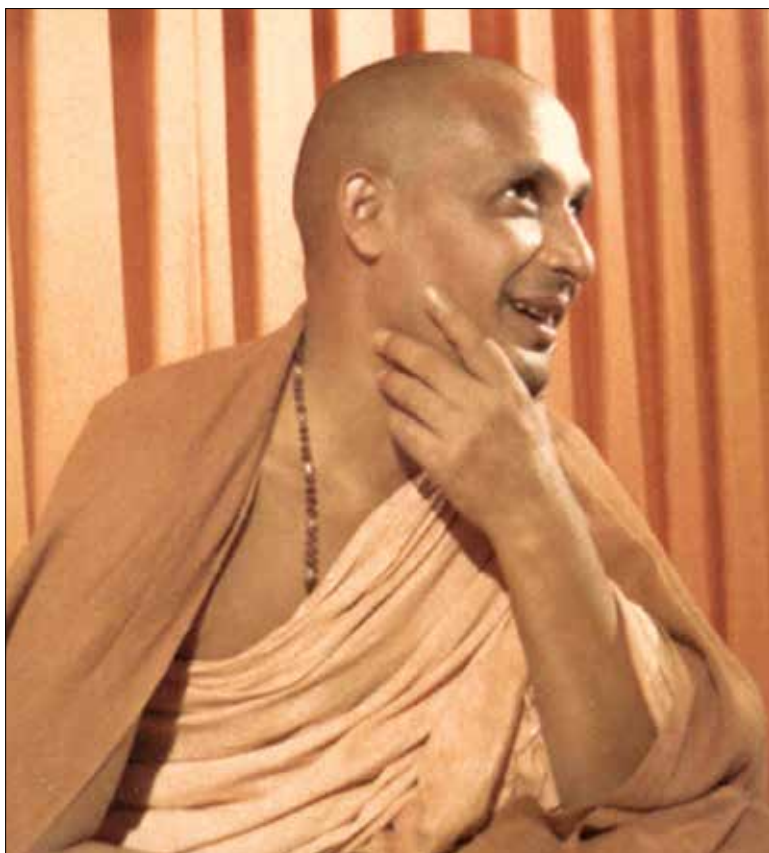


Satyam Speaks Trataka



Satyam Speaks
Trataka

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Satyam Speaks Trataka



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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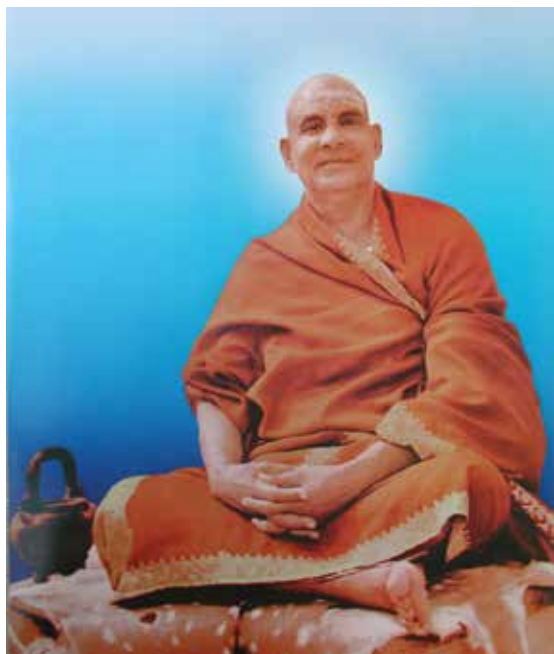
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Dedication

*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.*

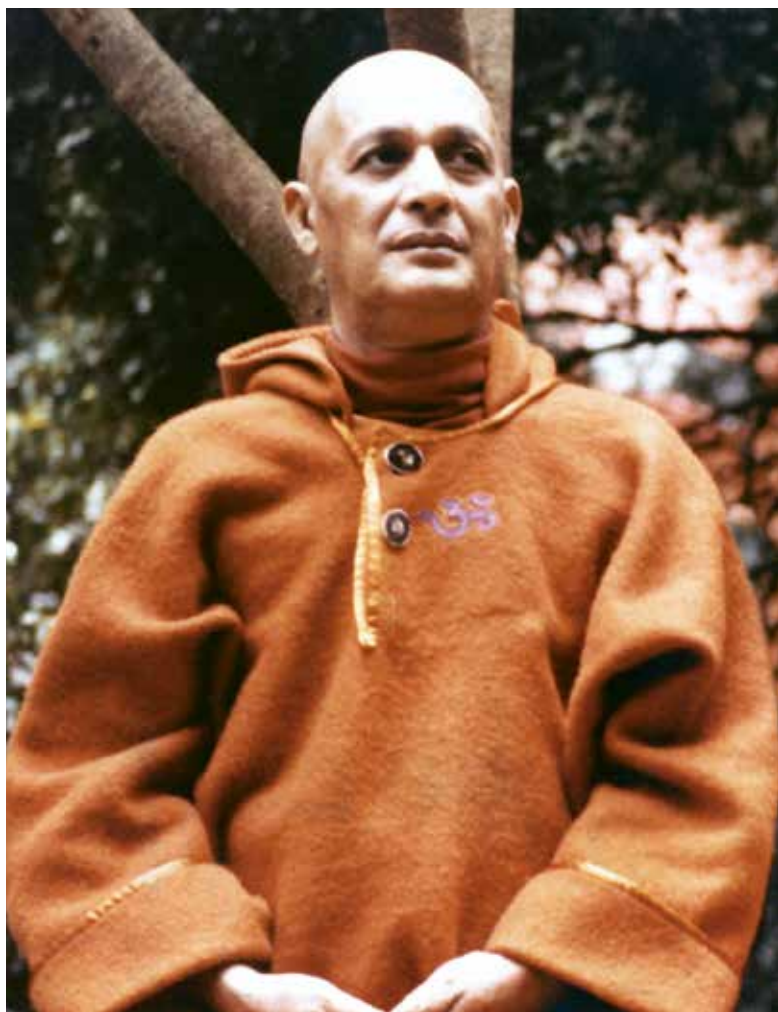
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Preface

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.



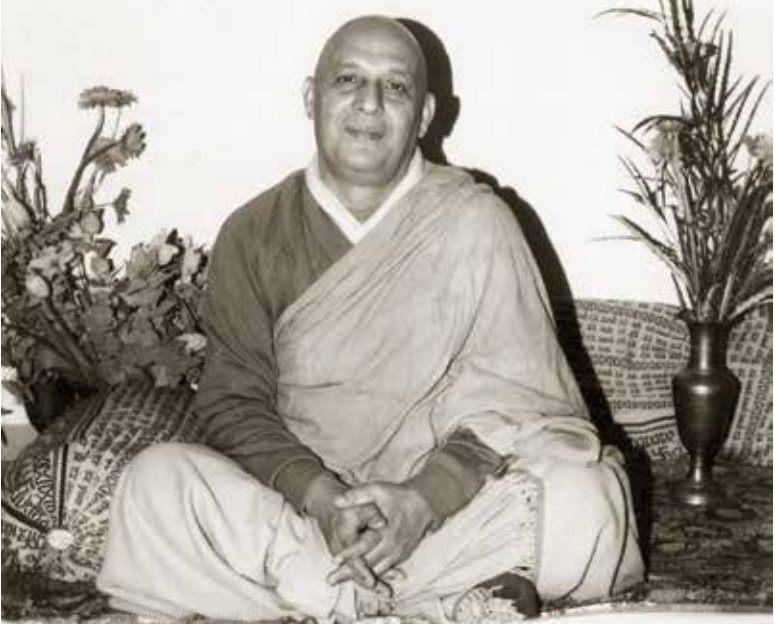
Satyam Speaks Series is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere aspirants to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place to be.

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

Part 1

1

Introducing Trataka



The Sanskrit word *trataka* means ‘to gaze steadily’. The practice of *trataka* develops concentration. The power of the mind is great, but through desires and energy wasting pastimes, this energy of mind is dissipated in all directions. If we can apply this widely spread mental power to one purpose, either spiritual or worldly, we cannot fail to succeed.

We are subjected to a continual bombardment of sensory data and we are unaware of the multitudes of thoughts that are passing through our mind. It is only when we relax and partially cut off the sense awareness that we become conscious of all this mental activity.

Trataka is a simple yet powerful form of meditation which is known in almost all religious systems and was practised in the mystery schools of antiquity. Christians have for centuries practised trataka on icons, holy pictures, candle flames and religious symbols. The Sufis used to place a mark on their eyebrow centre and with the aid of a mirror they would practise trataka on that point. Shamans and black magicians were also familiar with trataka.

In order to concentrate on an object, either internal or external, the mind must be kept under control so that it is not distracted. One way of doing this is by choosing something as the object of concentration which will make the mind experience peace and steadiness. For this purpose the mantra *Om*, a flower, a picture of your guru, a deity, or the flame of a candle can be chosen. The candle flame is the most convenient and practical object for beginners.

As well as developing concentration and memory, trataka can lead to the shores of dhyana. Trataka helps one to understand his mind, for it is a method of contacting the higher self and expanding consciousness into higher realms. By means of trataka we can cleanse the doors of our perception and awaken some of our psychic qualities.

Traditionally, trataka is considered to be one of the hatha yoga cleansing techniques, but it is practised like a mudra so it is also a part of raja yoga.

In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:31) trataka is described:

*Nireekshennishchaladrishaa sookshmalakshyam samaahitah.
Ashrusampaataaparyantamaachaaryaistraatakam smritam.*

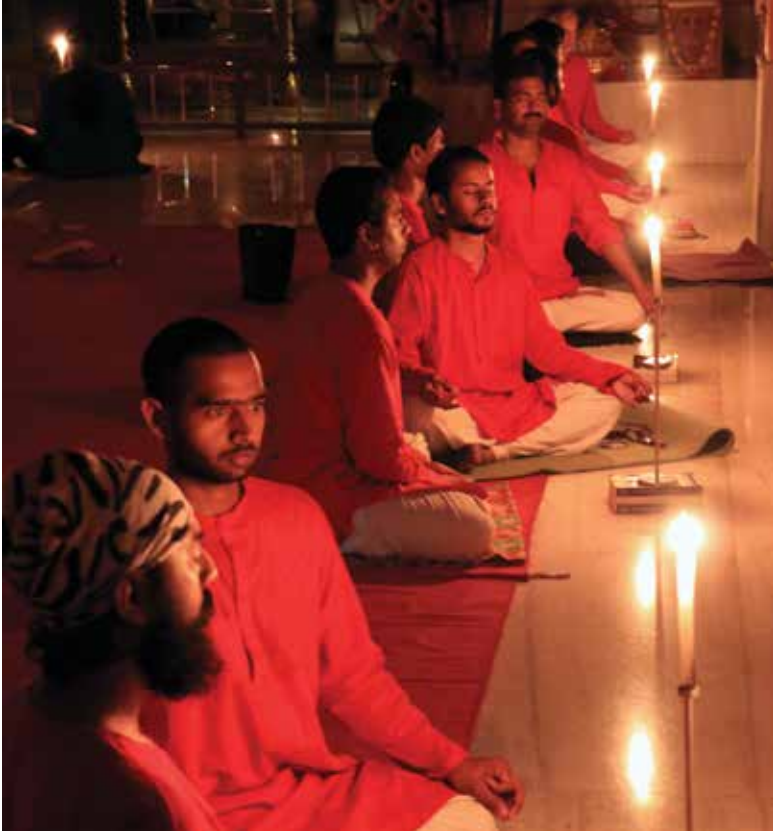
Looking intently with an unwavering gaze at a small point until tears are shed is known as trataka by the acharyas (teachers).

Yogi Swatmarama's instruction is to gaze at a small point, *sukshma lakshyam*. Sukshma can mean 'small' or 'subtle'. In the practice of *trataka* an object is gazed at until its subtle form manifests in front of the closed eyes. The best object is the flame of the candle. The flame is looked at for some time, then the eyes are closed and one tries to see the candle flame inside. It is not imagination, it is the effect of the light on the brain and ocular system. The candle remains burning inside, one concentrates on it, and the mind becomes introverted.

In the middle of the eyebrow centre there is a very important psychic nerve and when you close your eyes you can visualize that centre. If you are not able to visualize that centre, then there is a practice. Light a candle in front of you and concentrate or gaze on the flame of the candle for a few seconds without blinking your eyes, without moving your body, then close your eyes and concentrate in the middle of the eyebrows and discover the luminous point. This luminous point is a very, very tiny point, much smaller than a star you can see in the sky, and you have to discover that luminous point for you to go deep into yourself.

In the practice of *trataka* first you concentrate on the candle flame and then through the candle flame you slowly develop the luminous point. By concentrating on that luminous point you ultimately come to *ajna chakra*. In fact this centre, the middle of the eyebrows, is directly connected with a very important centre which is situated on the upper portion of the spine. The uppermost portion of the spine has a small gland known as *ajna chakra*. Some call it the eye of intuition and it has another name also, the third eye. It is very difficult to concentrate on that centre directly unless you have a vision of that centre somehow.

Many people who try to practise hypnotism start with this practice, but this is not the purpose for which I am teaching it to you. It is because you must have a basis for concentration and that tiny little star or that tiny little spot which is known as *bindu* should be seen in order to deepen your concentration.



Trataka is a method of focusing the eyes, and in turn the mind, on one point to the exclusion of all else. Trataka consists of two stages – *bahir* trataka and *antar* trataka. In *bahir* or external trataka the concentration is on an outer object because this is easier for the untrained mind, since the mind likes to attach itself to outside objects. When we close our eyes to concentrate on an inner symbol or point, the mind immediately gets bored and wavers. In *antar* trataka, or inner visualization, the mind is trained to introvert. When operating through the medium of the senses the mind loses energy, but when concentration is on an inner object, withdrawn from the senses, it gains energy.

Bahiranga trataka is simpler to practise as one simply gazes at an object or symbol, whereas antaranga trataka involves the clear and stable inner visualization of an object. In external trataka an object is placed in front of the eyes and the practitioner gazes at it steadily without blinking or moving the eyes. Only the object of concentration should be seen and the mind should not be allowed to wander from its observation. This takes some practice to master, but in time the aspirant develops greater concentration as well as control over his mental forces.

If practised daily, external trataka will help to strengthen the eye muscles and generally improve the eyesight. In the more esoteric and occult side of tantra, the open eyes are also used to reach the higher stages of awareness. This is demonstrated in kriya yoga where the aspirant, by keeping his eyes open for the first hour of practise, is drawn into the deeper levels of the mind when he closes his eyes for the next part of the practice.

By practising antar or internal trataka one gains awareness of the subtle forces within. Antar trataka can be practised after external trataka. One gazes at an external object for some time and then closes his eyes and tries to hold a clear image of the object in his mind. Antar trataka can also be practised on its own as a powerful exercise of concentration. Trataka, both internal and external, opens up dormant centres in the brain. As the predominant areas are quietened down, the areas which are normally dormant have a chance to come into our field of awareness.

Trataka is one of the most direct, simple and effective techniques for attaining concentration of mind. It can be practised by everyone and the benefits are vast. By practising trataka, all the attention and power of the mind is channeled into one continuous stream, allowing latent potential to arise spontaneously.

2

Types of Trataka



Trataka is an effective practice in itself, and a powerful prelude to a deep meditation. In the practice of outer or bahir trataka, it cleanses the eyes, but its purpose is mainly to draw the mind inward, thus clearing or cleansing the mind of thoughts, and allowing the transition from the physical

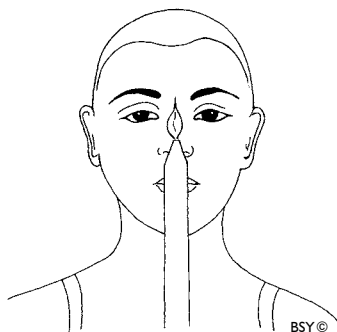
practice to the higher mental practices. Outer trataka can be practised alone, though it is generally combined with inner trataka for the best results. The most effective, though more difficult technique, is inner trataka practised by itself – the third stage of trataka practice.

Trataka consists of three different modes of practice:

1. Outer (bahir) trataka only
2. Outer and inner trataka combined
3. Inner (antar) trataka only.

1. Outer trataka alone

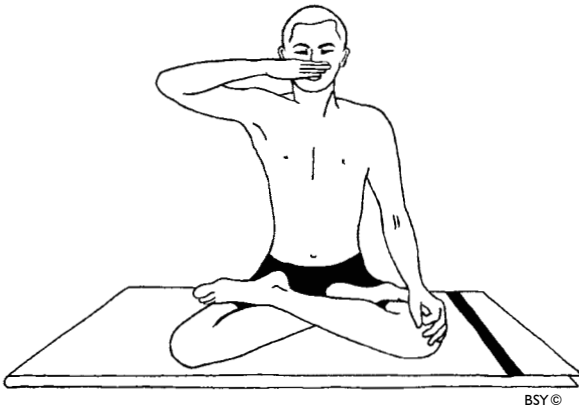
The first is the elementary practice which is the process of gazing without flickering the eyelids. In this stage, outer trataka is practised on an object without thinking of its form, steadily and devoid of any mental changes. This can be performed on any object during the day or night.



Outer trataka should be practised without any straining of the eyes; if the gazing is done in a natural state of mind, strain will be avoided. At the time of practising trataka, the eyeballs should remain steady and the eyelids should not flicker. No object except the one on which trataka is to be performed should be seen, and the mind should not wander hither and thither but be merged in observation of the object.

Outer trataka is the method used to strengthen the eyes and also to cleanse them. It also develops concentration, improves memory recall, banishes nervous tension, insomnia and it increases the intuition and 'sixth sense'. This system is most suited to the person with an outward going personality, someone who is easily distracted with a wandering mind and poor powers of visualization. It is also beneficial to persons who wish to improve their memory and deeper awareness.

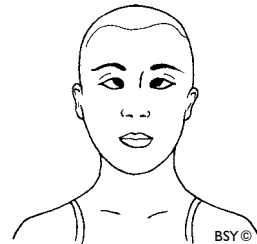
In outer trataka, you gaze steadily at a point, such as a candle flame. The rapid eye movements (R.E.M.) which take place during dharana, break your concentration from time to time, and they also remove the pattern of your symbol. You see the flame and it disappears. This is because the movements of the eye influence the structure of consciousness which is supported by the brain. So concentration on a particular point in trataka will give your eyes the required steadiness. Then, with eyes closed, you will be able to hold your concentration for three to five minutes, and R.E.M. will not occur.



Outer trataka and mudras

Agochari mudra is an excellent form of outer trataka. Because most people are habituated to being continuously extroverted during their lives, they find it almost impossible to close the eyes for more than a few seconds, unless they are intending to sleep. It is especially suitable for it can be done at any time during the day when you are most likely to meet stressful and disruptive situations.

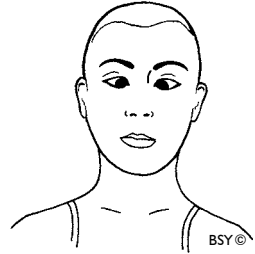
The second practice is shambhavi mudra, in which one focuses both eyes on the space between the eyebrows. Shambhavi mudra should be



practised after mastering agochari mudra for it is a little more difficult.

Bhoochari mudra is an allied technique to agochari and shambhavi mudra and all three are excellent forms of trataka.

Another practice is nasikagra drishti, in which one gazes at the nose tip. This is to maintain a steady vision of the symbol and it further strengthens one's ability to control the R.E.M. and thereby enables one to maintain a steady vision of the symbol.



The most useful purpose of outer trataka, however, is to train the eyes so that they can gaze at an object for a long time without flickering the eyelids, so that one can gain a clear inner after-image for the purpose of inner trataka.

When the aspirant succeeds in practising outer trataka continuously for fifteen or twenty minutes without any feeling of fatigue for a few days, it is time to practise the next stage.

2. Outer and inner trataka combined

In this form of trataka one first gazes at an external point or object for some time, then closes the eyes and gazes at the after-image of the same object. Again any form can be used, though a bright object is most suitable, for this imprints a clear picture on the retina of the eyes which can be clearly seen when the eyes are closed. While the stage of outer trataka does help to concentrate the mind, the main function is to produce a clear inner-image. This after-image acts as an almost overwhelming object of attention during inner trataka. If it is bright and clear enough it will, in a sense, fascinate your awareness so that you can be aware of nothing else. This is exactly what is required for it leads to concentration of mental forces and in turn meditation.

Whilst piercing breath is practised between the candle flame, the eyebrow centre and ajna chakra, the tongue can be turned backwards in khechari mudra. The breath and its

movement should be concentrated upon fully, until the actual movement of breath can be felt. Eventually the eyes should be closed, and the breath experienced on its passage between the candle flame and the back of the head. This movement has a profound effect on ajna chakra. At this stage the throat can be half closed and the ujjayi breath used, then there should be total absorption of the movement and the sound of the breath.

The method of outer and inner trataka combined is especially useful for those people who have great difficulty in creating an inner image at will, without an external counterpart. Those people who can easily create a steady and distinct inner image without the assistance of an outer material object can practise inner trataka alone.

3. Inner trataka alone

Inner trataka is called *dharana* or concentration because in this practice the eyes are closed and the mind concentrated upon some subtle element within. This form of trataka is most conducive to introspection and exploration of the mind, for there is no contact with the outside world as there is with the other two modes.

Inner trataka is practised with the eyes fixed as if they are trying to search for something: the process is as if one is carefully observing some objects or trying to find something small in a big thing. The eyeballs should be steady, there should be no strain, but at the same time the gazing should be with a purpose. The nature of the image has to be investigated as though looking for something. One must try to pierce through the exterior reality of the inner image by looking intently at the image and trying to probe its shape and nature.

Imagine a candle burning on a small table in a room. The window is open and the flame flickers. Now, if you switch on the fan, the flame will be extinguished. But if you close the window and turn off the fan, the flame will become steady. Your awareness is like the flame and it must be made constant by closing the windows of the senses.



Gazing into the depths of the flame, perceiving as much detail as possible, one feels and sees the aura of the flame penetrating the mind. The collected rays of one's awareness have to probe the flame in an attempt to discover its deeper significance. What is the nature of the flame? What is the deeper essence behind what can be seen? Then you will effortlessly experience *dharana* or concentration. In *dharana* the light of the candle immediately appears, although interspersed with thoughts as the mind is diverted. Basically the symbol becomes effulgent and steady.

This is continued for at least five to ten minutes or until the end of the practice. The longer the practice is maintained

the better, especially if the inner image is exceptionally clear. Although trataka is a simple practice, one has to be careful and alert when doing this sadhana, as one's vision and mental processes must be watched. If the mind is slightly active, the vision wanders away from the object.

However, the other two forms are most suitable for general practice and especially for beginners. The reason for this is that most people have a disturbed mind that is in continual conflict and turmoil.

Under these circumstances it is generally difficult to create an inner image that is sufficiently overwhelming to capture the attention of the mind. If the mind is disturbed and you practise inner trataka, you will generally find that the ever wandering mind quickly forgets the inner image and becomes sidetracked onto other thoughts. As a result, you will fail to gain the most benefits from the practice. In these conditions it is far better to practise outer trataka or outer trataka combined with inner trataka, for the clarity and more tangible nature of the outer object will be more likely to hold the attention of the mind to the exclusion of other thoughts.

You should definitely do inner trataka when you can create a clear inner image and when you feel that your mind has attained a reasonable degree of equanimity and steadiness. This state will come if you practise yoga with sincerity and enthusiasm. Inner trataka is a powerful method of developing awareness of the deeper aspects of the mind and awakening its incredible potential.

Throughout the practice of trataka the inner image has to be visualized and projected at the eyebrow centre. This is far easier if some kind of sensation is felt on the skin at that point.

By practising internal trataka, gazing inward, we learn to perceive our inner world. And utilizing external trataka we can look outward and at the same time retain awareness of our internal process. This helps to rebalance the pranic nadis, ida and pingala, opening up the middle path, sushumna, the doorway to higher awareness.

3

Effect on Eyes and Brain



Physiology of trataka

The effects of trataka on the psychic centres of the body are profound but the physiological effects are also profound. Most people have heard of the pineal gland. It is a small pea-sized gland above the top of the spine, in the centre

of the head between the two ears (technically it is located between the two cerebral hemispheres and above the cerebellum). This small body has yet to be understood by modern science, and does not seem to have any specific physiological function, but it has been likened to a third eye, and as such, is commonly thought of as the psychic centre of the brain. It lies on the roof of the spinal cord above the corpora quadrigemina. Physiologically, melatonin can be extracted from the pineal in its glandular state, but otherwise it has no apparent use. In adult life it tends to waste and atrophy.

It is possible that *trataka* has an awakening or stimulating effect on the pineal. In children, the pineal is active until the age of puberty, and it has been found that the gland in the female is larger than in the male. One could suppose that the pineal gland could be the control centre for intuition and psychic abilities, as these qualities are active in children until the age of puberty, which is the age when the pineal begins to calcify, also, on the whole, females generally have stronger intuitive powers than males.

Yoga, on the other hand, together with various spiritual systems throughout the ages, both eastern and western, says that this gland is the link, the antenna for higher vibrations. When it is stimulated or awakened then one can start to tune in with more subtle patterns of existence.

It is significant that the eyes are connected directly with the pineal gland, via the sympathetic nervous system. This much modern physiology has determined, together with various other factors which have recently come to light. The centre of the sympathetic nervous system, as well as the parasympathetic, is the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is also the centre of wakefulness and pleasure together with sleep and pain. Therefore the eyes, the pineal gland, the sympathetic nervous system, the hypothalamus and the wakefulness of an individual are all intimately connected with each other, directly or indirectly. Mental concentration of any type will tend to bring these systems into a high level of sensitivity. This, as we have already pointed out, allows

the infiltration and flow of higher consciousness through the pineal gland.

Effect on the brain

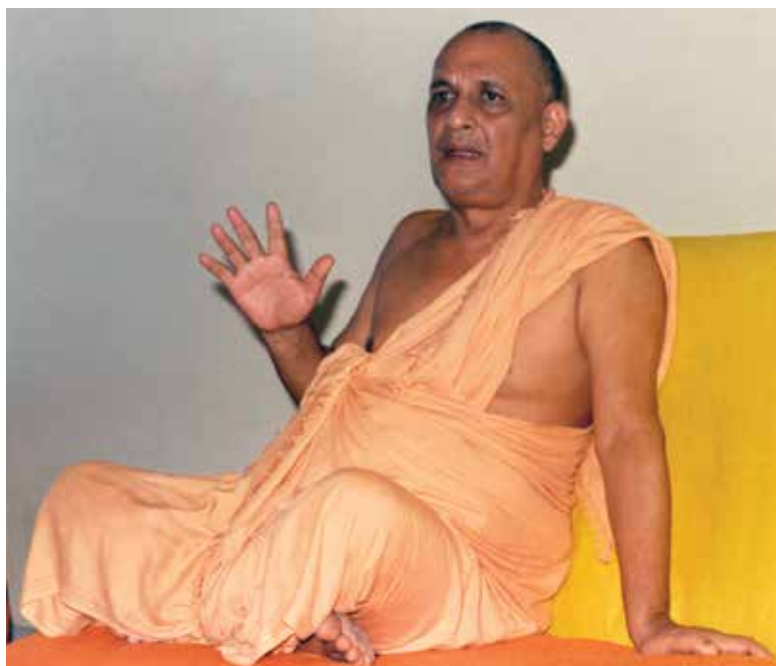
Trataka is a very important practice and a direct method of influencing the brain. During trataka the impression of the object falls on the retina at the back of the eye and it is carried to the brain by the optic nerve. Under normal circumstances the image on the retina is constantly changing and nerve impulses are continually being sent to the brain. This continual flow stimulates the brain, causing the sensory areas to send impulses to the motor areas

Trataka enhances the ability of clear thinking, improved memory, and powers of recall, due to bringing about a balance between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. The right side of the brain is responsible for imagination, colour, musical and artistic appreciation and recognition of faces. The left hemisphere controls logic, memory and intellect, time sequential analysis and speech. If one or the other of these two hemispheres is over active, the result can be a greatly unbalanced nature.

With a predominance of the right hemisphere, a person can become wrapped up in imaginings and daydreams, with a mind that continually wanders. Sometimes they can lose touch with reality. A left predominance blocks out the power of imagination and the subject becomes over logical and introverted.

The RAS (reticular activating system) situated in the brain stem awakens the brain cortex and keeps it awake; it also monitors the sensory perceptions. When stimulated with an electrical stimulus, all sensory perceptions are enhanced and muscular activity is increased. The RAS is the opening path for all forms of meditation and higher states of consciousness.

During the practise of trataka, the right and left hemispheres of the brain are quietened and direct contact is established with the RAS. When this happens there is a balance of the hemispheres, which establishes itself when



the normal, active, waking state is resumed. Any mental imbalance is then released and overcome by regular practice.

The brain has several centres which are connected with the optic nerves. These centres receive information through the optic nerves and send out commands. Many of these centres are asleep or inactive. Trataka does not merely increase the function of perception. Through the medium of perception, the centres of the brain which remain inactive in an ordinary person are awakened. Man is capable of becoming a superman if he is able to awaken and activate those glands and nerve centres which in the natural course of evolution are in an inactive state.

Whilst trataka and other meditation techniques are being practised, there is a marked increase in the alpha and theta activity within the brain. The alpha being the most pronounced, this indicates that a relaxed, mindless or deeply concentrated state is being experienced. The skin

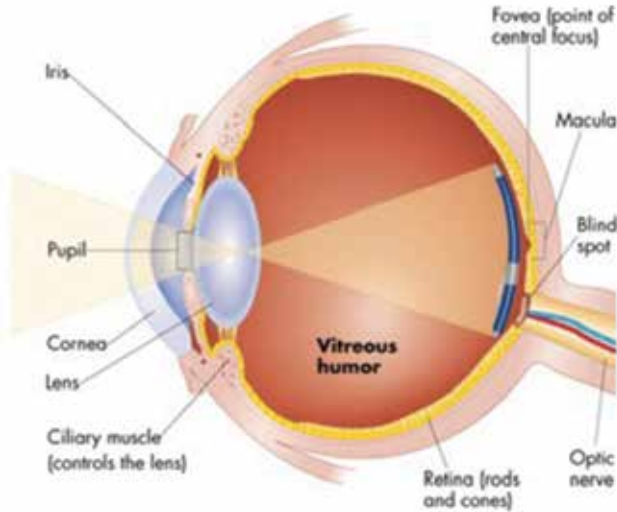
resistance, which mirrors our mental and bodily states, rises. The skin resistance is measured in ohms (the unit of electrical resistance). During panic, the ESR is fifty thousand or less; during normal states it reads between five hundred thousand and one million and during sleep two million or higher. During deep concentration and meditation, the ESR may rise to anything between twenty five percent and five hundred percent from the normal state.

During trataka the brain has an opportunity to rest. Receiving, sorting and categorizing thousands of millions of nerve impulses every second, the brain is constantly active. Even during sleep the brain goes on recording different sensory inputs, although we are not conscious of them. Partial or complete shutdown of the brain, which occurs for a short time during trataka, is an extremely powerful form of rest. This helps to conserve our energy for higher purposes.

Effect on the eyes

The eye is actually an extension of the brain and the optic nerve is one of the twelve cranial nerves that emerge from the brain, not the spinal cord; therefore, when the optic system is engaged the brain is influenced.

Within the eye, the retina receives the images of external objects and is made up of a ten layered delicate nervous membrane. It is soft and semi-transparent and tinted purple. When it becomes exposed to bright light, it becomes bleached, and the purple tint becomes clouded and opaque. The retina contains light sensitive rods and cones. The rods are situated in the ninth membrane layer, known as Jacob's Membrane. There are many more rods than the cones being concentrated in the area around the fovea, which is situated in the centre of the posterior part of the retina. This spot corresponds to the axis of the eye. There is an oval spot yellowish in colour and deeper yellow at its centre, called the Macula of Sommering. At its centre is a depression, the fovea centralize, where the retinal membrane is very thin. The fovea is only to be found in man and certain saurian reptiles.



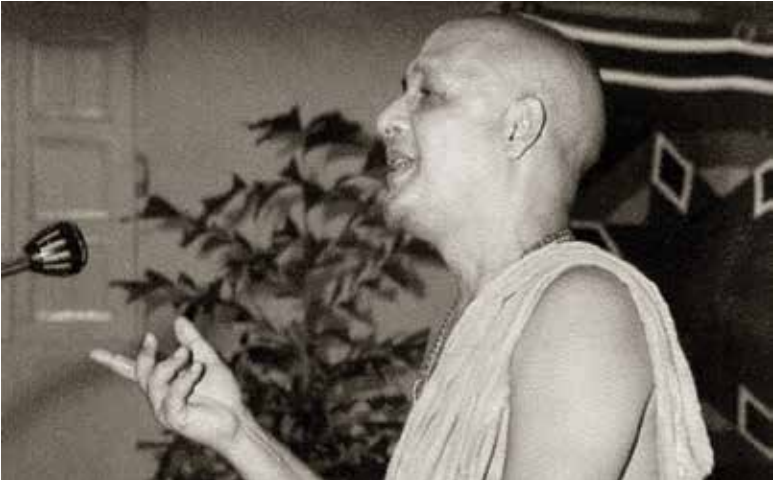
When a bright object is used for the practice of *trataka*, a brilliant after-image is imprinted onto the cones of the fovea, leaving an impression upon which concentration can be focused. This after-image can last for quite some time.

The cones are conical in shape, with their pointed ends facing the choroid. These are three types containing a special opsin which is activated by wavelengths in the blue, green and yellow regions of the spectrum. The colours of the candle flame would therefore register strongly here. The cones are stimulated only by brighter light than would normally stimulate the rods. With candle gazing the bleaching effect on the rods and cones leaves a vivid after-image and with regular practice, this image can be recollected at will.

The visual cortex situated in the occipital lobes of the brain, is activated by the stimulation of the cones of the fovea. The image is then transferred via the optic nerves to the brain, these cross at a point known as the optic chiasma, and its conjunction almost coincides with the placement of the pineal gland.

4

Objects for Trataka



We can give any pattern to the mind. We can shape it in the pattern of a woman, a man, or a pot, or a watch or a body. When we concentrate on Krishna, our mind assumes the form of Krishna which gradually becomes consumed in self-consciousness, resulting in nirvikalpa samadhi. When the mind merges in the form of the *ishta devata* (personal deity), the sense consciousness is withdrawn. You should select that object which would at once magnetize your mind and compel it to withdraw itself from all other objects. When the mind is merged in the one form, the light in us manifests itself.

Choose your object carefully and then practise earnestly. Note also that though we have described the technique of *trataka*, where one creates the image in front of the eyes, there is absolutely no reason why you should not mentally create a picture at the heart centre. Many of the ancient yogic texts recommend this place for creation of the image. In the *Katha Upanishad* it says that one can create an image at the heart, such as an inner-image the size of the thumb. You must therefore experiment for yourself and find the best object and the best location. Don't feel limited to the objects and techniques that we have given, for this is only intended as a guide.

The same object should be used each time so that the mind automatically quietens when the object is observed. Depending on the subject used for *trataka*, sometimes deeply hidden memories can be awakened due to the stimulation of dormant experiences which perhaps relate to the object in question. This can bring about vivid recollections of pictures and sounds that can sometimes become a little disturbing, but if the meditator is aware that these subconscious memories and thoughts can sometimes be stirred up, there will be no problem. The thoughts should be carefully watched; sometimes there are manifestations of the subconscious, problems, images etc. These should be observed with detachment. The concentration will begin to develop, peace of mind will come and the constant fluctuation of the mind will stop.

There are many possibilities. You can choose anything as your object, but once you decide, try not to change, for this will decrease the effectiveness of *trataka*. In other words, if you spend time developing your awareness of one particular object and then suddenly change, then you must in fact start from the beginning again to allow your mind to assimilate the new object. The mind has to mould itself around a particular object so that it is almost automatically attracted and drawn towards it. This takes time in general and it is really a waste of effort to suddenly start moulding the mind around another

object. Choose carefully and then try to stick to your decision. If you feel that you want to change after a period of time, and this is a common temptation, seek expert advice before you actually do so.

There are various objects for *trataka*. One can hold *trataka* on water, fire, earth, sky, ether, air, a dot, light, *chidakasha* and the like. Each has its own cluster of significant attributes.

Certain practices improve the eyesight, while others are helpful in removing certain cerebral congestions and reviving memory. In fact, *trataka* should be practised and can be practised on any steady object. It depends upon your requirement whether you need a shining substance or a dark object.

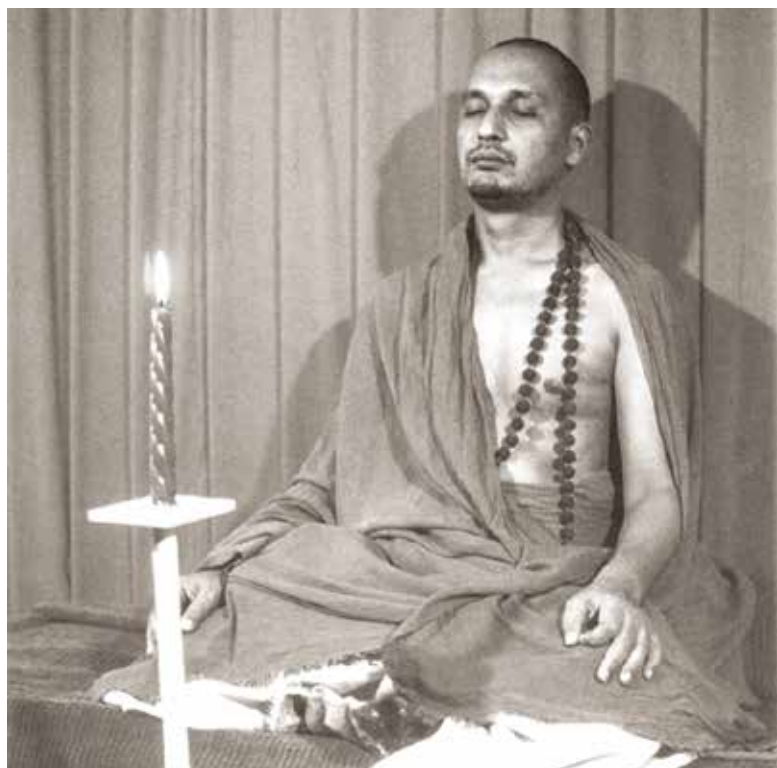
Objects of concentration

For the practice of *trataka* it is preferable to select an object which will make the mind experience peace and steadiness. You can choose from the following: a yantra or mandala, the symbol of Om, a flower, a shivalingam, a picture of your guru, a deity or your *ishta devata*, a coloured spot on paper, the moon, a star, a crystal, your psychic symbol, the reflection of the rising sun in clear water, an expanse of calm water, the darkness, *shoonya* – the void, your nose tip, your shadow, your mirror reflection, any non-metallic, solid object that is steady in nature, a candle flame. *Trataka* on the reflection of the rising sun, your shadow, your reflection in a mirror or a crystal should be practised under the guidance of a guru.

We have found a candle flame an excellent object for *trataka*, especially for beginners. The reason for this is that its brightness seems to rivet, to hold one's attention. It has an almost magnetic effect on the eyes and on one's awareness. It also leaves a very clear after image when one practises inner *trataka*, because of its brightness.

Other objects for *trataka*

There are many objects for *trataka* which can be utilized by *sadhakas* according to choice and situation.



Candle flame: Light a candle in the darkness and fix your eyes on the flame for five or ten minutes without blinking. Perform this practice in the morning and evening. There should be no break even for a day in this sadhana. It should continue as long as the eyes cannot fix themselves steadily on the flame.

Darkness: Sit by yourself in the dark and practise trataka on the darkness. The eyes should be open fully. Continue to see in the darkness without any light. Sit there daily and practise it steadily and firmly.

Blue sky: Sit in an open place or on a terrace at the end of the day and gaze at the blue sky without blinking. Try to feel that you have become like the sky or that the sky has come nearer to you. In due course the consciousness of the

practitioner becomes so transformed that even though the object is in front of your eyes, you are not aware of it. The consciousness which separates the seer and the seen does not remain separate, but identifies with the object.

Photograph: Have a small photograph of your chosen deity. Take a sheet of blank paper, the size of a book, and cut out a circle two inches in diameter, so that there is a round open space in the paper. Now place the photo of your deity behind the paper, fixing it in such a manner that you can only see the face through the hole, and frame it under glass. During the day practise trataka on the photo. The photo should be straight in front of the eyes at a distance of one and a half feet. Try not to take your vision outside the round circle.

Havan: Perform havan daily and in the sacrificial fire put scented objects. When the fire has ignited and has burned steadily for some time, repeat a prayer to the fire god Jataveda and perform trataka on the flame. Try to think of the divine being in the flame while doing trataka.

Crystal: If you happen to have a crystal, practise trataka on it. This is an independent and important sadhana. Trataka can also be practised on a big or small crystal ball. Crystal balls are of two types, those which are transparent and those which are not transparent.

Shivalingam: Worship a Shivalingam daily with great devotion. Concentrate on the water being poured on it. The Shivalingam must be a black stone. If it is a really black stone, make a sandalwood mark on it and steady your eyes on the mark. Otherwise try to concentrate on the entire black lingam.

Flower: Take a red, white or yellow flower. If it is a red rose, keep it in the light and practise trataka on it. If it is a white or yellow flower, then practise in a dark room.

Flower on cloth: Take a black or dark green cloth, two feet wide and three feet long. Hang it on the wall in front of you and in the centre of it pin a yellow, white or pink rose. Now sit in front of the flower in a semi-dark room and practise trataka on it.

Metal object: Take any small article made of bright metal, like vessels that shine when polished. It may be of brass, copper, silver or gold, for instance, an incense burner, a small jug, or a panchapatra. It should be no more than two inches in height. Practise trataka on that bright object in half light.

Needle: Keep a needle hanging on the wall and practise trataka on it. At the time of performing trataka, ensure that no other object is visible and that no other thought comes to the mind.

On a leaf: Take a large betel leaf. Prepare a collyrium (paste) with castor oil and make a black dot on the betel leaf. The dot should be the size of a pea or a little smaller. Fix this leaf onto cardboard. Place a light, a lamp or a candle behind you. Practise trataka on that dot in the morning and evening. Go on gazing at the dot continually for five or ten minutes without moving your eyelids. Do this for six months and then consult your guru.

Your shadow: In the morning, stand with your back to the sun and practise trataka on the shadow of your neck.

Tea: Take a glass full of tea. Practise trataka on the decoction of tea.

Elements: In order to attain mastery over the elements, draw them in their proper form and colour on paper or have them engraved on metal and perform trataka on it.

Moon: Practise trataka on the full moon or when the moon rises at night.

Water: Sit down on a riverbank or raised ground where you can see the current of water for a long distance. Practise trataka on the water. The eyes should remain steadily fixed on one spot; they should not move along the waves.

Changing scenes: While you are travelling in a train, open the window, keep the eyes open and watch distant scenes, without any emotion at all. The eyelids should not flicker, in spite of the changing scenes. The eyeballs should be completely steady and the mind devoid of any feeling. Thus you can also do spiritual practices while travelling.

Additional choice of object of awareness

Your choice of object can be almost anything. However, we recommend that the object has some meaning for you. In this way, there is more likelihood of maintaining your awareness on the object during *trataka*.

- A cross
- *Om* symbol
- Black dot on a white sheet of paper
- The rising sun (not the midday sun)
- The moon
- A star
- Shivalingam
- Nose tip
- Eyebrow centre
- Another person's eyes
- The sky
- Ishta Devata (personal deity)
- Yin and yang symbol
- Yantra or mandala
- Darkness
- Picture or statuette of Buddha
- Picture or statuette of Christ
- One's eyes in a mirror

Practice note: Please also read Chapter 8 on Precautions.

5

Trataka and the Mind



When a wise man has withdrawn his mind from all things without and when the spirit has peacefully left inner sensations, let him rest in peace, free from the movements of will and desire. Since the living being called the spirit of life has come from that which is greater than the spirit of life, let the spirit of life surrender itself into what is called *turiya*, the fourth condition of

consciousness. For it has been said: There is something beyond our mind which abides in silence within our mind. It is the supreme mystery beyond thought. Let one's mind and one's subtle body rest upon that and not rest on anything else.

—*Maitri Upanishad*

The mind is a faculty of the soul. The power of the soul is manifested through the mind. The mind has its own attributes, functions and nature, but it is not able to function without association with the soul force. If all the components of a machine are in order, the machine can carry out a particular task, yet it cannot function by itself without being motivated by some form of power, like electricity. The mind is in the same position. Its direction and tendencies are separate, but when associated with the soul force, it becomes active and works according to its faculties. That is why, motivated by past tendencies, a person does good or bad acts, higher or mediocre acts.

Just as the mind acts with the help of the soul, similarly the senses function with the help of the mind. We have five organs of action and five organs of perception. The ears, eyes, skin, tongue and nose are the organs of perception. Speech, hands, feet, reproductive and excretory organs are the organs of action. Like the mind, which is not able to function by itself, the senses also are not able to function without association with the mind.

For reasons of simplification we have named that power of thought and knowledge through which the senses function as the mind. It is because of the mind that we are absorbed in the world. The mind has been said to be the cause of the bondage of the soul, and also of the experiences of happiness and misery. It should also be remembered that the mind is an instrument of self-elevation, the inspirer of emancipation.

Under the normal waking conditions of life, one is subjected to a continuous stream of sensory data from the outside world. Added to this are the multitudes of thoughts

that arise from the subconscious mind, many in response to negative emotions and reactions to inner and external events. Due to this, the enormous power and potential of the mind is not used. Instead the mind operates at a low level compared to its fullest potential. Its energy is dissipated in all directions.

Trataka: sadhana for mind control and awakening

The first step on the path of spirituality is to control the mind and make it useful. The first sadhana of a sadhaka consists of understanding the mind, in knowing its direction and turning it upwards.

Hidden deep within the recesses of the mind are the samskaras or archetypes which influence the emotions, personality and life of each and every individual. Your problems arise from this inner store of experiences. Happiness and unhappiness lie deep in you and these experiences are stored in the form of samskaras. Within you they are accumulated in the form of particles. From particles they become waves of energy and these waves develop into a force which later emerges as an experience. Your experience of happiness or unhappiness arises in the form of a wave that is born of one particle. That particle is known as a *samskara* or archetype.

The archetypes in the brain come in the way of your expression. They are the substances which lie buried in the depths of the human mind, not the external mind which is connected with the senses, eyes, ears and other mediums of perception, this mind obtains knowledge. You don't need to have much to do with this mind, which depends on external sources of the senses, the indriyas; not even with that mind which depends on the storehouse or fund of knowledge which you have collected. The area of the mind which you do not know, which you have never experienced, has to come out. That mind can only come out if you can fix the archetypes.

An accumulation of archetypes collectively form the karma of an individual. It is on account of them that one's mind, emotions and personality are formed. If one suffers in life, it is on account of deep-rooted karma, or if one enjoys

life, it is also on account of karma. How does one deal with one's karma? Karma cannot be dealt with by a rational process such as psychoanalysis or psychiatric treatment; it has to be understood as a subtle force underlying each and every action or event that is encountered. It has been found that the practice of concentration on a symbol is effective in purging these archetypes from the unconscious mind.

When you practise *trataka* on a symbol, you stimulate these particles or *samskaras* in the brain. There are hundreds of symbols prescribed in yoga and tantra, out of which some are considered more powerful than others. For example, concentration on a yantra or mandala is very powerful depending on the quality of the yantra or mandala you choose for yourself.

When practising *trataka* on a symbol, these particles or *samskaras* in the brain are stimulated. *Trataka* cuts off this continual bombardment of the mind by fixing the attention or field of awareness at one point. In this way one is able to become aware of the potential of the mind, for it spontaneously shows itself under these ideal conditions of concentration. *Trataka* is a method of consolidating the power of the mind, so that it can be directed towards some useful end, whether material, mental or spiritual.

The science of yantra and mandala

In ancient Greece and Egypt, they had several different mandalas, but they have long been forgotten, for the west has turned its back on them. This is because they were wrongly misinterpreted as forms of gods and goddesses, instead of being related to human consciousness and human psychology. If the conditions of stress and tension are to be eliminated systematically and scientifically, then these ancient mandalas will have to be revived and utilized as a treatment for the deep-rooted ailments of the human mind. In the final analysis, we have to understand that the cause of stress can be related to several factors, some external, others purely internal. But whatever the cause, yoga has given us

an answer by showing us an effective way to eliminate stress, not through drugs or psychoanalysis, but through a profound and accurate understanding of the human body and mind.

Scientists in Switzerland, in connection with the educational system, have developed a science called yantra and mandala which of course most of you know about or have seen; but you have not tried to understand exactly what these things are.

Many times you see geometrical figures known as Sri Yantra, Kali Yantra or Tara Yantra. We thought for some time, even in our own country which is the origin of this culture, that these yantras were a mystical substance. People did not understand them, but now in order to improve the quality of understanding in terms of education, and with retarded children in particular, they are using yantras. And what do they tell you to do? To concentrate on the yantra with eyes open, then close the eyes and visualize the yantra as long as you can.

When you are not able to visualize with the eyes closed, then open the eyes again and gaze at the yantra. Go on practising this system of *trataka*, *dhyana* on the yantra, twice a day for ten to fifteen minutes. What will happen? They say that yantra has the capacity and power to penetrate far into the depths of the mind, that area of the mind I was talking about, and manifest or express that mind. Through this practice of yantra meditation, mentally retarded children are helped in the countries whose cultural tradition is not yoga, yet in this country where we have the tradition, we have completely forgotten what these funny geometrical things are.

Concentration on a yantra or mandala is extremely powerful, depending on the quality of the yantra or mandala one chooses. Concentration on different yantras and mandalas bring out different quantities and qualities of repressed material.

The second thing they have been talking about is mandala. For us it is a scientific process of conceptualizing the subconscious and unconscious areas of the mind. They



even go to the extent of saying that concentration on those mandalas can finally stabilize the alpha, beta, theta and delta waves in the brain which have got voltage, frequency, ampere and vibration. It is like electricity. You can reorganize, reset or restructure the brainwave patterns, then you can manifest a new quality of brain; a new quality of understanding.

Trataka is one of the most direct, simple and effective techniques for attaining concentration of mind. It can be practised by everyone and the benefits are vast. By practising trataka, all the attention and power of the mind is channelled into one continuous stream, allowing latent potential to arise spontaneously.

6

Guidelines for Practice



Trataka is not just looking intently at an object, it is looking at the object with awareness and mindfulness. The practice of trataka on any object can be performed during the day or night. In this practice, one must take into account the object, the place and the time. At the time of practising, the eyeballs should remain steady and the eyelids should not flicker; no other object should be seen, and the mind should not wander hither and thither, but should be merged in the observation of that object. Also, one should not enter into analysis of the object of trataka during the practice.

Posture

Trataka should be practised while sitting in the most comfortable, yet steady position possible. Any sitting position can be taken, even sitting in a chair. However, the preferred asanas are padmasana and siddhasana, which tend automatically to hold the body in the steadiest position without effort.

Position of object for outer trataka

The object should be placed so that it is at arm's length from the eyes and at eye level. It should be placed directly in front of the body when in the sitting position. This is important to gain the most from the practice. If the object is too far away then it is more difficult to hold the attention of the mind; furthermore, it is far less likely to leave a clear and absorbing after-image during inner trataka.

If the object is too low, then there is a tendency to stoop forwards while sitting; this is not conducive to a steady position and also produces discomfort and backache. If the object is too high, then the neck will become stiff. We have found from experience that the best position of the object is at the same horizontal level as the eyes and at an arm's length from the eyes.

Of course you can adjust the position of the object to suit your preferences; our suggestion is only a guide, though we have found that it is suitable for most people. Some people prefer the object to be at eye level but much closer to the eyes. There is much to be said for this, especially if the object is small. You must experiment for yourself.

This does not apply to many objects such as the sun, the moon, the nose tip, the eyebrow centre, etc., the position of which cannot be altered for nature has already fixed it. Nevertheless, the previous general comments apply to a wide range of objects from a candle to an *Om* symbol.

If you have eye defects, position the object so that you do not see double. The after-image will have a tendency to move up and down or sideways. Try to hold it steady in one place, preferably at the eyebrow centre.

Steadiness of gaze

As we have already mentioned, it is important that one tries not to blink or flicker the eyes while doing outer trataka. This is necessary to produce a clear after-image for inner trataka. Without a steady gaze it is difficult to discern a clear inner image and this is the main reason why beginners often fail to perceive an inner image.

Furthermore, steadiness of the gaze is directly related to steadiness and concentration of mind. There is an intimate connection between these two. Great sages with a calm, peaceful mind are often distinctive for their piercing eyes, their eyes don't seem to blink very much. So in trataka, by steadying the eyes you are automatically relaxing and concentrating the mind.

Often people are told not to flicker or blink their eyes under any circumstances, whether they feel discomfort, whether their eyes start to water profusely or whatever. We don't agree with this practice, for it only creates tension making it even harder to comfortably keep the eyes steady.



We have already pointed out that while the aim is not to move the eyes, if you must move them due to discomfort, then do so.

At first, beginners may find that this practice is very difficult and perhaps be able to gaze only for a few seconds before they feel the need to blink the eyes. Don't worry, with practise you will slowly develop the ability to gaze for long periods of time without the slightest movement.

The whole of your consciousness must become centred in the flame, to the extent that awareness of the rest of the body and the room is lost. The gaze should be absolutely fixed at the tip of the wick. When the eyes become tired or if they begin to water, close them and relax. Do not move the body, but be aware of the after-image of the flame in front of the closed eyes.

The same applies to inner *trataka* on the after-image. At first the image will move due to movement of the eyeballs while the eyes are closed. With practise you will be able to keep the eyes still and maintain a fixed image. Remember, the knack of mastering *trataka* lies in relaxing the eyes as much as possible.

There will be a tendency for the image to move upwards or downwards; try to steady the image. Try to be totally aware only of the after-image. If any psychic visions, extraneous thoughts or other experiences arise, merely act as a witness. Don't react to them in any way; just let them come and watch them with disinterest. Continue in this manner as long as the after-image is clear.

Location of the eyebrow centre

Throughout the practise the inner image has to be visualized and projected at the eyebrow centre. This is far easier if one can feel some kind of sensation on the skin at that point. To attain this, lick one finger just prior to commencing the practice and apply a dot at the eyebrow centre. This will help to initially locate the correct position. However, though this method does help, the water will soon evaporate. For this

reason, it is far better to apply a little menthol, camphor or tiger balm, which will give a definite sensation at the eyebrow centre that will last throughout the entire duration of the practice. If the practitioner can think of a better alternative, then that could be used instead.

Breathing

During the practice of trataka the breathing must be slow, rhythmic and deep. This will bring steadiness to the breathing process and make the body and mind steady.

Developing awareness and concentration

Though the immediate and primary aim of trataka is to develop concentration, you should not force yourself to concentrate. Concentration must arise spontaneously. Try to maintain awareness of the object of trataka. That is, allow extraneous thoughts to arise, but while simultaneously being attentive to the object. You must split your attention between distracting thoughts and the object. Don't become lost in the stream of invading thoughts, but merely watch them with a feeling of disinterest. If you do this, then the unwanted thoughts will automatically subside, and concentration will arise. Of course, on occasions your mind may be more agitated than usual; you should still follow the same procedure, though it may be difficult to attain any degree of concentration. This awareness is important, for if you try to force the mind to concentrate you will only create more tension and less concentration. So be aware. Don't battle with the wandering mind, for you will lose. Tame the mind and mould it into a state of concentration by adopting the attitude of awareness.

Time for practice

Trataka can be practised at any time, though early in the morning and late at night are ideal. The best times to practise trataka are the dark hours of the very early morning between 3 and 5 am or late at night. If possible, practise at both these



times. At these times, the atmosphere becomes very still and quiet, not only the physical atmosphere, but also the mental and psychic atmospheres. In this stillness, success in trataka is readily attained.

Duration of practise

To gain noticeable benefits try to practise for at least fifteen minutes every day; more if possible. The number of rounds or repetitions depends entirely on the ability to retain the inner image. Those who are more proficient may only need to do one round, for they will be able to hold the inner image throughout the duration of the practice.

Beginners, on the other hand, will need to do a number of repetitions according to their proficiency and the duration of the practice.

Duration of inner and outer gazing

Beginners should aim at about two or three minutes. With practice, the time can be increased up to five or ten minutes at one stretch. Beginners who cannot see an image should try to create or discern an image for a minute or so and then open their eyes

Inner gazing can be practised for as long as you can clearly see the after-image. The longer one is able to practise the internal stage of the practice the better. If a clear inner image can easily be retained, the external stage can be reduced or even eliminated. If a clear after-image cannot be seen, the duration of the external stage should be increased. During the external stage, one should continue to gaze at the flame for as long as possible without flickering the eyes.

Advanced practitioners may find that they can see an image almost indefinitely. In this case, practise inner trataka throughout the entire practice or for as long as you can see the image. The aim is to increase the duration of inner trataka and eventually reduce the period assigned to outer trataka. This is because in general, inner trataka is far more conducive to meditation and awareness of the deeper layers of the mind.

Trataka and the eyes

Trataka is a simple practice, but in this sadhana one has to be very careful and alert as one's vision and mental processes have to be watched. If the mind is slightly active, the vision wanders away from the object. At the time of gazing the eyes should not be opened very wide.

Spectacles should never be worn during trataka, and anyone who has poor eyesight should be particularly careful not to strain the eyes. When tears begin to form the eyes should be closed and should remain so until the tears have dried. Only one round of trataka should be performed at first and as the eyes become stronger the number of rounds can be gradually increased to five. It is said that by practising trataka on a castor oil flame the eyes can be healed and the sight improved.

7

Benefits of Trataka



As with a car, one's body requires constant attention and care. It requires regular servicing and cleaning of its major organs and parts. The hatha yoga shatkarmas are prescribed for the constant care and cleaning of the body and mind. By the practices of neti, dhauti, nauli, basti, kapalbhata and trataka, one is able to maintain the body against the wear and tear of life. Excess waste materials that build up in the different parts of the body are eliminated.

Yogis who have attained this state are able to see things with the eyes open or closed which a normal person is not able to see. Clairvoyance means psychic vision and such vision was given by Vyasa to Sanjaya in the *Mahabharata*.

In trataka the whole system is stimulated and awakened by concentration through the eyes. This induces higher sensitivity of the pineal gland and directly – via the sympathetic nervous system – greater wakefulness in the individual. This is why trataka is such a powerful technique; it directly influences the pineal gland. Furthermore, all other disturbing thoughts, which reduce receptivity, are blocked out, at least temporarily, because of the intense concentration. All these factors help to lead the individual to higher experiences.

The yogis discovered that making the eyes steady by gazing at a point, either at the eyebrow centre, the nose tip, or a point outside of the body, immediately and beneficially affects the brain, and this has a reciprocal effect on the eye movements, the retina and the whole visual apparatus.

Research indicates a definite relationship between eye position and hemispheric dominance. It also indicates that shambhavi mudra and trataka balance brain hemisphere activity because the eyes are held steady at the centre of the forehead, crossed in shambhavi and straight ahead in trataka.

Even when we practise these techniques we may feel a very powerful stimulation and pressure within the centre of the head, ajna chakra activation, and the subjective experience is that of simultaneous extroversion and introversion. Shambhavi is the more powerful technique and induces an almost immediate effect. Centralized focusing of awareness appears to affect both nadis simultaneously.

Trataka plays an important role in yoga. Parvati practised shambhavi mudra, which forms an integral part of inner trataka. Trataka is practised even in hypnotism. The eyes possess the power to act as a reservoir of energy as well as a transmitter. Through the medium of the eyes, we are able to express many things sorrow, joy, anger, displeasure, cheerfulness, malice, etc. Through trataka we can acquire great power.

A little practice of trataka is of great use in removing eye disorders. Those who have weak eyesight and wear spectacles should practise trataka for five minutes daily on a dot on the wall. Wash the eyes with triphala every morning and evening. Practise for fifteen days or a month and then have your eyes examined by a doctor.

There are other types of eye diseases. Certain people have double vision due to detachment of the retina. Some cannot focus their eyes properly. These disorders can be removed by performing trataka on the flame of a lamp and anyone who is shortsighted or has poor vision is also advised to do trataka regularly.

Trataka and concentration

What is concentration? It is one-pointedness of mind, the ability to hold, to focus one's attention on one point, without wavering. Perfect concentration leads to meditation. In meditation practices, such as trataka, concentration leads to complete mental attention on one object, form or thought to the exclusion of all others. There is no distraction from the environment or other peripheral things.

Why is deep concentration so powerful? This can be best illustrated by comparing the mind of an average person to a light bulb. The rays of light go in all directions; the energy emanating from the centre filament is dissipated, spread in all directions. If you stand five feet away from the bulb you will see the light, but will not feel any direct heat, even though there is intense heat at the centre of the bulb in the filament. In the same way, the mind of the average person has vast dormant potential and power at its source, its centre, but this is dissipated in all directions. The mind thinks of a continuous stream of things, one after the other, without dwelling on one subject or aim in any depth. The power is present in each person, but it is not focused and used.

In recent years science has produced something that was once the main topic of science fiction novels – the laser.

It is an apparatus that lines up all the rays of light from a source so that they are in unison with each other, so that they vibrate together in perfect harmony. The original source of light need not be great, not even as great as the average light bulb filament that we have just mentioned, yet if you stood five feet away from a laser source, the beam would almost instantaneously burn a hole straight through your body. This is the power of concentrated light. Concentrated thought, though unlikely to bore a hole in the body, also has vast power. A concentrated mind acts as an irresistible instrument of action; it leads to efficiency in all one's activities in the outside world; it is a dynamo which generates vitality and enthusiasm in every direction. A concentrated mind also has the ability to be a sensitive receiving instrument; it becomes receptive to higher vibrations, to heightened perception. It becomes a receiver of the influx of higher awareness, bliss and knowledge. All this is normally beyond the range of the average mind for it is too disturbed and distracted by a continual inner chatter of thoughts. Concentration is the key that will unlock the door to higher states of awareness.

Trataka develops the power of concentration enormously, which is of immense use in everyday life. Furthermore, the focusing of mental energy towards one point leads to peace of mind, for it stops the continually fluctuating tendency of the mind. Trataka is an excellent method of obtaining meditation experience and unleashing some of the dormant potential of the mind.

The power of memory is hampered in many of us by mental disturbances, which seem to cloud over our ability to recall events when we require to remember them. Trataka helps to improve our memory by calming the mind.

One can always control the onslaught of desire or anger by practising the elementary stage of trataka when excited. When any emotional shock is experienced, the practice of trataka is as beneficial as the practice of kumbhaka. Trataka opens up a storehouse of energy.

All people with nervous tension, insomnia, etc. are recommended to do trataka on a regular basis. Also those people with weak eyesight and weak eye muscles will gain much benefit from trataka.

For students

Trataka makes the mind steady and helps it to concentrate. Therefore, when an individual does any intellectual work, listens carefully to something or thinks about something, the eyes remain steady without a flicker, and thus a natural state of trataka is attained. This faculty can be applied consciously whenever necessary.

Students especially should practise trataka. Its daily practice will help them to develop concentration and memory power as well as improve their eyesight.

Trataka and stress

As well as being an excellent preparation for the higher aspects of yoga practice, trataka helps rid the mind and body of stress and tension. The human race is the only species to have the mental capacity of anticipation and reflection. Much energy is wasted worrying about past mistakes and events that have long since passed, also by anticipating the future events that could prove to be altogether different from our worst fears. Much energy is wasted with constant unnecessary tension due to unrestrained mental activity.

We can compare the waste of pranic energy as the result of tension, to the waste of water as a result of not turning off the faucet and allowing the water to trickle away hour after hour. So we allow prana to trickle away in the constant stream of tension, which in turn results in the wear and tear on our muscles and internal organs.

Trataka steadies the mind and creates a mental calm, this in turn, relaxes the body. Several people suffering from nervous tensions discovered that regular practice of trataka resulted in a clearer frame of mind, and that as a result they were more able to cope with the everyday problems that

they had to deal with. They reported being able to view their situations in a detached manner. The nervous debility previously experienced became a thing of the past. Some subjects said that using an object to hold the attention was a great help in maintaining the concentration and that time seemed to pass very quickly whilst trataka was practised.

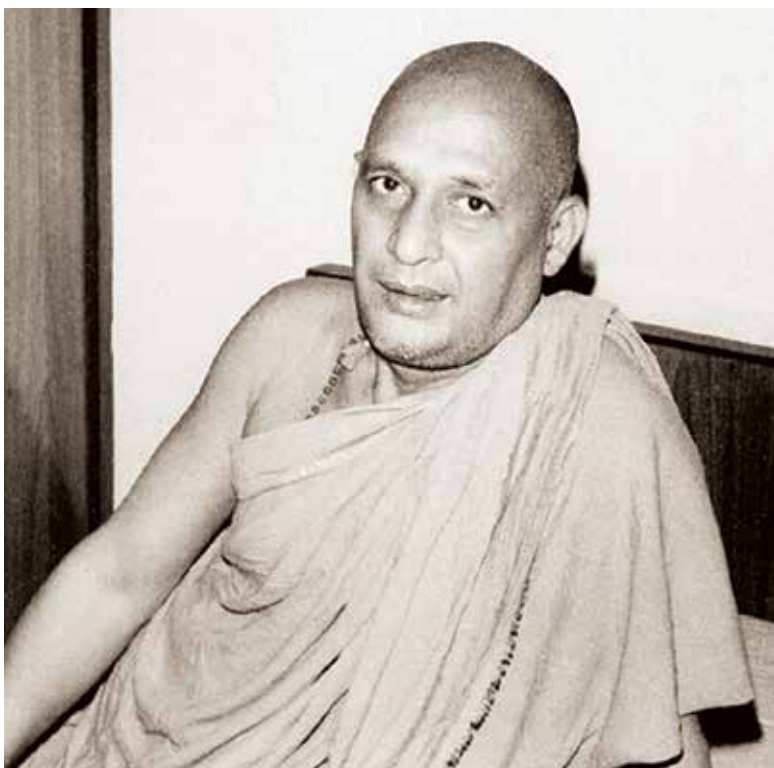
The people who suffered from feelings of anger and frustrations towards others, were instructed to place the image of the candle flame in anahata chakra and feel the warmth spread out from the heart centre, then they had to develop a feeling of love with the warmth and let the breath pass between candle and the heart center. One subject reported that after practising trataka in this manner, whenever she found herself in a stressful situation, she could develop the feeling of warmth in anahata, and the tension and anger would subside.

Trataka and sleep

Generally before going to bed people lie down and read a book. Why? By lying down on the bed, the optic nerves are pressed and this pressure makes the eyelids heavy. Due to heaviness the eyelids begin to close. The pressure on the optic nerves causes pressure on the brain too and therefore the instruments of the body, tired from the day's activities, fall asleep in order to remove fatigue and refresh themselves with new energy.

The mind also goes within at the time of sleep, but it does not sleep. The mind which was active in the external world through the senses goes inside during sleep and sees the pictures of its inner experiences and impressions. This is also exactly what is experienced through the medium of trataka. The only difference is that the eyes remain open. There is no sleep, but all the tendencies are turned inward.

For insomnia, first practise trataka, then yoga nidra. These practices will relieve insomnia, but there is something else one has to do. Why does one have insomnia? Because one thinks and thinks and thinks.



Trataka has many physical, mental and spiritual benefits. Physically, it corrects eye weaknesses and defects such as nearsightedness. Mentally, it increases nervous stability, removes insomnia and relaxes the anxious mind.

When the eyes are fixed and unmoving, the mind becomes steady and calm. It helps to develop good concentration and strong willpower. Spiritually it awakens ajna chakra.

Many diseases and afflictions are also cured. The poison of a scorpion bite can be eliminated by trataka on the affected area. In the same way, trataka can be performed on a diseased part of the body. Pain can be eliminated through trataka. In this case, the eyes become the medium for the transmission of healing power. The inner power can be transmitted through the eyes.

8

Precautions for Trataka



Beginners should practise trataka in such a way that the eyes are not strained. If gazing is done in a natural state of mind, strain will be avoided. It is difficult to explain this, but by practice this technique can be acquired automatically. When the gaze becomes fixed in a natural manner and the aspirant has success in practising trataka continually for fifteen to twenty minutes, without any feeling of fatigue, for a few days, then any other technique should be taken up.

Posture

Certain difficulties are encountered during trataka sadhana. Those who are not used to sitting in one posture for a long time, may have problems sitting comfortably and still.

Eyes

There are certain difficulties which are encountered in the practice of trataka. It is difficult to keep the eyes steady because drooping of the eyelids is a natural tendency and it is difficult to keep them from drooping, even with effort, for a long time. This creates an additional problem, as when the eyelids drop, it is difficult to gaze steadily and continuously on one central point.

Other difficulties are that the eyes get watery, and continuous gazing at an object may make it appear double, which is to be avoided. Sometimes the black dot appears white and vice versa. Finally, the sadhaka is often overcome by uncontrollable drowsiness during the practice of trataka.

If you have some form of eye defect you should try to position the object so that there is no double image and no blurred outline. You must be able to see a clear shape of the object. It is best if you avoid wearing spectacles – wear them only if necessary. For instance, if you are doing trataka on the moon and you are shortsighted then you will merely see a yellow blob. Under these circumstances spectacles will be necessary. However, the practice of trataka without glasses will help you to reduce your dependence on them, though this takes time and much practice.

Complaints are received that trataka, at times, injures the eyes. It is because the sadhaka has overstrained his eyes. If he looks into the object as he looks into a mirror upon his own reflection, with simple awareness and mindfulness, trataka will help him immensely. It is not necessary to enter into analysis of the object of trataka during the practice. The proper way of trataka is looking into the object with awareness and mindfulness.

If you use any type of luminous object for the practice of trataka, such as a candle flame or the sun's reflection in

water, you must not practise for more than two months at a time. Light can make a permanent impression on the retina and cause damage.

Avoid practising trataka on the sun as the delicate membranes of the eyes may be damaged.

Trataka on a flame is not recommended for people suffering from myopia, astigmatism, cataract or glaucoma.

Practice note: For any eye condition consult your medical practitioner before starting the practice of trataka.

Mental disturbances

Everyone has accumulated complexes and problems stored in the mind. The aim of yoga is to clean out the mind of this accumulated dross. Trataka is an excellent method in this respect for it helps one to become aware of one's problems. However, it is possible for the problems to manifest too rapidly, with possible mental upsets. If this occurs, the practice should be stopped and expert advice sought.

Visions

There is a way, a method and a definite process of practising trataka. Trataka can bring about the awakening of one's monstrous psychic being. Therefore, even when practising trataka for the eyes or for curing insomnia, it should be done correctly so that the wrong psychic explosions do not develop. Some people practise trataka and they see hell, monsters, ghosts, and such horrible things, so they stop the practice. They thought that perhaps these things really had come down, but actually it was all an expression of what was suppressed in them. Therefore, when trataka is practised there is a system according to what is being looked at, and the duration of the practice should not be too long.

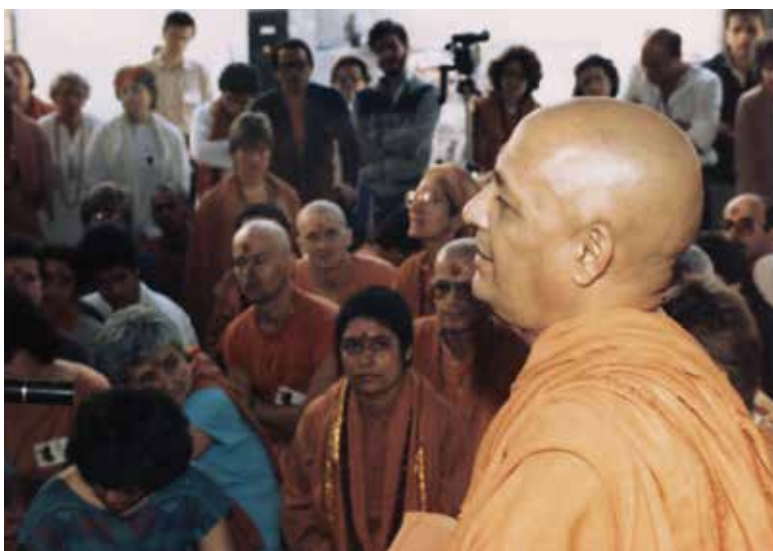
A sadhaka has to overcome these difficulties, but it is not difficult if one is alert and firmly fixed on one's ideal. For people of firm determination, the difficulties are surmountable. The practice should be increased gradually

and slowly. A concentrated mind is a great help to an aspirant. Everything becomes easy for one who practises with devotion, steadiness and sincerity.

Now you can practise this sadhana yourself. Select any of the above mentioned methods of trataka, according to your choice. By regular practice you will achieve knowledge of yoga through your own experience.

Try to be totally aware only of the after-image. If any psychic visions, extraneous thoughts or other experiences arise, merely act as a witness. Don't react to them in any way; just let them come and watch them with disinterest.

Trataka belongs to a high order of sadhana and deserves to be practised to increase one's mental power and to attain self-realization. This power should be used for the benefit of mankind, otherwise the aspirant hurts himself and also others. Moreover, one has to perform great austerities to acquire siddhis. These siddhis are automatically exhausted after a certain time. One should not waste one's inner power, time and sadhana for the achievement of such insignificant things, but should use them as an aid for self-realization.



9

Trataka and Meditation



All meditation practices aim initially at establishing concentration of mind as a prelude to meditation. To attain this state, different methods are adopted. One of the most direct, simple and yet at the same time effective, is the technique of trataka. Trataka is a most powerful practice for developing concentration. It is also an excellent method of developing inner visualization; in other words, the ability to see and maintain a clear image of any object in front of the closed eyes.

Both of these abilities are important for meditation. In the practice of *trataka* the mind is directed towards an external object such as a dot, the flame of a candle, a picture of a cross, *Om*, or anything. This helps to hold the mind more firmly on the object of concentration. The object should also be something that the eyes can easily focus on and which does not disturb the mind. Whatever the object, it has the same function: to 'trap' all the attention of the mind and eyes and focus it on one point.

Concentration is the essence of *trataka*, and it is through powerful concentration that one makes progress in yoga. What is concentration? It is one-pointedness of mind, the ability to hold, to focus the attention on one point, without wavering. Perfect concentration leads to meditation. With practices such as *trataka*, concentration leads to complete mental attention on one object, form or thought to the exclusion of all others. There is no distraction from the environment or other peripheral things.

Concentrated thought also has vast power. A concentrated mind acts as an irresistible instrument of action: it leads to efficiency in one's activities in the outside world and is a dynamo which generates vitality and enthusiasm in every direction. A concentrated mind also has the ability to be a sensitive receiving instrument. It becomes receptive to higher vibrations, to heightened perception. It becomes a receiver of the influx of higher awareness, bliss and knowledge. This is normally beyond the range of the average mind, which is too disturbed and distracted by its continual inner chatter. Concentration is the key that will unlock the door to higher states of awareness.

Inner concentration is preferable to external concentration for meditation practices, as it further reduces the tendency of the mind to wander. However, inner *trataka* is more difficult than external *trataka*, as a distinct image must be visualized. Ideally it is a non-changing image for the duration of the concentration, for if it fades or disappears the depth of concentration is lost. During the process of medi-

tation, when the meditating self and object of meditation combine and merge into one, it is called meditation. Perfect concentration is attained only when the three merge into each other. Perfection of concentration is meditation.

All one has to do is practise *trataka* and merge one's being into the object, form or thought, disappearing into it like an arrowhead into a target. To accomplish this, any method of *trataka* can be practised, according to one's liking.

Trataka and inner vision

When *trataka* is practised one develops a vision without an object. This requires a greater capacity of mind. After all, sensory objects are not the only reality: one must stop and think again – is there nothing existing beyond all this? Is there no form behind the form? Is there no sound behind the sound? Yes there is, and that experience can be lasting. It is clearly stated in the Upanishads that sensory experiences are limited by time, space and *maya*, illusion; only when the barrier of sensorial experiences is crossed can one come to a deeper reality. This is also the premise of modern psychology.

The highest experiences emanate from the unconscious, and the lower spring from *maya*. The practice of *trataka*, therefore, is of great relevance in the expansion of consciousness. Even beginners, with a little effort and persistence, can gain much from it in a short period of time with some kind of noticeable experience. And most importantly it can lead directly to meditation.

Trataka – a powerful sadhana

Trataka does not merely increase perception; through the medium of perception, the inactive centres of the brain are awakened. There are different categories of people. Some yogis live in the Himalayas, perform penances and attain *siddhis*. What practices do they perform? They perform *sadhanas* through which they develop the inner centres of the body. Thus, their senses are fully developed. These things are not impossible, they are natural, rational, intelligible and

form part of evolution. Every person who can devote the time can practise them under the guidance of a guru.

The sadhana of trataka helps one understand the mind, making its unseen powers active, in preparation for self-realization. The practice of trataka stands alone, and is meant for aspirants of higher categories; trataka is a powerful sadhana. Queen Gandhari, the wife of King Dhritarashtra of the Mahabharata, mastered trataka. Ramana Maharshi also practised trataka. Many sadhus in the mountains practise this sadhana. Trataka sadhana has shown that the eyes are the instruments by which the mind and the soul are reached.

Trataka is an essential component of kundalini yoga. The sleeping kundalini resides in mooladhara and its path of ascent is through sushumna nadi. Unless one has been a regular practitioner of yoga for some time, ida and pingala are not in communication with sushumna. But when trataka and kapalbhata are practised, these nadis are connected; when this link is established, the higher energy flows through them.

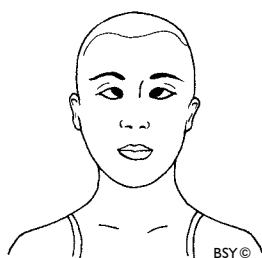
Ajna chakra



Trataka is an important *shatkriya* (cleansing technique) which will aid in the awakening of ajna. It is a powerful technique which can be defined as 'fixed gazing at one point'. If practised regularly, it develops the power of concentration and from this

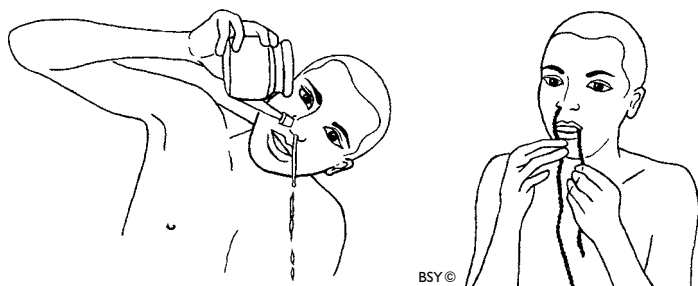
concentration, the direct awakening of the latent faculties of ajna chakra is brought about.

You can awaken ajna chakra by concentrating on the eyebrow centre, performing such practices as shambhavi mudra. Initially, when there is no sensation or awareness at this point, some ointment or oil such as tiger balm can be applied. This facilitates concentration. With practice,



the pressure of your concentration at this area increases and the sensations are carried back to the pineal gland. This brings about an awakening in the pineal gland in the form of visions and internal experiences.

Preparatory practices jala and sutra neti can be practised for a few months to purify the nasal area and the important nerve junction behind it. This will help to sensitize ajna chakra and aid in its awakening apart from having a profound effect on the nervous system. At the same time, it profoundly alters psychic awareness, facilitating free flow of breath in both nostrils, so that the meditative state can be attained. It should be practised every morning before you commence your other sadhana



Trataka is a powerful technique with regard to developing sensitivity to the location of ajna chakra and bhrumadhya. A candle is certainly the best object, the feeling should be as though one is gazing with the eyebrow centre instead of the two eyes. This is a particularly powerful method for simultaneously developing sensitivity to both ajna and bhrumadhya, it involves the integration of trataka with the flow of breath.

One tries to feel that the breath is piercing both ajna and bhrumadhya while it flows to and fro along the maha nadi. That is, with the inhalation there is a feeling that the breath is being drawn in through the eyebrow centre to eventually

pierce ajna; and with the exhalation, there is a feeling that the breath is being pushed forwards from ajna to eventually pierce the eyebrow centre. This type of awareness continues while maintaining a concentrated gaze on the candle flame.

Trataka on mandalas

Place the mandala in front of your eyes. Look at it with a steady gaze for a few minutes. Do not blink or flicker your eyelids. Then remove your gaze from the mandala, either by raising your eyes a little above it, or by lowering your gaze to the floor. The background should be white. Then, when you remove your gaze from the mandala, you will immediately see the counter-image of the mandala on the white background. The counter-image will only last for a very short time, say half a second to a second, but with practice, you will be able to extend this period of visualization. Once the image fades, repeat the practice.

If you have difficulty in visualizing the counter-image, you should try a different technique of trataka. On a sunny day, sit outside with your back toward the sun. Make yourself comfortable in a meditative posture and develop absolute steadiness of the body. There should be no movement at all, become like a statue. Practise trataka on the neck of your shadow and concentrate on this point for a few minutes. Then, without moving, raise your eyes and look at the sky. You will find a very big counter-image of your shadow. Keep looking at that counter-image until it fades away. Return to the practice and repeat the process again.

Now, if you are practising trataka on a mandala, the mandala should be in bright light. If the light is focused on the mandala, and the sides are dark, then the counter-image will be marvellous. When you have practised this for a long time and have perfected it, the counter-image will look as real as the mandala.

Once you have achieved success in visualizing the mandala against the white background with eyes open, start trying to visualize the mandala with the closed eyes. Practise

trataka in the same way, but instead of raising or lowering the gaze from the mandala, close the eyes and try to see the counter-image within. When you visualize the counter-image with the closed eyes, this is known as dharana, and this practice leads to meditation. Of course, the technique used for visualizing the mandala can also be applied to yantra.

Now, there is a more advanced technique. Once you are able to visualize the counter-image within you, with eyes closed, try to superimpose that image on one of the chakras or psychic centres. Choose one mandala for yourself and practise and perfect that. Then impose it on a chakra, then on another chakra. In the same manner, transfer it to each of the other chakras in turn. Or, you can do it another way. Take the mandala of mooladhara chakra. Perfect this and impose it on mooladhara chakra. When you have succeeded, take the mandala of swadhisthana chakra. Then superimpose that on swadhisthana. Similarly, go on meditating on the individual mandalas of every chakra, one after the other.

Of course this will take time, but it is a very interesting practice. It will keep you occupied for at least five years, because what I have spoken about in five minutes will take you five years to perfect. That is the problem in yoga, what you learn about yoga in one minute takes years to experience.

Now, if you want to practise mandala meditation on mooladhara chakra, first you have to practise trataka on the mandala with eyes open, against a white background. Make the counter-image very clear and distinct, then start practising with the eyes closed and visualize the mandala clearly inside you. Then superimpose the image on your mooladhara chakra. Can you imagine how much time it will take? It is a very rewarding practice which can occupy years and years of your life.

Trataka and dreams

The mind becomes very steady while performing trataka and when it is concentrated, a person sees visions. Many have had this experience when in a state of stupor. So long as

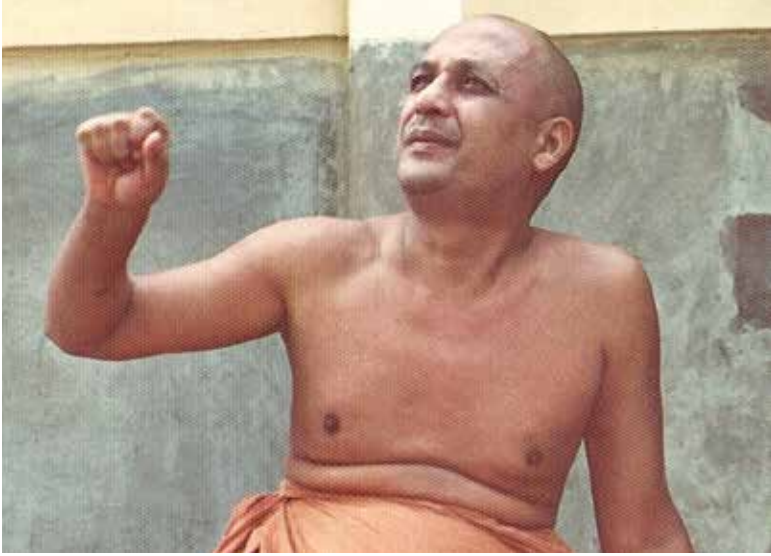


one remains awake, the mental tendencies become involved in many external objects, but at the time of sleep they turn inwards and become centrifugal. In this stage people dream, these dreams being the formations of their past impressions. During the practice of *trataka* the mind becomes concentrated, and the aspirant begins to see dreams which correspond to the predominant thought or mental attitude.

The dreams follow the mental patterns of the aspirant and reveal themselves as a reality or as symbols. A *tamasic* *sadhaka* has perverse dreams which indicate a different meaning. A *rajasic* *sadhaka* sees symbolic dreams, while a *sattwic* aspirant sees true visions. This is possible only when there is intensified awareness and concentrated consciousness.

10

Trataka as a Worldwide Method



Trataka has been used for many centuries, and has been practised within many cultures and religions, in one guise or another, as a means of gathering together diverse thoughts within the mind. One form of trataka or another is held to be common; this is when the gaze is held steady upon objects of worship, making the mind engrossed in the object, so that outward distractions can be gradually dropped. This total concentration leads to a still, meditative and peaceful

state of mind, encompassing only the object. The unity with the chosen deity then becomes complete and it results in a total awareness.

Tantra, probably the most all-inclusive spiritual system ever developed and the root of yoga, uses *trataka* on a wide scale in its many practices, whether using symbolic diagrams, deities or objects as a focus of worship or awareness. In Hinduism, an integral part of the religious practice is to sit in front of a picture or a statue of Krishna, Rama, Shiva, the symbol *Om*, and so on. Though many will regard this as a form of worship, and of course it can be if the worshipper is sincere, it is actually a form of *trataka* for the aim is to concentrate the mind on the external deity. From this comes mental peace and a meditative state. Furthermore, many Hindus have the ability to create at will internal visualizations of the outer objects and perform inner *trataka*.

Many primitive peoples, such as the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, dance in order to attain meditative states. They dance in a circle facing a fire and staring at it. At the same time they chant repetitively. The Bushmen make use of other *trataka*-like techniques, for example, gazing at the sun, the moon or a star.

In Christianity the same thing is done, though in a less obvious manner. In a church there are idols of Christ, there are candles and there is always the symbolic cross. These objects act as focal points for *trataka*, though of course it is not known by this name. All of these forms have a deep-rooted symbolic meaning which generally acts below the level of normal awareness. In other words, these symbols correlate with and stimulate experiences and memory that is contained in what Jung called the collective unconscious. Therefore these objects of awareness invoke experiences and knowledge of which you are normally unaware. Some sects of Christianity, notably the Catholic and Greek Orthodox, utilize *ishta devata sadhana*. Their churches and homes are adorned with many images of Christ, his mother, the various

saints and so on. The images such as the cross, or a particular form of Jesus or his mother Mary, become deeply impressed in the consciousness of the practitioners in the same way that *trataka* on a candle flame, a picture or a symbol is used in yoga to induce sense withdrawal, *pratyahara*. This leads to concentration of the mind, *dharana*, and meditation, *dhyana*.

Alchemy is the western tantric tradition of inner union and the attainment of the realms of expanded awareness. As alchemy was primarily concerned with elements, the subtle bodies, fire or energy, and consciousness, we can safely assume that we are dealing with a system that is invoking kundalini by manipulating the chakras. For this, formal meditative techniques, mantras, energy releasing postures and mudras (as are to be found in all eastern and western occult traditions) were used. One of the main formal meditations of the alchemists may have been concentration on the chakras and their various elements, sounds, colours and qualities. This can be done by performing *trataka* on the actual elements of earth, water, fire and air, by imagining the various aspects of the elements, external and internal *trataka* on the symbol or *tattwa* of each chakra, by contemplating the role of the elements in our everyday life from moment to moment.

In Tibetan Buddhism, *trataka* is often done on various deities, on Buddha and various geometrical figures known as yantras or mandalas. Even Zen Buddhism uses *trataka*, though possibly of a more abstract type, such as staring at a blank wall. The practice of *trataka* is not confined to yoga. It is universal and has been used throughout the ages as a method of transcending normal experience.

Trataka is simple, yet very powerful and this is the reason why so many different systems and religions have used it in one form or another as a means for spiritual upliftment

Part 2



Swami Satyananda had depth of knowledge and experience on the use and effects of trataka at physical, mental, emotional and psychic levels. He successfully used this practice to help people overcome physical ailments, as well as mental and emotional conditions. He guided serious practitioners to use trataka as a sadhana for evolution of consciousness. The use of trataka as an occult practice has results which cannot be explained. Without pure intention, trataka can be abused for personal gain and towards negative, even harmful, ends. Therefore, the following text is for information only, indicating that Sri Swami Satyananda was fully aware of the potential inherent in the practice of trataka.

The sadhana of trataka and other meditative techniques, develop the siddhis, or psychic abilities. There has been no medical evidence to show as yet whether the pineal gland is affected by the sadhana of trataka, but there appears to be a strong possibility.

11

Specific Effects of Trataka



Crystal gazing

Crystal stone is found in old rocks. It is the essence of the rocks. Just as coal is found in a coal mine, so also crystal is found in mountains and rocks. It is a transparent stone, more transparent and clear than water. Objects are seen as clearly through it as reflected on a mirror. It is also called *sphatik mani*. In very old mountains they form in a round circular

shape. This stone is not easily available today. But if a seeker happens to get it, it should be used for sadhana.

The crystal stone should be kept in a separate room. It should be kept at eye level at a distance of one foot. Bathe the crystal with pure water and clean it with a clean piece of cloth. Thereafter, you should gaze at it steadily without a flicker of the eyelids. The eyes should be steady. To begin with, this should be done for five minutes first and extended to half an hour later. Continue gazing steadily at some point in the crystal in such a way that you do not see anything except the crystal. This practice should be continued for a month or more.

The second stage: In this stage you should gaze at the crystal but without the consciousness that you are doing so. It is a stage similar to that in which, at the time of sleep, the consciousness of seeing does not remain. In this practice your eyeballs are extremely steady and the eyelids do not flicker or fall. Try to imagine sleeping with the eyes open but with the sight fixed on the crystal. It should not wander. The mind should be steady and quiet. You will have to exert yourself to practise this daily. It is easy to learn but difficult to practise.

In the third stage, while continuing the *trataka*, think that you are going within yourself. Detach the mind from the act of seeing. The eyes may remain open, they may gaze at the crystal, but the mind must go inside. When the mind becomes introverted there should be no thought or desire. The mind must be dissociated from external objects. It is possible that in such a stage one may see dreams and may feel like going to sleep. The desire to sleep is sometimes so strong that the seeker feels lazy and wants to sleep. At this critical time the mind readily deceives. It brings such thoughts and advises you to go out to the lower levels of grossness. In spite of that you should continue to gaze. In this state with open eyes you may see dreams. The *sadhaka* sees forms in the crystal, forms which appear to be moving and active and talking. It is just what one experiences in dreams which have little relation to the waking state.

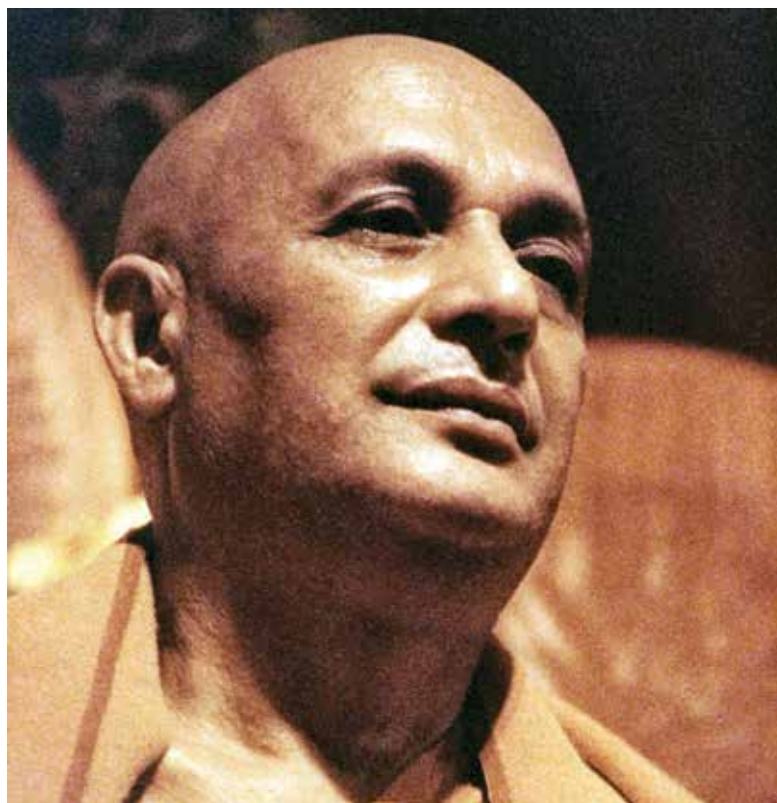
When you see forms in the crystal even while gazing at the crystal, you should gaze as if you are looking for or searching for something. Just as when we are observing something critically our minds are attuned to it, so also at this time you should create such an attitude of the mind. The look must be a searching look. If anything is seen the mind should observe it steadily and critically. By a little mental effort you will be able to see in detail every form. Try to make it mentally clear.

The practice of ‘looking into’

We can divide the sadhana of trataka into two stages. The first is the elementary practice of gazing without flickering the eyelids. In the second stage it is to be practised with the eyes fixed as if they are searching for something. Here the process is as if you are carefully observing an object or trying to find something small inside something big. The eyeballs should be steady. There should be no strain, but at the same time your gazing should be with a purpose. Continual practice will lead you to this experience.

The second stage is the practice of ‘looking into’. It is current in south India. By this method crimes and thefts can be detected, but no one should practise it without the instruction of a guru because it can prove dangerous to one’s life. Nature is trying to hide many things from us, which is why these faculties are not available to all.

When an aspirant has some success in this sadhana, he first of all comes to know about certain undesirable deeds, characteristics or events. Unless he has attained complete dispassion, however, he is unable to tolerate the negative things that he sees in his loved ones and nearest relatives. An ordinary person is unable to tolerate slander, sorrow and separation. How then will he bear foreknowledge of undesirable events? Often such people have nervous breakdowns and even go mad. Even if the science of trataka is practised for the sake of others, there is every possibility that the practitioner may come to harm through it. Therefore, this sadhana should not be practised in order to attain siddhis.



Even today many magic tricks are current in the villages and the practice of trataka is their basis. Often people practise trataka on a dot of ink put on the thumbnail of the hand and thus find out the whereabouts of hidden treasure, stolen goods and past or future events. This is indeed a science, but it is a subjective science, not a physical science. Its practice and attainments have no relation to external things.

When the practice of looking into is perfected, the third stage is reached in trataka. This is called the vision of the divine being. Several forms manifest themselves when one's concentration is perfected on the rays of light which fall on the particular object, whether a crystal, decoction of tea or whatever. These forms are called *purushas*. They are of two

types, bright and dark. The dark types are shadow figures which give knowledge of past and future events.

Trataka done on the Kali yantra or mandala will bring out repressions more quickly, often in the form of nightmarish experiences. Concentration on different yantras and mandalas bring out a different quantity and quality of repressions. These repressions can be experienced in dreams, or in the state of meditation, and that means you are flushing the whole thing out. Therefore, side by side with yoga nidra, concentration should be taught, according to the quality and resistance of the aspirant.

Many diseases and afflictions are also cured. The poison of a scorpion bite can be eliminated by trataka on the affected area. In the same way, trataka can be performed on a diseased part of the body. In this case, the eyes become the medium for the transmission of healing power.

The inner power can be transmitted through the eyes. The eyes and the science of trataka constitute the medium for accomplishing vashikaran, maran, uchchatan and stambhan, acquiring powers over other people. Trataka is also practised when water, flowers, linseed and cloves charged with mystic power are offered to someone. When trataka is perfected, any person can be called and given orders to do any type of work. For this end, trataka should be performed at two o'clock in the morning.

Of course, it is not proper for a sadhaka to go in for these things. One should not waste one's inner power, time and sadhana for the achievement of such insignificant things, but should use them as an aid for self-realization. This power should be used for the benefit of mankind, otherwise the aspirant hurts himself and also others. Reactions may take place later in a person on whom trataka is practised. Moreover, one has to perform great austerities to acquire siddhis. These siddhis are automatically exhausted after a certain time. Trataka belongs to a high order of sadhana and deserves to be practised to increase one's mental power and to attain self-realization.

11

Conclusion



Trataka is described in numerous scriptures, although it is usually known by other names and varies according to traditions. In the classical hatha yoga text, *Gheranda Samhita*, it is classified as one of the shatkarmas. Because the other five practices of the shatkarmas (neti, dhauti, etc.) are concerned

only with cleansing the body, trataka seems to be completely out of place – an anomaly in fact. However, it is regarded as the last of the shatkarmas and is included in this group for a good reason, namely to act as the stepping stone between physically oriented practices and mental practices that lead to higher awareness. In a sense, trataka acts as the bridge between hatha yoga and raja yoga.

When the tendencies of the mind flow towards sources of enjoyment, it becomes the cause of our downfall and unhappiness. When the mind flies towards higher objects, it becomes the instrument for achieving efficiency in action and for developing intelligence, knowledge and liberation.

We are not concerned here with whether the mind is biological or psychological, but with the fact that it constitutes a medium for working in this world. It is the instrument for acquiring knowledge and virtue, and also for the realization of God and the soul.

Trataka develops the power of concentration enormously, which is of immense use in everyday life. By stopping the fluctuating tendency of the mind, the mental energy is focused towards one point, leading to peace of mind. Trataka is an excellent method of obtaining meditation experience and unleashing some of the dormant potential of the mind. The power of memory is hampered in many people by mental disturbances, which seem to cloud over the ability to recall events. Trataka improves the memory by calming the mind.

Concentration is the key to open the gates of that great power. When you successfully concentrate on one idea or form, you enter *dhyana* (meditation). Whether you are a devotee of God or an atheist, you can realize the glory through meditation. A person having faith in God can meditate on any choicest form of God, through which he will attain realization. An atheist can choose a flower, or a star, or the nose tip, between the eyebrows, or the heart and so on. The result will be the same.

Notes



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 to be.

Trataka is a practice of the hatha yoga shatkarmas. It is a sadhana known the world over for its many benefits. This volume presents theory, guidelines, techniques, benefits and precautions of this sadhana.

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

