

YOGADRISHTI SERIES

Sadhana

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Sadhana

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sadhana

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses from the Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs
at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger,
from 5th to 8th April 2011*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Sadhana

“The aim of sadhana is perfection. When you achieve perfection in your actions then you achieve perfection in your sadhana and not before. Sadhana is necessary to perfect the imperfect karmas, to ripen and perfect the unripe senses and to focus the scattered and dissipated energies of the mind. Sadhana becomes the medium through which you can awaken the higher qualities. If you do not do sadhana, you cannot awaken the spiritual qualities.”

The Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs consists of discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in Munger as part of the new phase of sannyasa life that he has embarked upon since 2009.

The theme of the satsangs Swamiji gave in April 2011 at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yoga Peeth was sadhana. Swamiji explained sadhana as the attainment of perfection in all one does, to fulfil the aim of life which is to move from tamas, inertia, to sattwa, luminosity. Swamiji elucidated the process of sadhana and the different sadhanas for householders and for sannyasins, to attain one’s highest potential.

Many sannyasins have selflessly contributed to the compiling, editing and publishing of this text. To one and all, yoga aspirants extend their gratitude for bringing this information to them.

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The purpose of this book is to provide relevant information regarding yoga practice; it is not to be used for teaching oneself or others. All yoga training and learning should be done under the guidance of an experienced, competent teacher, not from the book alone.

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Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

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Preparation for Sadhana

5 April 2011

Sri Swami Satyananda says that the purpose of human life is to cultivate spiritual awareness. He is vocal and emphatic when talking about the cultivation of spiritual life, as for him that is the most important process in life. He always says that God-realization or self-realization is not the aim of life. It is the cultivation of spiritual awareness for which we have taken this birth, therefore all our efforts and actions should lead us to the stage where we can experience the spiritual awareness within.

Sri Swamiji's statement is, "Cultivation of spiritual awareness is the aim of life." My statement is, "The aim of life is also to develop efficiency and proficiency in all things that you do." Therefore, you have two things before you: the cultivation of spiritual awareness, and the development of proficiency in everything you do in life. Both of these aims relate to the effort that every individual makes to overcome the limitations and restrictions of personality and develop a greater degree of creativity, positivity and optimism in life.

Influence of the gunas

The mind and the senses are integrated with each other. While the mind has to be groomed and trained to experience spiritual life and develop spiritual awareness, the senses have to be groomed and guided to become more efficient and proficient in their involvement in the day-to-day world. When we are born into this life, our mind, senses, consciousness and *pranas* or energies, exist in a dimension where the tamasic nature is predominant. There are three different *gunas*, qualities. One quality and nature is sattwic, next is rajasic and the third is tamasic. *Sattwic* means pure, harmonious and luminous, and this is the final experience of an awakened mind. Next to sattwa is *rajas*, which represents the dynamism, motivation, determination, drive and inspiration to achieve, become and realize. The third nature is tamasic; *tamas* means defined, not negative. In fact, do not think of categorizing these gunas as either good or bad, positive or negative. They are neither positive nor negative; they are only characters, traits, conditions and qualities of life. Just as the weather is sometimes hot and at other times cold, depending on the season, in the same manner, in the manifest dimension the gunas – sattwa, rajas and tamas – represent qualities and conditions which your mind expresses and experiences from time to time. Most of the time, the expression

and experience of life is tamas. You are ten percent sattwic, forty percent rajasic and fifty percent tamasic.

Tamas represents darkness. In darkness or in the absence of light, you cannot see things although they are there. It is possible to see things only when there is light. We are sitting here now, in the sunlight, and are able to see each other. However, if we were sitting here in the middle of the night in total darkness, who would see whom? In the presence of light, things come into the field of perception, and in darkness you are unable to see anything although the same things are there. This is tamas. Tamas has been called by different names, such as darkness, illusion and ignorance. Since life is under the influence of tamas, the mind, the mental patterns or *vruttis* are also moulded by tamas. This tamasic mind blocks you from seeing the beauty inherent in life.

Rajas is an activity of the mind. When you speak of the mind, you think of it as the one word, 'mind'. From the yogic perspective, the two behaviours or expressions of the mind are sankalpa and vikalpa. *Sankalpa* means clarity, focus, sharpened awareness, knowing the right and appropriate. *Vikalpa* is the opposite of sankalpa: distractions, dissipation and diversions. The mind swings between sankalpa and vikalpa. This swing between clarity or confusion can be experienced in the thoughts, feelings, emotions, intellect and logic. Sometimes thoughts are clear, sometimes confused. Sometimes emotions are clear, sometimes confused.



The main condition of the mind, during predominance of the rajas quality, is sankalpa and vikalpa: clarity and confusion. Rajas dominates these states. When there is clarity you are motivated, you are inspired to do better things, new things. With the change of mind, there is a change of mood, which expresses greater happiness, optimism and hope. When you fall in the trap of vikalpa, the mind becomes clouded; hopelessness and despair set in and you are unable to use the abilities or inherent

strengths that you have. At that time you tend to identify more with the shortcomings and weaknesses in life.

Sankalpa and vikalpa are behaviours of the rajasic mind. This body, this brain and this mind are coloured by tamoguna, just as the clothes that you wear are coloured orange, yellow, blue, green, pink or red. When you are interacting with the environment and with the world, your mind is coloured by tamas. The colour of tamas is the conditioned nature, the conditioned quality: "I believe this and I do not believe that." This applies to nearly every situation.

There is a story of a frog that had lived in a well all his life. He reached his middle age, half his life having gone by and still he had never left the well. Then one day, while he was admiring the world of his well, he heard a sound: 'plop'. He looked around and saw that another frog had fallen into the well. He said to the newcomer, "You look new to me. Where have you come from?" The newcomer frog replied, "I come from the ocean." The frog of the well asked, "Where is the ocean?" The newcomer said, "It is not too far from here." "Is it as big as my well?" the well frog asked, as he jumped from one corner of the well to the other, feeling very proud. The newcomer frog answered, "It is much bigger than this well." "It cannot be," said the well frog. He took another big leap and asked, "Is it as great as my leap?" The ocean frog said, "Yes it is much bigger than that." The well frog answered, "Well, anything that you can't put in my well doesn't exist. Anything that does not fit in the well does not exist for me."

You are the well frog, as you have created your own world, your own associations, contacts, circles, and you live within that world which you have created. In the world of your creation, everything is fixed: your expectations, beliefs, ethics, morality and concept of right and wrong. Your lifestyle is fixed and your expectations about how to behave in society are also defined. Where everything is defined and you have to live within the parameters of the definition is known as the tamasic nature. If you try to change that tamasic nature, that act becomes rajasic. In this life, you are predominantly tamasic by nature: your body is fixed, your mind is fixed, your emotions and sentiments are fixed, and your spirit is also fixed. There is no growth in the spirit, as it is contained in a non-growing personality, body and mind.

In order to cultivate spiritual awareness, you move from tamas to sattwa. This is the definition given of spiritual awareness, of spiritual realization. Identify not with the changing and craving nature of the mind, but with the pure, luminous and peaceful nature of the mind. The journey from tamas to sattwa is the spiritual journey. This is the essence; this is the secret of spiritual life. You have to go from tamas, from the present condition of living, to sattwa, the purer, more luminous, more tranquil, harmonious and creative way of living. Our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, says that to overcome the predominance of tamas in your life, negate its influence by imbibing divine qualities. Only when you imbibe a divine quality, one positive trait, do your vrittis or mental patterns change. This is the way to get out of the narrowness or the limited nature of your present life. The ignorance of the present life is removed and light comes in. As you leave the area of darkness and enter into the sphere of light, you

experience luminosity within. You awaken the uplifting energies and your consciousness evolves into the higher dimension of intuition. You connect with creation and the creator.

Defining sadhana

The process which takes you from tamas to sattwa has a name, and that is sadhana. Generally, when we use the word 'sadhana', people identify it with a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice. However, *sadhana* means attainment of perfection in that which you do.

When you were learning to write ABC at school, you had to fill many pages by writing each letter repeatedly. After three or four pages of writing 'A,' you had to write 'B', and so on. You were given lined pages and you had to write in between those lines. That is sadhana for a child, and the result of that sadhana is received. If you write properly, you get plus marks, you get a gold star, and if you do not write properly then you get a red 'x'. The sadhana of a child gets results then and there. The more you write, the more fluent you become, the more clarity there is in the writing, and the letter is recognized the more easily. The result of any sadhana you do well is attainment of maturity. Through sadhana you get plus marks in life. Those who do not do sadhana get minus marks, become lazy and stay ignorant.

Another form of sadhana is found in the story of Arjuna, friend and disciple of Sri Krishna. When he was young, he was an avid archer. Once, while he was eating his dinner at night, the candle blew out and there was pitch darkness in the dining room. Arjuna kept on eating and suddenly he realized that his hands were going automatically to his mouth; they were not going to his nose, or to his eyes, or to his ears, but straight to his mouth. He recognized that even in absolute darkness, if the senses are trained, they will follow their course of action. With this in mind, he started training himself to shoot the arrow at night without seeing where he was shooting. Of course, this sadhana had its own problems, but he overcame them all and became the greatest archer of his time. The story indicates that if you train your senses and your mind, then there is nothing that you cannot achieve; everything is achieved naturally and spontaneously.

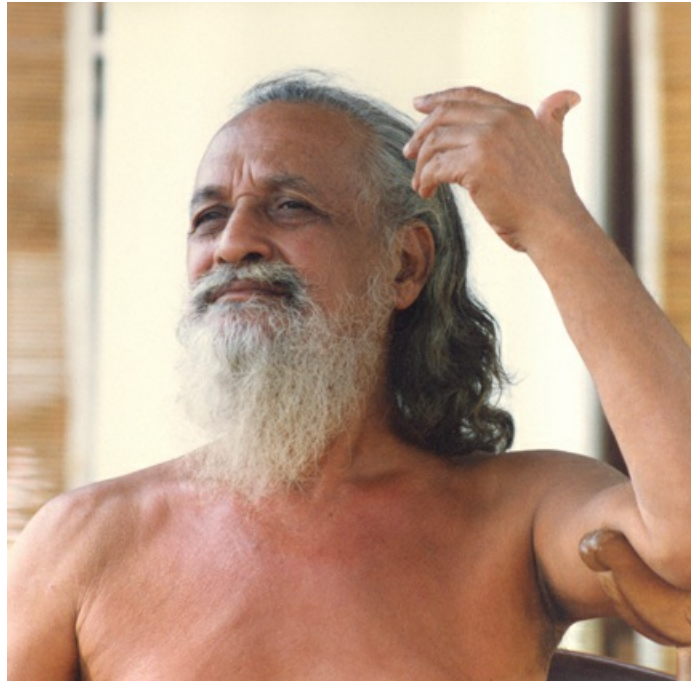
Training regulates the behaviour of the senses and the mind. This is the kind of training you lack in your life. This regulation of sensory and mental behaviour is known as sadhana. Sensory education takes place at the physical level, the sensorial level and the interactive level. It is an interactive process: you and the world. Mental sadhana is practised to pacify mental agitation and to develop concentration and focused awareness. Emotional sadhana takes place in the form of bhakti, intellectual sadhana in the form of jnana and spiritual sadhana in the form of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and absorption.

Preparation of the mind

Spiritual sadhana takes place in form of developing an understanding of your own nature and managing the problem areas in the mind. Sadhana means a process that

leads you to mastery and perfection. It is also a type of discipline, as without discipline no sadhana can be achieved or fulfilled. Therefore, the main subject and focus of sadhana is the preparation of the mind.

The mind is always being directed outward, and this mind has to be retrained. Sri Swamiji says never to fight with the mind, but to always guide it. If there is a fight at home between husband and wife, there is disturbance; there is emotional pain and suffering, intellectual confusion and conflict. That is happening between two people who may be a couple, may be friends, may be parents, that is it. If you fight with your mind, however, the mind lives with you twenty-four hours of the day. The mind is with you in the same bed when you go to sleep; it follows you around when you eat, when you shower, when you brush your teeth, when you work and when you visit your friends. The association with the mind is much greater than the other associations. A problem, a fight, a conflict in the family can disturb the environment at home. What would happen when you confront your own mind? When you fight with your own mind? Who gets disturbed? It is not the mind that gets disturbed, it is you.



Sri Swamiji says, “I never disturb my mind, as then the mind will disturb me. It is always better to be a friend to the mind and keep it happy all the time.” Keeping the mind happy does not mean that you allow it to follow its whims. It means you do not come into direct confrontation or conflict with the mind. You guide your mind just as you would guide your child to do certain things, to behave and act in a certain manner. In this way you guide your mind, but do not fight with the mind. The moment you fight with your mind, you become the loser; you get disturbed and you lose your peace, your *shanti*.

It is mental training that allows you to discipline the mind and, after that discipline,

to embark on the path of sadhana. This has been explained to some extent by Sage Patanjali and by other rishis who have developed the subject of yoga. Sage Patanjali says that the management of mental moods is yoga. He uses the phrase *chitta vritti*; I use the expression 'mental mood'. It is the mood in the existing environment of the mind that influences your thought process, behaviour, performance, responses, everything. If the mental mood is happy then the whole world is happy; if the mental mood is depressive then the whole world is dark and depressing. If you are fearful then you will experience fear everywhere. If you are angry, you will find cause for anger everywhere. If you are kind, you will find ways to express your kindness everywhere. It is the predominant mood of the mind which becomes the vritti, and it is the management of those vrittis which is the purpose of yoga. The vrittis colour the mind, and yogic sadhana, which is aimed at cultivating spiritual awareness, begins with understanding the vrittis of the mind.

Cultivating mental awareness

Sage Patanjali has spoken of the stages of pratyahara to develop the power of observation, *drashta*; you can stand back from your involvement and objectives and be a witness to everything that is happening. This is the process of pratyahara sadhana, to encourage the behaviour of the mind to change. When you are fearful and you practise pratyahara, you are changing that fearful state of mind into some different awareness of control. When you are angry and you practise pratyahara, you are creating a change from anger to peace. The management of the mind and entry into sadhana begins with the cultivation of mental awareness and by knowing, 'What is my mood at present? How is that mood or mental condition making me behave, act and respond? Is it an appropriate response or inappropriate? Is it positive interaction or negative?' This understanding has to come first. When you know how the mind responds you can begin to incorporate certain disciplines into the mental behaviour and, through discipline, change the patterns of thought, the patterns of expression and the patterns of understanding.

Development of sadhana

Define your intention: Sadhana is the attainment of excellence and perfection in everything that you do. It begins with involvement in constant, continuous awareness and focus. In the absence of awareness and focus, sadhana is not sadhana; it is only a waste of time. There has to be focus, there has to be awareness of the present mood and there has to be clarity of intention as to what you want to achieve.

Often people say, "I want to learn to meditate." Why do they want to learn to meditate? That, they themselves do not know. They have heard that meditation is good, so they want to meditate, but they do not know what their aim is and their teacher also does not know how to guide them. First, the intention has to be defined. Once the intention is clear then a path can be mapped. When you know that you have to go from point 'A' to point 'B' then you can plot a path on the map; however, if you do not know

that you are going to point 'B' how will you plot your map? You will just go around in circles and not reach anywhere.



First of all, know what your intention is. That is the primary requirement of starting the sadhana, otherwise it is like ordering pizza. Imagine you go to a Pizza Hut and the person behind the counter asks, "What kind of pizza do you want?" and you say, "I don't know. Give me one with everything." The pizza maker then puts a little bit of everything on it and gives it to you, and as there are so many items on the pizza you cannot taste any single item properly; it is a khichari pizza. You have to be clear about what kind of pizza you want; you have to state whether it should be cheese and onion, or cheese and mushrooms. There has to be an understanding of what you want. This applies to the food you consume and it also applies to your mental intentions. Only when you have decided, 'This is where I want to go' can you plot a path on the map, which becomes the starting point for every aspirant.

If the intention is not clear, you cannot start your journey. You reach the airport, but which flight are you going to catch? You want to go to London but end up in Timbuktu without a visa and you are deported from there. The same thing happens in your spiritual journey. Often, when you bypass your mind and go to a different place which you think is bigger, better and nicer, you reach there, then you find that you have no visa and have to come back. You cannot stay in that state, as there is no understanding and preparation.

Have conviction in the practice: The second point is that you must have conviction in, and dedication to, your practice. You have to believe that what you practise is going to lead you to your goal. Conviction and practice must go together. If you are practising something, you should believe, you should be convinced, you should know that your practice is going to lead you to your goal, and that becomes your focus, that becomes your aim.

Every practice in yoga, every branch of yoga has a specific aim. Every yoga and every practice has an aim, a goal, a target, and once the intention is clear and the path can be

plotted, then the appropriate practices can be selected for you to achieve your goal. Conviction in practice is the second aspect: intention and conviction.

Accept the change: The third aspect is accepting the change. Accept the change that takes place. If through your sadhana you are experiencing some change, some transformation, then be ready to accept it and not negate, deny or confront it. Many people do not accept change. They want to remain the same with an added quality, but how can you remain the same with an added quality? If you bring in some new quality, the reflection of that quality will be seen in your behaviour, your responses, your actions and your performance. There is already a change, a new identity being reflected. There has to be an openness to accept the change that occurs spontaneously and naturally, without compulsive and obsessive thinking as to 'Why is this happening?' or 'Why is that not happening?'

Often spiritual aspirants become confused by their own mind. This confusion is in itself a creation of their own mind. If I say, "In my practice today, I had this particular experience", then you sit down to think, "Swamiji had that experience, so I should also have it." You try and you do not have that experience. Then you begin to think, "Maybe I am not doing it in the right manner." The most important thing that you have forgotten is that you are not Swamiji. How can you compare yourself with another person? You have forgotten that and you are saying, "Maybe I am doing the wrong practice because I am not getting the experience which Swamiji had." It is not a question of having the experience that Swamiji had, it is a question of having the same mind as Swamiji in order to have the same experience. That, very few understand.

Accept the change in whatever way you feel it, you observe it. It is your response to sadhana. When you eat or drink, external things are going into your body, but the satisfaction, happiness and enjoyment is you responding to what you are eating and drinking. In the same manner, accepting the change and allowing it to take place is your response, knowing that it is going to take you in a different direction where you can be different; perhaps better, perhaps expressive, but different from what you were before.

Practise continuous improvement: First is intention, second is conviction in practice and third is accepting the change. Fourth is improving the changed nature with more conviction, faith, determination and belief. You integrate that practice and the change into your life, and improve upon that.

This is the process of sadhana in four categories. It can happen at a sensory level, at a mental level, at an emotional level and at a spiritual level. After all, the asanas that you practise are sadhana for the body. In order to practise one posture you have to go through preparation beforehand. In order to sit in the lotus posture, you need to practise pawanmuktasana for six months just to limber up your joints, legs and knees. Although the aim is *padmasana*, the lotus pose, your sadhana is not of padmasana; your sadhana is of pawanmuktasana. Your aim is to sit in padmasana, but your knees, legs and muscles are stiff and cannot bend. Do you make an attempt every day to sit in the lotus pose and crack your knee? Or do you practise pawanmuktasana for six months to

limber up, become flexible and then sit in the padmasana pose? In this way, at times the sadhana is different from what the aim is, and only a teacher or a guru can tell what is appropriate and what is not appropriate for you.

Just as asanas are practices to improve the quality and condition of the body and the senses, the method to improve the quality of the mind is meditation, in all its four aspects: pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. In the same manner, just as meditation can become the practice to cultivate the mental faculties and creativity, mantra is the practice to cultivate spiritual awareness.



Tools of Sadhana Practice

6 April 2011

Our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, says that the cultivation of spiritual awareness is the purpose of life. For spiritual awareness to become the purpose of life, performance in life should be efficient, proficient and excellent. These two ideas constitute the cornerstone of sadhana.

Understanding maya

Sadhana is a condition of creativity which you express as excellence in any activity, in any condition of life and mind. There are other definitions of sadhana; however, it also represents a state of mind which has attained the pinnacle of excellence, perfection. When you come into this world, into this life, you are subject to the influences of maya. You are not the master of yourself, you are not the controller of yourself; rather, you are subject to the influences of *maya*, the power of delusion. When you enter a coalmine, your clothes are bound to become black. Similarly, when you enter this worldly plane, you automatically absorb the colour of the world. When the transcendental self becomes embodied and enters the transient world, it takes on the colour of that world, which is maya, the world of illusion.

This dimension is the dimension of maya. It is not the dimension of spirit, it is not the dimension of the mind, it is not the dimension of energy, nor is it the dimension of consciousness; it is the dimension of maya. Although you can talk about it, maya is never seen. Nevertheless, all actions, all thoughts, all responses are guided by this power called 'maya'.

Evolution of life takes place in a specific place and at a specific time. Your body and your existence are in a specific location and time frame. When you enter this creation as a being with a material form, you come with the colour of maya. This colour of maya is the colour of tamoguna. The colour of maya cannot be derived from sattwa guna. Maya cannot be luminous; it will always be dark. Your mind, your senses, your intellect and your emotions are all subject to maya. The entire life from birth to death is subject to maya. Maya controls eating, drinking and sleeping, birth and death.

In spiritual literature, this cosmic power has been given the name *yogamaya*, identifying the two functions of the universal power or force: one function is to unite you with your higher nature, and the other function is to separate you from your higher

nature. *Yoga* is coming together, coming closer to the higher nature, and *maya* is separation and distancing from the higher nature. These are the two functions of this cosmic power called *yogamaya*.

In this world you are subject to *maya*, and you make the effort of *yoga*. While living in the same society, world and dimension, you function, act and live according to the dictates of *maya*, but your personal aspiration and intention is to move away from *maya* into *yoga*. The purpose and the direction of *sadhana* is to understand *maya* and gradually free yourself from its fetters and move towards *yoga*, the experience of the higher nature, the higher consciousness. This movement from *maya* to *yoga* is the journey that all aspirants undertake, the movement from *tamas* to *sattwa*. *Maya* is *tamas* and *yoga* is *sattwa*. When we call this cosmic power ‘*yogamaya*’, we are referring to both of these aspects, which coexist. In this life, *maya* is predominant and that is the beauty of life. If *maya* were not the predominant factor, we would all be self-realized and there would be no need for any spiritual teaching. *Maya* creates variety in life.

Sri Swamiji has said in his *satsangs* that the beauty of the garden is not seen if there is only one type of flower there. If you have only roses in a garden then yes, it will look nice, it will look beautiful, but it will not have the appeal of a garden. A real garden is that which has a variety of flowers, some big, some small, some shrivelled up and dry, some vibrant, some thorny, some without thorns. This variety of flowers actually creates the garden, and that is what *maya* has done. It has created a huge garden in which we are all living, and all the flowers, fruits and plants in the garden are the sense objects with which we identify.

‘Me’ and ‘mine’ is the identification, and this identification

is a product of the ego principle. *Maya* feeds ego. The colour of *maya* is black, as *maya* represents nescience, *avidya*. *Maya* represents limitations, the extroverted nature of the human being, a power which pulls the awareness out into the world of the senses and sense objects, a condition which restricts the faculties to the outside, external, sensorial dimension.

Your mind, thoughts, expectations and aspirations are guided by *maya*. Even in the life of a spiritual aspirant, *maya* is very strong. Swami Sivananda, our paramguru, gives the example that people have different qualities and skills; someone can be a musician, someone can be an artist. These people with their different skills go and live in an ashram with their guru, and there they are given an avenue to express their skills. The musician may have a very good voice and be able to sing nice kirtans, so he is put in the kirtan group. Then, after some time *maya* takes over, and the singer begins to think, ‘Oh, I am a very good kirtanist.’ The spiritual understanding and awareness disappears and song or sound becomes a means to attract other people who can say, “Oh, this person sings very nicely.” When they say, “You sing very nice kirtan”, the musician begins to sing even louder, thinking, ‘These people like my song.’ This is an example of how *maya* can influence the mind without you knowing it.

Ahamkara and manas

Maya affects the ego, the ahamkara principle. When *ahamkara*, the ego identity, the self-identity, is associated with maya, it gives birth to many other expectations and desires, which are known as *vasanas*. *Vasanas* are inherent desires in everybody's life, and are also instincts. Sexuality is a *vasana* and also an instinct. Craving is a *vasana* and also an instinct. Fear is a *vasana* and also an instinct. Sleep is a *vasana* and also an instinct. When these desires arise due to the ego principle, they direct the actions, motivations and behaviours of the individual. Therefore, it is safe to say that despite you having *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*, you function in the realm of *ahamkara* and *manas*, and there is negation of *buddhi* and *chitta*. *Ahamkara*, the ego, under the influence of *maya*, is creating more *vasanas*, more desires, more expectations, more connections, and that is linked with *manas*.

Manas is responsible for your actions and behaviours. You use the mind to deal with the world. You use it to help you become happy, to attain success and to fulfil your desires. It is the mind that decides whether to act or not. If you are planning to steal, the thought is first generated in the mind. If you want to murder, the thought first enters the mind. The trouble with the mind is it can neither stop you from inappropriate actions nor encourage you towards appropriate action, as right and wrong are not subjects of *manas*.



Buddhi and chitta

As subject to *maya*, you are living in the world of *ahamkara* and *manas*. When you move into spiritual areas, you realize there is also *buddhi*, the faculty of discrimination and intelligence. You realize there is also *chitta*, the place where all the memories and *samskaras* are stored, from whence all *karmas* germinate. In normal life you are not aware of either *buddhi* or *chitta*. You are only a reactive person: *ahamkara* and *manas*, *manas* and *ahamkara*.

You need to become aware of *buddhi* and cultivate right understanding,

discrimination and intelligence, as it is buddhi that leads to dharma. *Dharma* involves knowing the difference between the appropriate and the inappropriate and acting according to what is appropriate, what is in keeping with dharma. In order to cultivate buddhi, mental education is necessary. Not school education, not college education, not university education; these outer educations highlight the interactive aspect of buddhi which connects you with the world, with your ego and manas. There is another aspect of buddhi, the higher intelligence, which has to become the knower. You may know many things, but you are not the knower of things. When you become the knower of things, you live what you know, and when you begin to live what you know and understand, that is the application of viveka. *Viveka*, the faculty of discrimination, is the strength of buddhi.

With the cultivation of awareness at the buddhi level, you become the witness of things that happen at other levels of your existence. You begin to explore your own mind, and in the process of exploring the mind you realize that there is the chitta, the place where all the impressions and samskaras are stored, where all the karmas germinate, and that these samskaras, karmas and memories actually guide the functions of your life and mind. When you become aware of chitta, you become the drashta. When you are able to observe, when you are able to realize the functions of chitta and manage them in a slightly better way, you become the observer, the seer of yourself, the *drashta* of yourself.

While a normal person in society lives with ahamkara and manas, a spiritual person becomes the experiencer and the witness of buddhi and chitta. Progress in spiritual life is indicated by the lessening of vasanas, the inherent desires which are related to the four instincts: the craving for satisfaction and fulfilment, the need to procreate, the insecurities and fears which make you lose your grip on life, and sleep, disconnection from the world.

Attachment of the senses

Why is it difficult to awaken viveka? Due to *vishayakara vritti* or the pull of the mind by sense objects. Each object is like a magnet and you are like a piece of iron. A magnet draws all iron pieces towards it. Similarly, the mind draws towards itself the experiences of the senses which are *rasa*, taste; *roopa*, form; *shabda*, sound; *sparsa*, touch; and *gandha*, smell. A nice form or a nice aroma attracts your mind. In this way, your mind is continuously pulled towards sense objects. When an iron piece comes within the field of a magnet, it cannot stop itself from being pulled towards it and getting stuck. Similarly, when the mind gets stuck to the object, it is difficult to free yourself. You need strength to become free, whereas getting stuck does not require any effort or strength. Therefore, when you want to come to terms with the mind, with its manifesting vishayakara vritti, you have to make a strong effort to release the mind from the magnetism of the sense objects.

The senses are attached to objects and not to the body. Their restlessness disturbs the body. The seers have said that the dissipation of the senses ruins the balance of the

body, depletes its energy, and weakens the brain. The mind is coloured by maya; it becomes immersed in it and imbibes the darkness of tamas. For this reason the seers conceptualized asanas; a specific group of practices, a method, a sequence through which the turbulent senses can be quietened. These senses are the five karmendriyas and the five jnanendriyas. The *karmendriyas* or organs of action are just tools. The source of distraction and also the source of knowledge are the *jnanendriyas*, the organs of perception. When you quieten the inner dissipation and arrest the scattered energies through the process of yoga asanas, then the *jnanendriyas* become the organs of knowledge. If you are unable to rest the restless senses, they become a source of trouble.



The *Yoga Sutras* state that you are attached and attracted to things which you believe will give you happiness and pleasure (2:7:3): *Sukhanushayi ragah*. The mind automatically moves towards those areas and things which you believe can fulfil your whims and desires, and provide happiness, contentment and fulfilment. This attraction and later attachment to the object of attraction is known as *raga*. It is an association, a connection, a deep identification and an intense involvement, which is predominantly sensorial, sensual, mental, emotional and ambitional.

Greed is an outcome of raga. When raga increases, you become bound to it. There is a saying, “When a fly tastes and sits on jaggery (coarse, dark liquidy sugar), its wings get stuck to it.” The fly continues to enjoy the jaggery, unaware that it is unable to extricate its wings and fly away. Raga prevents you from moving forward in life. You get stuck in the attraction. You forget yourself and the attraction becomes your objective in life, when turning away from raga or attraction should be the objective of life.

Everybody wants happiness; nobody wants sorrow. Raga and happiness are interconnected. You seek happiness or pleasure from that which you are attached to, that with which you have a connection. There is no expectation of happiness from that with which you are not attached. If you receive unhappiness from someone you are not attached to, you take it in your stride. Your attitude is, ‘Oh well, it is in that person’s nature to create trouble’; and you bear that sorrow with equanimity. There is an expectation of happiness wherever there is attachment, from whomever you consider to be your own. Where there is no attachment, there is no expectation of happiness.

Abhyasa and vairagya

The two components of sadhana are abhyasa and vairagya. It is stated in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:12): *Abhyaasavairagyaabhyaaam tannirodhah* – “It is only through abhyasa and vairagya that one can become free from the restrictive effects of sensorial life.” *Abhyasa* means practice and it is predominantly related to physical practice, sensorial practice, the physical participation in some activity. *Vairagya* is related to something mental: an attitude, a perception of how you can change your views towards your own life.

Vairagya is the absence of raga, the absence of attraction, deep identification and involvement. It is not separation or moving away from raga, it is being free from raga, the attachment. If you want to free yourself from the bondage of maya and the clutches of sense objects, make an effort to free yourself from the raga effect. This is *vairagya*. The sensorial rope which has bound you to the sense object has to be cut. Whether you accept the attachment or reject it is then your choice; you are free from that influence which binds you to an expectation, to a desire for personal fulfilment and satisfaction. Sri Krishna says that one must use the sword of non-attachment to free oneself from the bondages of the mind (*Bhagavad Gita* 15:3): *Asanga shastrena dridhena chhitwa*. What has been described as a weapon is a state of mind, the state of *vairagya*.

The quality of *vairagya* has to be cultivated and each individual must find their own way. Each person starts their journey from the station they are at. If from Munger you want to go to Delhi, you will start your journey in Munger. If you want to go to Delhi from Kolkata, you will start the journey from Kolkata. If you want to come to Delhi from London, you will start the journey from London. Each person will start their journey to the destined place from the place where they are. In the same manner, you have to start your journey wherever you are, in whatever state of mind you may be in. Recognize the predominant condition of your mind and use that to change yourself, to transform yourself to become better. *Vairagya* must be understood by people in relation to their own understanding and the approach they want to adopt in order to come to a point of transcendence and purity of mind, heart and spirit.

You cannot have *vairagya* without intelligence, as only when you develop understanding are you in a position to become aware of your attractions. In the absence of intelligence, there is no awareness. Without awareness it is not possible to know the object of attraction, what you are attracted to; and the positive or negative outcome of that interaction with raga. You have to start the process of *vairagya* by dealing with your mind, and this is where the four aspects of meditative awareness become important. These are *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

Pratyahara is the beginning of *vairagya*. When you practise *pratyahara*, you become aware of your inner mental processes. You begin to observe, analyze and modify them, and this inner awareness is the beginning of *vairagya*, not the conviction and determination that, ‘From today I am going to renounce this or that.’ That is not *vairagya*. That is mental stubbornness. *Vairagya* must be paired with *sankalpa*. Without *sankalpa* or clarity of mind *vairagya* can never be attained. With a confused mind, you cannot disassociate from the object of association. You cannot be free from the object of

identification. You need to have a clear mind, and you need to know what your intention is, and what your real uncoloured nature is.



Intention is the first factor that you must observe. What is your intention when you practise yoga? Why are you practising yoga? If your intention is just to feel good physically, then limit your practices to hatha yoga only. If your intention is to free yourself from stress, then limit your efforts to that purpose only. However, if your intention is to cultivate spiritual awareness, then make the necessary effort to cultivate that higher spiritual awareness. Often sankalpa is confused with stubbornness. Sankalpa is not stubbornness. Very few differentiate between these two and the majority think that their stubbornness is their sankalpa. On the contrary, it is through observation, through analysis, through modification and fine-tuning of your nature and expressions of the mind that you can come to the point of vairagya. The moment you become aware of yourself and begin to filter the unnecessary from the necessary in your life, is the beginning of vairagya. For this, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, the four aspects of the meditative state, have to be used effectively and efficiently.

Swadhyaya as a tool for vairagya

Another way to enhance vairagya is through *swadhyaya*, self-study. When you study and observe yourself, you start a new train of thought, a new area of contemplation. This series of thoughts will propel you to decide what is *dharma* and *adharma*, the right and the wrong, the just and the unjust. When that seed grows in you and the difference between right and wrong, just and unjust becomes clear, then the awareness awakens within you. In the absence of awareness, that person remains involved in the karmas which cause bondage.

Ninety-nine percent of the people stay enwrapped in their karmas. However, there is another way of living, and that is living in association with dharma. It is necessary to know the difference between karma and dharma in life. In material life you live by

associating with karma, and when the spiritual fire awakens within you then you live dharma. Therefore, the basis of the material mind is karma and the basis of the spiritual mind is dharma.

A sannyasin must follow the dharma. Here dharma does not indicate the rituals of worship, pooja, dogma, belief, and so on, but relates to *sanatana dharma* or the eternal reality. This eternal reality takes on the form of an awareness, an understanding, an interaction, a connection, an obligation, a duty. This wisdom or abidance of dharma stops an individual from negative actions or from treading the wrong path. Dharma is the only medicine through which you can find relief from your stresses, troubles and worries. It is due to the lack of wisdom or dharmic awareness that nescience casts a shadow over life.

For many, life is spent between karma and dharma. You have a dharma towards your family, husband or wife, children, parents, profession, society, nation and towards life itself. When you act from dharma, the sentiment is that of duty or inborn commitment. When you act from karma, there is expectation. When you do something for your child, you do not do it with a selfish motive or desire. You see yourself in your child and since you identify with your child you are willing to sacrifice everything for him. If your child gets sick, you will stay up all night looking after him. That is dharma. When you go to work, to your business or job, that is karma. This is because you see yourself as separate from the situation. When you realize that you are the experience, you live by dharma. You must connect with both karma and dharma, as karma takes you towards attachment and dharma towards liberation.

In the *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana makes a statement: *Jaanaami dharmam na cha mein pravrittih* – “I know what dharma is, but I am not inclined towards it.” *Jaanaami adharmam na cha mein nivrittih* – “I know what adharma is, but I cannot free myself from it. I am not interested in dharma, and I cannot free myself from adharma.” Duryodhana is able to see the difference between adharma and dharma, so why isn’t he able to make a choice? Simply because he has no awareness. He has knowledge, but not the understanding to experience the wrong and the right. This is where swadhyaya comes in. Both knowledge and awareness are needed. Knowledge allows you to know the difference, and awareness can correct your actions. This is one way to stay free from the attractions or raga. The method is swadhyaya, self-study and awareness.

Abhyasa

Vairagya is for the mind, for manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas, to change the quality of the mind, and *abhyasa* or practice is for the body, for the senses, the annamaya and pranamaya koshas. The senses have to be mastered. You are not the master of your senses, as the senses and the mind move together. When you look at something, your eyes are looking at the object but your mind is recognizing it. When you hear a sound, your ears are hearing the sound but your mind is identifying the sound. When you smell something, your nose is smelling but your mind is identifying the smell. In this manner, the senses and the mind move together. Therefore, when working at the level of

vairagya, managing the extroverted vrittis of the mind, you have to reduce your sensory inputs, your sensory involvement with sense objects. However, the influence of vairagya on sensory inputs and outputs is minimal, as the attempt is to manage the mental response to raga and dwesha arising out of sensorial interaction.

Abhyasa is for the senses. How do you channel the senses? First understand their actions, know them. Often when you see something, the awareness is spontaneously directed towards it. What you see can be anything: a boy, a girl, a house, a television, a car, property. When you see that object, you become connected to it and consequently develop a feeling towards it. You see a good car and a desire immediately attaches itself to it. You see appetizing food, and a desire immediately attaches itself to it.

When you see that the mind is attaching itself to something, then just hold back for a minute, withdraw for a minute and ask yourself, “How will the object my mind is leaning towards benefit me in the long run?” After all, you also get pleasure from scratching yourself. Do you accept scratching as a thing of pleasure? No, as you know that an itch is not a normal condition of the body. Similarly, analyze how you will be benefited by acquiring any object of pleasure. What will be the end result of your mind attaching itself to that particular sense object? Slowly increase this capacity to see the situation, the object or the environment clearly, before the mind becomes coloured by raga.

Once, in one experiment, a single-cell bacteria was put on a table and in front of it were placed one grain of rice and one drop of acid. The cell has no mind and yet it went towards the grain of rice and did not invite self-destruction by going towards the acid. How did this single cell, which has no mind, no brain, no intellect, chitta, ego or ahamkara, decide what was good for it and what was bad, when you, the human being who has a mind, intellect, ahamkara and chitta, cannot decide what is right for you and what is wrong?

Drashta bhava

Yogic philosophies state that see everything from the perspective of a witness; see every situation not once but twice and then decide. This is *drashta bhava*, the ability to see oneself interacting in life. When you do this repeatedly, you are slowly freed from the clutches of raga. It means that the cause of your attachment to the objects of the senses is no longer there. The word for attachment is *asakti*, a-sakti, which means ‘that which can come’, but not go!

Through the practice of drashta bhava, stop the mind from attaching to objects. Understand the appropriateness or unsuitability of an object and situation, and mould your thought, behaviour and action accordingly.



Tapasya

Abhyasa begins with the body. There are many ways to restrict the senses from getting lost in the maze of sense objects. Tapasya is one form of austerity in which you force the body and mind to live in a particular manner. Austerities are difficult. In the stories of yogis, they used to practise a lot of austerities. In winter, they would stand waist deep in freezing cold water and do their anushthana. You have seen and heard of Sri Swamiji practising his panchagni sadhana surrounded by fires the whole summer months. That is *tapasya* ; placing the body and mind in extreme conditions so that the reactions and responses of the body and the senses can be gauged.

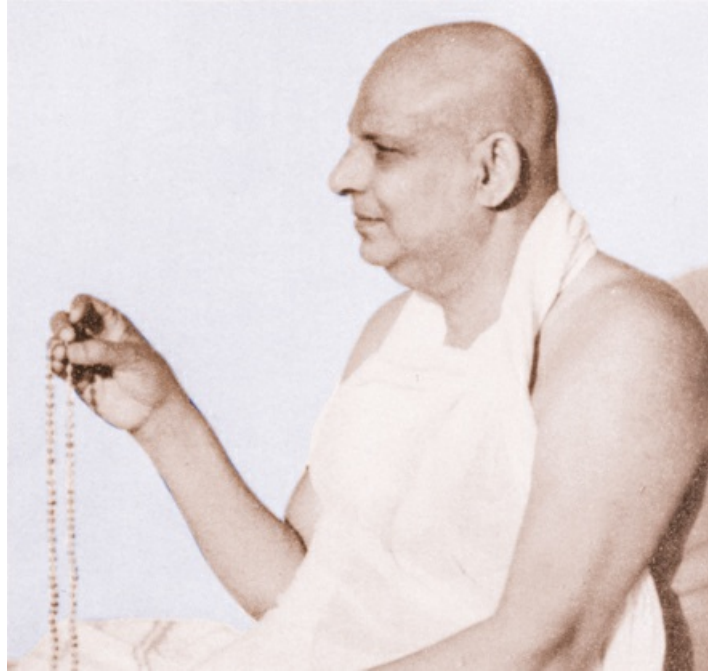
Normally all beings love comfort, enjoyment and luxuries, and do not want to strive to do anything. If you can achieve things without austerity, you will be happy. If by doing nothing you can become self-realized, you will be even happier. The normal trait of the human mind is not to make any effort at all, and where effort has to be made there is always a rejection in the beginning: “No, I don’t want to do it . . . Ok, I will try it, if it is too difficult then I am not going to do it.” People try to figure out the benefits of the effort to determine if it is worth it. If you feel the effort does not match the gain, you will not make the effort. This always happens, even with asana practice. There are certain asanas you are comfortable with, so you practise them continuously for years, and there are certain postures you cannot do, so you find a way out and say, “I will break my knee if I do that asana. I’d better not do it.” Even in this asana practice you are not willing to subject yourself to hardship. You prefer to do things in a manner where you can avoid hardship and still get the full benefits. Tapasya is the opposite of this.

Tapasya strengthens the body, the brain and the mind. It does not allow the senses to become weak, as in the normal course of life the senses do become weak. As you age, there are changes in the body: the sight goes, glasses are put on; the teeth go, false teeth are put in; the knees go, knees are replaced. With old age even the senses become old; however, the expectations from the senses still remain young. People may be old, but desires are young. The nature of the senses is like the flow of a river. The river only

moves in one direction, from its source to its point of merger with the ocean. The same is true of the senses. They will always move in one direction, outwards. These senses change the behaviour of the mind. Tapasya, austerities, or even physical sadhanas like hatha yoga, help to control and guide the behaviour of the physical senses.

Once at a program in Europe, after doing the Shanti Path, I asked the audience to open their eyes, and everybody expected me to start my lecture. I just sat there quietly, looking at everybody, and everybody was looking at me and smiling. For five minutes I did not say anything, rather I silently watched everybody and they were all fidgety, wondering what was happening. They were fidgeting in the mind and also in the body. Some people thought that Shanti Path was the lecture and they started to leave thinking, 'We have heard the lecture in Sanskrit.' Somebody thought, 'Swamiji is going in silence today.' Everybody had their own view and opinion. After five minutes I asked them, "How many of you were able to sit quietly in these last five minutes?" Nobody raised their hand. Everybody was fidgeting, everybody was moving. It showed that if the mind is agitated then even the senses are agitated; you cannot sit quietly. However, if you can sit quietly for five minutes with control over the senses and the sensory inputs, then the mind will automatically become quiet.

Sitting still is a tapasya. It is an austerity, as it is against the nature of the senses. Keeping the mind empty is also tapasya because it is against the nature of the mind to be empty. Some imp will always be playing around in the football field of the mind, kicking the ball here, there and everywhere. Therefore, taking the body to the extreme conditions in order to control the responses and the behaviour of the senses is also a sadhana. Yet, not everybody can do it, as sadhana really means exerting yourself beyond your capacity. That is why abhyasa is that which is done repeatedly. Doing anything once is not abhyasa; that is called *kriya*, an act. When something is done repeatedly, that is abhyasa, and when an effort is made to take it to its completion, that is sadhana.



Hatha yoga

There are complex sadhanas and there are simple sadhanas. The simple sadhana for the body is hatha yoga. Even in hatha yoga, you are not proficient in all the practices that you learn from the teacher. You select a few that you enjoy doing and become proficient in those. That yoga does not lead you anywhere. You have only selected six or seven postures that you enjoy doing, with which you can stretch your body, stretch your muscles, bend forward or backward in front of the mirror, see yourself, be happy and tell everyone, “I am able to touch my toes.” That is not sadhana. That is your choice.

In sadhana, it is not your choice that is important. It is the system that becomes important. A real yogi or a real practitioner is one who follows the system, not the whim of the mind. In this way, tapasya, hatha yoga, these different varieties of practices, become the sadhana for the body. They divert and redirect the pranas going out of the body through the senses back into the self, and that is the real purpose of asana. Not health, not wellbeing; the purpose of asana is redirecting the pranic flow from the sensory channels back within oneself.

Mantra yoga

Another practice about which Sri Swamiji has spoken is the practice of mantra. Sri Swamiji says that it doesn't matter whether you do hatha yoga or raja yoga, it doesn't matter whether or not you do hard austerities, but if you practise your mantra properly it becomes the finest and final sadhana of your life. It is the first sadhana and it is the last. Sri Swamiji says, “I have tried everything. I have tried hatha yoga, I have tried kriya yoga, I have tried kundalini yoga, I have tried laya yoga; I have tried every type of yoga, but the practice which gave me peace and inner awakening was the mantra.” It was the

mantra that he had received from his guru which he continued until the end.

Three things are needed in order to practise mantra sadhana. A psychic symbol is required to focus the mind. The mind has to be focused on the symbol. All the powers, faculties and energies of the mind will converge at that symbol. Then the mind becomes like the magnifying glass that you put out in the sun to harness and focus the rays of the sun to one point. That is the psychic symbol. It is like a magnifying glass, being used to focus the powers of the mind and give them intensity.

Second is breath. If you can regulate your breath then you can regulate the pranic flow in all the sensory channels. From a yogic perspective, it is the breath that directs your mind outwards into the world. When you inhale the mind becomes introverted, when you exhale the mind becomes extroverted. When you hold the breath the mind becomes stable. Therefore, regulating the breath through pranayama, or regulating the length of the breath by breathing at different speeds and ratios, alters the flow of prana shakti in the sensory channels.

Psychic symbol, psychic breath, and the mantra which is the psychic sound: these three become a powerful tool of sadhana as they work both on the mind and the senses. The meditative aspects will only work on the mind and the physical aspects will work only on the sensory channels; however, the mantra with symbol and breath will work at both levels.

The effect of the mantra is so powerful that if you can remain constantly aware of the mantra for twenty-four hours, you can bypass and transcend the physical and psychological limitations. When Sri Swamiji was practising his sadhanas, he would say, "Do not come to visit me. If you come I will be distracted. Do not talk to me. If you speak, my attention will be diverted from the mantra to what you are saying." Sri Swamiji made it very clear that there could not be any visits, there could not be any talk, there could not be any interaction with him. He had to be free from meeting everyone, from interacting with all, so that he could focus on the repetition of the mantra for twenty-four hours without break. If that intensity of concentration and focus can develop, vairagya will enter the mind and abhyasa will be perfected by the body. This was the ultimate tool, the final tool that Sri Swamiji used to set an example on this yogic journey, and we have his teaching to guide us.

The guru mantra is the sadhana given by the guru for spiritual growth and spiritual development. Asanas, pranayamas, hatha yoga and shatkarmas are not sadhanas given by the guru. They are taught in a class for you to come to a point of harmony and purity in the body, the senses and the mind. The sadhana which the guru gives is the mantra, and that mantra when combined with symbol and breath, works both at the level of the mind and the senses, cultivating vairagya in the mind and stillness in the sensory vrittis.

If you practise mantra japa with faith and belief, your mind will turn away from raga. The seers have explained this by saying: *Mananat trayate iti mantrah* – "The mind is liberated through mantra." The bondage of the mind is raga; therefore, through mantra the mind becomes free from its self-created bondage. As long as do your mantra with faith, belief and feeling, it does not matter if you have never before done any

practices. Everybody should do mantra japa. Mantra is one of the biggest contributions of the Indian culture to the global culture. There is no other culture in the world that has talked about mantra, and people have accepted and imbibed it.

When a child runs to his parents, he does not plan it. He just goes with simple innocence and faith. The love between a child and parent is simple and natural. If this feeling was not spontaneous and natural, they would not desire each other. This is how you should do mantra japa, with a spontaneous feeling, with faith and dedication, so that you can connect with the divine qualities and be free of the colouring of maya.

Cleansing process of sadhana

When you start your mantra practice, or when you start any sadhana, be ready to confront the negative aspect of yourself, for that will be the first thing you will face. The negative aspects that will come up are six: obsessive desires, aggressiveness, greed, infatuation, delusion and envy. These are the six negative traits of mind that will come up first in any sadhana, in any practice, as your mind and sentiments are all coloured by the tamasic nature of the world.

Kamah krodhah cha lobhah cha dehe tishthanti taskarah – “Passion, anger, greed and other negative qualities reside in the individual as thieves.” They steal the jewel of inner wisdom or *jnana*. When that inner wisdom is gone, you enter the dark realm of avidya, ignorance. When there is ignorance, you become bound by the chain of vasanas, desires. Through sadhana you become free from these negative qualities.

The pot is not clean, so when you start your sadhana, first the pot has to be cleaned. All the dross, all the gross nature will come to the surface. All the things you have disliked and liked will come to the surface. This is where people have to learn how to accept the change. People do not accept it. When the negative things come up, they say, “This can’t be me”, as they have a different opinion and projection of themselves.

Few people realize the dross that is contained deep inside them. This dross, this gross nature is what comes up first in its six forms. You have to continue with your practice and allow the dirt to come out. However, allowing the dirt to come out does not mean that you become dirty. There has to be *sanyam* or restraint even then. Be an observer, accept it, allow it to come out and know that it is a process of inner cleansing. As long as you keep in mind that what you are experiencing is a process of inner cleansing you will be all right, but as and when you begin to identify with what is coming up, your mind will become negative due to that influence. I have seen this happen in the life of many aspirants. They start their sadhana, the gross nature comes up powerfully, intensely, they get carried away by the force of this deformed state of mind and are unable find their balance again. The reason is very simple; they are not willing to confront the negative within themselves.

When food is cooked in any pan, something will be stuck to the bottom and it will burn. Whenever you cook any samskara, any karma or any vasana in your mind, some residue will always remain at the bottom of the pot, no matter how you cook. Practice and sadhana clear that residue. Sometimes you have to scrub very hard with full force,

and that, people cannot understand. They say, “How come I have to work so hard to clear my mind? Why doesn’t it happen easily?” People expect only good things to happen to them. That shows a lack of understanding about life. Lack of understanding about life makes one expect only the good, while understanding of life allows one to accept both the negative and positive with equal vision.

Requirements of Sadhana

7 April 2011

The aim of sadhana is perfection. When you achieve perfection in your actions then you achieve perfection in your sadhana and not before. Sadhana is necessary to perfect the imperfect karmas, to ripen and perfect the unripe senses and to focus the scattered and dissipated energies of the mind. Sadhana becomes the medium through which you can awaken the higher qualities. If you do not do sadhana, you cannot awaken the spiritual qualities. This is the truth of the matter.

Sadhana is effort

If you want to make a statue, you need to make use of a chisel and hammer. You need to work on the surface layer of the rock to bring out the beautiful statue that is inherent in the stone. The same logic applies to your life. However, you do not want to make the effort of using the chisel and hammer. You want attainment without effort, without hard work. You go to a temple, church or mosque and pray to God for relief from suffering without making any effort. You go to saints and mahatmas and seek their blessings for relief from suffering, but you do not want to do anything; you want someone else to do everything for you.

Everybody likes comfort and wants to stay away from trouble and *purushartha*, effort. If you have this type of mentality then you also have to accept that you will not overcome the situations you are facing in life. Suffering becomes the cause of *purushartha*. Unless suffering comes, no effort is made. As long as you are happy, you will live in complacency. There is a saying: *Dukh mein sumiran karen, sukh mein karen na koi* – “Nobody remembers God during times of happiness, but only during times of trouble.” Only when suffering comes do you make the effort to get rid of that suffering. Society sees suffering as a curse, but in reality suffering is a blessing, as it increases your willpower, faith, feeling and surrender.

Sadhana is the real *purushartha* or effort in life. Striving to get ahead in work and increase the number of your possessions is karma and not *purushartha*. Likewise, making the effort to keep your family happy is karma, not *purushartha*. *Purushartha* is the effort through which you attain peace and happiness in life, and which releases you from the bondage of life. You become like the lotus flower that grows in stagnant and muddy water, but is not affected by its surroundings. When you are untouched by the

disturbances of worldly life, your inner beauty blooms and your inner peace manifests.

Choosing your sadhana

Different sadhanas suit different people. The *sadhana* or practice of a normal person in society is not the same as the sadhana and practice of a sannyasin. Similarly, the sadhanas and practices that sannyasins do are not the same as the advanced sadhanas that have been given to people of a rare calibre.

What is the requirement of a person living in society? Health can be one requirement, peace can be another and inner contentment is the third. Beyond these, a normal person does not need to go any further, nor is it their intention to. The social person is looking for ways to improve the quality of their life: the quality of their health, how to manage tensions and stresses, how to relax, how to focus and concentrate, how to connect with the inherent creativity and how to express that creativity in normal, daily performance. Therefore, the sadhana must be geared for this purpose only.



When you go to a doctor, you tell the doctor your problem. If you are suffering from respiratory disorders, the doctor must treat you for respiratory disorders. The doctor does not say, “Look, in the future you might also get diabetes so take diabetic pills. In the future you may get arthritis and rheumatism, so take rheumatic pills as well. In the future you may get heart problems so take blood thinners.” The doctor does not say all that. The doctor only treats the condition that the patient has expressed. If the doctor says, “Look, I’m going to treat you for asthma but I’m also going to give you medicine for diabetes and arthritis just in case” then that is not the call of the doctor.

Now apply the same logic to yourself, especially if you are a yoga teacher. A person comes to learn how to relax, but you are telling him how to evolve spiritually, meaning that your teaching is wrong in the first place. A person comes who wants to learn how to concentrate, but then you are telling him everything: read this book, read that book, listen to this satsang, listen to that satsang, get inspired; all nonsense. This is a major

problem with sannyasins and yoga teachers. If somebody comes to learn meditation and after a month you are telling them that they should practise kriya yoga and kundalini yoga because it will help them to deepen their meditation, it is unnecessary, as kriya yoga or kundalini yoga is not the requirement of the student.

The purpose of sadhana for students who are living a normal social life is very different from that of people who come with some spiritual inclination, and you cannot mix the two. It is because people mix so many different ideas and practices that sadhanas become ineffective. Therefore, everyone should realize that specific systems of sadhana exist for different groups of people.

When I used to travel I would give 'yoga capsules' or sets of practices, and they were very limited and restricted only to certain practices for the common person. If I found that somebody was not receptive to understanding a higher thing, I would revert back to a lower thing. Once, I had been called to Switzerland to conduct a kriya yoga course for all the top yoga teachers in Europe. That is how it was advertised and that is what people had paid for. In the introductory lecture I asked them, "You have all come here to learn kriya yoga but tell me, do you know the basic yoga?" They said, "Oh yes, we are all yoga teachers. We can do this posture, we can do that posture, we can do this practice and that practice." I said, "Wonderful. Do you know pawanmuktasana?" Everybody shook their head. I said, "All right, instead of kriya yoga, this week is dedicated to the practice of pawanmuktasana." I changed the entire routine and syllabus of the people who had come to learn kriya yoga. They did not learn it; I did not teach them. I told them, "If you don't know the basics, then perfect the basics first."

What would another person have done? "You said kriya yoga? That is nothing. I will teach you kundalini yoga." Another teacher would have tried to show off, "I know something better than kriya yoga" and spoken of all sorts of theories and philosophies which would go above the heads of everyone, including the teacher, as teachers can be the most inexperienced people. They have the certificate of a teacher but they themselves do not practise. They think, 'Oh, I have become a teacher, so I don't need to practise any more. What I teach is for other people to practise.'

When sadhana is given to a normal social person, the purpose of that sadhana has to be known, and for sannyasins who are trying to transcend their own mind and limitations, a different group of sadhana is to be given. I consider these two different sadhanas, one for the social person and one for the spiritual person, as two different forms of education.

The sadhana that is given to normal people is the sadhana of engineering or the education of engineering. You have to learn how to practise engineering the body, the mind and the senses. With the right engineering, you can improve the responses of the body, the responses of the brain and the responses of the mind. This helps you to become fit for your position in life. The most important area for a householder is karma. You should strive to perform appropriate karma. If your karmas are appropriate, the results will bring happiness. If the karmas are inappropriate, they will bring unhappiness. You cannot go beyond this. You perform an action, and accept and

live with the result. The sadhana of engineering trains you on how not to become bound by karma and to use it as a medium to uplift yourself.

For the spiritual people the sadhana is that of medical education, not engineering. It is the education of medicine. Why medicine? It is because you have to know the systems that make this body tick. You have to know the systems that make the mind tick. You have to know the mechanics of body, mind, emotions and spirit.

The intention of both of these sadhanas is different. The normal person, the householder, wishes to enjoy life and the spiritual person, the sannyasin, wishes to transcend life. The normal person wants to be comfortable, happy, contented and fulfilled in their own nest in society, and the spiritual person wants to let go of their associations and attachments. A sannyasin does not desire peace, happiness and prosperity, but aspires for restraint and surrender, and tries to stand on his own feet. A sannyasin tries to realize his potential and inner strength. Therefore, the systems differ for each one. The sadhana of a sannyasin is not relevant for a householder. Similarly, the sadhana of a paramahansa is not relevant for a sannyasin.

Householder sadhana

Let us look at the sadhana of a householder first. Comfort or *sukha* is the first requirement and this comfort is physical, psychological, and internal. Comfort indicates a state of harmony and balance in the body. It indicates a state of the body free from every kind of illness, disease or imbalance. Imbalances and diseases indicate a state of discomfort that is arising either in the body or the mind. Therefore, the first thing that you are looking for is *sukha*, and this relates to physical health, mental health and spiritual health.

What are the practices that can be utilized to attain comfort, harmony and balance, and remove illnesses and imbalances from the body? Asanas, pranayamas, shatkarmas and all the other systems of raja yoga can help bring about this physical and psychological balance. For the attainment of comfort, health and wellbeing, the maximum you need to practise is asana, pranayama, shatkarma and certain aspects of raja yoga. Anything you do beyond this is extra and unnecessary. You can do it as a choice, but your choice has no relevance to the sadhana which has been taught to you by the teacher to reach a specific aim.

The second requirement of the householder is peace: to be free from tensions, anxieties and the negative and positive inputs in the mind which disturb the mental moods and behaviour. For the attainment of peace, the meditative processes of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana are the main sadhana. The primary focus for those people who want peace and who want to manage the disturbed mental states is the system of meditation.

What type of meditation? At night, before going to sleep, sit alone for five minutes. Relax the body, become still and steady, and tell your mind, 'I not the body, nor am I the fleeting experiences connected with the senses or the body.' Whether it is hot or cold, whether a mosquito bites you, pay no heed. Withdraw yourself for five minutes.

Once you are able to separate yourself from the body, say, “I am not the mind, nor any experiences connected with the mind: neither happiness nor suffering, neither contentment nor want, neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction, nothing.” Disassociate yourself from the mind. When you are connected with neither the body nor the mind, what are you? You are *chaitanya jyoti*, flame of consciousness. The flame stands for illumination. This is the nature of the self, which is there in all beings. Deep within your heart see yourself as the flame of consciousness, and the light spread to every corner of your body. Say to yourself, “I am not the body, nor the mind, nor any experiences connected with them. I am chaitanya jyoti.” Experience this light within and go to sleep.

Everyone connects and identifies with the body and accepts that as the totality of existence. It is said: *Shariramadyam khalu dharma sadhanam* – “The body is the medium for fulfilling the dharma in life.” That is acceptable. Keep in mind, however, that the body is also responsible for suffering in life. If the mind can be connected to the gods, then it can also be connected to the demons. It can have both of these qualities. The body can be a cause for both suffering and happiness. That is why you need to cut off your identification with the senses and the body for five minutes every day. When you are neither the body nor the mind, then you are chaitanya jyoti. Connect yourself with that jyoti for five minutes. If you do this for three days, five days, one week, you will slowly become a *drashta* or seer of your mental tensions, and solutions to your problems will be revealed.

The third requirement is contentment and prosperity, both internal and external. For that, mantra and various aspects of bhakti have to be incorporated, as mantra and bhakti combined become a very powerful psychological tool to change the thoughts and the behaviour of the mind. Mantra combined with different components and sadhanas of bhakti plays a major role in the management of the unconscious inhibitions and complexes, and in the management of distorted samskaras and karmic influences. Only when you are able to manage these distorted mental conditions will your emotions find peace. The main understanding of bhakti yoga is how to stop the dissipation and distortions of the mental nature, and when mantra is associated with this bhakti process, it becomes a powerful tool for the attainment of inner contentment and prosperity.

There is a couplet in Hindi that says, “You can have plenty of elephants and horses, plenty of diamonds, gold and jewellery, but they are like dust when compared to the wealth of contentment within your self.” You can have wealth, you can have prosperity, but if there is no contentment then wealth has no meaning. You may be rich, but you will not be happy, you will not be satisfied and you will not be content. However, if contentment is there, then that is the ultimate prosperity. Whether you are rich or poor, it makes no difference. Whether you have money or have to beg for your meals, it makes no difference. Contentment is the highest wealth that any individual can have; it is satisfaction. This contentment and satisfaction is the outcome of mantra and bhakti combined. This is the main sadhana for a *grihastha*, for a social person, nothing more than this. Doing just this much will change the quality of their life. It will make them happier, healthier, more prosperous and more peaceful.

Sannyasa sadhana

For a person who is dedicated to realizing their spiritual nature, the sadhana is different. A sannyasin is not looking for material prosperity or happiness. He is looking for *jnana* or wisdom, which will connect him with his *ishta*, chosen deity. He is looking for the experience which can give him this connection. Although even sannyasins start with asana, pranayama and the normal systems of sadhana, after coming to the point of contentment, the sadhana changes. This is because by the time you come to the point of contentment, your direction in life becomes clear, you know what you want to do. It becomes clear to you that you want to pursue the spiritual life, you want to transcend the limitations of your mind, you want to go beyond the *vasanas* or subtle desires of the mind, overcome your ego and go beyond the limitations of nature. To achieve this, sannyasins have to work hard, engage in different austerities and other sadhanas given by the guru. Therefore, when the thoughts about transcending the normal conditions and states of existence begin, the sadhana must change.



The sadhana in the life of a sannyasin is sannyasa itself. Sannyasa sadhana has five components: *seva*, service; *swadhyaya*, study; *sanyam*, restraint; *samarpan*, surrender; and *satsang*, understanding the spiritual precepts. It is these five elements that constitute the sadhana of a sannyasin. After having gone through asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, hatha yoga, raja yoga, mantra and bhakti, these five aspects of the sannyasa sadhana are to be lived in the company of the guru.

Seva, one can understand as selfless service. Swadhyaya is the study of literatures and the self. Sanyam is the need to restrain oneself. Satsang allows you to have a different perspective or attitude.

The final sadhana, samarpan, is hard to understand. How does one understand surrender? Samarpan is not whimsical surrender. A person came to me and said, "Please initiate me. I want to become your disciple." I asked, "If you become a disciple then what will you give me? You want to become a disciple for free?" He said, "Swamiji, I will give you my body, I will give you my mind, I will give you my spirit." I said, "Fair enough" and initiated that person and told him to go home and do his practices on a regular basis. That person had a mango orchard, so when the season came I sent a note to him saying, "Please send some mangoes for the swamis of the ashram." I got the reply, "Swamiji, I have given you my body, mind and spirit, but not my mangoes!" In this case, surrender was whimsical. When you feel that you cannot manage yourself you say, "I surrender" and let the guru do everything, but when you know you are in control and there is no need for the guru to do anything for you, then surrender goes away.

Learning to surrender, to let go, is the hardest thing in life. This is what people in the West refer to as being 'brainwashed'. I do not agree with the term 'brainwashing' as nobody can brainwash anyone, but that is how the westerners view it; they say, "This person has been brainwashed." For many westerners surrender means brainwashing, letting go of everything, especially their wealth, as that is what many people do; when you surrender you give everything. Nevertheless, the tricks of surrender have to be learned by following the directions of the teacher, of the master, and therefore the ashram plays a major role in the life of a sannyasin, as the sadhana takes place in the ashram, in a closed environment.

Those people who have lived in an ashram know the difficulties of being surrounded by the same people day in and day out with no new faces seen, except when there are courses and classes. Ashram life is therefore challenging because the faces do not change and you have to interact with the same people, in happiness and sorrow, in contentment and pain. Sometimes there is a friction between the boss and the co-worker and they also have to sleep in the same room. There is no change. Ashram life does become very challenging at times.

You confront yourself in an ashram. You become your biggest enemy and your best friend. No one else is your friend and no one else is your enemy. If you can surrender to the divine then you become friends with everyone, including yourself, but if you struggle then you become the enemy of yourself and everyone else. This lesson is learned in the ashram. It becomes the ground where you learn how to develop immunity from the different situations and circumstances of life. The sadhana of *sharanagati* or self-surrender is the last sadhana for a sannyasin. He has to live the precept: *Jehi vidhi rakhe Rama tehi vidhi rahiyo, Sita-Rama Sita-Rama Sita-Rama kahiyo* – "Whatever situation Lord Rama puts you in, remain there, and ceaselessly repeat His name." This is the sadhana of sannyasins.

The five sannyasa sadhanas have to be completed in the presence of the guru. They

are for those people who want to cultivate their spiritual awareness, their spiritual life and who want to dedicate themselves and focus on the realization of their nature. This has to be done under the direction and guidance of the guru.

Often people come to me and say, “Swamiji, I’ve been here for some time and now I am going to go away and I don’t know when I am going to come back. Please give me sannyasa as I don’t know if I can come back to India again or not.” They are leaving tomorrow and they want to take sannyasa today, while telling me that they will not be able to come back, meaning there will be no sannyasa training at all. In which case, why give poorna sannyasa? I say, “No, sorry, it is not for you”, as I am not in the business of pleasing anyone. If I have to please somebody it must be my God and my guru. I don’t have to please any Tom, Dick and Harry to satisfy their whim, and I cannot break the rules and the systems.

What is sannyasa for you anyway? You do not even know what sannyasa is. For many people, sannyasa means being part of a club, a spiritual club; being part of a group, part of a community, without knowing the systems, the disciplines or the requirements of this blessed tradition. Therefore, since the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth, no initiations are to be given anywhere in the world except in Sannyasa Peeth, as there has to be a proper awareness of the journey that you are wanting to undertake.

Sadhana for the few

There is another progression of sadhana for sannyasins who have gone a long distance, such as Sri Swamiji. When he left the ashram in 1988, Sri Swamiji lived in seclusion and isolation in Rikhia for many years. There he practised very intense and harsh sadhanas which a normal person cannot even conceive of doing, but he did it. Why did he need to do it? He did it to establish a system, a tradition, an understanding of the process and the path that a serious spiritual aspirant has to take. Those sadhanas, which were performed by Sri Swamiji, are impossible for normal people and also sannyasins. Most of them are going through the process of spiritual discovery, but they stop at a point where they feel comfortable and have the support of society, friends and family. They have a little ashram, a little group, a few resources and some finances and think they have become gurus, and are happy. There are very few sannyasins of the calibre of Sri Swamiji.



Sri Swamiji was very clear. He said, “I did all this to free myself from my own karmas, my own expectations, desires and ego.” Sri Swamiji had that knowledge, that understanding. He knew when he was free from his karmas. He had that awareness. You have seen Sri Swamiji as a guru; you haven’t seen him as a sannyasin. You have heard him speaking and thought, ‘Oh, he speaks wonderfully well,’ but you do not know the intensity of his sadhana. Some people have had the opportunity to witness it during panchagni and other periods, and those who have seen the intensity of his sadhanas cannot believe or imagine that a person can go to that length, to that extreme, where each atom of the body, each cell of the body, begins to vibrate and pulsate with spiritual power and force.

Bhakti yoga sadhana

While there are specific sadhanas for householders and sannyasins, there is one sadhana that applies to all. It is the sadhana of *bhakti yoga*, the practice of awakening and purifying the emotions. If you want God’s grace in your life, this is the way.

The scriptures define many different types of emotions to connect with the divine: *vatsalya bhava*, motherly love; *dasya bhava*, servant’s devotion; *vaira bhava*, enmity; *madhurya bhava*, lover’s passion. Relationships that are based on emotions are simple and the intellect has no role to play in them. All these emotions can awaken bhakti, and those who can awaken bhakti, receive the blessing of jnana.

When the awakening of bhakti takes place, you reach a very special state: continuous remembrance. It is just like a mother who always has her child on her mind. Arjuna says to Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Show me a simple way to connect with you.” Sri Krishna replies, “Absorb your mind in me.” Arjuna says, “Sorry, not possible. The nature of the mind is to run wild. How will it stay still on one point? Please show me another way.” Sri Krishna thinks about it and says, “In that case, through the intellect,

think of me sometimes.” Arjuna finds this also too difficult. Intellect is always involved in give and take, profit and loss. He asks for another way. Now Sri Krishna says, “Everything I try to suggest, you negate. Well, okay. Here’s another way. Believe that you reside in me.” Do not consider the world as your home, but as God’s home and yourself as His tenant. When you go to a temple you always try to think good thoughts. Since you are in front of God, you want to keep the negative away. You always maintain a certain decorum. This brings a change in your life. Until today you have lived in the world thinking it is yours and behaved in any manner you please. If you consider yourself a tenant in God’s home, you will think of what is appropriate and inappropriate and act accordingly. That will beautify your life. You will live a dignified life.

Wherever you live, in India, the US, Spain, Japan or Colombia, you live by the laws, rules and regulations of that country. The thinking needs to change according to what is appropriate there. Similarly, this entire creation is governed by God. You are his tenant. You rent a house to live in, do your work and when the time comes you give it up and leave. What is fifty, sixty or eighty years in infinity? It is the blink of an eye. You spend it throwing tantrums, kicking and screaming because you seek happiness. All your efforts are towards acquiring happiness.

How can you live a contented life? The answer is clear. Be a tenant. When you change your outlook, the way you live changes. Your karma changes, as then the light within shines and you know that the source of happiness is within, not outside of you. A deer has musk hidden in its navel, but it runs all through the forest searching for that aroma. Similarly, the transcendental reality is within you, but you keep on searching for it externally. You cannot have God’s darshan in meditation, in tapasya or sadhana, but you can have it through your *bhavana*, sentiment.

Bhakti is not devotion. Bhakti is a term that indicates an awakened emotional sensitivity. Devotion is one interpretation of it, but in reality it is the purity of your sentiments which is reflected in bhakti. Bhakti cannot be learned as a practice, as it is a process of the mind. When somebody puts a bundle of money in front of you, what feeling is evoked within you? Greed. When a beautiful child comes before you, what feeling does it evoke? Affection. When your rival comes before you, a feeling of enmity arises. These feelings arise spontaneously without any training. Similarly, bhakti is respect, faith and trust. Bhakti means the lessening of ego. Through bhakti, the influence of *ahamkara* or ego becomes less in your life.



Stages of bhakti

Bhakti yoga has nine stages. It is called *navanga yoga*, the ninefold path of yoga. Just as there is *ashtanga yoga*, the eightfold path of yoga indicating the systems of raja yoga, in the same way the ninefold path of yoga represents the system of bhakti yoga. Bhakti is a change that one brings about consciously in life by recognizing both the limitations and the strengths.

The first aspect of raja yoga is yama, the second is niyama, the third is asana, the fourth is pranayama, and in this way the sequence goes on. In the same manner, the first aspect in bhakti yoga is identifying one's associations and associating with the appropriate people. Association influences the mind. Your friend can influence you to do different things. Other people can influence you to do different things, as association creates a trust, a connection, and it is this trust and connection that brings two minds closer.

This is association, and association is based on trust and connection. Even the wrong thing is accepted due to association. When you accept the wrong thing, the mind also behaves in the wrong manner. In bhakti yoga the sutra is: associate with those people who can inspire and encourage you to become better in life and shun the company of those who restrict you and hamper your growth and development. Even if they are your own family members, shun them. It is a strong statement and instruction. Family is not a permanent thing in your life. Your spiritual awareness is the permanent thing in your life. If you want to protect your spiritual intentions, be careful with the family too. They should not be able to influence you negatively. You have to protect your intention, your pure intention, from every kind of external attack. Just as a seed is protected from different animals and the weather, in the same manner you have to protect the seed of pure intention, true intention in your life from various attacks of negativity coming

through different people and the environment. Choosing the right company is therefore the first requirement of bhakti yoga.

The right company is not God; that is the final company. Right company refers to the people who surround you. If somebody is grumbling and negative, cut them off. If you accept the grumbling and negativity of the other person, your mind will behave and respond in that manner too. You will also become critical and grumble about everybody, and two grumblers together make a convention! Choosing the right company, is a process of redefining your association and re-systemizing your interaction with people, friends, family and society. If you have the strength to shun your own negative family members, then there is a chance that you will be able to ignite the flame of spirituality inside you. However, if you don't have the courage to do so, then do not expect that you will be successful in meditation or in the management of your own mind.

Another aspect of bhakti yoga is having a liking for all that is good and inspiring. Often the good is not recognized. There is a story of two sisters, Maya and Bhakti: Maya, the power of illusion, and Bhakti, the power of pure sentiment. Maya used to wear dirty and torn clothes. She would dress in rags. Bhakti would dress in glittering clothes, shiny new silk with beautiful ornaments. As a result, people would be attracted to Bhakti and shun Maya. Maya thought to herself, 'This is not right. How come everybody is attracted to Bhakti and nobody looks at me. I should do something about it.'

One day, Maya and Bhakti went for a bath in a nearby river. Before entering the river they removed their clothes and put on their bathing suits. At this time, Maya took her bath quickly, came out, put on the clothes of Bhakti and walked away. When Bhakti came out of the water and looked around for her clothes, she couldn't find them. Instead, she saw the dirty rags of Maya lying on the ground and she had no choice but to wear those. Since that time, people have been chasing Maya, and not Bhakti. Previously people would chase Bhakti and shun Maya, but now they chase Maya and shun Bhakti.

To have a liking for everything that is good and auspicious indicates a level of discriminative ability inherent in the individual; the ability to recognize what is good, what is the truth, what is just and beautiful. If you recognize that, then you like it. There is a statement in the *Yoga Sutras* indicating this. It says, "Be friendly with those who are happy. Be compassionate towards those who are suffering, be happy for those who are pious and virtuous in life, and ignore the crooked."

The crooked must be ignored and eliminated from your life. In a basket of apples, one rotten apple can make all the other apples rot. Ninety-nine good apples cannot make the rotten apple well again, but one rotten apple can spread this rot to all the ninety-nine good apples. Ninety-nine good people cannot make a crooked person good again, but one bad person can spread rot to ninety-nine good people. Do not allow yourself to rot; it is as simple as that. If in the basket of apples one apple is rotten, take it out and put it in the rubbish bin. In the basket of life, where you are surrounded by so

many people and friends, if somebody is rotten, just put them to the side. I agree with this view of Patanjali, not because of the hardness or the harshness of the statement, but because of the validity and truth contained in it. Ultimately, your association with each other is not permanent, but your association with your inner spirit is there for all times to come.

Another aspect of bhakti is the cultivation of humility while adhering to the instructions of the teacher or the guru and, in a similar manner, all other conditions are indicative of the attainment of internal purity and luminosity of mind.

Yoga does not see bhakti yoga as the yoga of devotion, but as a yoga of psychological, emotional and sentimental transformation and upliftment. As the sentiments and emotions become pure, the nature, the vision, is guided naturally towards the higher self. When you stop looking in one direction, you start looking in the other direction. That connection with the higher nature is the final stage of bhakti; devotion is the final stage of bhakti, not the first. The previous stages represent the change in the behaviour and the quality of the mind, and that connection, that identification, that merger of the individual being with the higher being is the last condition.

Mantra yoga sadhana

Another sadhana that must be practised universally by everyone is that of three mantras. First thing upon waking up in the morning, chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, eleven times. It is mantra chanting and at the same time a mental yajna and upasana. It becomes a mental upasana as before you start the chanting you need to make a sankalpa for wellbeing. This means that you tell yourself that you are chanting the mantra for the fulfilment of your sankalpa. Second, chant the Gayatri mantra eleven times with a sankalpa for attainment of wisdom and knowledge, and awakening intuition. The chanting is done for the fulfilment of that sankalpa. Third, chant the thirty-two names of Durga three times with the sankalpa to be relieved of your suffering in life. With the chanting of the mantras with faith, the sankalpas become stronger.

I will tell you a story to illustrate what faith in mantra can do. Once, there was a man who lived by a river. One day, he had some work on the other side of the river and once he had completed his business he had some time to kill, so he decided to attend a satsang that was being given by a visiting swami. While the satsang was going on, it started to rain very heavily and the river level rose quite high.

By the time the satsang ended it was evening and, because of the heavy rain and the rising water levels, the boatmen had anchored their boats for the night and gone home. When the man reached the riverbank, it was deserted. He became worried. He wondered how he would get home; it was necessary to get back. He sat down by the river, feeling anxious and hopeless. The swami who had been giving the talk saw the man sitting there in that state. He went up to him and asked what was wrong. On hearing his story the swami told him, "Don't worry. Here, I am writing a mantra on this piece of paper. Put it in your pocket. Do not open it. Do not look at it. Just have faith in

the mantra and you will be able to walk across the water.” The man went to the edge of the water and dipped his toe in, but the toe did not sink into the water. It felt like he had put his toe on solid ground. Slowly, he put his whole foot on the water and it stayed there as if on solid ground. Then he put his other foot on the water and finally he started walking.

The man was very excited. He was walking on water! He thought, ‘What a wonderful mantra. Just by keeping it in my pocket I am able to walk on water. If I write it on a piece of paper and sell it to people I will be able to earn millions. I can charge each one a lakh of rupees. If I sell it to ten people, that is ten lakh rupees. If I sell it to a hundred people I will earn a crore.’ In this way, he went on and on. Then he thought, ‘I have received the mantra. I am also almost on the other side of the river. I wonder what the mantra is.’ He became restless and impatient. He could not wait to get to the other side. He thought, ‘Only about thirty to forty feet to go. Let me just take it out and look.’ He took the paper out of his pocket, opened it, read the mantra and blurted out, “That’s it?” On the paper was written *Ram*. He thought, ‘I know this mantra. How could it possibly let me walk over water?’ As soon as this thought entered his mind, the water under his feet lost its solid quality and he sunk in and drowned.



The story points out the importance of maintaining faith. While he had faith in the mantra, he could walk on water, but the minute his faith ran out, the minute he thought, ‘Even I know this, there is nothing special in it’, he sank.

Easiest path to divinity

Once there were two sadhus performing tapasya. They were hanging upside down from a huge neem tree for many years. One day, they heard somebody walking on the path

chanting, 'Narayan, Narayan'. They knew instantly that it was Sage Narada and came down to greet him. They asked him where he was headed. Narada replied that he was going to interview God. He wanted to know what God was up to: new projects, plans for the world, and so on. The two sadhus said, "Would you ask Him a question for us. When will He give us His darshan? We have been performing this austerity for a long time." Sage Narada agreed and went his way and the sadhus climbed back on the tree and began their tapasya again.

A few days passed and Sage Narada reappeared. The two sadhus once again climbed down and eagerly asked him, "Did you ask God? What did He say?" Sage Narada replied, "God said that you will have to wait as many years as there are leaves on this tree." The sadhus looked up at the tree. It was in full bloom. One said, "How can I know the number of leaves on this tree? There are too many to count. This means that I am not going to get God's darshan," and he left. He dropped his tapasya and began his journey back home. The other thought, "This is nothing. I now have God's word. He will give me darshan. What does it matter how long! I have His guarantee. I am going back up on that tree." As soon as he thought this, God appeared in front of him.

The other sadhu had gone some distance and noticed a brightness and peace cast over the forest. He turned to look at what it might be and saw Sage Narada and God. He ran back to that spot but he could not see God's form. He was only able to sense His presence because of his long years of penance. Sage Narada was livid. He said to God, "You have turned me into a liar. Everybody will say I lie. You told me it would take you many years to appear before them, and now you are here five minutes later." God said, "This sadhu's faith was so strong that it changed his entire thinking, mind and intellect. The other got disappointed and left. Due to his penance he can sense something special, but he cannot witness it."

This story illustrates that it is not tapasya, meditation or wisdom that creates a connection with God. These are only tools to increase the capacity of your mind, the worthiness of your life and the receptivity of your soul. If you meditate, your mind will become peaceful. Once it becomes quiet, the mind's power of comprehension increases. Meditation and tapasya become practices to develop discipline, sensory restraint, mental restraint, all kinds of restraint. Through these methods your abilities become refined, your understanding is enhanced, your intellect becomes sharper and you become radiant. This is not the path that will connect you with God. For that, you have to purify the emotions. Having done so, make emotions the medium to invite God into your life. This is the easiest method. There is nothing to show in this method and nothing to hide. It is the method of opening the heart and connecting. Once you are able to do this, that's it. You will have all the happiness, peace and prosperity you are looking for.

Remember the foundations

Sadhana is of two types, mental and physical. Mental sadhana is cultivation of *vairagya*, non-attachment, and physical sadhana is *abhyasa*, practice. These are the two elements

of sadhana. The underlying factor in all sadhanas practised by anybody is the perfection of these two things: the mental attitude of vairagya and abhyasa, continuous effort. In the *Yoga Sutras* (1:14), Sage Patanjali makes a statement about abhyasa or practice: *Sa tu deerghakala nairantaryasatkarasevito dridhabhoomih*, meaning that abhyasa or practice is something that you do regularly for a long time with complete conviction and faith. Only then does it give you the desired result.

Abhyasa and vairagya become the two crutches of every individual who wants to walk the spiritual path, and they have to be cultivated more and more. You cannot say, “I’ve come to the last point of vairagya,” or “I’ve come to last point of abhyasa”, as this journey into abhyasa and vairagya is on-going and continuous; there is no end here. This journey indicates the evolving mind of the sadhaka, the individual, the aspirant, and the mind continues to evolve even beyond this life; in another existence, another time, another planet, another place, evolution goes on. Evolution does not stop at any given point; rather, it is an infinite journey, and that is the statement of the scriptures.

If you understand these two things: abhyasa and vairagya, then you do not have to understand anything more in life. You can forget all religions, all philosophies. They are the secret of spiritual life and the ancient seers have put great emphasis on these two aspects. They say that in the end you have to transform yourself. Either you come to the doors of transformation voluntarily or Mother Nature will beat you with a stick and force you to change in the course of time. This is a path through which everyone must pass. Everyone has to go through old age. When God incarnates he also has to go through old age. Just as one goes through sickness after birth, as one has to go through old age, so also one has to come to an understanding with maya in the journey of life. This can come about now, or maybe after a thousand years, or after ten more births. However, through abhyasa and vairagya you can attain this state much faster.



Fine-Tuning Lifestyle and Practice

8 April 2011

Spiritual scriptures do not talk about enlightenment or realization, but instead begin with a basic thought: how to overcome suffering in life. Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva and the first disciple to whom he taught yoga and the tantras, poses this question to Lord Shiva. She says, “In this world, in this creation, there is suffering. How can a person overcome suffering; is there a method?” The instructions that Shiva gave to Parvati about overcoming suffering in life are the instructions of yoga and tantra. In this way, the foundation of yoga and tantra has been understanding the suffering of human life and making the attempt and the effort to overcome it.

Even Buddha started his journey with the same basic questions. The questions which motivated him to explore spiritual life were, “What is suffering; how can one understand and overcome it?” The philosophy of Buddha is based on overcoming human suffering. Similarly, the philosophy of Mahavira, the exponent of the Jain philosophy, also began with trying to understand human suffering, and if you look at the life of Christ, even he was concerned with human suffering; people say that he died for our suffering, for our sins. When I look at all these different examples in history and the original ideas behind every philosophy and system of spiritual practice, nowhere do I find any statement that says that spiritual life is realization of God. Instead, the idea that comes forth is that spiritual life indicates a life free from suffering, where you are in a state of bliss, happiness and fulfilment, and all the faculties of your life manifest homogeneously.

Three causes of suffering

Suffering has been classified into three groups: adhyatmic, adhibhautic, and adhidaivic. One type of suffering originates from within the self. You are the cause of your suffering. Your mind is the cause of your suffering. Your association with the world of sense objects is the cause of your suffering, as are your expectations. That is one category, one group, and in this group you can include things like stress, tension, anxiety, fear, phobias, inhibitions, complexes, neurosis, psychosis. Everything can be put into this first category of suffering, adhyatmic, which originates within oneself. The mental, psychological, spiritual and social problems that you face are self-created, as you do not know how to manage the distorted conditions and states of mind or

emotions. The first category of suffering stems from oneself.

Adhibhautic suffering comes from the world, and that also affects you. The suffering which comes from the world predominantly affects the physical body, creating problems such as fever, asthma, diabetes or cancer. The root cause of these illnesses is the environment in which you live: how you cope with your environment, how you deal with your environment and with what attitude you live your life.

Adhidaivic suffering is destined suffering: what you are destined to go through in this life. This category is more related to past actions, past karmas, and your responses to the world and to events, circumstances or situations that you are exposed to, but over which you have no control. That is the destined suffering.

Sages classified suffering in these categories: 1. *adhyatmic*: something that comes up from within yourself, 2. *adhibhautic*: something that you receive from your environment and the world in which you live, and 3. *adhidaivic*: something that is destined to happen.



Overcoming adhidaivic (destined) suffering

The method of overcoming destined suffering is managing it through faith in God and invocation of the higher powers. It is the higher power which creates your destiny and therefore if you invoke the grace of the higher power, that power will help reduce the destined suffering and bring greater peace and contentment in life.

The practices of *upasana*, worship, *anushthana*, a fixed course of sadhana, help one reach closer to the state of surrender. However, do not do these practices mechanically; do them with feeling, belief, faith and dedication. If you do not connect fully with your worship, you should not expect any result, as any worship done without *shraddha* and

vishwas, faith and belief, will not produce any result. On the other hand, if worship is done with shraddha and vishwas, it will produce a result.

Once there was a kingdom which suffered from a famine for many years. The residents of the kingdom started leaving the country. The wise men advised the king that Lord Indra, the rain god, should be propitiated. Accordingly, a yajna was held which went on for many months. Hundreds of people from the kingdom would come every day to participate in the yajna. However, the scorching sun continued to bear down on the hapless people, and not even a wisp of cloud appeared in the sky.

One day, a young boy came to the yajna holding an open umbrella. People started to laugh at him. They said, "It has not rained for years. We have been performing this yajna for so many months and there is not a cloud in the sky, and this foolish young man comes here with an open umbrella!" The boy heard all this and said only one thing in response, "All of you are performing such a magnificent yajna in the company of learned pandits, yet you do not have faith that this yajna will bear fruit. I have come from a faraway village with the faith that at a place where so many people have gathered together to invoke God, God will surely shower his grace and there shall be rain." The moment these words were uttered by the boy, the sky darkened, thick black clouds appeared, there was thunder and lightning and it began to rain.

If you do your rituals mechanically and faithlessly then do not expect any result. However, if in the process your mind becomes focused and your feelings are connected, you can rest assured that you will receive full benefit. It is fine to perform rituals, but there has to be an internal effort to cultivate faith so that everything is not left to the God outside.

Sri Swamiji says that God receives every prayer. He listens to all of us. However, His ultimate aim is to make you capable of overcoming your difficulties. If he provides help immediately, it is to strengthen your faith in Him. He did not help you to remove your difficulties. After all, He is the one who gives you difficulties as well as happiness. The popular belief may be that the devil brings trouble and God brings happiness, but that is not the reality. The pleasure and pain you experience is based on your karmas. Just like a teacher who gives plus or minus marks according to the effort of the student, God does the same thing. Therefore, when God does not seem to listen to your prayers, it is not because He does not like you, but because He knows that you can resolve the situation yourself.

Overcoming adhibhautic (external) suffering

Social or external suffering has to be dealt with through the proper management of your lifestyle; by regulating and creating different systems and structures in your life so that you are able to let go of the accumulated stress factors. For this, you have to resort to different practices of yoga. Remember, the common therapy up until the last century was natural, ayurvedic and yogic. It was with the discovery of penicillin during the First World War, that the foundation of modern allopathic medicine was laid. Therefore, modern medical science has only seen its birth in the early 20th century. Prior to that

how did people survive? What kind of treatment did they follow to help with their diseases, their problems, their difficulties in life?

Prior to the advent of the allopathic medical system, the prevalent therapy existing in this part of the world was naturopathy, yoga and ayurveda. Ayurveda utilizes the consumption of medicinal herbs to bring about a positive change in the functions of the internal organs. The effect of herbs is different from the effect of chemicals. Herbs are natural, easily assimilated by the body and strengthen its immunity, whereas chemicals deplete the immunity of the body.

The modern allopathic medicine is actually an emergency therapy, created for those people who are fighting in the front, especially soldiers. You feel feverish and have a bit of a headache today, take this pill, take your gun, go out and fight. It is only an emergency treatment. You are feeling weak today, take this tonic, feel well, go out, take your gun and fight. You are feeling pain today, you have a slipped disc or sciatica, take this painkiller, pick up your gun, go out and fight. The modern allopathic therapy is more for soldiers than for normal people, but the commercial angle attracts everyone so its use has become very common. It is now the prevalent therapy.

People have moved away from those kinds of therapies or systems which give total wellbeing. Total wellbeing comes with the combination of the right herbs and disciplines or structures in the daily routine of life. From the yogic perspective, that is the right therapy for total health. I am not anti-allopathy, I am just stating a fact which many people may not understand, realize or know. An emergency treatment cannot be the long-term therapy for the body. An emergency treatment cannot be the long-term therapy for the mind. Its purpose is to contain the symptoms and to allow one to function effectively until you are able to rework and modify those distressing conditions which created the problem in the first place. Therefore, it is the application and the proper use of ayurveda, plus modification of lifestyle through yogic practices, that can help in the attainment of total physical wellbeing.

Physical disease can be eliminated through hatha yoga and one can regain optimum health. However, there is one condition. As long you are not free from disease, you should follow all the rules of the practice one hundred percent; not ninety or even ninety-nine percent, but one hundred percent.

Overcoming adhyatmic suffering (caused by oneself)

For those problems that arise from within yourself, the meditative aspect is important. The meditative state or the meditative awareness of mind allows you to reflect, observe, analyze and change the disturbance, as well as the distraction and the dissipation that you know to be the cause of anxiety.

For the three different categories of suffering three different methods of management have been given, and the proper application of the systems to come to the apex of health and wellbeing is known as sadhana. Physical health and physical wellbeing, mental health and mental wellbeing, emotional health and emotional wellbeing and the spiritual health and spiritual wellbeing: these four things are catered

for in sadhana.

Combining abhyasa and vairagya

What is sadhana? People say sadhana is a spiritual practice, but if you look into the concept and idea of sadhana, you will discover that it is constant practice leading to harmony and balance at the physical levels as well as the psychological levels. The two components of sadhana are *abhyasa*, practice, and *vairagya*, dispassion.

Why is vairagya important in sadhana? It is the mental association with this world of sense objects that creates attachment, and attachment distorts the clarity of the mind. Once clarity of mind is gone, discrimination is lost and you get sucked into the attraction of the sense objects. When you get influenced by the power of the sense objects, attachment is experienced, identification is experienced, desire and expectation are experienced, and when you are caught in the vortex of desires and expectations, the obsessive-compulsive nature manifests. Therefore, vairagya comes in to free the mind from its obsessive identification with sense objects.

Raga is the result of an association with a sense object that you feel will give you pleasure and comfort. The *Yoga Sutras* state (2:7): *Sukhanushayi ragah*, meaning that wherever you feel you shall attain comfort and happiness you are attracted to that place, that object, that person. In this way, attachment comes when there is an identification of something pleasant and beautiful which you can have, experience or acquire. When desire does not exist, then attachment also does not exist. If you do not identify with the object, thinking that it is going to give you happiness, then raga will not exist. Vairagya, therefore, means absence of the obsessive-compulsive behaviour of attachment. You can keep the mind free from that intense desire, from that intense expectation, from that intense craving, and when the mind is free, it is at peace.

Next is abhyasa. Abhyasa is the practice that leads to the restraining of the senses and the mental forces which flow outwards. That is the purpose of abhyasa: to restrain energy, to hold back the energy which is flowing outward from yourself into the world, and which is the cause of your association and connection with the world, the environment, people and sense objects. Abhyasa and vairagya together constitute sadhana. Just abhyasa, practice without vairagya, can never be considered sadhana. That is a karma, a *kriya*, an action.

Aim of sadhana

Sadhana is needed when there is mental and physical suffering, as it allows one to disconnect from the feeling of suffering. During suffering fear also manifests. Suffering induces fear, disease induces fear, and that fear restricts the powers of the mind. Therefore, sadhana becomes the medium by which you can overcome these fears and insecurities that are normal in life.

What is the aim and the direction of sadhana? How do you know that you are on the right track and that your sadhana is giving you the desired result? The way to know is by observing your vairagya. Observe your own vairagya, observe your own raga. When

asked how can you know that you are progressing in spiritual life, the masters give only one answer. The lessening of sensorial and sensual identification is an indication that you are progressing in your spiritual sadhana. Your mind is becoming more and more balanced and it is gravitating less and less towards fleeting and temporary situations where you can have a momentary glimpse of happiness or sadness. The reduction of desires, attractions, associations and attachments is, therefore, an indication that your sadhana is giving the desired result.

Vairagya is not negation. You do not negate anything in vairagya; rather, it is acceptance of the situation and knowing how to come out of the maze created by the mind in relation to the sense objects. This suffering is caused by the tamasic nature of the mind. A sattvic nature knows no suffering; it is the tamasic nature that experiences suffering. The sattvic nature is free from all the attractions and repulsions, *raga* and *dvesha*, and experiences harmony and contentment. The craving mind is the tamasic mind, the desirous mind which seeks self-gratification and self-fulfilment, and it is this craving mind, the tamasic mind, which becomes the root cause of human problems. The aim of sadhana is, therefore, to go from the state of *tamas* towards the state of *sattwa*. Sadhana should lead you from tamasic conditions to sattvic conditions. Only then can the quality of life improve.



Different priorities for householders and spiritual aspirants

There are different types of sadhanas. There is no one universal progression of sadhana applicable to everyone, as each person goes only as far in their spiritual journey as is destined. After all, many go to study medical science and become doctors; however, out of those many, few end up becoming specialists. At each level, as you desire to pursue the path, your efforts, your understanding, your awareness has to change. Similarly, the sadhana of a householder is different from the sadhana of a sannyasin, as the requirements of a householder are limited. I am not talking about desires; I am talking about requirements. The desires are not limited. The desire can be, 'I want to be self-

realized’, but that is only a fantasy in your life. The desire can be, ‘When I grow up, I want to be a pilot.’ That is the desire, but the situations, the circumstances, the family, the education, the society, the resources may not make that child into a pilot. He may become an engineer. Being a pilot is the desire, but the destiny is to be an engineer. In the same manner, you can have a desire for self-realization, God-realization; that is your choice, and you can be happy with it, but that is your desire, not your requirement. Your requirement is to improve the quality of your life, to allow wisdom to flow naturally and spontaneously.

Take the example of the blind person who wants to see the sun. How can a blind person see the sun? Is seeing the sun the priority or the necessity of a blind person? No. The necessity and the priority of a blind person is to acquire vision, to acquire sight. Once you have acquired sight, you are free to see the entire creation, not only the sun. In the same manner, you can have your desires, but those desires do not necessarily represent your necessity or priority in life. Therefore, your priority has to be defined.

In the life of a householder, what is the priority? Definitely not God-realization. If God-realization is your priority then you cannot be a householder. You cannot say, “My training is that of engineering and I want to work as a medical doctor.” If you want to become a medical doctor, you have to leave engineering and study the science of medicine. Once you leave one profession and involve yourself in another, only then can you succeed in that new profession. You cannot be an engineer and doctor at the same time. Similarly, either you live in the world or you do not live in the world. There are only two choices: here or there. There are many people who try to bridge the gap, to build a bridge between the two islands, but the problem is that these islands keep moving and when they move, no matter how long that bridge is, it will always fall short and you will have to go in the water at some point. It is like trying to stand with your feet on two boats. You have one foot in one boat, the other foot in the other boat. Both boats go in opposite directions and you do a perfect hanumanasana, and after the perfect hanumanasana you have a good bath in the river; and you lose both boats.

Imagine that you are walking on the road. Delhi is ahead of you, Kolkata is behind you and you are walking towards Delhi. While you are focusing on Delhi, your back is toward Kolkata. If you want to make a journey towards Kolkata then you have to turn around and the moment Kolkata comes into focus, Delhi is behind your back. Can you be both in Kolkata and Delhi at the same time? In the same manner, your spiritual journey takes you in one direction and the sensorial journey takes you in the opposite direction. If you want to go in the spiritual direction, your back has to be turned to the material dimension, and if you want to go towards the material then turn your back to the spiritual.

Householder sadhana

What should the sadhana be for a householder who is involved in the material dimension, who has social and familial responsibilities, a profession, a society, a circle of friends and who wants to succeed in life? Sri Swamiji has classified the requirement of

every person into three categories which are universal. These three categories are comfort, peace and prosperity. The comfort must not only be external, but also mental and emotional. If there is not a sense of comfort and ease in the mind, then outside also you will not find any comfort and ease. However, if there is a sense of comfort and peace in the mind, then the situations outside will not have any effect on you.

The absence of peace is due to distractions and dissipations of the mental energies. The mind and brain are like the batteries of a torch. If you continuously use the torch, the charge will not last long. You can use the battery for maybe one or two days. However, if you use the torchlight sparingly, only when it is needed, the same battery can last you for two weeks, three weeks, a month. In the same manner, the brain is a battery and you use the energy of the brain. People who have no obligations and responsibilities preserve their hair colour, but people with lots of responsibilities and obligations go grey very quickly. That's the truth. The more brain energy you use, the faster your hair will become white and the less you use of your brain energy, the longer your hair will keep its colour. Your brain is a battery, your mind is a battery, and the more you use it, the more prana shakti is depleted.



Absence of peace is absence of mental balance and harmony, which is lost in different situations, in different times, in different circumstances. There are limited times when you feel that you are not in control of yourself; you are not in control of your mind, you are not in control of your senses. There are likewise times when you feel fully charged and confident. The responses of the mind and senses change depending on whether there is depletion of energy or charge of energy. If the mind is fully charged with energy, there is more optimism, hope and peace. When there is depletion of energy there is despair; a sense of hopelessness, anxiety, insecurity and fear set in and the mind becomes negative.

As for the third requirement, prosperity, everybody wants it so that there is nothing lacking in their life. The three requirements that become the priority for householders are therefore *sukha*, *shanti* and *samriddhi*, comfort, peace and prosperity.

The sadhana for a householder must be designed to cater to these three things. The sadhana can include asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and mantra. Beyond this, no other sadhana is required. Even if you desire to learn kundalini yoga or kriya yoga, it will not awaken your kundalini, as you have not changed your mindset or lifestyle. Nothing will happen. Kundalini will not awaken, chakras will not open. You can learn the practices to have a glimpse of the energy structure within yourself, you can learn to move with that energy of the chakras, you can learn to utilize them, but the awakening will take place only when you are ready to leave the world in total. Kundalini cannot be awakened by learning kriya yoga and practising it at home. You have learnt some techniques, but the environment in which you are living is still the same, the problems that you face daily are still there, the situations which you confront day in and day out continue to exist. Nothing has changed in your environment, nothing has changed in your mind, nothing has changed in your expectation, nothing has changed in your desire, and yet you want to awaken the kundalini, which goes beyond expectation, desire, the senses and the mind. You can learn and practise kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, but do not expect anything until you are able to wilfully bring about change in your own life.

People who have regularly practised asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and mantra have experienced great changes in their life. They have experienced great motivation and inspiration in life, which has carried them forward to experience their own creativity. However, this is the limit for the householder.

Sannyasa sadhana

Sannyasins also start their journey in the same way as householders, as they have come from the same background. You may live in the ashram, but your mind is that of a householder. You have the same expectations, the same desires, the same aspirations, only the location of living has changed. The nature of the personality is still the same; therefore, sannyasins must also start with asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and mantra.

When the inspiration comes that you now want to discover your nature more deeply and cultivate spiritual awareness, then another teacher enters your life, and that teacher is the guru. In the first stage of sadhana, the teacher can be any person, Tom, Dick or Harry, who teaches you asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, and so on. However, when you want to go deeper, to explore your nature, then a guru has to come into the picture, as guru is the competent person who knows the way and the pitfalls on the road that you may face and confront on your journey. The guru then guides you, “Do this and do not do this.” When the guru enters your life, one change must definitely happen in the life of the disciple: eradication of doubt and cultivation of faith. Those people who doubt the guru cannot progress, and there are people who doubt. Maybe you are one of them. If you ask some question and the guru tells you something, you will begin to question and think, ‘That was not what I was expecting’, as you are expecting your own thoughts and ideas to be sanctioned. You ask “Am I doing this right?” and you

expect the guru to say, “Yes.” If guru says, “No, you are not doing it right” then you will begin to think, ‘Maybe this guru doesn’t know me.’

The relationship of doubt has to be removed, that is the first thing, and the relationship of faith has to be cultivated, that is the second thing. Only after this preparation has been made, can guru guide you into higher spiritual disciplines. The basic first level of faith and conviction has to be attained for guru to become effective in your life. Even Arjuna had to go through this experience. While he was blabbering his problems, Krishna kept quiet. It was when Arjuna said, “Listen, I am totally confused, I don’t know what to do, please guide me, I am your disciple,” and surrendered himself, that Krishna started to speak. Prior to that Krishna remained silent, as he knew that a guru has no role in the life of a person who is not going to listen to the guru anyway, and who is too involved in all the mental idiosyncrasies. If you are caught up by your mental idiosyncrasies, doubts do come.

The proper relationship to be cultivated first with the guru is not devotion or dedication. The uninitiated speak in that manner. Devotion is not a priority. It is not even needed to cultivate the relationship between guru and disciple. Faith and trust is the first thing: removing the doubt. Then later, the guru begins to modify your lifestyle. This changing of the lifestyle becomes the first sadhana of the person who is now a spiritual aspirant.

Observe your lifestyle and change it to make it more fulfilling and more creative. Fine-tune your life by following the sequence of the stages of jignasu, karma and poorna sannyasa.

Next, the yoga of Swami Sivananda, which starts where the yoga of Sage Patanjali ends. Sage Patanjali defines a system of yoga in which the aim is to improve and experience a quality of life. You go through different sequences of practices and perfect them. However, after perfection there has to be expression, and Swami Sivananda provided the way to express the attainment of yoga. By cultivating and fine-tuning the lifestyle, observing your mind, your mental reactions, your sentiments and your aspirations, you are able to guide them, under the inspiration of the guru, towards a positive outcome.

In the *gurukul*, the place where the guru lives, the sadhana is different. I have mentioned that the sadhana of a sannyasin is fivefold. You have gone through asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, mantra and the basic sadhana, which is the primary class to which everyone has to go. A scientist and a sweeper both have to learn their ABC. High and mighty or low and poor, both have to go through the basic education. However, after those basics have been completed and you enter into the fine-tuning of lifestyle, the sadhana of the ashram and sannyasa is different; it is fivefold.

The first component is *seva* or service. Service allows you to come out of the self-oriented nature and become selfless. Seva allows you to move from the selfish dimension to selfless dimension. Sri Swamiji asked his guru Swami Sivananda, “What do I do after taking sannyasa?” Swami Sivananda said, “The same thing that you have been doing until today: sweeping the ashram, managing the office, managing the printing

press, managing the administration, managing the kitchen, managing the guests.” Sri Swamiji said, “Well, if I have to continue doing the same thing, then I might as well go home and do it. Why do I have to do it in the guru’s ashram?” Swami Sivananda replied, “You have to do it in the guru’s ashram, as at home your awareness will be self-oriented. You will think that you have to do it for yourself, you have to do it for your family, and you will be caught up in the karma. However, if you do it in the guru’s ashram, then you are offering it to the guru and you are not responsible for the outcome of your actions and you will learn selflessness.” In this way, service becomes the method to move from a selfish mentality to selfless mentality.

The second component is *swadhyaya*, meaning self-study, self-analysis, self-observation. The third is *sanyam* or restraint, letting the horse run but keeping control of the reins. Hold the reins, and if the horse becomes too wild, pull the reins, control its movement. That level of understanding and control has to always be there. You should not lose control. That is the idea of *sanyam*; you allow things to happen but you keep your awareness and know when you are overstepping the boundary, and control yourself. That is the aspect of *sanyam*.

I see this struggle of indiscipline and *sanyam* in many people. Sometimes during ashram programs seating becomes a problem; some swamis object to where they are being seated. They have their own ideas as to where they want to sit and if somebody says, “Please sit there,” they will get angry with the person who is guiding them to sit. Some people even threaten, “I’m not coming tomorrow unless I get to sit there.” I watch it but I keep quiet. They are going through their own hang-ups, why should I get involved in their head-trips? Nevertheless, it indicates the negative level of understanding they have for a situation. They are too caught up in their own projections. It is reactions like these that have to be observed and managed by the individual.



Why does it matter whether you sit at the front or on the side? It makes no difference, yet some people are affected by it, which indicates a lack of understanding, a lack of mental awareness and a projection of their arrogant selfish nature. That is their shortcoming, that is where they fail, that is where they fall, in the absence of respect and sanyam. If they were connected to sanyam it would make no difference if they sat at the back, as they would still be hearing the program. However, if there is no sanyam, a big reaction takes place. Restraint is, therefore, very much needed, especially in sannyasins, as sannyasins are not perfect people. They are learning to manage themselves, so they have to make that extra effort. When you clean your mind, all the negative tendencies will come up in the form of worries, tensions, difficulties, anger, distortions, desires. To manage them, sanyam is vital, as through sanyam the mind becomes peaceful, tender and pure. If you cannot make the effort to cultivate sanyam, do not take sannyasa, go and live a normal life. If you cannot fulfil the conditions and the necessities of sannyasa then do not be a sannyasin, and if you can make the effort then you will definitely succeed one day in your journey.

The fourth item is *satsang*. This is the input of new ideas, positive ideas, balanced thoughts which can inspire and encourage you to keep on walking. The fifth is surrender, *samarpan*. These are the five sadhanas that are followed in an ashram. People think, 'In the ashram I can practise hours of meditation,' but it doesn't work as the environment of the ashram is the opposite of a meditative environment. If somebody is meditating, a message is sent, "Please come and report to duty." This is the sadhana of lifestyle tuning for a sannyasin or for a spiritual aspirant. Whether you are a sannyasin or not, it does not matter. If you live in an ashram, these are the five things that you have to excel in.

The first level of education, the primary education, is common to one and all. The second level of education is restricted to those people who want to pursue their spiritual life and explore their nature. This level prepares the ground for the third level of sadhana that only a person who is convinced, one-pointed and focused like Sri Swamiji, can make the effort to do. These are the higher sadhanas that connect one's spirit with the higher spirit. We have seen this example in the life of Sri Swamiji, as he involved himself in higher sadhanas only after he had left all obligations, duties, responsibilities and associations with everyone. That type of higher sadhana cannot be done even in an ashram; you have to do it in isolation. However, the strength of character and the strength of mind has to be there in order to remain isolated, otherwise even in the mountains you shall be taking out your mobile and checking to see if a connection is there or not, thinking, 'Who can I talk to today?' For that higher sadhana the mind has to be ready to leave everything, all associations, so that there is nothing.

In the *Vedanta Sutras* it says, "I have no friends, I have no family, I am nobody's husband, I am nobody's wife, I am nobody's son, I am nobody's daughter." *Chidaananda roopah Shivoham Shivoham* – "All I am is *chidananda*, the form of inner spirit." *Mano buddhi ahamkaara chittaani naham* – "I am not the intellect, the ego, the individual consciousness." This is the song of a sannyasin, but in practice many sannyasins say, "I

am your friend, I am your guru, I am your associate, I am your well-wisher, I am your guide.” This is a conflicting philosophy that immature sannyasins live by. The example of the Shivoham bhava was set before us by Sri Swamiji, as that type of higher sadhana cannot be done surrounded by people. It is not something that you can be a witness to or a part of. What can a student who is in middle school do to help a scientist who is splitting the atom in a lab? Nothing, except create more confusion for the scientist, who will say, “Get out of here, let me do my job.” That is what Sri Swamiji did. He said, “Get out of here and do not come back again. Don’t come to see me, leave me alone.” He followed the discipline of higher sadhana.

Foundation of sadhana

Sadhana changes from person to person and from situation to situation. However, the purpose of sadhana is always to move from the tamasic to the sattwic state.

Now, coming to the practical point, what is the appropriate sadhana for you? I recommend that in order to increase the strength of mind, willpower and creative nature, early morning upon waking up practise the three mantras: the Mahamrityunjaya, the Gayatri and the Durga mantras. These three mantras will help to strengthen the willpower and bring optimism and tranquillity into the normal mental behaviour. After that, when you are ready before breakfast, practise a few asanas. Not many are required, only a group of five asanas are necessary: tadasana, allowing the body to stretch; tiryak tadasana, allowing the body to flex; kati chakrasana, allowing the body to twist; surya namaskara, allowing the body to move forward and back; plus one inverted posture, to reverse the pull of gravity. Beyond these five postures, anything more is extra, not necessary. These five asanas can be done by anybody at any time, as it takes only about fifteen minutes to complete them, and you do not need to practise more asanas.

After asana, practise some pranayama. First, alternate nostril breathing. Ensure that you breathe in long and deep. Do not take short breaths, but try to lengthen and deepen the breath. Second, *bhramari*, the humming sound, the bumblebee pranayama; and third, *ujjayi* breathing, the throat breathing. These are the three pranayamas required for a healthy individual to acquire good mastery over the body, the brain and the nervous system. The practice of these three pranayamas takes no more than ten minutes.

After asana and pranayama, you go to your normal work routine, and when you come back home after work, go to your room, lie down for fifteen minutes and practise a short yoga nidra to release the stress and tension accumulated during the day. Then, in the evening before going to sleep, practise mantra meditation. On weekends you can do shatkarmas, neti, kunjal and laghoo shankhaprakshalana to remove the impurities and toxins that have accumulated in the body over the period of one week.

To create a healthy and positive atmosphere at home, do one mala of Mahamrityunjaya mantra every Saturday. Sit down, close your eyes, sit still, visualize the havan in front of you with flames rising, do the mantra and make a symbolic offering to

the mental fire. As you make the symbolic offering, feel that all the dross of the body and personality is being pulled out of you and burnt in the fire; pull it out and burn it in the fire. That is *antaryaag*. This can be done every weekend. Sri Swamiji gave the instruction that it should be done every Saturday.

During the week, there should be some time dedicated to your studies; not novels, not magazines, not newspapers, but some inspirational spiritual book, fifteen minutes every day or half an hour once a week. It has to be done in a regular manner. The practice of *mouna*, silence, at home is also a must. Mouna, the practice of silence, is an important practice for householders. Additionally, one yama and one niyama must also be chosen every month to cultivate in your life.

Gradually start to fine-tune your nature, to fine-tune your mind, to regularize your routine, to create a system in your waking, sleeping, eating, working, talking, laughing, playing and joking. If you can start in this manner, you have taken your first step in the spiritual *yatra*, the spiritual journey.

The point that you should remember is that you have to work at two levels: the mental and the physical. Work on the mental level through the cultivation of vairagya and on the physical level through continuous practice, remembering the words of Sage Patanjali, (*Yoga Sutras* 1:14): *Sa tu deerghakaala nairantaryasatkaaraasevito dridhabhoomih* – “Abhyasa becomes firmly grounded by being continued for a long time with reverence and without interruption.”

Hari Om Tat Sat















Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.