gentleman 'offering' to the fish a worm on a hook.

We have to understand the spirit of karma yoga thoroughly. For, according to lord Krishna, it is the spirit in which the action is done that matters, not so much the action itself - though the spirit always expresses itself in right action. If the right attitude is maintained, and the correct spirit understood, then all action becomes yoga. If not, even great acts of charity and service, however good and beneficial they may be, do not constitute yoga. Doctors and nurses in hospitals, workers in charge of charitable institutions, priests, and mendicants, do not automatically attain salvation, unless the yogic attitude of humble worshipful service is present.

A poor man offering 'a cup of water, a leaf, a flower, or a fruit' with devotion to the Lord-in-all, practices yoga; whereas, a millionaire donating a million rupees to an orphanage, only pays indirectly the advertisement charges for his name and glory to be published in the newspapers!

What is the spirit of karma yoga? It is picturesquely presented in the Bhagavad Gita:

Man attains perfection by worshiping with every one of his actions the omnipresent God in whom all beings have their origin and in whom they exist. (18:46)

This spirit of worship is most important. It presupposes the recognition of the hidden godhead in all. 'God pervades all beings,' says the Isavasya Upanishad. 'I am the self of all beings,' says Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. It is only when we thus see and serve the lord in all, that we shall serve selflessly - without any selfish motive for gaining selfish ends, regarding the act or the service itself as reward enough. Only then shall we serve all with equal vision and balanced mind.

This is extremely difficult to understand, if we do not watch a living yogi demonstrate it. I have seen such a demonstration times without number in the life of my master Swami Sivananda. In fact, His divine life was one continuous commentary on the verse of the Gita cited above. After serving you, He always thanked you for the opportunity that you, His god, gave Him for thus worshiping the Lord in you. In rendering this service, no consideration of caste, religion, nationality, etc., ever swayed Him. For, all the time, the master was conscious that the Lord was hidden in the person whom He served, and the service was worship of the divine. When He was serving the sick as a doctor in Malaya, before

He renounced the world in 1923, He shared whatever He had with the patients, whatever their caste or social status. He did not charge them any fees, but gave them some pocket money when they departed, to help them buy their food.

It is in that spirit that we should work, in order to transform all our activities into yoga. Then would we live a life of meditation, constantly remembering the lord, and yet doing our duty in this world. That is contemplative dynamism, karma yoga, the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita - the yoga for you.

16. Not I, but the Lord

The most important factor which transforms all activity - and so, life - itself into yoga, is the inner understanding and knowledge that we are not serving humanity, but God in all. The next important factor is the 'nimitta bhavana' - the attitude born of the realization that 'God Himself is serving His own manifestations through us, and we are but instruments in His hands'. A moment's reflection will convince us beyond doubt that some mysterious power functions through us, and enables us to serve, and even to live. If that is withdrawn or even modified, a wise man may become stupid, and an intelligent man may become insane. If that is withdrawn, all our virtues and wisdom lose their luster. If that is withdrawn, the body turns into a corpse, and it is immediately disposed of. It is because of the presence of that spark of God or image of God in us, that we are considered human beings.

The karma yogi does not forget this great truth, even for a moment. 'Na aham karta isvarah karta' - I am not the doer, but the lord is the doer - is his constant feeling. He reminds himself often of the emphatic declaration of lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, addressing Arjuna: "Even if you did not do your duty, fight this battle, and kill these unrighteous people, they will not live. I have done away with them already; be a mere instrument in my hands." If we bear this in mind constantly, we shall not even claim any special merits for being good or doing good. It is he that is good in us, and it is he that does good through us. No special reward is necessary; and, if there is to be any special reward, it belongs to him!

This understanding or realization may develop in three stages:

(1) We see what we do as duty. 'This is my duty, I am discharging my duty.' If you observe yourself very carefully at this stage, you see that there is some sourness in this attitude! The duty seems to bind us, not free us, and liberate us - it seems to hold us in check, to constrict us. Yet, it may be necessary for the baby-soul. That is where we start. The rod of duty knocks down all your desires of profit motive, and so on.

(2) You begin to wonder: 'What is duty?' If a mosquito bites the back of my neck, is it the duty of my hand to chase it away? Oh, no. The hand does not argue, it does not say, "It is my duty to go and help my brother neck". Because the two belong to the same organism, there is spontaneous activity. There one discovers love. It is not duty, but it is done out of love. We serve one another because we are linked by a central essence - truth, reality, God, or self. We all form part of one God, and therefore serve one another.

(3) In these two attitudes, there is still a feeling of 'I' and 'another'. First you do it as a duty, and then you do it because you love all. In the third and the last stage, the question 'Why do I do this?' does not arise. The action is done - only actions exist. Neither the actor nor the person to whom the action is directed - only actions exist. We are all cells in the cosmic body of God; there is no 'I' here, nor a

'you' there. There is only one body of God. That is the reality, the rest is only a veil. When the 'I' and the 'you' have both been absorbed in the truth of God, what remains is pure action - which has been described and interpreted and misinterpreted.

'Be an instrument in my hands,' Krishna tells Arjuna, his disciple. But, as you meditate on this concept of an instrument, you realize something marvelous. You take a pen in your hand and write - the pen is an instrument in your hand. You think, "Ah, I have understood. I am an instrument in the hand of God, like this, and I do his will." Look at the pen again. Does it know it is an instrument in your hand? No. Even that idea of being an instrument is not there; even the instrument-feeling is an egoistic notion, a manifestation of your own separate ego-sense. So, even that is dropped.

When you lift the pen again, you see that all that happens is that the pen writes. The pen does its job, without thinking that it is its duty. There is neither the doer nor the object to which the deed is directed, but there is pure action.

When we can reach this stage of pure action, non-volitional action, instantly all problems disappear, because the creator of the problem - the ego - has been discovered to be non-existent. The body-mind complex is the channel for the flow of divine energy; that is, the ego-less person has no 'I', but is a body-mind complex. This is what is referred to as 'God's Will'. It only means 'I' is not the doer.

God's Will alone prevails here; and we are able to live, to love, and to serve, by His Will and power only. To surrender our little will, and merge it in His, is a great blessing; it liberates us from selfishness and egoism. Only he who has clearly grasped this spirit, and lives in that spirit, is and can be truly humble. The man who tries to cultivate 'humility' as a virtue in itself, often lands himself in the 'arrogance of humility' or 'pride of humility'. But, he who has understood that God does everything here, and that we are all but His instruments or cells in His cosmic body, is truly humble. Let no action spring from your own private intentions, and you will instantly be freed from self-willed, egoistic, selfish activity, and the consequent worries and anxieties.

An instrument has no anxiety to 'do'! Why is it then that, in our heart, there is such a tremendous anxiety to be an instrument in the hands of god? That anxiety is the surest sign that the ego is very much anti-God. It thinks: 'Without me, God cannot function'. So, the important thing is to be. In order to be, you do not have to try to be. Either you are or you are not doing the lord's will. Your only job is to look cautiously and constantly within at the springs of your own actions.

This, too, was readily evident in the daily life of our master Swami Sivananda. His genuine humility, His total unselfishness, and His wonderful optimism, even in the face of seeming crisis in the life of the institution He had so pain-stakingly built up, were the surest indications of the total self-surrender to the divine will in which He worked. Never once did the master look back with satisfaction or

pride on His own super-human achievements, nor did He ever rest on His laurels.

I have never seen another person who lived more truly in the eternal present, ever looking forward to doing more and more in the service of humanity, as the worship of the lord. He exalted dynamic selfless service as the best form of meditation and worship of the Lord, though He always advised us to combine both service and meditation, in order to evolve the synthesis of 'contemplative dynamism' - karma yoga.

The karma yogi lives in two worlds at the same time. He works in the external world, but never loses sight of the inner world. He serves humanity, but is ever conscious that he is serving God. He works with his body and mind, but never forgets that they are instruments in the hands of God, the indweller. To guard against the selfish nature, he adopts the Narayana-bhavana - I am serving God in all, and to guard against the lower human, egoistic nature, he adopts the nimitta bhavana - not I, but God. When vanity is removed, all the evils in one's own personality are removed. All our evils spring from vanity. Vanity confuses the distinction between right and wrong. So, once vanity is removed, right action becomes spontaneous. Nimitta bhavana fills us with inexhaustible power and energy. We do His work; in fact, He does His work, using us as instruments. He is omnipotent; and so, His instruments, too, enjoy abundant energy.

The spirit of karma yoga frees us from another problem in our daily life - the shock from which we suffer when someone whom we have served and loved is rude to us, insults us or hurts us. We do not resent when someone repays a debt he owes in any coin; we are happy. When that repayment takes the form of an insult or injury, why should we react differently? In fact, why should we react at all? Let others react as they will; we shall do what we should. And, if our nature is divine and loving, our actions - even those which appear to be reactions - will always be divine and loving. Happy in all conditions, let us continue to serve all selflessly, self-sacrificingly, and untiringly, feeling that we are serving the Lord in all for His sake, as His instruments.

That is the secret of karma yoga, which liberates us from samsara - birth and death, with the help of the very activities, which otherwise bind us to this wheel of birth and death.

17. Religion for the Modern Man

The entire universe is ever active. Man shares this nature, too. The Bhagavad Gita says that no one can remain inactive, even for a moment. The doctrine that to act in this world was to invite reaction - the chain that binds us to the wheel of repeated birth and death - involved a gross self-deception, because the very expression 'to do nothing' is absurd and meaningless. The man who 'sits doing nothing' is doing something - sitting! It is impossible to 'do nothing'. You are breathing, you are thinking, you are living. The Bhagavad Gita calls him a hypocrite who sits as if doing nothing, but who lets his mind think of ever so many objects. His physical organs may not be experiencing them, but his inner senses are, and his mind most certainly creates its own field of enjoyment, and satisfies itself. That man is a lazy hypocrite, deceiving himself, and perhaps others, too.

Hence it is that our master Swami Sivananda calls upon everyone, even the recluse, to come out into the world and to be dynamic in service - but with a difference.

The service should be selfless. This is the religion we need today - the religion of selflessness, of unselfish and loving service. We are all brothers and sisters. The entire world - not only the human kind, but all living beings - forms one family. Our physical body is made of 'earth', and when we leave it, it is returned to the earth. Earth is our mother, who gave us birth, and who nourishes us. 'Dust thou art, and to dust returnest', was not said of the soul of man. Perhaps the soul is the individual cell in the body of God. God is our father; earth is our mother. We are all the children of this divine couple. What they give us, belongs to everyone of us. Whatever be our status, knowledge or prowess, we have no right to deprive our brother of his share of our parent's blessings. The sense of possession should therefore go, because it is false and meaningless.

A gentleman was bathing in a river. A good walking stick floated along the current. The gentleman caught hold of it; there was no one else to claim it. As he was heading for the bank, the cloth he had wrapped around his waist began to slip. When he held the cloth, the walking-stick slipped from his hand, and was carried away by the current. He beat his face and cried aloud: 'Oh, my walking-stick has gone.' Isn't it strange that, holding it in his hand for a few seconds, should bestow this ownership on him?

That is what we do with the goods of this world. They belong to the earth, to all of us. We should learn to share them with all. We should learn to give, give, and give. This is my divine master's forte. I have not seen anyone else in the world take such an actual delight in giving, giving - everything, to everybody.

A correct understanding of this truth that the world belongs to all of us, and that we are all brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of God, will show us how we can achieve perfect social adjustment here. For, whatever may be our concept of

God - they are but concepts which do not always have relevance to our life here, unless and until we truly understand our relationship with the world, we cannot know how to live in harmony with what is around us; we cannot attain purity of mind and heart, and we cannot arrive at the truth.

Our relationship with our neighbors now is not governed by the universal teaching, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself', but by the profit motive. We have not learnt to give, but only to take - and there is no limit to what we want to take. Even if the whole world is given to us, we still remain unsatisfied. We expect to be paid for every little service we render. This expectation always brings disappointment in its wake. We are not interested in others' welfare, but only in our own.

Yoga asks us to serve and love our neighbor as our own self, for God's sake. "For God's sake, do this!", cries a boss when he is annoyed; the wise secretary should thank him for this great admonition. We should do our duty for God's sake, not for the sake of pleasing any person.

We shall never feel disappointed if we expect no material reward for the service we render. We feel that the self that dwells in us dwells in all, and that we are eternally united with all that exists in a bond of love - and that love is God. In order to attain cosmic consciousness, we cultivate cosmic love, and express it as selfless service for God's sake, as an instrument in the hand of God.

Let not the thought enter our mind that we have brought any great good, happiness, or relief, to any being on earth. It is not that, but for us, the world will collapse! God's will is done here, as it is in heaven. We are only His instrument. How blessed it is to be an instrument in the hands of God, to feel that His Will is done through us. He works through us. His Will is done, and we are glorified on earth. Unearned glory!

In this, there is no superior service or inferior service, no menial service, and no service from which we need shrink. It is all service of God. Whatever falls to our lot, we should do in this spirit. It is not necessary for us to run away from our homes, and search for sick people! Wherever we are, we shall find poor people, sick people, illiterate people, people in distress, etc., whom we can help. But, over and above all this, we should learn to do all our daily duties - even the prosaic household duties and office work - in this spirit.

This spirit of worship ensures that the service or the activity is sincere and efficiently performed. We shall not offer faded flowers at the Feet of God. We shall not be inefficient in our work either. We do not seek a reward. To worship Him, to be an instrument in His hands, is itself the supreme reward. There is no mechanical regimentation in this work. It is full of love and devotion. It is performed joyously - there is no tension in such activity.

This is the religion for the modern man. It is the religion of transformation of

the heart, a new social adjustment, a healthier outlook on life, and one that satisfies the dynamic, rational, and socialistic modern man. Everyone, living for 'others', promotes commonweal, and eventually realizes the supreme omnipresent truth, or cosmic consciousness.

When this spirit is absent, commonweal, peace, happiness, and prosperity, are beyond our reach, whatever be the progress we make in the spheres of science and technology.

18. The Three-pronged Attack on Ignorance

In karma yoga - and in yoga, generally - we have only one real enemy and obstacle, and that is egoism; and this egoism itself is nothing but ignorance. This mighty power manifests in our life as (a) I-ness (b) mine-ness, and (c) love of sense-pleasure, and comfort. The purpose of yoga is specifically to forget the self, the ego, to forget the world of pleasure and comfort that is likely to keep one away from God - God who is present in all, and who is bliss.

This ignorance manifests itself as the basic concept: 'I am this body', i.e., I am a distinct personality, different from all others, with my own soul separate from others, with my own ideas, ideals, thoughts, and aspirations. The yogi endeavors to 'sacrifice' - in the Bhagavad Gita this is called yajna - this ignorance at the altar of God who is the sole reality.

This ignorance manifests as a distinction between what is 'mine' and what is 'not mine'. If this is an object of enjoyment, there arises a tendency to preserve what is 'mine' with all one's power and by all means, fair and foul; and, what is 'not mine' is sought to be gained, by fair means or foul. If it is a person, then the tendency is to cling to, and to protect what is 'mine', and to ignore, to hate, and even to destroy what is 'not mine'. The destruction of what is 'mine' causes misery; and the promotion and prosperity of what is 'not mine' also causes misery - whereas the contrary gives pleasure. The yogi endeavors to rid himself of this manifestation of ignorance by what in the Bhagavad Gita is called 'dana' - charity.

On account of the identification of the self with the perishable, inert and element-compounded body, this ignorance considers those experiences which please the senses, as happiness of the self! Hence, man restlessly pursues sense-pleasure, forgetting that thereby he is driving happiness farther away! Ignorance prevents him from arriving at a correct understanding, and keeps him under the subjection of illusion. The yogi conquers this 'love and pursuit of pleasure', by resolutely leading a life of simplicity - austerity or tapas - which burns the veil of ignorance.

All three terms have been grossly understood. Let us approach the three from the lower end of the scale; for, without first getting rid of the false values in our life, and of the lust for luxury, we shall not get anywhere. Tapas is a 'burning fire'- often taken literally to mean that we should live surrounded by fire! There are yogis in India, even today, who sit on burning sands of a river-bed, with the blazing mid-summer sun above, and four heaps of burning firewood in the four directions close to them. It may develop one's power of endurance, but it has no real spiritual value; for, instead of burning ignorance and its offspring - egoism, such practices may very well fatten egoism and vanity. A simple life, providing oneself with nothing more than the bare necessities of life - not those luxuries which today have become bare necessities, a life of self-control, is tapas; for, such a life burns all unholy appetites of the senses.

Charity has also been distorted very much. Real charity is done, not because otherwise human misery will not be relieved - God can wipe out the world's miseries in a minute, but He gives us an opportunity to purify our own heart by charity and service, not for the sake of self-aggrandizement, but purely as worship of the omnipresent God. We offer to the God-in-the-beneficiary that which already belongs to Him. The whole universe is His, and we ignorantly feel that some objects are 'mine'. Charity is done in order to remove this sinful feeling of mine-ness, this anti-divine misappropriation which is the cause of all our miseries.

Yajna or sacrifice, too, has given rise to hideous practices of killing innocent and harmless animals in the name of God and religion. Sacrifice is the sacrifice of egoism, selfishness, which erects a wall of isolation to imprison the soul. This is the last big hurdle in yoga; and, just beyond, it is God-realization. This selfishness is the poisonous agent that pollutes the living waters of peace and bliss that continuously spring from our own heart, thus making us miserable, even though we live close to the fountain-source of supreme happiness and peace. Sacrifice of I-ness is not easy. It is not giving away something which we have - and which we may acquire again, but is the little ego which we, in ignorance, believe to be the self. When this ego-sense dies, then the cosmic being reveals itself from within as the self.

These three are vital to the practice of yoga. Tapas simplifies our life, and makes luxuries unnecessary. It opens our eyes to all the unnecessary things we store in our own house, which, when distributed, can lessen our anxiety over their preservation, and promote the happiness of others. Charity removes the sense of possession, and enables us to realize that all things belong to God, and are really pervaded by Him. Sacrifice removes the veil of ignorance and egoism in us, and enables us to perceive the hidden godhead within.

Sacrifice and charity together keep us ever open in all the aspects of our personality. Self-centeredness and selfishness are destroyed, and we are ever open to the reception of divine light, and to its rediffusion to all.

19. Love of God and Man

We studied karma yoga, the yoga of dynamic selfless service, or what I have called 'contemplative dynamism' at some length, for the simple but important reason that it is the best approach suited to the present age. For, partly on account of the total extroversion of man's consciousness, and partly as a reaction to the idle pretenders of holiness living a parasitic life, there is a world-wide revolt against life-and-world-negating forms of asceticism and cloistered mystery. Whilst all the masters of divine wisdom - from Lord Buddha, Lord Jesus, Prophet Muhammed, and Lord Krishna, down to our own Masters in the present age - have acclaimed with one voice that we should love God with all our heart and soul, they have almost equated this love with the love of man. One without the other is incomplete. Love of God without the love of man may amount to deception. Love of man without love of God may lead to worldliness and bondage, however well-meant it is. We need an integration of the two - that is yoga.

In fact, that is what we learn from the Christian symbol of the holy cross. It represents the message of yoga, and the vital teachings of Lord Jesus and Lord Krishna. Almost all the major religions of the world have symbols to embody this truth. I look at the two arms of the holy cross - the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical arm seems to say to me: 'O man! Love thy God with all thy being.' The two ends of this vertical arm point one above, and the other below. In other words, God is above, far beyond the reach of your mind and intellect - transcendental, and he is below, in the innermost core of your being, in the depth of your own heart.

I look at the horizontal arm of the holy cross. The outstretched arms of Lord Jesus command me: 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' Lord Jesus Himself clearly stated who that neighbor is, in the parable of the good Samaritan. Here, it is good to remember that this horizontal arm points both to the right and to the left. In other words: 'Love thy neighbor who is on your right - whom you regard as righteous and lovable, and also the neighbor whom you have left behind you - regarding him as wicked, uncivilized, undesirable and therefore your enemy, as your own self.'

These two are not isolated and distinct activities. The two arms of the holy cross are joined together, to indicate that the two aspects are in fact one. For, God dwells in your neighbor, and your love of your neighbor is 'not indeed for the sake of your neighbor, but for the sake of the self in him' - in the words of sage Yajnavalkya in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. The one God appears before us in these four directions: (a) above, as the transcendental reality, (b) below, as the immanent reality in our own heart, (c) all that is good and glorious in this world, and (d) all that we, in our state of ignorance, have come to regard as evil and undesirable. Perhaps, it is in order to further underline and emphasize the last aspect that Lord Jesus specifically added: "Love thine enemy!"

All saints and prophets have exalted love above all other virtues. They have at the same time warned us that this love should be pure and divine. That is, the love should not be directed towards the personality of the neighbor, but to the deeper inner reality - God. Thus, love of God must flow through our limbs as love of man, and that love of man is for the sake of the omnipresent being - God. You will love all - and not love some and hate others - only if you see the common unity in all. That is God.

It is easy to see, therefore, that karma yoga does not and cannot stand independent of other branches of yoga. It should either be based on the knowledge: "All activities spring from God's nature and not from me" - or on love of God: "I, an instrument in the hands of God, serve God in my neighbor, for God's sake." The former knowledge-approach - jnana yoga - is rare nowadays. The latter is within our reach. But it has its own discipline.

20. The Yoga of Devotion

We have seen how love of God and love of man are identical, two sides of the same coin. One without the other is sham and nonsense. This is very important to bear in mind. In loving man, we should not forget the God in him. In loving God, we should not forget that He is in all!

That is the wonderful message that Lord Krishna has for us in the Bhagavad Gita. He asks us to think of God constantly, and be united with him constantly - but never to neglect our duty! When we are puzzled if this is possible, he turns round and points out to us that he is in all. It is possible to love and serve him in all. It should be practiced; but let us not minimize its difficulty, either.

He who does not know what it is to love one, does not know how to love any. He who has not felt the presence of God at all, how do you expect him to feel the presence of God in all?

To solve this problem, our ancients instituted the devotional practices, together called 'bhakti' in Sanskrit. Bhakti means 'to resort to', 'to go to', 'to surrender oneself to', 'to take refuge in'. Please bear this in mind, and you will realize how wrong it is to take this wonderful yoga to mean mere emotionalism. Yet, that is what has happened. Crying, jumping, dancing, fainting, and such other abnormal practices, have often been mistaken for true emotion, but all emotion is not devotion.

We often forget that though sages may behave like mad men, mad men are not sages. We should know the genuine from the spurious. Otherwise, we shall regard bhakti as a mere riot of emotion. It is not. Such a misunderstanding also provides a safe cover for all sorts of misdemeanor and undesirable behavior.

We should take refuge in God. We should constantly go to God. We should constantly feel his presence - which is the same as his omnipresence. But, if we have never been in love, if we have never felt that presence in someone, something, somewhere, how shall we experience it in all?

Compassionate sages have provided us with a ladder with convenient rungs with easy steps to God-realization. These are worship of an image of God in a specially erected holy place, singing of hymns, repetition of the divine name, etc. All these external 'aids' provoke the inner feelings of the presence of God, which is most important. They all have their place in our approach to God. We use them as a child uses a doll, though there is a vital difference. The doll is not a baby; but the girl learns how to hold a baby. It is a vital part of training for eventual motherhood.

The child does not 'imagine' that the doll is a doll - you have seen how it is heart-broken when something happens to her 'child'. In all our spiritual devotional practices, it is good to bear this great factor in mind. We shall not

forget that the goal is realization, not imagination. We should see 'God' in the image. However, we have been conditioned to reject as superstition that which offends our rational intellect! In our devotional practice, therefore, we resort to imagination, which the rational intellect accepts as a necessary focal point. In the practice of yoga, this imagination is soon substituted by 'visualization'. Behind all forms is the formless. In every atom of matter is the spirit. The doll can never become a baby; the baby is not in it at all. But God's presence is omnipresent. That is the difference. The image does not 'contain' God, but is part of his omnipresence, anyway. To limit him is sin, blasphemy, spiritual tragedy - we shall not call a pot of ocean-water the 'ocean'. But, to approach him through the image, because of our subjective limitation, is sensible. Knowing that air is universal, we do not demand that we shall only breathe the whole air or nothing, but sensibly breathe in a little, still asserting "I am breathing air".

God, being infinite, is all. God being the center of everyone - which fact is symbolically expressed as 'God dwells in the hearts of all' - is close to everyone, and can be approached in infinite ways. The center is equi-distant from every point on the circumference. Every man thus has direct and independent access to God. Hence, proselytization is ignorant, if not disastrous.

The Bhagavad Gita bestows on us (a) total freedom of worship, and (b) freedom from interference. A man-of-God proclaims the dangers of disturbing the faith on which a man's life is based, and merely reveals the center; and, in the light of his teaching, every man sees his own path and marches on it. If the blessings of God - sunlight, rain, air, food and life - are bestowed by him on all, who are we to say that, unless they followed 'me', they will all go to hell? It is the worst blasphemy.

Even in regard to the individual's adoration of the one God, he is given total freedom of choice as to the form and the mode. The Bhagavad Gita specifically mentions this. The Hindu has taken advantage of this freedom, and provided the devotee with innumerable 'images' of God. These act as (a) a focal point for the devotee's concentration and meditation; (b) a kind of shorthand for sublime philosophical concepts, and an unchanging pictorial language in which they are preserved; and (c) a consoling presence to which the devotee could resort in times of stress, trials and tribulations.

Of all spiritual practices, bhakti or devotion or love of God is one which involves the greatest amount of symbolism. The symbolism is not to be intellectualized but realized. First comes faith, which generates love; love slips past the intellect, and throws open the heart's doors; and hence, there is intuitive realization of the symbolism. It is not an understanding of the symbolism, nor its rationalization - but actualization, revelation.

21. From Ritual to Realisation

Bhakti yoga - love of God - is basic to all religions that encourage their adherents to use icons and rituals in their spiritual practices. It is one of the main features of the Indian approach to God. This was regarded by ancient spiritual teachers as so vital that they wove it into the fabric of the Indian's daily life. In addition to a temple which is found in every village, every house has its own altar, at which full-scale ritualistic worship is offered every day.

It is unfortunate that the common man clings to the icon and the ritual, and forgets the spirit underlying their use. Worship of God-in-the-idol degenerates into idolatry, which has nothing to do with religion, but which is just another trade. However, whenever this has happened in India, it has immediately been arrested by saintly religious reformers who have restored to religion its pristine purity.

Man swings from one extreme to the other! People misinterpret the reformers' utterances, and use them to their own advantage. The words of Lord Krishna, the biblical prophets, Lord Jesus, Lord Buddha, and Prophet Muhammed, sprang from their realization or direct experience. It is good to hold them as 'lamps unto our feet', in order that we, too, may reach that experience. But, when we assume the role of their representatives here, and quote their words, in order to run the followers of the other faiths down, then we present a grotesque picture thus described by a Tamil poet: 'An ugly bird saw a peacock dance; and, feeling equally important, spread its own plumes, and began to dance!' The mischief is completed by the atheistic, materialistic, and worldly man, who uses all this to shake the faith of the devout.

We go to a temple, synagogue, church, or mosque, not in obedience to what the priest says, but to commune with God. We should not stop going there on account of what the priest says within it, nor what the reformer says outside it. To judge God and to make our devotion to him dependent on the thoughts, words, deeds of any man, is to blaspheme against God - you are the loser.

Understood and applied rightly, idol worship gradually leads the devotee to the realization of the absolute. My Master, Swami Sivananda, was devoted to idol worship till the end of His life, though He was a monistic philosopher. He was regular in His daily ritualistic worship of His deity. Thus He set an example for all of us to emulate. But He, as Lord Krishna before Him, reminded us that we should not stop there. We should practice constant remembrance of God. We should feel his 'omni'-presence everywhere, in all.

It is easy to say so, but quite another thing to do so. Two factors are involved in this: (a) we should know what it is to feel the presence of God - a 'salesman's sample' of it; and (b) we should have a method by which we can remember him.

The first is provided by the ritual of idol worship. The icon enables us to feel his

presence, and at the same time to look within and sample the feeling. Without it, it is possible that the novitiate may never experience the wonderful feeling of God's omnipresence.

The second is provided in the Bhagavad Gita, the tenth chapter. The technique is this: let everything that we see remind us of God - the light of the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, and the electric lamp; the vast blue sky or the ocean; the beautiful flower and the innocent face of a child; the gigantic tree and the strong arm of a gymnast; the image of God on the altar and the radiant face of a saint. All these remind us of the existence of God in them. Our master wanted us to practice constant nama-smaran - repetition of a mantra or the name of God. One helps the other. When they are combined, we grow God-conscious rapidly.

How does idol worship fit into this? What is an idol but a piece of matter, from the point of view of an ignorant man - whatever may be his wealth, position or titles? Yet, the devotee feels the presence of God within that material substance - clay, stone, metal, or wood. The wise sage allows him to 'play' - pray - with it, as a child plays with a doll. The child gets its training in mothercraft; the devotee gets to know that God indeed does dwell within that piece of matter. Then, he turns around and sees the sun, moon, etc., and realizes that even as god is the indweller of the idol, he is the indweller of the sun, the moon, etc. This looks apparently simple; but, in practice, it is difficult.

Why does not the sage advocate such a practice of the presence of God, without prescribing idol worship as a preliminary? For the simple reason that the human mind is more ready to associate divinity with the idol - on account of tradition - than to see God in the face of a child. In the case of the latter, immediately your eyes behold it your mind says, "It is my child, etc.," and you have to overcome a good deal of thoughts and counter-thoughts before arriving at the ideal thought, "God is shining through its eyes". But, in the case of an idol, this difficulty does not arise, on account of the age-old association of ideas. And, with a little practice, it becomes easy to extend the practice of the presence of God to everything in this world.

There is another important angle to this spiritual exercise. Idol worship should lead us on to meditation on the absolute. Without the first step of idol worship, meditation on the absolute is almost impossible; and, if we do not extend the frontiers of divinity beyond the idol, we may get stuck there. Hence, even in the method of worshiping idols, our ancient seers introduced elements of adoration of the nameless and the formless being - in fact, they emphasized that we should superimpose the qualities of the absolute on the idol. In the mantras, they provide for the worship, they wove expressions like "I bow to the all-pervading", "I bow to the eternal", which are obviously irrelevant to the personalized forms of God - e.g. Rama and Krishna, who are historical personalities - which the devotee worships. Again, they declare that mental worship of the chosen deity is superior - when we are ready for it, of course - to gross external worship, and that para puja - a way of adoring the omnipresent God through all our thoughts, words,

and deeds - is superior to all other forms of worship.

The sincere spiritual aspirant realizes that he cannot get anywhere on this path without the help of an image to fix his mind on. The idol provides a concrete form of God, on which he can pour out the devotion of his heart, to which he can pray, and on which he can lean in times of stress and strain, trials and difficulties. He finds great relief from tension, worries, and anxieties, when he has a 'tangible God' to whom he can talk! The omnipresent divinity, which is of course present in the idol too, hears his prayers.

When the concentration - which is love - grows intense, the power latent in the idol is revealed; and thus, we have stories of the great mystics who could 'see' God in and through the idols. Let us not forget that God, who is omnipresent, is in the idol too; and, he who is omnipotent, can reveal himself in any form to the devotee. It is in this respect that the idol is different from the child's doll. Whereas the doll remains forever a doll - because it is lifeless, the idol reveals the hidden godhead in response to the devotee's loving prayer and concentration. The concentrated beam of the devotee's consciousness will one day be powerful enough to burn the gross matter of the idol, and liberate and reveal the hidden God in it; even as the rays of sunlight, when focused through a lens, are able to bum a piece of cotton, and make it burst into flame. But, let us not forget that it was not the idol that they saw in the vision, but the divinity in the idol - the divinity that is in all, for that matter. When asked if he saw the goddess Kali with 'physical' eyes, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa explained that "God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline, one gets a love body, endowed with love eyes, love ears, and so on. One sees God with those love eyes".

Without correctly understanding this principle, people unwisely shout: "We do not want to worship a stone". Of course, they should not. But, first answer these questions: Who is worshipping the stone? - I. What idea have you of this 'I'? The first one is of the body. It is the body that actually performs the worship. The body is predominantly water, with some other chemical elements. What harm is there in water and matter worshipping a stone? How is it ignorance or superstition? Of course, you exclaim, I am not only the body, but I have a soul. Then, let the body worship the stone, let the heart, mind, and soul in you realize the lord in the stone.

Secondly, will you worship all stones? No. Only a particular stone, which has been given a shape. Who worships it? - I. If this 'I' is also chiseled and sculptured into a divine shape, it is divine. The stone-image of God reminds you of this. When this was stone, you stood upon it. When those chips of the stone which did not belong to this divine form were chiseled away, and the stone assumed the divine form, you worship it. In the same way, there is a lot of undivine element in you. Chisel it away. You will become a divinity on earth, adored by mankind. That, incidentally, is the argument underlying the adoration of the guru or the spiritual preceptor.

If idol worship thus leads us step by step to God-realization, through the worshipful service and recognition of the omnipresence of God, it is ideal worship. Else, it degenerates into idle worship.

22. Conquest of the Conqueror

As we have seen, it is the concentrated mind that is able to pierce 'matter' and perceive the spirit. Its dissipated rays are powerless. We do have periods of one-pointed mind, but they are determined by external forces. For instance, when we are witnessing an exciting movie film, the mind seems to be one-pointed; but, then, it is not in our control, and it is extrovert. On the other hand, when we wish deliberately to control it, it is more restless than the wind.

The mind, moving with the speed and power of the wind itself, is the conqueror of the whole world. Everything in this world has been achieved by the mind. Every great action and achievement in this world has had the mind - thought - behind it. Mind has conquered matter; mind governs matter. Who is to conquer the conqueror? The yogis have a simple answer - japa - repetition of a mantra or name of God. Unfortunately, in this world of complexities, the very simplicity of the answer makes people disbelieve in it. In all our spiritual practices, japa plays a vital role. This was our Master's forte. It is a solution to all our problems. It does not merely solve the problems, it dissolves the creator of problems, viz., the mind! All our problems are created by the impure mind. Repetition of a mantra is the best purifier of the mind, and tranquillizer, too. The effect is best illustrated in the following story.

A yogi spent some time in the house of a devotee, and the young son of the poor family served him devotedly. While departing from the place, the yogi volunteered to fulfill any of the boy's wishes, as he had control over an invisible spirit. The boy, however, wanted the spirit to be loaned to him for some time, as he had many 'wants'. Reluctantly, the yogi gave the young man command over the spirit, with the warning that, if he found any difficulty in dealing with it, he should think of the yogi. The latter then went his way, and the young man called up the spirit. The spirit agreed to do anything for him, provided he would keep it busy always - failing which it would eat him up. The young man had all his desires fulfilled in a few hours - had a palace built and furnished, a car made, etc. - and he was at a loss to know how to keep the spirit busy any more, as otherwise his life was in danger. In keeping the spirit busy, he could not even enjoy the wonderful things it had provided for him. Here is an exact parallel for the situation in which the modern millionaire finds himself - he has all the good things in the world, but has neither the time nor the tranquillity to enjoy them, as the ghost of ambition keeps him working all the time. The young man thought of the yogi, who appeared and gave him some secret advice. As soon as the spirit appeared after the last mission, the young man asked it to erect a big pillar in front of the house, and to climb up and down till he asked it to stop. That was the yogi's solution; and that defeated the restless spirit.

We have such a restless spirit in us, and it is the impure desire-filled mind. If we do not keep it busy with some good activity continuously, it will create impure desires and thoughts, and destroy us. The best way to keep it constantly busy, without obstructing our daily work, is japa of God's name or a mantra. This will

not only keep evil thoughts, emotions, and desires away, but it will enable us to enjoy righteous pleasures, as only a peaceful mind can.

What is a mantra? This word has several meanings. It has been defined as 'anything that protects when the whole mind is saturated with it'. It may even mean 'a wholesome advice' - like the one the yogi gave the boy in the story. Popularly, it is a formula, a phrase, or a word, which has mystical if not magical properties. Usually, the name or a word-symbol of a deity is woven into it. Many of the mantras have an interesting and significant feature - as in the mantra Om Namah Shivaya - salutation to Shiva, there is no 'I'.

Here are a few popular mantras: Om, Om Tat Sat, Soham, Om Namah Shivaya, Om Namo Narayanaya, Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya, Om Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram, Hari Om, Kyrie Eleison Christe Eleison, Om Jesus, Ya Allah, Allah-U Akbar, Adonai Elehaino Adonai Ekhad, Om Mani Padme Hum, La Ilahi Ill-Allah-U. Select any you like, according to your taste, temperament and tradition.

As soon as you wake up in the morning, start repeating the mantra, even in bed. Then, after having a quick wash, sit down and repeat the mantra for half an hour. During the day, every hour or so, close your eyes for just a few minutes, and repeat the mantra.

The greatest secret in mantra-repetition is to associate the mantra with the breath. If yours is a short mantra, repeat it once while you breathe in, and once while you breathe out. If it is a long one, repeat half while you breathe in, and half while you breathe out, but without 'breaking' into two. If you do this deliberately for a little while, a conditioned reflex will be formed, and the mind will enjoy the habit of mantra-repetition. You will soon create a habit this way, and ultimately the mind will go on repeating the mantra along with your daily activities, as a sort of undercurrent. Even during sleep, the mind will involuntarily go on repeating the mantra. This purifies and steadies the mind, and enables you to enjoy great peace and happiness. Before going to bed, repeat the mantra for about half an hour. You will have sound sleep, and the 'current' will be kept up during the sleep too!

There are at least three ways in which japa is done. (1) The mantra is repeated audibly. (2) It is uttered silently, but with a slight lip-movement. (3) It is repeated mentally. The masters declare that mental repetition is the most powerful, obviously because it leads to deep concentration of the mind.

All these mantras can also be sung aloud. Then it is known as kirtan or sankirtan, especially when several devotees sing in chorus. Kirtan also includes singing the praise of the lord, singing the psalms and hymns, and not necessarily mantras only. Many holy men are great votaries of this mode of devotion. Some of them sing and dance themselves into rapturous ecstasy.

My Master Swami Sivananda lays the greatest emphasis on the repetition of the Lord's Names. This is also a great blessing to all who experience the stress and strain in the modern world. The strain is built up as we carry it over from one activity to another, from one piece of work to another. My Master did not do that. As soon as one task came to an end, He withdrew Himself into this background of japa, and rested in it for a few seconds before turning to another task. Thus the carry-over is cut off, we do not suffer the least strain, and we do not have a nervous breakdown. When the limbs are worked out after a period of activity, they naturally ask for sleep and rest; and, since the mind has been trained to withdraw into the background of mantra, the moment the last task of the day is done, it immediately slips into the background, and we enjoy sound sleep.

23. From Mantra to Meditation

The mental japa protects the devotee from his own ego-sense, and saves him from assuming that the ego-sense - which is a shadow - is substance or reality. How does it do that? By leading to meditation.

While you repeat the mantra mentally, inquire within yourself, "What is the meaning of the expression - I am mentally repeating the mantra?" You know what verbally uttering the mantra means; but, what is 'mental' repetition, how is the sound of the mantra produced?

You will naturally realize that the mind or the intelligence in you utters the mantra; it reflects the mantra, it has identified itself with the mantra. You do not know what that intelligence is, and you realize that it is useless building an image of it, and then pretending to know what it is. But, when you do mental japa, the mantra and the mind become one, and by inquiring into the nature of the mantra - which is inwardly audible and therefore real - you are able to know what that inner intelligence really is. Be careful. For, if the mind produces a verbal answer, the inquiry is interrupted. Verbal answer is a description or a distraction; it is not the reality.

The inner intelligence produces the sound of the mantra, and the same intelligence is able to listen to it. When the attention is focused upon that aspect of this intelligence which repeats the mantra, you think 'I am repeating the mantra'. When the same attention is shifted to that aspect of the intelligence which listens to the mantra, you think 'I am listening to the mantra'. Then you hear the noise of feet moving on the floor, or such external noise. Watch very carefully now. If you are watching intently, you can almost see something jumping up and down within you. It is like when a movie camera is shaken - the figures suddenly become indistinct. This is the psychological moment at which the concentration is threatened. If you are not careful at that moment, you will wake up half an hour later, and wonder "Oh, what happened to my mantra?"

If this is to be prevented, one must learn to recognize when the mantra becomes indistinct. The moment of distraction is the most important and vital phenomenon. If you are able to recognize it, your attention will not be distracted.

We return to mental japa. You are repeating the mantra. You hear it. Are you one or two? Now you are trying to examine the phenomenon of space that divides the mental repetition of the mantra from the mental hearing. You are looking at the division with great intensity and concentration. Suddenly, the division disappears. The whole being repeats the mantra. You become one with the mantra. Your individual or separate personality is dissolved in the mantra.

Paramahansa Muktananda describes the technique of doing japa in the four bodies, in His book, "Light on the Path":

"The four bodies of the soul are: the gross, the subtle, the causal, and the supra-causal bodies. The physical body, about five feet in size, composed of five elementary constituents, and red in color, is the soul's gross body. The subtle body is about the size of a thumb, white in color, and is located in the region of the throat. The causal body resides in the heart, is black in color, and about half the size of the joint of the thumb. The fourth one, situated in the navel region, is bluish in color, and about the size of a grain of lentil or a tiny spot.

When japa - repetition of a mantra - of the gross body, as recited by the tongue, enters further inside, and begins to be repeated in the throat, it is known as japa of the subtle body. When this happens, the sadhaka - practitioner - should understand that japa yoga has purified the gross body, and has now entered the subtle body. Here, the number of japa increases many times. During the japa in the throat, the sadhaka experiences a divine tandra. In this state, he experiences a spell of blissful sleep; and sometimes, in that spell he gets visions of God, Goddesses, the Guru, and other Siddhas and Saints. The japa of the throat goes on continuously day and night, without a break.

After this, when the subtle body is thoroughly purified, japa goes still deeper, and now it occurs in the heart. The place where japa continues is the sadhaka's third or causal body. This region is also known as the seat of deep sleep. The seeds of all the evils, which cause one to go round and round in the cycle of birth and death, are also there. The japa of the heart not only strengthens the body and adds luster to the eyes and the face, but also makes the sadhaka do adventurous things. Usually, one falls asleep during japa, yet the repetition of mantra maintains its continuity.

When the required number of japa of the third body is completed, it moves to the fourth or navel region. From the spiritual point of view, this region of the navel is of great importance. The bluish lustrous body is also perceived within. Japa in this fourth body gives the sadhaka varied visions of divine lights. The light is also the light of Brahman, sometimes described as the supreme light of japa.

During sadhana - practice - in the fourth body, the vibrations of japa are also felt in the head. By the power of japa in the navel region, all the hidden shaktis - powers - are awakened. At this stage, as a gift from the Guru, the sadhaka gets a sort of mantra in the form of continuous awareness of his own self. This mantra is a prize medal from the benign and gracious Guru. As an immediate consequence, the disciple is entirely transmuted.

Such transmutation is the real meaning of the word 'mantra'.

The ancient wisdom of the yogi has already given us these two powerful forces - prayer and repetition of the mantra - to help us deal with our own impure mind, and enrich our daily life with peace and happiness.

There have been great masters in the world who have exalted bhakti yoga, and particularly japa, above all other spiritual practices. They believe that japa alone is sufficient for attaining the highest end and aim of yoga. Yet, anyone who has tried to do japa, would know that a wandering mind is the worst enemy of japa, of bhakti, of yoga; and japa needs to be supported by other practices, which fall under the category of hatha yoga and raja yoga.

24. Hatha Yoga - An Art and a Science

Hatha yoga has been widely advertised as a perfectly scientific way to health, relaxation, and peace of mind. By many people it is considered as a system of mainly physical exercise. Hatha yoga certainly gives you a healthy body and a healthy mind, but its goal is different and much higher.

The physical postures and the breathing exercises of hatha yoga calm the nerves, and ease the tensions in our body and mind, and are vitally important; but we should not stop with them. We should go deeper, and obtain the precious pearl we have within ourselves - self-realization.

These apparently simple postures and regulation of the breathing help in a wonderful way in our meditation and concentration. They who regularly follow up the yoga asanas and pranayama with a period of concentration and meditation - and they alone - can understand this.

The Gheranda Samhita lists the following seven as the aims of hatha yoga:

- (1) purification, through the six practices,
- (2) firmness, through the practice of the yoga postures,
- (3) steadiness, through the practice of mudra,
- (4) courage and patience, through the practice of introversion of the mind and the senses,
- (5) lightness, through the regulation of the life force,
- (6) self-realization, through meditation, and
- (7) freedom from bondage, through the direct experience of cosmic consciousness, or samadhi.

In the scriptures, there are declarations that the practitioner will conquer old age and death. This conquest is not to be confused with the physical immortality, nor is it a promise of perennial youth. It is the discovery of that which is untouched by old age and death.

Hatha yoga enables you to discover health - wholeness and holiness. It is a state of inner being in which there is no division at all, but only perfect balance and harmony. This wholeness or harmony concerns not only oneself, but one's relation with the all, with the totality of existence.

Health - also, peace, bliss, love, and god - is impossible to describe; the description is not 'health'. It has to be discovered and experienced. Even so, peace has to be discovered; love and bliss and god have to be discovered. Hatha yoga is a method and a technique for this discovery.

Hatha yoga manifests on two levels at the same time - the physical body and the subtle body. The physical body is material, the subtle body is the combination of the energy and intelligence that indwell the physical body, and animate it. The 'discovery' on the level of the physical body happens when the toxins that cover

the cells of the body are eliminated. The 'discovery' on the subtle level reveals the mysterious and mighty intelligence that uses the life force to animate the body, and to perform the numerous functions on the physical level.

Even the simplest movement of the body, like lifting one foot up while standing, is not the work of the muscles alone. When this simple movement is performed with great inward attention, you immediately see the wondrous function of the intelligence that is inherent in every cell of your body, which springs into action to restore the balance. You cannot imitate this action with both your feet on the ground. Hence, it is clear that this intelligence is beyond the 'me' - the ego-sense - and that it responds only to real need, not to imaginary situations. The discovery of this intelligence and the direct realization of its incredible power and efficiency, is the conquest of old age and death, worry, and anxiety. That intelligence knows what to do, and how to do it.

Even the physical aspect of hatha yoga is so designed as to work on the internal vital organs, rather than the superficial muscles. The health of the body depends to a great extent on the health of the nervous system and of the endocrine system of ductless glands. This is done by ensuring that the life force or prana flows through these organs, without being blocked or rushed. If the pranic pressure is even and harmonious, then the body and the mind function well.

Prana is life. It is the power in the life-breath. It bears the same relation to the nerves and the body as the electrical current bears to the electric wire. You do not see the current; you cannot see the prana either - but you see the function of electricity in the lights, fans, radio, television; you see the function of the prana in the countless faculties and functions you enjoy in your life.

Prana flows through nadis which are like light-waves or sound-waves. If the prana flows freely, you are full of life, cheerful, happy, peaceful, optimistic, and zealous; you look forward to facing the challenge of life with hope and enthusiasm.

The yoga system of physical culture waters the roots of inner health, so that the yogi's powers of resistance and endurance are much higher than those of others. He enjoys an inner sense of well-being. This system enables you to prevent illness in youth, and in old age to rise above such illness.

As well as concentrating on the glands, hatha yoga also strengthens the nerves, by working on the brain and spinal column, from which the nerves branch off. Glands, brain, and spinal column, are therefore our primary concern, though we do pay some attention to several important internal viscera, especially those connected with digestion.

However, a serious student would insist that he has nothing whatsoever to do with glands, nerves, and the digestive system, and that he is not interested in strengthening them. His attention is focused on the nadis and the chakras -

which the layman associates with the nerves and glands, and the solar plexus or gastric fire. His aim is to purify these nadis. In their pure state, they are strong, powerful, efficient, and radiant.

25. Purificatory Exercises

Prana is very much like a magnetic field in and around us. This prana 'flows'; those streams themselves are nadis. The student of yoga should observe this magnetic field with keen attention, and become sensitive to any disruptions that may occur in that field, due to faulty environment, wrong food, or unhealthy and unholy mental or physical activity.

Such a disruption needs appropriate healing exercise or remedial measure. The hatha yoga scriptures give several purificatory exercises. Six of these exercises have been described in both the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, and in the Gheranda Samhita.

They are :

- (1) dhauti,
- (2) vasti,
- (3) neti,
- (4) nauli or lauliki,
- (5) trataka,
- (6) kapalabhati.

Gheranda Samhita gives not only several variations, but elaborations and subdivisions in these. For instance, dhauti (washing) is subdivided into internal cleaning, cleaning the teeth, cleaning the heart, and cleaning the rectum. It also describes several variations of the dhauti, using different elements: air, water, a cloth, and a twig. As some of these need expert guidance, the technique given below is brief.

Dhauti

technique:

1. Drink air as you drink water. Retain it in the stomach for a short while. Then expel it through the rectum.
2. Drink water, till it fills 'up to the throat'. Shake the abdomen. Expel the water through the rectum.
3. Vigorously draw the navel back towards the spine and relax. Do this in quick succession one hundred times. It is like fanning the gastric fire. The above three are methods for internal cleaning, using air, water, and 'fire' respectively.
4. Cleaning the teeth. This includes cleaning of the teeth with catechu powder or pure earth, scraping the tongue right up to the throat with the fingers, cleaning of the ears with the index and ring fingers, and cleaning the frontal sinuses by rubbing the forehead near the bridge of the nose. The text also prescribes the gentle pulling of the tongue to lengthen it gradually.
5. Cleaning of the heart is really cleaning of the throat and the stomach.

This is done in three different ways.

- (i) A thin stalk of plantain or tumeric is inserted down the gullet, and drawn out

slowly.

(ii) After a meal, drink water 'up to the neck' and vomit it.

(iii) Take, a long strip of thin cloth about three inches wide and fifteen cubits long; wet it. Swallow it slowly. Draw it out again.

6. Cleaning of the rectum. Using a piece of tumeric root or the middle finger, clean the rectum with water.

benefits:

These cleansing exercises promote the health and efficiency of the organs thus leaned. Disorders caused by phlegm and bile are remedied. Digestion, assimilation, and elimination improve. The movement of prana is made efficient.

Vasti

technique:

Vasti is the cleaning of the large intestines.

It is of two kinds:

(i) Seated in water up to the navel, assume the utkatasana - resting the body on the toes and the buttocks on the heels. Contract and dilate the rectum, to draw the water into the colon. After a little while, expel the water.

(ii) Practice the pascimottana asana. Move the intestines from side to side, and at the same time do the asvini mudra - contract and dilate the rectum.

benefits:

The cleansing effect is obvious. The text says that it promotes clarity of the senses and the mind.

Neti

technique:

Take a piece of thread. Close one nostril, and gently insert the thread through the other nostril. When the end of the thread reaches the throat, catch hold of it and pull it through the mouth.

benefits:

Neti clears the nasal passages and sinuses. The text claims that it helps develop extra-sensory-perception.

Nauli

technique:

Practise uddiyana bandha. Isolate the rectus abdomini and let it drop forward. You may then 'churn' this. The technique is described in greater detail elsewhere in this section.

benefits:

The text calls this 'the crown of hatha yoga practice', and credits it with the ability to destroy all diseases, and restore harmony.

Trataka

technique:

Look with unwinking eyes at a small object till tears flow from the eyes.

benefits:

It improves eyesight and powers of concentration.

Kapalabathi

technique:

Three types are described in Gheranda Samhita:

- (i) Inhale through the left nostril, exhale through the right; inhale through the right, and exhale through the left, in quick succession.
- (ii) Draw water through both nostrils, and expel it through the mouth slowly.
- (iii) Sip water through the mouth, and expel it through the nostrils.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, however, prescribes rapid inhalation and exhalation, like the bellows of a blacksmith, which makes it look very much like the bhasrika pranayama.

However, if the student remembers that kapalabhati means 'that which makes the skull shine', it will be clear that in kapalabhati the attention is focused on the head; the rapid breathing must clear the head.

benefits:

Phlegmatic condition is remedied. The text says that the practitioner never grows old, but will have a radiant body.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika says that, when the nadis are purified, the body becomes slim and radiant, retention of the breath - during the practice of pranayama - is made easy, the mystic fire is kindled, and the practitioner hears the subtle mystic sounds.

26. Sivananda's Way

The next aspect of hatha yoga is yoga asana.

The motivation for the practice of the yoga postures varies from one practitioner to the other. Depending upon the motivation, the student's approach to hatha yoga is also bound to vary. There are some who devote several hours a day to the practice of the yoga postures. Others devote a few minutes. There are some yoga teachers and students who insist that the body must be forced to obey the practitioner's will, while others feel that the yoga asanas should be practiced without the least strain.

Swami Sivananda sought the subtle middle path, which reconciled these views. The wise student of yoga neither forces the body, nor leaves it alone; he educates it, and gently uncovers (discovers) the hidden potentialities of the indwelling intelligence. There is no pain in the process, and therefore, there is no resistance. The will-force is not used. There is an inner awareness, which detects the obstacles, and removes them.

It is also possible that, when toxins are eliminated by the action of the yoga postures, this is experienced as discomfort. The student's sensitivity should read the message correctly, and not treat this as pain, or the sign of the body's inability.

When you observe the effect of the yoga postures on the body, you see that in each posture the inner intelligence springs into action; that often manifests as the dual action of extension and tension. The student realizes that this action of intelligence is neither relaxation nor tension, but both, appropriately.

If one practices the yoga postures in order to increase the self-awareness, then the practice should be characterized by great gentleness, worshipfulness, thankfulness to the divine, discovery of one's potentialities, and the education of the body, so that it reaches out to its maximum capacity - without pain or strain, but with curiosity and an eagerness to treat each posture as a fresh challenge. This is done by performing every exercise of body and breath 'mindfully'. When done this way, they enable you to cultivate a special, non-possessive awareness of the body, and to learn the art of looking within.

The following pages give a description of a few basic yoga asanas. It is possible to derive great benefit if you devote from half to one hour to the entire series, though you can spend longer if you wish. Or you can select one posture for special attention on each day of the week, while not neglecting the other postures.

A suggested sequence for practice is asana, pranayama, mudra, and then meditation. It is unwise to do the asanas after pranayama or meditation. The best period for practice is either in the early morning or in the evening. However, it is important that the asanas are not practiced within two hours after a meal.

There are no 'dangers' in the practice of these postures. If you are attentive to the message of your body, and sensitive to the action of the postures on the body, you will know what to do and what not to do. The intelligence in the body will not allow you to injure your body.

27. I worship the Sun, the Giver of Life - Suryanamaskara

In the system of 'suryanamaskara' are combined several yoga postures with rhythmic breathing, rapid movement, sun-bathing, and prayerful contemplation of the divine power that the sun represents. We are asked to practice this suryanamaskara facing the morning sun, bathing our whole body in the life-giving rays of the sun, the giver of light, life, joy, and warmth, to the whole world.

Suryanamaskara consists of twelve postures or stages. One posture smoothly and gracefully flows into the next. There is fairly vigorous movement which builds up the muscles too, yet it conforms to the vitally important rule in yoga that there should be no undue strain or violence in the practice. Hence, the extraordinary and unique result: after the practice, one does not feel tired and exhausted as it often happens in mere physical culture, but one feels thoroughly refreshed.

Of still greater importance is the inner mood with which suryanamaskara is done. Inwardly watch every little movement, becoming aware of every change that takes place in the body, especially the spine. The mind must be quiet and observant to do this, and after a few months practice, this awareness will grow.

technique:

- (1) Stand upright. Fold the palms in front of the chest, as in the oriental way of greeting. Exhale.
- (2) Inhaling all the way, swing your arms up above your head, bending the trunk from the base gradually up the vertebrae as far back as you can. Exhaling, if begun towards the end of this movement, will enable you to bend a little more.
- (3) Extend upwards, and then forward, stretching the spine, and breathing out. Without bending your knees, place the palms of your hands squarely on the ground, fingers pointing straight in front, parallel to the feet. Bury the face between the knees.
- (4) Throw right leg back, while inhaling. Flex the left leg at the knee and let the thigh be in close contact with the torso. Look up. Inhale.
- (5) Throw the left leg also back. Straighten the back and the arms. Breathe out.
- (6) As you breathe out, flex at the elbows. Dip the whole body and touch the ground with your forehead, chest, palms, knees and toes. The other parts of the body should not touch the ground. Keep the 'tail' up, giving a pelvic tilt.
- (7) Swing the head up and backwards, straighten the arms and bending the spine backwards as much as possible. Inhale.
- (8) As you breathe out, swing the hip up and back, and assume the inverted V position, the feet and palms resting on the floor.
- (9) Bring the right leg forward, foot flat on floor between the hands - as 4 above. Inhale.
- (10) Bring left leg forward, straighten knees, head down - as 3 above. Exhale.
- (11) Inhale, straighten the body, and swing your arms up above your head, bending back as far as possible - as 2 above.
- (12) Stand upright - as 1 above. Now resume the normal standing position.

Repeat this at least twelve times every morning, alternating legs.

28. The Yogi's Favourite - Sirasasana - Head stand

The first and perhaps foremost of the yoga asanas is sirasasana - head stand, for it has an immediate effect on the brain, man's most distinguishing feature.

The head is also the control tower for the rest of the body, and is the root of the nervous system. It also contains two endocrine glands of the greatest importance to the whole body, the pituitary gland, and the pineal gland.

By practicing sirasasana - head stand, the yogi strives to keep the brain and these glands strong, so that he can utilize them to their fullest capacity.

technique:

It is good to do the sirasasana - head stand by stages, though young people might regard this as a waste of time, and might be able to do the perfect sirasasana - head stand on the first attempt.

Stage one: Spread a folded blanket on the floor. Lock the fingers of your two hands, while squatting on your knees. Lean forward and place this finger-lock with the little fingers on the floor, and the finger-lock itself at right angles to the floor. Rest the forearms on the floor, making an equilateral triangle. Now, let your head rest on the blanket, not on your palms - please remember that the palms and finger-lock are meant only to help you maintain your balance. The two palms together 'cup' the back of your head. Lift your knees off the floor. 'Walk' in till the knees touch your chest. Do this for a few days or weeks. Do not try to lift the toes off the floor. Try to make the back and the spinal column as perpendicular to the floor as possible.

Stage two: As soon as you are able to walk freely, without the legs becoming stiff and tense, you can proceed to the next stage. Bring the knees to your chest. Tense your torso, not the legs. Gently lift the toes off the floor. Do not be in a hurry. Do not kick. It might help you if you hold your breath as you are attempting to lift the toes off the floor - but remember that great masters of yoga rightly disapprove of holding the breath during postures. Every attempt you make improves the muscles of your torso. If you are able to lift your feet off the floor, repeat the entire movement a few times.

Stage three: When you are able to do this quite easily, then proceed to the next stage. With the calf muscles still in contact with the thighs, lift up the legs till the thighs are parallel to the ground. Gradually, with the legs still folded at the knees, straighten them till from head to knee is perpendicular. Then straighten the legs.

Every time you practice the sirasasana - head stand, please make sure that the floor is even, that there is a firm, soft padding under your head and that there are no hairpins etc., on your head.

When you have reached stage three, hold the posture for a few seconds to begin with, and increase this period by about a minute a week, till you can comfortably hold it for about five minutes. Come down slowly. Rest.

caution:

Do not attempt the full sirasasana - head stand - stage three if you suffer from blood pressure or from a heavy 'head' cold. Be content with stages one and two till the condition improves.

concentration:

While standing on the head, concentrate on the brain itself, particularly the pineal and the pituitary glands.

benefits:

It is impossible to describe all the benefits that one can derive from this posture. The mental action involved in the concentration, sends an abundant supply of pranic energy to the head, thus vitalizing the brain - which is the seat of the thinking faculty, and the two glands - which have a lot to do with our emotional balance. The head takes advantage of the gravity of the earth, and draws to itself an abundant supply of blood from the heart. All the parts are nourished and strengthened, and there is an increased flow of energy and its circulation in the brain. The abdominal viscera, which have become sluggish on account of the intra-abdominal pressure of the thoracic organs, regain their tone. The eyes, neck, ears, nose, etc. are also strengthened. Muscles of the neck, back, and shoulders - which play no part at all while we stand, walk, sit, or sleep - get their exercise in this unusual posture. Brain power, memory, and intellectual faculties lying dormant in the head are awakened and enhanced.

Regular practice of the sirasasana - head stand imparts luster and smoothness to the face, and removes wrinkles. Though this is true of the whole system of yoga, this particular posture greatly strengthens the will power. In the yoga system, the parts of the body which are usually regarded as beyond one's power to influence, are brought under control. This strengthens our will power, self-confidence, and optimism.

29. The Yogi's Tonic - Sarvangasana - Shoulder stand

Sarvangasana - shoulder stand works primarily on the glands of our throat - the thyroid and para-thyroid glands, which are situated at the base of the neck, astride the windpipe. The thyroid gland works in close harmony with the pituitary gland, and together they are largely responsible for our physical and emotional well-being. The para-thyroids control the calcium content in the body.

Our neck is the slender link between the head and heart. It is from the neck that the brain flows down the backbone as the spinal cord. It is in the neck that we have the vocal cords, and the neck hides within it pipe-lines for the flow of breath and blood. Hence the importance of a pose that concentrates on this region.

technique:

Stage one: Lie down flat on your back. Inhaling, tense your abdominal muscles, and lift the feet off the floor. Hold them at the 45 degrees position for a few seconds; relax. Repeat a few times.

Stage two: If that is easy enough, now proceed. Inhaling, tense or abdominal muscles, and lift the feet off the floor till they are perpendicular, at right angles to the floor. Your 'tail' must still be on the floor. Hold it for a few seconds, then drop the feet to the floor. Do this a few times.

Stage three: If that is easy enough, now proceed with the next step. Using the hands as little as possible i.e., without digging them into the floor, and without pushing the body up with them, but with help of the abdominal muscles alone, lift the legs off the floor; lift the waist also up. Gently but firmly, hold your waist with your hands. If your elbows are spread out too far to the sides, they have no power to support the body. Bring them close to each other. Once you are used to this posture, you can breathe normally, and maintain the posture for a long time - over half an hour. Begin with a few seconds, and increase the time gradually. Returning to the original position, lower your legs a little over your head, but not right down to the floor. Drop the arms flat on the ground. Gently exhale. 'Unwind' the whole body, using your abdominal muscles again. Do not let the body drop on the floor, and try not to lift your head off the floor. This is half shoulder stand, which is an excellent posture, especially for women who suffer from abdominal troubles, and for those who suffer from varicose veins.

Stage four: If that becomes easy, then try this one. Again, using the hands as little as possible, lift up your legs and waist off the floor, and swing them over and back till they are well away from the floor. Fold the arms at the elbows, and balance your body with your hands. Straighten your legs now. Gently but firmly, push the torso towards the chin, all the time straightening the whole body. You must breathe normally. Relax the neck and shoulders, and ensure that they lie flat on the carpet.

concentration:

On the neck, the thyroid gland and the parathyroids.

Return to the original position as in stage 3. Relax; as you relax, feel that the

energy that was concentrated at the throat during the posture is being distributed throughout the body. Remain relaxed for a few seconds or a minute or two.

Remember that we are dealing with yoga postures, not movements, not exercises. A posture is for being held; a posture repeated becomes more of a movement. This is unavoidable in the beginning; but the central principle should not be forgotten. When the posture is held, the yogi feels that certain parts of the body are squeezed, tensed, and relaxed. The posture is obviously not the way the body is normally; hence, sectors of the body which did not receive attention in one's normal life, do so now. This attention - which is different from tension - draws the mysterious life-force or prana to these sectors of the body. Such attention is effective only if the posture is held for a few minutes at least; if there is constant movement, the attention is disturbed and the benefit is lost.

Sarvangasana - shoulder stand can be held for a considerable time; but, in the beginning, it is better to repeat it a few times instead. If it is held for over two minutes, then follow it up with matsyasana - fish posture.

benefits:

Sarvangasana - shoulder stand has nearly all the benefits of sirasasana - head stand, plus the wonderful effect on the glands of the throat. It also relieves asthma, colds, bronchitis, and nasal troubles. The intensification of circulation in the area of the glands promotes their more efficient functioning. The yogi achieves this by concentrating his attention on the glands concerned, which is the best way to ensure that the prana flows to the glands. This should be remembered in the case of all the other yoga asanas, too.

30. Healthy Plants Grow from Healthy Roots - Halasana - Plough posture

The yogi's whole attention is concentrated on the nerves. The spinal nerves are the roots of the branches that act on the various parts of the body, and the health of the latter depends entirely on the health of the former.

It is comparatively easy to keep the spine healthy; but, once the mobility of the vertebral bones is lost, the various parts of body become less active. That is perhaps why we feel so refreshed vigorous after practicing halasana - plough posture; it restores the mobility.

technique:

Start as for sarvangasana - shoulder stand. As you lift the legs up, instead of merely pointing them up, lower them above your head, till the toes touch the floor behind the head. Keep the knees straight and close together. Press the chest against the chin. The arms rest where they were when you were lying down.

breathing:

Inhale; exhale slowly as you commence the posture. When you complete the exhalation, your toes touch the floor. In the beginning, you may have to raise the toes off the floor while breathing in. With a little - but regular - practice, it should be possible to breathe normally while holding this posture.

benefits:

The thyroid gland is massaged by the prana, that is directed to it when you concentrate your mind on it. The back muscles and the spinal nerves are exercised and strengthened. It has a beneficial influence on the sympathetic nervous system too. In addition, it tones up the digestive apparatus. The pressure of the thorax on the abdomen is relaxed. The abdomen itself is lightly - because it is lifted up - and firmly massaged; the 'idle' blood accumulated in that region is thrown back into circulation. The tone of all the digestive organs is improved. This posture can cure all the maladies that originate or thrive on digestive disturbances.

A person's metabolic rate is largely dependent on the functions of the glands, in particular the thyroid. That is why the sarvangasana - shoulder stand, and the halasana - plough posture, are so important, for these two give a gentle squeeze to the thyroid gland and invigorate it. This posture also tones up the adrenal glands.

Till you become proficient in this posture, you can practice it a few times - like an exercise, retaining it for a few seconds each time. Once you are proficient in it, and you are able to breathe normally during the posture, it is good to hold the posture for a few minutes. But, then, immediately after this you must do the fish posture.

An advanced stage of this posture is: First do the halasana - plough posture; relax. Drop the knees down till they touch the ears. Lift the hands off the ground, bring them above the head, and lock the fingers, keeping the hands close to the calf muscles.

concentration:

The backbone, mainly. You can actually visualize the muscles of the back relax, allowing the spinal nerves more freedom and activity. You can also concentrate on the thyroid, the adrenals, and the abdomen.

caution:

Be gentle. If you are violent, you might lose your balance and roll on your sides, and perhaps sprain your neck. The more relaxed you are, the better and easier it is to do this posture.

As you relax, you will notice your shoulders and the back of your neck dropping flat on the carpet, and the uncomfortable pressure in the neck suddenly ceasing. Do not be impatient to achieve perfection in a day! Return to the normal position as in the case of sarvangasana - shoulder stand.

31. A Divine Marvel - Matsyasana - Fish posture

Matsyasana - the fish posture - is complementary to sarvangasana - shoulder stand and halasana - plough posture; but it also has its own unique advantages. Man does not use his lungs correctly; and wrong sitting, standing, and walking, have all conspired to produce shallow breathing.

In the matsyasana - fish posture, the yogi corrects this inefficient breathing. The pose achieves a double purpose; not only does it stretch the chest and throat, but it also gives a gentle squeeze to the back, and the all-important supra-renal glands.

technique:

This is generally done in the lotus posture - padmasana, which is: sit on the ground, flex the legs at the knees, bring the right foot on to the left thigh, and the left foot on to the right thigh; then it is very effective. But, if the lotus posture - padmasana is not possible, sit with the legs stretched in front, bend backward till the crown of your head touches the ground and the chest arches away from the floor, rest the elbows on the ground, and press them firmly, thus raising and throwing the chest out fully. If the lotus posture - padmasana is possible, hold the toes while resting the elbows on the ground. If a slight feeling of dizziness is experienced by the beginner, try easing gently up into the fish posture - matsyasana from a lying down position, and hold only for a few seconds at first until the balance mechanism of the ears is adjusted. If you cannot manage this, try the half fish posture - matsyasana: sitting back on your heels, resting on the palms placed on the floor behind you, arch the spine, and head back while remaining seated.

concentration:

Is on the lungs, thyroid and also on the back, specially the suprarenal glands.

breathing:

Normal. Do not allow the rib cage to collapse when you exhale. Breathe with the lungs themselves, using a minimum movement of the diaphragm - i.e. the abdomen.

benefits:

The neck which was 'crushed' forward by the shoulder stand and the plough posture - halasana, gets a reversed movement; and is stretched now. The massage of the thyroid, parathyroids, the vocal chords, the adenoids and the tonsils, is completed by these alternate crushing and stretching movements. This massage invites greater blood circulation to those parts, thus stimulating their proper activity.

Regular practice of the matsyasana - fish posture, prevents the numerous ills that afflict our respiratory system, including asthma, pneumonia, pleurisy, and tuberculosis.

The yoga practitioner does matsyasana - fish posture, and holds it for half the duration of the previous two - viz. the shoulder stand - sarvangasana, and the plough pose - halasana.

caution:

Those who have goiter should be careful.

32. Unlock the Hidden Treasure - Bhujangasana - Cobra posture

The fountain of wisdom is in us. Great power is hidden in us. Health is within us, not in the bottle at the drug store. How few of us do really unlock this hidden treasure.

Two factors promote the proper functioning of the spinal nerves: (a) the mobility of vertebrae, and (b) the health of the muscles in the back. If the vertebrae lose their mobility, they impinge on one another. If the muscles lose their tone and become rigid, they impede the functioning of not only the vital spinal nerves, but also several of the vital blood vessels and the inner viscera. The trunk contains the sympathetic and the para-sympathetic nervous system. These are in charge of all the vital functions of the body, and work in complete harmony. One raises the blood pressure; the other lowers it. One gives the chest the command to expand, so that you can breathe in; the other gives the counter-command, so that you can breathe out. Both these opposite actions are necessary in order to preserve harmony!

The autonomous nervous system lies close to the spinal column. There are two plexuses of nerves, one in the cervical region and the other in the lumbar region, besides several other plexuses along the spine, which are of special importance. The yogis regard these plexuses as the physical counterparts of 'psychic energy diffusion centers'.

You cannot think of the trunk, without considering kidneys and the suprarenal glands themselves. Cortisone is manufactured by these glands. In health, they have their own medical board of which the pituitary, the thyroid and the adrenal glands are members; they consult one another and plan their life-saving activities. They are also closely related to the body's vital communication system, the sympathetic nerves. Anger, shock, fear, passion, all act upon the adrenals.

The suprarenal glands, in fact, seem to control all the functions of body, either directly or indirectly through the other glands like the pituitary, the thyroid and the gonads. How essential it is, then, to keep them healthy! But how? Here is the yogi's answer: bhujangasana - cobra posture.

technique:

Lie face downwards on a carpet, forehead touching the carpet. Place the palms of the hands by the side of the shoulders. Relax. Roll the head backward - caution: do not lift it. You will feel intense pressure on the middle parts of the spine and back. This pressure will slowly ascend as the upper part of the back bends over. Keep looking straight up and in front. Hold the posture for a few seconds. Roll forward, stomach first, chest, shoulders, and then face. There should be no lifting, no dropping - but rolling all the time. Repeat this a few times. In the beginning - even if you are able to do it properly - you might feel a bit of a strain; but as you go on, you will notice it fills you with energy.

breathing:

Should be normal though very light throughout.

concentration:

On the nerve-plexuses in the cervical region, the solar plexus just behind the stomach, the adrenal glands and the lumbar region.

benefits:

In addition to strengthening the spinal nerves and the suprarenal glands, this will correct many defects of the spine.

33. Maintenance of the Nutrition Factory - Salabhasana and Dhanurasana

Salabhasana - Locust posture

In the bhujangasana - cobra pose, we notice that the spine is curved backwards and pressure is exerted on the back muscles. The yogi is not complacent. He wants to make doubly sure that the vital glands and nerves within the back are benefited. Hence, he follows the cobra pose with the locust posture - salabhasana.

technique:

Stage one: Lie down on your stomach. Let your chin rest on the floor. Clench your fists, and place them under your thighs, with the elbows straight. Inhale, and simultaneously raise your left leg up, straight and stiff. Exhale and bring the leg down. Inhale while raising the right leg up. Exhale and relax. Repeat this a few times.

Stage two: Lie down as before. Inhale. Press your hands down, and with a powerful contraction of your abdominal muscles, gently but firmly, without jerks and without kicking, raise - not just lift - both your legs up as far as you can. Breathe gently. The Gheranda Samhita mentions that you need to raise your feet only half a yard from the floor. It will help if you feel that the weight of your body rests on your chin; try it.

A variation is to place the arms by the sides of the body, and lift both legs and the shoulders up. Another variation is to raise the arms up too.

concentration:

Alternately on the solar plexus and the abdominal viscera.

benefits:

You can readily see that this is a powerful stimulant, not only to the solar plexus, but to the abdominal muscles and the vital digestive organs. The solar plexus is the biggest nerve center in the body, aside from the brain, and is the ruler of the 'sympathetic system', the digestive organs, and other vegetative functions. All these vital organs are interconnected: the adrenals, the sympathetic nervous system, the solar plexus, the digestive organs, the pituitary, the thyroid, and the gonads. The yoga system exerts its beneficial influence upon all of them.

Try this pose, and you might immediately realize that your abdominal walls have lost their tone, the muscles their strength, and the joints their flexibility. All these are vital to our health, happiness, and long life. Try and try again; you will regain them. You will immediately feel a certain 'lightness' in the abdominal region, whatever its size. This is due to the fact that the nerves which had become sluggish, on account of neglect, have 'awakened'.

This posture, with the cobra posture - bhujangasana, and the bow posture - dhanurasana, which follows, can cure a host of digestive disorders, not by

artificially stimulating the digestive organs themselves, but by filling the solar plexus with life. But, please remember that the yogi wants to improve his digestion in order that he may eat less.

Dhanurasana - Bow posture

The bow posture - dhanurasana supplements both the cobra - bhujangasana and salabhasana - locust postures, and makes sure that the solar plexus, the suprarenal glands, and the abdominal (digestive) organs have all received their due share of prana.

technique:

Stage one: Lie down on your stomach as before. Inhale. Raise your head and shoulders. Fold your left leg at the knee. Catch hold of your left ankle with your left hand. Hold your breath. Make a slow 'kicking' movement with your leg, stretching it out; avoid pulling the leg towards you; do not bend your arm. Feel the tensing of your left back muscles. Relax. Exhale. Do the same with the other arm and leg. Repeat the movements a few times. This is of special value to those who, on account of stiffness of their back, are unable to reach both their ankles together; they will usually find it easier to hold the ankles one by one. If they practice this for some weeks, they will be able to proceed to the next stage without difficulty.

Stage two: Lie down on your stomach. Inhale. Raise your head and shoulders. Fold both your legs at the knees. Catch hold of the ankles with your hands. Hold the breath if necessary in the beginning. Gently and firmly stretch the legs without loosening the grip on your ankles. Your body will 'curl' up. Keep going till the entire torso is up above the ground. At the same time, by shifting your attention to the thighs, lift them up too. If you find this difficult, 'rock' forward. For this, keep your body tension high. If you relax, your thighs and your body will come down. If you keep the tension and 'rock', or 'roll' forward, your thighs will rise from the floor. Once you are able to lift the thighs up, you need not rock or roll. Hold the posture for a few seconds. Exhale and relax. Repeat this a few times.

breathing:

When you are efficient you will not hold the breath at all. Breathe gently through the nose.

concentration:

Alternately on the solar plexus and abdominal viscera.

benefits:

One should practice this in order to realize what it can do. It gives a gentle but powerful squeeze to the entire back. It preserves the mobility of the vertebrae. The spinal nerve-roots are freed from intervertebral pressure. The autonomous nervous system becomes fully autonomous. The kidneys and the suprarenal

glands are purified, vitalized, and strengthened. Indirectly, the heart and the other ductless glands are also benefited. The solar plexus is given a gentle massage, and the abdominal viscera are charged with power when you concentrate on them. The otherwise neglected lower parts of the spine, and particularly the sciatic nerve are exercised. A host of pelvic disorders - especially in women - are prevented. That the muscles of the abdomen and the thighs are also benefited is a minor matter.

By working on the solar plexus and the abdominal organs these three postures, plus the next one - pascimottanasana - forward bending posture - increase the anti-anemic factor in the system.

34. Health is Within Reach, Bend Forward - Pascimottanasana

In this modern world, where everything is made to order, sluggishness - euphemistically called comfort - and luxury, are the fashion. The vital organs in the abdomen yawn, turn over, and go to sleep! Their demands are less, and appetite fails. But modern man eats more, for he is the victim of his own habit and others' hospitality - and lands in a hospital! Pascimottanasana - forward bend posture will help to prevent this.

technique:

Lie flat on your back, hands stretched above the head, parallel to each other. Inhale. Tighten the abdominal walls and muscles, and raise the torso from the ground. Do not lift the legs off the ground, if possible. Keep the upper arms close to the ears. Keep the back straight. Stretch yourself up, tall and taller still, right from the tail. Bend the whole body forward, still stretching the back from the tail, keeping the head up, face looking at feet. Exhale. Bring the whole body down on the outstretched legs. With complete exhalation, hold the ankles at least, with the knees straight and stiff. Do not strain yourself over much. What you can do today - the maximum - is best for you today. Gently hold the ankles, the calf muscles, or the knees, and rhythmically and 'cyclically' relax and stretch the sides of the body, fixing the attention on the small of the back. Bend forward quickly again, and bury the face between the knees. This does not depend upon the size of the belly at all, but on the suppleness of the hip joint. If you can do this holding the ankles comfortably and bend forward, bend a little more, and hold the heels, and repeat the bending forward movement; lastly, hold the big toe (or all the toes) and bend forward. Once you have achieved this, you will find that the asana becomes easy of accomplishment, and you can even hold it for a few seconds or minutes - when you can breathe softly throughout.

concentration:

Focus your attention on the small of the back during the first part, and on the abdominal viscera during the posture.

benefits:

Yogis claim extraordinary spiritual and psychic benefits for this asana. It has an extraordinary effect upon the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, and also the spinal cord - which the yogi regards as the most important nadi - psychic channel of power - in the body. The liver and the spleen, the pancreas and the intestines, receive a gentle squeeze. Whatever the size of the belly, it will not be sluggish. If the size of the belly is pathological or psychological - result of compulsive eating - it will be reduced without any drugging or dieting. If the size of the belly is yours by inheritance, you will be unaware of its bulk. We should not omit to mention the salutary effect this asana has on the lowest end of the spinal column, on the sciatic nerve, as also on the knee joint. All of them are wonderfully benefited by this asana. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika says that it makes the prana flow through the susumna or the central channel in the spine.

caution:

Anyone can practice this. One should be gentle, but bold and optimistic. This is the counter-posture to the three previous ones. All of them together keep the hip joints flexible and vital, and senility at a distance.

35. The Twist is Yoga - Ardhamatsyendrasana

So far we have only dealt with forward and backward bending postures. The spinal column has another form of mobility, the twist. The twist not only completes the work on the spinal column, but also exerts the greatest influence on the sympathetic nerves, and the parasympathetic vagus nerve as well.

technique:

Stage one: Sit with both legs stretched straight out in front of you. Bend the right leg, drawing the right foot up; level with the left knee. Turn left, keeping the spine straight, until the right shoulder is to the left of the right knee. Bring the right hand round behind the right side of the body, until you can grasp it with the left hand. Look over the left shoulder. Repeat with the left leg bent, and left arm circling around.

Stage two: Sit on the floor, with the legs stretched in front of you. Bend the right leg, and place the right foot to the left of the left knee. Make sure that the foot is planted well on the floor. Bring the right hand behind the back, and turn to the right. Bend the left arm, and take it to the right of the right knee. With the elbow, push the right knee to the left, thus giving yourself added leverage to turn as far to the right as possible. Exhale as you begin to turn; breathe lightly when you hold the posture; inhale when you relax, and resume the normal sitting position. Rest for a few seconds. Then repeat to the other side.

Stage three: Sit on the floor with legs outstretched. Fold the left leg at the knee, and place the left foot at the root of the right thigh. Bend the right leg, and place the right foot close to the left of the left knee. Take your right hand behind your back towards your left hip. Exhale, and turn to your right. Bring your left armpit on to your right knee, and catch hold of the right ankle with your hand - the whole arm lies close to the right leg. Using this as a lever, turn as far to your right as you can. Exhale as you begin to turn; breathe gently as you hold the posture - for a few seconds; inhale as you relax. Rest for a few seconds and do it 'on the other side', turning to the left this time.

Stage four: Sit with the legs outstretched. Bend the left leg at the knee, and place the left foot at the root of the right thigh - so that your right buttock rests on the left ankle. Draw up the right knee; place the right foot to the left of the left thigh as near to the left hip as possible. Bring the right arm behind the back, and grasp the right ankle. Bring left armpit over the right knee, and hold the left knee with the left hand. Repeat on other side.

caution:

Avoid stooping. Keep the back straight. People with large abdomen and chest should tilt their body backward slightly as they begin to turn, and then bring it forward; else, the thigh will obstruct the chest.

breathing:

Exhale as you begin to turn. You will notice that, every time you exhale, you relax, and you are able to twist some more. Breathe lightly when you hold the posture.

concentration:

Inwardly feel the entire spinal column.

benefits:

The benefits of this asana are incalculable. It strengthens the muscles of the back, and prevents curvature of the spine. In the early stages, defects of the spine can be corrected. It prevents and cures lumbago.

On account of unhealthy and unceasing eating habits, the digestive apparatus is kept continually busy by modern man. This implies a great concentration of blood in the abdomen; and, with an expansion of the abdominal walls, there is a tendency for idle blood to collect there. Thus the brain is impoverished. This posture gives a gentle squeeze to the abdomen, and drives back into useful circulation the idle blood there; it also stimulates the abdominal viscera.

The vagus nerve and the sympathetic nervous system get their twist too, right from their roots - at the neck - down to the solar plexus, where the vagus ends, and even below down to the lumbar region. This results in the vitalization of the several ganglia along the autonomic nervous system, and the gradual awakening of the power in it. This power, generated in the supreme 'nerve' center, viz. the brain, is properly utilized at the different plexuses along the spine and, at the same time, the energy locked up in the abdomen is released for better use. Hence, the yogi is convinced that the technique was revealed by God Himself, through one of the greatest divine yogis of India, Matsyendra.

In fact, with every posture, as he bends forward and backward, twists, and turns, the yogi thanks the Lord for the gift of such a marvelous instrument as the body. And it is this remembrance of God which hastens the inner awakening.

36. Be Balanced, Be Sane - Mayurasana - Peacock posture

The Bhagavad Gita describes the yogi as a man of balanced mind. This balance is not a negative, passive state, but something very positive. Balance is the most important thing in our life. If the mind loses its balance, we do the wrong actions, say the wrong words to the wrong person at the wrong time and then go on worrying about them.

The mayurasana - peacock posture looks the very picture of balance. It is not as difficult as it looks; of course you have to be careful, gentle and wise - and, is that not the sign of a 'balanced' person?

The peacock posture - mayurasana is possible only if:

(a) Sitting erect on the floor, you are able to bring the two elbows together and touch the middle of your abdomen with them - keeping your forearms together while doing so.

(b) You can bend your wrists back till they are at right angles to the forearm. If these are impossible or to anatomical difficulties, then the peacock posture is not for you.

technique:

Stage one: Squat on the ground, sitting on your knees find toes. Bring the forearms together in front of your chest. Partially raise yourself and bring the palms down on the floor in front of you. Now you are standing on 'all fours', with your palms, knees and insteps resting on the floor. The fingers should point towards your knees. If you find that you are not quite comfortable at your wrists, stop here and repeat this step a few times daily for a week or so.

Stage two: Gently, and with intense concentration, lower your abdomen on your elbows, bending the arms at the elbows as much as it is necessary. The forearms should be almost perpendicular to the floor, and the elbows as close to the center of the abdomen as possible. Hold this for a few seconds. Wait. Examine yourself and make sure that you are all right. It may be necessary to readjust the palms slightly to ensure proper balance. Return to the sitting position, and do it all over again till you gain mastery over this.

Stage three: Very gently glide forward. If you feel that you are losing your balance and you are inclined to fall, stop the gliding motion and return to the original squatting position. Do it again. Concentrate on the position of the body. You are now standing on your palms and toes. Your aim is to let the whole body rest on the forearms alone. For this you have to find the proper balance. As you glide along, with your abdomen resting on your elbows, you will discover the balance. Very little effort is needed to raise your feet off the floor. Keep your body nearly parallel to the floor.

The Gheranda Samhita prescribes the lotus - padmasana position (41. Postures for pranayama and meditation) for the legs.

The first impression that you get is 'I cannot do it'. If you are already

determined that you cannot do it, how can you? This applies to our life, too. This asana helps you to overcome lack of confidence.

The second factor in this posture is that, having made up your mind that it is very difficult, you rush through it, as though doing it quickly lessens the difficulty. In fact, it only increases it! You will tend to kick and strain; and sure enough, you will fall. That again is true of life.

The third factor is that we should know the laws of balance. Usually, the upper part of the body is heavier than the lower, and when you lean forward on the elbows using them as a fulcrum, you will find that the legs rise. It is generally more difficult when the forearms are vertical; if you push yourself forward just a little bit, you will find that the posture becomes easy. In life too you will have to find out your own balancing point! This asana brings that truth home to you.

breathing:

Let the breathing be natural.

The yogi does not neglect the fact that this balance can be achieved only by 'balancing' both the body and mind. He knows that the body is nothing more than the materialization of the mind. One affects the other. The physical organ that contributes in a big way to the mental balance is the liver, one of the most vital organs in our body. It is this asana which promotes its well-being.

benefits:

The yogi believes that mayurasana - peacock posture enables you to neutralize and destroy poisons in the body. It also prevents you from becoming unduly fat. It prevents anemia, and also jaundice. It corrects a host of digestive disorders, like constipation, by exerting a healthy intra-abdominal pressure, and giving the whole digestive apparatus a gentle squeeze.

The right elbow presses close to the liver, and the left elbow exerts a similar pressure on the spleen, another vitally important organ in our body. Thus, mayurasana - peacock posture achieves a lot for us.

37. You Can Be Beautiful, If You Want - Cakrasana Padahastasana Trikonasana

Cakrasana - Bridge posture

In order to live a healthy life and enjoy a balanced state of mind and outlook, it is good to ensure that the balancing apparatus in the ears is in a state of health. The yogi achieves it by practice of the cakrasana - bridge posture.

technique:

Lie down on your back. Fold your legs at the knees, and draw the feet towards the body, feet just a little apart. Place the palms on the floor just outside the shoulders, with the fingers pointing towards the feet. Inhale, and simultaneously lift your whole body up. Breathe gently and hold for a few seconds to begin with. Use your thought, feeling, and awareness to ensure that the pressure on your arms and legs is equal. Gently lower the body and relax. Repeat again a few times.

benefits:

This posture closely resembles the dhanurasana - bow posture. All the good effects of the dhanurasana - bow posture are obtained in this posture, too, with the addition of a mild stimulation of the balancing mechanism. The legs and arms are also strengthened by this posture.

Padahastasana - Head to Feet posture

In order to ensure harmonious development, the yoga system gives a counterpose for each one. Cakrasana - bridge posture gives a backward curve; and padahastasana - head to feet posture gives a forward bend.

technique:

Stand erect, with hands raised over the head. Exhale and bend the body forward and down, stretching from the small of the back. Grasp the big toes, or place the palms by the side of the feet. Keep the knees stiff, and bury the face between the knees. Remain in this posture for a few seconds, and repeat it a few times. The effect of padahastasana - head to feet is the same as pascimottanasana - forward bend posture, but with the added advantage that the sudden bending forward stimulates and strengthens the balancing mechanism in the inner ear.

benefits:

In both cakrasana - bridge posture and padahastasana - head to feet posture, the blood rushes to the head, helped by the natural force of gravitation. Even those who for some reason or other cannot do the sirasasana - head stand, will derive some of its benefits from these two postures.

Trikonasana - Triangle posture

Trikonasana - triangle posture completes the effect of these two, and gives a valuable spinal movement.

technique:

Stand upright with the feet three feet apart, arms raised sideways, palms down, parallel to the floor. Let the right foot be turned in and the left turned towards the left. Bend the body to the left, touch the left toes with the left hand, without bending the knees. Bring the right arm parallel to the floor, till the upper arm touches the ear. Keep looking at the right palm. Hold the posture for a few seconds. Repeat with the other side. It is the posture that is important. Let the movement be graceful, in order to remove the very idea of motion from the mind. Yogis insist upon retaining a posture for as long as is possible. Where this is inconvenient, we repeat it, but do not forget that it is retention of the posture that will confer its manifold benefits upon you.

benefits:

In trikonasana - triangle posture the spine gets the lateral bending. The abdominal viscera are strengthened, and digestive disturbances are remedied.

38. First Step to Self-mastery - Uddiyana and Nauli

Two yoga-practices are combined to promote the vitality of the abdominal organs, and also to stir up the latent psychic powers, not with an eye upon their misuse but in order to attain a great measure of self-mastery. These two are uddiyana and nauli. They are not easy to learn from books. Here at least it is almost entirely the work of the mind on the body. The more relaxed you are, and the more intense your concentration, the more easily will you get success in these two.

Uddiyana

technique:

Stand with the legs a little apart. Bend slightly forward, and place the palms just above the knees. Inhale deeply and exhale fully. As you exhale, concentrate on the abdomen; starting from the lower part of the abdomen, pull the 'inner' contents up - with a backward-upward motion. Hold it for a few seconds. Relax, and breathe in.

Nauli

technique:

First practice uddiyana. Isolate the rectus abdominus, and let it drop forward. The two sides of the abdomen look 'hollow' while there is a 'pillar' of the abdominal viscera in the center. When you can do this with confidence and ease, you can churn the abdomen, clockwise and anti-clockwise.

caution:

Whereas these are extremely beneficial, any foolish attempt at their violent practice might cause a slight pain in the abdominal muscles and nerves, and - some authorities say - such practice is not very good for the heart if there is undue pressure against the diaphragm.

benefits:

The benefits are incalculable. The abdominal viscera come under the conscious control of the yogi. Sluggish peristalsis and improper functioning of the vital digestive organs are removed.

Uddiyana is a bandha - lock. Nauli is a kriya. Neither is a yoga asana.

We have come to the end of the essential yoga asanas. There are many others, but the ordinary student of yoga may be content with those which we have studied; and they are quite sufficient. We can do all of them within about half an

hour, and all of them should be done every day.

39. Relaxation - Savasana

It is highly recommended that between two postures and between two repetitions of the same posture, you should relax for a few seconds, and mentally visualize that the energy - prana - that was concentrated in certain parts of the body during the posture, is redistributed throughout the body.

Relaxation appears to be most simple, but in truth it is very difficult. Complete relaxation is appropriately called savasana - corpse posture.

technique:

Start from sitting position, legs in front, knees folded, and feet squarely planted on the floor, making sure that your nose is in line with the space between the knees.

Gently and uniformly stretch the legs out, making sure that the median line is not disturbed.

Let the heels be slightly parted, and allow the feet to fall apart.

Place the hands beside you on the floor, palms up, and roll the back down, making sure that you go down vertebra by vertebra, and that each part as it comes down sits squarely on the floor.

The bridge of the nose should be parallel to the ceiling, and the chin at right angles.

Adjust the shoulders, so that the shoulder blades are flat on the floor.

Rest the fingertips on shoulders, and allow elbows to fall at a comfortable angle from the body.

Allow the forearms to fall gently to the floor, palms up.

Focus the eyes on the region of the heart, to relax the eyelids and the eyes.

Listen to your own breathing.

Take a deep breath, and suddenly 'let go'.

Let the whole of the weight of your body and thoughts drop away completely.

Mentally go down to, and catch hold of your toes.

To make sure you have done so, tense the toes; then relax.

This tension-relaxation is like self-massage, and can be done in three stages.

First, produce a mild tension-relaxation.

Next time, let it be a little firmer.

Lastly, let it be 'sudden' and intense.

The last relaxation is complete relaxation and conscious relaxation too.

Now shift the attention to the calf muscles; follow the same procedure.

Go up in this manner part by part of the body, till you reach the chest.

Then the hands, and up to the shoulders.

Continue with the neck, mouth, eyes, eyebrows, forehead.

Each time you have relaxed a part of the body, become aware of the vibrations of prana in that area, and actually visualize that all the organs there are

completely relaxed.

Yajnavalkya gives the following sixteen parts from which to withdraw the mind step by step.

We can adopt this list for our relaxation: great toes; ankles; middle of shanks; part above the shanks and below knees; center of knees; center of thighs; from thighs to navel; navel; heart; the right arm; the left arm; pit of the throat; roof of the palate; root of the nose; eyeballs; center of eyebrows; forehead; crown of head.

Now, relax the brain, too; the best way to do this is to offer a prayer to God.

Feel that you are floating in a cloud of grace, free from all pains, cares, and anxieties, resting in the lap of God.

Feel that His Grace and His Light flow into you and fill your brain, and flow to all parts of your body, filling them with health, well-being and vitality.

Gently roll the head from side to side; stretch the hands and feet.

Gently open your eyes, and gently get up.

After a vigorous practice of the yoga asanas, there is perfect relaxation. In perfect relaxation, the intelligence that rules the body is free from interference. It is clear, light, and luminous; and in that light you see that the state of relaxation is not lethargy, and that it is possible to be relaxed even in the midst of the most intense activity.

The alternating tensing and relaxing will be more effective if you synchronize inhalation with 'tense', and exhalation with 'relax'.

40. The Incredible Secret - Prana

The pace and the texture of modern life have become so fast and so complex that we simply refuse to believe in the simple. Thus, when the yogi offers us the secret of life - that with the help of the life-breath we can achieve relaxation, clarity of intellect, and emotional stability - we think that it is incredible and impossible.

Thousands of years ago, the yogi discovered that breath has an intimate connection with thoughts and emotions. The great sage Vasistha, in his celebrated teaching known as Yoga Vasistha says:

"In this body, that energy which circulates in the energy channels - nadis - is known as prana. In accordance with its diverse functions in the body, it is also known by the names of apana, etc. This prana is indistinguishably united with the mind. In fact, the consciousness that tends towards thinking on account of the movement of prana, is known as the mind. Movement of thought in the mind arises from the movement of prana; and movement of prana arises because of the movement of thought in consciousness. They thus form a cycle of mutual dependence, like waves and movement of currents in water. The wise ones declare that the mind is caused by the movement of prana; and hence, by the restraint of the prana, the mind becomes quiescent." (Upasanti Prakaranam, chapter 78)

When our thoughts are concentrated, and our emotions are well under control, the breath is calm, deep, and rhythmic. On the other hand, when the thoughts and emotions are in a state of imbalance, as when we are excited or in a state of anger, the breath is uneven, fast, and disturbed.

If the emotional upset was accompanied by disturbed breathing, regulated breathing will naturally be accompanied by balanced thinking and emotional stability. This is the yogi's simple logic, proven axiom, and incredible secret. In fact, it may well be that breathing in and out does not have the ventilation of the lungs and the oxygenation of the blood as its only or even main purposes. All this could have been achieved by merely keeping the lungs open, even as a room is open to outside air which therefore circulates freely in the room without the walls having to inhale and exhale. Maharishi Patanjali, in his Yoga Sutras, also suggests that inhalation and exhalation indicate the degree of mental distraction. (chapter 1 - sutra 31) Ramana Maharishi considered watching or listening to the breath itself as pranayama. Pranayama is not 'restraint of the life-force', but 'the realization of the life-force'.

There are numerous theories concerning this prana, but the theories themselves are not prana. We cannot see the prana; it is the prana that enables us to see. Prana is not the object of thought, but its subject; thought moves because of prana. It is life, though not as we understand it. It presides over even what we call death. In life, it performs a myriad of functions, to help the body function; in death, it patiently decomposes the body, so that the elements may return to their

source; and it is this prana that lives in all beings, as all things. It is everything, whatever moves - in which it is the kinetic energy - and what does not move - in which it is static energy.

It is the cosmic power or energy. It is also known as chitti shakti or kundalini shakti. When this energy is 'asleep', there is a cloud of ignorance which veils self-knowledge. Pranayama is essentially a way to awaken this sleeping energy, and thus to dispel this cloud of ignorance.

41. Postures for Pranayama and Meditation

The hatha yoga scriptures contain descriptions of the following postures especially suited to the practice of both pranayama and meditation.

Siddhasana

Siddhasana - the posture of the adept, is regarded as the best among the meditative postures.

technique:

Press the perineum with the left heel. Place the right heel on the pubic region. The toes of one foot are then locked in between the thigh and the calf muscle of the other leg. Drop the chin on the chest, and make a firm chin-lock. Keep the back quite straight. Gaze steadily at the space between the eyebrows.

Padmasana

Padmasana - the lotus posture, is of course the most popular among the practitioners of yoga.

technique:

Place the right foot on the left thigh, and the left foot on the right thigh. The soles face up. Let the hands rest on the lap, palms facing upwards, one on top of the other. Rest the tip of the tongue at the roof of the front teeth. Form the chin-lock. Gaze at the eyebrow center.

benefits:

In this posture the yogi endeavors to unite the apana with the prana, and thus to awaken the kundalini. Hence, the scriptures declare that this posture destroys all ailments.

Bhadrasana

technique:

Place the right heel on the right side of the perineum and the left heel on the left side, with the soles of the feet in contact with each other. Now hold the feet firmly. Keep the body erect. The gaze is directed at the eyebrow center and the chin is firmly pressed on the chest.

benefits:

The same as for other meditative postures.

Svastikasana

technique:

Fold the legs at the knees. Insert the right foot between the left thigh and calf and the left foot between the right thigh and calf. Keep the body straight. This is the posture of peace and auspiciousness.

Gomukhasana

technique:

Cross the ankles under the body so that the right heel is under the left buttock and the left heel is under the right buttock. The heels can be beside the respective buttocks. Let the hands rest on the right knee. This posture resembles the face of

a cow. It is suitable for meditation.

Virasana

technique:

Place one foot on the other thigh. Later, use the other foot similarly. The technique seems to indicate the half-lotus posture. Some yogis say that this can be done sitting on a raised seat; the left foot is placed on the floor and the right foot rests on the left thigh.

Vajrasana

technique:

Sit on the heels or between the heels. Keep the hands on the knees and the back straight. Do the chin-lock and gaze at the eyebrow center.

benefits:

This is also a good meditation posture. Our master Swami Sivananda recommended that we should sit in this posture for a few minutes after meals - it improves digestion.

Sukhasana

technique:

Any comfortable sitting posture is sukhasana. This is what the word means.

42. Realisation of the Life-force - Pranayama

To breathe correctly looks simple on the face of it; but, when we sit down to do it, we realize that we have forgotten how to breathe properly, and we begin to wonder how we live. We have forgotten the utter simplicity of total breathing.

Many people have cultivated the habit of drawing the abdomen in while breathing in, contrary to the natural way of allowing the diaphragm to drop, thus pushing the abdominal walls slightly out in front. This must be corrected, to begin with.

Try this: Hold the palms a fraction of an inch in front of your abdomen, palms facing the body. Take a deep breath till the abdomen actually pushes the palms away. Exhale, at the same time pressing the abdomen in firmly with your palms. Do this with deep concentration, so that you get the right inner feeling, after which you may dispense with the ceremony of holding the palms in front of the abdomen. Some people find it more effective to begin with an exhalation with the palms pressing the abdomen in. Repeat this thrice.

The next step: Hold the sides of the rib cage with your palms. Exhale and press the palms inwards; inhale and let the rib cage expand and push the palms away. Do this thrice.

The third step: Fold the arms sideways and gently grip your shoulders with your fingers, your elbows are now spread out as your wings. Still gripping the shoulders, raise your elbows till they point upwards, at the same time inhaling deeply. Gently lower the elbows to the previous position, exhaling. Do this thrice.

These three together enable you to get the feeling of parts of a complete breath. Please do not use this as a ritual; it is only meant to give you the feeling of a complete breath, which is combining the three steps given above into one long smooth wavelike movement. As you start to inhale, allow the incoming air to push the abdomen forward for a second or two; then, still inhaling, allow it to drop back as the rib cage expands sideways; finally bring the air to the top of the chest. Then, exhaling, let the rib cage move back, finally drawing the abdomen in as you exhale completely. As long as you are trying to do this, you are not doing it correctly! But, hopefully, you will suddenly discover this one of these days and then you will breathe like a baby without creating a division (between the abdomen, the rib cage and the top) where no division exists!

Exercises

Now try the following exercises before going on to the pranayama of hatha yoga:

(1) Be seated comfortably on a straight-backed chair, with your feet planted squarely on the floor, chin up and the whole back straight but not stiff. This posture is the second best if you cannot sit in padmasana - lotus posture. If you rock with your body very gently forward and backward, you can discover your

own center of gravity where there is an inward feeling of weightlessness. Close your eyes if there are distractions; otherwise keep them open, softly gazing at a point about two feet in front of you. Watch your own breath. Listen to it, without deliberately producing any sound or regulating the breath. Incidentally this is the easiest way to relax any tension. Breathe slowly in and out with both the nostrils. See that there are no jerks while inhaling or exhaling. Breathe more and more deeply, slightly heaving the chest and even bulging the abdomen outward, but with the minimum effort. Occasionally you may let the breath produce a mild sound as in the ujjayi pranayama or even the bhramari pranayama (to be described later in this section); that will enable you to ensure that the breathing in and out is smooth.

(2) Still using both the nostrils simultaneously, breathe in and hold the breath within for a few seconds each time, and then breathe out. Be sure that this does not result in a forced or hurried exhalation. Breathing must still be even and graceful. Do this for a fortnight or a month before attempting to regulate the breath. Try to work toward the ratio of 1:4:2, i.e., one unit for inhalation, four for retention, and two for exhalation.

(3) Still using both the nostrils simultaneously, become aware of the sensation of the inner holding of the breath at the following points:

(i) at the tip of the nose - in order to do this, you will have to block the tips of the nostrils with the fingers and then blow the breath out;

(ii) at the junction of the nostrils with the throat - to do so you lift up the root of the tongue;

(iii) at the base of the throat - open the mouth just a little to get this sensation;

(iv) in the middle of the chest, and

(v) at the solar plexus. In the last two cases you may have to exhale the air a little after the completion of the inhalation to ensure that there is no block except where it is desired.

(4) In this exercise, the inhalation and exhalation can be with both nostrils together. Inhale slowly through both nostrils. Watch the breathing, and remain constantly aware of the breath flowing in through the nostrils. Keep inhaling even when you 'think' this flow has stopped. Watch for the moment when this inhalation has to change to exhalation. During this period, the 'impulse to inhale' is sustained. The breath is obviously held within, and the whole chest is 'open' in terms of exercise (3.v). When exhalation commences, let it similarly proceed slowly till all the air has been exhaled. At the same time draw the abdomen in. Keep up the impulse to exhale as long as is possible. Now there is 'external kumbhaka'. Watch for the 'moment of change', when exhalation naturally comes to an end and inhalation has to commence. It is a beautiful exercise which combines internal kumbhaka and external kumbhaka, as also awareness of breathing. There should be no strain in this practice.

(5) When the previous exercise becomes easy and natural, then you may attempt alternate nostril breathing. Use the fingers of the right hand to close the

nostrils. The thumb closes the right nostril; the ring and the little fingers close the left nostril. The other two fingers are usually folded on the palm, but some prefer to let them rest on the space between the eyebrows. It is better not to remove the fingers entirely from the wings of the nostril even when the particular nostril is open. Inhale through the left nostril (the Hatha Yoga Pradipika commences the pranayama with the left nostril). Exhale through the right. Inhale through the right. Exhale through the left. Without holding the breath, try to prolong the inhalation and exhalation. Ensure that the breathing is smooth and graceful. Watch the breath carefully. See if you can become aware of the exact moment at which inhalation turns into exhalation and exhalation into inhalation.

(6) If the alternate nostril breathing is easy, smooth and graceful, hold the breath after the inhalation. Become aware of the point at which the breathing is held, which should be at least 'in the middle of the chest' mentioned in paragraph (3) above. This is also the purpose of the chin-lock, which is recommended by most yogis. If this is not done, then the breath knocks at the throat and creates discomfort. It is good to let the breathing work out the right ratio without conscious effort or use of the will. This is what our master Swami Sivananda called sukha purvaka pranayama - easy comfortable pranayama.

(7) During the same alternate nostril breathing, split the inhalation into three installments with a three second interval between installments. The exhalation is smooth and continuous, after the usual retention of the breath. After a few rounds of this, let the inhalation be continuous and the exhalation be broken up into three installments with a three-second interval between installments. Watch to see at which point the breath is held. A great yogi Satchidananda Paramahansa highly recommends this practice which prevents the breathing from becoming mechanical.

(8) Again, with the same alternate nostril breathing technique given in paragraph (6) above, try to hold the lungs empty for a few seconds after every exhalation and before commencing the next inhalation through the same nostril through which the exhalation was done. The uddryana bandha happens: and if it does, it is effective. If you hold the lungs empty for longer than your capacity warrants, your next inhalation will be violent; it is good to avoid this, without unduly shortening the period of retention. If you devote half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening to the practice of these exercises, you will discover that, not only are you immediately relieved of any nervous tension (and intellectual and emotional imbalance), but your normal breathing habit is soon changed for the better. You will not get exhausted as often and as much as before, and you will face life itself more calmly, hopefully and cheerfully.

hints:

A few hints concerning these practices may be useful at this stage.

When you practice the alternate nostril breathing and use the right hand for this purpose, it is advisable in the beginning to practice in front of a mirror or a

monitor, to ensure that you are still sitting straight, and that your face is not turned towards the right, and the body is not leaning to the right.

One wonders why all this fuss, when both the nostrils lead to one throat. The inspired air has not only the oxygen our blood needs, but something very subtle which even the nerve-endings in the nostrils can absorb. The nerve-endings in the left nostril differ in their 'polarity' from those in the right nostril; even as a single piece of magnet has two different poles at the two ends. The right nostril is considered solar, positive and warm, and the left is considered lunar, negative and cool.

The arm that is used in this practice might experience discomfort if it is held up for a considerable time. You may use the other arm, alternately. Or use a coffee table or the T-shaped yogadanda (yoga stick) which the yogis use to support the arm.

ratio 1:4:2

Why the ratio 1:4:2? It is interesting. Modern physiology claims that of the oxygen we breathe in, we use only about one fifth, and breathe out the rest of it. What a waste! The yogi, by retaining the breath for the four units, ensures the maximum use of the inhaled air.

What does unit 1 represent? The Yoga-cintamani says that it is the time taken for one breath during sleep. But Yajnavalkya says that circling the knee thrice with the hand (neither fast nor slow) and then snapping the fingers, is the duration of one unit. The latter is the generally accepted scale.

43. The Heart of Hatha Yoga

Relaxation, release from tension, and the ability to live a happy and healthy life, are incidental to the principal aim of hatha yoga - self-knowledge. Meditation is the means to self-knowledge, and quiescence of the mind is necessary for meditation. Pranayama is practiced for reaching this quiescence of the mind. The very essence of pranayama is the kumbhaka or the retention (or suspension) of breathing.

When the Gheranda Samhita enumerates a variety of pranayamas, it calls them kumbhakas. Eight such kumbhakas are described: sahita, suryabhedha, ujjayi, sitali, bhastrika, bhramari, murccha, and kevali. Just as asana means posture, and holding the posture is its vital essence, kumbhaka means suspension of breath - that is its vital part, even though the inhalations and exhalations may also be elaborated.

Both the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Gheranda Samhita demand that the practitioner should ensure that the nadis are clear before embarking upon a serious practice of these kumbhakas.

The six cleansing processes have already been described.

The special mystic purification pranayama as laid down in the Gheranda Samhita will be described in the chapter on laya yoga.

technique of the kumbhakas

Sahita

This kumbhaka can be practised in two ways: with or without the repetition of certain mantras.

technique:

Sit in any comfortable posture. Contemplate Brahma the creator - who is of a red color. Inhale by the left nostril, mentally repeating the sound 'a' for the duration of sixteen units. After the inhalation and before the kumbhaka, do the uddiyana by pulling the abdomen up. While doing the kumbhaka, contemplate Vishnu - who is dark in color, at the same time mentally repeat the sound 'u' for the duration of sixty-four units. Exhale through the right nostril similarly contemplating Siva - who is of a white color, and mentally repeating the sound 'm' for the duration of thirty-two units. Then inhale through the right, hold the breath as before, and exhale through the left.

It is recommended after the inhalation that the chin-lock is done and that during the exhalation the uddiyana bandha is done. Towards the close of the exhalation, and therefore during the next inhalation, the mulabandha is practiced. By this the prana is forced into the central channel or the susumna. The prana is pushed down by the chin-lock and apana pulled up by the mulabandha.

The word sahita means 'with' as distinct from kevala which means 'alone' i.e. without. The allusion is to the inhalation and the exhalation. In sahita, there are inhalation and exhalation; in kevala there is retention alone.

The sahita kumbhaka is the mainstay of the pranayama practice. It is classified into the best, the middling, and the inferior, on the basis of the length of the kumbhaka. The ratio of 20:80:40 units is the best; 16:64:32 is the middling; and 12:48:24 is the inferior.

The texts mention that the practice of this kumbhaka may be accompanied by the following symptoms:

The inferior type - the beginner - experiences profuse perspiration. The perspiration that issues during the pranayama should not be wiped but rubbed into the body; otherwise there is loss of energy. The middling type experiences tremors of the body. The best type of practitioner, who is surely advanced in his practice, experiences the entry of prana into the susumna-nadi.

The Lingapurānam and Gorakṣa give different ratios for the middling and the best type of practitioner: 24:96:48 is the middling, and 36:144:72 is the best. They also declare that, in the best type of kumbhaka, the mind is stilled into a state of unconsciousness of the external world, the prana unites with the apana and enters the susumna-nadi.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika declares that one should practice pranayama four times every day - at sunrise, midday, sunset and midnight - gradually increasing the number of kumbhakas till one is able to do eighty kumbhakas at each of the four sittings. The Kurmapuranam recommends that the student should do ten kumbhakas on the first day, and increase the number by five daily, or weekly. The Pradipika prescribes the sahita pranayama for the purification of the nadis, and declares that one who practices it thus achieves purification of the nadis in three months.

benefits:

The Gheranda Samhita promises peace of mind, psychic powers, bliss and the awakening of the kundalini shakti as the fruits of the above kumbhaka.

Suryabheda

technique:

Sit in a comfortable posture. Inhale through the right nostril. Do the chin-lock (jalandhara bandha). Hold the breath till the breath - prana - enters every cell of your body, from the top of the head to the tip of the toes, and perspiration pours from every pore of the body. Then slowly exhale through the left nostril, at the same time doing the uddyana bandha. Towards the conclusion, mulabandha is practised.

Such retention of breath is the rule in the case of the other pranayamas that

follow. The coward, reading the description, is frightened away; the serious student discovers during the practice that there is no danger at all in it. Prana or the life-force is beyond the 'me' or the ego-sense. Your own limit for the retention of breath is set by this prana! This discovery makes the student fearless. He learns to trust the divine intelligence beyond the ego-principle and surrender the ego itself to it. Needless to say: the presence of an expert guru enables the student to overcome the irrational fear.

Ujjayi

technique:

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika has a simple technique. Slowly inhale with both nostrils while partially closing the glottis, so that there is a resonance from the throat to the chest. Practise kumbhaka or retention as before. Exhale through the left nostril. This can be done even while walking or standing, obviously without the prolonged kumbhaka.

The Gheranda Samhita description differs considerably - but it is interesting. Inhale with both nostrils; while doing so, keep your mouth shut, but drop the gullet inwardly, as if you are about to yawn with closed mouth. Now the inhaled air fills your mouth, too. At the same time, close the glottis, and produce a sound as in the previous technique. At the conclusion of the inhalation, swallow the air you hold in your mouth. Then do the kumbhaka as before, with the chin-lock. Exhale.

benefits:

"Practise ujjayi to overcome old age and death," says Gheranda Samhita - which also says that it is a cure for consumption, fever and dysentery.

Sitali

technique:

Inhale through the tongue, rolled into a tube and slightly protruding from the mouth. Do kumbhaka as before. Exhale through the nose. Sitali means 'cooling'.

benefits:

It cures biliousness. Gheranda calls it the giver of bliss.

Bhastrika

technique:

Bhastrika means bellows. Here the abdomen is used like a bellows. Hatha Yoga Pradipika commences the bhastrika with a rapid exhalation 'till it resounds the heart, throat and head.' Inhale similarly till the chest is filled. Again exhale rapidly and powerfully; and inhale. Repeat this twenty times. Inhale through the right nostril after the last rapid exhalation. Hold the nostrils tight and practice kumbhaka as before. Exhale through the left. Our master encouraged the use of both nostrils for the final inhalation and exhalation.

benefits:

It makes the prana flow through the susumna-nadi. Gheranda asks the student to do this thrice, and assures that thus he will never suffer from any disease.

Bhramara

technique:

Close the eyes and listen to the inner sounds. Gheranda recommends that this be practiced at midnight, in a place where there is no noise. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika has a different approach. Inhale rapidly making the sound of a male-bee. Practise kumbhaka as usual. Exhale slowly making the sound of a female-bee. Bhramari means 'bee'.

benefits:

It is a great aid to concentration of the mind.

Murccha

technique:

Inhale through the nostrils. Press the chin firmly against the chest (jalandhara bandha). After kumbhaka, exhale very slowly, while concentrating on the eyebrow center. This is according to the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Gheranda, however, says that when this kumbhaka is performed with the mind concentrated on the eyebrow center, fainting will result - as also the experience of bliss. Murccha means 'fainting'.

Kevali

technique:

Gheranda prescribes intense concentration of the mind on the so-ham sound of the breathing. 'So' in inhalation and 'Ham' in the exhalation. When this concentration is perfect, the breath remains within the body. There is suspension of breathing, without inhalation and exhalation. Soham is a mantra, meaning 'That I am'.

Sitkari

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika omits the sahita kumbhaka - the simple pranayama anyway - and kevali kumbhaka - treated as the culmination of the practice, not as a special exercise. Instead, it mentions sitkari and plavini.

technique:

Inhale through the mouth, making a hissing sound. Practise kumbhaka as usual. Exhale through the nostrils.

benefits:

It drives away lethargy.

Plavini

technique:

Drink air as you drink water, and fill the stomach with it. Retain it for some time and expel it.

benefits:

It enables you to float on water.

44. General Advice

For the guidance of those who wish to take up the practice of yoga seriously, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Gheranda Samhita, provide a few rules:

The student should practice yoga in a modest hermitage which is situated in a peaceful environment. The hermitage itself should have a small door, and no other opening. It should not be long, or it may distract one's attention. It should be clean.

Jnanesvara, in his celebrated commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, says that the place chosen should be one that is frequented by holy men, and it should have a natural spiritual atmosphere so that (a) one who goes there would wish to practice yoga, and (b) "Should a heretic enter the place unawares, even he would feel a strong inclination to practice penance."

It is best to commence the practice of yoga during either the spring or the autumn. The yogi should observe strict moderation in eating. The Gheranda Samhita says: "Pure, sweet, and cooling food should be eaten to fill half the stomach; one quarter of the stomach should be filled with water; one quarter should be kept for the movement of air."

The Samhita also prohibits bath in the early morning, any observance that causes physical discomfort, like fasting or living on one meal a day.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika lists the following as the causes for failure in yoga: "Overeating, too much of exertion, excessive talk, the observance of dull routines, bad company, and unsteadiness." It also suggests these six aids: "Zeal, determination, courage, right knowledge, steadfastness, and the avoidance of contact with people."

Another text of yoga, known as Yoganusasanam, has the following list of aids and obstacles: 'Success in yoga is impossible for one who has no faith, and who does not exert, who is attached, who is devoid of keenness, who is not devoted to the guru, who is given to falsehood and harsh and arrogant speech.' The following six are the aids: 'Confidence in one's yoga practice, intense faith, devotion to the guru, a state of equilibrium, control of the senses, and moderation in eating - there is no need for a seventh aid' However, the scripture recommends the cultivation of dispassion, listening to philosophical discourses, singing the Lord's Names, listening to good music, and cultivation of virtues.

In the beginning of the practice of pranayama, the student would do well to take a little milk before commencing. After the conclusion of the practice, he should have a hot bath.

During the entire practice, and especially during the kumbhaka, he should repeat his own mantra; this was our master's special advice.

The scriptures even suggest the following procedure: wake up at dawn or at sunrise; adore the guru at the crown of the head, and the lord in the heart; attend to the ablutions and cleaning of the teeth, etc; sit down on a soft seat; meditate on the guru and god; practice some asanas savasana - corpse posture only, if you are tired; viparitakarani - sirasasana - head stand before commencing pranayama; viparitakarani - sirasasana should be avoided during the evening and night practice.

The Kurmapuranam suggests the following sequence: commence with the sukha-purvaka pranayama - the alternate nostril breathing, with kumbhaka; then suryabhedanam, ujjayi, sitkari, sitali and bhastrika, in that order; then others; conclude with contemplation on the inner sound - nada-cintanam.

The Gheranda Samhita asks the yogi to sit facing the east or the north; east is where the sun rises, and north is the field of positive magnetic activity.

What should the yogi sit on for his yoga-practice? The Bhagavad Gita prescribes a seat of kusa-grass with a deer-skin on top of it, and a piece of cloth on top of that. The Gheranda Samhita says that the yogi "should sit on a seat of kusa-grass or a deer-skin or tiger-skin, or a blanket or on earth."

Pranayama is not mere rhythmic breathing as it is commonly misunderstood. It is exercise or extension of the life-force - prana - which uses the body and mind, and which is used by them. This intimate connection should be clearly grasped. Prana and the body together enable us to live. With all this yoga-practice and pranayama, if our life is not well regulated, and if we waste our life-force in a hundred ways, it is idle to expect to make any progress in any direction. Yet, if our life is regulated, and at the same time we practice yoga asanas and pranayama, they will lead us to the next step - meditation - and ultimately to god, the supreme bliss.

45. What Shall I Eat

Dietetic discipline is part of this overall discipline of yoga. The body is made of the food that you eat. Therefore, your health depends to a large extent on the food that you consume. The yogi goes a step further, and says that the subtlest portion of the food builds your mind. It 'colors the mind' might perhaps be a better expression, nearer the truth. Hence, the yogi is extremely selective in his food.

My guru Swami Sivananda used to say that a diet of fruits and milk is most conducive to a meditative mood, and is therefore the ideal food for the serious student of yoga. In His book on yoga asanas, hatha yoga, and so on, Swami Sivananda has given detailed lists of articles of food which are recommended, and others which are forbidden for the student of yoga.

Coarse food makes our mind coarse, unfit to pursue the refined and delicate task of meditation. I have seen this myself in the Himalayas: a monkey, when it feeds on cooked and spiced food, is aggressive and hostile, whereas when the same monkey lives on leaves and fruits, it is calm, non-violent, and introvert. Denatured food deprives us of our good nature.

What about meat eating? Meat is entirely unnecessary. A totally vegetarian diet is infinitely better than a diet of meat. Medical science agrees. Here is an excerpt from 'The British Medical Journal':

"Epidemiological studies of heart disease suggest that some at least of the deaths in middle age from myocardial infarction could be cut by a move towards a more prudent diet - which means more cereals and vegetables, and less meat and fat."

A vegetarian diet has also been found to be more economical at both the domestic and the national levels.

"But, from where do you get animal protein so very essential for the building of your tissues?", asks a friend. The reply is simple: "The body produces its own protein, just as the body of the herbivorous animal does, whose flesh you eat!" People eat only herbivorous animals. Their flesh is nothing but secondhand vegetable. Why not eat fresh vegetable, instead?

All the above is apart from the ethical principles involved, the highest of which is 'ahimsa' - non-violence. Even if you do not directly engage in the act of killing the animals, you participate in their murder by providing the market for the criminal. If you have not developed the sensitivity to spare the animal's life by refusing to eat its flesh, how can you hope to attain cosmic consciousness which is the consciousness of the oneness of all beings?

Of course, even vegetables have rudimentary life. However, in nature there is a reciprocal relationship between the plant and the animals - including human

beings; whatever we give, the plant takes, and whatever it gives, we consume.

It is possible for even habitual meat-eaters to give up the bad habit, if they want to, by initially cutting meat out on one day a week, and then extending this to cover the whole week.

In regard to other types of food, adopt the motto of moderation. Eat as little as you really need. This will preserve the digestive organs in excellent shape.

The sincere student of yoga will, of course, never touch alcohol and tobacco; and will progressively try to avoid all stimulants and unnatural food and drink.

Eat good food in a good mood. The mood is very important. The mood of the giver of the food is as important as that of the receiver. The yogi offers all food to the deity and takes it as sacrament, as god's gift to him. One who serves food to another treats the latter as god.

46. The Seal of Triumph - Mudra

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika recommends the practice of the mudra after pranayama; some yogis prefer to practice some or all the mudras after the asanas and before pranayama.

Mudra is a seal, both in the sense of the seal of authority, and the seal that closes and safeguards. The Pradipika describes ten mudras, while Gheranda Samhita speaks of twenty-five. In both, the lists are included what are known as bandhas, the meaning and the effect being the same as those for the mudras. The purpose of the mudras is said to be the awakening of the kundalini shakti.

Yoga Mudra

technique:

Sit in Padmasana. Hold the toes. Or, hold the left wrist with the right hand, behind the back. Softly exhaling, bend forward and touch the ground with your face. Breathe normally. Concentrate on the spinal column.

Mahamudra

technique:

Press the perineum with the left heel. Keep the right leg stretched in front, making sure that it is at a right-angle to the body. Take hold of the right foot with both hands. Inhale. Drop the chin, and press it firmly against the chest. Inwardly raise the prana up. Turn the gaze towards the eyebrow center. After holding the breath to your capacity, release the chin-lock, and exhale very slowly. Repeat it using the other leg. Do this several times on each side.

This should be immediately followed by the

Mahabandha

technique:

Press the perineum with the left heel. Place the right foot on the left thigh. Inhale. Do the chin-lock as before. Practise mulabandha also. Meditate on the susumna-nadi. Hold the breath to your capacity. Exhale slowly. Repeat it on the other side, using the other leg.

The Gheranda Samhita recommends moving the rectum in addition to the practice of the mulabandha, to make it more effective.

An alternative to the chin-lock (jalandhara bandha) is also, suggested; press the tip of the tongue against the front teeth (jihva-bandha). This has the same effect.

This again should be immediately followed by the

Mahavedha

technique:

Begin with the mahabandha posture. Inhale. Make the chin-lock. Hold the breath. Place the palms on the floor. Lift the whole body up, and gently strike the floor with the body. Prana and the apana unite by this, and the vital force enters the susumna nadi or the central channel. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika states, "There is a death-like state; then the air should be exhaled."

The Pradipika recommends that these three should together be practiced by a serious student of yoga every three hours!

[Khecari Mudra](#)

technique:

When the tongue enters the posterior nares, and the gaze is fixed between the eyebrows, it is kehcari. This is achieved by systematically cutting the frenum linguae, lengthening the tongue, till one is able to touch the forehead with its tip. All the hatha yoga texts sing the glory of this mudra, and unanimously declare that when the tongue points upwards the yogi drinks nectar, he is freed from old age and death, and he easily enters into samadhi. It is said that kehcari should be practiced till yoga-nidra is experienced - which is when the mind is absorbed in the center between the eyebrows.

Some yogis believe that this is similar to what the hibernating animals do.

The Yoga Vasistha suggests that for this purpose it is sufficient if the tip of the tongue touches the uvula. The late Paramahansa Satchidananda Yogeshvara was also of that opinion; he declared that when the tip of the tongue is thus turned up and back, mental agitation ceases.

The Gheranda Samhita describes a similar practice known as nabho-mudra: "Wherever he is and in whatever work the yogi is engaged, he should turn the tongue up and hold the breath."

Khecari means 'moving in space'. The kehcari mudra is reputed to confer upon the practitioner the power to roam at will in space. In some tantrik texts, kehcari means 'air which moves in space', and kumbhaka or holding the breath is referred to as kehcari-bandhanam. Khecari mudra in this sense may refer to kumbhaka.

[Uddiyana bandha](#)

The technique has already been described.

[Mulabandha](#)

technique:

Press the left heel against the perineum. Contract the rectum, and inwardly pull the rectum and the perineum up. Draw the abdomen back towards the spine. The Gheranda Samhita adds: "Place the right heel on the pubic region - which makes it the siddhasana also." This is a very important practice in connection with pranayama, as also the awakening of the kundalini shakti. Through this practice, the prana and the apana are brought together; they easily enter the susumna-nadi. Great energy and heat are generated by this practice.

Jalandhara bandha

technique:

Drop the head forward. Press the chin firmly against the chest, thus squeezing the throat.

benefits:

This ties up the network (jala) of the nadis and thus prevents the downward flow of the nectar from its source above the palate. Thus the nectar is saved from being consumed by the gastric fire.

When the yogi practices the three bandhas together: the mulabandha - contracting the rectum and the perineum, jalandhara bandha - contracting the neck, and the uddiyana bandha - contracting the abdomen, prana and apana unite and enter into the susumna-nadi. The prana is no longer agitated. It is steady. This is bandha-traya - triple lock.

Viparitarana

The description is vague enough to suggest the half shoulder-stand - sarvangasana and the head-stand - sirasasana. The Pradipika says that this increases the gastric fire and the yogi should not go hungry.

Vajroli

When one is able to arrest the flow of the seminal fluid, and retrieve it even when it has been discharged, it is vajroli. This is according to the Pradipika, which also calls it yoni mudra.

The Gheranda Samhita, however, describes it differently: "Place the palms on the ground and raise the legs up in the air, the head not touching the earth."

Sakticalanam

technique:

It should be remembered that this is a technique for forcing the kundalini-shakti to move. Inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left after a brief retention. Then practice the abdominal movement, which resembles but is not exactly nauli kriya. If this is done for a longtime, it is good to practice the simple 'inhale-hold-exhale' pranayama every few minutes. It will enhance the

shakticalana effect. After this, be seated in siddhasana - the Pradipika calls this the vajrasana also. Grasp the ankles and exert pressure on the kanda which lies just above the perineum. Practice bhastrika kumbhaka. The kundalini, which has already been moved by the previous practice, now awakens. The third part of this technique is: contract the solar plexus repeatedly. This is done by agnisara (see Laya Yoga). By these three practices, the kundalini begins to move in the susumna-nadi. Needless to say, this practice is meant only for one whose life is totally dedicated to the practice of hatha yoga. Such a person is probably living with a teacher. Even if you are living with an expert teacher, you will still have to be guided by your inner guru, commonsense.

benefits:

The text assures that "One who observes moderation in eating and who observes brahmacharya or celibacy will attain perfection in forty days." When the kundalini has been awakened, the yogi should practice the bhastrika kumbhaka more and more. All the 72,000 nadis are purified only when the kundalini is awakened.

The Gheranda Samhita emphasizes that one should do the sakticalanam first, and then go on to the yoni mudra, and that without the sakticalanam the yoni mudra is not complete.

Yoni mudra

The yoni mudra is described in the Gheranda Samhita thus

technique:

Sit in the siddhasana. Close the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the upper lip with the ring fingers and the lower lip with the little fingers. Inhale and exhale through the lips, rolling the lips as if you are about to whistle - known as the kaki mudra or the crow-beak mudra. Contemplate the kundalini and rouse the shakti by repeating the mantra 'hum hamsah', and take it to the thousand petaled lotus in the crown of the head. If you wish to, you may relax the middle fingers a little when you wish to inhale and exhale, instead of the kaki mudra.

The Yoganusasanam gives a different technique:

technique:

Inhale. As you do so, direct the mind towards the base of the spine to the perineum (the yoni). Now do the mulabandha by contracting the perineum. Visualize the prana entering the radiant susumna-nadi. Exhale. Visualize the prana moving up the spine to drink the nectar at the feet of the lord in the crown of the head, descending to the base and once again rising to the crown of the head. This is yoni mudra, which bestows all psychic powers and liberation on the yogi.

Sambhavi mudra

technique:

Concentrate internally on any of the psychic centers. Keep the eyes open, fixedly looking at an object at a distance of about two feet. Look without seeing, and without winking. The Gheranda Samhita asks that the eyes be turned towards the eyebrow center, and that one should 'behold the self'. The Pradipika has a similar technique. Direct the gaze towards the center of the eyebrows, raise the eyebrows a little, and behold the inner light; you will soon reach the unmani state, or the state of utter tranquillity. The movement of both mind and prana is suspended.

note:

A specialist in eye-training advises against the unwinking gaze when the eyes are not focused on the object that is in front of them. The argument is that the eyes feel cheated when the mind is not linked to them. However, observation shows that the baby does not blink very much and this does not harm its eyes. The mind is the real seer, the eyes are but instruments; the mind sees with the eyes closed and in the same way the mind may not wish to see when the eyes are open. A word of caution may be relevant here: when you practice the sambhavi mudra seriously and often, it is good also to practice the trataka - or the exercise which demands focusing the vision on the object in front.

Hearing of nada

technique:

Sit in siddhasana. Practice the sambhavi mudra first. Close your ears with the thumbs - as in the yoni mudra. Listen intently with your right ear to the inner sounds. Focus your mind on them. If you persist in the practice, the mind will soon become tranquil and the inner sounds will shut out all external sounds and distractions. The mind will enter into the great silence, which is brahman.

Many yogis emphasize the importance of nada-anusandana - hearing of the inner mystical sounds. In this connection, it may be of interest to hear the opinion of Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi: "Meditation on nada is one of the several approved methods. Nada helps concentration. After it is felt, the practice should not be made an end in itself. Nada is not the objective; the subject should firmly be held; otherwise a blank will result. Though the subject is there, even in the blank, he would not be aware of the cessation of nada of different kinds. In order to be aware even in that blank, one must remember his own self. Nada-upasana is good; it is better if associated with vicara. In that case, the nada is made of chinmaya and also tanmaya - of knowledge and of self." Nada-upasana is the practice of hearing the mystical sounds. Vicara is enquiry into the self.

Indeed, hatha yoga does not consider the hearing of these mystical sounds the goal, but one of the methods of bringing about quiescence of the mind. In fact, the Pradipika declares that, for those who have no self-knowledge, Goraksa has given nada-upasana, which even the dull student can do.

47.1. The Inner Psychic World

What is self-knowledge? What veils it? How do I know that such a veil of impurity exists?

To answer these questions, one need not be a philosopher, metaphysician, or theologian. You know you exist, but you do not know what you are. You think - or you think that you think - but you do not know what thought is. You say, "I am," and you do not know what 'I' is.

This self-ignorance creates a limitation, a conditioning. In oneness it creates diversity. We live in a universe - the 'single' verse, the single manifestation of the cosmic being, in which self-ignorance creates endless divisions. We live in a cosmos - cosmos means order - in which there is perfect order; But, the self-ignorance creates disorder; it sees conflict where several forces and factors complement one another.

In order to appreciate all this, it is helpful to be acquainted with the vision of the perfected yogi of self-knowledge. Obviously, his knowledge is not your knowledge, it is not self-knowledge, it is not valid - but it enables you to know your ignorance. This is valuable.

The entire universe and beyond are filled with cosmic consciousness; all this is nothing but pure cosmic consciousness. Being consciousness, it is aware of itself; and this awareness of itself creates a seeming duality. There is awareness of the truth that consciousness is not inert, but that it is all-power, all-energy; there is awareness of the infinite potentiality of the manifestation of this cosmic energy. This causes a stirring or a movement in consciousness, which is comparable to a wish arising in the individual. In the individual, the wish is soon translated into action; in the cosmos, this stirring is realized as the universe. Consciousness, energy, and matter, are different states of the one. It may be that they are what are known as satva, rajasa, and tamasa, in yoga philosophy.

When consciousness becomes aware of itself, and therefore of the energy, duality, and therefore space is created. This is the first evolute. Consciousness becoming aware of this space feeds this movement, and motion within space is air. That is the next evolute. Movement of air creates friction, and fire is evolved. Science affirms that when two gases fuse, a spark of fire is produced, and at the same time there is water. Water is the next evolute. Water cools, condenses, and solidifies into the earth.

The yogi sees the universe as the body of the cosmic being. It is macrocosmic. His own body is microcosmic, non-different in essence from the macro-cosmic. He busies himself with understanding this microcosm, knowing that a total knowledge of the microcosm is at once the total knowledge of the macrocosm. Self-knowledge is the knowledge of the absolute, infinite or god.

Whatever exists in the universe, is in your body, too. "In his upper member, man has an image of god, which shines there without pause," said Meister Eckhart. Up in the head of man is the seat of consciousness - it is not the brain cells, but what is in them, what works through them, of which the cells are but the abode. When that consciousness becomes aware of itself, it sees itself as the object; and that is the mind.

Consciousness itself is life, energy. Consciousness and energy differ only in their polarity, and not in their substance. The movement of thought within consciousness creates space, and the other cosmic elements are evolved. As in the cosmos, so in the body. Consciousness has its seat in the crown of your head, the mind is centered in the space between the eyebrows, the element space in the throat, the element air in the heart region, fire in the navel region, water in the genital area, and the earth-element in the anal region.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells us: "By a small part of my being, I pervade all." There is a large residue. Cosmic consciousness-energy is immeasurable. In the microcosm, too, there is a great residual energy. Residue is 'sesa' in sanskrit; and 'sesa' also refers to a snake. Hence, perhaps the yogi views this residual energy as a snake. How do we know it exists? By the fact that, in a crisis or danger, there is a great surge of energy whose existence we were unaware of. This residue is beyond the 'me' or ego-sense, and it is the suspension of the 'me' in crisis that seems to release it. A further proof of this is the fact that, in sleep, we get a small dose of this residual energy, and hence we wake up refreshed; and that again is when the ego-sense is suspended.

Consciousness, when it is aware of the faculty of sight - i.e., when it wills to see - shines as the eyesight and the physical eyes. Similarly the other faculties and vital organs evolved. Having thus brought these faculties into being, it identifies itself with them and develops individuation. Consciousness, projecting itself as life, becomes blindly involved in ignorant activity and endless, helpless automation. When it is clouded by the veil of ignorance, the truth of immortality becomes fear of death, and an attempt to perpetuate oneself in one's progeny.

It is not as though consciousness has become ignorance! Just as the sky is not tainted by the cloud, and the canvas is not affected by the picture of fire that appears on it, neither consciousness nor prana can ever become impure. However, there is a notion of such impurity in the nadis - flow of prana - which veils self-knowledge. This has to be removed. Hence, the Bhagavad Gita hints that yoga is practiced in order to purify oneself, not in order to realize god or the self - this is ever real and need not be made real.

It is easy to theorize: "I am not the body nor the mind, I am the immortal self." While such affirmation has its value, and therefore its use, what we are looking for is an actual transcendence, not wishful thinking. One of the methods suggested for this is hatha yoga. The uniqueness of hatha yoga is its recognition of the physical body itself as the crystallization of the psyche, and therefore the

proper vehicle of the soul. Its philosophy is appealing, since it 'stoops to conquer', and does not demand that man pull himself up by his socks.

The Bhagavad Gita describes an inverted tree, with its roots above and branches below. Consciousness which is above, polarized as prana, pours down to every part of the body. Still it is one; it is all consciousness. The polarized consciousness, animating the millions of cells of the body, is known as the subtle body. In this, there are 72.000 nadis, (the Yoganusasanam mentions 350.000) all of which come together in the kanda (approximately the perineum).

Of these nadis, three are considered most important. They are the link, as it were, between consciousness in the brain-center and the distant organs. In the physical body, the spine is such a link between the head and the limbs. These three principal nadis are known as the ida, the pingala, and the susumna.

The ida and pingala lie on the two sides of the susumna. Some say that they cross each other between the head and the base of the spine like the caduceus. The Yoganusasanam says that the ida lies on the left side of the central channel, and terminates in the left nostril; the pingala lies on the right side of the channel and terminates in the right nostril. We may overlook the different theories concerning this, since the most vital nadi for consideration is the susumna.

The description of the susumna in the tantrik texts is highly inspiring. In the section dealing with antaryaga - inner adoration, a tantrik text describes the susumna as having the appearance of a walking stick - from the muladhara up to the crown of the head and bending down to the nostrils. It has the luminosity of lightning and a thousand suns. Yet, it is cool on account of the nectar that flows in it. The Sat-cakra-nirupanam says that the susumna nadi is like the sun, moon, and fire. It extends from the kanda to the crown of the head, while the vital part of the susumna known as vajra-nadi extends from the root of the genitals to the crown of the head. Within even this vajra-nadi is the citrini, which is extremely brilliant, and at the same time extremely subtle. This concept demands the most intense concentration and attention. Citrini is pure intelligence, and runs all the way through, like the vajra-nadi. Inside even this citrini is the brahma-nadi which 'shines in the minds of sages' - i.e., pure knowledge or self-knowledge.

47.2. Kundalini for Character Building

The human being is a very complex personality, but he need not suffer from the complexes that are so evident in our society today. It is true that there are numerous aspects to his character, which are delicately balanced, and that this balance can be easily upset by very many factors, both internal and external. At the same time, his entire personality is an integrated unit, saturated with the highest degree of intelligence. Hence, it should be easy to sustain the balance or restore it, even if it is temporarily disturbed.

Unfortunately, we have devoted too much attention to imbalanced states of the mind, and to abnormal behavior and very little, if at all, to the study of the wholeness or health of the human being. Yet the right understanding of the wholeness might provide the key to the prevention of what we wish to cure. As being increasingly realized by medicine and psychology, it is indeed the existence of this wholeness that makes even the so-called "cure" possible.

Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, gives a succinct description of the total human personality. It occurs in the thirteenth chapter of the text. To begin with, there are the "field" and "the knower of the field". The field is the apparently diverse components that constitute the psychophysical organisms. The knower of this whole field is the intelligence "within", which is indivisibly one with the intelligence "within all", and which we commonly refer to as God. No part of the field is unknown to the knower of the field. The knower is not only the subject of an object - as in "The eyes see the foot" or "I am aware of the pain in my back" - but the knower or the indwelling intelligence aware of the functions in this psychophysical organism that the conscious mind is unaware of. That the conscious part of the mind is unaware of these functions is irrelevant; perhaps it is meant to be so, even as the nose is not meant to hear or to see. More than even this, this indwelling intelligence, by its very nature, is aware of itself, in a non-subject-object fashion. It is self-knowledge, knowledge which is the self, or self which is knowledge. Hence, Krishna declares that it is the knower of all.

In the same chapter is given the clue to creation, and therefore to the operation of the creative intelligence: "It is on account of the interaction between this knower and the field that a being arises here, moving or unmoving". It is the knower, the indwelling intelligence, that determines the character of every component part of the field.

The component parts of the field are thus enumerated in the same chapter of the scripture: "The cosmic elements, ego-sense, buddhi, or the determining intellect, the unmanifest nature, the ten senses with the mind as the eleventh; the objects of the five senses, desire and hate, happiness and unhappiness, the intelligence that holds everything together and the cohesive force." One is tempted to see a distinction here between the cosmic elements and their individualized counterparts, but such distinction can at best be arbitrary and fictitious. All this is the field. The knower of the field is the very heart, the creator,

and the reality of this field, and that which is aware of the field at all times. The individualized intellect - the inner intelligence - enables one to think, to reason, and to observe the physical actions and the psychological states. But the cosmic creative intelligence is the overall observer of the whole field, and is reflected in the medium of a small part of itself, which then becomes the individualized intelligence.

The individualized intellect is able to observe, and perhaps detect a fault, but the remedy is found, and the fault is remedied only by the creative intelligence. When the fault is remedied, wholeness - health - holiness is restored to the whole personality.

That is what yoga is about. That is what meditation means. The diagnosis is made, but the intellect, the individualized intelligence, then turns within in prayerful adoration, to set the creative intelligence in motion, to heal the organism, and restore the inner harmony and balance.

All this is especially true of behavioral or psychological problems.

The cosmic intelligence, which created diverse objects in 'the field', evolved them from the unmanifest and the five cosmic elements - space, time, air, fire, water, and earth - which are also part of the field. In their subtlest forms, they are unmanifest. In their less subtle forms, they themselves form the perceiving senses. In their gross forms, they are themselves the objects of these senses. These three forms of the element interact upon one another constantly, and their equilibrium is often disturbed. On the gross sphere or plane, these disturbances are known as diseases, and on the psychological plane, they are the character defects. In order to help with the detection of these various disturbances of the inner harmony or disequilibrium among the elements that constitute the psychophysical being, the yogi has mapped out certain fields within the wider field described above. These fields are again represented by mandalas, which are geometrical configurations, intricately worked out and woven with inspiring symbolism. Here is an outline of the whole scheme which is well worth meditating upon.

47.3. The Mandalas - One by one

Let us examine the mandalas one by one and see what they stand for.

Muladhara Chakra

It is the chakra or mandala that is at the base of the spine. The word 'muladhara' means 'the root-support'. It is where the body rests on the floor. It is at the very root of the spine, or the sushumna nadi. It represents the earth-element. It is that part of the back which is in contact with the earth. The yellow square is the mystic sign-language for the earth-element. The mantra is lam - phonetically similar to 'land' - for the earth. However, on the four petals that ring the mandala are found the mantras: vam, sam, sam, sam. The mantra lam rides the elephant, the animal in the mandala. It is presided over by the Brahma, the male creator, and by Dakini as the female counterpart.

The earth-element is firm and strong enough to support the diverse beings. It represents the sense of smell and the function of locomotion - the feet which are in contact with the earth. Earth is solid. It supports all. It is the nourisher of all beings. It is also the graveyard of all. It is both the source and the end. It is hard and firm. It is always beneath everyone's feet, and is trampled upon by all - it is patient and forbearing.

From all these evolves a beautiful picture of the psychological characteristics that are associated with this mandala, and we get a clue to their relation to our character and behavior. The masculine quality of hardness and inflexibility should, in a state of balance, be matched by the female quality of forbearance and forgiveness. One without the other is imbalance. The earth, as the nourishing mother, is also the grave that swallows us all. It is possible that we pay excessive attention to "youthfulness and vigor", and too little to the inescapable fact that all this should one day come to an end. We might be tempted to boast of our origins or our beginnings, and ignore the inevitable end. All these imbalances reflect in our behavior as perversions.

On the physical level, the earth-element represents the sense of smell and the function of locomotion or the use of legs. The defective function of the earth-element in the body might lead to illnesses in these two areas. The elephant is strong, but slow-moving. We need the strength of the elephant, but not its sluggishness.

Deep and devout contemplation of the details of the mandala in the muladhara will restore the balance. Such contemplation also enables us to avoid undesirable elements, to promote those qualities that we lack, and to sublimate our nature. To do all this, it is not necessary to indulge in auto-suggestion or affirmations. Intense contemplation of the mandalas is sufficient.

The mandala is also ringed with tridents on all sides, suggesting that (a) the

characteristics of the element spread out in all directions, covering all aspects of one's life, and (b) the wholesome effects of contemplation on the center are protected from obstacles which may approach from any direction.

Svadhithana Chakra

This chakra is related to the genitals. The element represented is water, which is obvious, and the nectar of immortality, which is again obvious, since it is related to the faculty of reproduction). The mantra is vam, phonetically analogous to water. The geometrical sign is a crescent moon: presumably because the moon is somehow related to the tides. The animal is makara or the aquatic alligator, which is extremely strong in water - hence, symbol of virility- and which feeds upon an unwary prey. The lotus has six petals, on which are prescribed the six syllables bam bham mam, yam ram lam. The presiding deities are Vishnu - male, and Rakini - female.

We are concerned with the element water, male Vishnu, and female Rakini, and the animal alligator. The qualities of water are: life-giving and life-destroying - as in floods, drowning, etc., raining and evaporating, thirst-producing - on account of perspiration, and thirst-quenching, taking the line of least resistance normally, and also breaking down all resistance as when breaching a dam, causing obstruction - as a river across one's path, but supporting the vessel - boat - which overcomes this obstruction, the ability to find its own level, flowing from a higher to the lower level, normally cool but capable of boiling, normally liquid but capable of hardening and also vanishing, dissolving substances, conveying taste, source of energy, cleansing. Water also symbolizes life, immortality, and wisdom.

Physiologically, an imbalance at this center can manifest as disturbance in the sense of taste, as also malfunctioning of the hands which are both related to the water element. Water is variable in its quality; and the extremes - vapor and ice - are states of imbalance. Even so is heightened sensitivity of the sense of taste as undesirable as greatly weakened sensitivity.

Psychologically, the water-element is associated with several qualities which, again, can be masculine, feminine or animal. Supercilious pity, loving compassion, unhelpful sympathy; life-promoting service, gentle ministrations, insincere profession of kindness - crocodile tears; giving and receiving at the appropriate time, at the inappropriate time, unpredictably; a balanced state of mind, heartless indifference, a hypocritical suppression of emotion; stimulating or satisfying positively, negatively, aimlessly; the humility of the noble, weak-willed cowardice, callous destructiveness; the psychological freedom of the spirit, unpredictability, erratic temperament; wisdom that dissolves all conflicts and contradictions, the unrestrained or untrained behavior, speech that spreads conflicts and contradictions; vigorous in all its constructive, destructive, neutral aspects; and, in general, a cool temperament and a clean heart.

We are not looking for "this" or "that" in all this, but for a happy balance

between the positive, the negative and the neutral aspects. When this balance is disturbed, and when the individualized intelligence - intellect - detects the imbalance, contemplation of the inner intelligence that manifests as the water-element at this center will exert a correcting influence.

Manipura Chakra

It is the chakra that is related to the solar plexus or the navel. The element represented is fire, which is obvious - the solar plexus and the gastric fire. The mantra is ram - ram for red, the color of fire. The geometrical sign is a red triangle. The animal is the ram. The lotus at this center has ten petals, on which are inscribed the ten syllables from dam to pham. The presiding deities are Rudra - male, and Lakini - female.

The qualities of fire are: luminosity, the heat that is generated by intense activity, burning and consuming nature, generation of energy, (it is interesting that this aspect is shared by fire with water which can also generate energy; and hence, in this aspect, it is closely related to the svadhithana chakra, sexual arousal may be experienced at both the centres, and mis-directed sexual energy may manifest as compulsive eating, bad temper and rage) constant upward movement, warmth purifying, all-destroying, creative fire of the sun, cooking and maturing food and fruits, digestion, motion, transmutation of substances and elements, the mediation between the seen and the unseen, and hence between gods and humans. Besides all this, fire paradoxically creates something - smoke - which veils it, and the sun, another form of fire, gives rise to clouds, which veil it. A ram is a sacrificial animal, representing self-sacrifice.

Physiologically, the element is linked to sight, the organ of excretion (anus) as part of the gastric or alimentary system and the faculty of speech, and their malfunction is indication of imbalance of the fire element.

Psychologically, the following faculties and characteristics are associated with the three - male, female and animal - aspects of fire: warmth of heart, which may take the forms of violent passion, tender emotion or brutal lust; energy and dynamism which may be active or passive or dull; emotional and intellectual clarity; tendency to move up and evolve; tendency towards purity; destruction of the impure, the pure and all else; the fire of wisdom; the fire of renunciation and self-sacrifice; creative activity and destructive activity; the ability to assimilate thoughts and ideas and mature them into wisdom; austerity which transmutes undesirable qualities and characteristics into noble and exemplary spiritual qualities; fiery speech or inspiring speech. Most of these even desirable characteristics are capable of generating pride as their by-product which can then veil the very faculty that gave rise to it. Even the color of the petals in the Manipura is that of the dark rain-bearing cloud. In this respect as smoke, this aspect is related to the Anahata which is of a smoky color.

Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras (111.29) declares that contemplation of this chakra

leads to knowledge of the body and its functions, obviously because this is the center of the life-force.

Anahata Chakra

It is related to the heart, and perhaps the lungs, too. The element represented is air, which again is obvious, because it is close to the lungs and to the oxygenation of the blood. The mantra is yam, phonetically similar to air. The geometrical sign is a smoky hexagon. The animal is a black antelope, swift-footed and restless. The lotus has twelve petals of crimson color, on which are inscribed the syllables from kam to tham. The presiding deities are male - Isa - Siva, and female - Kakini. Below the deity is the jivatma or the soul, which is like the steady tapering flame of a lamp.

Air moves in all directions. It is unseen, though its presence can be felt. It is powerful, though it appears to be weak and non-resisting. It is life-giving and life-sustaining, though it can at times become destructive, as in gales and cyclones. It carries scents. Like water, it flows from dense areas to light areas. It has a dual relationship with fire, which it promotes and puts out.

Physiologically, air is linked to the sense of touch, and to the organ of generation, as also to the respiratory mechanism. The imbalance between the male and the female, the animal and the elemental aspects in this center can affect these organs and senses.

Psychologically, this is a very important center if we remember that even the very soul of our being abides there. The air-element is associated with diverse qualities. The mind is unsteady and easily distracted, like the antelope, and like the wind, or, the faculty of comprehensive vision exists. The emotion of love cannot be seen but is experienced at heart; this may be a mere emotion or pure devotion. It represents also secrecy, deep devotion, sneaking suspicion, or treachery. The soul-force is strong or weak; it is either irresistible or non-resisting. Love is life-giving, creative and sustaining, but as attachment is destructive all round. Love again is like a sweet fragrance which emanates and radiates from the heart. As compassion, love seeks the lowly, the needy and the afflicted. This love of the heart gets sometimes involved in passion - associated with the manipura Chakra - and sometimes it uplifts passion to its own spiritual level.

There is a spiritually significant feature in this chakra. It is the intertwining triangles. The triangle with apex downwards represents the descent of the divine, and the triangle with apex upwards is the ascending seeker. It is here at the heart, at the seat of the soul, that all of life's energies are gathered and offered to the divine, which graciously descends to receive the gift of the self. All is not utterly clear and pure yet, and hence the color of the chakra is smoky with red petals.

Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras (111.34) declares that contemplation of this chakra

leads to a knowledge of the mind.

Vishuddha Chakra

It is related to the throat. The element represented is space - perhaps because space is related to sound, and sound is related to the throat. The mantra is ham - the sound that you hear when you enter an empty cave and hence associated with space. The geometrical sign is the white full circle. The animal is the elephant. The lotus at this center has sixteen petals of smoky color with all the sixteen Sanskrit vowels inscribed on them. The presiding deities are male - Sadasiva, and female - Sakini. However, Sadasiva himself is hermaphrodite. Even the male-female - positive-negative - distinction is almost overcome. Hence, perhaps the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali declare that contemplation on this chakra enables the seeker to overcome hunger and thirst (111.30).

The primary qualities of space are: it is ever yielding, encompassing all, intangible and inconceivable, all sustaining without attachment to anything - hence it is often used as the symbol of the supreme Being, Brahman. It is the conveyor of sound and hence knowledge. It is immovable like the elephant.

Physiologically, this center is related to the vocal cords, and also the faculty of hearing.

Psychologically, this center has all positive characteristics. There is a tendency to live and let others live, to yield space to all without let or hindrance. This is a great improvement upon the previous quality of love. Whereas love at the 'heart'-level can be hurt - hence the smoky color of the petals, the purity at the throat center cannot be hurt, and it cannot hurt either - Visuddha means purity. It is enduring, unchanging, immeasurable, and inconceivable, though it can be vague. Here the passion, which was transformed into love, is totally transmuted into the realization of the indivisibility of life and oneness of love. When these noble qualities are lacking or weak, contemplation of this chakra will promote them.

Ajna Chakra

It is related to the center of the eyebrows. The mind is represented here. Om is the mantra. It has no geometrical symbol at all. Nor is there an animal. The lotus here has two petals with the syllables ham and ksam inscribed on them. The presiding deity is the female Hakini, with the formless Siva.

This is beyond the manifest universe of the five elements. This chakra represents, therefore, the unmanifest nature of the substance whose appearance is the universe. There are no animal tendencies here. The text declares that it is here that the seeker has a vision of God, like a flash of lightning.

Sahasrara

Sahasrara is not a chakra, properly speaking. But it is of interest to note that in the very center of the sahasrara, as it were, the seeker is encouraged to contemplate the lotus-like feet of his own guru. Patanjali declares that one who contemplates this center attains a vision of the sages and saviors of the universe, their blessings and their guidance. (111.32)

All these characteristics and faculties are beyond the reach of the mind or of the physical being, but are accessible to the intelligence within where the individual meets the cosmic, where the soul meets god. It is when that intelligence is clouded or stupefied that an imbalance in them arises. Hence, it is only when that intelligence is awakened and directed to the centers involved in the imbalance that the fault can be rectified. The awakening of this intelligence is the function of Kundalini Yoga. Kundalini is the power, part of which is distributed throughout the body for its sustenance and day-to-day functioning, but which is otherwise dormant. Its awakening is achieved by various methods which may be learnt from a guru, and by the grace of guru or god.

While that is the indisputable way of directing the awakened intelligence to the various chakras, I venture to suggest that even intense and prayerful visualization of the chakras by anyone may exert a wholesome influence on the centers, and bring about the desired change in one's personality and character. This will happen when the intelligence is awakened and turns to the divine - the cosmic creative intelligence - in prayerful adoration.

The snag however is that, in a state of inner imbalance, such intense contemplation may be all but impossible. Such contemplation is possible only when the mind is utterly calm. Hence, again, if the student is guided by a competent and intelligent guru, the student can be trained to appreciate the hidden potentialities for character building that this branch of yoga holds.

The Gheranda Samhita provides a brief description of five elemental chakras. Concentration - dharana - on them is advised. The Samhita, however, simplifies the theme, selecting only the vital essentials in each chakra - the geometrical sign, the word-symbol and the presiding deity. Intense concentration on each for a period of two and a half hours, bestows on the yogi mastery over that element. The Samhita recommends that the earth-chakra - muladhara - and the water-chakra - svadhisthana should be placed in the heart for this purpose. Some yogis, who feel that by concentrating on the lower centers, one runs the risk of rousing baser instincts, visualize them in the heart.

Some serious students of yoga have sought to combine contemplation of the chakras with the practice of the yoga asanas. For instance: muladhara for uddiyana bandha while seated, svadhisthana for dhanurasana, manipura for halasana, anahata for gomukhasana, visuddha for sarvangasana, ajna for trikonasana, sahasrara for sirasasana. It is possible to find other yoga asanas for these centers.

It is also possible to integrate hatha yoga with the other branches of yoga - in fact, some people feel that karma yoga is hatha yoga, since karma means action, and hatha yoga is active. All yoga practice starts with muladhara. Bhakti or god-love begins at the anahata, where the jiva - individual soul - meets Siva - the lord - and hence the intertwined ascending and descending triangles. Visuddha is the purifier of the individual; to a devotee this is the consuming and purifying longing for god. Ajna is the center of illumination for the yogi, the eye of wisdom for the student of jnana yoga, and the center where the devotee sees god.

47.3. The Mandalas

The mandalas are the six chakras or psychic centers which the yogi believes actually exist in the subtle body which corresponds in some respects to the physical body. They are: muladhara, svadhisthana, manipura, anahata, visuddha, and ajna. The sahasrara is usually not considered a chakra, but as the culmination of all these, and the fulfillment of the six. In what is known as Kundalini Yoga, the yogi contemplates these chakras, in order to free the knower from the false notion that he is somehow separate from the field, and is therefore imprisoned in it. The process of creation is reversed as it were, and the indivisibility of the creative or cosmic intelligence is realized by the yogi, who is made directly aware that these six centers are in fact, in truth, and for ever, in the sahasrara or the seat of cosmic creative consciousness. At the same time, there exists in these chakras a potential for character building which has not been sufficiently explored. Each of these six chakras represents one of the five elements, the sixth being the mind.

Each one has a certain geometrical design at the very core of it, and the encircling field is depicted as a lotus with different number of petals. In the pericarp of this lotus dwell divine - male and female, animal, and elemental forces. The deities presiding over these mandalas also symbolically wield several weapons. Certain mantras or mystic syllables are inscribed on these petals and in their pericarp. All these chakras are said to exist in the subtle sushumna nadi, which is said to be the spiritual counterpart of the spinal cord.

The general scheme of the mandalas is obvious. The body, the senses, and the mind, are evolved out of the five elements and the individualized intelligence. The elements have their own characteristics, bestowed on them by their presiding deities. These deities are male-female configurations, suggesting that the characteristics too may be masculine and feminine. Not only that, the deities are supported by animal forms, suggesting that the characteristics have their animal aspects, too. Thus, the basic characteristic of the element is acted upon by the masculine, the feminine, and the animal propensities. They can be positive or negative or neutral.

The words 'masculine', 'feminine', and 'animal', are used in this note only in a symbolic and spiritual sense, and there is not the slightest hint of a suggestion of superiority or inferiority. These three words could easily be substituted by 'satva', 'rajas', and 'tamas' with equal validity, but without any suggestion of comparison.

We should not forget the other factors mentioned by Krishna. For, all these characteristics are also motivated by desire -likes, and hate - dislikes, which in their (re)turn operate as happy and unhappy experiences; all these (likes and dislikes, and happiness and unhappiness) are also part of the field, with an overall binding - self-ignorant - intellect which considers itself an ego.

The ideal is to find the optimum equilibrium or balance among all these forces.

Then there is health, wholeness, holiness, harmony, love, and peace - elements of character we love to see in ourselves and in others. Let us not forget that evil is not the existence of one or the other factors in creation, but an imbalance among them. Malfunction of the psychophysical organism is the indication of an imbalance. The yogi, trained in meditating upon these chakras or mandalas, becomes directly aware of the particular field in which such imbalance has arisen, and what the nature of that imbalance is. The chakras are the tuning points in our own subtle body, which interact with the corresponding factors in the cosmos. By intense contemplation and prayerful adoration of the deity presiding over the particular mandala and, through that deity of the indwelling cosmic intelligence - God, the yogi appeals to God to remedy the character defect, and to restore the balance. If we realize that intense contemplation is the molder of character, and that it is such contemplation when misdirected that brought about perversion of character, we can appreciate that contemplation of the chakras should restore the balance, and remedy the character deficiencies.

48. Laya Yoga

Almost all the great masters have said that self-knowledge, god-realization, enlightenment, or liberation, is possible only when the kundalini is awakened and it reaches the sahasrara. They have also said that this may happen after yoga practice, by the practice of meditation or devotion, or by the sheer grace of god or guru. Even they who insist that it happens by grace alone emphasise the need for the student to engage himself in meditation and also in some yoga practices.

The method that the hatha yogi uses is known as laya yoga. Laya means merging or absorption. It is pointed out that the risk in this method is the stimulation of the lower impulses. On the other hand, with sincere and intelligent application of this technique, you can overcome and sublimate those very impulses. Yoga is not for the weak-minded, but only for one who dares. If the following 'preliminary purificatory exercise' is practiced diligently and sincerely, all the physical, emotional, and psychic disturbances, can be removed. Above all, if we have faith in god and guru their grace will remove all obstacles from our path.

Liberation is liberation from self-ignorance. Enlightenment is the realization of self-knowledge. It is self-ignorance that conjures up division where only polarization exists. Whereas prana and apana are complementary, self-ignorance creates a division. This division is the ego-principle. Hatha, by bringing together the ha - positive, solar, prana, and tha - negative, lunar, apana, unites them - or recognizes their indivisibility.

This first union of the prana and the apana is effected in the solar plexus. When their division is thus canceled, the ego-sense is suspended, and kundalini is awakened. The energies that flowed outward, begin to flow towards their source, which is consciousness. This is laya.

In all this, the yogi needs to exercise strict control of his physical being in its most vital aspects, so that there may be unified action, and not haphazard movement of prana. Such a control is acquired by the practice of the yoga postures and the pranayama. Dissipated energy must be gathered, for dissipated energy is a distraction, and a perpetuation of self-ignorance. To do this efficiently, all the energy-channels should be cleared and purified. Only when the prana flows freely in all the nadis can it change its course or direction. It is like the gears of a motor car. Only when the power is connected to the wheels, can the latter be controlled, moved forward, or stopped.

Usually, the prana flows haphazardly in man, without proper control or direction, as a motor car careering downhill in neutral gear. If everything seems to go right, it is only because the free ride has not yet been challenged by a turn, bump or obstruction. The yogi cannot afford to leave this vital process to chance.

The fusion of the prana and the apana at the solar plexus sparks off great power. The yogi does not let the control even over this psychic heat or energy get out of

hand. Using definite techniques, he directs it to the base of the spinal cord, or more properly susumna-nadi, and up along this from center to center, from muladhara, to svadhisthana, to manipura, to anahata, to visuddha, and to ajna. Ascent beyond to the seat of consciousness, or the thousand-petaled lotus, is effected by divine grace. After enjoying communion with the divine here, the power is brought down again through the successive chakras, to enable the yogi to live and function in a divine way.

Daily, the yogi visualizes the whole process actually taking place. Nothing may happen for a long time - not till his heart is purified, his mind steadied, and the power actually awakened. Yet, the very visualization helps him, for the concentrated mind directs the prana to those centers, corrects any defects there may be in the flow of the prana, promotes health, and brings near the day on which the visualization might be actualized.

Does the awakened kundalini purify the heart and steady the mind, or does it awaken only after the heart is purified and the mind steadied? Paramahansa Baba Muktananda declared in one of His inspiring talks in California that it is the awakened kundalini that leads to the vision of truth, and 'all the knots of the heart are cut asunder, all doubts dispelled, and all the karmas come to an end when the supreme truth has been seen'; and He reminded His audience that the rising sun dispels darkness - it is not as though when the darkness goes, the sun rises! According to Baba, the kundalini is awakened through shakti-pata or the Grace of the guru, who directly transmits His energy to the disciple. The guru is one who can bring about such awakening through shakti-pata. This statement is supported by a beautiful verse which occurs towards the conclusion of the Yoga Vasistha. The sage Visvamitra says: "O Vasistha, you have demonstrated that you are the guru by shakti-pata. Only he who is able to awaken god-consciousness in the disciple by a look, a touch, a verbal instruction, or non-verbal grace, is a guru."

One thing is beyond controversy, and that is that total purification of the heart and steadiness of the mind are simultaneous with the awakening of the kundalini and its ascent to the sahasrara. The following exercises are aimed at this. The most vital part of the practice described below is self-purification. It is perhaps self-hypnosis; but the effect is more real and long lasting than self-hypnosis. We may not in one sitting burn all evil in us for ever, but every attempt is bound to leave a positive mark on our personality; if it does not, then you can be sure that there is a lack of sincerity or intensity of faith.

As students of self-hypnosis know, the conscious mind must be lulled, in order that self-hypnotic suggestions might strike root. This is achieved by pranayama, which accompanies the purificatory process. Each suggestion is then propelled by a mantra, the seed-mantra.

Understood rightly, the technique is entirely scientific, though it leans a bit heavily on psychology.

It is better before undertaking the practice of the following exercise, to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the alternate nostril breathing (pranayama), bhasrika pranayama, sitali, khecari mudra, mulabhandha and jalandhara bandha, and yoni mudra, described earlier in this chapter. Then the integrated practice of laya yoga described in the following pages becomes easy.

48. Laya Yoga

a. Purificatory Pranayama - Nada-suddhi

This is also known as bhuta-suddhi (purification of the elements which constitute the body). It is intended to purify the subtle body, and to tune it with the divine, in order to commune with god. It is the yogi's conviction that man should become divine, in order to co-mingle with the divine consciousness. In the Yoga Vasistha (Upasama Prakaranam - chapter 31), Prahlada declares that one who is not Vishnu cannot worship Vishnu. And, chapter 54 of the same text, gives a description similar to the following exercise, but using only the mantra Om.

The first part is drying up of the sinful or impure aspect of our own personality; the second part is burning it; and the third part is wholesale rejuvenation or re-creation of a divine body with which to practice yoga.

(i)(a) Be seated in a comfortable posture. Breathe steadily. With closed eyes, visualize that the soul, located in the heart, is withdrawn to the top of the head; also, that all the evil tendencies in the heart have assumed the form of a dark cloud hiding in the left side of the abdomen. You may commence the simple alternate nostril pranayama even at this stage. Inhale through the right nostril, at the same time visualizing the soul in the form of a flame ascending to the crown of the head. Repeat 'om' mentally. While you retain the breath, visualize the dark cloud. Exhale through the left nostril. The recommended ratio of repetitions of the mantra is 16:64:32 in every case throughout this exercise.

(i)(b) Breathe in through the left nostril. Mentally repeat the syllable 'yam' - mantra for air. Hold the breath. Feel that the dark cloud of sin is dried up by the wind generated by the mantra. Breathe out through the right nostril, repeating the same mantra. Some students might wish to prolong the pranayama. For instance, in stage (i)(b) it is possible to inhale through the left nostril and commence repeating the mantra 'yam'; hold the breath for a few seconds and exhale; and then breathe normally for a couple of minutes, visualizing the drying up of the cloud of sin, till this is actually experienced. Even so with the other steps in this exercise. Your own inner ruler is the best teacher and guide.

(ii) Breathe in through the right nostril repeating the syllable 'ram', which is the word-symbol for fire. Hold the breath. Feel that the fire generated by the mantra burns up the dark cloud. Breathe out through the left nostril, repeating the mantra.

(iii)(a) Breathe in again through the left nostril. Meditate on the moon as being seated at the left nostril. Repeat the mantra 'tham'. Tham rhymes with 'rum'. The 'th' is a hard t, harder than in 'tell' and not the soft sound in 'the'. Hold the breath, repeat the mantra. Visualize that the moon-rays, full of cool nectar, are filling you with new life-force to create a new body, and cooling the fire generated by the previous 'ram' breathing. Breathe out through the right nostril, still repeating the

mantra.

(iii)(b) Breathe in through the right again, repeating the mantra 'vam', and feel that this mantra symbolising water provides the fluid for this new divine body. Hold the breath, and breathe out through the left nostril, repeating the same mantra. Generally, hatha yogis use (a), and tantriks use (b). A few masters use both. You are free to use one or the other. If you use only one, obviously the breathing pattern of (c) will change. The spirit of both (a) and (b) is exactly the same: the old sinful body has been reduced to ashes, which are now sprinkled with divine nectar (which both the mantras 'tham' and 'vam' represent), so that a new divine body may rise from it. Again, some tantriks omit the visualization of the specifically located evil force on the left side. Once the soul is withdrawn to the head, the entire body may be subjected to the purification process; but the visualization of the specifically located evil force may make this purification more intense.

(iii)(c) Breathe in through the left nostril, repeating the mantra 'lam', the mantra for earth, and feel that its power confers solidity upon the new divine body. Hold and breathe out. Drop the hands on to the lap.

(iii)(d) Breathing gently through both the nostrils, repeat the holy mantra soham - 'so' with the inhalation, and 'ham' (pronounced as the English 'hum') with the exhalation, and visualise the soul descending into the heart from the top of the head, to occupy this new divine body - pure and holy. This can be continued for a few minutes.

The Yoga Vasistha (Nirvana Prakaranam) suggests the use of the above procedure as a health-measure. It says, "When the mind is in a disturbed state, the body is weakened. Then there is blind movement of the energies which flow along wrong channels. All nourishment consumed in this state turns into poison and disease. Such diseases are got rid of by the use of mantras like ya, ra, la, va, by right action, and by the service of holy men."

48. Laya Yoga

(b) Agnisara (Fanning the Fire)

Remain seated with your hands on your knees. Draw the abdomen in quickly, and immediately relax. It is just fanlike movement of the abdomen - back and forth. You can do this well only you are completely relaxed, though with a little persistent effort, this exercise itself will help you relax. There is no hard and fast rule regarding breathing: you may go on breathing normally, or you can exhale and hold. Gradually, increase the number of back and forth movements, till you reach one hundred.

(c) Bhastrika (The Bellows)

Bhastrika is a powerful pranayama or breathing exercise. All the great masters of yoga are very fond of it. Descriptions of it are always inadequate. The method can be properly understood only by watching an expert.

In this, we use the abdominal muscles as a blacksmith uses his bellows. Quick and powerful movements are involved in this. When the abdomen is pulled in, the breath is powerfully expelled from the lungs through the nose, in one installment. Be sure that you do not merely breathe out, but throw the breath out as you do while sneezing. Immediately and quickly, the abdominal muscles are relaxed, and the breath rushes into the lungs. About ten such expulsions should be sufficient to start with. Gradually increase the number to twenty. Then breathe out completely. Follow this by an almost complete inhalation. Use the chin-lock to hold the breath; hold it as long as you can. Do this thrice. You will be amazed to see your lung capacity and the retention time grow.

(i) During the first kumbhaka, concentrate on the solar plexus, and feel that the prana is being built up there. Hold the breath as long as you can. When you feel that the energy wants to escape through the lower apertures of the body, gently contract them and stop the energy-escape. In due course, you will actually experience the prana vibrating both in the solar plexus and the muladhara. Before you breathe out, release the chin-lock. Sometimes the throat becomes dry during some of these breathing exercises. Either 'suck' a little butter, or sip a little water. There is a tendency on the part of some to draw the abdomen in while breathing in and pushing it out during the exhalation. This must be carefully avoided. Take a few normal breaths.

(ii) When you retain the breath in bhastrika the second time, mentally repeat the mantra 'hamsah' and feel that the prana from the solar plexus flows to the muladhara.

(iii) On the third attempt you can feel that the power generated at the solar plexus 'strikes' the kundalini shakti in the muladhara. Mentally repeat the mantra 'hum' as the prana strikes at the muladhara. If the bhastrika has been practiced

effectively, and properly, then an actual pulsation is experienced in the muladhara. The mantra 'hum' is repeated with each pulsation. Hum is the kavacabija, the psychic protective shield. It will protect you from obstacles. It is, as it were, a ray of Siva himself coming down to awaken the shakti in the muladhara. During the following exercises, too, whenever you feel that you are becoming dull and lethargic, you can use the bhastrika to 'build up' power.

(d) Sitali (The Cooler)

Bhastrika heats up the whole system. When this is followed by sitali, the excess of heat is taken away, and only the power is left. It is optional. Open your mouth. Protrude the tongue just a little, rolling it into a kind of a tube. Close the lips around this tube and breathe in through it. A cool current passes into you through this tongue-tube, and cools your body. Hold the breath for a few seconds, and then breathe out through the nose. This can be done after each bhastrika, or you may not do it at all.

(e) Pranayama

Sit in padmasana or siddhasana. Use your right thumb to close the right nostril, and the right ring and little fingers to close the left nostril. First breathe out through, either both the nostrils, or the right nostril alone.

Breathe in through the left. Hold. Breathe out through the right. Breathe in through the right. Hold. Breathe out through the left. This is one round. Mentally repeat your mantra. After some practice try to establish the ratio 1:4:2. Do this for about 5 or 10 rounds. Concentrate on the muladhara cakra.

Continue the above. Practice mulabandha (rectal uplift) with the pranayama, as follows. With the inhalation contract the rectum and the perineum and pull them up, feeling that the energy in this region is flowing upwards. While retaining the breath, use the same technique and pull the energy up. If you are able to hold the breath for a long period, and you are unable to hold the mulabandha for that period, you can contract and relax several times during the retention of breath. During exhalation relax the mulabandha.

This pranayama, when practiced with the mulabandha, answers the description given in the Bhagavad Gita: "There are others who offer prana into apana and apana into prana". There is a feeling of the prana being poured into the apana during the inhalation and apana being poured into prana during exhalation after the mulabandha. The Yoga Vasistha also declares: "There is no rebirth for one who offers prana into apana and apana into prana."

This is a very important exercise for awakening the kundalini shakti. It will also enable you to sublimate the sex-energy. You can do this pranayama about 10 times in all. Throughout the exercise keep repeating your mantra.

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(f) Khecari mudra

Visualize a psychic tube running along the center of the spine connecting the center of the eyebrows with the muladhara chakra. Open your mouth just a little to let the tongue roll back and close the posterior nasal openings. Even an unsuccessful attempt to do so will ensure an internal widening of the throat. Breathe in through the open mouth. Feel a cool current pass down the tube to the muladhara chakra. As you breathe in, you will make the sound 'Ah' with the lower part of the expanded throat. Hold the breath for a few seconds, concentrating on the muladhara. Breathe out, feeling that hot air rises from the muladhara and goes right up the tube and comes out through the top part of the expanded throat, with the sound 'Ee'. The tongue may be allowed to resume the normal position during exhalation. Practice this a few times to start with and gradually increase the number. Mentally repeat 'soham' for the downward movement of the energy, and 'hamsah' for the upward movement.

While you inhale, you feel the air flowing in; it is also possible to sense a feeling of 'fullness' rising within at the same time. When you exhale, there is the sense of emptying which seems to descend inwards, though the air rises up to be exhaled.

Hence, there are some yogis who visualize the current flowing up during inhalation, and down for the exhalation. While there is no objection to this, the other way round seems to help tremendously in the sublimation of all energies, as there is definitely a very real feeling that the student is keen on taking all energies upwards - it is as if the lord stretches his hand from the sahasrara and pulls all the energies in the chakras up to himself. The Yoga Vasistha describes the mystic process by which kundalini is aroused by inhalation and made to rise up; the kundalini thereupon absorbs all the other nadis and rises through the susumna as the yogi exhales.

In khecari mudra, the polarity (of consciousness above and energy below) is actually visualized; and in the next, yoni mudra, the absorption is effected.

(g) Yoni mudra

Yoni is womb. The word mudra has several meanings, one of which is 'that which makes happiness flow'. Just as the unborn child is enclosed within the womb, even so, by this mudra, we enclose our consciousness entirely within the self, without allowing it to be externalized. By the practice of this mudra, the fountain-source of happiness is tapped - hence, it is called mudra.

This mudra is best practiced in the siddhasana. In siddhasana, the two lower openings in the body are closed. Now we proceed to close the others: Block the ears with the thumbs, close the eyes with the index fingers, the nose with the middle fingers, the upper lips with the ring fingers, and the lower ones by the

little fingers. Lift the middle fingers a little when you want to breathe in and out.

breathing:

Inhale. During the inhalation and during the period of the retention of breath, fix the attention on the chakra concerned. During the exhalation contract inwardly - and if possible outwardly - the region of that chakra, so that you have a firm hold on it. Draw the abdomen in during exhalation. When the exhalation is complete, hold the lungs empty for a few seconds and during this period feel that the energy is moving to the next chakra. Thus you may have one retention of breath at each chakra.

(i) Concentrate on the muladhara chakra. Mentally repeat the mantra 'om lam'. Meditate on the yellow square - the symbol of earth-element. Practice mulabandha - rectal uplift. Feel the kundalini shakti is moving upwards to the next center. As it travels up, repeat the mantra 'hamsah' mentally. Since the 'observer of the chakras' still seems to be at the eyebrow center, the color visualized naturally pervades the whole body with the point of radiation in the respective center. It is also rational because every element is everywhere in the whole body.

(ii) Next, concentrate on the svadhisthana chakra at the tip of the spine in the region of the genitals. Repeat the mantra 'om vam'. Meditate on the 'crescent moon' (the symbol of water-element). Practice mulabandha again. Feel the kundalini shakti is moving upwards to the next center. As it travels up, repeat the mantra 'hamsah'. In the same way, take the shakti to:

(iii) Manipura chakra - behind the navel region; Repeat the mantra 'om ram'; red triangle (symbol of fire-element);

(iv) Anahata chakra (behind the heart region); Repeat the mantra 'om yam'; smoky hexagon of two interlaced triangles (symbol of air-element).

(v) Visuddha chakra - throat, behind the Adam's apple); Repeat the mantra 'om ham'; white circle (the symbol of ether-element).

(vi) Ajna chakra (between the eyebrows); Repeat the mantra 'om'.

(vii) From here, visualise the shakti ascending up to the sahasrara at the crown of the head, and enjoying blissful union with the lord. No special mantra has been mentioned for the sahasrara. In fact, it is not regarded as a chakra at all, it being the psychic abode of all the energies dwelling ordinarily in all the six lower centers. It is usual to meditate upon the lotus feet of the guru or the supreme lord in that center (if it is regarded as such). The Gheranda Samhita asks the yogi to meditate in the pericarp of the sahasrara, visualizing there a lotus of twelve petals, white in color, and with the twelve mantras ha, sa, ksa, ma, la, va, ra, yum, ha, sa, kha, phrem. Within this there is a triangle with the mantras a, ka, tha on the sides, and ha, la, ksa at the angles. The mantra for this center is 'om'. On it

there is the jewelled seat where the feet or the sandals of the guru rest. If all this sounds a bit complicated, the following may be helpful: when with the yoni mudra the shakti has been taken up to ajna, drop the hands on the lap and meditate. During this meditation visualize the consciousness linking the ajna with the lotus feet of the guru in the sahasrara. When this is achieved, then with the further inhalation and exhalation it is easy to feel the energy flowing up and down this channel: i.e. the prayer flowing up and the grace of the guru flowing into the ajna.

Baba Muktananda Paramahansa - Who is one of the greatest living yogis, and Who gives Shakti-Pata - asks all yoga students meditate with 'so-ham', - 'so' during inhalation, and 'ham' during halation - feeling that 'so' or he is the guru, and 'ham' or I is the disciple. If you listen intently to your breath, you will actually hear the breath sing this mantra. If you look deep within, you will actually see the identity of your innermost self with your guru - identity of the atma with the paramatma.

All this is already elaborate. Each center is a psychic mandala or pattern. This meditation is an elaborate practice, leading the mind from the gross to the subtle, from the physical to the psychic, and to the spiritual. Laya yoga involves meditating upon each chakra, in all its details as set out in the last chapter. Meditate on the deity there, and with his blessings gather up the mantras on the petals of the chakra and merge them into the bija or the seed-mantra. Then raise the bija or the seed-mantra on to the next one, where it spreads out into the next mandala. If all this is done with intense concentration, faith, devotion, and keenness, the effect is indescribable.

When you wish to terminate your meditation, get back to the yoni mudra position and continue the cakra meditation in the reverse order. The technique is the same as for the ascent of the kundalini, except that as the sakti moves from one chakra to the one lower down, the mantra used is 'soham'.

During the meditation on the ajna chakra, feel that the kundalini derives immense power, peace and bliss from the union with the lord. As the shakti descends into the various chakras, feel that this power is being distributed at those centers. Incidentally, this meditation can vivify the entire nervous system and the body.

While watching the breath during meditation, the following technique can be adopted. Besides the psychic benefit, it has the unique advantage of maintaining the attention on the susumna - the mystic or psychic channel within the spine - which we endeavored to cultivate by the previous exercises. Remember the walking-stick shaped psychic tube? Visualize that it bends down to the navel region (the solar plexus) or the heart on the right side of the chest. Thus the 'stick' has the shape of the letter C, more or less. As you inhale, feel the psychic current coursing down the C-tube from the center of the eyebrows down to the solar plexus (or the heart); when you exhale, feel that this direction is reversed,

starting from the solar plexus (or the heart), going down to the base of the spine, up the spine and forward to the center of the eyebrows.

This technique can be adopted whenever you feel like concentrating on the breath - even during the pranayama exercises, during the laya yoga or otherwise.

healing

Always pray and radiate healing rays to all those in need, before rising from the meditation seat. This is a great service to humanity.

48. Laya Yoga

Conclusion

The effectiveness of laya yoga lies in powerful imagination - which is image-in-action: i.e. transferring the image of god within, visualizing god within and feeling his living presence there. The emotional risks involved can surely be avoided if the 'purificatory breathing exercise' is practiced with intense visualization and feeling. This blossoms into experience. That is what the sculptor does. He looks at the stone and visualizes the statue he wants to carve out of it. He sees it there. He persists in this visualization till the chips that do not belong to the statue are chiseled away. Now his imagination or visualization has become actualized, realized. The 'purificatory breathing exercise' itself can be used to overcome any evil habit - physical or mental. Instead of vaguely imagining that all the evil tendencies are stored in the left side of the abdomen, you can actually visualize the particular evil habit there; and then visualize that habit being dried and burnt. That is the obvious purpose of prefacing the laya yoga practice with the important and vital process of purification.

To reject the practice of laya yoga, fearing the risk of undesirable physical or mental results, is like throwing out the baby with the bath-water. Yoga is for the brave man, full of common-sense and wisdom, with discrimination to absorb what is good and guard himself against what is undesirable. The caution found in the texts on yoga applies only to those who devote their whole time to the practice of yoga; and even then only if they refuse to heed nature's warnings in the form of pain, discomfort, etc. Fear not.

Regular practice of yoga will dispel all your doubts and bestow the highest prize upon you.

The sage Vasistha says: "By any one of these methods propounded by the various teachers, the movement of prana can be restrained. These yogic methods bring about the desired results if they are practiced without violence or force. When one is firmly established in such practice, with simultaneous growth in dispassion, and when the mental conditioning comes under perfect restraint, there is fruition of the restraint of the movement of prana. Surely, all these practices appear to be distractions; but, by their steady practice, one reaches the absence of distractions. It is only by such steady practice that one is freed from sorrow, and he experiences the bliss of the self. Hence, practice yoga. When through practice the movement of prana is restrained, then nirvana or liberation alone remains." (Upasama Prakaranam of Yoga Vasistha: 79)

However, all these, when practiced mechanically, are of no use at all. Hence, the same Vasistha declares that the energies in the body are purified only through jnana or spiritual insight. That is the teaching of Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi, too. He says, "Breath control is said to help the yogi to rouse the kundalini-shakti which lies coiled in the solar plexus. The shakti rises through the nadi called the

susumna, which is embedded in the core of the spinal cord and extends to the brain. If one concentrates on the sahasrara, there is no doubt that the ecstasy of samadhi ensues. The vasanas (tendencies) are, however, not destroyed."

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika therefore defines laya as 'The non-recollection of past experiences'. Till all the vasanas or memories of past experiences are destroyed, one should practise laya.

49. Yoga of Meditation

"The glass may be made of gold, but what makes the glass useful is the place where there is no gold - the empty space." - Taoist maxim. That is meditation. It is not the feverish activity in which you are engaged constantly that ensures your prosperity, but the period when you are in meditation. That is the creative vacuum, that is the creative silence, the creative peace.

Hence, yogi Svatmarama declares in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika: "Without hatha, raja yoga is not fruitful; and hatha is not fruitful, is not fulfilled without raja yoga. Hence, one must practice both. At the conclusion of the kumbhaka, and the restraint of prana, one should make the mind supportless - unconditioned. Then, one will attain the goal of raja yoga."

All this is laconically expressed in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. He declares that the mental modifications cease when the breath is suspended after being expelled. Then, surely the mind stands supportless. That is meditation.

Gheranda, however, gives the student some support! Gheranda Samhita describes three kinds of meditation - the gross, the luminous, and the subtle.

The gross meditation involves elaborate visualization, in the region of one's heart, of a heavenly abode of god, who reigns supreme in that heaven. It is contemplation of god with name and form, to be visualized in elaborate detail. This is extremely popular, especially with devotees of god. The legends known as puranas provide the devotee with very many variations of the theme for his contemplation.

The second type is the contemplation of light. The focal point can either be the muladhara chakra, or the center of the eyebrows. The student contemplates muladhara chakra, in all its glowing details, and visualizes the light of the jiva or the living soul in the form of a radiant flame. Or, he can contemplate the light of 'om' in the eyebrow center.

The third type is regarded as 'difficult to be attained, even by the gods, as it is a great mystery', in the words of the Gheranda Samhita. The student practices the sambhavi mudra during his meditation. The kundalini is awakened. Along with the self, this kundalini shakti - life-force - leaves the body through the eyes, and appears in front of the yogi. This is not easy even to imagine!

Meditation is the art of realizing the universal self, beyond the ego-sense. Universal is one, and not many; What is it that appears to have created a division in the one, so that this one appears to be many? Meditation is the quest for the answer to this question.

In the practice of the yoga asanas, we sense an intelligence which is beyond the 'me'; during the practice of pranayama, again we realize that life is governed by

an intelligence that is distinct from the ego-sense. In meditation, we actually pursue this ego-sense, to see what it is, and how it veils that intelligence. In samadhi or vicara - inquiry, we discover that the ego-sense is a non-entity; it has always been a non-entity. The transcendental intelligence alone is the reality at all times. Even ignorance and enlightenment, covering and discovery, are words invented by the mind, to rationalize all this.

The one is one; it only appears to be many. Even the three factors that we discussed in the last chapter - consciousness, energy, and matter - are really not three, but one unity apprehended at three stages. If you have watched trees in early spring - especially in countries like Canada, where the growing season is brief - you see this clearly. In winter, the trees have no foliage at all. Early in spring, you go near a tree and watch; the tree knows the season, the temperature, and the climatic conditions; it has also the know-how of sprouting fresh leaves. When these sprouts emerge triumphantly, you see the fiction of the energy, the will; and then you see its materialization.

Such division of this phenomenon into knowledge, will, and action - or consciousness, energy, and matter - is not a fact, but the fruit of your own mental conditioning. You think that one has become three, and then you think that the three are somehow one. As long as this thinking thinks that it thinks, it will continue to think diversely creating contradictions, conflicts, conditioning, happiness and unhappiness, fear and anxiety.

You think that you are unhappy, and therefore you feel unhappiness. It is true that there is a temporary benefit if you come face to face with the truth that you are unhappy, only because you think you are unhappy. You know that this unhappiness is not something real in itself, but is the product of your thinking. All the great movements, which pretend to cure all ills, by enabling one to think one way or the other, are based on this wonderful formula. But, unless this discovery is your own, you do not know how to think! You think you are unhappy, so you feel unhappy. The obvious inference here is that, if you think you are happy, you will feel happy! Theoretically, it seems to be sensible, but only theoretically. It does not work, because you do not know what it is that thinks. In the case of the unhappiness which you are experiencing now, the thinking is there already. You are not producing anything, it is there, and you are observing it; whereas in the other case, are you thinking that you are happy, or are you thinking that you are thinking that you are happy? The happiness is twice removed! You are only sitting and thinking that you are thinking that you are happy. In other words, do you know what this thinking means? Who thinks? That is the problem.

There is another problem. You are seriously observing a thought - let us say of anger, and you think you discover that a thought of anger is later felt as anger. This apparent discovery sometimes makes it appear that the anger has gone, or it seems to have gone. Perhaps, it has merely been overlaid with dullness; perhaps, you are looking away inwardly. Because, to observe the anger is painful. Or

perhaps, having understood all this theoretically, you imagine that, in the light of your observation, it has gone. A few days, later it comes back! That means, it was there, hidden all the time, covered with a lot of thinking and imagination. When it is thus covered, there is no longer the pain to provide the incentive to look within. What do you do now? You look within. Everything is calm - or appears so. The mind has not been conquered. A few days later, somebody else provokes you, and suddenly you realize that anger was there all the time - but you were 'asleep'. So, during that period of dullness, you lose the edge, the incentive. What must you do?

The yogi suggests that you practice an exercise. As you inhale, repeat the mantra mentally. As you exhale, repeat the mantra mentally. As this mental repetition of the mantra goes on, the mind forms a habit. This habit is not looked upon by the mind as a threat or a challenge. If breathing itself is not a challenge to the mind, then this automatic repetition of the mantra is not a challenge either. The mind is not bothered at all. The habit is formed.

You sit listening to your own mental repetition of the mantra. You hear the mantra. Who is it that is repeating the mantra? 'Me.' Who is it that is listening to the mantra? 'Me.' Now there is a new incentive to watch the mind. The thing that repeats the mantra inside, and the thing that listens to the mantra inside, both seem to be your objects of observation - and you are watching both these. You can similarly observe anger or other psychological factors now.

Only a calm mind can observe itself, can reflect. Any reflection that takes place in a distracted mind is a perversion. You can neither meditate nor reflect when the mind is in commotion. Whatever is reflected, when the reflecting medium is disturbed, is a distortion. You cannot make the mind calm, because any effort to do so is going to disturb the calmness of the mind, is going to alter the essential nature of the mind. All the methods that people have invented - including the methods of visualizing an image of god - are confessions of failure, though they are excellent aids. You do not know how to still the mind. Therefore, instead of allowing the mind to think of a million things, you make it think of just one thing - call it Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Moses, or a mantra. When you successfully plant this mantra or image of god in the mind, you have only succeeded in creating one huge tidal wave in the mind - with the result that all the little waves disappear.

Hence, Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, after giving elaborate instructions for meditation, suddenly reveals the essence of meditation: "Don't think anything!" There lies the problem.

Try this exercise. Grind your whole thought process to a stand-still, by using one thought, 'I will not think,' like a broom, and sweep all other thoughts out with it. This is not meditation, but merely sitting and thinking 'I will not think'. Do this for a few minutes, then let go. Let the mind think what it likes for a couple of minutes, then begin again. You will see the fun.

You may find as many methods for meditation or for concentration, or for entering into samadhi as there are teachers in the world. Because, meditation is not a technique which can be taught, but an experience which can be caught by each one in his own unique way. Having learned these methods, when you go into your own meditation room, you will find you will still have to evolve your own method. What is good for another person, may not be good for you. After studying everything on earth, eventually you will have to discover for yourself how not to think.

In the pursuit, there are three types of internal obstacles. One - thinking itself. Streams of thought occur in the mind. From where do they come? Two - what are known as emotions. These emotions are a bit more problematic than mere thoughts. You will find that, when there is a thought, you are able to observe the thought fairly dispassionately; but when there is an emotion, it carries you off. Emotion is a motion outward. Three - the manifestation of energy - restlessness. You cannot pinpoint it as a thought or a feeling; it is just an amorphous disturbance of energy. You will have to discover it yourself, a description will not help.

The yogis have simplified our approach to these three. But, unless we come face to face with them in ourselves, this simplification is useless. The theory is that thought has its seat in the brain, emotion has its seat in the heart, energy has its seat in the solar plexus. If you have a bee buzzing in your bonnet, it means your mind is focused too much on your head - shift it. If you are going crazy with some emotion, your whole attention is focused on your heart - shift it. There seems to be a simple method for doing this. In the case of both mental and emotional upheaval, try to see if you can shift your attention to the solar plexus. Then you have withdrawn the energy from the thinking and from the emotion, and you are in contact with the energy center. From there, you are looking at the emotion or the thought. When you are looking at the emotion in this manner, it does not move outside anymore. The emotional disturbance or mental disturbance is checked, and you have acquired some ability to look within yourself. Each one has to do it for himself - one cannot explain it too much.

You will discover that emotion is nothing more than thought of a different intensity of energy, a greater voltage. Thought is made of energy. The brain cells generate a minute electrical charge. That means, prana moves in the brain cells, and they produce this thought. But that is not all; there is a second element to it. In those brain cells are hidden some past impressions. That is what you call memory. When this energy moves among those impressions, something comes up - this is what you call thought. This understanding helps you by revolutionizing your observation. You are no longer caught up in these emotions; you are merely an observer. You see that energy activating brain cells produces thought, energy activating latent impressions produces thought. Thus, you become free of your thoughts and your emotions.

In the Yoga Sutras, a beautiful series of meditation exercises is given. Vitarka

vicara nanda 'smita 'nugamat sampra jnatah - in which a kind of path is carved out.

First, vitarka: you allow the mind to indulge in thinking thoughts and counter-thoughts. Then you look directly within to see where thought arises. Can you distinguish that spot where the thought arises? Is there any difference in the source, in the ground of the experiences, of pleasure and pain, of happiness and unhappiness? Are they not all different waves that are the one ocean?

That intelligence which sees this directly, is called vicara. Vicara is not analysis or inquiry. It is when this awareness moves directly within to see that all these thoughts, all these feelings, are of the same substance, whether called pleasant or unpleasant, pleasure or pain, happiness or unhappiness.

The aggregate of all these is what we have so far considered as 'me'. The 'me' is, therefore, the ground of all these. When thus the ground of thoughts, feelings, and experiences is directly seen, there is peace, not unlike the experience of sleep in which, however, there is still this 'I'.

We started by seeing differences in this world, good and evil etc. Then these seem to disappear, because we realize that all these divisions were in 'me', created by 'me'. Finally, there is just 'me' left. But the 'me', so long as it is there, is capable of creating a division. Why do we run after what is called pleasure? Because we have given them a lot of value. Switch off this attraction-repulsion, and the mind naturally moves in one area called 'god'. That is brahmacharya, which means the mind moves in Brahman. But, although the object seems to have gone, the 'I' is still there.

You look at a mountain, and even though the idea that it is a mountain may not arise, there is still the feeling: 'I see ... ' When the eyes are open, there is seeing. What is it that jumps up within you and says: 'I see'?

There is a lovely sutra in the Yoga Sutras which says: "The seen is the seeing." With this realization, there is great delight within you. There, your inquiry ends. Then, Divine Grace steps in. For, the undivided intelligence or cosmic consciousness cannot be realized by the finite, by divided consciousness. 'I' cannot see God. 'I' cannot see the totality.

All this is part of what we call meditation. Meditation is self-discovery. It leads to self-knowledge, which is synonymous with samadhi, enlightenment, freedom, liberation, etc. We readily understand what is meant by knowledge; it is knowledge of another, of an object. But, self is not an object; self-knowledge is not knowledge of another. Hence, self-knowledge poses a big problem. All other knowledge is associated with thought; hence, self-knowledge is said to be free of thought, a direct realization. Self-knowledge is free of interference of the mind; hence, it is declared that it follows control of the mind - though that is an extremely inadequate term.

There is a very big difference between our physical and psychological being. In the case of the body, exercise or work brings on fatigue. In the case of the mind, if it does not do anything, there is fatigue. If you make the mind stop functioning, you will feel as though you are carrying a terribly heavy load, you are so fatigued. So, we should neither stop the mind, nor let the mind flow as it will, but bring it under the control of our intelligence, so that we may be able to observe it. It is possible to vary the technique, vary the method, but not the goal. Instead of sitting upright and meditating, one can walk about and meditate. Instead of inactively and passively sitting in your own meditation room or on the seashore, one can be active and meditating. Instead of outwardly seeming to be in the meditative mood, one can even go into a club or a hotel or a theater, sit and listen to some music, and, at the same time, inwardly be watchful. One can do all sorts of things, if one is sincere.

The whole problem of yoga or meditation is one of sincerity. If you are sincere, you will find some way out. If not, nothing in the world will be of any use. Here, one must use common sense all the time, and modify the method of meditation, to bring it in alignment with life itself, and bring life in alignment with our attempts at meditation. Our daily life and our meditative life should not be in conflict with each other, other wise there is no meditation at all. Everyone must constantly be watchful and alert.

50. The I-dea of I

Such watchfulness or alertness itself generates virtue and order in one's life. It harmonizes what is initially called the daily secular life, and what is practiced as yoga or meditation. This division of life is also the work of the ego, which pretends to holiness, while clinging to unholiness. All division is ego; and evil and unwisdom flow from the ego.

Commonsense tells us that east and west, above and below, right and left, meet in 'me'. When you stand on the ground, all that lies in one direction is to the east, and all that lies in the other direction is to the west. If you move a mile in the easterly direction, what you previously considered east has joined the west! Is it difficult then to see that you are not only the meeting point, but you are also the dividing factor?

Caught in this trap of 'I am this' or 'I am that', we are not aware that there is a state of peace of mind, an existence that is unconditioned. Every time we want to get out of one trap, we walk into another trap. This is so, because we have no idea whatsoever that a state beyond all this exists.

In yoga, at the beginning of our practice, it has to be taken for granted that there is a state of consciousness, accessible to all of us, provided we are willing to take the necessary steps, in which there is no confusion, conflict, distress, or disharmony - a state of bliss, joy, and peace, which is reached through yoga, through meditation, through the understanding of the mind and its modifications - citta and vrtti.

When you are not in that state of yoga, then the state of your mind, the thought, and the feelings that prevail in it, determine the world around you. An object does not exist except as the sum total of all the thoughts of all the observers. When all these thoughts and viewpoints, opinions, and descriptions are dropped, the object is what it is, not as an object anymore.

These are words. It is when you become like little children, as Christ enjoined, that you can get an idea of this. Hence, the Bhagavatham declares that the greatest sages are like little children. If you wish to learn to meditate, the only person to teach you is a baby less than six weeks old. When you look into its eyes, you will know what yoga means. There, it is in all its absolute purity, gazing at you, without projecting a single thought of what you are!

Patanjali gives us a three-word phrase about yoga in his Yoga Sutras: yogas citta vrtti nirodhah - yoga is citta, vrtti, nirodha. These three words cannot easily be translated into English.

What is citta? Mind-stuff. This citta throws up countless vrittis (explained later). Something has to be done with these citta vrittis to bring about a condition of yoga. That something is nirodha.

We want to know exactly what citta is, what mind is. Let us say that you have your eyes open, and see something sitting in front of you, and a thought arises in you, 'He is a swami'. Someone else may think, 'He is a man', or 'He is an Indian', or 'He is a nice man', or 'He is not a nice man', and so on. How does all this happen? A totally blind man would not see a swami. What makes you see? Your eyes, the optic nerve, and the particular brain center. But, in the optic nerve brain complex, there is no swami, but merely light waves, vibrations. Where and how are these sensations or vibrations decoded into, 'He is a swami'? The material of which the sensations in their essential nature are made is citta.

All these are words. Citta cannot be grasped by your mind, however brilliant you are. In order to know the citta, you must experience it, here and now. It must be as real as the ant crawling on your back - felt externally, or the headache or anger - experienced internally. Seeing the chair is the perception of a material object. Being aware of the crawling of the ant on the back is a sensation, and the feeling of anger is an emotion. In one or all of these contexts, the citta must become visible to you. You must experience it, here and now. Just as you cannot experience a headache that is not there in you now, you cannot meditate unless there is meditation, you cannot know the citta, unless the citta reveals itself to you. This will happen only when the vrttis make life intolerable, when all your desires and cravings begin to hurt you, and the mind naturally turns upon itself.

Citta can only be experienced when desire naturally drops away. Only when it hurts, will the mind let fall what we have been calling evil - the cravings, the lust, the greed, and the hatred. You do not have to drop them at all. When you have developed sensitivity within yourself, then, without any outside persuasion, the mind is ready to let them drop. Then the citta is seen, is experienced. That is called meditation. Meditation is coming face to face with citta. In that state of yoga, there is an inner understanding of the vrttis and the citta. Such understanding is nirodha.

Nirodha cannot be adequately translated. You look at the ocean, and you look at the waves. Now there seems to be within you a notion that the waves are something apart, something which come into being, which seem to exist, and dissolve in the Ocean. You are creating a distinction, a division that is untrue, false. I am not suggesting that the wave is false, but the division that thought creates between the wave and the ocean is false. An enlightened person looks at the same ocean, and he has the same vision; but, in that vision there is no division. There is direct experience without the division created by the thought 'the wave has come out of the ocean'. Nirodha is the abolition of the non-existent division. The distinction between the wave and the ocean is only an idea. Let that disappear. Its disappearance is called nirodha.

Similarly, you have various ideas concerning the world and the objects around you. You need not suppress your thoughts, or express your thoughts; you need not run away from the world, or get drowned in it; you need not wipe the world

out of your vision - but you should directly see the truth, and abandon the idea that you have concerning this truth.

In reality, the citta is undivided, indivisible. Not only indivisible in the sense that there is no distinction between subconscious, conscious, and superconscious, in what is called the 'me', but in the sense that consciousness is cosmic all the time. Cosmic consciousness is indivisible. There is no such thing as my consciousness as distinct from your consciousness. The citta is really not restricted to the individual body.

If you compare citta to an ocean, each individual is just a ripple, a wave, in that ocean. Having continually identified yourself with one ripple, you consider yourself a limited individual - and you think that that individual is the whole. This individuation is what has brought about trouble, and it is the identification with the vrtti that has caused the individuation.

You can probably study these vrttis more closely and thoroughly within yourself. But, one must never make the mistake of considering the cosmic intelligence to be limited to the individual. It is universal. Yet, it is easily accessible to each one within himself, within what he has come to regard as his self.

If you observe your own citta, you realize that vrittis - thought-waves, ideas - arise in it constantly, in that part of the citta where the attention is focused. Some of these thoughts or ideas are considered pleasant, and others unpleasant. The pleasant are pleasant because you like them - and of course you like them because they are pleasant; and the unpleasant are unpleasant because you dislike them - and of course you dislike them because they are unpleasant. Regardless of whether they are considered pleasant or unpleasant, good or evil, ugly or beautiful, they are all thoughts and ideas, vrttis.

The observing intelligence is obscured by these vrttis; and then there is the notion of an observer, the self, or the ego.

What yoga philosophy suggests, if one studies it without preconceived notions and prejudices, is this. When you observe the ego, it is possible that you discover that the ego is not an entity, like a table or a tape-recorder. The ego is more like an assembly, in the sense that Buddha used that word. What you call consciousness, the self, is nothing but an assembly of past impressions and experiences. Buddha did not deny the existence of the world and its objects.

A great Buddhist used the example of the bullock cart. He asked a disciple, "What do you see there?", as a cart drawn by bullocks passed. "A bullock cart." "What are those two circular things?" "Wheels." "Burn them." "Now what is sticking out there?" "The axle." "Throw it away." Then the body was discarded, then the yoke. "Where is the cart now?" If all the different parts that have their own name and individuality, have been dismantled, where and what exactly is the cart? If you put all these separate parts into a scrap heap, they would not make a

cart. The cart is an idea. Even before the assembly of the parts, the idea of the cart was there, and it persists.

The ego, the 'I', is nothing but an idea, a vritti. As an idea, 'I' exists, but not as an independent entity, capable of producing its own ideas. One must observe all this. As you observe for instance, seeing, you note that seeing takes place. Who sees? The eyes see. While seeing happens, from somewhere, for no apparent reason, the idea arises, "I am seeing."

Patanjali gives us a very beautiful sutra in which there is a description of what is the ultimate in yoga. Translated literally, it reads: 'Then the seer rests in himself.' When you are not in that state of yoga, you identify yourself with a million thought waves or modifications of the mind. But, 'in a state of yoga, the seer rests in himself.' What does the seer signify? Later in the text, we get an inspiring statement. "What one calls the seer, is only seeing." Why must you invent a thing known as 'I' which sees? When the eyes are open, they see. You have a beautiful expression in English, viz. 'sight-seeing tours.' The sight is what sees! Who sees the scenery? Sight sees. What you call the seer, is nothing but the action, the event of seeing. All our yoga practices lead us to this realization that seeing is not the doing of 'I', but a happening.

In exactly the same way, all of life can be lived. Sight sees, action takes place, everything in this world happens. Somehow, somewhere, we have been conditioned by the idea that, without this vanity, this ego, without a goal to reach and hold on to, we shall not progress, but our lives would be a failure. There is only one failure, the failure to do, not the failure to achieve. Success is always there. To succeed is 'to come after'. When one does anything, success follows. It is when you do not do what should be done there is failure.

Once you see the whole picture, action is spontaneous. The finite thing - I, you, he - does not exist in reality. It is only when you are not really spiritually awake that there is this division and confusion. Once the awakening has taken place, it stays alert until you discover the reality, and it swallows the 'I'.

As we have seen, citta is indivisible cosmic consciousness or intelligence, and the vrittis are ideas which may be knowledge, wrong understanding, imagination, memory, or sleep. These are all universal - wherever there is ocean, there are waves, wherever there is citta there are vrittis. It seems to be clear, but when you view the ocean as one indivisible entity, there are no waves apart from it. The whole thing, with all the waves, is the ocean.

Similarly, in the physical body, there are millions of cells sparking off, all sorts of streams flowing from the heart to the parts of the body and back again, there is tremendous activity; yet, because the organism is the activity, and there is no division, it is unaware of it. A body approaching fire is burned; but if you are the burning fire, you will not be burned at all. You are the burner, not the burned. Somehow, this fact that 'I am that' has been forgotten.

We ask, "Why should that cosmic intelligence forget that it is cosmic and create a diversity, change, or a becoming?" Why should this great universal being become anything? No one can answer. One can only, bluntly, frankly, and honestly, say, "Sorry, I do not know."

Somehow, mysteriously there is what philosophers call *maya* or *avidya* - translated as ignorance, which merely means, "I have no idea." But the question still remains as to how there can be ignorance in cosmic intelligence. This question is unanswerable. The same question comes round in countless different ways for us.

The body of everyone is made of the same substance. For, all of us, food, comes from the same source, the earth. Prana, the life force, is cosmic. We are all breathing the same air. We all have the same intelligence within us. It cannot be divided. Yet, when someone calls you a fool, you become angry. But, when you say, "My hand is dirty", the hand does not strike the tongue for this remark. Yet, this is what we do to one another. Somebody insults you, and at once you want to retaliate. We eat the same food; but each one wants to destroy the other, because "I feel that I am different from him."

How does this happen? We have missed two steps: we have forgotten that we are all one. And, when this is forgotten, there is a peculiar polarization - 'I' and 'the other'. Neither cosmic intelligence nor cosmic ignorance - *avidya* - creates the concept, the idea of you and me. It is in the shadow of *avidya* that the 'I' arises; and this 'I' creates 'you' and 'the other'.

Perhaps, the first person pronoun 'I' is nothing but the abbreviation of the full word 'idea'. The 'I' may itself be nothing more than an idea. However, as soon as this idea arises, it creates you, the other person, then he, she, and it.

The problem of our world is that the human being, the individual, each 'I', becomes the center of the universe as soon as the ego-sense arises. Why do two individuals fight? Because each one assumes that he is the center, and that everything must somehow be related to his pleasure, to his will. This self-limited cosmic being, which is the individual personality, then goes on building relationships. It is all ignorance. The child and the grandchild of ignorance can only be ignorance, just as all offspring of man can only be human. So, everything which manifests within this cosmic being or cosmic consciousness is born of ignorance. The self-limited infinite, which is called the individual, looks around, feels, registers, and reacts. Fear, contempt, like, dislike, attraction, repulsion, approval, disapproval - all these spring from the ignorant self-limitation that is called ego.

Once the idea of 'I' is there, it becomes the center of the entire universe. Who determines what is East and what is West? The deciding factor is where you stand at the moment. You lay down the law, as a nation or as a culture. It depends on

where you stand physically, psychologically, morally, or spiritually. 'We' declare this to be good and that to be bad, that is pleasant and this is not pleasant. The center of creation is always 'I' and collectively 'we'.

From this 'I' comes raga - attraction, approval or liking, and dvesa - repulsion, rejection or dislike. Raga is better translated as 'approval', and dvesa as 'disapproval'. If someone gently scratches your back, you approve of him; but if he twists your arm, you disapprove of him. This is so because you see yourself as the center of the universe.

There is one more category, which the wise, keenly observant mind of the author of the Yoga Sutras recognized - a man clinging to one's physical life - or I would like to regard this as 'hope'. This clinging to life that is known to be temporary, which is found even amongst the wisest, absurd, though it seems is a trend away from the center, away from the cosmic intelligence. This trend is manifest in our lives as 'hope' - hope which is always related to the nonexistent future, hope of even an after-life, heaven, and so on.

How does one get over all this? How can one restrain all these innumerable thought-waves or ideas or notions with which one identifies oneself, because of one's original identification with one idea, the 'I'-idea? How does one return to the source, the truth, the reality of one indivisible consciousness?

Patanjali says that the answer is abhyasa and vairagya. Abhyasa means 'to be established in it'. All effort directed towards remaining established in the truth is abhyasa. So, abhyasa means, in one word, practice. The sutra concerning vairagya is somewhat complicated. It refers to objects seen and heard; longing for them is raga, and the cessation of such longing is vairagya. There is vairagya when the craving is turned upon itself - when there is intense craving, only to know 'what the craving is', as soon as it arises.

Although I have described abhyasa and vairagya as two separate steps, they really go together. They are two sides of the same coin. A holy man gave a remarkably simple definition of the two words abhyasa and vairagya. "To know that cosmic consciousness alone is true, is abhyasa; not to allow an idea of diversity ever to arise, is vairagya." Yoga does not restrict you to a set of practices; whatever enables you to be established in this cosmic consciousness, is abhyasa, provided you persist in that practice. Abhyasa requires the integration of your entire life. This is similar to the Hassidic teaching, that one's whole life should be offered to God, given a God-ward direction. If that is not there, then there is no abhyasa, no practice.

Abhyasa has to be combined with vairagya. What is called vairagya, is extremely difficult to define, because all the definitions pre-suppose the opposite. Detachment implies having been attached. Vairagya is not that. It is not dislike, or indifference. It is not aversion, or infatuation. If, during yoga practice, there is a soft towel under you, the back of the neck 'likes' it. If there is a rough mat, the

neck does not 'like' it. This approval or disapproval belongs not to 'me', but to the body. The skin responds positively to a pleasant sea breeze, and negatively to ice cold wind or desert heat. That is understandable, natural. But, when you say, "I love him", or "I hate him", that is not natural. It does not exist in nature, but is a perversion of nature.

When you begin to see this, then your heart, mind, or consciousness, does not register the causative factors of raga-dvesa, whatever caused the attraction or aversion. That state in which your consciousness does not register these causes at all is vairagya. There is no more registration of experiences. Let life flow on. The sensations, the body, the life-force, approve of certain things, and disapprove of others. Let your consciousness not be tainted by this. If your finger intentionally or unintentionally pokes your eye, there is no accusation, because the finger and the eye belong to the same organism. There is no aversion, no hatred against the finger. When the hand drives away a mosquito sitting on the cheek, there is no special love relation between the hand and the cheek as a result. These things go on naturally. The inner consciousness is not modified at all by these experiences. There is no judging, no condemnation, and therefore, no need to forgive and forget.

How does one overcome the mad clinging to life, the desire to live - hope? Krishna expands this idea in the Gita. The first need is to perceive immediately that all life is tainted by old age, sickness, and death. This does not mean that one should not eat or marry and stop doing this or that. But when this immediate, direct, perception is there constantly, then one's consciousness is not influenced by those experiences called pleasure and pain. It no longer runs after pleasure, because it knows that it is temporary, not real. It will not masochistically look for pain. Pain and pleasure are inherent in life - there is no need to search for some more. When all desires re-enter oneself, return to the source, there is true vairagya, true dispassion - the total opposite of passion and craving.

The teaching of Patanjali points out that there is this cosmic being, cosmic oneness, cosmic harmony, cosmic consciousness, which has been mysteriously ruptured, fractured, by ego-sense. The ego-sense says, "This is I", therefore "That is you". From this division flows an interminable stream of worry, anxiety, fear, and hate. How does one put an end to this? By realizing that you are the stream. The moment you realize that, the menace has ceased. The 'I am anxious' duality creates a distinction between 'I' and the anxiety. If you know that "I am anxiety", anxiety no longer haunts you. You are it, and there is no more struggle. The anxiety, as anxiety, falls away.

A very holy man pointed out, "Fear is the first product of duality. The realization of non-duality, is yoga." But, you cannot create harmony, bring about unity, or non-duality; there is no need, no possibility of this. It is already there. But, what you can and must do, is observe how and where this oneness has been disrupted. If one sincerely and seriously carries out this observation, then it does not take a split second to realize that the break happens the moment the 'I' thought arises.

The moment the feeling "I am this" comes up, that thought, the vritti, mental modification creates the 'you', and there is conflict.

Meditation is the direct observation of the arising of the 'I', the ego, without a mediator. A mediator is merely another distraction. Even words, descriptions of meditation, may be disastrous. Meditation is observation without descriptions of any type that will give you an image of what it 'should be'. What you practice while you are seated in a meditation posture is meant as a help. But, even while talking, eating, looking at, or doing anything, one should watch the arising of the 'I'. This questioning is to be done continuously, not only in the morning and evening. If we continually observe the arising of the ego-sense during our waking hours, whatever we are doing, then even while dreaming there is the inquiry, "Who is dreaming, to whom is the dream occurring?" So, eventually, even while one sleeps, there is this continuing self-consciousness. This continuous awareness which runs through all states of consciousness is called samadhi, the fourth state of consciousness.

But, all these words are useless for us. So, we are given exercises to lead us on to the discovery of the ego. When one is able to see where the 'I' thought comes from, one immediately realizes, "Ah, this is the mischief-maker, this is the villain that has brought about a division, disrupted the harmony that in fact exists all the time." You observe where this fracture has occurred. You see that it is the 'I' that creates this disruption of harmony, and as soon as the 'I' consciousness yields its place and reveals that it is merely a shadow, there is realization of oneness.

51. The Eight Limbs of Yoga

'I' makes the division, 'I' makes the disorder, and thus 'I' is responsible for evil in this world. To preserve all this, and yet to strive for meditation, or to pretend to meditate, is self-deception.

How does one get rid of this disorder, this evil, and this sinful nature? Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi advocated the method of inquiry to trace all these evils to their single source - the ego - which when investigated further in what is known as vicara, proves to be unreal. A devotee once asked him, "This method seems to be quicker than the usual one of cultivating qualities alleged necessary for salvation." Ramana answered: "Yes, all bad qualities center round the ego. When the ego is gone, realization results by itself. There are neither good nor bad qualities in the self. The self is free from all qualities. Qualities pertain to the mind only."

The nature of life in which there is order, and in which there is not the division of the ego-sense, has been mapped out and charted in the yoga text of Maharishi Patanjali under the headings 'yama' and 'niyama'.

Yama

Yama is five fold:

1. Non-violence - ahimsa;
2. Adherence to truth - satyam;
3. Non-stealing - asteyam;
4. Continence - brahmacaryaram;
5. Non-coveting - aparigraham.

Swami Sivananda emphatically declares that ahimsa means positive love towards all beings. But, we should not mistake this divine love for the manifestation of lust, with which this sublime emotion of love is universally confused. Hence, Patanjali's cautious negative description. This love is not infatuation, attachment, or lust; it is pure and divine, selfless, cosmic, and self-sacrificing. This is a great truth which should not be forgotten.

Satyam or truthfulness has elsewhere been defined as that which is at the same time pleasant and beneficial. Our speech should be truthful, pleasant, and beneficial. Where these three criteria are not fulfilled, we should be silent.

Why has asteyam - non-stealing been given a place of prominence among these great canons? The secret is revealed in the universal scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Lord Krishna calls him a thief who appropriates to himself all the gifts of the gods, without sharing them with others. My master lays the greatest emphasis on this: "Give, give, give. Share what you have with others," is His clarion call. That is what is alluded to by the word 'non-stealing' here.

Brahmacarya is generally translated 'continence' in connection with yama. Let

us turn to Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi. A devotee asked him, "Is not brahmacharya - celibacy necessary for the realization of the self?", and the Maharishi replied, "Brahmacharya is 'living in Brahman'. It has no connection with celibacy as commonly understood. A real brahmachari - that is one who lives in Brahman - finds bliss in the Brahman, which is the same as the self. Why then should you look for other sources of happiness? In fact, the emergence from the self has been the cause of all the misery." To a further question, "Can a married man realize the self?", the Maharishi replied, "Certainly, it is a matter of fitness of mind." Surely, then, continence should happen as a consequence of 'living in Brahman' or the consciousness flowing in a single stream towards the self; forced restraint is force, and not restraint, and besides negating the definition of brahmacharya, violates ahimsa, too! However, when it naturally happens, it makes available a great source of creative energy.

Aparigraha, or non-acceptance of what belongs to others, saves us from our own greediness. It acts as a curb on desires. It generates contentment, the axle which cuts at the root of a sense of want, the enslaving lust for material possessions, which only oppress us by their weight, and pin us down to this earth.

Niyama

Let us proceed to the next limb: Niyama.

They are rules of conduct that govern our daily life.

Niyama is fivefold, too:

1. Cleanliness - sauca;
2. Contentment - santosa;
3. Austerity - tapas;
4. Study - svadhyaya;
5. Devotion to God - isvarapranidhana.

All-round cleanliness is indicated by sauca. Cleanliness of the surroundings, of the clothes, of the body, and of the mind and the heart. 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' is an accepted maxim. The prayerful devotee and the practitioner of yoga know that the mind tends to be pure and powerful in a clean body, in clean surroundings.

Santosa is contentment, cheerfulness, acceptance of what falls to our lot, without wry-faced grumbling. This enables us to be in a positive frame of mind, always up and doing, striving to steady the mind, free from distracting thoughts and desires, and their opposite counter-thoughts and frustrations.

Tapas or austerity is the twin sister of contentment. These two together bring about simple living and high thinking. "Simplify your life; purify your heart; intensify your sadhana and meditation," are Swami Sivananda's teachings. We cannot serve god and mammon at the same time. If we multiply our wants, suffer from luxury, our mind will be where our heart is - in our earthly possessions - and it will be almost impossible to practice concentration and meditation. An

austere and simple life is indispensable for yoga. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna has given a revolutionary definition of tapas. He calls for strict discipline of thought, word and deed. The aim is to awaken us from the earth-earthliness, and to inspire us to keep the ideal of yoga always before us.

Then comes svadhyaya, or study of scriptures, whose place in spiritual life cannot be over-emphasized. Scriptures and the words of our own preceptor - or the guru - are the two eyes with which alone we can see our way.

Finally isvarapranidhana, or devotion to god, without whose grace no spiritual progress is possible. It is when we recognize this truth, and surrender our finite little ego to him in prayerful devotion, that this subtle veil is removed, and we are enabled to perceive the divinity that we are in truth.

My master Swami Sivananda does not want us to wait until we are established in these virtues before attempting the advanced yoga practices. He asks us to strive to concentrate and meditate, at the same time endeavoring to cultivate these virtues. The destination is brought nearer our reach.

Asana

The third limb is asana - a steady and comfortable posture in which we can sit for a considerable time - a posture which enables us to forget the body without lulling us to sleep. Students of yoga all over the world have found padmasana to be the best. Patanjali says that, when you are able to sit steadily in this posture in a meditative mood, you 'overcome duality'. This is usually interpreted to mean pain and pleasure etc., but it may also indicate the overcoming of the sense of duality, which is possible only if the ego-sense ceases. The cessation of the ego-sense is the central issue.

Pranayama

After the body has thus been brought under control, we proceed to the next step. We have already seen that there is an intimate relation between the breath and the mind. When we are deeply thinking, when the mind is automatically concentrated, our breathing is slow, rhythmic and steady. When we suffer from that temporary madness of anger or lust, when our mind is agitated, we breathe hard, fast and haphazardly. Patanjali, therefore, prescribes control of breath or pranayama as the next step. Seated in padmasana, we try to regulate the breath - inhalation, retention, and exhalation. Do not forget the all-important criterion - slow, rhythmic, deep, graceful, and steady breathing.

Mantra

Even as this is being done, we shall not fail to notice that the turbulent mind has become tame. There is an experience of peace, a foretaste of the transcendental experience, which awaits us. We are ready to take the fifth step. Krishna asks us

in the Gita to withdraw our senses from their objects, just as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into the shell. Our devotion to a personal deity helps us here. With closed eyes, we perceive Him within us. Swami Sivananda exhorts us to repeat the mantra - our ears listen to this inner 'sound'. The senses are thus withdrawn from their contact with the external world. The mind longs to taste the peace and the bliss that await it in the inner realm. When the senses are turned inward, it is as if a million flash-lights are focused into yourself. The light is brilliant. You are no longer interested in what goes on outside, but you are tremendously interested in what goes on inside. This is pratyahara.

Dharana

If we have succeeded in all these, we shall find the next one - the sixth limb - very easy. Dharana or concentration will be almost effortless, and effective. The mind of the common man knows only three states: it can either yield to a thousand distractions and roam about in the outer world - the waking state, or the inner world - the dream state, or it can succumb to inertia and ignorance - the deep-sleep state. The diligent practice of yama and niyama curb distractions. Asana and pranayama drive away inertia. Now we are ready to experience the fourth or superconscious state. The rays of the mind are focused on itself. When they are passed through the lens of concentration - dharana, they burn the ignorance that covers the self or god-head in us. Dharana is defined by Patanjali as focusing the mind within. This is not because the omnipresent god is only within us, but because the omnipresence is realized most easily as the indwelling presence. A dissipated mind is unfit for this realization.

Dhyana

By the Grace of God, we enter His presence, the kingdom of God within us. We roam that kingdom. We partake of the 'peace that passeth understanding', and the bliss that is perennial and unbroken. We drink at the fountain of immortality. This is dhyana or meditation, the seventh limb of yoga.

Samadhi

In the Light Divine, the little 'I' vanishes. In total self-forgetfulness, we commune with the Lord. The salt doll tries to measure the depth of the ocean - it gets dissolved. But, it is the ocean of bliss in which we get so dissolved. This is samadhi, the eighth limb. We have successfully cut ourselves away from the trammels of this world of pain and death. The cords of ignorance and egoism, that bound us to the relentless wheel of transmigration, have been broken. The vicious octopus - ego-sense - which, with its tentacles of the pairs of opposites - like and dislikes, pain and pleasure, honor and dishonor, success and failure - was strangling us, is dead. This is known as kaivalya. This is the goal. The yogi who has reached the goal, is once and for all liberated from sorrow; he swims in the ocean of bliss, he drinks at the fountain of peace and immortality.

It is important to understand both samadhi and kaivalya correctly. When, during meditation, That alone is - in other words, when the meditator has ceased to be a spectator and the truth or the consciousness alone exists - it is samadhi. It is the 'I' that creates the duality in all this, even up to the division of the meditator and meditation. In samadhi, even this distinction disappears. Meditation, which is non-different from consciousness, alone is. The ego-sense, which is non-different from it, is now really so, having abandoned its unreal duality. That alone - all-one - is. That is kaivalya.

The path is strewn with psychic powers. Dharanadhyana-samadhi - together called samyama - can be applied to various objects of phenomena. The concentrated beam of light can be focused on anything, and that thing will reveal its true nature to us. But, these powers are distractions and obstacles. The yogi should not be misled or waylaid by the spiritual bandits that these psychic powers are. With intense and unabated zeal, intense application and adamant will, he should proceed direct to the goal, which is the realization of cosmic consciousness or the indivisible intelligence. Merely visualizing the divine presence, and visualizing oneself as being a cell in the cosmic body of god, is not samadhi; it is visualization. If this visualization is intense, it can appear to be and to materialize. That is not self-realization.

Control of the senses and mind is the indispensable pre-requisite to successful meditation. Exciting and animal food, intoxicating drinks and drugs, amusements and pastimes, that divert and distract the mind, are all obstacles to be avoided.

Progress in meditation is rapid if you lead a well-regulated life, and practice what my master called the yoga of synthesis. In your own daily life, combine hatha yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, raja yoga, and jnana yoga. You will have integral development. Without God's and Guru's Grace, you cannot enter into deep meditation. Therefore, never give up japa, and worship, and devotion to and service of the guru. Maintain good health through the regular practice of some yoga asanas and pranayama. Selflessness in all your activities is a touchstone of progress in meditation. If you experience the presence of god in all, you will naturally be filled with love and compassion for all.

Patanjali, in his Yoga Sutras, and Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, prescribe two remedies for the waywardness of the mind: 1. persistent practice, and 2. giving up those pleasures and evil habits which show up during the meditation practice, and which thus disturb the mind. Regularity, which is absolutely essential, will establish the habit.

If you forget why you are practicing yoga, it is possible to amplify this abhyasa - practice, and vairagya - dispassion or uncoloredness - into a thousand divisions and sub-divisions, a thousand rules and their exceptions and amendments. If, however, you never lose sight of the main issue - the realization of undivided consciousness, then abhyasa can only mean being firmly established in the state

of non-division; and vairagya, which is its necessary correlate, is the prevention of the consciousness being colored by the awareness of objectivity.

All these eight limbs of Astanga yoga have to be practiced from day to day, from moment to moment. The whole of life must be meditation, one continuous self-observation. One who does this, is a yogi. One who does this, is free from the painful effect of the ego-sense. He may still use the word 'I'. He will still eat, work, and live - but without ego-sense.

Yoga is that state in which there is no conflict, no anxiety, no fear, no false, 'I'-'you' relationship, no approval, no disapproval. That supreme state of bliss and peace, while yet still living, is what is meant by yoga.

Yoga welcomes you to test its doctrines in your own inner laboratory, and taste the delicious fruits it offers you.

52. Why Meditate?

The basic problem in the world today seems to be that there is no interest in meditation as such. It is partly the fault of people who preach and do propaganda for meditation. When you want to spread the practice of meditation, and encourage people to take it up, you persuade them that there is some benefit in it. In order to do that, the preachers suggest, 'Practice meditation. You will be completely free of all tension.' The moment that aspect enters the field of meditation, the whole practice is ruined. From there on, you are not sitting completely relaxed, meditating, but you are tense, looking at the state of relaxation which the preacher suggested was your goal. Trying to reach out to it, you become more tense.

The moment you introduce a goal to meditation, it is gone. Happiness in life comes not by manipulating what you want to achieve, but by paying attention to something seemingly totally unconnected with it. In order to make the mouth laugh, you tickle the foot. This seems to be of fundamental importance. Concentration of mind is not achieved by concentrating the mind, but by going right round, doing something completely different. That is actually what the great masters of yoga suggested when they said to sit down and repeat your mantra.

The problem is that our minds are in a terrible state of disorder, our attention is not steady at all. Physically, we are tense; mentally, we are distracted. We go to a teacher and he says, "Sit down, and repeat a mantra." While you pay attention to the mantra, which is totally unrelated and unconnected with the problem, you are really trying to solve the problem. You don't have to solve the problem, the problem can be dissolved. That is much simpler; otherwise, when you have a problem, and someone tells you to solve it, the solution becomes another problem! The confused brain creating another solution, is in worse confusion. The mind, after all, is one thing, not a supermarket. You are happy sometimes, and you are unhappy sometimes. When you are unhappy, what happens to that happy person? And when you are happy, what happens to the unhappy person? Are you one or two? It is not difficult for you to see that you are one thing.

The mind is one substance which seems to assume several successively different disguises. It is not possible for the mind to be in two moods at the same time; and, even when one is able to juggle the moods quickly, it only means that the mind is able to change very fast.

There is no more mystification about meditation than this. The master, by suggesting that you sit down and go on repeating a mantra, has made you temporarily forget your problem. A problem that is forgotten does not exist; unhappiness that is forgotten, is happiness. It can come back again, but never mind. If you have been unhappy for 6 or 7 hours at a stretch, you have at least had 20 minutes of happiness. That is marvelous; the unhappiness was a mental state, nothing more than a mood.

In real life, we see quite plainly that, if an external situation was responsible for one's unhappiness, that situation is not going to be changed by being unhappy. Therefore, the yogi said, "Free yourself from this external compulsion, and realize that unhappiness is a mental mood." The mind substance is still there, it has temporarily assumed the form of unhappiness, the character of unhappiness. You can be sure that, even if you are in the worst of all moods now, the sun is not going to be veiled because of you; it will still shine brilliantly. And, if you shake off your bad mood, and get into the sun, it is to your advantage. You have been unhappy before, you may be unhappy later - 'so what'! All the problems are there waiting outside - let them! For the next half hour, sit down and say your mantra; and, as you go on in this way, suddenly you discover that the unhappiness is not there any more. Suddenly you realize that you - or something in you - is totally independent of the happiness or unhappiness that the environment imposes upon you. Coming out of your meditation room, you are able to say 'so what', right in front of the unhappiness that faces you again.

So, it is possible to free yourself psychologically from external compulsion, external imposition. Sitting there in that room for half an hour, you have tasted it. The mind, being of one substance, was fed with this mantra, or something totally unconnected with all worries and anxieties, happiness, and unhappiness.

You have not been struggling, you have not been praying to God to please take this problem away. That is useless - another one will come. But, in the meantime, you have discovered that it is possible for you, without changing the external environment, to be happy within yourself. You taste it. The most important thing in meditation is not to try to solve the outside problem, but to taste the present mood of peace and joy and happiness that is flowing inside. Then, when you come out, you are able to face this problem.

I am not saying the problems we are surrounded by can ever be removed; but, the inner attitude can be radically and instantly changed. It doesn't even take half an hour. Meditation makes this possible by not dealing with the problem head on, but by turning the attention to something completely different - which happens to be beyond the source of all problems. This is not a policy of escapism. Let us take a very simple example of inter-personal conflict. You and he are working in the same organization. You are saying something, he is saying something different; you have a little misunderstanding, a quarrel. He is too strong and powerful; so, you don't want to fight with him. You go into your meditation room, sit and repeat the mantra. After a short while, everything is at peace within yourself - there is harmony and joy within you. Are you escaping? No, because you have got to come out and meet him, again. Then you are a completely changed person, you realize that conflict can be ended by ending it within yourself. There is a lovely expression: "You cannot clap with one hand. It needs two to make a quarrel." But, I feel: "It needs only one to make a quarrel - me".

The yogi's approach through meditation deals with the fundamental problem of human response. Once you have trained yourself in this technique - you can call

it meditation or concentration - then it is possible for this to happen throughout the day, when there is need for you to respond. And, though superficially it looks as if you are self-centered and selfish, you are not, because you have found the key to dissolving the problems and conflicts. That, I think, is the greatest contribution one can make to human happiness in society as a whole.

Half the problem connected with meditation springs from thinking about it. The thoughts that one may have about meditation are not meditation. It is possible to think about it, it is possible to talk about it, and it is even possible to 'do' it; but, none of these is meditation. Like sleep, it is something that has to happen, and one does not know when it is happening, but realizes something has happened in retrospect. What is it that puts an end to sleep? What is it that puts an end to meditation? Strangely enough, the desire to experience it.

We are trapped in a strange and delightful problem. We need to meditate, but we cannot will ourselves into meditation. Meditation is vitally important, not only to some of you who might be spiritual seekers, but also to people who want to become more alert in mind and in intellect, and even to people who pursue material goals. If meditation is a state in which there is no mental confusion, there is inner harmony and peace, then it is of vital importance to everybody. Whatever be your aspirations, whatever you are looking for - whether spiritual, intellectual, mental or material - one who knows what it is to meditate, or what it is to surrender oneself to meditation, realizes that the key to any achievement is there. But, fortunately or unfortunately, it is not possible to force it.

It is extremely fortunate that meditation cannot be made to happen, for the simple reason that if it could, it is liable to be marketed as we already see is being done, and what is even worse, it can be mis-used and abused. It is unfortunate, because, though we aspire for the state called meditation, it seems to elude us, and we are still groping. A few broad hints may be given; but, even these are like preparing the bed as an invitation to sleep. You cannot 'go to sleep'. It is an expression as inadequate and erroneous as all expressions are. Sleep has to come - you can only go to bed.

53. How to Meditate

So many textbooks are available on meditation nowadays, that everyone has some idea of what it is all about. In brief, meditation is the most wonderful adventure - 'discovery of self'. Meditation enables us to enjoy consciously the peace, happiness, and revitalization that we unconsciously have in sleep. Meditation lifts us above the cares and anxieties of our daily life; it enables us to overcome our moral weaknesses and evil habits, and thus transform our very life. By dispelling ignorance, meditation removes all our morbid and childish fears, and leads us to the hall of divine light, where we perceive our self as the immortal essence of all existence, where we realize that we are at once linked in a bond of eternal love with all creation. By enabling us to get in tune with this cosmic substratum, and so with others, meditation gives us supernatural powers. Unless these powers - of whose existence we are not conscious and which we shall not deliberately use - become natural to us, they should be shunned as distractions.

'An ounce of practice is better than tons of theory'. The following simple procedure will, in due course, enable you to enjoy deep meditation

1. Select a calm, quiet, clean, and secluded spot, or a room or corner of a room in your house reserved for this purpose. Sit there - preferably facing east - the sun rises in the east - or north - there is a great power in the north pole - with a symbol of God or a lighted lamp or candle, placed at eye-level. The best posture is, of course, the lotus posture; if you cannot do this, sit in any comfortable posture with your body erect, as for the pranayama exercise discussed earlier. The yogi wants you to keep the back straight. All sorts of interesting reasons have been given, and one might be of interest to you. If the small of the back is held in, your back is naturally straighter than before. It seems to promote alertness of the mind. The moment you slouch, and the small of the back shoots backwards and the spine curves forward, your alertness is gone. The best time to meditate is from 4 to 6 a.m.; but if this is not possible, do this as soon as you wake up. It is good to have a quick bath; if this is not possible, without loss of the good morning hour, have a quick wash of hands, feet, and face.

2. Chant a few hymns, or offer your own prayer - audibly - to the lord; this is like switching the radio on, and tuning it. Raise the mind to a higher level. Imagine you are in the presence of God. This may appear to be self-hypnotism, but the results are astounding.

3. Become aware that you are seated in your room or wherever it is. You are now aware of even your body's contact with the seat. The knowledge 'I am sitting here' ensures that the mind is also here, and does not wander away. If the attention tends to wander, gently but firmly bring it back - 'I am sitting here.' Become aware of the sensation of the hands resting on your knees or in your lap. Immediately the attention is brought within the body and, once the attention is narrowed down, the whole inside seems to be illuminated. You realize that just one thing is happening - breathing. You are breathing.

4. Chant 'om' deeply, concentrating on the solar plexus, feeling that the sound vibrations arise from there. Feel that these sound vibrations travel upwards towards the crown of the head, through the vagus nerve. They actually will. When they reach the throat-region, close your lips and continue 'ommmmmmm', and let the sound fade out at the crown of the head. Do this three or six times.

5. It is one of those ironies of life that we seem to be interested in so many wonderful things in this world, without paying the least attention to the greatest wonder - breathing. It is because we are breathing that we are alive, that we are able to enjoy life. It is a supreme wonder. Ask yourself: "What makes you breathe out and having exhaled - what makes you inhale again?" What makes one take the next breath, or in other words, how does the breathing go on? When you pay attention to this, you have forgotten where you are sitting. That is, the attention has gone still deeper within yourself, and is now ready to go even deeper down. Breathe normally, effortlessly. At the same time, close the glottis a little bit, so that the breath itself produces some sound. It is not the vocal cords, but the glottis that helps to produce this sound. Let this sound also fade away, and not stop abruptly. You will find that your mind follows this sound and 'goes inwards.' You may do ujjayi or bhramari pranayama.

6. Breathe gently now. Watch the breath. Try to listen to it, without producing any sound even with the throat. It is good to use a visualization of the nadis in conjunction with the breathing, to bring about more intense concentration of the mind. Visualize the inhaled breath flowing down the ida and the pingala nadis on both sides of the spine. Hold the breath - kumbhaka - for just a moment. Kumbhaka literally means 'pot-like', which alludes to the abdominal cavity being filled by the inhaled breath. Visualize the exhaled breath ascending up the susumna - the central channel, at the same time drawing the abdomen in and up, as in uddiyana bandha.

7. Now, the only thing you are doing is breathing. That is the only action, motion, movement. Become aware of this. Let there be the inner awareness, "I am breathing," and let this stop the mind from doing something else. Gently but firmly hold on to the awareness, "I am breathing".

8. Repeat your mantra - any name of god or sacred formula or 'om' - as you breathe in and out, without straining the breath. Associate the mantra with the breath - this is the trick. Repeat it once while you breathe in, and once while you breathe out. If the mantra is long, repeat half while inhaling, and the other half while exhaling, without breaking it. Without tension, you gently but actively keep listening to the mantra being heard within yourself. Become more and more deeply aware of this sound. Listen to it with all your heart, with all your attention.

9. Keep looking at the picture, symbol, or the flame, in front of you - that is what you have been doing all the time, at least from step 5 above - but transfer that symbol to within yourself. Feel that the image is in your own heart. See it there.

Do not stare at the picture or flame in front; if you do, then your eyes will get tired and begin to smart. If you merely look without staring or focusing, you will find that the symbol goes out of focus. Do not worry. Your eyes will not blink. They will not water or smart.

10. Now, close your eyes if you like, and visualize that image of god clearly within your heart. Let it be radiant and living. If the mind tends to wander, keep the eyes open, looking within.

11. Gradually let that image expand till it occupies your whole body, the room in which you are sitting and eventually the whole world. Feel this. Feel that you yourself are just a little part of god, one with him.

12. Sit like this for a minimum period of 20 minutes. The preliminaries may take about 10 minutes. Gradually increase this period.

13. After this period is over, offer a prayer to the lord for the health and long life of sick people - whom you can actually visualize in front of you, and for the peace and prosperity of those who are suffering.

14. Get up slowly. Do not immediately run away. Take a few minutes before you leave the meditation room. Your mind and your nerves were extremely calm during this practice, and if you suddenly jump out of that mood and rush into company, you might injure the nerves. This is very important.

15. You can practice this at other times, too - several times a day. Do not sit for this practice within two hours after a meal. Do not wear tight clothing.

16. Do not eat anything for half an hour after this practice. And, do not take bath immediately either.

17. If you wish to do a few rounds of pranayama, you may do so before you start this meditation practice, or soon after step 2 above. Bhastrika is useful.

If the mind wanders, open your eyes, gaze at the picture, and start all over again from step 5 above.

Japa - repetition of a mantra - itself will lead to meditation. The lord's Grace will lead you to meditation and samadhi.

If evil thoughts enter the mind, do not pay any attention to them. Let them depart, as uninvited guests will if totally ignored! Go on with your japa, visualizing the lord in the heart. If the mind wanders, resort to mental worship; or, open your eyes again, and gaze at the image.

It is very important to see that the body and mind are relaxed. There should be no tension anywhere. The posture of the body should be steady but not tense. The

mind should be concentrated on the object with ease; otherwise, every extraneous thought entering the mind will also get fixed there! Let go your hold on the world, and gently hold on to the thought of God.

The secret in meditation is to be active without effort. Usually, we are either active and full of effort, or we go to sleep. But, there is a state which is the happy medium between the two - to be awake and alert, but without struggle.

In the initial stages of meditation, it is possible that, as soon as the mind is concentrated and you begin to do japa, something you had forgotten is recollected by the mind. If it pertains to the business of the day, the mind is distracted. It is therefore advisable, in the initial stages, to keep a piece of paper and pencil by your side and note these down, so that the mind may be reassured that they will not be forgotten again, and that it could go on with the japa. Use your commonsense in overcoming such obstacles.

Several methods have already been suggested, not only to offset obstacles, but to keep the meditation alive and alert. The very best is of course to seek the source of the sound of the mantra that is heard, and then the identity of the one that listens to the mantra. If this method is mastered, no disturbances - internal or external - need distract you, because you know how to make use of any disturbance! Anything that happens inside or around you is only going to stimulate you to greater vigilance. If there is a distraction, this vigilance will confront it with the question, "I am watching my breath and repeating the mantra; from where do you come?" Thus, there are no obstacles at all from there onwards.

On no account should you give up the morning meditation, and get up from your seat before the appointed time; if the mind knows that you are a hard taskmaster, it will meekly obey you.

One of the main reasons why this meditation exercise is performed in the early morning hours, is because it is then that the ego-sense arises after the period of deep sleep earlier. It is therefore possible to ask oneself: "Where was this ego-sense a few minutes ago? How does it arise, and what is its source?"

Even during the day, close your eyes every hour, and consciously withdraw the mind from the world, repeat the mantra, and meditate upon god for just a few seconds. Keep up the current. If you keep a small japa-mala - rosary - in your pocket, it will help.

By even attempting to practice meditation, you will enjoy peace of mind, and the ability to concentrate the mind at will, wherever you are.

Another period of meditation, just before going to bed, is of incalculable benefit. It carries the fruits of meditation into the state of deep sleep. If you restore order to the mind before you go to sleep, the mind is free to refresh itself thoroughly.

Meditation restores order to the mind.

Of course, all that has been described so far, is no more than japa or the repetition of a mantra, and the visualization of what that mantra represents. These are effective aids - but in themselves they do not constitute meditation. The use of these aids is based on a simple and sound principle. The world outside is mainly name-and-form to us; the other sense stimuli are not so strong as the visual and the auditory. Our waking consciousness is dominated by sights and sounds. Our inner world is even more so. Our dreams - day dreams as well as night dreams - are also made up of these two. Objectivity is name and form. Hence, the student of yoga replaces the multitude of names and forms - worldly, exciting, emotion-generating, and pain-ridden, by one name and form of god - divine, sublime, peace-giving, and bliss-filled. This too is name and form, and this too is an object - though surely god is not a name and form, and god is not an object. Ultimately, therefore, even this will go; but, pushing it is foolishness.

Used rightly, however, these aids turn out to be valuable. And, what is their right use?

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras suggest the following:

When the name and the form are perfectly steady, the student begins to question it. "Is this the reality? Is this the self? Is this god? Is it not my own imagination, the object of my thought, the projection of my mental conditioning?" This questioning is not just mental or intellectual exercise; it is much deeper; for, by this time, the mind is fully concentrated, the image is clear and steady, and the mind is calm.

The answer to all these questions is an obvious 'yes'. However, the student does not abandon the whole thing, and get up and walk away. He enters into himself even more deeply. The inquiry may continue along these lines: "This is not the self or the reality. But, then, what is it? How is the unuttered sound heard within; what is it made of? How do I see this image, where is it, and what is it made of?" Surely, there are no verbal answers to these questions! The sound is not made in the usual way - by the vocal cords, etc. The image of god - or whatever it is that is chosen for the inner visualization - is not there as a solid substance. What is it made of? 'The mind-stuff' is an unacceptable answer; it is an expression as meaningless as the other one we suggested to ourselves as an aid - 'god within'. To be meaningful, it must be as real and as clear to you as this paper is. Thought answering a question concerning thought is waste of time. Hence, we pursue the inquiry by direct internal observation. The vital aspect of this part is to reject all thoughts concerning this phenomenon.

At this stage, the observing consciousness looks steadily at the object. There is no movement of thought. There is great clarity. Suddenly, it becomes clear that the object is but a reflection, a projection in the indivisible consciousness. Thus, the division between the observer and the observed is abolished; and this gives rise to an experience of inner delight.

However, there is still movement in consciousness. Consciousness is still aware of itself; this is the original division which is therefore potential diversity. There is the awareness of 'I am', which can easily expand itself into 'I am this', 'I am that' etc. Hence, even this is known as samadhi with consciousness, or samadhi with the seed of diversification present.

Beyond this, no effort on the part of the student is of any use, nor is it necessary. An effort is the expression of the ego, perpetuation of the division; abandonment of the effort is also the expression of the ego's inability or unwillingness to reach this point. The ego-sense should reach this point and, in total self-surrender, abandon all effort to abolish division, in the knowledge that the ego itself is the creator of the division, it is itself the division. What happens beyond this, the masters have alluded to as 'divine grace'. Patanjali also speaks of god as what remains after the ordinary self-awareness ceases to be - purusa visesah.

Awareness of division is the abolition of division. There is no division in the awareness which is undivided by the division. This position is not reached, it is not something to be attained; it 'is', it always is. When the dividing ego is seen to be incapable of dividing the indivisible, the shadow is seen as shadow. That which is, is; it alone is - and that is kaivalya - aloneness or all-one-ness, the knowledge that infinite diversity is infinite.

How this enlightenment takes place, no one knows. At one moment, this inner light begins to shine everywhere in your consciousness, and suddenly the 'I' has disappeared. It was not there in the first place. Only consciousness remains. Knowledge alone remains. Action alone remains. Seeing alone remains. Without the ego creating a division, a space between I and the other. When this light shines constantly within oneself, only then is one able to realize that what goes on inside is love; that that love is genuine, and that that love is directed towards the omnipresence.

54. Self-Knowledge

In support of all these practices, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika declares: "There is no self-knowledge as long as there is the mind in motion; the mind does not cease to move as long as the prana moves. He who arrests the motion of the prana and the mind, attains liberation."

Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi approved of pranayama, and encouraged seekers to practice it. However, he asks: "Is it the mind that wants to kill itself? The mind cannot kill itself. So, your business is to find the real nature of the mind. Then you will know that there is no mind. When the self is sought, the mind is nowhere. Abiding in the self, one need not worry about the mind." That is meditation and samadhi in brief.

Again, the Maharishi made another thought provoking statement: "Both meditation and investigation amount to the same. Those unfit for investigation, must practice meditation. In this practice, the aspirant, forgetting himself, meditates 'I am Brahman' or 'I am Siva'; thus, he continues to hold on to Brahman or Siva; this will ultimately lead to the residual being as Brahman or Siva, which he will realize to be pure being, i.e., the self. Meditation is possible only if the ego be kept up. There is the ego and the object meditated upon. The method is indirect. Whereas the self is only one. Seeking the ego, i.e., its source, ego disappears. What is left over, is the self. The method is the direct one."

Though he had said that the self is only one, he adds that even that, as a concept, is to be discarded. He says, "If there is unity, there will also be duality. The numeral 1 gives rise to other numbers. The truth is neither one nor two. It is as it is. Leave the thought-free state to itself. Do not think of it as pertaining to you. Just as when you walk you involuntarily take steps, so too in your actions; but the thought-free state is not affected by your actions."

All this is direct experience, not intellectual knowledge. It is beyond the ego, beyond division, and therefore beyond thought and expression. Yet, even here the sages have evolved some aids.

Thus, jnana - self-knowledge - is often classified into paroksa jnana - indirect, others'-eye wisdom - and aparoksa jnana - direct, not-others'-eye wisdom. The former is acquired through books and teachers, who are extremely essential and indispensable, but who can lead us 'thus far and no further', who can only place the bread of wisdom on the table. We should consume it, digest it, and assimilate it. Then it becomes aparoksa jnana. In this world, to give a rather gross and crude illustration, the knowledge that Mr. So-and-so is a man, is indirect knowledge, but the knowledge "I am a man", is direct knowledge. Indirect knowledge is knowledge-by-acquaintance, but direct knowledge is knowledge-by-identity. It is when bread is no longer bread, but 'you' - assimilated - which means, it has become similar to you. That is what vedanta literally means: 'end of knowledge', which is when knowledge ceases to be knowledge, but it becomes 'you'.

However much we argue in favor of free-thinking, it is saner to admit that this freedom is always conditioned by tuition consciously or unconsciously received. This tuition stands in the way of intuition. To overcome this, we need the guru. All the great masters have declared that, as long as one seeks, one needs a guide, that even though the real guru is within, and this inner guru is the same as the lord and the self of each one, this inner guru appears as the external guru for the guidance of the aspirant.

The seeker approaches the guru in all humility and devotion - love. That is the only attitude in which reception of the spiritual truth is at all possible.

The first step at that stage is sravana - hearing. It is not acceptance yet. It is like the lunch laid out on the table, not yet served. It does not appease anyone's hunger.

The second step is manana - reflection. Reflection is just that sense of the word; the aspirant holds the teaching steadily in his mind, so that it is clearly reflected in the mirror of his intelligence. This is like partaking of the lunch. Tradition allows even discussion and dialogues among the aspirants at this stage, to clarify the teaching.

The third step is nidhidhyasana - contemplation. Here, the teaching is assimilated. It is the same as the samadhi of raja yoga. There is enlightenment. The lunch is no longer food on the table, nor chyme in the stomach, but flesh of your flesh, the bone of your bone - no longer food, but you.

It is the ruggedness of this path that prompted the sages who designated it, to lay down the qualifications of the seekers who could pursue it.

They are:

(a) viveka - the inner light in which the shadow is seen as shadow and substance as substance, which in practice is

(b) vairagya - which is the total absence of mental coloring or conditioning, and which is therefore the twin-sister of viveka; these two together ensure order in life, and in behavior manifest as

(c) the sixfold virtue in the aspirant, namely, sama - control of the mind, dama - control of the senses, titiksa - endurance, uparati - un-worldliness, sraddha - faith, and samadhana - equilibrium of the mind.

All these are not golden shackles of proud virtue but based on

(d) mumuksutva - a keen longing for liberation from ignorance.

The aspirant who is endowed with these qualifications, is benefited by the master's teaching. Enlightenment is dependent entirely on the intensity of the disciple's work.

What form the guru-disciple encounter takes from here on, is individualistic; it is the upanishad, which literally means sitting near. It may take the form of a

dialogue or a discourse. The guru may adopt one of the many methods of leading the disciple to enlightenment.

Om Tat Sat.

The end and a beginning.