



Laya Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda



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by
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Dedicated to

Mothers Shanti, Jaya, Ena, Iza, Kamala and Swami Sevananda, Sri Michael,
Swamis Yogeshwara and Yogendra

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Introduction

Control of mind is essential for the attainment of the goal of life, viz., God-realisation. Of the various methods of controlling the mind, hatha yoga is one of the most effective.

Bhagavan Krishna says in the Gita: “Having filled the whole universe by just a little part of myself, I remain as the inexhaustible fountain source”, i.e. a little part of God’s power has manifested as the whole universe and maintains the whole universe and the balance of the power of God is there to be used when He wills. In the same way, the yogi believes that the power - prana, which has been deposited in the individual, composes and activates the body but is not exhausted by the various functions of our body. The balance or residual power which constitutes the major portion of the power in the individual, lies dormant and unused. To this residual power the yogi gives the name ‘kundalini shakti’. Just as the mind has its seat in the brain, this power has its seat in the muladhara chakra at the base of the spine. By this we mean at a corresponding point in the physical body, as all the centers or chakras are in the subtle body.

Here is a simple illustration. A son comes home feeling very tired and does not want to do anything but go to sleep. His father asks for a glass of water but the son feels too tired to oblige. The son goes to his bed and finds a big snake where his pillow ought to be. You know what he will do: he will run ten miles before looking back. That means he was not really so tired as he imagined himself to be and yet he was not bluffing the father either. He actually and literally felt like a dead man but something was able to release some part of the reserve power in him. This type of experience happens to all of us in daily life causing the kundalini shakti to be occasionally and involuntarily release. If you carefully watch, you will notice that this release of the reserve power always involves the back - an electric shock telling along the spine.

Instead of waiting for the kundalini shakti to be accidentally released, the yogi wants to make conscious use of it for eventually attaining spiritual realisation. It is awakened with the aid of heat or power which is generated at the solar plexus, by hatha yoga.

Prana or the life force has two poles, the positive or solar energy - prana, and the negative or lunar force -apana. Roughly, prana moves in the upper part of the body and apana in the lower. With the aid of pranayama - breath control, the positive force is pushed down and the negative force is pulled up so that the two forces unite at the solar plexus. The principle is that heat is produced when the positive and the negative are brought together, as in electricity.

'Ha' stands for the positive and 'tha' stands for the negative aspects of this prana. 'Hatha' symbolises their union.

The heat is then directed to the reservoir of power at the base of the spine to rouse the latent kundalini shakti. The awakened shakti is led up through five psychic centers, called chakras, along a psychic channel corresponding to the spinal cord. These centers roughly correspond to certain nerve plexuses in the physical body and represent the elements. As the kundalini shakti is led from center to center, each one is visualised and concentrated on. When the shakti reaches the center at the crown of the head, the power which has been gathered up and raised to the consciousness- center, is reabsorbed into Consciousness - hence the title laya yoga - the Yoga of Absorption, and meditation ensues.

If you carefully study and practise this technique, you will soon realise that it is natural and full of commonsense and that if it looks strange it is only because it is forgotten. The only mystery is: how did this science ever become a mystery?

THE ORDER OF PRACTICE

1. Prayers.
2. Purificatory Breathing Exercise.
3. Agnisara.
4. Bhastrika.
5. Sitali.
6. Pranayama.
7. Khechari Mudra.
8. Laya Yoga - chakra-meditation with yoni mudra.
9. Meditation.
10. Healing Prayer.

Note:

- a) The best time for this practice is early morning, between 4 and 6 a. m. You can also practise in the evening.
- b) Do not practise until two hours after a meal: do not eat for half an hour after the practice.
- c) A bath or a good wash must precede it.
- d) It is good to do the yoga asanas (at least the sirasasana or headstand) before the practice.
- e) A few rounds of simple pranayama will also help.

Preliminaries:

- (a) Sit facing east or north, with a symbol of God and a lighted lamp or candle at eye- level.
- (b) The whole series can be done sitting in the lotus or the perfect posture, or any comfortable and firm posture.
- (c) Always keep the spine erect.

1. PRAYERS

Meditate on the Guru and ask for his blessings on the yoga practice. Chant your own prayers or hymns. The Morning Prayer, Prayer to the Guru and the Peace Prayer may be used.

OM

Morning Hymn

pratasmaramai hrdisamspurat atmatatvam
satcit sukham paramahamsa gatim turiyam
yat swapna jagara susuptim avaiti nityam
tat brahma niskalam aham na ca bhuta sangah

In the early morning hours, I think of the Self which shines in the chambers of my heart, which is of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which is the goal of paramahamsas, and which is the fourth state of consciousness. I am that Brahman which is nirguna and eternal, beyond the three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming and deep-sleep, and I am not composed of the elements.

pratar bhajami manaso vacasam agamyam
vaco vibhanti nikhila yad anugraheana
yam neti neti vacanair nigama avocuh
tam deva devam ajam acyutam ahur agryam

In the early morning hours, I adore Him who is the God of gods, who is beyond the reach of the mind and speech, and by whose Grace alone speech is illuminated, whom the scriptures describe by the neti-neti formula, who is unborn, acyuta and the Primordial Being.

pratar namami tamasaa param arkavaram
pramam sanatana padam purusottam akhyam
yasmin idam jagad asesam asesamurtau
rajvam bhujangama iva pratibhasitam vai

In the early hours of the morning, I bow down to that purusa a who is beyond darkness, who is the brilliance of the sun, who is full, eternal, and in whom this universe appears as a snake appears in the rope.

slokatrayam idam punyam loka traya vibhusanam
pratah kale pathet yas tu sa gacchet paramam padam

He who reads these verses which are auspicious, the ornament of the three worlds, attains to the Supreme Being (of self-realisation).

brahmanandam parama sukhadam kevalam jnanamurtim
dwandwatitam gaganasadrasm tatwamasyadi laksyam
ekam nityam vimalam acalam sarvadhi saksibhutam
bhavatitam triguna rahitam satgurum tam namami

I prostrate to that Sadguru, the Brahman, who is bliss, who is the giver of supreme happiness, who is absolute knowledge, who is beyond the pairs of opposites, who is vast like the ether, who is attained through assertions like tat twam asi , who is one, eternal and changeless, the witness of the mind; who transcends all change and modifications, who is devoid of the three modes (of prakriti).

ajnana timirandhasya
jnanajana salakaya
caksuraunmilitam yena
tasmai sri gurave namah

Prostrations to that Guru who, through the collyrium of knowledge opens the eye of he who is blinded by the gloom of ignorance.

gurur brahma gurur vishnu
gurur devo mahesvarah
guruh saksat para brahma
tasmai sri gurave namah

I prostrate to that Sri Guru, who is himself Brahma, Vishnu and God Mahesvara, and who is verily the Supreme Absolute Itself.

dhyanamulam guror murtih
pujamulam guroh padam
mantramulam guror vakyam
moksamulam guror krpa

The form of the Guru is the basis of meditation, the feet of the Guru are the basis of worship, the words of the Guru are the basis of mantra, the Grace of the Guru is the basis of liberation.

om namah sivaya gurave
satcidananda murtaye
nisrapancaya santaya
niralambaya tejase

Om. Salutations to the Guru who is Siva! His form is Being, Consciousness, and Bliss. He is transcendent, calm, free from all support, and luminous.

om sam no mitrah sam varunah
sam no bhavat varyama
sam na indro brhaspatih
sam no vishnururukramah
namo brahmane namaste vayo
tvameva pratyaksam brahmasi
tvameva pratyaksam brahma vadisyami
rtam vadisyami satyam vadisyami
tanmamavatu tadvaktaramavatu
avatu mamavatu vaktaram
om santih santih santih

May Mitra be blissful to us. May Varuna be blissful to us. May Aryama be blissful to us. May Indra and Barhaspati be blissful to us. May Vishnu of long strides be blissful to us. Salutations to Brahman. Salutations to you, O Vayu. You, indeed are the immediate Brahman. You alone I shall call the direct Brahman. I shall call you righteousness. I shall call you truth. May He protect me. May He protect the teacher. Om, peace, peace, peace!

om saha navavatu
saha nau bhunaktu
saha viryam karavavahai
tejasvi navadhitamastu
ma vidvisavahai
om santih santih santih

May He protect us both (the teacher and the taught) together (by revealing knowledge). May He protect us both (by vouchsafing the results of knowledge). May we not cavil at each other. Om, peace, peace, peace!

Mahamantra

hare rama hare rama
rama rama hare hare
hare krsna hare krsna
krsna krsna hare hare

These sixteen words destroy the evil effects of the kali yuga (Iron Age). They remove the veil of ignorance of the jiva, surrounded by sixteen kalas (rays). Then like the sun which shines in full effulgence after the clouds are dispersed, Parabrahman alone shines in full splendour.

Salutations to Gurudev Sivananda

sivananda sivananda
sadguru natha sivananda
sivananda sivananda
sadguru natha sivananda
sivananda sivananda
sadguru natha sivananda

om

2. PURIFICATORY BREATHING EXERCISE

This is the mystic way of burning sin and negativity and acquiring a Divine Body. The practice 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. The effectiveness of this exercise depends upon the intensity of visualisation of the inner process which consists of:

A. Drying up of the 'man of sin', the sinful or impure part of our own personality.

B. Burning the 'man of sin'.

C-E. Wholesale rejuvenation or recreation of a divine body, with which to practise yoga.

Preliminaries:

Be seated in a comfortable posture. Breathe steadily. With closed eyes, visualise 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 and sinful man who is crouching in the left side of the abdomen.

Use the right thumb to close or to open the right nostril, the right ring and little fingers to do so with the left nostril. Now you are ready.

A. Breathe in through the left nostril. Hold the breath. At the same time, mentally repeat the syllable yam - mantra for air, and feel that the dark man of sin is being dried up by the wind generated by the mantra. Breathe out repeating the same mantra through the right nostril.

B. Breathe in through the right nostril in the same way, 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 man of sin. Breathe out through the left nostril, repeating the mantra.

C. Breathe in again through the left nostril, meditate on the moon as being seated at the left nostril. Repeat the mantra for Moon tham - to rhyme with rum and the th is a hard 't', harder than in 'tell' and not the soft sound in a 'the'. Visualise that the moonrays - full of cool shower of nectar are filling you with new life-force. Breathe out through the right nostril, still repeating the mantra.

D. Breathe in through the right nostril again, repeating the mantra vam^① and feel that this mantra symbolising water provides the fluid for this new divine body, and cleanses all the pranic channels. Hold the breath and breathe out through the left nostril, repeating the same mantra.

E. Breathe in through the left nostril, repeating the mantra lam, and feel that its power confers solidity upon the new divine body, as it is the mantra for earth. Hold and breathe out. Breathing gently through both nostrils, repeat the holy mantra soham - so with the inhalation and ham (pronounced as the English hum) with the exhalation. 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.

3. AGNISARA - Fanning the fire within

Remain seated, with the hands on your knees.

Draw the abdomen in quickly and immediately relax. It is just a fan-like movement of the abdomen, back and forth. You can do this well only if 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.

Start with twenty movements. Gradually increase the number.

4. BHASTRIKA - The Bellows

In this we use the abdominal muscles as a blacksmith uses his 'bellows' . Quick and powerful movements are involved in this. When the 'stomach' is pulled in, the breath is powerfully expelled from the lungs through the nose, in 'one instalment' - 'be sure that you do not merely breathe out, but throw the breath out as one does while sneezing. Immediately and quickly, the abdominal muscles are relaxed and the breath effortlessly flows into the lungs. No special effort is needed here.

Ten such expulsions should be sufficient to start with. Then, breathe out completely. Follow this by a complete inhalation. Use the chin-lock and hold the breath.

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. Feel that the pranic energy is being united in the solar plexus. In due course, you will actually experience the prana vibrating both in the solar plexus and the basal center - the part of the body on which you are seated. Before you breathe out, release the chin lock.

There is a tendency for the throat to become 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 exhalation. This must be carefully avoided.

(a) First Round: concentrate on the solar plexus and feel that the pranic energy is being built up there.

(b) Second Round: when you retain the breath in bhastrika the second time, mentally repeat the mantra 'hamsah', and feel that the power is being led to the basal center. Contract the perineum and push the energy hard down to the perineum.

(c) Third Round: during the third round you can feel that the power generated at the solar plexus 'strikes' the kundalini sakti in the basal center. Mentally repeat the mantra 'hum' - pronounced as as 'whom', as the prana strikes at the basal center.

It can also be done without bhastrika by merely inhaling and holding the breath. 'Hum' is the psychic protective shield. It is a powerful mantra which will protect you from all obstacles and distractions.

You can do this three times as indicated above. Too many expulsions will make you giddy. During the following exercises, too, whenever you feel that you are becoming lazy and lethargic, you can use the bhastrika to 'build up' power.

5. SEETALI - The cooling breath

Bhastrika heats up the whole system. When this is followed by the 'sitali', the excess of heat is taken away and only the power is left.

Open your mouth and protrude the tongue just a little. Roll it into a kind of a tube. Close the lips around this tube. Breathe in through this tube. You will feel that your whole inside is being cooled. 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.

6. PRANAYAMA

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

(a) Simple pranayama: breathe in through the left nostril. Hold. Breathe out through the right. Breathe in through the right. Hold. Breathe out through the left. This is one round. Mentally repeat your 'ista mantra' - the one which the student has received from his Guru, which should always be repeated throughout the day. After some practice, try to establish the ratio 1:4:2. Do this about 5 or 10 rounds. Concentrate on the muladhara chakra.

(b) Advanced pranayama with mula bandha: continue the above. With the inhalation, contract the rectum and the perineum and 'pull' them up, feeling that the energy in this region is 'rowing' 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 mula bandha (rectal uplift) for that period, you can 'contract and relax' several times during the retention of breath. During exhalation, relax the mula bandha.

This is a very important exercise for awakening the kundalini sakti. It will also enable you to sublimate the sex-energy.

You can do this pranayama about 10 rounds in all. Throughout the exercise, keep repeating the i ta mantra.

7. KECHARI MUDRA - Meditation on the spinal tube

The visualisation is most important here. With closed eyes, visualise a radiant channel in the shape of a walking stick, one end between the eyebrows and the other at the base of the spine - the perineum. From the center of the eyebrows, the handle of the walking stick goes right back to the medulla, down the spine till you reach the perineum. Visualise this very clearly.

(a) Open your mouth just a little to let the tongue roll back a little and close the posterior nasal openings. Even an unsuccessful attempt to do this will ensure an internal 'widening' of the throat. Visualise a hollow tube running along the center of the spine, connecting the center of the eyebrows with the basal center - muladhara chakra.

(b) Breathe in through the open mouth. Feel cool current pass down the tube to the muladhara chakra. As you breathe in you will make the sound AAAAHHHH with the lower part of the expanded throat. Mentally repeat the mantra: soham.

(c) Hold the breath for a few seconds, concentrating on the muladhara and repeating the ista mantra mentally.

(d) Return the tongue to the normal position whilst maintaining the expanded throat position. 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 EEEEEEE. Repeat the mantra hamsah mentally. Practise this six times and then gradually increase the number to sixteen.

8. LAYA YOGA - Chakra-meditation with Yoni Mudra

Practise yoni mudra: 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 lips with the little fingers. Lift the middle fingers a little when you want to breathe in and out.

A. Concentrate on the muladhara chakra - at the perineum. Repeat the mantra: om lam - lam, yam, ram, yam, ham; all these are pronounced to rhyme with the English word 'hum'. Meditate on the yellow square - the symbol of the earth element. Practise mula bandha - rectal uplift. Feel that the kundalini sakti is moving upwards to the next center. As it travels up, repeat the mantra: hamsah.

B. Next, concentrate on the svadhisthana chakra at the tip of the spine in the region of the prostate or uterus. Repeat the mantra: om vam. Meditate on the white crescent moon - the symbol of the water element. Again practise mula bandha. Feel that the kundalini sakti is moving upwards to the next center. As it travels up, repeat the mantra: hamsah. In the same way, take the sakti to:

C. Manipura Chakra behind the navel region. Mantra: om ram. Meditate on the red triangle-symbol of the fire element.

D. Anahata Chakra behind the heart region. Mantra: om yam. Meditation is on the smoky hexagon (two interlaced triangles) which is the symbol of the air element.

E. Visuddha Chakra at the throat, behind the Adam's apple. Mantra: om ham. Meditate on the white circle - the symbol of the ether element. All these are to be visualised within the 'hollow tube'.

F. Ajna Chakra between the eyebrows. mantra: om. From here, visualise the sakti ascending up to the sahasrara at the crown of the head and enjoying blissful union with the Lord.

You can do one 'retention of breath' in the yoni mudra position for each chakra meditation. Retain the concentration at the ajna chakra for a little while. During this time you may let go the yoni mudra and let your hands rest on your lap. Then with the yoni mudra continue the chakra meditation in the reverse order. The technique is the same as for the ascent of the kundalini sakti, 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 kundalini derives immense power, peace and bliss from the union with the Lord. As the sakti

descends into the various chakras, feel that this power is being distributed at those centers.

Incidentally, this meditation can revivify the entire nervous system and the body.

9. MEDITATION

Conclude with a period of meditation at the ajna chakra or the anahata chakra.

See 'How To Meditate'.

10. HEALING PRAYER

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

MEDITATION ON THE CHAKRAS

Each chakra has the following characteristics: a certain number of petals, color scheme, a geometrical symbol, a phonetic symbol, association with an element, an animal, a deity and a goddess of power.

The practitioner can devote a considerable time to each chakra, visualising in it the lotus with the appropriate number of petals, the pericarp with the geometrical symbol in it, 'riding' on the particular animal, the deity and the goddess associated with Him, and the phonetic symbol and the element it represents.

Or, he can take the above factors one by one, and while doing the yoni mudra visualise that factor in the various chakras without tarrying at any one of them, and return to the muladhara for the next factor. Such meditation will vitalise the centers and, according to the adhyatmaviveka, enable the practitioner to eradicate the vices associated with each center and cultivate the corresponding virtues.

The physical benefits are incalculable. As each center is touched by the vital force, all the irregularities connected with it disappear and the practitioner enjoys excellent health and peace of mind.

A SIMPLE VIEW OF THE CHAKRAS

MULADHARA

1. It is situated at the base of the spinal column, at the psychic counterpart of the perineum.
2. On its four red petals are the letters yas, mam, sas, mam of the Sanskrit alphabet.
3. In the center of the lotus is a yellow square which represents the earth-element.
4. At the center of this square is the seed-mantra for earth lam riding the elephant - the elephant is strong and firm and so is the earth; lam is the equivalent of the vibration produced by the earth element and is perhaps the origin of the word 'land' too.
5. The God who presides over this center is the Creator Brahma and the Goddess Dakini.
6. Right in the middle of this lotus is a red triangle with its apex downward, enclosing the linga, around which the kundalini is coiled three and a half times, blocking the opening of the susumna - the psychic channel, through which the awakened sakti passes upward with its mouth.
7. It roughly corresponds to the sacrococcygeal plexus. It is a center of extreme pleasurable sensation.

SVADHISTHANA

- I. It is situated at the base of the male genitals at the psychic center roughly corresponding to the prostate or uterus.
2. On its six vermilion petals are the letters bum, bhum, ram, and lam of the Sanskrit alphabet.
3. In the center is a white crescent moon, related to the water-element.
4. In the center of the lotus is the seed- mantra: vam riding a crocodile - an aquatic creature which is also associated with Cupid; vam is obviously the vibratory note of the element Water (note the phonetic similarity). Vam also symbolises the nectar of immortality and its association with the genital organs is significant.
5. The God who presides over this center is Visnu; and the Goddess is Rakini.
6. The qualities associated with this center are: credulity, suspicion, disdain, delusion or disinclination, false knowledge, pitilessness - which can be removed by purifying this center.
7. This center is associated with the sacral plexus, with sexual functions and also excretory activities generally. Its vitalisation can therefore correct any irregularities in this sphere.

MANIPURA

1. It is situated within the spinal column at the level of the navel.
2. On its ten blue petals are the Sanskrit letters dam, dham, nam, tat, mham, dam, dham, nam, pam and pham.
3. In the center of the lotus is a red triangle - the symbol of fire element.
4. The seed-mantra ram - the fire is red and hence the phonetic similarity of red with its mystic equivalent ram, rides a ram.
5. The God who presides over this center is Maharudra and the Goddess is Lakini.
6. The qualities associated with this center are : shame , treachery, jealousy, desire , sleepiness, sadness, worldliness, ignorance, aversion or distrust, fear - all of which can be controlled by proper concentration on this chakra.
7. It corresponds to the lumbar plexus, and the solar plexus which is the junction of the right and left sympathetic nerves with the cerebro-spinal axis. It is concerned with digestion (gastric fire) and assimilation.

ANAHATA

1. It is situated in the region of the heart.
2. On its twelve golden petals are the twelve letters of the Sanskrit alphabet starting with kam.
3. In the center is the smoky hexagon or two interlaced triangles - the Jewish Solomon's seal.
4. The seed-mantra is yam, for air (note the phonetic similarity) riding the swift-footed (fast as the wind) antelope. The relationship with air is obvious: the region is of the lungs and the heart. Hence, this center is also the abode of the primary prana - life force) and the jiva - the living soul. The color of the lotus is red, since it is obviously related to the heart.
5. The God who presides over this center is Isa and the Goddess is Kakini.
6. The qualities associated with this chakra are: hope, care or anxiety, endeavour, mineness resulting in attachment, arrogance or hypocrisy, sense of languor, egoism, discrimination, covetousness, duplicity, indecision, regret, and the evils of these can be eradicated and their corresponding opposites cultivated by proper meditation here.
7. This center corresponds to the cardiac plexus.

VISHUDDHA

1. It is situated in the region of the throat.
2. On its sixteen smoky purple petals are the vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet.
3. In the center is a white circle (enclosed in a blue area within the lotus), to symbolise space.
4. The seed-mantra is ham - for ether or space when you utter the mantra ham, the space in the throat expands considerably, riding on an elephant - the symbol of stability, even as space is stable.
5. The God is Ardhanarisvara - the combined form of Asiva and Asakti, and the Goddess is Sakini.
6. It corresponds to the medulla which controls the activities of all the vital organs, particularly of respiration, as also the throat and the vocal organs.

AJNA

1. It is situated between the eyebrows.
2. On its two white petals are the Sanskrit letters ham and ksam.
3. In the center of this all-white center is the holy word 'om'.
4. This is the seat of the cognitive faculties and the senses in their subtle modality, and is therefore of supreme importance. It is through this center that the yogi receives divine commands - hence the name ajna.
5. The God is Paramasiva Himself and the goddess Hakini.
6. This center corresponds to the cerebellum and is the seat of intelligence, the controller of all the functions of the body and the mind.

Between the ajna and the sahasrara, at the crown of the head - the psychic counterpart of the cerebral cortex, is the seat of the causal body.

The sahasrara is not a chakra or a psychic center but the goal itself, with a thousand petals, i.e., all the chakras are represented in it twenty times.

In the mid-brain is a soma chakra, according to some authors, which is related to the following qualities: mercy, gentleness, patience or composure, dispassion, constancy, prosperity, (spiritual), cheerfulness, ecstasy, humility, meditateness, quietude, gravity of demeanour, enterprise or effort, magnanimity and concentration.

These qualities can be cultivated by concentrating on the ajna chakra itself.

HOW TO MEDITATE

So many text-books are available on meditation nowadays that I feel everyone has some idea of what it is all about. In brief, meditation is the most wonderful adventure: 'Discovery of Self'.

Meditation can enable us to enjoy consciously the peace, happiness and revitalisation that we unconsciously have in sleep. Meditation can lift us above the cares and anxieties of our daily life, can enable us to overcome our moral weaknesses and evil habits and can 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 realise 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 can give us supernatural powers. But unless they themselves become natural to us, of whose existence we are not conscious and which we shall not deliberately use, they should be shunned as distractions.

Let us get down to the practice. "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. Sit, preferably facing east - as the sun rises in the east, or north - there is 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. The best time is from 4 to 6 am. 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 quickly (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. 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 'om' and let the sound fade out at the crown of the head. Do this three or six times.

4. If the 'om' chanting has not succeeded in completely turning the mind inwards, and specially if there is some external disturbing noise, do this: breathe deeply, but 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'.
5. Breathe slowly now. Watch the breath. Try to listen to it, without producing any sound even with the throat now.
6. Repeat your mantra - any Name of God or sacred formula or 'om' now - 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 out. If the mantra is long, break it into two and repeat half while inhaling and the other half while exhaling.
7. 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 4 above. But transfer that symbol to within yourself. Feel that 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 get tired and begin to smart. You will find that the symbol goes out of focus. Do not worry. Your eyes will not blink. They will not water, or smart.
8. Now close your eyes if you like, and visualise that presence of God clearly within your heart. Let it be radiant and 'living' .
9. Gradually let that presence 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, but one with Him.
10. Sit like this for a minimum period of 20 minutes. The preliminaries may take about 10 minutes. Gradually increase this period.
11. After this period is over, offer a prayer to the Lord for the health and long life of the sick people - whom you can actually visualise in front of you, and peace and prosperity of those who are suffering.
12. 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.

13. You can practise this is 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 on you.

14. Do not eat anything for half an hour after this practice. And, do not take bath immediately either.

15. 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.

Laya Yoga students will start from step 3 above after doing the yoni mudra.

If the mind wanders, open your eyes, gaze at the picture and start all over again from step 4 or 5 above.

Japa - repetition of 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, visualising 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 His Presence.

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 will be recollected by the mind. If it pertains to the business of the day, the mind will be 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 common sense in overcoming such obstacles.

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.

It is most important that the return to the work-a-day world should be gradual. After you open your eyes, take at least five minutes to get up from the seat, all the time continuing the japa. Even afterwards, slowly walk around the room, repeating the mantra for another five minutes; then come out of the room.

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.

Self-control, or control of the senses and mind, is the indispensable prerequisite to successful meditation.

Progress in meditation will be rapid if you lead a well-regulated life and practise the Yoga of Synthesis. 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. Maintain good health through the regular practice of a few asanas (sirasan, sarvangasa, etc.) and suryanamaskar. Selfless service of humanity will enable you to gauge your progress in the practice of meditation. If the meditation was deep, you will be filled with compassion and the spirit of selfless service, and experience the presence of God in all.

Patanjali Maharshi in his Yoga Sutras and Sri Krsna in the Bhagavad Gita prescribe only two remedies for the mind-wandering: (i) persistent practice and (ii) giving up those pleasures and evil habits which show up during the meditation practice, and which thus disturb the mind. Regularity will establish the habit which is absolutely essential.

You will attain God-realisation eventually; but even within a few weeks of commencing this practice you will enjoy peace of mind and get the ability to concentrate the mind at will, wherever you are.

May you become a yogi in this very birth!

CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of laya yoga lies in powerful imagination - which is image-in-ation i.e. transferring the image of God within, visualising God within, feeling His Living Presence there. The emotional risks involved can surely be avoided if the Purifactory Breathing Exercise is practised with intense bhavana - imagination, visualisation and feeling. This bhavana it is that later blossoms into anubhava - experience. That is what the sculptor does. He looks at the stone. He visualises the statue he wants to carve out of it. He sees it there. He persists in this visualisation till the chips that do not belong to the statue are chiselled away. Now his imagination, visualisation, have become actualised, realised.

The Purifactory 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 visualise the particular evil habit there: and then visualise that habit being dried and burnt. That is the obvious purpose of prefacing the laya yoga practice with this important and vital process of purification - make a habit of it, even.

In a stirring pamphlet entitled 'Moral Alchemy', Yogi Suryanarayana Rao gives a practical technique for the sublimation of all energies in the body and mind, and for the control of baser propensities. He effectively brings out the importance of the solar plexus in this self-culture. Here is the basic exercise:

- (i) For half an hour daily, imagine a stream of prana - not breath, but vital fluid, to course downwards from your throat to the solar plexus;
- (ii) then similarly imagine a current of vitality to rapidly flow upwards from the generative organs to the solar plexus;
- (iii) by means of will-directed and mind-concentrated imagination, transmit the solar- plexus-stored prana to any part of the system that stands in need of the same by reason of exhaustion, depletion, pain, disease or weakness;
- (iv) clearly visualise the organs concerned, and feel that the disease-symptoms are fleeing before the onrush of pranic current. This is for pranic healing and the technique is also useful for sublimation of the reproductive energy. The author gives detailed instructions on how to deal with the other evil qualities and tendencies like anger, fear, greed etc. Interested students are requested to contact: Sri Lalitha Charities Trust, 4, Bhagavantam Gupta St. Thyagaraynagar, Madras-17, India., for a free copy of the pamphlet.

To reject the practice of laya yoga fearing the risk of physical or mental undesirable results is like throwing the baby away with the bath water. It is true that injudicious practice might lead to awakening of baser craving; but have all wicked men reached their condition via yoga? It is true that overzeal and excesses in the practice of pranayama and other yogic practices might lead to nervous breakdown and insanity - though their wise practice will prevent them; but go to the mental hospitals of the world and see for yourself what brought the patients there. Not yoga, but loss of wealth, love affairs, family quarrels, drink etc. which no man is ready to recognise and abandon. It is true that some of the yoga asanas when they are practised violently might lead to physical troubles and dislocation of joints. Are the hospitals of the world filled with people who suffer from these because they practised yoga asanas?

Recognise that these excuses are advanced by the vicious mind which rebels against any restraint and God-ward direction. 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 dangers mentioned apply 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 above should not be taken as justification for wickedness! Virtue is the foundation of yoga. Yoga, sincerely practised, must promote virtue and eradicate evil.

Om Tat Sat