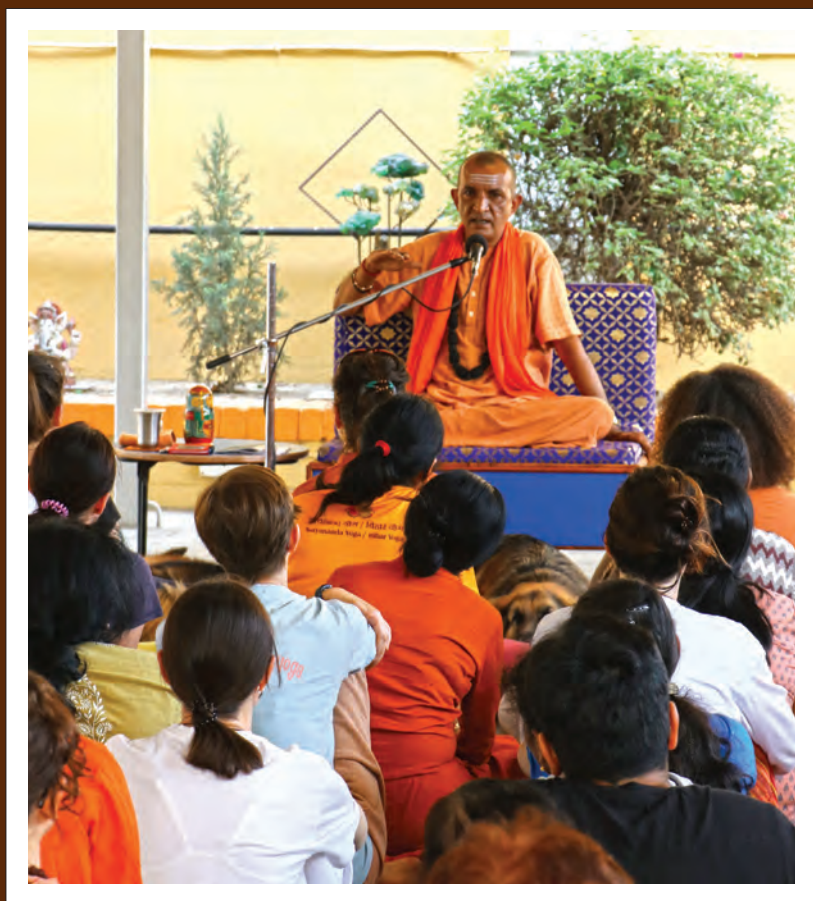


Hatha Yoga Yatra 2

Understanding Asana and Pranayama

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Hatha Yoga Yatra 2

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Hatha Yoga Yatra 2

Understanding Asana and Pranayama

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
during the training of Hatha Yoga Yatra 2:
Asana and Pranayama, held at Ganga Darshan
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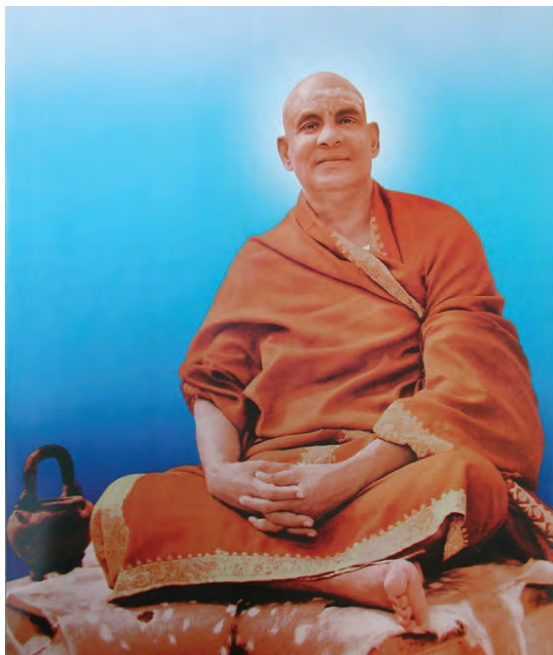
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Dedication

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

Contents

Preface: The 2nd Chapter of Yoga	<i>ix</i>
The Vision of Hatha Yoga	1
Progression with a Purpose	8
The Wisdom of Yogic Routine	23
Become a Human Being	38
IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS	46

Preface:

The 2nd Chapter of Yoga

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati established the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963, in order to fulfil the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. The mandate Swami Satyananda received was to propagate the science of yoga and take yoga from “shore to shore and door to door”. In the days of Swami Sivananda, yoga was far from the globally recognized and accepted word it is today. Yoga was considered a spiritual practice reserved for sannyasins and renunciates who had renounced society and were seeking enlightenment. It was not seen as something that could be incorporated into society and practised by the general public.

When the Bihar School of Yoga was established, the philosophy, practices, applications and lifestyle of yoga as practical and scientific systems were unknown, even in Indian society. From the beginning, yoga training and propagation by the Bihar School of Yoga took the form of intensive residential programs, in which yoga was taught as a way to qualitatively enhance physical health, mental peace and emotional harmony. A sequence of progression in yoga was defined fifty years ago by Swami Satyananda, by giving systematic training first in hatha yoga, raja yoga, and kriya yoga, as *bahiranga yoga*, external yoga. Simultaneously, training in *antaranga*, internal, aspect of karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga was provided through the lifestyle and inspiration of the ashram environment. A holistic or

integral yoga system developed in which the yoga aspirant could awaken and integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands. The different *angas*, limbs, of yoga become the means of attaining this personal harmony and integrated expression.

In the early 1940s, the subject of yoga was propagated across the world by teachers and masters of different traditions, introducing the idea that through the practice of yoga one could explore the body, mind, emotions, and have a glimpse into one's spiritual nature. The first-generation teachers focused on bringing the knowledge of yoga to human society according to the need of the society at that time. In the 1960s, yoga was seen as a physical culture. In the 1970s, it was seen as a way to overcome stress, anxiety, tension and to improve the physical and mental functions. In the 1980s, research into the various possibilities and potentials of yoga to assist and promote physical and mental health took the forefront. By the 1990s, a rapid increase in the popularity of the practice of asana was evident across the globe. The asana component of yoga had been accepted worldwide and other components of yoga were relegated to the background and largely ignored by the mainstream practitioners and majority of yoga teachers. Today, 28 million people are practising yoga in the United States alone and statistics estimate 300 million practitioners worldwide.

In 2013, the World Yoga Convention was conducted in Munger to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga. Over 50,000 yoga practitioners, teachers, students and aspirants participated in this historic event either in person or through the internet. The Convention was a milestone that marked the completion of fifty years of yoga propagation. The mandate of taking yoga from shore to shore and door to door was fulfilled. Over a fifty-year period, with the help of yoga aspirants and well-wishers all over the world, a yogic renaissance had taken place. The chapter of yoga propagation was complete and when one chapter closed, the next chapter opened.

Thus the World Yoga Convention also heralded the beginning of the second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga. The hallmark of this second chapter is a new vision of yoga not as a practice but as a *vidya*, a wisdom to be understood, imbibed and expressed in life. This understanding of the fundamental need for integral development was the vision of Swami Satyananda, which he imparted and taught through the concept of the *yoga chakra*, or the wheel of yoga.

The second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga and the teachings which are being presented are not concerned with propagation of the practices of yoga. Isolated practices of yoga do not bring about the qualitative change and spiritual evolution intended and envisaged by the seers. The transcendence of the negative and restricting conditions and the real evolution and growth of the personality takes place only when the *vidya* of yoga is comprehended, absorbed and realized.

The profundity of yogic understanding must increase and the depths of yoga must be fathomed, if the *vidya* is to be realized and maintained for future generations. The experience and wisdom of accomplished yogis and spiritual scientists is recorded in the scriptural and classical texts detailing each *anga* of yoga. The second chapter teachings are a progressive effort to discern and elucidate the experiences and realizations of the ancient seers, within the blueprint of the *yoga chakra*.

For individual aspirants, the challenge of the second chapter is to deepen the understanding and experience of yoga. Practice is merely an introduction to yoga, which is limited by personal motivation and constraints. The *yoga vidya* dimension is accessed only when one moves from practice to *sadhana* and makes a sincere effort to experience the aims defined by the different *angas* of yoga. Until that sincerity awakens, the commitment to adhere to the system and the *vidya* of yoga is lacking. With sincerity, seriousness and commitment, each aspirant has to accept responsibility for their own development and betterment in life.

Ultimately, yoga is a lifestyle. It is not a practice. For, once the yogic principles are imbibed and become part of life, the attitudes, perceptions, interactions, the mind, actions and behaviours will improve. To meet the challenge of the second chapter, the expressive and the behavioural components of yoga, the antaranga and the bahiranga aspects, have to come together. When head, heart and hands unite, an ordinary moment can become divine. An ordinary life can become a divine life.

The Vision of Hatha Yoga

7 April 2018



Many people across the world practise an aspect of yoga, which is *asana*, the postures, and they believe that it is the final practice of yoga. There are also many schools of 'hatha yoga' that teach asanas in different styles and ways, and what they teach in the name of hatha yoga is neither hatha yoga nor does it convey any understanding of the total concept of yoga. They only teach asana, which is merely one component of the yogic science that was envisioned by our sages.

The word *yoga* means ‘to bring together’, ‘to join’, ‘to unite’, and this idea of unity or joining is an individualistic idea; it is not even a spiritual idea. It is individualistic since we as individuals have to make the effort to rise above our own limitations and connect with the higher consciousness, the higher nature. This idea of union has been identified by many as the union of the soul and superconsciousness. The yogic idea of union, however, is transcending the human limitations to connect with the higher source of wisdom and energy. This is the journey of yoga.

You can call that higher source of wisdom and energy by any name, that is your choice. People say, “Union means merging with divinity”, and it is only their individual expression and idea. Nowhere in the scriptures of yoga will you come across the words ‘God’ or ‘divinity’. They speak of states of mind that have to be transcended, refined and acquired. Therefore, there is a big gap in the understanding between the perceived and the real notions of yoga. In this training, we are going to look at yoga as a way of overcoming the restrictions and conditions that limit human growth and evolution and that do not allow one to connect with the higher source of knowledge and energy.

Yoga was originally a concept; the practices were added later to achieve the ideals that the seers experienced in the sequence of development of the yogas. Yoga has also gone through many changes through the ages. The understanding of yoga with its branches of hatha yoga and raja yoga is a new understanding, derived from the old branches and traditions of yoga. The old branches and traditions do not speak of hatha yoga or raja yoga; the references to these terms are seen only in the last two thousand years. Prior to this, yoga was known by other names. Those ancient systems evolved into the branches that we know today. Nevertheless, the focus of every yoga is one: to overcome the limitations of life, of body, mind and emotions.

Understanding hatha yoga

Hatha yoga is a precursor to raja yoga. The practices of hatha yoga lead you to raja yoga and the practices of raja yoga lead you to other higher yogas. Each yoga is a step; no yoga is the final destination. They are steps that take you from one level to another. Hatha yoga is the starting point; it is like the primary class where you learn the ABCD.

Hatha yoga is not asana. It does not even begin with asana; hatha yoga begins with a group of practices known as shatkarma. The second stage of hatha yoga consists of asana, the third stage of pranayama, the fourth is the practice of mudras and bandhas, and the fifth stage is pratyahara. Hatha yoga gradually develops through these stages.

The starting point of hatha yoga, shatkarma, includes techniques that help clean the body of its toxins. As the toxins leave the body, there is a feeling of lightness, energy and health. The yogis accord so much importance to detoxification of the body as it also leads to passivity of mind. Once the body is detoxified, the mind becomes quiet and still. Thus, cleansing is the first focus of hatha yoga. After the cleansing of body has been achieved, the practice of asana, physical postures, comes in.

The purpose of the postures in hatha yoga is to provide *sthirata*, stability. The same concept is conveyed in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali when he describes that in raja yoga the focus of asanas should be to provide stability and comfort: *sthiram sukham asanam*. Hatha yoga also says that through the practice of asana you will acquire sthirata. Hatha yoga does not speak of *sukham*, comfort; it only speaks of sthirata. The purpose is to allow you to go into higher states of meditation. Therefore, hatha yoga becomes the primary step before raja yoga, and raja yoga becomes the primary step before other higher yogas.

The biggest misconception prevalent in society is that asana is yoga or hatha yoga. To clarify these misconceptions and experience the depth of yoga, we started the Hatha Yoga Yatra trainings. Each Yatra focuses on one specific aspect.

Hatha Yoga Yatra 1 begins with shatkarma, the cleansing practices. Yatra 2 focuses on asana, the physical movements, and pranayama, the breathing practices to develop the awareness of the pranic field. Yatra 3 focuses on the practice of mudras and bandhas where the same pranic energy is being channelled into the body. The next level is the practice of *pratyahara*, sensory internalization.

Asana is only one component of hatha yoga where physical postures are focused on with the purpose of attaining stability. Pranayama, mudra and bandha are all pranic components, pratyahara is a meditative component and shatkarma is a cleansing component. Out of the five components of hatha yoga only one component is about postures. The others are in relation to the subtle experiences of energy and learning to stop the dissipations of the mind to move into meditation.

The word 'hatha' also indicates the purpose of the practice of this branch of yoga. *Ha* represents the solar energy. It is the bija mantra of the *surya nadi*, the solar channel. *Tha* is the mantra of the lunar channel, the *chandra nadi*. They are also known as pingala and ida, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, sunlight and darkness, physical motion and mental motion. The word hatha denotes attainment of balance between these two functions in the body and mind, between ida and pingala. The purpose of hatha yoga is attaining this harmony.

There are many parallels between hatha yoga and raja yoga. Raja yoga seeks to stop the mental vrittis and in hatha yoga too, the stopping of mental activity takes place. The difference is that the focus in hatha yoga is more on the pranic field, the prana shakti, and the focus in raja yoga is more on the mental field, the chitta shakti. Nevertheless, both complement each other.

The lifestyle of inner victory

When the yogis conceived of yoga, it was more as a lifestyle and not as aerobic exercise. Today people think of yoga as aerobic exercise. They enjoy going to studios where they can

stretch in front of full-length mirrors and admire themselves. Then they say, “I had a wonderful yoga session!”

Yoga has to be understood as a lifestyle. That is what the originators of yoga intended. I am grateful to our ancestors for sharing not their knowledge, but their lifestyle, for the seers in the past lived this yogic lifestyle. It was not only theoretical knowledge for them; it was what they were living day in and day out. They were going through the yogic journey, discovering their shortcomings and achievements, discovering how this could be harnessed or that could be controlled. It was a study of life, while making the effort to improve the areas that were seen as limiting the expression of positive human behaviour and nature.

Sri Swami Sivananda says that the purpose of yoga should be to integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands. Once you are able to integrate these faculties, life can be happy. As long as these faculties are not integrated, there is struggle, for you are not connected to your own clarity or creativity. Struggle comes due to the absence of clarity and creativity. If a person is endowed with clarity and creativity, every struggle turns into victory. It is not seen as struggle; it becomes a journey to overcome a limitation, block or condition that has restricted you from expressing your positive, creative and constructive self.

Our effort here will also be to not only learn hatha yoga but to experience hatha yoga as the yogis did, and to understand how it can become a part of the daily routine.



Revival of the Yoga Chakra

When our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, first came to Munger, he taught yoga to us from the traditional and classical perspective. However, when we started to go out and teach yoga in society, we found that people could not practise the same yoga that we had learnt, possibly due to health problems, lack of exercise and sedentary lifestyles. Therefore only a few practices were selected to teach the public: a few asanas, four or five pranayamas, one technique of yoga nidra, and a few techniques of concentration and meditation. That is what everybody has been practising throughout the world: the select techniques of yoga.

Now, as more and more people know about yoga globally, even if under the wrong labels, we can take the next step. The original teachings of yoga that Sri Swamiji gave to us have been revived. These teachings are known as ‘Yoga Chakra’, the Wheel of Yoga. Yoga Chakra is the actual teaching of Swami Satyananda, starting from hatha yoga and progressing to raja yoga and kriya yoga. These were the three yoga sadhanas that Sri Swamiji considered important for human society. Hatha yoga for the body, raja yoga for the mind, and kriya yoga for the psychic awakening. These three branches of yoga represent the sadhana of yoga.

Then he added karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga, which represent the culture of yoga. Culture means something that you are able to express in your life. Culture is not some theory or academic subject. Culture is what you are and what you express. If you express the good and the beautiful in you, you are recognized as a cultured person. If you express the negative and the worst in you, you are recognized as an uncultured person. Culture always represents the expression of the best, the creative and the constructive.

Karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga represent the yogic culture; they are not practices. Someone gives you a broom and says, “Sweep this path, this is your karma yoga.” That is not karma yoga. Someone else says “Believing in God and worshipping Him is bhakti yoga.” That is not bhakti

yoga. A third person says, “To practise jnana yoga, question yourself, ‘Who am I?’” That is not jnana yoga. Karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga constitute the expressive nature of humankind, which is balanced, harmonious, uplifting, creative and peaceful. Hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga represent the perfection that you acquire over the body, the senses, the mind and emotions.

Armed with the skills of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga, you can express your humanness. That is what Swami Sivananda indicated by saying, “Yoga is integration of the faculties of head, heart and hands.” Head represents the intellect, heart represents the emotions, and hands represent the ability to perform.

This is the Yoga Chakra that Sri Swamiji conceived of when he came to Munger in the late 1950s. It was this Yoga Chakra that we were trained in. After fifty years of yoga propagation, we are reviving this Yoga Chakra as we move into the experience of yoga: to realize yoga as a lifestyle and to experience the expression of the best and the beautiful in each one of us. The second chapter of yoga is *jivanshaili*, lifestyle, and *sadachara*, appropriate conduct and behaviour, whereas the first chapter of yoga was yoga *prachara*, yoga propagation. From the propagation of yoga we have to move into lifestyle, and expression and cultivation of the best human qualities. This is the journey that we are going on.



Progression with a Purpose

9 April 2018



There are two kinds of hatha yoga. One is meant for householders and the other is meant for renunciates. The hatha yoga practices for householders are simple and focus on eradication of diseases, physical problems and giving a deeper understanding of the human psychic body, chakras, kundalini, the practices of pratyahara, and so on. The hatha yoga meant for renunciates is tough. Normal householders

cannot do those practices. Therefore, when you think of hatha yoga, remember that you are only thinking of the hatha yoga for householders. The book that describes these practices is *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Yogi Swatmarama. The books for renunciates include *Gheranda Samhita* by Sage Gheranda, *Dattatreya Samhita* by Sage Dattatreya and the *Shiva Samhitas* by Lord Shiva. These books provide a different perspective of hatha yoga when compared with the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. What is relevant for you at this stage is the householder hatha yoga, which deals with the experiences of annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha and manomaya kosha.

Koshas: subtle sheaths of the personality

If you have seen a Russian doll, you will remember that it contains several dolls within one doll. You open up the first one, inside is another doll. You open that, inside is another one. In this way, there are several dolls in one Russian doll. The same concept applies to the human body as well. Inside this physical sheath, or physical body, there is the subtle body of prana. Inside that subtle body of prana is the mental body. Inside the mental body is the psychic body, and inside the psychic body is the spiritual body. The physical body is known as *annamaya*, composed of matter. The pranic body is known as *pranamaya*, composed of energy. The mental body is known as *manomaya*, composed of rationality and thinking ability. The psychic body is known as *vijnanamaya*, composed of specific knowledge. The spiritual body is known as *anandamaya*, composed of bliss.

The anandamaya kosha is the smallest body and it is contained in vijnanamaya kosha, the psychic body. Vijnanamaya kosha is contained in manomaya kosha, the mental body. The manomaya kosha is contained in pranamaya kosha, and the pranamaya kosha is contained in annamaya kosha.

Ananda means bliss and *maya* means complete or filled with, so anandamaya means the state in which you are totally filled with bliss. That is the spiritual body. The next

is vijñanamaya, the psychic body. *Jñana* means knowledge and *vijñana* means specific knowledge. Vijñana also means science, but the reference is not to science here; it is to specific knowledge of oneself, of the deeper, higher aspect of one's consciousness. The lower aspect of consciousness is manomaya kosha, the mental aspect, the rational, thinking, desiring mind which is affected by *raga* and *dvesha*, attractions and repulsions. This mental body is contained in the pranic body, which follows the physical, material or matter body. Only the physical body is composed of matter; everything else is a refined state. The refined state of energy is pranamaya kosha, the refined state of mind is manomaya kosha, the refined state of consciousness is vijñanamaya kosha, and the refined state of spiritual awareness is anandamaya kosha.

Reaching into the koshas

The yogas that Sri Swamiji has described in the Yoga Chakra deal with the awakening of the faculties of these different bodies. Hatha yoga deals specifically with annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya koshas. If you look at the practices of hatha yoga, the first is shatkarma, the practices of purification. That is annamaya. The second is asana, that is also annamaya. Pranayama is pranamaya. Mudras and bandhas are also pranamaya. The pratyahara techniques described in the hatha yoga texts deal with manomaya. This is the scope of hatha yoga.

In raja yoga, the first two stages, yama and niyama, are mental. The third stage, asana, is a state of body which is still, and this stillness is guided and directed by the mind. Therefore, raja yoga asanas influence manomaya kosha. The definition of asana in raja yoga is the state of *sthiram* and *sukham*, stability and comfort. If there is stability and comfort in the mind, the body will reciprocate in a like manner; if the mind is agitated then the body will also become agitated. Raja yoga does not name any specific asana, it only uses the word 'asana'. This means that any asana in which you are stable and comfortable qualifies. If you can practise scorpion pose

and be stable and comfortable in it for an extended period of time, it can be seen as a raja yoga practice. If you are doing headstand for an extended period of time, being stable, firm and comfortable, then that can also be considered a practice of raja yoga.

Patanjali does not name any asana. He only uses the concept of asana to indicate harmony and equilibrium between mental and physical functions. He describes pranayama also without naming any specific practice. He says that inhalation is one form of pranayama, exhalation is the second form of pranayama, and retention is the third form of pranayama. He does not speak of kapalbhati, bhastrika, ujjayi or any of these pranayamas; he uses the breath as an indication of prana. The longer the breath, the more control there is over prana shakti. The shorter the breath, the less control there is over prana shakti.

Patanjali has not defined asana and pranayama in the *Yoga Sutras*, instead he has referred to them as states of harmony between mind and body. The focus is on the mind, manomaya kosha. Thus, in raja yoga, yama, niyama, asana and pranayama are for manomaya kosha.

In pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, the concept changes a little. Pratyahara in hatha yoga was for the mind and pratyahara in raja yoga is complementary to dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Therefore, the practices of pratyahara are more specific in raja yoga in order to discover the deeper strata of mind and consciousness.

The practices from pratyahara, withdrawal of the senses, to samadhi, ecstasy in meditation, represent a movement of consciousness from externalized sensorial awareness to a totally internalized spiritual awareness. These four stages of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi work at deeper levels of the mind, more specifically with vijñanamaya kosha. Samadhi gives a glimpse of anandamaya kosha.

Samadhi is not the ultimate in yoga. No other yogic literature places as much emphasis on it as the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Samadhi is a concept dwelled on by Patanjali to

indicate a high and refined state of consciousness where one's intelligence and interactions in life are perfectly balanced.

Samadhi does not mean enlightenment, it means attaining a state in which a person has the knowledge and understanding of the external as well as the internal experiences and dimensions. That state is known as *sthitaprajna*, which means one whose wisdom has become stable. This definition of samadhi is given in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:54): *Sthitaprajnasya ka bhasha samadhisthasya keshava*. Arjuna asks, "One who has attained equipoise, balance and harmony in wisdom, one who has attained the state of samadhi, how does he live?" Sri Krishna answers in a simple manner, "The person in samadhi or sthitaprajna lives in the same manner as you and I live, there is no difference. The only difference is in the understanding, the balance, the peace and harmony that such a person has." It is not possible to live that condition for people in society due to distractions and many other factors. Therefore, samadhi is not given as the aim of yoga. It is only an indication of a refined state of consciousness.

After raja yoga, Sri Swamiji describes the process of kriya yoga in the Yoga Chakra. Kriya yoga gives you the experience of and connects you with anandamaya kosha. Thus, from hatha yoga to raja yoga to kriya yoga is the progression in yoga that has to be maintained and sustained if you want to have the full experience of the yogic system.

Two paths

Just as there are two hatha yogas, one for householders and the other for renunciates, there are two raja yogas as well. Patanjali's raja yoga is for householders, and the raja yoga of Shukracharya which pre-dates Patanjali is for renunciates.

In Patanjali's raja yoga the emphasis is on chitta vritti and in Shukracharya's raja yoga the emphasis is on dissolution of mind. The whole approach is different. In the raja yoga of Shukracharya you dissolve the mind into higher and higher experiences until you reach the *param tattwa*, the supreme element. Just as you go from class one in primary school to

class two to class three and so on, in the same manner the raja yoga of Shukracharya takes your mind from this level to another level, dissolving the lower level and becoming stable in the upper level. Then you take another step, the previous area is dissolved and you stay on the third, then you move further. The third rung is dissolved; you stay on the fourth. There is no concept of chitta vritti here, only dissolution.

The raja yoga of Patanjali speaks of chitta vritti and the focus is on managing chitta vritti. This is the path that householders have to follow, whereas the renunciates go on the path of dissolving the lower strata of mind, the gross behaviours of mind and consciousness.

Kriya yoga also has two paths: one for householders, another for renunciates. The one for householders was propagated by Sri Swamiji in the early 1970s in the three-year postal sadhana course. That is common to everyone. If you follow the progression from hatha yoga to raja yoga to kriya yoga, you will have certain experiences of your own higher nature. However, if you follow the path of the renunciates, that kriya yoga will give you control over the elements. You can become a person like Babaji who does not die, who is ever youthful. Death does not touch such a person.

These are two distinct paths. In these trainings, we are focusing on the hatha yoga for householders, as all of you have to go back to civilian life, to society, to your obligations, responsibilities and commitments.

First stage of hatha yoga: shatkarma

The first aspect of hatha yoga for householders is shatkarma. *Shatkarma* means six actions. The first three – neti, dhauti and basti – are physical practices of purification and detoxification. The next three are for activating the energy and withdrawing the mind from the external sources of attachment. Nauli and kapalbhathi, the fourth and fifth kriyas of shatkarma, activate two psychic centres in the body: nauli activates manipura chakra and kapalbhathi activates ajna chakra. Manipura represents the solar flow, pingala, and ajna

represents the lunar flow, *ida*: the physical and the mental. The purpose of hatha yoga is to work with these two flows to create a balance between them, and this process is activated with *nauli* and *kapalbhati*. The final practice is *trataka*, steady gazing, usually on a candle flame. *Trataka* is a powerful medium for introverting the externally dissipated senses. These six practices constitute the first stage of hatha yoga.

You have to understand the purpose of *shatkarma*. People practise *kapalbhati* and think, 'Oh, pranayama is taught in hatha yoga.' *Kapalbhati* is not used as pranayama in hatha yoga. It is there as a technique to activate *ajna chakra*. Similarly, *nauli* is there to activate the *manipura chakra* and *trataka* is there for internalization. The three cleansing techniques are for detoxification of the head, oesophagus, stomach, and the small and large intestines. With these six practices, the yogis started their practice of hatha yoga.

First group of asana: for optimum health

After completing the *shatkarma*, the yogis would come to the practice of *asana*. *Asanas* have their own purpose. Many people say there are innumerable *asanas*. Some venture to number them at eight hundred, some forty thousand, some seventy-two thousand. However, if you look at the classical texts, you will find that the maximum number of *asanas* is no more than sixty. If you include some remote literatures, you may be able to find a few more, but the number would never be above one hundred. These one hundred *asanas* collected from all sources, are classified in different groups.

The first group is *asanas* for physical health. Due to mismanagement of the body, diet and environment, illnesses and diseases affect the physical behaviour. If there is hyperacidity, *pitta*, it will affect the behaviour of the digestive system, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system. Similarly, *kapha* or phlegm will affect the ENT: the sinuses will become inflamed, the nose will be blocked, the throat will be choked, the lungs will be full of mucus and there will be breathing problems. Imbalance of gas or *vata* will also cause

other problems. These three: acid, mucus, gas, have been identified as *mal* or toxic matter. This toxic matter becomes the cause of physical imbalance, allowing illnesses to come in. It weakens the physiological immunity and reduces the capacity of the body to survive the onslaught of external viruses and bacteria.

The first group of asanas in hatha yoga is focused more on the attainment of health. Therefore, in the classical literatures of hatha yoga, benefits of all asanas have been given. The sutras describing the asanas state which physical condition an asana is good for, which imbalance it can eradicate, which illness, disease or condition it can rectify. The texts indicate that the purpose of asana is to attain optimum physical health, without which progress in yoga will not be possible. Thus, health-oriented asanas are one group.

Second and third group of asana: for chakra activation and meditation

The second group of asanas is chakra-oriented. With the practice of an asana, activation of a chakra can take place. There are different triggers in the body just like switches and lights. The switches are at one place and the fans and lights are somewhere else, yet when you turn on the switch here, the lights and fans come on there. The switches are the triggers. In the same manner, there are trigger centres in your body that are influenced, awakened, stimulated or activated with the practice of asanas. Once the trigger, the switch, is turned on, your ajna chakra, anahata chakra, manipura chakra, or sahasrara chakra can become activated and awakened.

There is another group of asanas, which are used for meditation. They are known as dhyana asanas. In broad terms, in hatha yoga there are these three groups: for physical health, for chakra awakening and for meditation.

These asanas require a great degree of physical and sensory control. You are not able to control the senses when you are performing an asana; the fluency has to come in order to perfect the hatha yoga asana groups. The advanced

yoga postures that the hatha yoga texts speak of are difficult to practise for householders, yet for hatha yogis they are common, normal and general practices.

For you padmasana may be an advanced asana as you have weak or stiff knees or arthritis, therefore you are unable to sit in that posture for a long time. For hatha yogis it is the simplest asana, as they sit in it for eight hours a day. For you maybe the peacock pose is hard, yet for hatha yogis it is a practice to activate a chakra. In this manner, the same asana can be basic or advanced, depending on which group you belong to.

The asanas have to be perfected to obtain the benefit of optimum health and chakra awakening. The hatha yogis spend at least twelve years in completing the hatha yoga course, not twelve days like you. People want to learn everything in a short time and become masters of yoga. The hatha yogis spend at least twelve years in perfecting their sadhana, for it takes that long to become the master of each and every stage of hatha yoga. You may not be able to spend that kind of time, yet definitely you can improve your practice by sustaining your asana practice for longer periods of time when you do them at home. That will help you derive the maximum benefits.



Pranayama: for clearing and balancing the pranic flows

Many types of pranayama are described in the hatha yoga texts. Kapalbhata is given as a shatkarma practice here. The pranayama practices include nadi shodhana, surya bheda, chandra bheda, ujjayi, sheetali, sheetkari, plavini, etc. Sri Swamiji has classified all these pranayamas in three categories for easy understanding and practice: heating or vitalizing, cooling or tranquillizing, and balancing. Pranayamas that heat up the system such as bhasrika, kapalbhata, surya bheda belong to one group. Pranayamas that cool the system such as sheetali, sheetkari, bhramari belong to the cooling category. Pranayamas that balance are the practices of nadi shodhana.

If pranayama is practised for awakening the pranas in the body, then many rules come into force. You have to be aware of how different pranayamas are to be performed in different seasons, as defined in the hatha yoga texts. Heating pranayamas should be practised in the winter. Cooling pranayamas should be practised in the summer. However, in the classroom environment, we are doing a combination of the cooling, the heating and the balancing to improve the lung function and the volume of air that is taken in. The rules are not stringent when the practice is limited to a few rounds. It is when you do it as sadhana that you have to follow the guidelines carefully. Diet restrictions also come in. Pranayama and diet are closely connected and the lighter the diet, the easier it is to perfect pranayama. The heavier the diet the more difficult it is to practise, forget about perfection. Dietary rules, the right time to practise a pranayama, everything has been defined.

The focus of pranayama in hatha yoga is to balance the two channels, ida and pingala. According to the yogic texts, there are seventy-two thousand nerve channels in the body, like a web of arteries and veins throughout the body. These nadis conduct the prana shakti from one part of the body to another. Nadis are not nerves; they are flows. The word nadi comes from the root *nad*, which also means river, or a flow of water. Thus, nadi means a flow of shakti, energy.

Out of the seventy-two thousand nadis, ten are considered important, and out of the ten, three are most important. The ten flow out to the senses: to the five karmendriyas and five jnanendriyas. The three major ones are ida, pingala and sushumna. These are considered most important as they connect each chakra and have the ability to activate the chakras. In a pictorial depiction of the nadis, you will see that along the spinal cord, the two nadis of ida and pingala move upwards making loops. The points where they cross each other are the chakras. Ida and pingala give the experience of chakra activation as they are intimately connected to the chakras. Therefore, they are important.

The mantra of pingala is *Ham*, the mantra of ida is *Tham* or *Ksham*. These two mantras combined, *Ham* and *Tham*, become 'hatha'. That conveys the meaning of hatha yoga: the yoga that balances the solar and lunar flows. Some people define the meaning of hatha yoga as the forceful yoga, that is incorrect. The actual meaning of hatha yoga is the yoga that balances ida and pingala. That is why the practices of pranayama focus on the activation and harmonization of ida and pingala. When these two flows become one, then the third nadi becomes activated, which is sushumna. With the activation of sushumna, kundalini is awakened, which rises through sushumna from mooladhara to sahasrara.

The intent and purpose of hatha yoga is activation of ida and pingala to allow kundalini to rise through sushumna. Therefore, texts like *Hatha Yoga Pradipka* define how to practise pranayama such as nadi shodhana, ujjayi, kapalbhati, bhramari, surya bheda. The practices are aimed at pumping and cleaning the nadis, allowing the prana to flow in them, and developing awareness and activation of the chakras.

Mudras and bandhas: for recharging the pranic circuits

Pranayama in hatha yoga is aided by mudras and bandhas. These are psychic gestures and psychic locks.

If you take the photograph of a hand with a Kirlian camera, you will be able to see electrical emanations from

around the fingers. That is the discharge of prana shakti from the body. Prana shakti discharges through the extremities, that is why the fingers, the toes, the tip of the nose and the forehead show a lot of electrical output in Kirlian photographs. It is like the drainage of a battery. When you feel tired, you say it is due to lack of energy. Energy is prana shakti. When there is lack of prana shakti, the body becomes weak, sick and tired. It recharges during sleep at night when there is no activity. In the state of activity, when you are awake, the energy is again discharged through action and motion.

During the day you use up prana shakti and during the night you recharge yourself. The whole system is like a battery. When you feel mentally fatigued there is no ida flow. When you feel physically fatigued there is no pingala flow. There is reduction of prana shakti in the absence of pingala activation, and reduction of chitta shakti in the absence of ida activation.

Mudras and bandhas help in reversing and blocking the wastage of prana shakti and chitta shakti. When you perform a mudra like chin mudra, it is not so you look like Buddha. By doing this, the energy that is escaping from the fingers is redirected and it makes a circuit within the body. It is not escaping out any more; the body again absorbs it. Rather than getting wasted, the energy comes back into the body and feeds the system once again.

Different mudras reverse the flow of this shakti in different directions and create different circuits. Shambhavi mudra is for the forehead, a centre that wastes a lot of pranic shakti. When you practise a mudra for the head, it focuses the pranic energy back into ajna chakra and stops dissipation. When you practise a hand mudra like hridaya mudra, you are redirecting the flow of energy back into the heart. In fact, if you are able to make the practice of mudras a regular feature in your day-to-day activity, you will feel less tired. When you are travelling in a car, bus or train, just assume jnana mudra, chin mudra, yoni mudra, or any other mudra. Over a period of time, if you are able to observe your condition of physical and mental tiredness, you will discover that since you started

incorporating the practice of mudras in your daily routine, the level of tiredness has come down as the energy is being recycled.

The same applies to bandhas, the psychic locks. There are three chakras responsible for circulation of pranic energy: manipura chakra, where the prana shakti is generated; mooladhara, where the prana shakti is stored; and ajna chakra, from where the prana shakti is distributed. The complete electricity board is within your body: it is the human state electricity board. Ajna is the distribution station; from here it goes to the meter of every household. Manipura is the generation station; the hydrothermal power is always churning here. Mooladhara is the storage station; all the extra energy is stored in the batteries here.

The three bandhas act on these three chakras, and therefore there are only three bandhas, not more. Jalandhara bandha acts on ajna chakra, the distribution centre; uddiyana bandha acts on manipura chakra, the generation centre; and moola bandha acts on mooladhara chakra, the storage centre. The specific purpose of the bandhas is to regulate the prana shakti in these three centres.

Hatha yoga pratyahara and raja yoga pratyahara

The purpose of pratyahara in hatha yoga and the purpose of pratyahara in raja yoga are different. In hatha yoga, the purpose is to learn how to withdraw and disconnect from the outside and be centred inside. This is known as sensory withdrawal. In raja yoga, the purpose is not sensory withdrawal; it is management of *pratyayas*, the impressions in the mind. The word 'pratyahara' also has two definitions. The first relates to the hatha yogic process of disconnecting the senses from their external associations and attachments, while the second relates to the raja yogic process of observing and eliminating the pratyayas.

The first definition of pratyahara is arrived at when you see it as a combination of two words: prati + ahara. *Prati* means anti or opposite, and *ahara* means consumption. It is through

your senses that you are consuming constantly. Your skin can feel the movement of the wind and the touch of clothing. Your eyes can see people, colours, shapes. Your ears can hear sounds, both distant and near. The senses are all connected with the world outside. Even when you are unaware, they are active: your ears are hearing sounds, your eyes are capturing images. Your senses are connected to the external sources all the time. In hatha yoga pratyahara, you disconnect them by becoming aware of where you are connected.

You are hearing the sound of the train, you disconnect, you stop hearing the sound of the train. The train will be there, but you will not hear it if you are able to disconnect your ears from their connection with the sound of the train. You are seeing another person. You can shut your eyes and not see the person. Shutting the eyes becomes an act of pratyahara. It is visual disconnection. Plugging the ears can become pratyahara: auditory disconnection. Blocking the nose can become pratyahara: olfactory disconnection. In this manner, little things can help you disconnect from the objects with which your senses are connected. This is known as hatha yoga pratyahara, prati + ahara: negation of the consumption or connection.

When you come to raja yoga, pratyahara is associated with pratyayas, the impressions. The definition of the word now becomes pratyaya + hara; *pratyaya* means impression and *hara* means removal. Memories are an indication of impressions. You have seen a beautiful place sometime in your life; it is in your memory. That is a pratyaya, the image of an experience that you have retained. You have had a fight with somebody and you have maintained that memory. Twenty years later when you meet the person, the same memory, the same pratyaya will come up. No other pratyaya will come up except the one which was your last. Therefore, pratyayas are part of memory and are conditions that force you to act in a particular manner.

In the pratyahara of raja yoga, you observe your pratyayas, the mental impressions, both the positive and

the negative. You clean your chitta, your mental blackboard of these impressions, of the clutter and the rubbish. In every household and office there is a rubbish bin, and whatever is useless you throw in it, and from time to time clear it out. The pratyayas are your rubbish, you have to clear them out, not keep them. This is possibly one of the most difficult techniques of raja yoga: the clearing of pratyayas. Everything comes up: childhood memories, remote memories. Everything that you have lived comes up. Even what you have forgotten will come to the surface of the mind. To deal with that is another subject altogether. It is not a simple practice of disconnection where you unplug the plug from the socket. You have to observe, analyze, accept and clear.

For pratyahara of raja yoga to happen in the most efficient and effective manner, the yamas and niyamas have to be perfected. Otherwise some memories can again push you into the dark abyss, into depressive states, into aggressive states, into confrontational conditions. At that moment, the method to deal with these things is totally different. It is not disconnection. It requires strong will, observation, understanding, and the ability to eliminate the pratyaya by cultivating the opposite qualities that counteract the negative aspect of the pratyaya.

In relation to pratyahara, most people only practise the sensory disconnection of hatha yoga. Rare people venture into the raja yoga pratyahara, as it is much more challenging and difficult to deal with the negativity that comes up from within. Disconnection is simple, but to deal with the negativity that comes up is difficult. You use the term raja yoga, but you have not practised raja yoga. Your practices are mostly from hatha yoga. Therefore, hatha yoga is the first yoga, as it allows you an awareness and experience of the physical and physiological balance that you can attain. Then, if you want to go deeper into the discovery of your nature, you move into raja yoga.

The Wisdom of Yogic Routine

11 April 2018



When the word ‘yoga’ is used, it refers to the total personality; when the reference is to asana, it means only the physical practices of yoga. People are not yogis, they are practitioners of asana.

In his teachings, Sri Swami Sivananda has emphasized integration of the faculties of head, heart and hands. ‘Head’ represents knowledge, wisdom and understanding; ‘heart’ represents emotions, sensitivity and the soft qualities of life such as love, compassion, sympathy, kindness and generosity; ‘hands’ represents *purushartha*, the effort and drive to attain what you wish for to be content in life. The integration of these three faculties is yoga. It is the definition of Swami Sivananda, not the definition of Patanjali or Swatmarama.

Our focus is the teachings of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, for in today’s context, they are the masters who have brought down the philosophical ideas into the practical dimension. It is the practical dimension that you need to realize rather than entangle your head in philosophical debates. Yoga, from the perspective of head, heart and hands, is integral yoga. It is *yoga vidya*, the complete knowledge of yoga, in which all aspects of the human personality are enhanced and balanced.

To make yoga into a part of your life as routine, you have to think differently, out of the box. In the box, you think of yoga as classroom training only. Beyond the classroom, yoga is forgotten and you live your normal life. I give satsangs and my own sannyasins say, “Oh, Swamiji’s satsangs are for the people in the course, not for us.” That is cutting your connection, and it is not yoga. The qualitative enhancement of life is applicable to everyone. Whether you are participating in the course or not participating in the course, it is a learning.

The practice of asana and pranayama is fine, as it gives your body a purpose, which can be health, vitality, the feel-good factor or removing the stiffness and tightness of the joints and muscles. The feel-good factor for the body is necessary as everybody identifies with the body. However, in the yoga routine there is a feel-good factor for the mind, a feel-good factor for emotions and a feel-good factor in actions as well. This is where the yoga of Swami Sivananda comes in.

Three morning mantras

We start our morning class with the chanting of three mantras in all programs and all classes. I advise that when you wake up in the morning, before you go to the bathroom to relieve and freshen yourself, when you are half-asleep, without getting out of the bed, simply sit up. Now bring to mind three thoughts, three sankalpas. The first thought of the day is for health, with which you chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. The second thought of the day is for wisdom, with which you chant the Gayatri mantra. The third thought of the day is to overcome distress in life, with which you chant the 32 names of Durga. These become your sankalpas.

When you complete this mantra sadhana, which takes about ten to fifteen minutes, then get out of bed, go to the bathroom, brush your teeth, look at yourself in the mirror and give yourself a nice smile. That should be your first smile: at yourself. Then do your asana practice. Within a week you will see a qualitative difference in your mental, emotional and intellectual behaviours and responses.

The psychological reason is simple. When you wake up from sleep you do not become extroverted instantly, you remain in a state similar to that of yoga nidra. With half-closed eyes you stagger your way to the bathroom and try to locate things. It takes time for your engine to kick-start. Maybe after your bath you feel more awake, yet you are not fully awake. Then you have your breakfast, which increases the energy level, and you feel more awake. Then the pressures come in: 'I have to do this today, I have to do this tomorrow, I have to do this now', and suddenly you are wide awake. The tensions make you come alive.

Before you come alive, when you are in the semi-drowsy state, the state of the subconscious mind, if you plant a thought, the subconscious mind will respond to it. That is the power of the subconscious.

First thought of the day

A few decades ago, when people would wake up, they would turn on the telly for the news, have tea and read the newspaper. In that relaxed state of mind, they were putting the bad news in: this scam, that scandal, this violation, that abuse. These were the impressions in the mind in the morning. That was how people generally started the day. In present times, the earphones never leave the ears. You are connected to the iPhone or some other instrument all the time.

The mind is now geared in a different manner and the subconscious mind in present-day children is not active. It is either in a state of lethargy or in a state of hyper-activation due to the chemical changes in the brain. There is no regularity in life either. How do you ensure that your children are sleeping on time? You cannot. They might be hiding under the covers in the bed with their iPhone watching a movie until one o'clock or two o'clock or until they fall asleep. This is a serious problem.

Just to give you an indication of how serious the problem is, last year the psychiatrist association in the UK recommended to the government to change the school timings from morning to late morning or afternoon. They said, "Children sleep late, watching movies, chatting, facebooking, instagramming, netflixing." They sleep late, so if they have to wake up early they are sleep-deprived and irritable. Therefore, the routine of education has to change, not the children. The classes should begin at ten or eleven o'clock instead of seven or eight o'clock.

This is an indication that when humans search for excitement and stimulation, the social behaviours and systems change and an irregular lifestyle sets in. Once the irregular lifestyle sets in, there is no hope and even yoga will not help. Yoga has to be seen as a personal commitment to discipline. If you believe in yoga, you try to live yoga. If you believe in yoga, you have to realize that it is a personal discipline. You have to define areas of interaction and know what is good for you and reject what is bad for you.

The first impression upon waking has to be a positive thought, a sankalpa. Therefore, you take sankalpas for three things that are important in life: good health, good mind, and overcoming difficulties and distresses in life, which everybody is affected by.

The basis of mantra chanting

The mantras that you chant are not mantras of any god or goddess, as religions make you believe. Religion wants you to believe and spirituality wants you to discover, that is the main difference between religion and spirituality. It is this discovering process that you are going through. Mantras have existed much before religions came into existence. They were the discoveries of sages who were able to access different koshas of their existence and different dimensions of creation during meditation through their sadhanas and efforts.

The change from spirituality to religion came historically during one specific period: the puranic period. In the puranic period in India, the spiritual ideas were made part of the emerging religious trends. It takes time for a religion to develop. The foundation of every religion is something that has existed before. People have lived that tradition, that culture, that life and believed in certain aspects of divinity. For example, Christians believe in Judgement Day, or that Christ died for their sins. People live with certain understandings, and then it becomes religious dogma, ritual, belief and philosophy.

When you are spiritual you can follow any religion, for spirituality allows you to explore your nature and beautify it. The foundation of spirituality is only three ideas: *Satyam*, the truth; *Shivam*, the beneficial; and *Sundaram*, the beautiful. If your life can express these three ideas, you will be spiritual. If you consider these ideas as distant thoughts that you are trying to access, then confusions come in. It is not thinking which is important, it is living which is important; it is not philosophy which is important, it is how you integrate it in your life practically which is important.

Mantras are psychic sounds; they don't mean anything. You might have seen two-dimensional images of chakras with different letters of the Sanskrit alphabet written on petals. Some chakra has four petals, some has eight, some has sixteen, some two. The chakra represents a nerve plexus in the body and the petals represent the pranic nadis that come into the nerve plexus to activate that centre. Each nadi has a frequency, a vibration, a pitch, a range of sound, a decibel.

In deep states of meditation, people hear sounds; they begin to hear the sound of raindrops, flute music, the chirping of birds, and so on. From where do those sounds come? Seated in a quiet, silent, closed room, how do you hear the sound of a flute, a gong, the chime of cymbals?

I had an experience once in 1982 during Christmas time in the United States of America. It was my habit to spend the time between Christmas and New Year in isolation to do higher practices of yoga. I used to take my car, drive to a camping ground in some forest or park, and find an isolated spot. The incident in 1982 made me realize that there is something beyond our physical experience.

After I had completed my sadhana for the night, I was getting into the sleeping bag inside my tent to go to sleep. Suddenly I heard loud music. I thought some other campers had come and were playing jazz music. I did not pay much attention, and it continued for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes. It was loud, full volume. Finally, I came out of my tent and looked around for any neighbours. Nobody was there but the music continued. I got in the car, turned on the headlights and went around to see if anybody was around. Nobody. No matter where I went in the camping grounds the music followed me, loud and clear. I was stumped and wondered what was going on. For about one hour I drove around the camp checking behind every bush to see if any radio was left on. I could not find anything and I came back to my tent. Suddenly it struck me that it was my own creation. Somehow this gave me an idea to try whether I could reduce the volume. I willed the volume to

come down and it did. This continued for the duration of my stay.

Eventually I began to enjoy it as I could control the volume and the music. I could change the music and listen to every type of music of any album in my mind. Later I discovered that I could play music. I had to hear a song only once and I could replicate it with instruments. This lasted for about six months. Then somebody asked me if I had read the kundalini experience of Gopi Krishna. I had and I recalled that in his experiences he mentions that though he was not an artist or musician, when his psychic centres awakened he could compose music and paint. Not amateur painting or composition, but professional. The centres come alive in the brain and they start firing their neurons. This gave me an understanding of how yogis heard mantras in deeper states of meditation.

Yogis have stated that they have experienced the mantras in meditation in the form of vibrations or frequencies of sound. These frequencies stimulate specific nadis. Sahasrara has one thousand petals and there are one thousand mantras written on them. Ajna chakra has two petals and there are two mantras written on them. Vishuddhi has sixteen petals and sixteen mantras are written on them. Mooladhara has four petals and four mantras are written on them. In each petal the mantra is different, the vibration, the frequency is different.

The mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* was not associated with religion prior to the puranic age. It was associated with an experience in a state of consciousness. The different sounds in the mantra were each associated with a different centre. *Om* is the sound or vibrational frequency of ajna chakra, which is the seat of intuition. The other syllables are also sounds placed on the petals of different chakras. *Na* is a sound of vishuddhi, *ma* is a sound of swadhisthana, *shi* is a sound of mooladhara, *va* is a sound of swadhisthana, *ya* is a sound of anahata. Thus when you say *Om Namah Shivaya*, you are in fact connecting with your own psychic body. This was the vedic understanding. Later, when the puranic age came and

religions emerged, *Om* became the primordial sound, and *Namah Shivaya* became the mantra of Shiva of an emerging religion. In this way, the spiritual mantras were identified as religious mantras in society.

If you look into the pre-puranic age and the spirituality of that time, you will discover that mantra was a process of inner discovery and enhancement of human qualities for the individual practitioner, the *sadhaka*. When you chant the *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra clearly and precisely, each sound of *Om trayambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushti vardhanamurvaa rukamiva bandhanaat mrityormukshiyamaamritaat* is stimulating different petals and nadis of your chakras. When they vibrate and respond, a chemical change takes place in the brain and the experience becomes real.

The first practice of the day, therefore, is the three mantras. It is a part of your lifestyle practice. Every day you are reinforcing the idea in your subconscious mind for your health, wisdom and overcoming distressing situations in life. This will give you the inner courage and strength to deal with daily events and circumstances with greater ease and clarity of mind.



Minimum asana and pranayama for maximum benefit

After you have freshened up and before breakfast, practise a few asanas. You don't have to practise fifty asanas to feel good, you only need to practise five. If you have a headache and you take one aspirin, the headache will go away in ten minutes. Does that mean if you take ten aspirins your headache will go away in one minute? Whether you take one, ten or twenty, the dissipation of the headache will take the same time: ten minutes. With a minimum you can clear your headache, so why go for the maximum which will create more toxins in your body? The same principle applies to yogasanas as well.

If for optimum health five to six practices are sufficient, then practising fifty or sixty is not necessary. If you want to satisfy yourself, that is another matter. Otherwise, the practice of asanas should not constitute more than five or six, which will take you ten to fifteen minutes. Choose simple yogasanas that help the body move, twist and stretch in all possible manners – extending each and every muscle, opening each and every joint, limbering and loosening each and every ligament, strengthening and toning each and every system of the body. You do not need anything more than that for optimum health. In our yoga capsules also, we have minimum asanas with maximum benefits for different purposes, reasons and conditions.

A similar rule applies to pranayama practice. The practice of a few pranayamas for ten minutes is enough. Why do you want to practise pranayama? The purpose of pranayama has to be defined before you practise. The purpose is to release cerebral tension, increase vitality, open up the lungs so that more oxygen can be absorbed by the body and more toxins can be eliminated from the body. These reasons should become the focus of your pranayama practice and for this a few pranayamas are enough.

There was a trend in India a few years ago where people started practising hundreds of rounds of kapalbhati and bhastrika. Six hundred rounds of kapalbhati and one

thousand rounds of bhastrika. The people were led to believe that by doing this they would reduce their weight. Many developed chronic conditions such as hypertension and heart problems and they would come to us for intervention. This is an example to indicate how extreme practice of pranayama can be harmful for the body. Therefore we teach in a slow and gentle manner, gradually increasing the capacity of the body to inhale, retain and exhale. This helps in reducing cerebral stress, increasing physical vitality and also balancing the hyperactivity of the nervous systems.

This is more than enough for you to lead a joyful and contented life. You don't want to die of brain haemorrhage while practising pranayama. Pranayama has to be gentle. Two or three pranayamas are more than enough, such as nadi shodhana, which balances the sensory and motor nervous systems, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems; bhramari pranayama, which stimulates melatonin and thereby tranquilizes and neutralizes other chemicals that stimulate the brain, including dopamine. All the excitement that you crave, all the desires that you build up, all the enjoyment that you look for, that drive, that impulse of chemicals in the brain will be neutralized with melatonin through bhramari pranayama. In this way, just two or three simple pranayamas can help you manage your cerebral conditions in a much better manner.

De-stress and find peace

After your asana and pranayama practice, maximum half an hour, engage in your regular activities of the day. Go to your work, engage in society, and return home in the evening. The general tendency is to now put down the bag, sit on a chair or sofa, drink a cup of tea or coffee and have some snack. After you have taken a few deep breaths in and out, you prepare for family life: you listen to the problems of the family and home, go shopping, visit friends and attend parties.

When you come home from your profession or workplace, instead of having tea or coffee, practise yoga nidra for twenty

minutes. Release all the stress accumulated from work. Refresh the brain and mind, relax yourself and then tune yourself to deal with the present environment of home and family. You will discover that as the stresses leave, your own irritation and confusion will also subside. People will look forward to spending time with you as you will be happy. People will not look forward to spending time with you if you are grumpy, they will avoid you.

Before going to sleep, do ten minutes of japa. Japa becomes the medium to disconnect your senses and mind from the material world. As you centre yourself within for ten minutes, you will find peace, solace, comfort and relaxation. Then go to sleep.



The beautiful you

This is the yoga routine that people can follow at home. A simple one: ten to fifteen minutes of mantra, then break. Half an hour of asana-pranayama, then break. Twenty minutes of yoga nidra, break. Ten minutes of japa meditation before going to sleep, and then sleep. If you are able to stagger your practices during the day in this manner, you will derive much more benefit than doing two hours of vigorous practice in the morning with the hope that you will trim your body and look beautiful to other people. That is not necessary. You are

beautiful as you are. Everyone is a beautiful person. Why do you want to look more beautiful?

Mulla Nasruddin was a Sufi saint. One day he was looking out of his window with his friend who said, "Look Mulla, on that tree is a beautiful bird, very rare." Mulla looked and said, "I can make this bird even more beautiful." He spent the day trying to catch the bird and finally succeeded. Then he came home, took his wife's lipstick and painted the bird's beak. He took her mascara and painted the eyes. He took her face powder and powdered the bird's face. He took her red nail-polish and painted the bird's claws in glaring red. He took her green nail-polish and changed the colour of the bird's wings. When he was satisfied with all the colouring he had done on the bird, he showed it to his friend, "Look how beautiful this bird is!" The friend replied, "Your bird looks like a circus clown."

That is how people appreciate their own beauty every morning in front of the mirror. The artificial beauty is what attracts people, not the natural beauty. If you are able to follow the yogic routine, the natural beauty will come out and you will begin to glow without any external aid. That is the reality of life.

Conditions of hatha yoga

Your effort when you go home should be to make yoga into a routine. That means more than practice. Just as raja yoga has a set of yamas and niyamas, so does hatha yoga. People think of the yamas and niyamas of raja yoga, and that everybody who comes to yoga should follow satya, ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacharya. Everybody has to be truthful, non-violent, a celibate, a saint and a pious person. That is a tall order, to become something that you are not. People associate these yamas and niyamas of raja yoga with every yoga and impose these conditions on everybody who comes to yoga.

Someone asked me, "Is brahmacharya applicable in hatha yoga also?" Brahmacharya is one of the yamas of raja yoga.

It belongs to the syllabus of a higher class. How can it be applied in a lower class? If brahmacharya and satya have been mentioned in raja yoga, it means they do not apply to hatha yoga or to any other yoga. Each yoga has its own syllabus.

Yamas and niyamas are the natural behaviour of every individual. However, you are unable to practise them as you are disconnected from those positive qualities due to your involvement in the material dimension. You are disconnected from the spiritual dimension, therefore you have to search for the natural human qualities. You have to impose them as ideas and disciplines on yourself in order to practise them. You haven't gone through the primary class of hatha yoga, so how will you ever live the yamas and niyamas of raja yoga which are beyond the scope of your mind, acceptance, behaviour, performance and action?

Understand properly what the conditions of hatha yoga are. The first condition, the first yama is *manahprasad*, happiness, and the first niyama is japa. Can you practise ahimsa, brahmacharya or any other yama or niyama of raja yoga without being happy? You cannot. Can you practise any of the higher states of sadhana without perfecting japa? You cannot. Just as a child is taught the letters of the alphabet individually and separately in primary class – A, B, C and D – in the same manner, happiness is the first letter of hatha yoga that you need to learn.

Whenever you connect with your positivity in life, you become happy. Whenever you connect with the negativity in your life, you become unhappy. The reason for your unhappiness during the day is your connection with the negatives. Can you change that? Can you increase the moments of your happiness from fifteen minutes to twenty minutes, to half an hour, to one hour, two hours, four hours, six hours, twelve hours? If you can do that, you will be a man, my son.

The second yama is *kshama*, forgiveness. You are affected by so many things, are you ever able to forgive and forget? Never. When you are unable to forgive and forget, the

impressions become vrittis in the mind. Your fight with this person becomes a vritti which will go on till the end of your days. You will never forget and you will never forgive the bad this person has done to you. A negativity remains blocked, under lock and key. Even when you practise higher yamas and niyamas, that negativity is still there and it will drag you back. Therefore the second yama is forgiveness.

Can you start forgiving, from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep, the little things that irritate you, bug you, hassle you, bother you? Can you live that quality of life during the day? Try living it for one day, and don't forget it when you encounter a confronting situation. The ego will come and the desire to forgive will take a backseat, showing the human limitation. You have to overcome it. Many people speak of forgiveness but they are unable to live it in day-to-day situations as they cannot overcome the push of the ego. Remember that when ego takes prominence, forgiveness turns into a philosophy. You are disconnected from that quality, behaviour and attitude. It is when there is maturity and wisdom that forgiveness is always there as a natural expression. You forgive everyone just as you forgive the travesties of your own child. That is the second yama.

The second niyama in hatha yoga is tapasya. *Tapasya* does not mean austerity; it means continued effort. If you are travelling from one city to another, what do you do when your car has a flat tyre? You stop, change the tyre, repair the punctured tyre, and begin your journey again. The journey is an ongoing process. Whatever situations arise in between, you have to make the effort to overcome them. If the punctured tyre makes you decide 'I will not travel', then your journey is finished. If you have the determination to reach the destination, then fixing the tyre, changing the tyre and continuing the journey is tapasya. Tapasya also means that you remain undefeated by situations and maintain your clarity of mind, best intentions and correct actions.

This idea has also been emphasized in the *Yoga Sutras*. Patanjali has defined sadhana, tapasya or effort

by saying: *Sa tu dirghakala nairantaryasatkarasevito dridha-bhumih*. Something that you do for a long period of time: *dirghakala*; something that you do continuously: *nairantarya*; something in which you have faith and conviction: *satkara*; something that will create the solid foundation from where you can launch your rocket: *dridha bhumih*. It is a beautiful description of tapasya. It is a beautiful description of sadhana and human effort.



In this context, tapasya should not be seen as hard, physical austerity. It should be understood as drive and motivation, continuation and conviction that you have in life, which needs to be increased more and more every day. The sustained effort will bring about a qualitative change and give the fruit of your sadhana.

The yamas and niyamas should not be seen merely as concepts or ideologies to be pursued. Rather, a definite and concrete effort has to be made to bring a positive change in human consciousness, so that you can experience and connect yourself with your spiritual aspirations while living the material life.

I will conclude with a statement of our guru, Sri Swamiji. During a satsang, he was asked a question: “What is the purpose of human life?” People were expecting answers like self-realization, God-realization, moksha, samadhi, enlightenment. He did not say anything of the sort. He said one simple sentence: “The purpose of human life is to cultivate spiritual awareness.” To what extent you are able to do that depends on your effort, yet the purpose of life is not samadhi, moksha or enlightenment. It is the cultivation of spiritual awareness.

Become a Human Being

14 April 2018



Sri Swami Satyananda says that disciples should be like dogs and gurus should be like donkeys. Donkeys carry the weight of everyone and that is what people expect a guru to be: “You carry my weight so I don’t have to carry it myself.” Disciples

have to be like dogs: no matter what the external behaviour, the bond and the loyalty remain unshaken.

The happy dog

A man had come here about fifteen years ago and he had hypertension. He was looking for a solution to his hypertension. I asked him, "Since when have you had hypertension?" He said, "For the last six months." I looked at him and asked, "What is the reason for your hypertension? You are a retired person, you don't have any professional tension in your life. You are a well-off person, you don't have any financial lack in life. You have a good family. You are settled in life and your family members are also well-settled. You have good food to eat, a good house to live in. Why do you have hypertension?"

He said, "Swamiji, I know the reason of my hypertension, but I don't know how to deal with it." I asked, "What is the reason?" He said, "After I retired, I was leading a comfortable life at home. One day, my daughter-in-law had some dispute with her husband, my son, and she was in a foul mood. I asked her for a cup of tea and breakfast while sitting in the living room where I was watching television. She came with my meal, but she was muttering under her breath, 'He sits on the couch like a dog.' I heard that. I was shocked by her perception and expression. Since then I am having this fluctuating hypertension." I said, "Wonderful, now that we know the reason, we can find a solution. We know that it is not a physical reason, it is a psychological reason." He said, "How can yoga help?" I said, "Yoga will not help you, you will help yourself." He said, "How? Which asana should I do? Which pranayama should I do? Which meditation should I do?" I said, "Nothing of the sort. You just have to become a better dog." He looked at me in shock, thinking, 'What is Swamiji saying! Is he taking the side of my daughter-in-law?'

I asked him a question, "When you heard the word 'dog', what kind of image came to your mind?" He said, "Oh, the street dog, the flea-ridden dog, the scrawny dog, the bony

dog.” I said, “Okay, that was your visualization when you first heard the word ‘dog’, and that is how you are seeing yourself, like a street dog. You believe that your daughter-in-law is saying that you are like a street dog.” He said, “Yes, definitely. How do I get rid of this thought?” I told him, “When you sit down at home, think that you are a lucky dog. You have a house to stay in, you get your meals on time. When you travel, you travel in an air-conditioned car. There are people ready to serve you. Think that you are the dog of a rich memsahib.”

He looked at me with sad eyes and said, “I thought you would help me, but you are just making fun of me.” I said, “No, I am not making any fun of you. This is a serious matter. Instead of thinking that you are a scrawny little dog, think that you are a happy, contented dog for whom everything is provided.” He got up and left. I thought he had gone forever. Three months later he returned and said, “My hypertension is gone.” I had forgotten about the incident. I said, “What happened? Did you do any asana, pranayama?” He said, “No, I followed your advice.” I said, “What advice?” He said, “The dog.”

The bull’s-eye

Here is another story of Mulla Nasruddin. One day, he went to a village fair. This was in the eighteenth century and in those days, a village fair would have different games and contests, such as wrestling, archery, and so on. Those who won a contest would receive a prize. Mulla Nasruddin was a famous Sufi master and his disciples were excited that they were going to the fair with the master. When they reached the fair, the disciples entered his name in the archery contest without telling Mulla Nasruddin. The archery contest required one to hit the bull’s-eye at fifty metres in three attempts.

Many people tried shooting the arrows. Some were able to hit the bull’s-eye in one try. Some arrows went the other way. Some went far beyond the bull’s-eye and some fell short of the bull’s-eye. While Mulla was watching this competition, suddenly his name was called out. So he got up, picked up his

bow and arrows. He sighted the target, checked the wind, adjusted his turban and his robes, pulled the string to see if it was strong enough. Then, very proudly, he picked up one arrow, took good aim and shot. The arrow went wide of its mark. Everybody giggled to see the archery acumen of their master. While everybody was laughing, one of Mulla's disciples said, "There must be some teaching in the way Mulla is acting."



Mulla picked up the second arrow. This time Mulla was not so confident, for the first one had gone astray. Extremely carefully, he shot the arrow. It went up to ten metres and then plunked to the ground. Again everyone started giggling. Then he picked up the third arrow, and this time he did not look left or right. He simply shot. The arrow went straight and hit the centre of the bull's-eye. The disciple who did not giggle said, "Three arrows were shot by Mulla, one went wide, one went short, and one hit the bull's-eye. There must be some reason behind this."

As Mulla was collecting his prize from the counter, the disciple went to the mic and said, "I have seen something of my master which I can't explain and I am questioning him in public, for if I question him in private, he is not going to answer me. Can he tell all of us who are present here, why three arrows went three different ways?" Everyone started clapping, so Mulla was forced to come to the stage. He picked up the mic and said, "Well, the first time I picked up my bow and arrow, I was an overconfident person, who thought that he could do anything and everything in life. When you are overconfident, the inner balance is gone, and you cannot achieve your goal. You cannot focus. You are

more aware of your confidence, ego and ability than what you have to do outside. The second time when I picked up the arrow, I was an under-confident person. My first arrow had not hit the bull's eye, therefore now I was under-confident. I was shaking. I wasn't sure whether I had the ability or the strength to pull the bowstring. I wasn't sure if the arrow would go to the right instead of to the left. Therefore I pulled very carefully, but the strength, the pull, was not enough, and the arrow went half the way and fell flat." He said, "This is the learning: that you should not be overconfident and you should not be under-confident. Thank you very much." He left the stage. The people stopped him and said, "You explained two arrows, what about the third one?" As he was picking up his prize, he said, "Oh, the third one, that was me." 'Me' here means the natural self.

The natural you

During the day, you put on different kinds of masks to present yourself, to project yourself, to be recognized as a quality person. You present a different face of yourself to other people. You never present the natural face. The third one was the natural person, who was not affected by confidence or under-confidence. The third person was just content in doing what he did.

Being natural is a learning, for people put on different masks. Some people consider themselves moralists and are vocal about it in public. Some consider themselves reformists and are vocal about it in public. Some consider themselves to be principled, *adarsha*. They live their life in that manner and don't care about other people. If other people are inspired by that, fine; if other people are put off by that, fine, but you are living your principles in life.

People have different opinions about themselves and that is what they project to everybody externally. They don't live a natural life. In spiritual life it is important to live the natural life, where you don't have to put on a mask of any kind. For

example, people connect *satya*, truth, with speech, not with life. If somebody thinks of truth, the first idea is that they have to speak the truth. You will never think that you have to live the truth. Living is more important and valuable than speech. That applies to every good quality in life.

If somebody feels kindness, they want to tell everybody, “I am a very kind person.” If somebody is generous, they try to show everybody that they are generous. If somebody experiences compassion, they try to prove to everybody that they are compassionate. All this is self-projection; it is not living the quality. It is using the quality to project yourself and your agenda. This is why people are not able to understand how to live the *yamas* and *niyamas* in life.

People are so self-centred and caught up in their own projections that they fail to see the reality behind the appearance. You will never be able to progress as long you hide away from the reality and not acknowledge your shortcomings. There are people who think, ‘This is too much responsibility. I don’t want responsibility, I want rights.’ They want rights, they don’t want responsibilities. Even that is a projection of the individuality. These are the traits that everybody lives in life and therefore spirituality does not emerge, evolve or grow in anyone’s life.

You do not want to understand or change your shortcomings, you blame others for your suffering and yet you want to be spiritual. It is hypocrisy and it is a paradox. If you identify with hypocrisy, you remain a hypocrite. However, if you think of it as a paradox and try to shift from one to the other, you can change. You should be able to look at your life clearly and objectively and not hide from your shortcomings. The moment you hide from your shortcomings, you are negating spirituality.

After all, what is the teaching of Swami Sivananda? *Pratipaksha bhavana*, cultivating the positive, the beautiful in you. When you experience something negative, can you not make the effort to change that into something beautiful? That is the *sadhana*. That is the effort. Progress only happens

if there is struggle in life. Advancement in technology happened when there was struggle. Advancement in medicine happened when there was sickness. If there was no sickness, would there be advancement of medicine? Therefore, every opportunity to discover your weakness will always take you one step further. It will give you more strength, courage, conviction and inspiration. That is the yogi's mind. The bhogi's mind is the opposite of that. Self-centred awareness projects a mask and yogi awareness removes the mask. This is the natural life.

The best quality

There are times, situations and conditions that influence and affect your thoughts, perceptions, mind and emotions. If in your house one wall is weak, would you not strengthen the wall so the house does not collapse? In your life do you do that? In your material life you do it: 'This pillar is weak, this beam is weak, this wall is weak, it is cracking, so I must repair it and make it stronger.' When you recognize a shortcoming and weakness in life, then what effort do you make to strengthen the weak part? The weakest aspect is always misunderstanding people, situations and circumstances. This misunderstanding is the cause of human downfall.

Love is not the best quality in life or in the world. Compassion and kindness are not the ultimate qualities that one has to live. Understanding is the quality that strengthens every other positive quality. If you have understanding, love has meaning. If you have understanding, compassion has meaning. If you have understanding, seva has meaning. In the absence of understanding, these qualities are imposed conditions, disciplines and situations. The moment there is lack of understanding and the imposition comes in, your slide into darkness again begins. If you can cultivate understanding and not think of compassion and love as the qualities that you want to express to project yourself, then that understanding makes you live a spontaneous, natural life, in which luminosity shines from within you.



Never think of love as the quality that you want to attain in life. Never think of compassion as the quality that you want to attain in life. Never even think of attaining self-realization in life. Even that is useless if there is no understanding. The one and only thing that you require in this world is understanding and connection. That connection is not due to a whim of self-satisfaction. That connection is to help you walk another step. This is a vital point that people miss.

Live a natural life and try to remove the masks, one by one. Try to understand and not impose your own beliefs. Expand and enlarge your understanding. Then you will become a human being.

IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS



I will remember this Yatra with the satsangs of Swamiji for a long time. Everything was so deep and at the same time understandable, both serious and full of humour. Two hours with Swamiji in the rain! I won't forget it.

—*Jignasu Buddhi, Bulgaria*

Following the inspiration and clarity that came during Hatha Yoga Yatra 1 last November, I returned home with a long list of what needs to change in my life, with new priorities and ideas, tasks to be completed. I did not look at my November list until April when I came again to the ashram for Hatha Yoga Yatra 2. When I looked at it, I was surprised to realize that almost all important things that were planned in the list had already happened.

Now the inspiration is much greater, as Swamiji was here with us and was so generous and touching with his satsangs. I am again drawing a clearer and challenging 'map' of routes, ideas and steps to be done by the time I will be back at my spiritual home – the ashram!

—*Sannyasi Nirbhasa, Bulgaria*

When I first came to the ashram for Hatha Yoga Yatra 1, it was a good experience. But the second time, from good it becomes great. The knowledge and wisdom shared by Swamiji is immortal and divine. Nowhere in the world will we find the knowledge he shares of yoga.

I will give my best to follow the teachings of Bihar School of Yoga in my daily life. Mantra chanting has opened the dormant doors of my mind. It feels there is more confidence and peace in the heart and mind. Taking all the wisdom taught here and looking forward to coming to Hatha Yoga Yatra 3.

—Sneha, Bengaluru, India

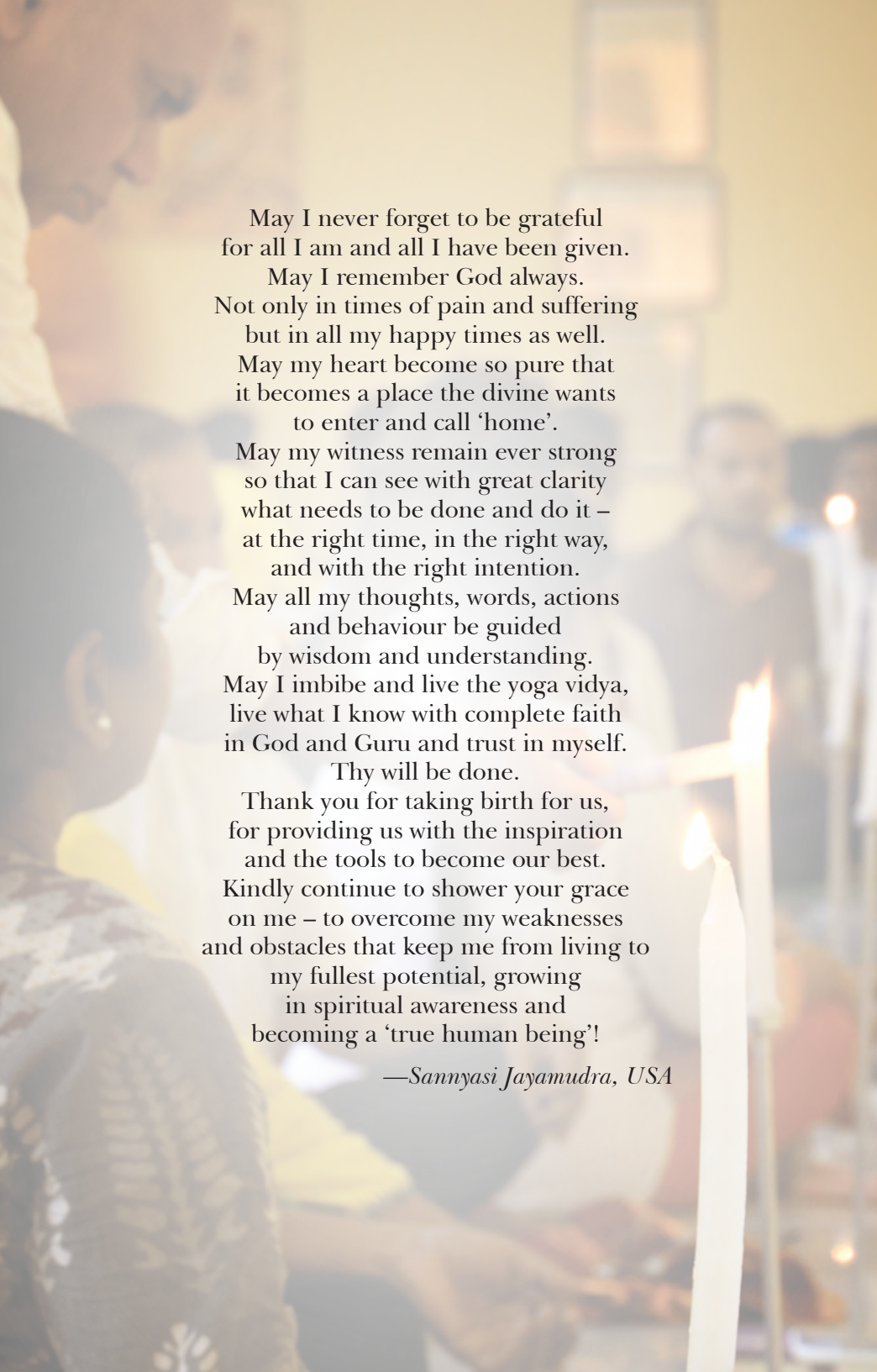
It was a wonderful and insightful experience. The training teaches us how to move from being an asana practitioner to being a hatha yoga aspirant. I have gained a clearer understanding of:

- What hatha yoga is
- Why the components are being practised
- How to practise them with understanding and awareness
- How to practically implement yoga practices into the daily routine of a householder.

Swamiji's satsangs emphasized that yoga must be viewed and incorporated as a lifestyle and culture, for only then the real transformation of personality can take place. Most important, Swamiji gave us direct guidance on how to do it.

—Miroslava, Lithuania





May I never forget to be grateful
for all I am and all I have been given.

May I remember God always.
Not only in times of pain and suffering
but in all my happy times as well.

May my heart become so pure that
it becomes a place the divine wants
to enter and call 'home'.

May my witness remain ever strong
so that I can see with great clarity
what needs to be done and do it –
at the right time, in the right way,
and with the right intention.

May all my thoughts, words, actions
and behaviour be guided
by wisdom and understanding.

May I imbibe and live the yoga vidya,
live what I know with complete faith
in God and Guru and trust in myself.

Thy will be done.

Thank you for taking birth for us,
for providing us with the inspiration
and the tools to become our best.

Kindly continue to shower your grace
on me – to overcome my weaknesses
and obstacles that keep me from living to
my fullest potential, growing
in spiritual awareness and
becoming a 'true human being'!

—Sannyasi Jayamudra, USA

Notes

Notes

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



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

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

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

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

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



At the World Yoga Convention held in 2013 on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda announced: “The first chapter of yoga propagation is over. Now the second chapter begins, which is focused on consolidation of yoga and better application of yoga, with sincerity, seriousness and commitment.”

In writing the second chapter, a complete change in the training programs at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth has come about since 2016. The new programs are setting a standard of understanding the practices and principles of yoga from the perspective of the original intentions of yoga.

Among these programs was Hatha Yoga Yatra 2: Asana-Pranayama Intensive, during which the focus was on understanding the asana and pranayama of hatha yoga and placing the practice in the broader context of yoga and spiritual life.

This book presents the satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda during the program.



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