

YOGADRISHTI SERIES

Yoga in Daily Life

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Yoga in Daily Life

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses from the Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs
at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger,
from 19th to 22nd August 2011*



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Yoga in Daily Life

“I do not consider yoga as just a practice; rather, in ‘Niranjanananda Yoga Samhita’, yoga is grouped into four categories: practice, sadhana, lifestyle and culture. This is how I see yoga. I see yoga as a practice, I see yoga as a sadhana, I see yoga as a lifestyle and I see yoga as a culture. This is the progression of yoga.”

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 August 2011 at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth was yoga in daily life. Swamiji spoke on the purpose of yoga in one’s life and the practical integration of the various systems for body, mind and spirit. He gave a detailed description of the yoga capsules that everyone can include in their daily life. Swamiji elucidated the spiritual sciences and traditions in a classical and deep yet light manner, bringing to life the insight and wisdom of the ancient seers and scriptures.

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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The Nature of Life and the World

19 August 2011

In the historical scriptures of India, which are known as the Puranas, there is a story of a king who ruled his kingdom for many long years. During his time the kingdom prospered and attained peace with its neighbours, but the duties of the king were such that he never found any peace or contentment. He was always engaged in the business of the kingdom and confronted by difficulties, obstacles, moments of happiness, and moments of frustration. When facing all these different situations in life, the king used to question himself, “Is this my life? There is no happiness, there is no contentment, there is no fulfilment. Every day I have to go through the same routine; listen to the difficulties of people, solve them, face my own difficulties with my wife and children and try to manage them. Is this the nature of life? Is this the nature of the world?”

In this manner, the king used to spend his time thinking about the meaning, purpose and nature of life and the world. Eventually, he grew old and appointed the young prince as king and left the kingdom to live in isolation, following the path of vanaprastha ashrama. Living in solitude and seclusion, he continued to ponder the nature of life and the world. Time passed. One day in the morning, when he had finished his sadhana, duties and worship, he sat down in front of his cottage, lost in thought about life and the world.

After some time, he saw an old man walk up the narrow footpath in the forest leading up to his cottage. The retired king rose up and welcomed the elderly person to his humble cottage. He offered him a seat and they started a conversation. The old man asked the king, “Why are you living here in isolation and solitude? You look pensive and thoughtful, what is bothering you? Maybe I can help you overcome your problems.” The king said, “There has been something on my mind which I have been thinking about for many long years. I was the ruler of this kingdom. During my reign, there was peace and prosperity in the kingdom, but there was never any peace in the life of my subjects or in my own life. Although I had everything, I always felt discontented and unhappy. I have been wondering, is this the nature of life and is this the nature of the world? This thought has been on my mind and I am looking for answers to my questions.” The old man said, “You have interesting thoughts, interesting questions. Let us go for a walk in the forest and maybe some answer will come to us.”

The two started to walk deep into the forest. After walking for many hours and many

miles, the king became tired and said to the old man, “Let us sit down somewhere, in the shade of a tree. Let us rest, eat some fruit, drink some water and when we are ready we can walk back to the cottage.” The old man said, “Walk a little further with me, I want to show you something.” And they continued walking.

After some time, the old man came to a tree and said to the king, “We are going to rest here under this tree.” The king looked at the tree and thought to himself, ‘Maybe this old man has gone a bit senile. After all, there are so many big, shady trees, laden with fruit, flowers and leaves, yet he chooses this one to sit under. This tree does not have a single leaf, flower or fruit on it. It is barren. Instead of leaves, flowers and fruit, it only has thorns. Some are green and young; some are dry, brown and old.’ Nevertheless, he did not want to contradict the good intention of the old man, so he sat down under the tree. There was no shade, there was no respite from the heat, yet he sat down with the old man and tried to make himself comfortable. He kept looking at the tree, which was only a trunk, branches and twigs full of thorns. The whole tree was full of thorns.



After some time, the wind picked up. The gentle, cool breeze that was blowing through the forest gradually became a strong wind. As the wind grew in strength, the twigs and branches of the thorny tree began to rub against each other and the dry thorns began to fall on the bodies of the two men, pricking their skin. The king became uncomfortable. He said, “What is this nonsense? We are trying to rest and there is no rest here. Instead of leaves, thorns fall on our body. Instead of shade, there is sun shining through the twigs and the branches. I can’t take it any more.”

Thinking thus, he got up and moved away from the thorny tree to a safer place where no thorns were falling. He said to the old man, “What are you trying to do? There is no shade and no rest under the thorny tree.” The old man said, “O king, I am only trying to provide you with the answer to your question. Your question is about the nature of life and creation. I am an old man. I brought you to this tree because it represents *samsara*, the world. In the world, which is like this tree full of thorns, you have respite from thorny pricks when the wind is not blowing, and those are moments of happiness, joy and comfort. However, when the wind blows and thorns fall on the body, they prick the body and make you uncomfortable; they create distress in the mind. Just as the wind makes thorns fall from the tree, in life and this world also, it is the wind which makes leaves, flowers, fruits as well as thorns fall on us.” The king found this statement by the old man very interesting. He said, “Explain to me a little more what you mean.” The old man said, “The entire creation and life in these created worlds are subject to the influence of maya, subject to the influence of tamas. When you are subject to tamas and maya, it is very difficult to attain harmony, peace and contentment.”

The old man further explained, “The world which you see outside is only a reflection of the world which is inside, and the world which you experience inside is nothing but a reflection of the world outside. The thorny tree is the world outside, but inside you also there is a thorny tree in the mind. The mind is subject to maya. It is influenced, motivated and moved by maya. The wind that blows through the mind is the wind of *vasana*, inherent desires. In the inside world you are influenced by your desires. When the wind of inherent desires blows through the mind, there can never be any fulfilment, contentment or peace.” In this manner, the old man explained to the king the nature of life and the world.

Our own ancestors, the rishis and munis, have carried forward this idea and explained it in a beautiful manner. Creation represents the tamasic aspect and those who are born in this creation are tamasic people. Just as a fish lives in water and is surrounded by water, in the same manner, all living beings in the created universe are subject to material conditionings. They are subject to the conditionings of the mind which identify the consciousness with the outside world. As long as there is identification with the outside world, the inherent desires will motivate, guide and move you, and you will always be trying to pursue a desire. You will always have one desire in focus that you will want to fulfil and attain. Once you have attained that desire, another one will take its place. In this manner, desires move the mind. Desires are the wind that moves through the field of the mind affecting all its levels, from *manas* to *buddhi* to *chitta* to *ahamkara*; from rationality to intelligence, to inputs and expressions of life, to ego identity. The mind is like that thorny tree. As long as the wind of inherent desires is not blowing, the tree will not shake; it will be still. However, when the wind blows and the mind tree begins to move, the thorns will begin to fall and prick you.

Conditioned mind

The rishis and munis said that this entire created universe, including all life forms, have

a tamasic nature. A tamasic nature does not mean a detrimental or negative nature; rather, it means a conditioned quality. Soil from the earth has no form, but you can take some soil, give it a shape and convert it into a pot, into a form. The loose soil, which was without form, has come together to take a form. It has become a pot; it has become a statue. The transformation of soil into a form is tamas. As it is given a form, it is given an identity, a name and quality. Whatever has name, quality and form is a tamasic or conditioned manifestation. This body is tamasic; you can't change the structure of your body. That is tamas. The mind is tamasic; you can't change your mentality, your thoughts. That is tamas. That is the conditioning of the mind.

What you experience as life is actually a conditioned form of living, not a free form of living. The free form of living is not tamasic; it is sattwic. The unconditioned nature is called sattwic: the pure, the uplifting and the expansive quality. The conditioned nature is tamasic. This becomes evident in your own life when you say, "I want to become better. I want to become sattwic in life." The idea or the statement that 'I want to become better and I want to become sattwic' indicates that you live in a tamasic nature and strive to become what you are not. You never say, "I want to become tamasic." That is what you are; the thought doesn't even come into the mind. Similarly, you never say or think that you want to become rajasic. You always say, "I wish I was a better, sattwic person." You say that because you are not that, and that is what you want to become. The nature of life and the nature of world are the tamasic conditioning, which is maya; the confined, the limited, the conditioned. The opposite of this, which leads you to transcendental experience and knowledge, is the sattwic state of purity, upliftment, harmony and balance in life.



Maya's deception

There is a story about two sisters called Maya and Bhakti. The difference between them was that Maya wore tattered, dirty and unclean robes, whereas Bhakti wore glittering, good clothes, and was beautiful to look at. Maya was also beautiful, but nobody would look at her because she wore torn and dirty rags. People would follow Bhakti around because she was glamorous and beautiful and ignore Maya, as she would not look

beautiful or glamorous.

This is a story of satya yuga. That was when people would follow Bhakti and shun Maya, when they would remain absorbed in the contemplation of their nature and try to overcome their own limitations to experience the transcendental quality of life. That was the path of bhakti in satya yuga. Everybody used to come to Bhakti because she was glamorous. She had good clothes, ornaments and makeup; she was beautiful. Maya, although she would also put on makeup and jewellery, wore such dirty clothes that nobody would look at her twice.

If two ladies walk into this room, one wearing good clothes and the other wearing tattered robes, who will you look at? You are definitely not going to look at and admire the lady in tattered clothes. You will look at and admire the lady wearing glittering robes and looking beautiful.

Maya became jealous of Bhakti. She thought to herself, 'Everybody follows Bhakti, nobody even looks at me. I should try to change the equation a little bit. I will wait for my time.'

Ages passed and kali yuga came. At the dawn of the first day of kali yuga, Maya said to her sister, "Bhakti, come on, a new age is beginning. Let us kick-start this new age properly. Let us go have a bath, put on our best robes, and go out into society to celebrate the coming of this new age, the kali yuga." Bhakti was very simple and innocent. She said, "Good idea. You are my sister, I will do whatever you say." Thus, they both went to the village pond, which was the public bath. There, before entering the water, Bhakti took off her beautiful robes and Maya took off her tattered robes, and they went into the water and started to frolic in it. After some time, Maya said to Bhakti, "I am tired and am going to get out and dry myself." She got out first and of course, she had a devious plan in mind. When she came out of the water, she dried herself and put on Bhakti's glittering robes and jewels and went away.

After about fifteen minutes, Bhakti came out of the water. She searched all over the place for her robes, but did not find them anywhere. All she saw were Maya's tattered clothes lying on the ground. Poor Bhakti had no choice. She had to cover herself, so she put on the tattered clothes that Maya had left behind. Since that time, people have been chasing Maya and very few people run after Bhakti. Maya has become the glittering damsel, attracting, hypnotizing and controlling everybody. Bhakti is this poor little tattered woman who nobody looks at, although she is uniquely beautiful. Nobody admires her beauty because the apparel that she is wearing is not attractive. This happened in kali yuga.

Maya is the controller of the created universe, not just the universe, but the multiverse. The concept of universe is incorrect. Even in science, they say that there are multiverses, and ours is one out of the many that exist. In our tradition we say that there are many brahmandas. Ours is one out of the thousands that exist. The entire multiverse, the created multiverse, is subject to the influence of maya, and maya is the conditioning of nature, of the personality, character, mind, emotions and body. Everything that has a form, quality and name is an offshoot of maya.

As individual beings, you identify with this aspect of maya through your senses,

which are also tamasic and conditioned. The sense objects represent maya and the senses represent you. You crave for fulfilment through your senses; you crave for the fulfilment of your desires by obtaining sense objects, and that is the entire game of life: senses and sense objects. Senses are responsible for action, and sense objects are responsible for the creation of desire.

Your eyes see a flower. The eyes are one sensory faculty and the flower is one object. When the association takes place between your sight, your vision, your sensory organ and the object, a desire takes birth at that time. You wish to possess that beautiful flower. You wish to acquire that flower, and many times in that drive you will go pluck the flower from the tree, take it with you and keep it in your room.



There is always a connection between the sensory organ and the sense object. This connection between the sensory organ and the sense object gives birth to a specific desire. Therefore, sense objects outside represent the desire, and the senses represent your effort and connection with the sense object. Whether human or animal, insect or reptile, in all life forms the senses interact with sense objects continuously. There is always a movement of desire and an effort to fulfil that desire which crops up and becomes predominant in the human mind. Desire in action; sense objects and senses always go together. This craving, this desire, influences the entire behaviour of the mind and creates an imbalance in the mind. A spike is suddenly seen in the flatline of life: a desire. Another spike is seen, another desire, a third spike is seen, another desire. With each spike there is also the action involved in the fulfilment of that desire.

Attachment and desire

The identification with desires and sense objects leads to frustration and anxiety. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that in this world of sense objects, the mind becomes attached to an object. Attachment of the mind to that object gives birth to a desire. When you pursue the fulfilment of that desire, there is aggression in you. If that aggressiveness is uncontrolled it will affect your mind, and you will not have the concept of what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. If you lose the idea of appropriate and

inappropriate, intelligence will become deluded. Once your intellect is deluded, you cannot survive in this world as a normal being. The delusion of intelligence and intellect is a state similar to death. This is the statement made by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62–63):

*Dhyaayato vishyaanpunsah sangasteshoopajaayate;
Sangaat sanjaayate kaamah, kaamaatkrodhobhijayate.*

*Krodhaatbhavati sammohah, sammohaatsmritivibhramah;
Smritibhranshad buddhinasho buddhinaashaatpranashyati.*

When a man thinks of the objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises.

From anger comes delusion; from delusion the loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes.

There is a story of a famous Indian saint, Tulsidas. One day his wife left home and went away to her parents' house. This disturbed Tulsidas a lot and he became completely restless. He was unable to live without her and left to get her back in the middle of the night. It was the monsoon season and the river was in spate. There was no boat in sight. Tulsidas saw something floating in the river, and assuming it to be a raft, climbed on it and crossed the river. What he had actually hung on to was a dead body. When he got to the house, it was night-time and he wondered how to enter the house. He saw a rope hanging down from the roof. He climbed it and entered the house. The rope was a snake. This is how desire leads to delusion. To have climbed up a snake and not noticed its slipperiness, to have climbed upon a dead body and not realized what he is sitting astride, this is the death of intellect. Once intellect dies, nothing you do will be accomplished in a proper manner. Life loses all its meaning; you might as well be dead.

Living appropriately

Yogis started to think along the same lines as the king in the story, 'For what do we take birth?' You take birth, as children you play games, go to school and equip yourself with skills to survive in society. You enter into a profession and work in that profession. Sometimes you rise in that profession – you are promoted. However, whether you are at a lower rung or a higher rung, you are still pursuing a profession. You raise a family and undergo struggle associated with it, and worry becomes an integrated and inherent part of your life. You worry if you don't have a job; you worry when you have a job. You worry when you don't have children; you worry when you have children. You worry when you don't have food; you worry when you have food. You worry when you don't have prosperity; you worry when you are prosperous. There is continuous worry and ultimately you are sorry. When you are on your deathbed 'worry' becomes 'sorry'.

The yogis asked, "What is this? Does everyone have to live this life in such a manner? Sometimes becoming friends to a few people, sometimes becoming enemies to a few

people, sometimes becoming the supporter to a few people, sometimes becoming the critic to a few people. Is this all life has to offer?” The situations and circumstances may be different, but the actions are always the same from generation to generation.

In my childhood I used to dream of changing the world, but today I know I was wrong. How can a person who is prejudiced, who is tied up in likes and dislikes, change the world? First, you have to change yourself. After all, the world is only a place of sensory gratification. You go to a restaurant to please your taste buds and to the cinema to please your eyes. While watching a movie you identify with the actors, you cry and laugh with them. This is sensory pleasure. This is the way of the world. Sensory gratification only leads to restlessness, confusion, disorder and dissatisfaction. This conditioned state is what you call your life.

Thinking in this manner, the yogis said, “No. This can’t be how we have to live our life, there has to be a better way. Why can’t we live this life in the conditioned manner that we are destined to live, yet at the same time make the effort to experience the freedom from the conditions of life? Is there a method, a way, is it possible to do it or not?”

In the course of time, after thinking about it the yogis came to a conclusion and said, “Yes, it is possible to gradually decondition oneself in life.” How? By fine-tuning the different areas and aspects of the personality. What areas and aspects? They gave an example. The *tanpura*, the classical Indian musical instrument, has four strings. If these four strings are not tuned properly, it will not create any music, but if they are tuned properly and resonate with each other, then one can sing an entire composition using only the four strings. From *sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa*, to ragas, raginis, everything. The yogis said that just as you tune your tanpura, in the same manner you have to tune your life. Tuning between the body, mind, emotions and spirit has to take place. Tuning between *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara* has to take place. Tuning between *padartha*, matter, and *urja*, energy, has to take place. Until and unless this tuning takes place, you do not live life or realize the purpose and aspirations of life to improve yourself.



Aim of yoga

How is this tuning possible? The yogis said there is a system known as yoga, and through yoga this tuning is possible. Our ancestors came to the conclusion that yoga is a means by which one can improve the quality of life and eradicate the limiting conditions of life to experience freedom and transcendence.

Our param guru, Sri Swami Sivananda, and our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, have always said yoga is not a method to attain God-realization. In fact, I would say that no scripture or yogi has said that yoga is a method for God-realization or self-realization. People who have not understood the principles of yoga and spiritual life claim that God-realization and self-realization is the purpose of yoga, but nowhere have the enlightened, illumined masters or the yogic scriptures said that God-realization is the aim of life. Why have they not said this? It is because they know it is a very difficult journey for an individual. Before you learn how to explode the atom, you have to know how to recognize letters and become literate. Next you have to pick the topic, study and understand it, and then you experiment with what you have learnt. Finally, after going through a long process of education, you become the scientist with the ability to explode the atom in the lab.

Why did they not say that God-realization is the purpose and aim of life? They said that aspiring for God-realization is like a blind man aspiring to see the sun. Trying to see the sun may be the blind man's desire, but it is not his need. The need of the blind man is to acquire eyesight, vision. Once he has vision, he is free to look at the sun, the moon, the stars and the entire creation. Being able to see the sun is not the priority for a blind person; vision is the priority. In the same manner, self-realization is not the priority in the life of any individual. Working through the dross of the mind and attaining the state of purity is the aim, aspiration and effort of every individual.

Managing the mind

This is also explained by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*, where he states that the aim of yoga is *chitta vritti nirodhah*, cessation of mental modifications, not *atma sakshatkar*, self-realization. The aim of yoga, according to Sage Patanjali, is managing the mind, not God-realization. Yoga does not speak of God. It speaks of a state of mind known as kaivalya. If you look at the last chapter of the *Yoga Sutras*, you will find reference to kaivalya pada. The state of *kaivalya* is the state of unity where all the dissipated energies of life have come together to create a new identity and a new experience of life. In that transcendental state, the oneness which one experiences is known as kaivalya.

Sri Swamiji always says that the transcendental experience is not separate from you. God is where you are. God is not found in churches, temples and mosques. He is where you are. Sri Swamiji has given a very simple method of attaining the higher transcendental experience. The trouble is that when you sit down to find God sitting next to you, you do not find God; instead, you are confronted by your own mind, thoughts, desires and ego. Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda have both said that yoga is a medium, a means by which you can cultivate your inherent creativity and manage the external manifestations of the mind which cause grief and strife in a better way. If you can learn how to manage your grief, tensions and strife, if you can learn how

to manage your emotions, desires, ambitions and passions, then that state of equilibrium will lead to the birth of a different consciousness, which is the *drashta* consciousness, described in the *Yoga Sutras* as *Tada drashtu swaroope avasthanam*, the state of the witness. It is the state where you can become the witness of your participation in the world of *maya*, the world of senses and sense objects, rather than being a blind follower of the senses and sense objects. By cultivating this witnessing aspect you can see how *maya* influences you, affects you and how you can try to come out from the influence of *maya*.

When the waters of a lake are still, you can see the clouds, the sky, the trees, the mountains, the sun and the moon reflected in it. However, when the water is disturbed nothing can be seen in it. In the same way, when your mind is at rest the world is reflected in it; the inner excitement, restlessness and stimulation have been quietened. As the mind rests and finds peace, it discovers *sattwa*, the quality of truth, but when it is restless, you lose clarity of mind. The yogic journey started from this idea. The sages taught that through yoga, it is possible to overcome the restrictive conditionings of life: the restrictions in the mind, energy and body. It is possible to have an understanding and experience of the higher nature, the transcendental nature beyond the range of attraction and the gravitational pull of *maya*, which is very strong. In order to harness that energy and realize that consciousness, and then become free from the conditionings of life and the world, a system was developed. This system included physical practices, mental practices and many other types of practices, which could become the tools to transform the expressions of the faculties and energies that you normally express outwardly in your life.

Integration of head, heart and hands

The basic philosophy of yoga has been that it is a system by which one can integrate the faculties and the qualities of head, heart and hands. This was the statement of Swami Sivananda. Swami Satyananda says that the intellect, the emotions, the spiritual aspirations and the physical interaction with the world and society have to take place, and they will continue to take place. They can, however, occur in a better, more harmonious and selfless manner, rather than the dissipated manner in which you are living right now.

The dissipated nature of the mind is the cause of grief in everyone's life, as the mind has to always attach and associate with something or somebody. People may have problems at home: a discord between husband and wife, a fight with the daughter-in-law or son-in-law, and grief is experienced. Why? It is because of an association, an attachment, an expectation. There can be discord in the office and you will feel the anxiety, grief and tension due to that. Everywhere, the mind becomes the cause of grief and tension, frustration and agitation. Therefore, yoga came upon a very simple process. The yogis said, "The mind is affected first; therefore, first manage the mind." This is how Sage Patanjali also started: learn to manage the expressions of your mind. Learn to balance and harmonize the expressions of your mind.

In this manner, the subject of yoga evolved and developed as a way to move away

from the conditioned nature of life, which causes grief, to the unconditioned nature where freedom and transcendence from conditionings are experienced.

Mind-body connection

The yogis realized that there are many levels at which one lives, so they devised many different, small practices and principles which, if followed and adhered to, help change the disruptions in the flow of behaviour, emotions, ideas, thoughts, and so forth. An unfulfilled expectation or desire leads to discontentment, tension, anxiety and eventually high blood pressure, ulcers, hernias, asthma, diabetes. Even medical science says that the majority of problems are psychosomatic in nature. Psychosomatic means something that germinates in the mind and manifests in the body. There are very few problems which are somatopsychic in nature, meaning those that begin with the body and affect the mind.

Psychosomatic problems are many in number, not only the ones identified by the psychiatric associations of the world. Even negativity, anger, jealousy, hatred and greed are distorted conditions of the mind. Be careful of them. Protect your mind from these things. Do not allow yourself to be swayed by your hatred and jealousy. If you are swayed by them, the body becomes sick; it becomes diabetic, constipated or cancerous. Hatred is cancer. If you hate or dislike somebody, it means there is cancer in the mind, because it simply grows and grows. How do you treat that?



The range of psychosomatic illnesses, according to yoga, is not confined to those identified by psychiatrists and psychologists. Negative and destructive tendencies, behaviour and thinking are all illnesses of the mind. If you have them, please treat them

seriously, just as you would treat your body. If you have asthma, you use an inhaler to find relief. If you have hatred for somebody, do something to find relief from that hatred. Otherwise, you will suffocate in your own hatred, in your own jealousy, frustration, depression and anxiety. Once you suffocate, you will die. That is certain.

Restlessness in thoughts affects the mind; restlessness in desires affects the emotions and restlessness in the senses affects the body. Yoga came about as a means to manage these limiting conditions of life.

Yoga as practice, sadhana, lifestyle and culture

I do not consider yoga as just a practice; rather, in 'Niranjanananda Yoga Samhita', yoga is grouped into four categories: practice, sadhana, lifestyle and culture. This is how I see yoga. I see yoga as a practice, I see yoga as a sadhana, I see yoga as a lifestyle and I see yoga as a culture. This is the progression of yoga.

The majority of people are only practitioners of yoga. They go to a yoga class, do some exercises, some relaxation, some meditation and walk out saying, "I've done my yoga." Sorry, you have not done your yoga! You have only practised certain aspects of yoga. When you practise yoga, when you go and join a class, you are doing it out of curiosity or because of a personal reason. You are either stressed, therefore you want to do yoga, or you are having some physical complications and you want to practise yoga in order to manage them. You are practising yoga to suit your own need. You are not practising yoga to experience the aspirations of yoga. Those people who practise yoga to experience the goals set by yoga are known as sadhakas. Those who practise yoga just to feel good and light, a bit more flexible and get rid of stiffness, are not yoga sadhakas. For me, they are the people who are in the primary class learning A, B, C, D. For years, you keep writing your A and your B and your C. For years, you have a selection of twenty practices that you do every morning as your yoga practice. You cannot turn on the switch for a light bulb and expect the fan to come on. If you want to start the fan, you have to turn the fan switch on. You cannot do asanas and expect the kundalini to rise. That is an incorrect idea.

There has to be a change in the understanding, appreciation and experience of yoga. One has to go through these four stages from practice to cultivation of yogic culture in order to realize the full depth of yoga. I classify the hatha yoga teachers in the world as kindergarten teachers. All their life, all they speak to their students about is how wonderful this exercise is and what a beautiful feeling they have when they practise the exercise; the back pain went away, the stiffness went away. That is a kindergarten subject of yoga.

The primary school subject of yoga is yoga sadhana, in which you have to pick up one thing and master it. If you have to learn the tables, you learn and master them. If you have to learn history, you read it and memorize it. If you have to learn math, geography, physics or chemistry, you absorb it: understand the process, develop the right mentality. That is sadhana. Yoga sadhana is practising yoga for its prescribed purpose. The goal of kriya yoga is awakening the kundalini, and you practise it with this goal in mind. You keep at it until your kundalini awakens. That is being a sadhaka. The

effort that you make to beautify your life is sadhana.

When you start incorporating yogic principles in your life, then yoga becomes part of your lifestyle. It is reflected in your behaviour and interactions. This disciplined, positive and awakened individual helps himself as well as others: family, society, the nation and the world. Yogic lifestyle is the college subject of yoga.

When these principles become an inseparable part of your behaviour then they come forward as yogic culture. In this manner, yoga has to be seen progressively in terms of how it can become useful in the long run of life, not just as an hour's practice every day.



Birth of Yoga

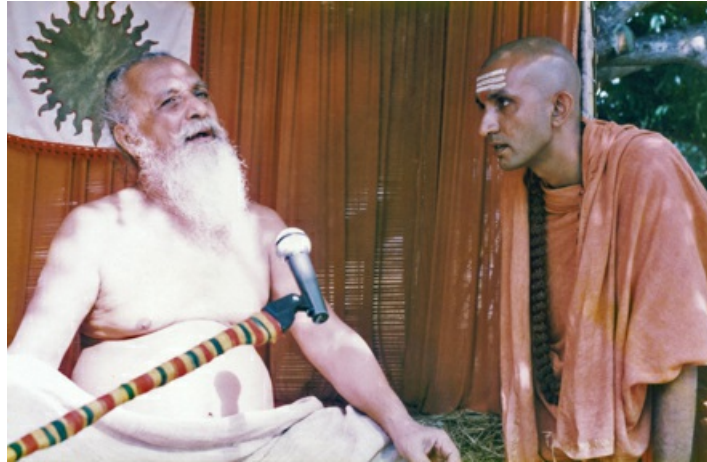
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Our ancestors, the thinkers who contemplated life, the world and the connection of the individual with everything around, ultimately came to the conclusion that the purpose of life, of living in this body, is to improve the quality of consciousness interacting with life. It is to use the energy given to us creatively, constructively and positively. However, the situations of nature and the manifest world do not give us the freedom to express and explore the realms of the mind and consciousness, or how this energy can be utilized for the betterment of our personal life along with the environment.

Moving towards sattwa

Take the example of the four strings of the musical instrument, the tanpura. If the four strings of the tanpura are not tuned harmoniously with each other, it is difficult for the melody to express itself. Sounds will exist, but they will be horrendous to the ears. Once the tuning takes place, the symphony that comes out of the tanpura will allow you to sing anything under the sun in perfect *swara*, in perfect tune. That is the quality of the instrument.

You need to fine-tune your life in the same way, as within you there are also four components: *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*; rationality, intelligence, memories and the ego identity. In the same manner, the body is one component, the mind is one component, the emotions are another component and the spirit is another component. Body, intellect, emotion and spirit, the four have to be finely tuned. Once they are finely tuned, your journey begins from the state of *tamas* towards the experience of *sattwa*, expansiveness and harmony. Keeping these ideas in mind, the yogis developed a technique, a system, a discipline, a lifestyle called yoga. Yoga is a vast subject. It is an attempt to discover the undiscovered self, the undiscovered qualities and the undiscovered nature of life. This yoga was categorized as physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Different components of yoga aim to bring out the faculties of different aspects of your nature. Yogis also try to integrate yoga with management of the body and mind, and they have been successful. Yoga is more than discovery of the mind and of your higher consciousness and the proper application of your energy. It is the management of different situations which you face on a day-to-day basis which has to become the foundation for the development and evolution of yoga in your own life.



Hatha yoga: maintaining the body

What is it that you face in your body to begin with? In the realm of the senses, you face illness and disease. The word ‘disease’ is composed of two different words: ‘disturbed’ and ‘ease’. When the ease of the body is disturbed, when the level of comfort in the body is disturbed, when the harmony of the body is disturbed, then it is disease. The meaning of the word ‘disease’ is ‘disturbed ease of the body’. To manage that, yogis formulated ways in which this body can be influenced and the internal systems and organs of the body can be brought into balance. In order to deal with the body, they came up with the system of hatha yoga so that internal disturbances could be removed, and comfort, ease, stamina and health regained.

Contrary to popular belief that hatha yoga is only the practice of physical asana and nothing more, it is an important aspect of yoga. Hatha yoga is like the primary class to which you get yourself admitted before you can continue your study in higher classes. Admission to yoga takes place through hatha yoga; it does not take place through dhyana or meditation. Admittance in the yogic journey does not happen through kriya yoga or kundalini yoga. You are admitted in yoga education when you begin hatha yoga, something with which you can physically identify. The body is something gross, physical, material with which you can identify. You can see it; you use it to fulfil your aspirations and ambitions.

The wellbeing of this physical structure was a concern for the yogis. If the body is sick, how will you do the other practices? Try practising meditation while having an asthma attack, not possible. Try awakening your kundalini when you have a hernia or an abdominal ulcer, not possible. Your mind will be diverted to your problem rather than the practice. It is impractical for anybody to practise yoga if they are not well. Therefore, the welfare of the body was thought of by the yogis, and to manage the disturbed conditions of the body they developed the science and the subject of hatha yoga. Hatha yoga contains many different practices such as asana, pranayama, shatkarmas, mudras and bandhas. Their purpose is to realign the energy flow within the body and the mind.

The purpose and the destination of hatha yoga is perceived, recognized and known

when you understand the word 'hatha'. Hatha is a combination of two mantras which are of ajna chakra. If you look at the image of *ajna chakra*, the third eye, the two petals have *ham* and *tham* written on them. *Tham* can be substituted by *ksham*. The mantra *ham* represents the flow of the solar energy, the prana shakti, the pingala channel. The mantra *tham* represents the flow of the lunar energy, chitta shakti, the mental power, through the ida channel. Balance of ida and pingala, balance between the pranic and the mental energies, is the purpose of hatha yoga.

When you sit for an extended period of time in any posture, blood and prana circulation to certain parts of the body slows down. If you sit cross-legged without having any practice, without being proficient in the practice, after twenty minutes, half an hour, one hour when you try to get up, you will discover that your legs have gone to sleep. Often, when you sleep in a different posture at night, in the morning your arms have gone to sleep and you can't even move them because circulation has slowed. It takes a few moments or minutes for the circulation to restart and for the movement to resume. Blood circulation becomes a factor which can inhibit the movement of a physical organ. In the same way, pranic circulation is also a factor in the maintenance of the health of a physical organ. Diseases and illnesses occur when there is lack of prana in that particular organ. That is the yogic understanding.

Why do digestive problems occur? It is because prana is not flowing into the digestive system. It is not active there, therefore constipation is experienced. Digestion is affected, therefore gastric problems occur. Digestion does not take place, therefore you experience acidity. Once digestion begins to function properly, constipation ceases, gastric problems cease, as do problems with acidity.

Each organ needs to have a certain amount of pranic energy in order to function, just as in the outer life each mechanical, electrical instrument uses certain volts of electric power to function. Power is available either through the socket in the wall or through a battery depending on what power is required. In the same manner, different organs of the body also need power. The brain needs power to function, and energy in your life is depleted on a daily basis. When this pranic *urja*, energy, is depleted you feel tired, and through rest this pranic *urja* is restored, pranic shakti is restored and you feel fresh again.

Similarly, when chitta shakti, the mental power, through which you think, contemplate, understand sensory inputs and act, is blocked, the mind becomes dull. You have experienced this. Often, after a hard day's work when somebody asks you something, you reply, "Not now. I'm tired." This is chitta shakti. If it flows properly, you would be able to answer promptly. You would never need to say, "Later. I am resting now."

The postures of hatha yoga, asana, and pranayama, which are of a dynamic nature, help to rectify the imbalances in the flow of prana shakti into the body and the flow of prana shakti into the mind. That is the purpose of hatha yoga.

As the balance is being restored in your body and the imbalances are removed, the problems become less. There is an improvement in asthmatic respiratory conditions, in the cardiovascular system and in the functions of the digestive system. In this manner,

through gradual practices of hatha yoga, the body achieves a state of wellbeing. This harmony of pranas allows them to focus on the management of the mind, as after hatha yoga follows raja yoga.

Raja yoga: managing the mind

Constipation in the body is dealt with by hatha yoga and raja yoga deals with mental constipation. When you are constipated, how do you feel? Heavy, bloated and uncomfortable. This is because the body's function is to digest what has been taken in and throw out the waste. Similarly, the function of the mind is to take in material, assimilate it and then throw out the rest. What do you do? You do not allow the mind to eject its unnecessary thoughts, desires and waste. You hold on to them. Then you have mental dysentery. The mind keeps swinging back and forth between constipation, mental diarrhoea and dysentery. The purpose of raja yoga is to remove these imbalances of the mind.

Raja yoga has been defined as the eightfold system of yoga, as eight different systems are given. Lay people say that Sage Patanjali is the creator, founder and original thinker of yoga. I differ from that, as each yogi has written a particular thesis and dissertation on the subject of yoga, and the dissertation that was written by Sage Patanjali was on the subject of mind. Sage Patanjali is an expert in the management of the mental states and conditions and that is reflected in the *Yoga Sutras* as well. Swatmarama, Gheranda, Gorakhnath, Matsyendranath and others were propagators of hatha yoga, whereas Sage Patanjali was not the propagator of asana and pranayama. Often I see signs of 'Patanjali Yoga Centre' and under the name of 'Patanjali Yoga Centre' all they teach is asana and pranayama. It is like naming an organization 'Edison Centre' and teaching the philosophy of Newton there. The name of your centre is 'Edison Centre'. Edison discovered electricity, and you are teaching the philosophy and the theory of Newton who discovered gravity. Therefore, if you teach yoga asanas and pranayama in the name of Sage Patanjali, you do not understand what yoga is. I'm just stating a fact.



Sage Patanjali's description of asana and pranayama is that asana is that posture in which you can sit comfortably for an extended period of time, without effort or pain. You have been sitting here for one or two hours. Can you sit for that period of time without feeling any discomfort? If you can do that, then you are practising asana as visualized by Sage Patanjali. It is the same with pranayama. Sage Patanjali describes four kinds of pranayamas: the first pranayama he says is inhalation, we all inhale; the second pranayama he says is exhalation, we can't live without exhaling; the third pranayama he says is internal retention of breath; and the fourth pranayama is the external retention of breath. At present you breathe at the rate of nine to eleven breaths a minute. If you were able to take one breath a minute: thirty seconds inhalation, thirty seconds exhalation, then that would be pranayama for Sage Patanjali. Not bhastrika, not kapalabhati, not bhramari, sheetali or sheetkari. Why does Sage Patanjali speak of asana and pranayama in the context of the mind? It is because the physical posture helps you attain better and greater concentration.

Breath is the mirror, the reflection of the state of mind. If you are agitated, you will breathe rapidly; if you are angry, your breathing will be short and shallow; if you are relaxed, your breathing will be long and deep. The states of mind are reflected in how you breathe. By watching someone's breathing pattern you can know what kind of mood that person is in: whether it is an aggressive mood, a quiet mood, a depressive mood or a frustrated mood. All the symptoms of mental behaviour and mood can be observed in the manner in which you breathe in and out.

Sage Patanjali used the two systems of asana and pranayama to deepen the awareness of the mind, and although eight steps of yoga have been described according to Sage Patanjali, I believe that he has only described six stages of yoga. Yama and niyama for managing the behaviour of the mind; pratyahara and dharana to enable withdrawal and disconnection from the senses and the sense objects and to develop greater concentration, one-pointed awareness; and dhyana and samadhi, experiencing the deeper states of meditation, which lead you to the final and the last experience of oneness with everything.

The six stages of Sage Patanjali's yoga deal with rectifying the behaviour and the nature of the mind, and the two extra stages added are asana and pranayama. Asana and pranayama are included because when your body is fixed, physical disturbances will not distract your mind. When you sit and there is slight discomfort, your meditation is broken. A mosquito bites you and the meditation is broken, an itch or a pain is felt and the meditation is broken. In order to maintain the stability of the physical posture so that the mind is not disturbed by the movements of the muscles and the nervous stimulation, asana has been prescribed by Sage Patanjali as a state of body, a condition of body, a posture of the body in which you are comfortable and still for an extended period of time. Sage Patanjali is not the advocate of asana and pranayama as Sages Swatmarama and Gheranda are; he has focused on the management of the mind. Please remember this.

Bhakti yoga: managing the emotions

After you have perfected the management of the mind through raja yoga, then you move into the management of emotions. Managing emotions is a little more difficult than managing the mind since the mind can become more objective, while emotions are more subjective. Through intellect you can observe, analyze, peel away the different layers of the onion of the mind and be a witness to that effort. However, the management of emotions is a more subjective experience. The meaning of the word 'emotion' is 'e' plus 'motion', energy in motion.

What is anger? An explosion of pranic energy which you can't control or channel. What is depression? An implosion of pranic energy which you can't control. Anger is explosion and depression is implosion of the same prana shakti. These mental energies are raw; they are not refined. No emotion can be controlled by any individual. Greed cannot be controlled, passion, grief, fear, etc. cannot be controlled. All emotions are uncontrollable energies.

Emotions connect and identify you with those things that you feel belong to you or that you own. Some form of ownership or identification exists in emotions. You identify with your family, as you are emotionally connected to them. You do not identify or feel the same sentiments for your neighbour's family as those that you feel for your family. This is because there is no emotional connection to your neighbour. There can be friendship, but you will not lose sleep over your neighbour's son who has a fever. Yet, you are willing to sit up the whole night monitoring your own child who has fever. Emotions create a limited and personal world around everybody: "This is mine, this belongs to me and this is my area, my association, my identification. I like this person, I dislike that person, I love this person, I hate that person, I feel angry about this, I feel agitated about that." Emotions create your world.

According to Sri Swamiji, emotion is a flow of energy, not a state of mind. It is an energy that flows like the river, and as long as that flow of energy is directed outward into the world of sense objects, into the material world, with each association a corresponding response will be experienced in your emotional field. If you see a little baby, the emotional response will be that of affection. If you see money and gold lying unclaimed on the road, your response will be that of greed. If you see somebody who is happier and more successful than you, your response will be that of jealousy. In this manner, whenever an association and connection takes place outside, an emotional response is evoked.



Sri Swamiji says that emotions are continuously flowing outside and attaching themselves to different objects: family, friends, car, house, money, property, clothes, shoes, watches. How many pairs of shoes do you possess? Be truthful about it. And how many do you wear? One every hour, one every day, one every week or one every month? Yet, it is not possible to give away even a pair of shoes and say, “I am not going to use them.” No, there is attachment to shoes. Even a totally insignificant and useless object has an emotional value associated with it. A broken pen which was owned by your grandfather, for which you have no use, still holds sentimental value: “It belonged to my grandfather therefore I’m keeping it.” There is the emotional association, attachment.

The way to manage these emotions and the havoc created by them is through bhakti yoga. This is the third yoga to be perfected in life. Generally, people define bhakti as devotion. That is one definition of bhakti, but bhakti also means experiencing the harmonious purity within you. Experience the harmonious purity; that is the meaning of bhakti. Bhakti refers to the harmony and purity of emotions. Emotions become pure when they are directed inwards. They are impure and tainted when they come in contact with the sense objects. When they are disconnected from sense objects and sensory experiences, then emotions become pure, as they connect with your inner spirit.

You can experiment with this in the state of meditation; just bring the thought of your child, or your husband, or your wife into your mind and see how an emotional response will come up instantly. There is no delay. Then, just focus in your heart, just focus in chidakasha, in ajna chakra, and become emotion-free. Suddenly you will experience tranquillity, peace, as at that particular moment the emotion is not connected to anything with which you identify. When emotion is not identified with anything, there is the experience of tranquillity and peace. Therefore, the purpose of bhakti yoga is to manage these disturbances of emotions, which give birth to different uncontrolled moods and behaviours leading to further distress in life.

Our tradition speaks of the nine steps of bhakti yoga. Just as raja yoga has eight steps, bhakti yoga has nine steps. It begins with cultivating a positive attitude in the mind. With the cultivation of a positive attitude and idea, you can better control the manifestation of your emotion and stop it from being affected by these outer and

sensorial associations and connections. In this way, you move through one stage, then another, and another, through all nine stages of bhakti yoga before you experience that emotional tranquillity and balance. Just as in raja yoga you move from yama to samadhi to experience the luminous state of mind, in bhakti yoga you move from satsang, which is the first step, to *sanidhya*, union, which is the last step, the ninth stage of bhakti. That union, *sanidhya*, is the purity that you experience within you when your emotions are harnessed and their energy is used constructively. Just as raja yoga is the system of mind management, bhakti yoga is the system of emotion management. These three constitute the major yogas: hatha yoga for the body, raja yoga for the mind, bhakti yoga for the heart.

Kriya yoga: awakening the spirit

For spiritual awakening, there is kriya yoga. Those people who have perfected kriya yoga have become siddhas, as they have attained the spiritual illumination. You may have heard of Babaji, the ever-youthful saint. He was the master of kriya yoga. Once that spiritual awakening takes place, you have power to control the energy flowing in your body. You can rejuvenate the dead cells through that prana shakti and not allow the body to decay; it is a natural outcome. After having perfected kriya yoga; the whole body changes, as there is mastery, control and governance over the laws of nature which regulate the normal behaviour of the body.

When you arrive at that state of realization, where you are able to use the faculties of your consciousness and shakti, even the body does not know old age or decay. However, the purpose of kriya yoga is not to stop old age and decay of the body. This is a natural outcome of having perfected kriya yoga; you can live a long life. Kriya yoga has to be understood as a sadhana, not as a practice: “Oh, Swamiji said kriya yoga is wonderful, I can extend my life span, so now every day I practise kriya yoga, and I check myself, ‘Have I aged today? Are there more wrinkles on my face?’” No. That is a futile exercise. If you do that you are not a yogi, you are a narcissist. A yogi is a person who practises for the sake of perfection and realization, not to check the quality and condition of the body in front of a mirror to be more appealing and attractive to other people.

These are the four major practices of yoga which have been defined in the tradition to perfect oneself, to awaken and enhance the potential of each state: body, mind, emotions and spirit. These four are known as *bahiranga yoga*, external aspects of yoga.

Jnana yoga: rediscovering oneself

Then there is also *antaranga yoga*, internal aspects of yoga. Jnana yoga is *antaranga yoga*, as it aims to better manage and develop the capacities of the intellect. Jnana yoga is not abstract thinking: ‘Who am I?’ If you ask yourself the question, ‘Who am I?’ it is abstract thinking, although there are people, endowed with certain samskaras, for whom this thought is not abstract. Ramana Maharshi was someone who discovered his true source, his true nature, just by questioning, ‘Who am I?’ However, don’t think that you can do the same, as he had different samskaras; he had a different karma, destiny and mentality. He was a detached person. You are attached.

A normal person, in the absence of proper samskaras, is a bound person, subject to the influences of family, society, culture, traditions and customs. When practising jnana yoga, such people should begin with something definite and specific, so as to discover certain aspects of their nature which they have missed so far. What have you missed so far? What have you not discovered about yourself? There are four things that you do not know about yourself: your qualities and strengths, your limitations and weaknesses, your ambitions and your needs. Often you confuse your needs with ambition and ambition with need. Often you fall prey to your weaknesses and forget to use your strength to march forward in life. The purpose of jnana yoga has to be the rediscovery of oneself, of one's own nature.



There is a story of one aspirant who came to our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, and said, "I've come here and I'm going to live here until I am fully illuminated. I'm not going to move out of this place until I am self-realized." Sri Swamiji said to him, "Don't have such grandiose plans. Live on a day-to-day basis, week by week, month by month. If you like, stay; if you don't like, move on." The disciple said, "No, I have made a decision. You are my master, you have to give me some techniques, some mantra by which I can attain that transcendental understanding and realization." Eventually, Sri Swamiji said, "Okay, I'm going to give you a mantra. Practise it, and don't come out of your room until you perfect this mantra." He gave the person a mantra and told him to sit down and just identify with that mantra. This aspirant, in his zeal to experience the divine, the transcendental, sat down with a sankalpa, "I am going to stay here until this mantra gives me realization because my guru has said so." He began his mantra

sadhana, his anushthana.

The aspirant was living in Yoga Arogya. In those days I looked after administration and one day while going about my daily rounds, I happened to walk past Yoga Arogya, and from inside Room Number 43 I heard a big shout, “I GOT IT! I GOT IT!” I knocked on the door and asked, “What happened, are you all right? Why are you screaming?” This person, who looked like a mad man, said, “You know, I’ve seen the light.” I said, “Wonderful. Those people who see the light don’t look mad. You look mad.” He said, “No, no, no, this is intoxication! I am intoxicated by my experience.” I brought him to Sri Swamiji.

Sri Swamiji asked, “What happened?” and the aspirant started to describe his experience; how the mantra changed his perception, his viewpoint, his understanding about life. Sri Swamiji asked, “Then what happened?” The disciple said, “Now, with your grace and with the power of the mantra, I see light everywhere. I see the divine light everywhere.” Sri Swamiji asked “Where?” He said, “In everything! The leaf on the tree is radiating divine light; the rock thrown on the road is radiating divine light; the speck of dust floating in the air is radiating divine light; the mangy, scratchy dog on the street is radiating divine light; Swami Niranjan is also radiating divine light.” I thanked him for it, because until then I did not know it was so! In this manner, he named everything under the sun, all radiating divine light.

Sri Swamiji said, “Now, do one thing. You have to be grounded. In order to become grounded, take this bag, take this money, go to the market and buy vegetables for this evening’s dinner.” The aspirant took the money and the bag, and went to the market.

When he reached Munger market, he saw everybody running here and there, and the shutters of the shops closing down. He wondered what had happened. He stopped a person and asked, “Why is everybody running away? Why are the shops closing down?” The person said, “There is a mad elephant in the market! It is destroying everything, trampling over animals and people. We are all running to save our lives.” The aspirant thought, “Well, if I can see divinity in everything, I will definitely see divinity in this mad elephant, too. Just as Buddha was able to stop the rampage of the mad elephant because he had attained peace, just as Krishna was able to stop the rampage of the mad elephant because he had the shakti, I, too, can face that elephant.”

He continued walking until he was right in front of the elephant. The red-eyed elephant looked at this puny little man and said, “Who are you? Who dares to come before me?” and in his anger he picked the man up with his trunk, swung him around thrice giving him a good view of Munger town, and dashed him to the ground.

The man forgot all about his realization. He crawled to the local hospital, had himself bandaged and crawled back to ashram without vegetables, just the empty bag and the money pouch. We were all waiting for the vegetables so we could start the preparation for the evening dinner, but instead of vegetables we see this body covered in a bandage, like a mummy crawling on the ground, entering the ashram gates. Again, I went and informed Sri Swamiji and Sri Swamiji asked him, “What happened?” The man told him the full story.

After listening to the whole story, Sri Swamiji said, “Yes, realization of the mantra

was right, but you forgot one thing. The elephant was on a rampage, and when the person you stopped warned you, did you not see the divine being warning you not to go there? Why did you not heed the warning of that divine being in front of you, telling you not to go there? You disobeyed the divine mandate; therefore, this is your condition.”

This is only a story, but a good one. It indicates that in your zeal of having attained something, you lose touch with the realities of life. That is why many spiritual people behave in a peculiar manner, with a holier-than-thou attitude. A person who started to practise yoga today behaves like a saint. Why? Because that person thinks, “I have started to practise yoga, I have become spiritual, everything is peaceful.” No, it is wrong. You have to remain practical and grounded. You need to have an understanding of how to apply the spiritual wisdom in your life. The mental processes of spiritual wisdom are applied when you perfect jnana yoga. I told you this story to indicate that abstract thinking will disconnect you from reality. That is not the purpose of jnana yoga.

The purpose of jnana yoga is to cultivate an understanding of the nature of the individual. What are your qualities, what are your limitations, what are your needs, what your ambitions? These are the four things that you express to survive in this world. The beginning of jnana yoga is self-observation, self-analysis and self-rectification. If you can follow these three processes properly, the dross of the mind will drop away. The veil of maya covering consciousness will drop away and the light will shine forth.

The light bulb is burning, but if you put different layers of paper on top of the bulb, each layer that you put will reduce the intensity of the light. If you put ten pieces of paper on the bulb, there won't be any light at all. However, as you start removing each piece of paper, one by one, the light will become brighter and brighter and it will shine in its full glory when the last piece of paper is removed. That is the approach of jnana yoga. Don't start with the basic thought, the abstract thought, 'I am light.' You may be light, but totally covered with many layers and not even a shaft of light is coming through. You may be light burning bright, but it is all covered up. By thinking, 'I am light' you are not going to achieve anything, but by knowing about how you can remove the covering you will ultimately experience luminosity. Therefore, antaranga yoga, internal yoga, reflective yoga, is jnana yoga.

Karma yoga: developing the right attitude

After jnana yoga is karma yoga. *Karma* means action, something you all do from the time you are born until the time you die. You are never free from karma or the reactions to karma. You are so involved and engrossed in karma that you have become reactive beings; you react to situations most of the time. You do not apply your wisdom; rather, a karma evokes a reactive response. The purpose of karma yoga is to avoid that reactive response and to incorporate the component of wisdom in karma. When you bring the component of wisdom into karma, then there is no reaction. You perform your duties without any feedback, negative or positive, and you are free from the influences of these actions.

A man came to me once seeking advice on how he could manage his blood pressure.

In order to discover the cause of his hypertension I asked him, “When did you first notice that you had hypertension?” He said, “Swamiji, I remember. It was an event that shook me up emotionally.” “What was that event?” I asked. He said, “Once, I was sitting in my home after breakfast, watching the morning news. The night before my daughter-in-law had had a fight with her husband, so in the morning she was quite angry and agitated. While I was sitting there she was vacuuming the room and she muttered under her breath, ‘My father-in-law sits there on the couch like a dog.’ Of course, she did not mean it; she was in a different frame of mind when she said it, but I heard it and I felt hurt, shocked that my daughter-in-law could say such a thing. From that day on, I have had hypertension.”



I told him, “There is a simple way to manage your hypertension.” He said, “Please tell me the practice, I am willing to do it.” I said “No practice, no yoga for you. Just listen carefully to what I am about to say. If you follow that, I am sure that your hypertension will go away.” “How?” he asked me. I said, “When your daughter-in-law said, ‘You look like a dog’, what did you visualize?” That was my question, “How did you visualize yourself?” He said, “I imagined myself as a mangy, scrawny dog on the street.” I said, “Yes, and that image is the cause of your hypertension, not your daughter-in-law’s statement. You identified yourself with that mangy dog; you are seeing yourself in that form. If you follow my advice, change your visualization of the dog. Become an Alsatian and be grateful that as an Alsatian dog you have a couch to sit upon; be grateful that food is served to you on time, breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea and snacks whenever you want them. Be grateful that everybody is trying their best to please you.”

The man looked at me aghast; he must have thought, “What nonsense is this swami speaking. I come here for help, asking for a solution for my hypertension and he is saying, ‘Think of yourself as a different kind of a dog!’” I stirred him even more. I said, “You are very fortunate. You are a dog who has a bed to sleep on; you are a dog who has an air-conditioned car to ride in; you are a dog whose food is served to you daily. If you look at the beauty and the convenience that life has afforded you in your life as a dog, you will be happy.”

The man left. However, three months later he came back and said, “Swamiji, no more hypertension.” In the meantime, I had forgotten about this incident. I said, “What

happened?” He replied, “I developed the image and the visualization of the dog that you had described and it helped me!” I said, “Yes, God’s grace!” Then I started thinking, how did that change happen? I realized that this is the concept of karma yoga! The cultivation of *pratipaksha bhavana*, an opposite attitude to the existing one.

When you perform actions, you always react to the situation or to your own mind, and that reaction is generally negative. However, if you can cultivate the opposite bhavana, the opposite visualization, while you are reacting, the negative result will not affect you. You can say I am dog, you can say I am a donkey. I won’t be affected by what you say; rather, have that ability to change the negative reaction. That, according to yogic theory, is called *pratipaksha bhavana*, cultivation of the opposite visualization, the opposite behaviour. This makes you free from reactions; it gives you immunity from the effects of karmas.

Karma yoga is not hard work; it is not about being busy from morning until night saying, “I am doing my karma yoga.” There are people who do that. Even sannyasins and students who have participated in ashram karma yoga say, “Oh, I am going for my karma yoga.” Have they ever observed themselves while they are performing karma yoga? They are thinking, “Why am I given this broom to sweep the road? Why am I asked to clean the toilets?” They are reacting to the karma. If there is a reaction, it is not karma yoga. However, if you do it with pleasure, happiness and joy, then it becomes karma yoga, as there is no negativity being cultivated inside your mind.

True karma yoga is only performed when you are free from your prejudices and predilections. That is when karma is performed as duty and nothing else. Until then, karma is conditioned action. There is struggle and effort which leads to dissatisfaction and lack of peace. Karma yoga is where contentment and peace become an integral part of the actions. The act of sweeping is not karma yoga in itself. The attitude with which it is done will determine whether it becomes karma yoga or not. If you are sweeping, but feel that this is not the job for you and you are unhappy as you do it, then that is not yoga. Yoga is when the job is done spontaneously as something that needs to be done, without emotions and thoughts attached to it.

You know the story of Milarepa? He was asked by his guru, Marpa, to make a stone hut on top of a mountain. To do this he had to carry stones up from the bottom of the mountain. He did that diligently and constructed the house. When the house was ready, Marpa said to him, “No, I don’t like the location of the house. The base of the mountain is better. Carry the same rocks and reconstruct the house at the base of the mountain.”



If you were in his place, what would you have done? You would have left the guru, saying, “What is this? Making me carry rocks from the bottom of the mountain to the top and from the top to the bottom! He does not appreciate or accept anything that I do.” Milarepa, however, cultivated pratipaksha bhavana, opposite thinking. He was not deterred. He did not feel anything. No reaction, no response. He said, “This is the mandate; I am going to do it.” With the same feeling of sincerity, innocence and service he continued to do his thing. It was that attitude of karma yoga that ultimately made Milarepa great.

Karma yoga is not working hard twenty-four hours of the day and saying, “Oh, I am exhausted because I have been doing my karma yoga.” Karma yoga is cultivating pratipaksha bhavana so you are not influenced or affected by the results and effects of your actions, behaviours, attitudes and responses, and you are able to maintain a tranquil state of mind. Then your expectations take on a motivational force, an inspirational force rather than a negative force, and you act with freshness, creativity and purity. Karma yoga is a way to develop immunity from karmas, from the reactions of the karmas.

These are the six major yogas that have developed in order to allow human beings to express their creativity and potential. Other yogas have become an integrated part of these six yogas. Yogis propagated these yogas as a system of life and discipline which, if adopted, can help you experience the beauty of life.

Role of yoga in life

Why do people come to yoga? For five decades, I have worked for yoga. I have propagated it and taught it. This was at a time when the world did not know anything about yoga; they did not know the word ‘yoga’. Today, there are thousands of yoga

teachers and people who have been exposed to yoga. In the West people would say, "Yoga is another religion." In India people would say, "Yoga is for renunciates and not for common people; therefore, do not practise yoga."

Today, when people come to yoga, what are they seeking? They come for relief from disease. They come due to illness. This is the truth. In today's world of hustle and bustle, you cannot find time for yourself. As you wake up, the day's worries and jobs consume you and they stay with you until you lie down again at night. If you find time for yoga, you will do it for a day, a week, a month, a year. For how long will you sustain it? Eventually, you will drop it. The purpose of yoga is not therapeutic. If someone tells you this, they are wrong. If yoga is adopted as a lifestyle then disease will disappear. Consequently, becoming disease-free is an outcome of yoga, not its objective. Your yoga practice should not stop when the physical ailment is cured; you should continue with your practice.

You come to yoga because of your troubles, whether they are health related, stress related, emotional or familial. Your purpose is relief from difficulty. As long as the problem exists you will do your practice, but when that problem is resolved, you drop yoga. Five to ten years later when the problem resurfaces, you think of yoga again. You start your practice again. This is not yoga sadhana. It is not even yoga practice. It is yoga for alleviating a problem. There is no attempt to understand what yoga stands for, to understand its objective.

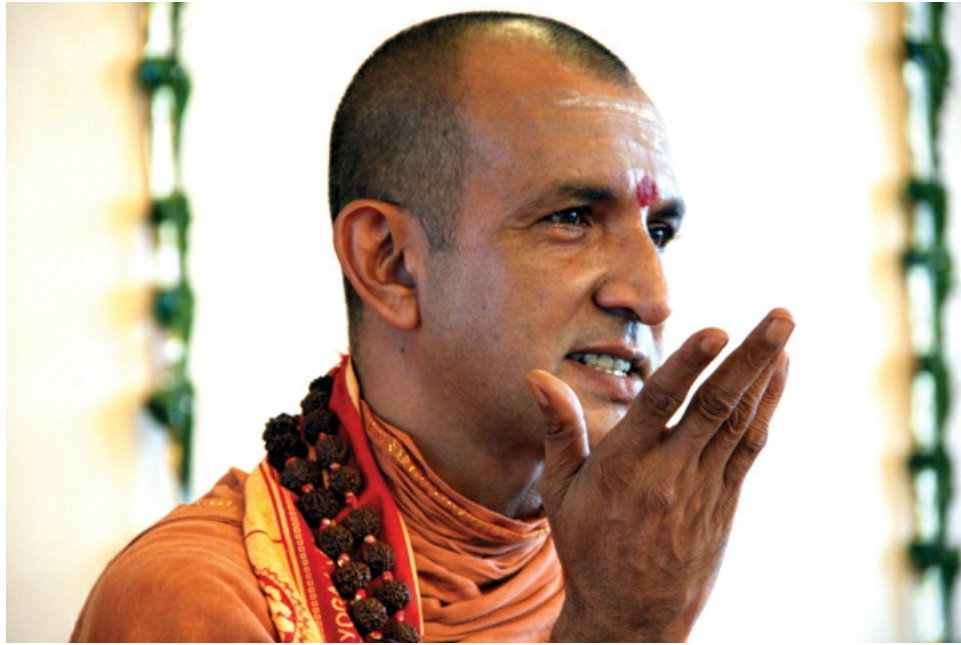
What kind of sadhana should you perform so that yoga becomes an integral part of your life? The biggest obstacle in this attempt is that you believe you need to take time out to be able to practise yoga. Not at all. To learn yoga, yes, but not to live it as a lifestyle. As a lifestyle, it becomes a regular part of your behaviour, something that you do not even need to think about. A musician will hear music in the hammering of a nail into the wall. Someone who is proficient in a subject will bring it into every experience of his life. Slowly, as you practise these yogas, little changes begin to come into your life, which will eventually lead to a change in your lifestyle. Then, you will begin to live yoga as a lifestyle.

When you go to school, you study and pass your exams, your lifestyle changes. As you grow up, your thoughts, intellect and viewpoint change. This is called maturity. You say that the person has become an adult. It is the same with yoga.

When you perform your actions with patience and endurance, and your behaviour reflects these qualities, then you are called a karma yogi. Similarly, when you use your common sense and are practical in life, then you become a jnana yogi. When you do not get carried away by your emotions, then you are called a bhakti yogi. This is yoga sadhana. That is how yoga has to be experienced in life.











Integration of Yogic Practices

21 August 2011

Today we are going to look at the integration of yogic practices into the daily routine. From my experience and understanding, yoga is not confined to classroom learning. You learn in the classroom and then you have to apply the yogic principles and practices in your daily life. People get deterred when, after joining a class and sitting there for one and a half to two hours, they are told to practise these things in their home daily.

People begin to think, “How can I fit two hours of yoga practice into my schedule?” They begin to imagine all kinds of things: “I will have to wake up early and practise my two hours of yoga, I will have to change my lifestyle, I will have to change my pattern, I will have to do this, I will have to do that.” They go through mental confusion and strife. There are many people who do make the attempt to practise yoga diligently for one or two hours as they have been taught in the class. However, after some time the motivation and inspiration fizzles out, other factors and situations begin to encroach upon their time, and maybe after a couple of months, a couple of weeks, or maybe after one year, the yoga practice stops.

Yoga is not to be practised in that manner. In class you can learn as much as you want or as much as the teacher teaches you, but when you come home, don't try to practise everything you have learnt in class. Instead, try to integrate what you have learnt in small capsules and practise them during the day when the time permits and when the mood is appropriate. The mind has to be in the right condition and the mood has to be right in order to derive the maximum benefit from a practice. I have come across many people who practise yoga nidra in the morning and say, “Swamiji I just woke up two hours ago and now I am practising yoga nidra. It doesn't sound or feel right.” I say, “Yes, you are doing it wrong. It should be done at night, not in the morning.” In this manner, little adjustments have to be made in your yoga practice. You have to see what you can do daily, you have to see what you can do weekly, you have to see what you can do quarterly, monthly and yearly, and that becomes your one-year yoga program. Next year it can change, you can progress, you can take another step into the second stage of yoga.

How does this daily program begin? What are those small periods of time throughout the day when you can practise some yoga technique and overcome the conditions and states that the body, mind, brain and emotions are facing due to their interaction with the outside world?

Morning mantra sadhana

Begin with your daily routine. Your day begins early in the morning when you open your eyes in bed and your day ends when you slip into the state of sleep. The day is divided into twelve-hour periods: twelve hours of day and twelve hours of night. In reality, it is the moments of living from the time you open your eyes until the time you close your eyes during which you have to regulate your routine. When you wake up in the morning, the first thing that should be done is the practice of the three mantras: Mahamrityunjaya mantra, eleven times; Gayatri mantra, eleven times; and Durga mantra, three times.

Why should these mantras be done in the morning? In the morning the brain is relaxed, it has had a good night's rest. The mind is not agitated; it has not confronted the realities of the world yet. It is in a peaceful, relaxed state. Immediately upon waking up, before you climb out of bed, sit on your bed. When you do that, you will know that you are drowsy, you are not fully awake. At that moment when you are neither fully awake nor fully asleep, when you are drowsy, when you are in-between sleep and wakefulness, the subconscious mind is active.



At one extreme you have the conscious faculty, and this conscious faculty is fully involved and integrated with sensory experiences. At the other extreme you have the unconscious faculty and this unconscious faculty is totally disconnected from sensory experiences. The subconscious faculty is in the middle as a link between the conscious and the unconscious, as the source where the mind can be strengthened, creativity can be developed and positivity can be acquired. It is this subconscious mind that you need to protect from the influences of the outside environment, and from negative and destructive tendencies.

According to yogic philosophy, the subconscious mind is the seat and the source of mental energy. It is in the subconscious that you can develop a strong willpower. By using the subconscious, you can alter and modify the patterns of behaviour and thought. The conscious mind in itself is a redundant mind, in the sense that it is only one-sided awareness, one-sided perception: you and the world and that's it. This one-sided connection does not allow the willpower of the mind to develop. There are many occasions in life or during the year, such as the New Year, when people make positive affirmations and resolves to attain in their life. They say, "On the 1st of January, I'm

going to make this sankalpa. I'm going to make this resolution and try to live that for the year." I'm sure you must have also made many such resolutions on New Year's Day, but for how long have you been able to sustain that resolution? Maybe one week, maybe three days, maybe fifteen days; nothing lasts beyond January! In February, you are back to your normal behaviour and normal self. It indicates that the connection with your environment and the material world dissipates the faculties and energies of the mind and it does not allow a sankalpa, an affirmation, a resolution, to take birth, as the mind is too distracted and dissipated. Thus, the conscious mind is a redundant mind, as it only interacts with the world of senses. It does not inspire you to develop a different quality of life. The unconscious mind is also redundant because you have no access to it, and if you have access, you go to sleep, so you can't work with your unconscious. However, you have access to your subconscious. The semi-drowsy state which you experience upon waking up is the state of the subconscious in which the senses are not fully engrossed, involved or active in the outside world, nor are you cut off from the outside world as in the deep unconscious. You are in between.

Sri Swamiji experimented on me. When I came to the ashram at the age of four, there was no chance of going to school anywhere, and I had the great opportunity and privilege that Sri Swamiji would allow me to sleep in his bed. I used to kick at night as children do: they move their arms, they move their feet, they kick! I used to do all that to Sri Swamiji. The next morning he would ask me, "Why were you kicking?" but I did not realize that I was kicking. Then he took me through this process of yoga nidra and accessed my subconscious mind. He planted many seeds in my subconscious mind when I was fast asleep and did not even know what was happening.

I have tried the same experiment with some children. Some children wet their bed when they sleep at night. Others are poor at studies. Five to six minutes after they fall asleep, shake them lightly so their eyes kind of open and shut again. This means they are in the state between wakefulness and deep sleep. They are half asleep. At that time say four to five sankalpas, ten times each. You will notice the change in a week or month. The child lives with a new enthusiasm.

I realized the power of the subconscious at the age of eleven when in the UK I had to give a lecture to a group of medical doctors. What can an eleven-year-old child lecture about to a group of professional medical practitioners? The night before the lecture when I went to sleep, I had a dream in which I was giving the lecture, and when I woke up everything that I had said was very clear to me. I noted it all down, word by word, sentence by sentence, all the points. After I gave the lecture to the group of medical professionals, they said, "Where have you studied?" I said, "I have not studied." "Who has taught you all these things that you spoke about?" I said, "Nobody." They said, "Do you know what you have spoken about? You have spoken about biofeedback, a science which we in the seventies are still developing and thinking about." I had spoken about GSR, galvanic skin response. I had spoken about the effect of asana and pranayama on the heart which could be observed through an electrocardiogram, the effect of meditation on the brain which could be monitored through an EEG, electroencephalograph and also by monitoring the alpha, beta, theta and delta waves.

In other words, it was a purely scientific lecture that I had given.

The next day, I started to think, 'From where did that knowledge come which, until yesterday, I did not have! Until yesterday, I did not know about it, then in the dream I spoke about it and now I am talking about it.' I asked Sri Swamiji at the next opportunity I got to see him, and he just gave me a smile and he said, "This is only one thing. Many more things will come to the surface of your mind." He left it at that, but as I grew up, I understood that he had planted seeds. When I used to sleep, he would speak on the *Bhagavad Gita*, he would speak on history, mathematics, he would read books on geography, physics, chemistry, literature, the Upanishads and the Vedas. The next day he would give me the book to read, and after opening the page, I used to think, "I have read this someplace; I know this subject." Where I had read it or when I had read it, of that I had no recollection. In that manner, it was easy for me to grasp the subject, practically instantaneously. It used to come alive. This was the result, the effect of yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra acts on the subconscious mind. Even when you practise yoga nidra, many times you will experience that you are neither asleep nor awake. You feel that you have been awake all the time, but you don't recall the instructions that have been given, from the opening *Hari Om* to the closing *Hari Om*, but you feel you have been awake all the time. That means the instructions have gone into the subconscious, they have bypassed the conscious and entered into the subconscious. If they went through the conscious mind, you will know that the instructor had said, "Thumb, second finger, third finger" or this visualization or that visualization, this sensation or that sensation. However, there is often no conscious awareness of having slept or even of having heard the instructions. You have not slept.



When you wake up in the morning and the subconscious is active, at that moment make three resolutions, three *sankalpas*. These resolutions, these *sankalpas*, are like seeds that you plant in the ground and then you forget about them and allow the seeds to germinate naturally and spontaneously. After taking the *sankalpa*, don't even think about it.

Once, a farmer wanted to grow a mango tree, so he took the seed of a mango and planted it in the ground. Every day he would take it out to see whether it was sprouting or not and put it back in. One year passed; nothing had sprouted. He was a bit confused and worried, so he asked somebody who knew about fruits and plants for advice. The man told him that once you plant the seed, you must leave it there and not take it out. Let nature do the work. The farmer followed this advice and behold, in one month a little sprout was seen. For one year he had been taking it out every day to see whether it was sprouting or not. That is the idea of the *sankalpa* and affirmation: a positive thought. Think about it, plant it and then forget about it and let nature take its course. That is the purpose of the mantra *sadhana* in the morning.

The timing is important, as the subconscious is active. Alpha waves are predominant at this time and the first impressions that enter the mind determine the state of the mind for the rest of the day. If you do the mantras after your bath it is no use; your feelings, emotions and beliefs come forward and make a big *khichari* inside.

Most of you wake up to the ring of the alarm clock. That is the first sound your mind hears and your whole day passes with a buzz. On a holiday, you wake up, have tea, a big breakfast and read the newspaper, all in bed. It is like you are continuously throwing pebbles into a lake and causing ripples. This is how you take the mind towards the

conscious state. Chanting of the mantras while the subconscious is still active allows the mind to retain its peaceful state. Before the mind becomes active and the mental energies become dissipated, you plant the sankalpa. What are the sankalpas, the resolutions, the affirmations?

The first one is for health and wellbeing: make the sankalpa for acquisition of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Make the sankalpa that “I will be healthy, wealthy and wise”, and chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times while sitting on your bed, audible only to yourself. You have woken up and you are sitting on your bed with eyes closed, make the resolve and chant the mantra eleven times.

When you complete the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, make another sankalpa for the acquisition of wisdom and understanding. Anyone can acquire knowledge, but few acquire wisdom and understanding. These two are the greatest qualities in life. Not the ability to know, not the ability to have intellectual creativity, but the ability to understand. Wisdom and understanding. After this sankalpa, chant the Gayatri mantra eleven times.

When you complete the Gayatri mantra, make a sankalpa to receive inner strength to confront the world with positivity and optimism and to overcome distress and disease: distress which is mental and disease which is physical. With this sankalpa, do three rounds of the thirty-two names of Durga.

Once you become fluent in these three practices, it will take you about seven minutes. Initially it may take a bit longer, but once you are accustomed to the chanting and the sankalpa is appropriate, the entire early morning mantra sadhana upon waking up will only take about seven minutes. After that go to the bathroom, freshen up, dress up, get ready to face your life and the day.

Those who have tried this method of mantra early in the morning find that they are able to remain optimistic, positive, creative and clear for the rest of the day. The mantras provide strength to the mind and act as a shield that protects you from all the negative influences of the outer world. They keep the mind undisturbed when faced by the worries, stresses and troubles of daily life. They help you maintain your clarity of mind in all situations. Therefore, item number one: practice of the three mantras. This is the first morning sadhana, the first vitamin capsule that you take upon waking up. This is the doctor’s prescription.

Pre-breakfast asana and pranayama

The second capsule comes after you have had your bath or shower and freshened up, but before breakfast. This is the practice of a few asanas and pranayamas. Practitioners of yoga are generally confused as to which asanas to practise regularly since they learn so many things from basic to advanced. They choose, “Okay, I will practise this and this and this.” They do it for a couple of days and then they think, “Oh, I should also practise that other one and leave this one for some time.” There is no continuity in the practice of asana and pranayama. In the absence of continuity, the effect is only physical, stretching the muscles and moving the joints.

From the yogic perspective, only five asanas are considered important for a normal

person who is seeking general wellbeing, and not trying to overcome some difficulty, problem or illness. Imagine all the ways you move your body throughout the day. In how many ways is it possible to move the body during normal activity? Stretching is one movement; bending, both forward and backward is one movement; bending sideways is another movement; and twisting is another movement. These are the major movements that you perform with your body. There are postures which help create balance in the body, and they should be practised in the early morning. When you sleep at night, due to the lack of movement in the body certain acids accumulate in different joints, lactic acid for example, and the accumulation of these acids creates stiffness. The body has to be freed, and in order to do so, the basic normal movements of the body have to be understood.



Tadasana: Begin with *tadasana*, traction. It will stretch each and every joint; it will stretch the muscles and remove the tension of the physical compression: the spinal vertebral compression, as well as the joint compression of the knees, hips, waist, feet and ankles. Traction is very useful for opening up the joints, stretching the muscles, expanding the nerves, and *tadasana* is a good practice of traction. When this practice is performed, the expansion of all the internal organs takes place: the lungs expand, the arteries and veins expand, the muscles stretch, the joints open up, circulation begins to happen. With this expansion, breathing becomes easier, stiffness in the joints goes away as does stiffness in the shoulders and the lower back. The whole body is stretched, and when you imagine that you are going to touch the ceiling, with every movement the body stretches one centimetre more. *Tadasana* should be done ten times in a slow, controlled, regulated manner.

Remember, if you want the physical benefits of yoga, do the practices dynamically. By practising them dynamically you will affect your muscular structure, your nervous

structure and your bone structure. If you want the subtle results of yoga, the pranic effect, practise with slow movements, concentration and awareness of the complete stretch. Every movement should be observed and understood; no movement should be mechanical.

Tiryak tadasana: The second practice is tiryak tadasana. Following the movement of the body, you bend sideways. When you practise tiryak tadasana, there is compression on one side of the body and a stretch on the other side, and then it is reversed. As contraction takes place on one side of the body, stretching is taking place on the other side, and the contraction creates a sponge-like effect in the internal organs. You can squeeze a sponge and, when you release it, it comes back to its original shape. Squeeze it again, and again it will come back to its original shape. Similarly, when you bend to one side the organs on this side are squeezed and the organs of the other side are extended; the muscles are extended, the nerves are extended. Contraction and expansion take place and this gives the internal organs a massage.

The squeezing and relaxing effect on the internal organs also releases the stagnant blood from that particular organ and allows fresh blood to come in. The stretch happens from the arms right down to the legs, while the other side of the body contracts. In this posture, a complete stretch is taking place on one side and contraction on the other side. This has to be repeated ten times on each side, and each time try to bend a bit further, try to bend one centimetre more, to the maximum limit of your body, and stay at that point until you become comfortable. The asana is good for the liver, the kidneys, the small and large intestines and the stomach.





Kati chakrasana: The third practice is kati chakrasana. In this position, the body is being twisted. When a cloth is wet and you need to remove the water, you twist the cloth to remove the water. In the same manner, the body is being twisted first on one side, then on the other. During this movement, the entire spine and the vertebrae are being shifted and moved.

Remember, the spinal cord is the support of this body just as pillars are the support of a building. The pillars must be straight in order to hold the building. If there is a crooked pillar, the building will have a very short life. It will fall very quickly. People are in the habit of being hunched over most of the time; they don't sit properly. The main pillar of the house is bent. You have to straighten the main pillar of the house, and that does not happen by you trying to sit straight and push your chest out all the time. Even when you try to sit straight, you don't sit properly; you just push your chest out thinking, "Oh, now I am straight."

Due to its movement of the vertebrae, kati chakrasana realigns the whole spinal column so that the natural alignment of the spine is attained. Once the spine comes back to its natural form and shape, all the nerve plexuses of the spine can carry the nerve impulses from different organs and parts of the body to the brain. There is a perfect connection and coordination between the nerve impulses, the brain and the body organs.

You can create different effects on your spine by spreading your legs further apart or keeping them closer together. If you spread your legs wide apart, the effect will be felt more intensely in the lower region of the spine, in the waist area. If you keep your feet close together, the effect will be felt in the entire spine. As the feet and legs are spread further apart, the effect of the motion comes down and the waist is twisted, but when the feet are together or closer together then the entire body is being twisted. When you find that from sitting for a long time, the hips are tight, tense and aching then do the practice with your legs further apart and the effect will be concentrated on the hips. When you find that your upper shoulder area is stiff from working too much, then keep the feet closer together and the movement will affect the whole spine. This is the squeezing effect. In the course of time, when you become adept in the practice, you can

feel how the muscles and joints are being turned, twisted and squeezed. There is a fresh supply of blood to each and every part of the body, muscles and joints, giving the feeling of lightness and energy.

These are the ways in which you can move your body: traction is the first one, bending is the next, twisting is the third, the fourth and fifth movements are the forward and backward bends; which are achieved through the practice of surya namaskara.

Surya namaskara: The practice of surya namaskara is also known as the sun salutation. The effect of this practice is that, as you bend forward and backward and you stretch your arms and legs in a specific manner, pressure is created in the different nerve plexuses in the body. For example, in posture number two when you raise the arms and lean back, the neck is being stretched. You assume that it is your back because you are bending, but in reality it is the neck area that is being stretched, vishuddhi chakra. When you bend forward, manipura chakra is being stimulated. In this manner, each posture, each movement affects, influences and alters the energy movement in different chakras.



In positions four and nine, when there is contraction of one side of the body and stretching of the other side, ida and pingala are being influenced by that movement, and when ida and pingala channels are regulated there is a feeling of increased vitality, energy and stamina; the pranas become active, the prana shakti becomes active. There is a lot of energy acquired through the surya namaskara technique; therefore, it is known as salutation to the sun. It activates prana shakti.

When we were young, we used to have competitions in the ashram between sannyasins to see how many rounds of surya namaskara we could practise. The goal was to achieve a hundred and eight rounds, and for many months we sustained it, and that was the only yoga practice that we would do: one hundred and eight rounds of surya namaskara every day. After that, I tell you, the energy that we felt would keep us going for the entire day without much sustenance or nourishment, an added benefit since in the old ashram, when we first started, we had no money. I used to go to the Munger market with a gunny bag and pick up the leaves of the vegetables thrown on the ground and bring them to the ashram. We would clean them, cut out the rotten parts, cook the green parts and eat that. It was like that. In our ashram, we did not know the taste of salt. When salt was put in food, it used to be a feast!

If I tell you the stories of our growth, you will say, “Swamiji is saying all wrong things. We don’t see anything like that here.” No, but we have lived a very tough life. If

I try to introduce that life now, all these people who you see here will leave. The soup used to be hot water with salt and one piece of leaf floating in the water. That used to be our soup! We lived the life of a beggar in the early days.



I am only telling you this to inform you that asana practice sustained us at that time of malnourishment, when there was nothing to eat. Perhaps for two days we would have nothing to eat. Sri Swamiji used to charge three rupees for a two-hour yoga class, and people used to criticize him: “Three rupees for yoga class! This sadhu is crazy.” Well, we needed to do that in order to eat something! Asanas sustained us at that time. Don’t ask me how, but by increasing the level of prana shakti we were able to carry on for a long time. That is one effect of surya namaskara.

With these four postures you complete all the five major movements of the body: traction, side bending, twisting, forward and backward bending. The final practice in this series of general practices for normal people is the shoulder stand, sarvangasana.

Sarvangasana: This is an inverted posture. All day long you are on your feet and the blood flow is constantly in a downward movement. When you perform sarvangasana, the blood flow is reversed. Therefore, it increases brain power and mental sharpness. Stay in this posture for a few minutes, breathing normally, and counting your breaths. If you can stay in this posture for five minutes then the blood enters the brain.

Beginners should hold the posture initially for eleven breaths only. Start with that much. The only limitation and restriction in this practice is that people who have hypertensive tendencies, cardiovascular problems, spondylitis or a weak neck and shoulders should not do it.



These are the five postures which are a must for everyone in order to maintain a sense of wellbeing and physical health. Beyond this, there is no need for a normal person to do any other practice of asana. This series of postures and asanas can be completed in less than fifteen minutes once you are used to them, and that is your daily asana practice. You don't need to practise peacock posture, wheel pose, this pose, that pose, and so on. If you do so, that is your choice, but in reality, for the maintenance of your physical body, for removal of tensions, tightness, aches and pains, for regulating circulation and to activate the chakras so that there is proper flow of energy, prana shakti, these practices suffice.

Remember that yoga is primarily a promotive science; it promotes health and wellbeing. When health is promoted, you can prevent many of the situations that cause illness and disease. Yoga is not a therapy, it is not a curative science; primarily it is a promotive science. It promotes the sense of wellbeing, energy and lightness in the body.

After you have completed these five practices, two pranayamas are important.

Nadi shodhana pranayama: The first one is known as nadi shodhana pranayama, alternate nostril breathing. Many times it is also called anuloma viloma. However, *anuloma* means breathing in and *viloma* means breathing out. Therefore, anuloma viloma is what we do all the time. It is not pranayama. The name of the pranayama is nadi shodhana pranayama. Inhale through the right nostril, exhale through the left nostril; inhale through the left nostril, exhale through the right nostril. Practise ten rounds of this breathing technique, and with each round try to lengthen the inhalation and exhalation. Regulate your breath. You can even count seconds. When you are inhaling, start breathing in at the count of one and finish breathing in at the count of, say, seven. When you begin to breathe out, start at the count of one and finish breathing out at the count of seven. Inhale for seven seconds, exhale for seven seconds; inhale for seven seconds, exhale for seven seconds. That is one round of nadi shodhana pranayama. Yogis consider nadi shodhana pranayama to be perfected when one

inhalation is the length of one recitation of the Gayatri mantra. This takes approximately thirty seconds. So inhale for thirty seconds and exhale for thirty seconds. This makes one round in the advanced stage.

If you can maintain this regularity and the ratio of breath in nadi shodhana pranayama, it will calm the nervous agitation; it will calm the cerebral waves. It helps control nervous anxiety, cerebral anxiety and mental anxiety. Nadi shodhana pranayama also cleans the nasal passages. Therefore, this pranayama is a must as a regular practice for everyone. When you are disturbed and the mind is in turmoil and the brain feels fatigued, practise this pranayama.

I have experimented with nadi shodhana. In 1977, when I was living in Australia, I did some research into Kirlian photography. There was a group of swamis and other professionals from the city of Sydney who would meet every day to take their print of a Kirlian photograph and measure the emission of the electromagnetic field visible in the hands. Then they would go and do their work: the psychiatrist would go and see patients, the engineer would go, the doctor would go, the sannyasin would go, and they would meet in the evening, take the print again and measure the emanation. They would then practise certain pranayamas. We noticed that with this pranayama, within five minutes, the depleted energy was recovered.



Bhramari pranayama: The second pranayama to be practised is bhramari pranayama, the humming sound that is created when you breathe out. Plug the ears, breathe in deeply, focus on the vibration in the centre of the head and hum, seven to ten times.

Bhramari pranayama is beneficial for people with high blood pressure or hypertension. If you do it thirty times in the morning and thirty times before going to bed at night, in a week's time you will be cured of your condition. Researchers in the West found that melatonin is only secreted in the body at night time, between two and four o'clock in the morning, which is when you are in your deepest sleep. Research has shown that this practice activates and stimulates the secretion of melatonin. The

secretion of melatonin helps to relax the cerebral and mental functions. It allows you to release the cerebral and mental tensions and find a restful, peaceful, state of being.

These two pranayamas, along with the five asanas, take about twenty minutes.

End of the workday yoga nidra

Before breakfast, do your asana practice, then have your breakfast and go to your job, your profession, your duty, your obligation. When you come back home fatigued, tired, exhausted, go to your room and for ten minutes practise a short yoga nidra. In this practice, you can count your breath backwards from one hundred to one. With each exhalation, allow your body to relax a bit more than before. Just deepen the experience of relaxation, little by little, with each exhalation. You will find that the tension and stress you have accumulated during the day in your work, in your profession, in your job, in your involvement, will be gone in ten minutes' time.

Another method that can be adopted is the rotation of consciousness. Without going through the entire process of yoga nidra, just lie down in shavasana, close your eyes, and begin to visualize different parts of the body and start relaxing them. Once you have done one round of visualizing the different parts of the body as you would in yoga nidra, the practice is over. Then get up and do your thing: have your dinner, watch TV, go to parties, whatever you do.

Yoga nidra has been practised throughout history. Napoleon practised yoga nidra sitting on his horse before he entered the battlefield. Mahatma Gandhi used it every time he needed to work through the night. Even a former Colombian president used the short yoga nidra technique. Puzzled by his level of energy, when his subordinates asked him the secret to his energy levels, the president's reply was crystal clear. He said, "Whenever I tire, I practise yoga nidra."

Pre-bed meditation

Before going to sleep, practise ten minutes of meditation. This is actually a combination of two practices.

Antar mouna: The first part is to de-stress and clean the accumulated stuff from the mind. It is the practice of antar mouna, of witnessing and observing the thoughts, clearing the mind of the thoughts, of those impressions that are dominating your conscious faculty. The tensions, the problems, whatever they are, thoughts about the family, about the next day, just clear them out during these five minutes through antar mouna. Take one thought at a time, watch it and let it go. Then the next thought, watch it and let it go. Go on like this for five minutes.

Ajapa japa: The next five-minute part is ajapa japa: awareness of the breath from the navel to the eyebrow centre. When you inhale, visualize the breath flow up from navel to eyebrow centre, when you exhale, visualize the breathe flow down to the navel, and repeat the mantra *So-Ham* mentally. Kabir, a famous Indian saint, has said that if you can practise *So-Ham* mantra in a way that it becomes part of your every breath, *So-Ham* with every inhalation and every exhalation, it will open up other dimensions of the self and you will be able to hear the inner sound.

Five minutes of antar mouna and five minutes of ajapa japa are the right mediation techniques to be done on a daily basis. Unconscious tensions surface when you sleep at night. Often, you wake up feeling tired, as if you had no rest even though you slept, and you drag yourself through the day. Meditation keeps these tensions away. It does not let the unconscious tensions disturb your night's sleep. The result is you sleep well and feel energetic, clear headed and ready to face the new day.

You don't have to practise meditation for one hour. If you do it properly then ten minutes of practice will give you the same result as a yogi practising meditation for eight hours.

Monday through Saturday practice in brief

Mantra practice in the morning, asana, pranayama for twenty minutes pre-breakfast, yoga nidra or deep relaxation when you come home and ten minutes of meditation at night before sleep. This constitutes your daily routine of yoga practice. You can definitely find this much time in the day. You may not have one unbroken hour, but you can break that one hour into ten-minute, fifteen-minute, twenty-minute periods. This should be practised daily, Monday to Saturday.

Shatkarma on Sunday

Sunday off, but on Sundays do shatkarma. If you are able to, practise kunjla kriya. Drink water and regurgitate it, on an empty stomach, after having learnt the practice. Kunjal should be learnt under proper guidance. Don't try it from tomorrow because I have told you to do it, but learn it and see if you are in the right condition of body to practise it or not.

Kunjal: Kunjal will clean the stomach and remove traces and symptoms of acidity, gas and mucus. There are three humours which affect your body: *pitta*, bile; *vata*, gas; and *kapha*, mucus. When there is imbalance in these three humours, diseases emerge. However, if you can maintain the balance of these three humours, you can be free of every kind of physical problem arising out of the imbalances of pitta, kapha and vata. This internal cleaning of the stomach and oesophagus is important once a week to detoxify yourself. Just clean it once, so that digestion takes place in the right manner and you are able to absorb the nutrients from the food properly without creating any other imbalance.

Neti: After kunjla, practise neti kriya, nasal cleaning. Neti is an ENTE practice: ear, nose, throat and eyes. You breathe in so many pollutants and all day they accumulate in your sinuses and result in allergies and inflammation of the sinuses. The weather also affects the sinuses. Inflamed sinuses in turn affect eyesight and the frontal region of the brain. You can experience headaches because of affected sinuses. Therefore, to maintain the health of the face and head, neti should be practised once a week.

Neti clears the sinuses, but at the same time it affects the many tiny, sensitive nerves and tissues of the eyes, ears, nose and throat. As the water flows through the nostrils, sensation is created in these minute little nerves and tissues and they are stimulated. It has been observed that many types of short-sightedness can be rectified with neti, as it

stimulates the optical nerves. People who do not hear well find that after practising neti the blocks are removed and the nerves are stimulated, helping the auditory faculty. Sinuses are cleared so that the nose is not blocked and you can breathe properly. The forehead is stimulated, therefore it is also good for migraine or different types of headaches. The practice of neti will help you control your headache, your eye ache, your earache, your mouth ache, your throat ache. Neti is the best ENTE doctor in the world.

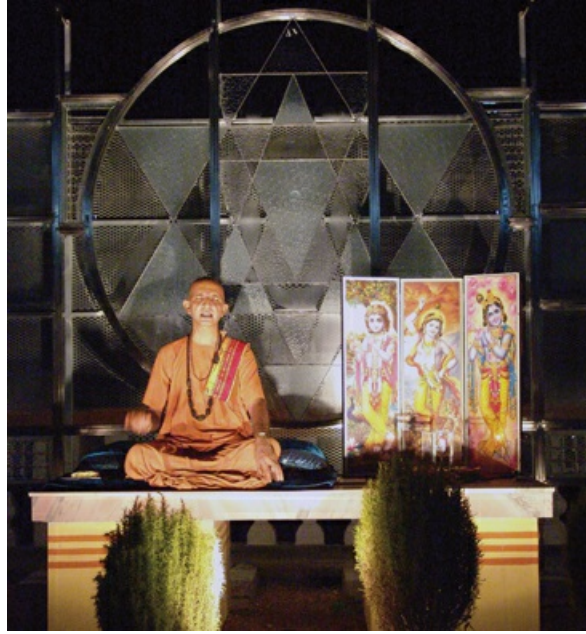
This is your Sunday hatha yoga practice. This much you should do as practice. Along with this, there are certain things to fine-tune your nature and character. What are those things to fine-tune in yourself?

Nightly review of the day

Every night before you go to sleep, analyze your day, from the time you woke up until the present moment. What did you do? How did you interact with people, circumstances and situations? When did you feel angry? When did you feel confused? When did you feel depressed? Just observe each moment of the day; run through each hour of the day. If there has been some problem in any communication, notice it and think, “If I encountered the same situation again, is there a better way to deal with it?” In this way, observe your responses and reactions on a day-to-day basis. It only takes five minutes at night. In the course of time you will find that you are able to control your own reactive responses in a better manner. Analysis of the events of the day must be done after meditation, as you lie on your bed, when you are about to go to sleep, to clear your mind of all the clutter that has accumulated during the day.

Know yourself: the SWAN principle

Once a week, when you are free, take four sheets of paper and sit down in a quiet place. On one sheet of paper write down what you perceive to be your strengths and qualities. On another sheet write down what you perceive to be your limitations and weaknesses. On the third sheet write down what you perceive to be your aspirations, ambitions and expectations. On the fourth sheet of paper write down what your needs are, your real needs, actual needs, not supposed needs, but the actual needs to survive, to live, to be happy. Develop this list. It won't happen in one day; it took me many months to make my own list, as one week I would write it out, then look over it and analyze, “No, this is not correct. I should cross this from here, I should add something here.” Analyze it. It will take time: one month, two months, three months. Then you will be able to discover the traits of your personality and nature. You will be able to discover what your weaknesses and limitations are. You will be able to discover what your strengths are. When you encounter such situations in life where you have to confront your weaknesses and limitations, you will be in a better position to deal with that situation by cultivating the opposite quality, the strength that is the opposite of the weakness.



You have to become like a programmer who sits down in front of the computer and writes a program. When computers first came out, I was the only computer literate person in this ashram, so I had the duty of making programs using the basic language. This was in the 1980s, and when I used to sit down to do programming work, I did not know how many hours would pass. One gets lost in that. You need to check that the program works and if it does not work, you need to go through the list of things that you have written again. Sometimes, programming used to drive me up the wall, because by mistake I would put a comma instead of a full stop and the program would not work. It would come to a point and then stop. You have to check the whole sequence of programming to find out where you have made the mistake, and to differentiate between a full stop and a comma is very hard because it is something you very easily miss. The program would not function and I would lose sleep over it. However, when I found the problem I would think, “Oh I made a mistake. Such a simple thing. I should not have put a comma there,” and then the program would work. That is analysis.

Apply the same principle to your life. Analyze where the mistakes are committed and try to rectify them. That is jnana yoga. Not questioning yourself, “Who am I? Am I divine? Can I turn water into wine? Or am I a fool who can’t walk across a swimming pool?” Analyze yourself. Rectify those defects, those traits of the personality which hinder your development and your creativity by identifying your weaknesses, strengths, ambitions and needs.

After you have made the list, pick one item, inferiority, for example, and work with that item for one week. Pick one weakness and one strength. Observe when that weakness affects you and observe in which moments you can cultivate your strength even more. This is what we call the SWAN principle: strength, weakness, ambition and need. It is a practice of jnana yoga that I am asking you to do: self-analysis, self-reflection, by writing down the traits of your character and mentality. Work with each

trait individually, and if within one year you can work with one quality per month, in twelve months you will have overcome twelve limiting conditions and acquired twelve positive strengths. Work with one item first and learn to manage that. The SWAN analysis must be done once every week and this will allow you to know yourself.

Weekly group mantra sadhana

Another sadhana that should be practised once a week in a group, as a family if you are at home, is mantra sadhana. Sri Swamiji has given us the tool of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. Once a week, on Saturday or Sunday, whenever it is possible and convenient for you, at your place, either alone or as a couple or with the entire family, spend twenty minutes perfecting and chanting the mantra. After all, you can spend twenty minutes criticizing each other, watching television and gossiping, so why can't you spend twenty minutes in a constructive involvement which helps uplift the mind and emotions?

If you can inspire your family to come together for twenty minutes and sit together, in this effort of chanting the mantra, you will find that a much deeper understanding and connection takes place between the people who are chanting with you. If it is a family, there is a better bonding with the entire family. Positivity enters the mind of the entire family: strength enters, belief and conviction enter, and the entire family is uplifted. This is the sadhana which has been prescribed by Sri Swamiji, and we are following it. Many people globally are following that sadhana, in ashrams and also in homes. It should become a must for every yoga aspirant. This is the weekly sadhana.

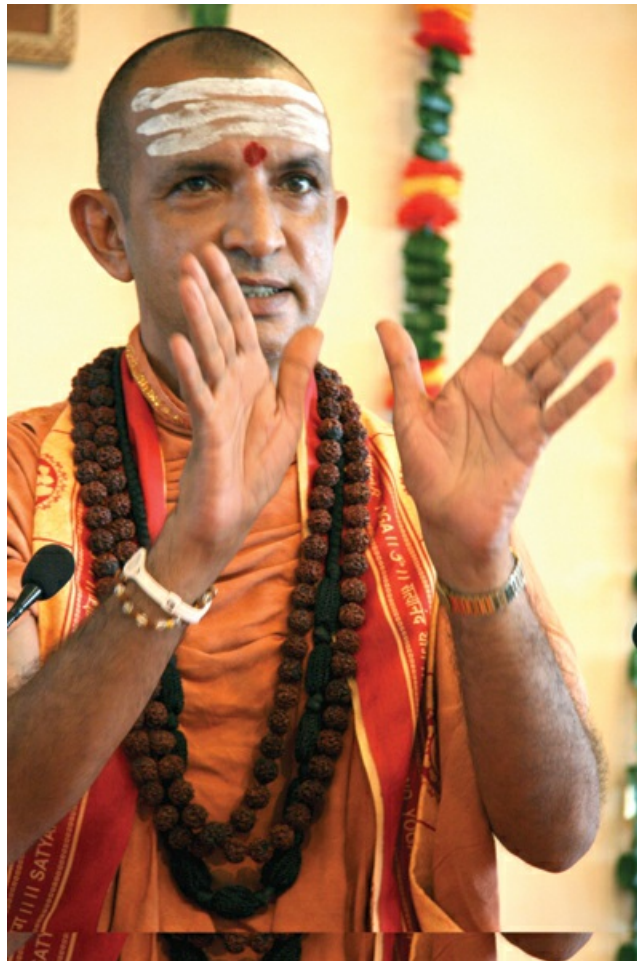
Fortnightly incorporation of yama and niyama

From daily routine to weekly routine, in little bits, yoga has to be incorporated into your life. Next comes the fifteen-day program. Choose one yama and one niyama and try to live that yama and niyama. Whether you succeed or fail, it does not matter, but make the attempt. You know the yamas and you know the niyamas. According to Sage Patanjali, *satya*, truthfulness; *ahimsa*, absence of violent nature; *asteya*, honesty; *aparigraha*, non-covetousness; and *brahmacharya*, continence, are the five yamas. The niyamas are *shaucha*, purity; *santosha*, contentment; *tapasya*, austerity; *swadhyaya*, analysis or study; and *ishwara pranidhana*, cultivating faith. Each yama represents a quality of mind, a strength of mind, a character of mind, a nature of mind. Ahimsa, for example, is absence of violence in thought, in word and in deed. Don't be negative. Don't be aggressive, even in your thought. If you can do that you have attained ahimsa, but if you think ahimsa is only non-injury to other beings and you can be critical and negative about everybody in your life, you are not a follower of ahimsa.

Ahimsa means absence of aggressiveness and violence in the personality: in thought, communication, behaviour and performance. Try to live this life for fifteen days. You may not be one hundred percent successful, but you will have a glimpse, at least one percent, of what ahimsa is about and that will bring peace to you. It will stop your internal upheaval, agitation and negativity. Those who are aggressive and violent, those who hate, those who are jealous and greedy need to cultivate the quality of ahimsa. If you try to find out whether you have all these qualities, the answer will be yes. Sri

Swamiji used to say, “If a person does not have hatred, if a person does not have jealousy, if a person does not have fear, if a person does not have anger, then that person is an idiot.” They all have to be there; they are the natural expressions of life. However, don’t fall under the sway and influence of these things; rather, try to become the master of these expressions. They should not control you; you should be able to control them. This control can be achieved with the monthly or fortnightly practice of yama and niyama.

Read about them and choose one. Make that item the focus of your effort for those fifteen days, then change it. Don’t worry whether you have accomplished and completed that yama or niyama. Even if you improve one percent, it is a beginning, and stop at that point. Next fortnight, pick another set of one yama and one niyama, and work with it, and the following fortnight, another set. When you have completed the cycle, go back to number one again. In this way, for one year just keep on rotating the awareness of yamas and niyamas, and you will notice a tremendous transformation taking place in your perception, behaviour and attitude. Attitude is what kills you in life. In order to create a change in attitude, adopt one yama and one niyama. You have to work at it, but eventually you will succeed.



Make the effort, the attempt and see what happens. Adherence to yama and niyama will bring *sanyam* or restraint in life. Restraint is the outcome of having wisdom. It is the outcome of having understanding. If there is no understanding and no wisdom, there is no restraint. Yamas and niyamas allow you to cultivate sanyam by stimulating the component of wisdom and understanding. In this way, you also express a higher quality of your consciousness, as such virtuous behaviour represents the higher quality of consciousness. Behaviour that is full of vice, aggressiveness, anger and frustration represents the detrimental expression of consciousness. It takes you towards suffering. That which takes you towards freedom is the virtuous lifestyle. Virtuous means positive, optimistic, creative, endowed with understanding and wisdom, and the cultivation of these virtues is the purpose of yamas and niyamas.



The Yogic Lifestyle

22 August 2011

We have discussed how your involvement with yoga begins and ends at the time of difficulty, strife, confusion, tension and problems, and as long as you are making an attempt to solve your difficulties in life, you are only a yoga practitioner. If you come to yoga for stress management, you are a yoga practitioner; if you come to yoga to learn meditation, you are a yoga practitioner; if you come to yoga for management of certain physical or psychological conditions, you are a practitioner of yoga. The practice of yoga stops the moment you are able to rectify the imbalance or damage to your life, to your personality, body and mind.

Once you begin to experience a sense of wellbeing, comfort and health, the involvement with yoga gradually lessens because you have attained what you are searching for: stress release, you have got it; learning how to meditate, you know it; overcoming the physical challenges or mental challenges, you have done it; so now there is no purpose in practising yoga any more and yoga practice stops.

There are some people, however, who wish to explore it in greater depth, those benefits of yoga which yoga has described and stated can be attained by the proper practice and application of yoga in life. Such people who follow the aspirations and the goals as set by yoga and try to achieve those aims become yoga sadhakas. They are people who are trying to incorporate the principles and practices of yoga into their life, to explore the dormant areas of their own nature, and gain mastery and command over the different states of consciousness and energy.

Some people are keen to awaken their kundalini and take up kriya yoga or kundalini yoga sadhana and stick with it for a long time. Some people are interested in hatha yoga, so they pick that up and stick with it for many years. Other people are interested in raja yoga, so they take that up and are involved in it for many years. In this manner, according to your aspirations, you try to find how yoga can be applied to enhance your own creativity. That is yoga sadhana. As you become more and more involved and engrossed in the yogic sadhana, yoga becomes part of your daily routine.

Making time for yoga

The normal tendency of yoga practitioners is to believe that they need to set aside one to one-and-a-half hours of time on a regular basis for their yoga practice. However, setting aside this amount of time every day is not possible or even practical for anyone. Even sannyasins don't do it, so how can a person who is involved in society and has

many commitments and duties find that two-hour period to practise their yoga?

Our param guru, Swami Sivananda, said that the practice of yoga should be tailored in such a way that all the faculties of life: all the faculties of the mind and the intellect; all the faculties of the heart, sentiments and emotions; all the faculties of the hands, performance, interaction, creativity and communication, are approached simultaneously, so that there is no one-sided or lopsided development of the human personality through the practice of yoga. It was Swami Sivananda who emphasized that you should be selective in your yoga practice.

Developing your daily sadhana

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, says that if you are cooking some vegetable, say spinach, and you have two kilos of spinach and you boil that in two litres of water and you put in two kilos of salt and two kilos of other condiments, what will it taste like? Horrible! However, if you put two kilos of spinach in two litres of water and add two pinches of salt and one pinch of other condiments, you will get the right taste. Yoga practice should be understood in the same manner. One hour of asana, one hour of pranayama, one hour of meditation, one hour of this, one hour of that, you won't be able to survive and sustain that. However, if you use the principle of cooking a tasty vegetable and do twenty minutes of asana, ten minutes of pranayama, fifteen minutes of relaxation, fifteen minutes of yoga nidra, it is a very good combination. Practise five minutes of mantra, five minutes of this, ten minutes of that, as if you are cooking a vegetable dish, using some ingredients in large quantities and some in small quantities. In this manner, do some yoga practices in large quantities and some in small. Following this guideline given by Sri Swamiji, a daily program is developed.

Cultivate awareness in eating and sleeping

Give particular attention to diet and to sleep. Regularity of meals is important for the maintenance of health. Timing is important for the maintenance of health, not just eating whenever you feel hungry. In the life of my guru I have seen this trait. Sri Swamiji was a time-conscious person. He would always do things five minutes ahead of time. He would never be late for anything, including his meals. Ten o'clock meant ten o'clock. Five o'clock meant five o'clock. Not five past five. Not ten past ten. He used to rebuke us when under the guise of work and responsibility we would not be on time, sometimes twenty minutes late, sometimes half an hour late, sometimes one hour late. He would say, "Look, right now you are young and healthy, therefore you don't realize it, but ultimately you will realize that health depends on diet and sleep." He says, "If I am healthy today, it is because I have always been time conscious."



Those people who have rectified their eating and sleeping patterns have had the experience of being healthier than before. Once, a lady came to the ashram. I must have been eight years old then. She had brought a big box of biscuits with her, her month's supply. My eyes fell on the box. The moment she went for her class, I emptied the box of biscuits. She created an uproar. Sri Swamiji knew who the culprit was and she must have guessed as well; neither said anything. She had to abide by the rules of the ashram. Three meals a day and tea in between. She had come to the ashram quite obese; when she left she was slim.

When you do not maintain a fixed mealtime, it puts added pressure on your limbs and organs. Just like a toilet flush. If you flushed every few minutes, the flush would not work for very long. If you flush as required, four to five times a day, then the flush will work well. Similarly, your stomach works in a mechanical fashion. It secretes digestive fluids every time something is eaten. The quantity of digestive fluid is always the same, regardless of whether you have eaten just a peanut or a full meal. Think of the way you eat. Two biscuits now, after some time an orange, then again something else. The mouth is constantly chewing. This puts pressure on the stomach. Every time it flushes the system with digestive acids, but the acids don't always flow out. Sometimes they stay in the stomach and start collecting there. Then you get gas and problems of pitta and kapha. In ayurveda they suggest eating food according to the season. Today, with cold storage facilities you eat anything at anytime. This also affects the body in a detrimental way.

In India, the tradition has always been to eat only between the hours of sunrise and sunset. The reason for this is that the bodily systems and biorhythms become active with the first rays of the sun and become sluggish in darkness. This affects the assimilation of the food by the body. Also, one should go to bed only after three hours of taking a meal. Otherwise, the system becomes sluggish and the digestive fire becomes weak. The digestion is affected, which is evident the next morning.

Next is sleep. When you go to bed, leave the world at your doorstep. Bid it goodnight and tell it, "I will see you again in eight hours." Go to sleep with the thought, "I am going to bed tension and worry free and I shall wake up full of energy." If sleep does not come, count backwards from a hundred. By eighty you will fall asleep.

In this way, give special attention to monitoring the dietary habits and the sleep patterns. Have a routine; decide on a time to have your meals, decide on a time to go to bed, decide on a time to wake up.

Cultivating awareness

One of the components of yoga is sustaining awareness every moment of the day. You are not aware every moment of the day. You live every moment of the day, but you are not aware that you are living. This awareness has to be increased gradually. Start with five minutes. I will give you one example.

In my early days in the ashram I used to have big problem with sleep. I was a deep sleeper and I could sleep twenty hours of the day, no problem. I used to love sleeping. However, it became a problem when my guru brothers used to pick up my bed with me in it and put me outside the ashram gates. When I woke up, I would see myself outside the ashram gates, sleeping on my mattress. I would always be late for every activity and class because of sleep. I would hardly participate in the morning classes that were conducted by Sri Swamiji personally, in those times. It became a very big problem for me. What to do? How could I train myself to wake up early in the morning?

I asked Sri Swamiji, "How can I train my mind?" He said, "Little by little." I was only a tiny, nine-year-old kid at that time. I started thinking about it and I looked at the clock. I thought, "If I wake up at seven am every day, then starting tomorrow for one week, I will wake up at five to seven. Then the second week, ten to seven, the third week, quarter to seven, the fourth week, twenty to seven." Over a period of many weeks, I reached four am without any difficulty or problem. It was a very natural transition from late waking to early waking. If I had tried to wake up at four o'clock on the first day, I might have been able to sustain it for three, four, five days, maybe a week, but then I would have fallen back into the old pattern. The gradual training of a five-minute adjustment every week meant that I did not miss my sleep at all. In small intervals of five minutes, I was able to reduce it from seven o'clock to four o'clock without any difficulty, problem, exhaustion, tiredness or setback later on. You have to progress little by little, don't think of taking a long jump. Learn to walk the first steps by taking smaller steps. If you take smaller steps you can cover more ground. If you try to take large steps to cover more ground, somewhere you will fall.

In order to cultivate awareness, you have to apply the same principle; the five minutes span. Can you maintain your awareness of what you are doing for five minutes? Even when you are working you cannot hold your concentration for five minutes; it jumps from here to there. In any activity, it becomes difficult to hold the concentration, the focus and the awareness for a long period of time. Dissipation always takes place. Therefore, for one week, try to become aware for five minutes. During those moments of awareness, be in command and control of your responses, your reactions and your attitudes. Next week, try ten minutes. The third week, try fifteen minutes. Gradually you will be able to increase this time and then naturally, spontaneously, without any effort, you will be able to maintain your awareness twenty-four hours of the day.



I observe myself, “For how long can I maintain my awareness?” Even during satsang, as I am speaking, I do that. I know exactly how many times I have shifted my hands; it is not an unconscious movement. I know what I am saying, and in my mind I think twice before I speak. All this is happening inside while I am talking to you. I am aware of my body posture: am I leaning back, am I leaning forward? I am aware of all that. Even when I adjust my dhoti, I am aware of that movement.

The span of awareness has to extend from momentary to large periods. This allows you to ultimately become the witness of your life, the drashta you hear about in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali. Many people think that being the drashta, being the witness, is only a subject of meditation: “With your eyes closed, you try to become the witness of what you feel.” Forget it! With your eyes open become the witness of yourself; that will be the real achievement of your life. Don’t be like an ostrich that puts its head in the ground and thinks nobody can see it. Cultivate and expand the period of your awareness. You will discover that a lot of the negative responses and reactions that you express or confront in your life can be easily managed by cultivating awareness.



Once yearly: take a pilgrimage

Sri Swamiji says that the mind is like a torch battery. If you kept your torch on all day the battery will run out very quickly but if you run it when you need it, it will run for weeks. Similarly, the mind is like a battery, when its energy runs out, it goes flat. It becomes dull and if this state continues for a long time, then you lose interest in life. Life becomes drudgery and a burden. Therefore, keep the battery charged.

Once a year, make an effort to change your environment. To change their environment people go travelling, to some other county, to some forest, to some mountain, to some river, to some camping ground. However, the new environment does not allow you to change your mental environment; you go with the same problems, you think about the same things while you are holidaying and you come back to the same situation at home when you finish your holidays. If you can go to a place of pilgrimage, an ashram, where you live in a different routine, in a different environment, where the thoughts, speech and interaction are different from normal, that will help you to relax and change your attitude, your perception, your understanding. For this reason, in India our ancestors said, “Go to a place of pilgrimage and live there for some time.” Go to an ashram and live there for some time in the company of people who are thinking about different things, who are devoted to a different cause, who are religious or spiritual by nature, or who live a different life. For those of you who have come to our ashram from many different countries, it has been a change for you. It might have been a hectic change, running from morning until night, but it has also been a very pleasant change. You have enjoyed it, and in that enjoyment, in that happiness, you have also gained some inspiration, some ideas, some understanding of what things you can do better so as to improve yourself. When you go back you are inspired. You go back with

that inspiration. That inspiration remains with you for some time and when it dissipates, come again and recharge yourself.

The type of change required in the mental environment cannot be had through holidays. It can only be experienced by going someplace where you are forced to think of something different from normal. If you are travelling and living in a hotel, you will be thinking about your family and what you have to do once you return. You will be receiving phone calls and so forth. However, in the ashram you are forced to think about different things. 'What is yoga? Oh, yoga is like this. How do I practise yoga? Oh, I practise like this. What did Swamiji say? He said this.' Tiny little things allow you to bring forth a different thought. When you are at the ashram, it is important to avoid thinking that you are on vacation, you are on holiday, and that when you go back again you will have to face the same situations and the same problems. Otherwise, you are living here, but your mind is there. Bring your mind where you live and be part of that environment. That is the change which is important for the development of better thinking, behaviour and performance.

Observing your responses allows you to modify them and become the drashta in the waking state. This is the highest sadhana of yoga. Any Tom, Dick or Harry can close their eyes and meditate and be the witness of what they experience for those ten minutes, but that is not enough. As a yogi, learn to remain aware of every moment. You have to be aware of when there needs to be balance between exertion and relaxation. In order to understand when this balance between exertion and relaxation is needed, observe your mental stress, anxiety, insecurity, phobia and inhibitions and try to manage them. Use the tool of yoga nidra to dispel physical and mental tension. Use the tool of asana and pranayama to rectify the physical and the pranic imbalances. Use the tool of meditation to de-clutter your mind, use the tool of jnana yoga to discover a better aspect of yourself, a positive and creative aspect of yourself. Use yamas and niyamas to fine-tune your behaviour and your character, your personality.

Keep a spiritual diary

What I have told you today is the first-year lesson of yoga. If you can maintain a spiritual diary, in which you can write, "Yes, today I was able to control my anxiety; yes, I have been able to overcome my feelings of insecurity through meditation or through this practice or that practice," your spiritual diary will eventually become a chronicle of your change.

Six months later when you read your diary, you will be able to identify exactly what has transpired in your life. The spiritual diary is the chronicle of change in life. Write it to observe your own growth, your own progress. In this manner, little by little, small technique by small technique, short practice by short practice, make yoga an integrated part of your normal life. When this happens, yoga becomes a lifestyle.

When yoga becomes a natural and spontaneous expression of your life, you become a yogi. You develop the skills of a yogi. Therefore, do try to become a yogi in your life.

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 1995 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.