

Satyam Speaks Ajapa Japa



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Ajapa Japa

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

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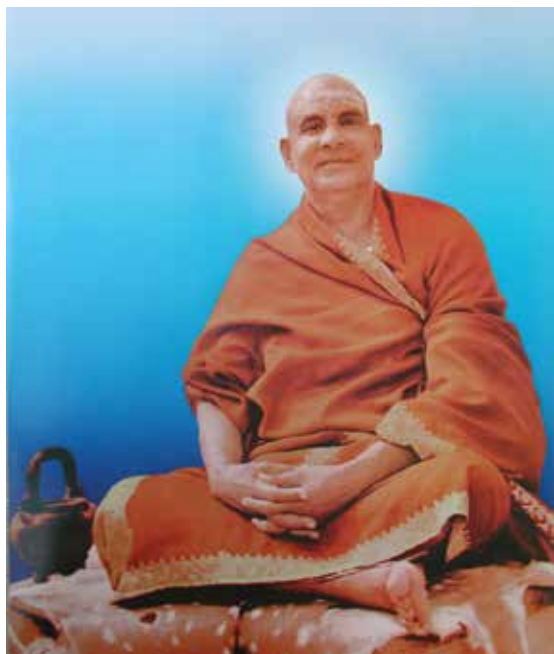
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

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

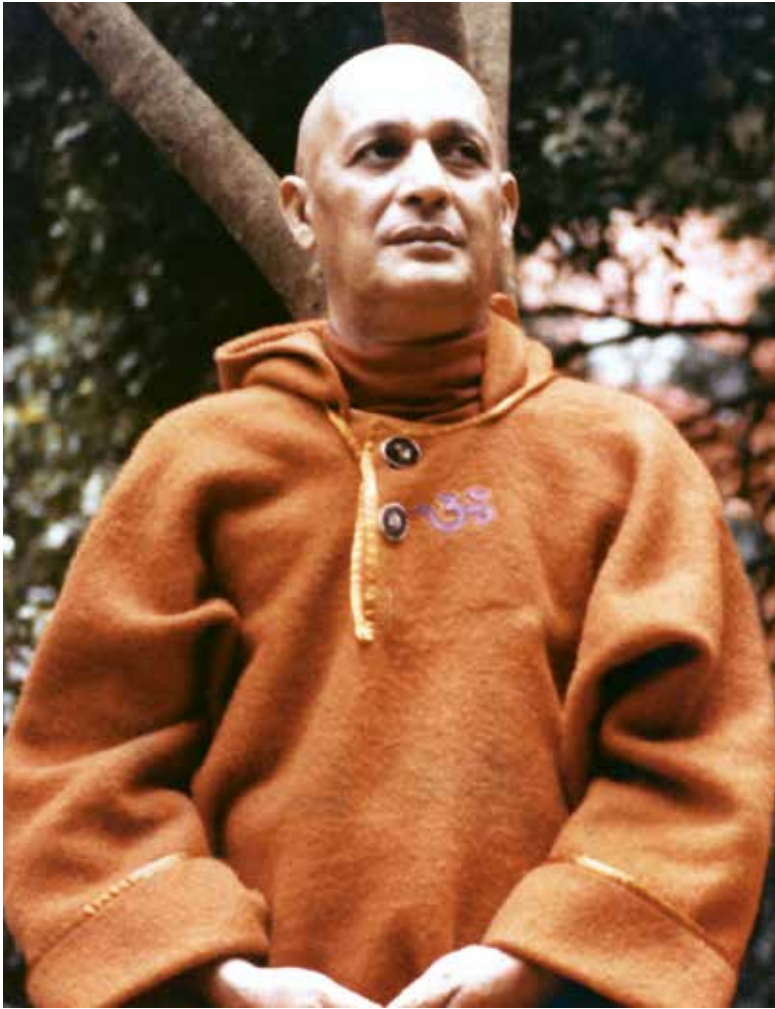
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Preface

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati dedicated twenty years of his life to the propagation of yoga, and thus fulfilled the mandate given by his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 'to spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. He travelled around the globe many times bringing the message of yoga to people of all walks of life, regardless of caste or creed. Master of yoga vidya and creator of the Yoga Chakra, he adapted his knowledge and understanding of yoga to the needs and abilities of people. Swami Satyananda simplified valuable techniques and complex processes by giving systematic and clearly defined sequences. Everyone could understand and progress following the theoretical explanation and practical instructions. Everyone was able to benefit from yoga.

Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. For some titles, more information is provided of specific conditions or applications, which are for the information of the aspirant only and not for practice. These have been included to show the depth of understanding and experience Sri Swami Satyananda had of yoga vidya.



Satyam Speaks Series is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere aspirants to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place to be.

Learn from an accomplished yoga master, not from a book. This series is a knowledge guide and a yoga master is a practical guide.

1

Introducing Ajapa Japa



All of life throbs with pulsations of expansion and contraction, of intake and expulsion, of prana and apana. Every molecule, every aspect of existence vibrates with this pulse. Everything is in a continuous and spontaneous state of cyclical change. Everything is endlessly repeating a subtle mantra.

Man throbs with this pulse of life in many ways. The most obvious are the heartbeat and respiration. The ancient yogis developed a wonderful yet simple method of using this constant beat of life as a means to calm the mind and to raise levels of awareness and understanding. They realized that the breath is constant rhythm continuously repeats a mantra. This mantra is normally known as *So Ham* or *Sa Ham*. The practice is called *ajapa*.

Definition

Japa means, ‘constant awareness’ and *ajapa* means, ‘spontaneous’. Hence, *ajapa japa* means, ‘spontaneous constant awareness’. The spontaneity of awareness is to be maintained by developing awareness of the flow of breath. You know that you breathe all the time, but you are not aware of it. You don’t try to breathe, but you do it naturally – that is spontaneity. In the same way, the awareness of breathing also has to become spontaneous.

Japa can also be defined as the continuous repetition of a mantra. The suffix ‘*a*’ in front of japa implies that the process of japa becomes spontaneous. That is, japa is transformed into ajapa when the mantra repeats itself without effort; the mantra has been planted so deeply through japa that one’s whole being pulsates with that mantra. Japa requires conscious effort, whereas ajapa requires no effort.

The first step of ajapa japa is to concentrate on the natural breath and become aware of the mantra *So Ham*. ‘*So*’ is the sound of the inspiration and ‘*Ham*’ is the sound of the expiration. After some time you practise a more advanced form of ajapa japa. Between the navel and the throat create an imaginary passage. When you inhale try to feel the breath ascending from the navel to the throat, and when you exhale feel it descending from the throat to the navel. Next make the breath a little bit deeper than normal and become aware of the mantra *So Ham*.

The practice of ajapa is as old as the Hindu scriptures. In some of the old scriptures on yoga like the *Yogashiksha*

you find some passages and stanzas which declare that the breath goes in with the sound of *So* and comes out with the sound of *Ham*. This is the sound of the ajapa gayatri which the *jiva*, individual soul, continuously repeats. The ancient sages practised ajapa. Rishi Valmiki was initiated by Muni Narada in the technique of taking the inverted name, which is this very ajapa. It is said in the *Gheranda Samhita* (5:86):

Hankaarena bahiryaati sahkaarena vishetpunah; Shatshataani divaaraatrau sahasraanyekavimshatih; Ajapaam naama gaayatrem jeevo japati sarvadaa.

The soul of every living being repeats *Ham* with each exhalation and *So* with each inhalation. Every human being takes 21,600 breaths during one day and night. This is called (*Ham So* or *So Ham*) ajapa gayatri. Every living being always keeps on repeating this mantra.

Even now a number of spiritual sects in India practise ajapa, including those who follow the Nirguna Pantha Sampradaya like Radha Swami Pantha and Kabir Pantha. Mahatma Gandhi has written in his books that the 'name' should come out from within the heart and not only from the mouth. When the 'name' comes out from the mouth it is called japa. When it comes from the heart it is called ajapa.

Rationale

The aim is to create a situation where the chosen mantra repeats itself continuously and spontaneously twenty-four hours a day. The mantra should overwhelm your whole attention; it should be a permanent background to all thoughts and actions. No matter what you are doing, work or play, there should be constant awareness of the mantra. This brings about incredible one-pointedness of mind and in time all problems and mental fluctuations are soothed away.

The whole body and mind should unceasingly vibrate with the mantra. This is not easy, for at first great mental effort is required to prevent the mind wandering here and

there. Effort is required to train the mind to repeat the mantra as japa. As soon as the mind wanders, the mantra will be forgotten. But when the process becomes spontaneous as ajapa, then no effort is required. You will be forced to be attentive to the mantra; you will be attracted to the mantra like iron to a magnet. To attain this stage, however, will require much time and effort. If the stage of continuous ajapa is reached, then one's whole life will be transformed. The mind will become a perfect reflector of experience and consciousness.

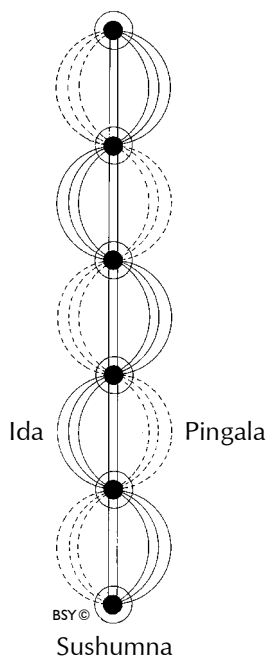
Ajapa japa is an important meditation practice by which we can 'plough' our psyche, making it fertile and receptive. Another name of ajapa japa is 'spontaneous awareness'. Its translation is 'to see, to look within, to watch, to observe'. Ajapa requires no mala, pen, pencil or paper. You only have to become aware of your breathing cycle and repeat the mantra mentally along with your breath.

Ajapa japa is a complete sadhana in itself, which can take an aspirant from the most elementary level of body and environmental awareness to the highest stages of meditation. Its practice, if undertaken gradually and with full awareness, will eventually bring all the hidden desires, fears and complexes of the mind to the mental surface. When this occurs, little by little over a period of months, the practitioner should view these previously hidden samskaras and vasanas with the attitude of an unconcerned witness. Through this process, ajapa japa relieves the mind of all tensions, which in turn removes the root cause of most physical and mental ailments.

The practice of ajapa japa is concerned with checking and curbing the outgoing tendencies of the mind so that awareness can be directed inwards. It is impossible to explore the inner realms of the mind if one is addicted to, disturbed and distracted by external sense experiences. Therefore, the sense experiences, such as sound, smell, sight, touch and taste, are cut. All meditative techniques such as nada yoga, antar mouna, ajapa japa and trataka are initially

concerned with inducing this stage of pratyahara. Ajapa is a powerful technique for sense withdrawal and can induce concentration and deep meditation.

The real ajapa japa is that which goes on within in silent rhythm all the time and still there is no loss of concentration in our external activities. To acquire this art, we have to master the technique of pranayama through the sushumna, a subtle motor nerve in our spinal column, which transmits our consciousness. Of the three, ida, pingala and sushumna, which comprise our central nervous system, sushumna is the most vital nerve, and our aim is to awaken it and to make it fully operative.



The ajapa way

This method of meditation is a very ancient one. It was taught by Lord Buddha, and was also mentioned in the ancient Vedas and Upanishads. Meditation is for everybody, in relation to his day-to-day life, for sickness of body, for sickness of mind, and for sickness of inner spirit.

There is not only one method of meditation, but many hundreds, which are chosen according to the temperament, the quality, and the capacity of the individual. One method of meditation may suit one person, but may not be suitable for another person. However, this particular practice has been experimented with for over three thousand years. It is called breath meditation. In the ancient books, it is known as ajapa japa.

You can concentrate on an object in the mind, but you cannot maintain spontaneity, because in the majority of people, the mind itself is not spontaneous; it has no regular-

ity. Distraction is the nature of mind; it breaks often, so you cannot maintain spontaneity. However, the breath is spontaneous and continuous, even at night, even under anesthesia. So your consciousness of it can become spontaneous too.

The practice of ajapa is complete in itself and through it one can enter the spiritual realms even without the help of a spiritual master. If you merely take *So Ham* for ajapa, you can complete six stages in *So Ham* itself.

Ajapa japa has also a sacred significance, which has been hinted at in several cryptic and mystic formulae in ancient literature. This was a secret treasure jealously guarded through the centuries and was told only to deserving and earnest aspirants.

Ajapa is a very important sadhana and through it one can have direct experience of samadhi. In order to attain samadhi in all other yogic practices one has to control and suspend the breath. The breathing system, however, remains normal in the continuous practice of ajapa, and even in samadhi there is no change. Ajapa japa is the best means for attaining inner peace. It is said in the *Gheranda Samhita* (5:92):

*Yaavajjeevam japenmantramajapaasankhyakevalam;
Adyaavadhi dhritam sankhyaavibhramam kevalee krite.*

Throughout life living beings spontaneously keep on repeating the ajapa mantra, yogis must do it consciously.



2

Framework of Practice



Hakaarena bahiryaati sakaarena vishetpunah. (31)

*Hamsa hamsetyamum mantram jeevo japati sarvadaa;
Shat shataani divaa raatrou sahasraanyeka vimshatih. (32)*

*Etat samkhyaanvitam mantram jeevo japati sarvadaa;
Ajapaa naama gaayatree yoginaam mokshadaa sadaa. (33)*

With the sound *Ha* (the breath) goes out and with the sound *Sa* it comes in again, making the sound *Ham Sa*, *Ham Sa*. Thus the individual soul continuously repeats

the mantra. Day and night this mantra is being repeated 21,600 times. When the jiva ceaselessly continues to repeat this number of mantras, it is called the ajapa gayatri, which always brings liberation to the yogis.

—*Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* (31–33)

Before explaining the actual practice of ajapa, let us explain one thing. If your hand gets hurt and I ask you if you feel the pain, you will reply in the affirmative. But where is the pain? You will say it is in your mind. This is locating the pain. In yoga also, there is a process of locating consciousness.

Where is your consciousness? Think for a few minutes about where you are. You do not know where you are. Your awareness or consciousness is now extroverted and dissipated, but it can be located at any particular centre of your body.

Suppose you suddenly see a light on your mental plane while meditating. You see it for a second. In yogic language, this is called locating the consciousness. This is an important fact on the path of spiritual progress. It is through this process that the yogis transmit their consciousness. We normally do not know where our astral body is. Through the practice of ajapa you will be able to know where your awareness is.

There are two birds, black and white, tied to a peg with two ropes. They fly for a while, but have to come back because they are tied. They fly many times. Ultimately they get tired and sleep peacefully near the peg. This illustration refers to ida and pingala nadis. They are two birds as it were. The flow in the right nostril corresponds to *pingala*, the sun channel, and the flow in the left nostril corresponds to *ida*, the moon channel. The alternate functioning of ida and pingala keeps one away from one's inner consciousness. So long as they work alternately, samadhi cannot be attained. It is only when the two birds – ida and pingala – are tired and they retire to the centre, the self, that sushumna awakens and the process of meditation becomes automatic.

In order to stop the chain of thoughts, one has to observe the thoughts, to see them consciously. During ajapa you

must have a complete and unceasing awareness of what you are doing. Like the oil stream, which does not break in the middle, let your consciousness also be continuous. Maintain continuous awareness of what you are doing.

Ajapa japa is a method of exploring the deeper realms of the mind and eliminating mental problems. In the initial stages the mantra functions on the surface level of your mind, but in time and with regular practice it will permeate and plummet into the deeper subconscious realms. It is then that you will start to come face to face with your deep-rooted fears, worries, desires and neuroses. All these negative aspects of your mind come to the surface or rather they come within the range of your conscious perception.

Sometimes these aspects of your mind can explode very quickly. You may become a little unhappy for some time, but if you persevere then these problems will be neutralized and you will emerge on the other side with a more harmonized and contented mind. Try to continue the practice no matter how much negative dross arises; only stop the practice if it stirs up too much of the murky aspects of the mind, too quickly. In this case, you can continue the practice at a later date.

In the process of cleaning out the mind it is a good idea to combine ajapa with chidakasha dharana. In this case, you will see the subconscious contents of the mind in the form of images on the mind screen or *chidakasha* in front of the closed eyes. These will be like dreams, but you will be fully conscious of them. These will be images of your deeper problems. In Sanskrit they are called *samskaras*, mental impressions, and *vasanas*, deep-rooted desires. Don't suppress these images or react to them. You must merely be aware of them and watch them with an attitude of an unconcerned witness. You must feel as though they are something separate from your being. In this way, these *samskaras* will be exhausted and the mind will be relieved of much tension and anxiety. This will take time and practice, but is essential in making the mind a perfect instrument.

An important point in ajapa is that one should keep the mind fixed on the centre of meditation. It may be *ajna chakra*, the third eye or eyebrow centre, *anahata chakra*, the heart centre, or any other centre in the body. This is called Ishwara pranidhana. Three things are very important in ajapa: *tapasya*, sustained endurance, *swadhyaya*, continuous self-observation, and *Ishwara pranidhana*, fixing the mind on the centre of meditation. The anahata chakra can be awakened very simply through the practice of ajapa japa. It is said that ajapa japa comes from the heart, whereas japa comes from the mouth.

There is no technical difficulty in doing ajapa. The only difficulty is tapas, which means sustained endurance. You must sit in one posture. The body should not shake and the mind should not run here and there. It is not physical mortification. It is sustained endurance. You take the pledge that you will do ajapa for forty-five minutes every day. One day you do it, but the next day you lose patience; the third day you lose interest, and on the fourth day you lose everything. Keep up your resolve and continue with patience for at least a month.

Breathing

The most important point in ajapa japa is that firstly you have to breathe in and out consciously and not automatically. Automatic breathing goes on at night also. It is not ajapa. You must consciously notice every ingoing and outgoing breath. Like a watchman, watch the continuous and unceasing consciousness of the two breaths. You must also observe how far the breath is going in. Lie down and feel as if you are going to sleep. You should breathe like a person who breathes deeply in sound sleep. After continued practice your breathing will be complete, systematic and proportionate.

The normal rate of inhalation and exhalation is fifteen times a minute each. In one hour, nine hundred breaths and in twenty-four hours 21,600 breaths are drawn. A person who has perfected ajapa will do 21,600 rounds of japa per day.

As and when the concentration becomes deep, the breathing will become slow. Instead of fifteen rounds, you will do ten rounds a minute. In japa you make the breath as long and as deep as when you are snoring. This increases longevity because the entire system becomes absolutely calm and steady, thereby expending less prana.

The other important points of ajapa practice are: deep breathing, relaxation and total awareness. Not a single breath should go unnoticed. There should be no automatic breathing. You must have unceasing awareness of every ingoing and outgoing breath. As soon as the mind wanders, bring it back to the breath.

Ajapa is adjusting a mantra to the breathing process. It can be practised anywhere: in a chair, on the floor or in any asana, particularly *padmasana*, lotus posture, *siddhasana* and *siddha yoni asana*, accomplished pose for men or women, or *sukhasana*, easy pose.

Other important points to remember in ajapa japa are:

1. Deep and rhythmical breathing
2. Continuous awareness of the breathing
3. Continuous repetition of mantra synchronized with breath
4. Relaxation of mind and body
5. Comfortable sitting position
6. Practice of ujjayi pranayama
7. Practice of khechari mudra

If you can carry out all these features, then you will make great progress.

Ajapa japa and the mind

In the practice of ajapa japa, it is said that, if your mind is wandering, just watch it, do nothing with it, just observe it. And if your mind is getting unified, continue to watch it. In both these events, you have to watch your mind. So, while you are doing the sadhana of breath consciousness, *So Ham* consciousness, sushumna consciousness, eyebrow

consciousness, light spot consciousness, you have to be very watchful of the distractions of the mind.

The main difference between japa and ajapa is that japa generally functions on the conscious plane of the mind, whereas ajapa reaches down into the subconscious plane.

When you sit in a posture, the first consciousness is called body consciousness. Then you slowly breathe in and out. After some time you will feel that the bodily consciousness is diminishing and you are becoming more conscious of the ingoing and the outgoing breath. This happens proportionately. You become all the more aware of the flow of prana. As a result of this, after some time, pranic consciousness becomes predominant and body consciousness is extinct. At that stage you will feel that you are just breathing, breathing and only breathing. When you are aware of breath consciousness, that is pranic consciousness, and when it becomes predominant then it is called bodily unconsciousness. You become unconscious of your body.

Now, to that pranic consciousness add the mantra *So Ham* and become conscious of *So Ham*, then you feel *So* with ingoing and *Ham* with outgoing breaths. After some time, you will become unaware of the two streams of breaths. Simple *So Ham* will remain in your awareness. When this becomes intense you will have visions.

As you see visions, mental consciousness begins to fuse into astral awareness. At this stage all forms of ajapa will be consumed by an overgrowing astral consciousness. You will land in a plane, which is beyond the mental plane. Here the suspension of individual consciousness will take place, as a result of which the aspirant will enter into deep slumber and become unaware even of the process.

Coming to the point of concentration

In the first stage of ajapa japa you practise mental repetition of the mantra *So Ham* together with the breath. On inhalation you repeat *So* and on exhalation *Ham*. Then after some time, you change the circuit in the mind. Don't change the circuit

in the prana; change the circuit in the consciousness. And what is it? Now, you say *Ham So*. There is no difference in the system of breathing or in the awareness of the breath, but the difference is that instead of the *So Ham* circuit, you are now practising the *Ham So* circuit. *So Ham* is the first circuit and *Ham So* is the second.

When you practise this for some time, let us say ten minutes or even less than that, you will experience that your mind is gaining a kind of psychic equilibrium. The moment this stage is reached by you, there is an indication, just like a bell. The moment that indication appears, it means stop your *ajapa japa* and start concentration.

Up to now you are not practising concentration. You are trying to develop concentration. As soon as concentration develops and the psychic equilibrium takes place, there is an indication. You lose touch with the external and you begin to see something inside. It could be a flower, a colour, sunlight, moonlight, a donkey, a kangaroo. It can be anything. It need not be a divine being or your guru, but it is something in the psychic dimension, which you are able to see as you see a dream. The moment that psychic expression, psychic balance or psychic equilibrium takes place, you should begin the practice of concentration.

The barrier of unawareness

Every meditative practice utilizes something that the mind can grasp, on which it can take hold. It can be the breath; it can be a mantra. In *nada yoga* both gross and subtle sound is the object of awareness. In *kriya yoga* the object of awareness is a combination of breath, psychic passages, chakras, sound and so forth.

In *ajapa japa* it is breath and mantra. Always one's awareness is fixed on an object or process. This is done for a good reason, namely that the mind naturally and automatically moulds itself around objects of perception. In day-to-day life it does this continuously with various external objects and thoughts. It is the nature of the mind to form itself, pattern

itself around something. Without an object of perception, one lapses into a state of unconsciousness. This also applies to meditative practices: the mind must be patterned into some form, whether it is breath, sound or whatever. If you do not do this then you will only fall asleep, gaining little from your practice.

Continuous practice

The practice of ajapa should be done for a fixed duration every day. If you are inclined, there is no reason why you should not try to do ajapa twenty-four hours every day. But we warn you: it is difficult and requires sustained effort. Only try to be aware of the breath and the sound *So Ham* that it makes. It does not matter whether the breath is fast or slow; only be aware of it and the associated mantra. It can be done while walking, talking, eating, working, sleeping or whatever you do in your daily life. Everyday activities are continued but with a background of the *So Ham* mantra.

Continuous repetition makes the mantra penetrate the deeper layers of the mind, and the mind becomes harmonized and one-pointed, leading to meditation. If you have the determination, then follow the advice given in the scriptures. It is by no means an easy undertaking, but the fruits of your effort will be to unlock the potential of your mind.



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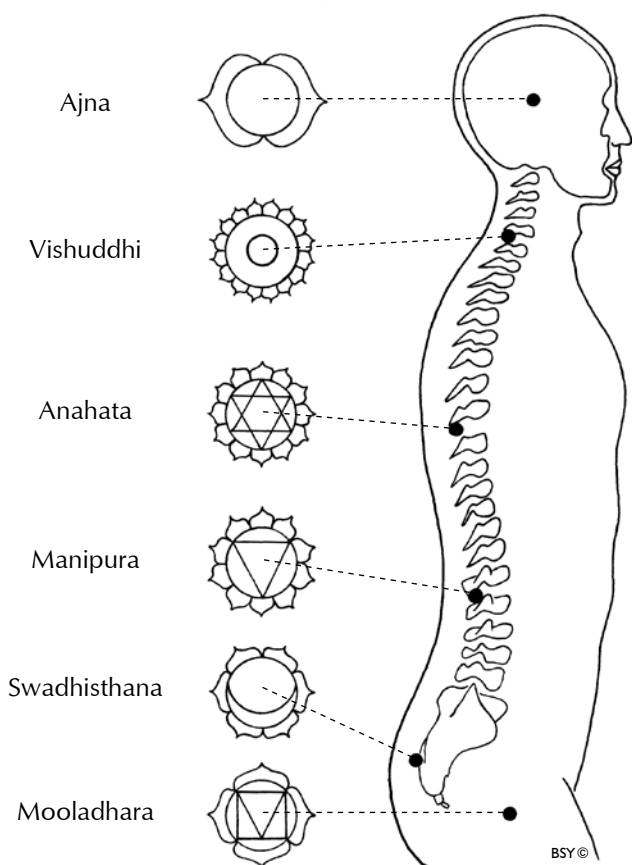
Influence of Ajapa Japa



According to modern science, the parasympathetic nervous system connects the brain with the rest of the body through two centres; from the mooladhara chakra the impulses can be conducted through the parasympathetic nervous system right into the brain and at the top of the spinal cord is the other centre – the pineal gland. This is known as ajna chakra in yoga. It is also very important

because it connects the parasympathetic nervous system with the brain. Ajna chakra and mooladhara chakra at the bottom are both carriers, or vehicles of impulses to the brain. The impulses travel through the parasympathetic nervous system which also controls the endocrine system in the whole body. In addition to these two vital centres, there are other centres:

Swadhisthana	– sacral region
Manipura	– solar region
Anahata	– cardiac region
Vishuddhi	– cervical region



These are the four vital centres situated within the spinal cord and these four centres connect the brain to the rest of the body through the sympathetic nervous system.

The parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems are channels of neurons that work hand in hand to control your physical and emotional state. The parasympathetic nervous system rests and relaxes the body and slows down many high energy functions of the body. The sympathetic nervous system prepares the body to either run from danger or fight back. It is also activated in response to mental or physical stress.

The awakening influx of the sensations is carried from these four centres through the sympathetic nervous system and from the two centres, mooladhara and ajna, through the parasympathetic nervous system to the brain.

They carry the shakti, they carry vitality, and this vitality should be created by breathing in and through this psychic path. This is a practice in kriya yoga and ajapa japa is a preparatory to kriya yoga. Kundalini yoga is not an abstract concept, but is based on the physical body. Now these physical centres cannot be revitalized, you cannot cause vitality by any other method except yoga. Therefore, you have a lot of yogic practices such as:

- Asanas – postures
- Pranayama – breathing
- Bandhas – control of inflections
- Mudras – psychic attitudes
- Kriya – the motion of consciousness
- Ajapa japa – awakening of the subconscious and unconscious; cognition of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious
- Antar mouna – explosion of the ‘dirty man’, elimination of the impurities in man by spontaneous methods
- Many other practices are included in the structure of yoga.

Ajapa japa also exerts a direct influence on the nervous system's reticular activating nucleus, which is located in the midbrain.

Techniques of kundalini yoga involve kriyas, combinations of asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha, rotation of breath and consciousness through nadis and subtle spaces, repetition of mantra and the piercing of psychic centres. These heat up the psychic and physical energies of man and activate and awaken the chakras to our conscious level of experience and control. The techniques are also designed to bring about balanced purification and activation of all the chakras, with the gentle accentuation of one or two important centres. Techniques of ajapa japa, achieve this aim, creating a psychic friction which ignites the spark of higher consciousness.



4

General Guidelines for Practice



Posture

Sit in any comfortable position, padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana or sukhasana with the hands in jnana or chin mudra. Close your eyes and relax the whole body. Hold the spine upright, but without excessive strain. Stop all physical movement. Tell yourself that for the duration of the practice all problems and worries will be discarded; all attention will be on the practice of ajapa japa.

Awareness

Mindfulness during ajapa is essential. You must be mindful of every activity, whether breathing, mantra or thoughts. Without this mindfulness you will slip into the state of drowsiness. This is called *tandra* or *laya* in Sanskrit. It is a great obstacle that has to be overcome. It is the stumbling block, the greatest impediment, the greatest hazard that faces every person who tries to practise meditational techniques.

You must be aware of what you are doing. You must be awake. If you feel sleepy, go and take a cold bath or wash your face. Or practise a few rounds of surya namaskara. Without developing mindfulness, you will never be successful in meditative practices.

The mind can wander from the practice in hand . . . there is nothing wrong with this. In fact, initially this is positive, for it helps to release pent-up mental problems. But you must be aware of the thoughts as they arise. You must know that you are thinking about a certain subject. The mind will always wander here and there; it is its very nature. Let it, but maintain mindfulness.

In ajapa you must be alert to all things that occur in the mind and the processes which are part of the practice. Don't suppress thoughts; this is not the way to harmonize the mind. Let them arise, while simultaneously being attentive to the breath and mantra movement of ajapa.

Breath awareness

The first thing one must be aware of in ajapa japa is your own natural breath. You breathe 21,600 times in twenty-four hours, but you are never aware of this most vital process, which is the key to life. During the practice of ajapa japa, the practitioner should watch the changing dimensions of breath. Throughout meditation there are likely to be four dimensions of breath: natural, deeper than natural, relaxed and suspended.

The second and most important point in ajapa japa is awareness of the movement of breath as it flows through

the body. This can be practised in many ways, but the most important is awareness of the breath in the spinal cord. When the breath has assumed the relaxed third dimension it becomes *ujjayi pranayama* or psychic breathing, long, deep and soft, like the gentle snoring of a baby. This relaxed breath is rotated up and down the spinal cord.

Mantra

The third point in ajapa japa is the sound or mantra. Any mantra can be used during the practice of ajapa, though traditionally the mantra *So Ham* is utilized since it corresponds with the natural sounds of inhalation and exhalation. This is especially true if you do *ujjayi pranayama*. Depending on the length of the breath, the sound of *So* will be a prolonged *S-o-o-o-o*; the sound of *Ham* will be a prolonged *H-a-a-m-m-m-m*. Little or no imagination is necessary. This is why the mantra *So Ham* is such a powerful mantra – it arises almost naturally from the sound of the breath.

Although any mantra can be used, it is recommended that the *So Ham* mantra be adopted. This has been tested by yogis throughout the ages in conjunction with ajapa. It is this mantra that is most conducive to continuous awareness in union with the breath. In the *Kularnava Tantra*, *Sa Ham* or *So Ham* is called the *Sri Prasadapara* mantra because it gives sublime grace, *prasada*, and is regarded as the greatest, *para*, of all mantras.

The meaning of the mantra *So Ham* is not essential for the practice of ajapa. However, it is worthwhile explaining it:

So – Siva or He

Ham – Aham or ‘I am’

That is, *So Ham* means ‘I am He’ or ‘I am Siva’ or ‘I am consciousness’. The mantra *Sa Ham* can be split up in the same way (i.e. *Sah* + *Aham*) to give the same meaning. This indicates the power of continuous ajapa. This is further emphasized in the *Kularnava Tantra* (chapter 3):

The more you repeat this mantra (*So Ham* or *Sa Ham*), the greater the fruits both temporal and spiritual. Therefore, with intense effort, in all conditions, at all times, you should repeat the mantra.

The meaning can be remembered continuously with the practice of ajapa as a method of affirmation. It is an excellent method for those who have had a deep transcendental experience to help in maintaining that state of awareness. It is a method of intensifying identification, but other people need not associate any meaning with the *So Ham* mantra. It is not necessary in order to bring results. It is the continuous remembrance and attentiveness that is important.

Many practitioners, however, have achieved great results in ajapa using their guru mantras, and also those who practise with the Gayatri mantra, repeating half the mantra with inhalation and half with exhalation. If you have your own mantra you can substitute it for *So Ham*. Any mantra can be chosen, it does not matter, for it is only a technique. The mantra should be one that comes naturally to you, and once chosen, the mantra should not be changed.

The mantra should be integrated with the breath. When you inhale, the breath spontaneously makes the sound of *So* and when you exhale it makes the sound of *Ham*. The most important thing is that the breath and the mantra should become one. While you are inhaling through sushumna from mooladhara to ajna and exhaling from ajna to mooladhara, be aware of the movement of the breath combined with the movement of the powerful sound – *So Ham*. This practice purifies the *nadis*, the pranic channels in the body.

When mantra is awakened in the breath the whole body is recharged. Psychic toxins are eliminated and blocks in the nadis, which are the main source of physical and mental disturbances, are removed. The mantra should awaken sushumna and permeate each and every particle of the body. When sushumna begins to vibrate, self-awareness becomes active. When ida starts vibrating, the mind becomes active.

When pingala starts vibrating the prana becomes active and energy flows through one's whole system, extending even outside the physical body.

When the awakening of sushumna takes place with the help of mantra shakti, the elimination of karma takes place symbolically. This results in the arising of inner sounds and fantastic experiences. Whatever you experience is rising from your deeper consciousness. It is mental shankhaprakshalana, part of the purging process.

Psychic pathways and nadis

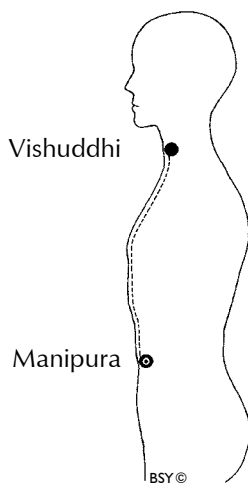
In the preliminary practices of ajapa japa, the practitioner watches the breath flow through the frontal psychic passage between the navel and throat. In the intermediate practices the breath is felt flowing through sushumna nadi and the practitioner feels the prana passing through each chakra from mooladhara to ajna and back down to mooladhara. Advanced ajapa japa is similar to intermediate, with the breath becoming longer and slower, and the psychic passage extends all the way from mooladhara to sahasrara chakra.

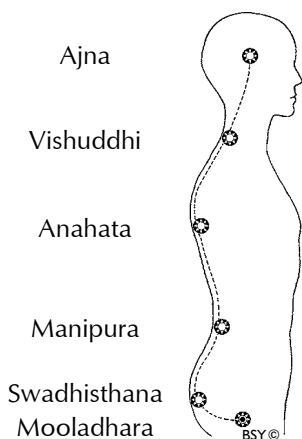
Frontal passage

This is visualized as extending up the front of the trunk from the navel to the centre of the throat. It is used extensively in the preliminary practices of kundalini yoga, such as vishuddhi shuddhi and ajapa japa.

Spinal psychic passage – Sushumna path

Between the trigger points of the ajna and mooladhara chakras lies the spinal psychic passage. It is called sushumna. It connects all the chakras together and is located within the centre of the spine. The six chakras are, starting from the bottom:





mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna. You must feel the breath moving up and down within this psychic passage, piercing all the chakras in turn. You will have to use a little imagination. At first you may find this difficult, but with regular practice you will find it becomes natural. You will feel the breath moving within the spinal passage without the slightest effort.

In tantra, we call the spinal passage, sushumna. It is a channel through which the higher consciousness flows, and at its base is a centre called mooladhara chakra. Up along the length of sushumna are six chakras in all. Mooladhara is in the centre of the perineum; swadhisthana is in the centre of the sacrum; manipura is in the spine behind the navel; anahata is in the spine behind the heart; vishuddhi is in the spine at the lower neck, and ajna is at the top of the spine.

The chakras represent waves of energy, and the sushumna is situated through and penetrating each of them, just as the thread goes through each bead in a rosary. It is this sushumna which is the basis of the psychic passage in ajapa japa with ujjayi breath.

When you breathe in, in ujjayi, you must feel that your breath flows up through sushumna in the spine from mooladhara chakra to ajna chakra. Then, when breathing out, you feel that the breath is flowing down from ajna to mooladhara. As you continue to breathe in and out, up and down, you can hear the hiss of the ujjayi breath moving through sushumna and piercing the chakras. It is not necessary to be particularly aware of the chakras, but you should definitely be aware of the passage. This is the basic technique,

Ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra

Ujjayi pranayama helps induce a meditative state. It is practised by contracting the glottis. When performed correctly a soft sound is produced like a cat purring or like light, gentle snoring. One should feel one is breathing through the throat rather than the nose. When a healthy child sleeps he always breathes by contracting his glottis and his breath can be heard in the throat.

Khechari mudra is practised by rolling the tongue backwards so that the normally lower surface touches the upper palate. Try to bring the tip back as far as possible. If khechari mudra is practised correctly, in conjunction with ujjayi over a long period of time, the tongue will eventually go into the upper nasal orifice.

Try to practise both ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra throughout the practice. If you become tired, especially with khechari mudra, then release the tongue lock for a short time, but it should be recommenced. These two practices are very important. Both ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra are very simple but very powerful practices and should be integrated with ajapa to gain maximum benefits.



Preparation with nadi shodhana pranayama

To gain the most benefits out of ajapa we suggest that you first practise nadi shodhana pranayama. This not only brings about deep relaxation of the mind and body, but also intensifies the awareness of the breathing process.

Timing

The best time for ajapa japa practice is early morning between 4 and 6 am or at night just before sleep. It should be done for 5 to 10 minutes per day, either in the morning sadhana session or at night, immediately before sleep. It should be continued for at least one month.

Sequence

There are many different stages in ajapa japa and the techniques for each stage progressively require a little more concentration and awareness. Anyone wishing to practise ajapa japa should commence with stage one of preliminary ajapa japa and progressively work through and perfect each stage. Little can be gained by randomly selecting any technique for practice. It is also advisable to be acquainted with the practices of japa before proceeding to ajapa japa.

Go to the root of things through ajapa. Purify the mental plane, by silencing the thoughts through ajapa japa. The power of the mind is limited and due to misuse it becomes weak. A sadhaka is not able to succeed in meditation, in spite of effort, because he spends his mental energy in a large measure, in thinking confusing thoughts. This energy could well be used for making meditation successful.

But how can this misuse be stopped? The method is simple and that is to perfect ajapa through the practice of mental japa. This controls gross and subtle thought processes. But to perfect ajapa is not a joke. As long as the sentiment and the devotion are not deep and intense, how could ajapa be perfected? Therefore, with a full heart, practise mental japa repeatedly and knock at the doors of inner consciousness.

Inner light is selfluminous. Light of the self is the indestructible lamp of the jiva. Theology and philosophy are intellectual acrobatics. Ajapa japa is the basis for kriya yoga. With its mastery pratyahara is achieved and the real practice of dharana begins. When ajapa japa is perfected and fully realized, the samskaras are totally exhausted and the mind becomes one-pointed.

5

Benefits



*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai,
Soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahase ikkisau jaap,
Anahada upaje apai aapa.*

Absorb your mind in japa in such a way that your memory and mind ever sings So Ham, So Ham.

The daily japa of twenty-one thousand and six hundred mantras produces spontaneously anahad nada, the unstruck sound, the unlimited sound, the divine sound.

—Kabirdas

When the mantra is awakened with the breath the whole body is recharged. Psychic toxins are eliminated and blocks in the nadis, which are the main source of physical and mental disturbances, are removed. The sound, the mantra, permeates each and every particle of the body.

Ajapa japa and the mind

Yoga is mental therapy. Asana, pranayama, ajapa japa, nada yoga and the other practices of yoga help to rid the mind of the accumulated *samskaras*, impressions and unconscious memories. No matter which yoga one practises, the toxic matter of life is going to come out: thousands of patterns of experiences, unworked karmas, suppressed emotions and everything else that is there, desirable and undesirable, necessary and unnecessary, horrible and wonderful. Once these *samskaras* go, one's neuroses, mental conflicts, complexes and frustrations also depart.

We are conscious of the external world and of the surface levels of the mind, but the mind is also functioning at other levels below the level of conscious perception. The subconscious mind is a turmoil of fears, worries, tensions, desires, etc. We generally only experience the reflection or manifestation of these deeper aspects of the mind when they rise to surface perception. Ajapa is a method of consciously perceiving these hidden levels of the mind. The practice of ajapa makes one's sensitivity and perception more subtle so that one begins to explore the mind.

The exposition of the method of ajapa japa being practical, not much has been said of the psychological significance of this practice. It is, however, not to be forgotten that ajapa japa offers significant benefits for mental disorders and its therapeutic effects can hardly be over-emphasized.

Ajapa gives the benefits of all other meditative practices. The benefits that you actually reap will depend entirely on your effort, regularity of practice and the degree to which your mind is now harmonized. It is an excellent and essential

preparation for kriya yoga, brings mental peace and one-pointedness of mind and leads directly to meditation.

The sushumna nadi starts functioning through the practice of asana and pranayama, and this helps in meditation. The constant practice of japa leads to the practice of ajapa japa. When ajapa japa is perfected and fully realized, the samskaras are totally exhausted. In this way dhyana yoga blossoms forth.

Ajapa japa and the physical body

Ajapa japa gives deep relaxation and allows the senses to withdraw. It removes mental agitation and keeps the practitioner calm, quiet and happy; it increases oxidation in the blood, thus giving vitality and freshness; it helps in achieving deep meditation and even samadhi. It is a powerful technique for exhausting the accumulated samskaras; it decreases the rate of metabolism and therefore decreases the quantity of food and sleep required, and it cures many mental and physical abnormalities. Ajapa japa reduces hypertension.

We need as much sleep as is needed for proper decarbonization in the system, which may differ from individual to individual. Six hours for intellectuals, eight hours for manual labourers, four hours for sadhakas of yoga and ajapa. You can minimize the hours of sleep by taking recourse to sattwic diet, asanas, ajapa japa and meditation.

Every time you lose your mental equipoise, it has a lowering effect on your blood circulation. This process produces toxins in the physical system, which in turn has an adverse effect on mental operations. Thus a vicious circle is formed. Mind affects body and body affects mind. Our sages declare that mind alone binds or liberates. This, as you know, is literally true. It logically follows that if the mind improves, your whole personality also improves.

How to overcome this body-mind morbid state? With ujjayi pranayama you start a process of decarbonization of the system and throw out the accumulation of toxins. By khechari kriya you retard the ageing process. You reabsorb the saliva.

Yogis call it *amrit*, nectar, which is produced by khechari kriya and prolongs your youthfulness. But khechari is beneficial to those only who lead a moral life, do not go in for excessive physical labour and conserve vitality. For them it is amrit, for others it is poison, it harms. Our mystic poets have sung songs in praise of khechari kriya. The vicissitudes of life run you down. These yoga techniques will again put you on the top, and you will face challenges of life with courage and equanimity. This, in brief, is the technique of ajapa japa.

Ajapa japa for rajasic personalities

Ajapa japa is particularly recommended for rajasic people with tension and problems. The practices will help to divert one's attention from worries to higher spiritual ideals. People who do a lot of study and mental work will benefit greatly from ajapa japa. It provides a balance between mental and physical activity. Whereas study and mental work introvert the mind, ajapa japa requires one to be aware of one's mental activities, while maintaining awareness of the movement of the breath and repetition of the mantra. As well as these purely mental and physical activities, the practitioner begins to explore the more subtle regions of the psychic body – the psychic centres or *chakras* and psychic passages.

Ajapa japa is also a good practice for those people who have reasonable control over their mind and for those who want to develop greater concentration. Ajapa japa is a combination of pranayama and meditation and it is said that through pranayama you enter the land of meditation.

Finally, if you practise yoga asanas, pranayama, meditation, ajapa japa or antar mouna, a change does take place in the body, undoubtedly, but more than that, a change is taking place in the deeper spheres of your life, but you do not know it.

Benefits of ajapa japa in other spheres

Running or jogging is a good example of a sport, which enables one to develop a meditative state of mind. One should start to train on a flat, grassy field or soft dirt track,

running slowly and being aware of the tension in the body. Gradually one will become aware of body alignment, weak points, the muscle frame and the potential inherent within. This will automatically lead to movements which free any tension. There is no hurry, nor need to compete with anyone, especially oneself. Development must be slow and steady. Awareness of breathing must be developed and coordinated with movement. Preliminary ajapa japa type movements from the navel to the throat can be used without ujjayi pranayama or khechari mudra. Sometimes ujjayi develops spontaneously.



6

Ajapa Japa in Other Traditions



The Buddhist tradition

Lord Buddha named the sadhana of breath awareness *vipassana* which means, 'to see the mind'. One has to be watchful of the distractions of the mind while maintaining awareness of the breath.

Jesus Prayer in the Christian tradition

Japa yoga (repetition of God's name) is used throughout Christianity. It is the basis of the Jesus Prayer and also of the prayer known as the Rosary, which is commonly practised in the Roman Catholic Church. This prayer uses a set of rosary beads, similar to the mala used in japa yoga.

Assume a comfortable sitting position, making sure that the spinal column is upright and straight. Relax the whole body. After the body has become still and relaxed, take your awareness to the path of the breath. Follow each inhaled breath and send it to the heart. Continue for some time, maintaining full awareness of each and every breath passing to and from the heart.

When your mind has become very still, begin to concentrate on the heart itself. Intensify your concentration on the heart and repeat the following prayer mentally, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.' With the inflowing breath repeat, 'Lord Jesus Christ'. Holding the breath within the heart repeat, 'Son of God', and with the out flowing breath repeat, 'Have mercy on me'.

Continue to follow each inhaled breath to the heart, retain the breath, then exhale, while repeating the prayer with full concentration and devotion. Continue for 15 to 30 minutes.

With practice, the japa or repetition of the prayer with the breath becomes spontaneous or ajapa japa and will be maintained throughout all daily activities.

The Sufi tradition

Nearly all Sufi meditational techniques involve mantra, 'zikr' or 'dhikr'. Sometimes zikr is utilized with dance and music or 'sama', sometimes in introspection, in techniques like japa and ajapa where a mala or a 'tasbih' is used. Sufis, in their wandering, might never sit formally for meditation but, as they move, some kind of mantra will be going on, gradually permeating their entire being. Its use varies with the master and disciple involved but its power always remains.

7

Conclusion



Nowadays there is an overwhelming tendency for human endeavour to be completely absorbed in the outside world. Everything in society, in education and so forth is orientated towards outside aspiration and activity. In fact, any tendency to be introverted is widely regarded as abnormal.

The direction of man's life is almost totally fixed on the pingala path. This results in disequilibrium in life because the pingala path is not supplemented and balanced by the ida path of introspection. This is one of the main reasons for so much mental turmoil and dissatisfaction in the world today. Attention is continually directed outwards, so that one never knows the nature of the inner world. Balance between the inner and outer realms, ida and pingala, is essential in order to find spiritual bliss and knowledge.

The whole aim of yoga is to find this balance between ida and pingala. Many methods are utilized. One of the simplest yet most effective is ajapa. Continuous practice of ajapa puts you in tune with the breath and the associated mantra. The breath is a continual reminder that you must be aware of yourself in relation to the outer and inner world. And while you are alive, the breath never stops. It is therefore the continual reminder. If you use it, it will make you more harmonized and sensitive. You will attain perfect balance between excessive introversion and excessive extroversion; you will find there is a balance between becoming totally lost in the outside world of material objects and becoming totally lost in the inner world of fascinating psychic events. Perfect balance of ida and pingala implies that sushumna functions. This leads directly to meditation.

Ajapa is a powerful technique, especially if it is done continuously throughout the day and night. Many great yogis have attained highest stages of consciousness through this method alone. We realize that continuous practice is difficult for most people, especially those who have many responsibilities and this is nearly all of us. At least try to do ajapa as much as possible, whenever you find the time. Instead of brooding over past regrets and future problems, do ajapa. You can practise at any time . . . before sleep, before lunch, while on the bus or train to work or wherever. This will help to harmonize the mind and allow the deeper mental impressions or *samskaras* to arise to conscious perception. This is the way to equanimity in life.

Notes



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Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. *Satyam Speaks Series* is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere seekers to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place.

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Note: This series is for knowledge only. The practices must be learnt from an accomplished yoga master.

