

# Hatha Yoga Yatra 4

## Origin of Hatha Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati





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SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

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CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS



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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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during the training of Hatha Yoga Yatra 1 & 2,  
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## **Hatha Yoga Yatra 4 – Origin of Hatha Yoga**

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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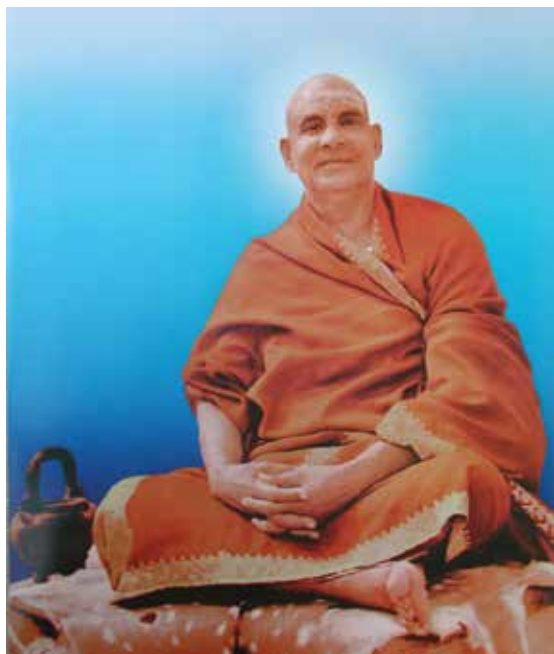
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## Dedication

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



## Dedication

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

# Contents

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Preface: The 2nd Chapter of Yoga | <i>ix</i> |
| The Pilgrim's Progress           | 1         |
| Milestones of Hatha Yoga         | 11        |
| Hours of Humanity and Yoga       | 25        |
| Make the Transition              | 39        |
| Rules of the Journey             | 51        |
| The Flowing Tradition            | 63        |
| IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS      | 70        |



## 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, 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 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 Pilgrim's Progress

*21 April 2019*



The trainings that are being given at present are called *yatra*, which means 'journey into'. Therefore, Hatha Yoga Yatra 1 is a journey into the first level of hatha yoga, Raja Yoga Yatra 2 is a journey into the second level of raja yoga, Raja Yoga Yatra 3 is a journey into the third level of raja yoga, and so on. 'Yatra' represents journey and that is what we are undertaking.

From 2013, the Bihar School of Yoga stopped yoga propagation and it was stated at that time that yoga propagation represented the first chapter of BSY. When we started to propagate yoga in the 1960s, you could count the number

of yoga teachers in the world on your fingers. By the time we concluded fifty years of BSY, there were thousands of yoga teachers in every country, city and street. Many of them became 'brands'. That was the end of our journey of propagation.

From 2013 to 2018, for five years, we took our time and devised the syllabus of the second chapter of yoga, which is not about propagation of yoga but going into the experience of yoga. For this, the Yatra trainings were created. These journeys allow you to explore the systems, the techniques and the processes, and experience the change that you can attain to improve the quality of life. Thus, the intention behind the Yatras is to help you make yoga a part of your life.

Right now yoga is not a part of your life. It is a part of your practice that you can do in some yoga centre whether for one hour, two hours, three hours or four hours a week. Beyond that, there is no other experience of yoga. The Yatras are the opposite. They allow you to experience yoga right from day one and go deeper into the principles and practices.

Despite many years of yoga propagation, today yoga, and especially hatha yoga, is seen as a collection of exercises. The term 'hatha yoga' evokes an image of a person practising asanas, whether simple or complex, for the purpose of physical fitness. The understanding of hatha yoga is limited to the physical and is applied for fitness. Nothing wrong with that. However, there is also another dimension of hatha yoga that you need to know. For that you have to ask: 'What is hatha yoga?'

Hatha yoga belongs to a tradition: the yogic tradition. If you look at hatha yoga not as an isolated practice of physical fitness, but as part of the yogic tradition, then what do you find?

### **Historically speaking**

The history of hatha yoga goes back to Lord Shiva, who was its first teacher. He gave instructions on many yogas and from among them, hatha yoga was picked up by a person named Matsyendranath. He was the originator of

hatha yoga in the human dimension, and started the Nath tradition. This tradition still exists in India and its adherents follow the original teachings of hatha yoga as given by Sage Matsyendranath. They live an extremely disciplined life and through hatha yoga gain mastery over the elements, over prana shakti and over the physical and psychological dimensions of life. Most people don't know of this tradition of hatha yoga, even in India.

The yoga propagated by Matsyendranath and the Nath tradition was later picked up by two people who compiled the teachings and gave them a written form. The first person was Sage Gheranda and the second was Yogi Swatmarama. Their writings are the two classical books on hatha yoga known to people today: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Yogi Swatmarama is followed by the common person and *Gheranda Samhita* by Sage Gheranda is followed by ascetics.

The two represent two streams of hatha yoga training. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* was written for civilians, or householders. The practices in that book do not apply to ascetics, who have a different syllabus. For them there is another school of thought and practice, which is contained in *Gheranda Samhita*. The theory, the philosophy, the approach, the understanding to hatha yoga is totally different in the two books. There is a reason.

Yoga was not created for the civilian society. It was devised by yogis to help their journey in life. The yogis lived a rather sedentary life, as they would sit the whole day in their meditations. For four hours, six hours, eight hours, their body would be inactive. To compensate for the stillness of the body they utilized hatha yoga and were its first users. I am a living testimony to that.

When I was doing my panchagni sadhana, I had to sit for eight hours from morning until afternoon. For one day, two days or one week this is fine. However, if you have to sit for six months every day following the same routine, the body definitely takes a beating. Eight hours of physical inactivity is not balanced by one hour of walking or one hour of asana

and pranayama. One has to use the body vigorously. For this the yogis used hatha yoga. So the intent of the yogis was to compensate for the sitting. While they were sitting, through their mind they could do many things: direct the prana, control the body and the senses. Yet, when they were active, they had to utilize the mental energy and diffuse it through physical activity.

Hatha yoga had a specific purpose. It was not only a physical fitness tool; it also represented the effort to balance the forces that are physical and psychological, pranic and mental: ida and pingala. The word 'hatha' represents these two ideas. *Ha* is the sound of the solar energy, *prana shakti*, and *Tha* is the sound of the lunar energy, *chitta shakti*. These two powers or conditions control everything in life. Therefore, *ha-tha* represents control over the physical and the psychological conditions of both mind and prana. That is the literal meaning of the word hatha, covering the dimensions of ida and pingala. The whole purpose was to utilize and give direction to the energy the yogis were accumulating during their sadhana. This utilization was at all levels: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

Then Swatmarama came into the picture. He was not a rishi. He was a general practitioner of hatha yoga. He said that these practices can also be applied to the civilian society without the trappings of spiritual experience. They can be given as physical practices, which will benefit everyone. He removed the spiritual thoughts from the body of hatha yoga and presented only the practices and theories in a simple manner, which would be understandable by the civilian society. He also modified the practices a little so they would be easily practicable. This is how hatha yoga developed.

### **The times and teachings**

It was always recognized in the yogic tradition that hatha yoga is the primary class and raja yoga is the secondary class. There was never any confusion about which yoga comes first or which one thereafter. Right from the word go it was

accepted that hatha yoga is the primary class, as it deals with the body and prana: *annamaya kosha* and *pranamaya kosha*, the two gross dimensions of human existence and experience. Raja yoga was the secondary school, the next class, the next jump in education, which dealt with the mind, *manomaya kosha*, and the final dimension of consciousness, *vijnanamaya kosha*.

The fifth kosha, *anandamaya*, was connected with spiritual qualities. To develop spiritual qualities, different people in different ages gave different answers. These are qualities that have to be developed not in isolation but while living in society, and the social mind-set changes from time to time. The sadhus gave their teachings according to the need of people. Buddha was a yogi but the need of the time was not yoga; it was receiving a sermon on *ahimsa*, non-violence. Buddha was also the founder of martial arts; therefore it is not right to say that he was an advocate of *ahimsa* since he was teaching people martial arts for defence. Yet *ahimsa* became the mainstay of his teachings at a time when there was upheaval in society. As a result, everybody says that Buddha spoke on non-violence and it is a great spiritual teaching.

The reality is that *ahimsa* was not the teaching of Buddha. That was his compulsion due to the times and the social environment. Just like Buddha, yoga is not our teaching, it is our compulsion, our mandate. Our life is not yoga life; it is *sannyasa* life. In the same manner, the teaching that many sadhus and sages gave were extensions of some spiritual idea to deal with the given situation in society.

### **The range of ‘Satyananda Yoga’**

If you look at the various teachings, nobody has taught the paths or the systems to progress spiritually. They have only spoken on different ideas and highlighted them as positive human qualities that one should aspire for to develop and experience peace, comfort, solace, strength, willpower, clarity. And from that perspective, it is fine.



Beyond the teaching of an individual, there is a whole subject. This is evident in yoga too. For instance, what you call ‘Satyananda Yoga’ comprises of no more than seven groups of basic asanas: stretching, bending, twisting, inverting, balancing, and so on. How many of you can do advanced asanas like the scorpion or the peacock pose? Only a few. The majority practise the beginners and intermediate groups of asanas, nothing beyond that. Even asana practice is reduced to something that you can do comfortably. The full range of asanas is never perfected by anybody.

You may say how can we practise the full range of asanas if there are 72,000 or 84,000 asanas? In reality asanas don’t number more than a hundred. In all the literature of hatha yoga, the asanas that have been written about do not number more than 30, 40, or 50. From where did the huge number come? No idea. If you want to call any movement an asana, that’s your choice. However, every movement or posture is not an asana. Asanas have a specific focus and purpose to affect the body in a specific manner. So, even out of the 40 or 50 asanas of hatha yoga, you don’t do the advanced ones, as the body is not ready. Your range of asanas remains limited.

When it comes to pranayama, how many do you do? Many are written about, but practised? Not more than three or four. In relaxation practices, there is only one: yoga nidra. Everybody says yoga nidra is a practice of pratyahara, yet they use it to sleep. They do not do it as a practice of yoga but as

a practice to sleep, “Oh, when I practise yoga nidra I have a good sleep.” You never practise yoga nidra for the purpose for which it is intended, you only practise it to get into a good space.

Meditation is limited to three or four practices: antar mouna, ajapa japa, chidakasha dharana, trataka. Therefore, four meditative practices, one relaxation, four pranayamas, and seven groups of simple asanas, is known as Satyananda Yoga in the world. Is this the only scope of yoga in the wholistic and integrated yoga? No.

### **Yoga Chakra**

The original yoga propagated by Sri Swami Satyananda was the Yoga Chakra. Satyananda Yoga is the scaled-down version of Yoga Chakra. If Yoga Chakra is at hundred, Satyananda Yoga is only at twenty. You have been exposed to only twenty percent and eighty percent still remains to be explored. We were trained in Yoga Chakra when we first came to the ashram. However, when we went out to teach, we found that nobody was able to practise it, just as nobody is able to practise the scorpion pose, *vrischikasana*. Some people had a big tummy, some were sick, some had aches here and there. So the entire system had to be scaled down to fulfil the needs and requirements of the individual, not of yoga. Satyananda Yoga represents that scaled-down twenty percent version.

Even that has been significant, as it has allowed you to explore yoga in your own life, more than other groups in the world. Most of the other groups adhere to only one aspect of yoga, either the physical, or the intellectual as jnana yoga, or the emotional as bhakti yoga, and so on. In the wholistic approach to yoga, even today, Bihar School of Yoga stands alone, and that is due to the creation of Yoga Chakra by Swami Satyananda. In 1968 we used to call Sri Swamiji ‘Yoga Chakra Kalanidhi’. That was the title given to him – The Creator of Yoga Chakra. It was only after the World Yoga Convention in 2013, when the age of yoga propagation was over, the Stone Age was over, and we were entering into the

Bronze Age, the age of exploration, that the idea of Yoga Chakra was revived. Enough of propagation, now exploration.

When Sri Swamiji taught us yoga, he taught in a manner which made it easy to understand the philosophy. I will give you that visual image, try to see it. Visualize a wheel, a wooden wheel, not a car wheel, the original horse-cart wheel. In the centre is the hub, from the hub come out the spokes, and the spokes are connected on the outside by the rim to the hub. The spokes, the rim, the hub create the wheel. Apply this imagery to yoga.

The state of purity that yoga tries to attain is identified as *Satyam*, *Shivam*, *Sundaram* – the true, the auspicious and the beautiful, the divine nature. Swami Sivananda said that this divine nature is accessible to all, and one should strive to attain it. That is the hub, the pure state of the self. From this pure state emerge six spokes. One is hatha yoga, which is complemented by the second spoke of karma yoga. Both are at the physical level. The third spoke is raja yoga, which is supported by bhakti yoga. Both are at the mental level. Raja yoga deals with the mind, bhakti yoga deals with emotions; the two constitute the mental dimension. Then fifth is kriya yoga and the sixth is jnana yoga. These two lead to the realization and experience of ‘who I am’. These are the six spokes which come out from the hub. They are held together by the outer rim, which represents lifestyle. They are all connected with, influence and support life, so it is lifestyle that has to be improved for yoga to be effective.

### **Beginning the journey**

In this wheel of Yoga Chakra, the first two components are hatha yoga and karma yoga. Hatha yoga is a complete yoga in itself, when you consider its different components.

Hatha yoga begins with practices to purify and detoxify the body. It does not begin with asana and pranayama, hatha yoga begins with an awareness that ‘I need to purify myself, I need to detoxify my body, I need to attain that physical cleanliness’. This takes you to the practices of shatkarma:

neti, dhauti, basti, kapalbhati, nauli, trataka. These constitute the six actions of hatha yoga, *shatkarma*.

The first three purify the body, the physical organs, utilizing water and other liquids to create different benefits and achieve different results. Neti is for cleaning the head region. Dhauti is for cleaning the upper region of the trunk: stomach, oesophagus, throat, lungs. Basti is for the stomach, small intestines, large intestines. This entire process of cleaning helps regulate the three humours of the body: mucus, bile and gas. Hatha yoga believes that unless these three are balanced in the body, there will always be illness. If they are balanced, you will attain health.

A person becomes sick when there is excess of either mucus, bile or gas. The imbalance in the humours displaces the harmony of the body and the physical organs. The cleansing practices repair these three *doshas*, flaws. Once they are repaired, there is health.

The other three practices of shatkarma are nauli, kapalbhati and trataka. Nauli is for cleansing and activation of prana, the vital force, kapalbhati clears the mind and trataka focuses the mind. This is shatkarma, the beginning of hatha yoga. Thus the purpose of shatkarma ranges from physical cleanliness and purity of the body to clearing and focusing of the mind.

### **The next stop**

When you have achieved the purpose of shatkarma, then you come to asana and pranayama, which is the second Yatra of hatha yoga. The first Yatra is exploring the shatkarma; the second Yatra is experiencing asana and pranayama.

The purpose of asana and pranayama here is not what has been given by Patanjali. It is not *sthiram* and *sukham*, to be comfortable and at ease. That is the purpose of raja yoga asana. The purpose of hatha yoga asana is totally different. Here, seven *bhumikas* or foundations have to be created in the human personality, with each one becoming a launching-pad for prana and mind to go into higher and deeper spaces.

When you have developed those seven foundations, then you can say, “My hatha yoga practice is complete.” Your hatha yoga practice does not become complete when you are able to perform a posture efficiently. It is complete when you are able to achieve each of the plateaus that hatha yoga desires you to achieve with the practice of asana and pranayama. The term *sapta bhumika* means seven plateaus or seven supports.

We will explore these seven platforms during our Yatra, so you will have a totally different exposure to hatha yoga. It will not be a studio hatha yoga: “Stretch out in front of the mirror and see how beautiful you look.” It will be hatha yoga from the perspective of the sadhus. To do this, you will also have to make the effort to go deeper into your own experience.

The understanding of hatha yoga or raja yoga is limited. People do not know much about the tradition. Once you look into the tradition, you suddenly realize that what you have learnt so far is just a fraction, the tip of the iceberg. An iceberg has a much bigger unseen part underwater, on the surface you only see the tip and say, “Oh, this is the iceberg.” That applies to yoga too.

### **Going yonder**

The third journey is mudra and bandha, as they form part of hatha yoga. The fourth journey is pratyahara. Pratyahara of hatha yoga is different from pratyahara of raja yoga, and it is something that people have not practised at all. At least I have not taught it to anybody since we have been following the Satyananda Yoga system, which is specific: “This much only for everyone.”

The whole pratyahara system of hatha yoga is different from what you have so far understood it to be. You have understood pratyahara as withdrawal of the senses, but your ideas will change once you begin the hatha yoga pratyahara in Yatra 4. The fifth Yatra is dhyana and laya. This is the classical hatha yoga. Thus, in classical hatha yoga there are five journeys that one can undertake: shatkarma; asana-pranayama; mudra-bandha; pratyahara; dhyana and laya.

# Milestones of Hatha Yoga

22 April 2019



In a Russian doll, one big doll contains various smaller dolls. The human system is the same: the outer structure is *annamaya kosha*, the body of matter. The next one is *pranamaya kosha*, energy, vitality. Then comes *manomaya kosha*, the interactive mind and the senses, the interactive world awareness. Subtler than this is *vijnanamaya kosha*, the dimension of consciousness, and subtler than this is *anandamaya kosha*, the dimension of spirit. This is the journey from the physical to the spiritual.

## Shuddhi to sanyam

The yogis have seen this journey as a gradual dissolution of the influence of the tamasic nature. Your body is subject to the tamasic nature, your mind is subject to the tamasic nature, therefore all your responses become tamasic. ‘Tamasic’ here means conditioned, not negative or detrimental. A potter makes pots by giving shape to a formless lump of clay. That is *tamas*: something that has come into existence and is used for a purpose; a condition, a form that has been created, a shape which is limiting. Therefore, the body is tamasic, the mind-set and behaviour can be tamasic. *Tamas* is not always a detrimental or bad thing; it is also a restrictive and conditioning aspect of life.

*Sattwa* is the free aspect where you are not conditioned by any emotion, thought or idea, but open and receptive, applying the wisdom and knowledge to know the truth from the untruth, the real from the unreal. The *annamaya*, *pranamaya* and *manomaya* koshas are all under the influence of *tamas*. You have your likes, dislikes, choices, attractions, distractions, repulsions, passions, everything. All this is not for self-improvement but for self-satisfaction, only to satisfy your desires, *vasanas*, needs and ambitions. Due to this reason, the human behaviour and response is always tamasic, conditioned towards one’s own self.

This self-oriented awareness is what is known as the binding awareness, for it makes you more material, more aware of your senses, needs and demands, more aware of your negative mental traits such as greed, hate, jealousy, frustration, anger, disillusionment, and so on. It is in this state that you begin to practise yoga to bring about a positive and qualitative change, to reduce the intensity of *tamas* and increase the intensity of *sattwa*. The dropping of the tamasic negatives is the concept of *shuddhi* or purification. *Shuddhi* does not only mean washing with soap and water; it also means maintaining clarity and purity of thought and intention, being aware of *dharma*, the right conduct, and *nyaya*, the just.

Shuddhi is at three levels: for the physical body, for the pranic body, and for the mental body. After purification at these three levels there is sanyam. Now you create your own conditions to live, you are not subject to the outer conditions to survive. That is the idea of sanyam, which is experienced in vijñanamaya and anandamaya koshas. This is where the process of shatkarma takes you. When you move to the practice of trataka, you are entering the realm of sanyam. For managing the upheavals of mind and prana, you practise kapalbhati pranayama. To balance the output and production of prana, you practise nauli. To remove the blocks from the channels, *nadis*, you practise asana and pranayama. This is the process of shuddhi.

Where the block is physical, not only posture but a *tattwa*, an element, such as water is used. Many other tattwas are also used, through different objects, but water is the main element. Thus, the shatkarmas are purification practices that combine the use and application of water along with posture.

Prior to the cleaning, the organs of the body have to be exercised. They have to be stretched, turned, twisted, folded and squeezed so that the muscular resilience comes in them before detoxification takes place. The posture has to be appropriate to give that depth of cleansing where the toxic matter is eliminated from the body.

### **Influencing body and prana**

You have to understand the purpose and the role of asana, for asanas are not just physical exercises or movements. They represent a condition of the body in which all the systems and organs function as per the demand of the posture. If the purpose of shoulder stand or headstand is to activate the pineal or pituitary gland, it will not be achieved by practising them only for a time which is comfortable for you, possibly ten or fifteen seconds. You would have to hold the pose for the time that it takes for the hormones and the glands to begin to function harmoniously. Therefore, when the

approach is to influence something in the body, there has to be that level of awareness and concentration.

The purpose of hatha yoga is not only physical posture modification; it is activation of prana shakti, regulating the functions of the physical systems and organs, stimulating the circulation of blood in the body, toning the muscles, strengthening the bones, improving the flexibility and resilience in the joints, improving the function of different systems such as the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, the digestive system. The purpose is to bring the body to a point where everything happens in the correct manner. To come to that state, you have to build an awareness of your body which is not limited to the muscular and skeletal systems; you have to also become aware of the pranic, mental and spiritual dimensions of life. There can be different types of concentration while practising an asana, which take you from the physical awareness to the cultivation of spiritual awareness.

### **The first ‘who am I?’**

When we go back in time and history, we find that from the time human beings emerged on the planet up to when they entered agriculture and capitalism, they lived a nomadic life: hunting, gathering, foraging. This was the situation throughout the world, in Europe, the Americas, Asia, the Middle-East, everywhere. It was a completely extrovert and dynamic life. There was no place one could call one's own, no house, no room. In those times the physical dimension of yoga was not needed. People had to walk long distances in one day to forage for their food. They had to eat what they found the same day since there was no storage facility and other people and animals would compete for the meal. As a result, certain traits developed.

The attitude to food is one of those ancient traits. Even today human beings eat like there is no tomorrow; that instinct is there since those times. If you travel around the world, everywhere you see people just eating and eating.

There are so many different varieties of foods to stimulate and satisfy the taste, labelled as exotic, organic, Continental, Chinese, Mexican, Italian, Portuguese, and so on. All this comes from the instinct that human beings have carried since those ancient times.

Another necessity at that time, due to the active, extrovert and natural life, was the need to become still. The mind-set was of enquiry, not in terms of 'How am I going to go to the moon?' or 'How do I make my rocket?' It was a mind-set that questioned, 'What is this? What is that fruit? What is that plant? What are the shining objects in the sky?' Everything was questioned. This questioning led them to discover the existence of spirit. Therefore, the first culture that evolved was a spiritual culture and not a material culture.

The first culture that evolved in the world due to this enquiry was the spiritual culture. 'Who am I? What is this body? How do I live? How does this body age and decay? How does it become sick and how does it become healthy? How can I maintain and sustain my body? How can I make it strong? What do I eat? What is that fruit? What is poison? What is nutrition? Which water to drink, which to avoid?' One had to go through a process of discovering and questioning everything that was around. This questioning led to the development of an introspective spiritual culture. 'What is the world? What is the source? Who is the creator? Who created me? What is there in me? What happens when I die? What happened before I was born?' All these questions formed in this first period, and the spiritual traditions started at this time across the world. Nature worship started at this time, whether in Asia, Europe, or the vedic idea of nature and the divine.

The result of the spiritual awareness was that everybody wanted to know the truth. Everybody was searching for the truth. Not the abstract truth, but truth which they could experience and live. Therefore, the connection of every individual at that time, apart from the outer, was with the desire to know the truth, *satyam*, and how that truth could be experienced in life. This enquiry led them to develop a

culture in which they could become still for some time from their heavy routine, contemplate, think about and discover the logic and the reason behind what they saw and perceived, and find the answers to their questions.

Thus, the meditative and contemplative component developed first. That was the emergence of spiritual yoga: connection with nature, the divine and all other individuals, righteous living, appropriate conduct, expression of the best human qualities. That was the focus of the human civilization known as the vedic civilization. They lived to discover the source of truth. The time was spent in contemplation, in worship, in doing good, in being good, in doing the right and the appropriate to help build a harmonious community and society. There was recognition that there is tamasic nature, rajasic nature and sattwic nature, and the effort was to find a balance between the three to create a harmonious social organization: the human community.

### **The agrarian society and yoga**

With time, human beings moved into an agrarian society, where the nomads formed small communities and became static. They did not travel long distances to forage for food anymore. They made small shelters, tepees or small enclosures where families and groups could live, and they started working the land. Now the civilization became static. The physical activities were restricted and limited to farm and home. The need to walk long distances was over. The lifestyle changed.

In this period, in each community, according to the requirements, different groups of skilled people also emerged. Some became teachers, some farmers, some medicine men. Each one had their own skills and it became their profession. At the same time, when the movement they were used to for so many generations was suddenly reduced to a confined space, the lifestyle became more sedentary.

At this time, the physical postures evolved. ‘How can I, in my own environment, fulfil my physical needs?’ The



hatha yogic practices evolved. Therefore, first the spiritual culture and then the physical culture emerged. Then both came together and were seen as one supporting the other: the concrete and definite, the physical and material, with the abstract and the universal, the invisible and subtle. Both came

together and were seen as part of the human experience. The process, the method which brought in all the components of nature together was known as yoga, that in which everything came together and united.

### **Aim of yoga**

The word ‘yoga’ came into being and its meaning was union. Swami Sivananda has defined this union as integrating the faculties of head, heart and hands. This is the practical dimension. The philosophical, the theoretical, the religious can be the merging of the soul and the divine, union of the individual consciousness with the higher consciousness. However, that is too far away from what we can do right now. What we can do right now is bring this fractured personality together by joining the faculties, by supporting and nourishing the performance and qualities of head, heart and hands. This was the meaning that Swami Sivananda gave to the word yoga. He never said, “Yoga is for self-realization.” He said, “To live a divine life, you need to integrate these three faculties.”

When we look at the tradition, the three goals of life are: the discovery of truth; the discovery of correctness, appropriateness and auspiciousness; and the discovery of underlying, inherent beauty – *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*. This is what the yogis and sages of the vedic civilization were searching for. Today the search is not for Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. People are now totally dependent on technology and information. If you don’t have technology, you don’t have access to information and you cannot survive in society. Even the air ticket comes to your mobile phone. Whatever you do is to keep yourself at par with your environment. You become involved and entangled in technology and the search for information. Remember, information is not knowledge; information is not experience.

Today children look up the internet and know everything about a medicine before they go to the doctor. Then they demand of the doctor, “In Google I have seen the medicine

has this contra-indication. I don't want this. I want the other one." That is only out of information, not from knowledge or experience. The doctor says, "No, you cannot have that one, you need to have this one." That is experience and knowledge. So, there is a difference between information and knowledge and experience. Information does not illuminate or enlighten anyone. Knowledge and experience illuminate and enlighten every individual.

When hatha yoga developed, all the components of human life in which people were interacting to discover the satya, were incorporated. In order to know the satya, the mind has to be cleaned of every negative influence, it has to be purified. Purification is the first requirement. The body has to be cleaned. The mind has to be cleaned. The rooms have to be opened. The doors and windows have to be opened. The dusting has to take place. Fresh air has to come in. Fresh light has to come in. Shatkarmas fulfilled the requirement of purification. The next practice was that of asana, not for therapy or as a practice of fitness. Today you might apply asana for therapy or fitness, but that was not the intention at the beginning.

### **Purpose of asana**

The intention of asana was to pacify the agitated senses, when a shift took place from the mobile, nomadic society to a stable, agricultural society. The movements of asanas gave the level of exercise which the body needs to maintain its optimum health at the physical, pranic and mental levels, as the three are interconnected. There are many things that asana and exercising can do to the body. I will give you a short list. Exercise and asana:

1. Boosts memory
2. Slows down cognitive decline
3. Improves mental health
4. Improves concentration
5. Improves heart, lung and digestive conditions

6. It is protection against age-related decline of the body, as it slows down cellular decay.
7. Maintains physical fitness and appropriate weight
8. Results in increased lean mass and strength
9. Improves cholesterol levels and helps to prevent and manage diabetes
10. Improves physical immunity
11. Improves hormonal and chemical balance leading to calmness and happiness
12. Makes you more outgoing and approachable, so you have a better social life and interpersonal relationships.

These are the various benefits of asana and exercise. They regulate the functions of the body systems. The digestion, the heart, the respiration, the kidneys, the liver, the pancreas, all become healthy. They limber and tone the muscular system, create more strength in the bones and flexibility in the joints. In this manner, many benefits are experienced by the individual when they fully involve in a regular practice of asana and exercise. This is a requirement of life.

There are rich people who have a large staff, so they do not do any work at home, yet they go to the gym to exercise. If the same person were to do the entire housework on a daily basis, they would not need to go to the gym, to run, to jog, or join a triathlon, pentathlon or decathlon. Just the normal activity of the day done in the right manner is enough for optimum health. The more obsessive you become about your body, the more wear and tear there is to the muscles and ligaments, which will ultimately become a curse in old age. In your youth you are happy to hear from people, “Wow, Mr Universe!” But in old age, you curse yourself for becoming Mr Universe in your youth, for now you can’t walk, sit, lie down, breathe, twist or turn, you are just a stiff board.

The whole idea of exercise has to be seen from the perspective of regulated physical activity, and asanas provide that. They regulate the physical activity. They don’t take you to the extreme, they maintain the optimum of health, vitality and stamina, including the health of all the systems, whether

cellular, muscular, skeletal, or any other. When the body is in that state of health, the mind becomes happy. When the body is unhealthy, the mind is also unhealthy, unhappy.

When the body is healthy, the mind is happy as the pranas in the body are active. These active pranas elevate your manas also. However, when the pranas are down and depleted, then the manas is also down and depleted. This happiness is also caused by the changes in the chemicals of the body. When you practise asana, the happy chemicals, the endorphins, are secreted. Therefore, there is more happiness and optimism; there is a brighter glint in the eyes and a brighter smile on the face. Thus, stilling of the senses, regulating the functions of the physical systems, activation of the energy, creating the condition of relaxation, are the aims of asana.

### **Earth people**

Asana is supported by pranayama, as annamaya kosha and pranamaya kosha are integrated experiences. *Prana*, energy, is different from matter, yet this energy in matter is what makes you live. Your body is a mini earth. Earth is composed of five elements; your body is composed of the same five elements. You were born from earth despite people believing that aliens brought them here. I belong to earth. The colour of my skin is the colour of earth, I am one hundred percent an earth man.

We are all earth people born from the same earth, the same soil. Even the insects did not come from outer space, they are also born from the same soil. Where do mosquitoes come from? From the same soil, the same water. Every life-form has come from earth; we are all earth men and women. Our body is a miniature earth, the only difference being that in planet earth, matter and energy are still separate. The energy has not revitalized the matter in earth to act in the way the energy has revitalized the matter in our body to act. Therefore the planet is insentient earth and we are sentient earth.

If you look through a super microscope at your body, you will find many different cultures and civilizations growing

and thriving in it. You will realize that your body is home to many different civilizations of mites, bacteria, viruses. Many different cultures, colours and civilizations live there. Some are technologically advanced, totally immune to the external medical onslaught; some are backward and primitive, yet they exist. You are their master, their god and lord.

We are a miniature earth, the same tattwas which are in planet earth are within us too. The only difference is that in our body, the tattwas are closely connected to prana. That is why the human body can move, but a statue made of wood, mud or metal is not able to move. This is the close connection of annamaya kosha with pranamaya kosha; they are integrated. Therefore asana is always accompanied with pranayama.

### **The tail of asana**

Pranayama is the tail of asana, and in the tail lies the beauty of an animal. Just as in human beings the beauty lies in the face, in animals the beauty lies in the tail. Chop off the tail of an animal and you won't find it beautiful or pleasing anymore. Pranayama is the tail of asana, and this tail is very important as it complements and completes the practice of asana by increasing the vitality and making you aware of the subtle energy in air and breath. It develops the awareness of prana shakti.

Prana shakti is not breath. What is fire? Fire is a combination of colour, heat, light. These are the three primary attributes of fire. Heat can be experienced separately, colour can be seen separately, and light can be experienced separately. Yet when the three come together, the unified form is fire. Similarly, in our life too prana as the vital force is responsible for making our organs tick in the correct manner. It is the pranas that make your heart tick. By controlling respiration, you can control your heartbeat. Research has shown this to be true. What is considered an autonomic function of the body can be controlled by mastering prana. However, prana is not an autonomic entity, it goes beyond.

There is the example of Swami Nadabrahmananda, my uncle guru. He left his body at the age of ninety-eight and up to that time, he was able to practise breath retention for one hour. You cannot hold your breath for more than a couple of minutes without feeling discomfort. Try it for any longer and you will begin to turn black and blue, your eyes will pop, your heart will beat faster. This sannyasi was able to retain the breath for one hour and several researches were done on him. In one research while he was holding the breath, they put the microphone of a tape recorder on different parts of the body and it recorded a humming sound like the *mmmmmm* sound in *Om* or *bhramari* pranayama. This humming sound was heard all over the body and recorded by the tape recorder. Swami Nadabrahmananda explained, "That is the sound of prana moving through my body, I am not breathing but the pranas are active. Since the pranas are active, I can remain alive without breathing." If the pranas dissipate, then the body will have to suffer the consequences: gasping for breath, palpitation, dizziness, falling to the ground. All that will happen.

This is a good and clear example that prana is different from breath, it is different from the air that you breathe in, even though there is more concentration of prana in air than in any other element. When you inhale, the air goes into the lungs and there oxygen is separated and mixed with the blood, while carbon is carried out by the exhaling breath. This is the physical part. There is another aspect. Oxygen contains negative ions. Together they represent prana shakti, which is carried by the blood to each and every part of the body. The energy is then exploded in those cells, giving the feeling of vitality, stamina and strength. That is prana shakti which you experience in the form of natural body heat. That is the expression or experience of prana shakti.

When there is imbalance in prana shakti, the natural body heat changes; it also becomes imbalanced. There is fever and hypertension on the increase of heat and low blood pressure and lethargy on the decrease. When prana is not going into

the body parts, lethargy sets in. Excessive prana also results in an urge to run and run to remove the excess energy from the system.

You might have had the experience while going to sleep at night that your legs feel tingly; you feel as if you want to walk and run and tire your legs before you come to lie down. That is an example of hyper pranic activity. If that excess prana is not released, it will become a condition and turn into a disease. You will not be able to sleep and find yourself irritable the next day. The pranic system has to be balanced, and for that pranayama is used. In this way, asana and pranayama go together. They are like the front and back of a coin; if asana is the head, pranayama is the tail.

### **Into pratyahara**

The next limb is pratyahara. You have to understand that pratyahara of raja yoga and pratyahara of hatha yoga are two different subjects. When we are in hatha yoga, don't think of raja yoga pratyahara where you sit down, close your eyes and watch your thoughts, or this and that.

The preparatory practice for pratyahara is kaya sthairyam. It has many stages. The basic one is experiencing the stillness, from there you go on to other stages. Kaya sthairyam is more important than any other meditative practice and people do not realize this, for they have never practised it properly. They think that wrestling with their mind is more entertaining than sitting still. In reality, it is the other way around. When you go through the entire sequence of kaya sthairyam, you will realize the truth of these words.

# Hours of Humanity and Yoga

*23 April 2019*



Let us consider the timespan since the first human couple appeared on planet earth and began to propagate the creation of human forms, whenever it happened, whether one hundred thousand years ago or one billion years ago, to today. If this timespan is measured on a scale of twenty-four hours, then we lived a nomadic life for twenty-three hours and forty minutes and the agricultural capitalistic life for only nineteen minutes.

The jump from hunter-gatherer and beyond to modern times took only nineteen minutes whereas for twenty-three hours and forty minutes we lived a different lifestyle. The modern civilization is now at twenty-four. All the changes that have happened to us were extremely fast. Normally evolution takes a long time to adjust, adapt and accommodate. What happened in twenty-three hours and forty minutes as one lifestyle was accelerated so much in the next nineteen minutes that the entire natural system of the body was thrown out of gear. The mind was not able to adjust to this fast pace of evolution and therefore it is so distracted and dissipated. Of course, there are differences in times and needs. Yet, feelings, thoughts and emotions have always remained the same, only the objects that trigger those feelings, thoughts or emotions have become different.

Fear, for example, in the nomadic days was about being eaten by tigers, trampled upon by elephants, bitten by snakes and scorpions, or how to find protection at night. Today the fear is, "People don't like me on social media." "You did not tick the 'like' in my Facebook." The feeling of fear is the same, however, as you have changed your environment, the cause of fear has changed from animal to another person, action, idea, event or situation. In the early days, the fears had to be managed on a daily basis. You see a sabre-tooth tiger, you deal with him right then and there; either you run, or fight, or play possum. You had to confront that condition immediately. Today you don't confront the conditions immediately, and therefore they turn into anxiety. People have so much anxiety today due to the underlying fears. If this fear was not there, they would not have anxiety. You can check yourself.

Whenever there is some insecurity or fear, there will always be anxiety. Anxiety is an indication of psychological fear. You have lost the ability to deal with it as you have lost that mental firmness and strength. Therefore, an outer intervention is needed: psychiatrists have to deal with your anxiety. The point is that the situations which trigger the

feelings, the thoughts, the emotions are different yet the experience of those feelings, thoughts and emotions have the same pattern as before. The habits which have been cultivated over the twenty-three-hour-forty-minute period, can they be changed in twenty minutes? No. No matter how much you know or how much effort you make.

### **Emergence of yoga**

The impressions which we have carried in our genes are based on the interaction between the senses, energy and consciousness. That has given rise to experience, which in turn has become knowledge and wisdom. In the early days, the experiences that people had were not as much physical or material but more internal, mental. When you begin to wonder, 'Who am I? What is this body? What are those glowing objects in the sky? Why do they appear every day?' then you are starting your life-journey of jnana yoga. That is the first quest: you want to know. Evolution begins with jnana yoga; enquiry is the first step.

The next stage is where you begin to like, love, respect and honour something, and there is an emotional connection. That becomes bhakti yoga. Thus jnana yoga emerges first with the enquiry and bhakti yoga emerges next due to the emotional connection, association and attachment. 'I identify with you', 'I identify with this', 'I identify with that', the emotional bond which develops with this identification is the beginning of bhakti yoga.

When you try to actualize, achieve or do something, and your plans, desires and actions become coordinated, then that is known as karma yoga. This is how the idea of yoga evolved. These three – jnana yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga – were the internal, spiritual or behavioural yogas. They developed first and were identified as the spiritual vidya, the knowledge that takes you to your centre.

When the agricultural society was formed and communities came together, the routine became different. Now you were not walking twenty kilometres a day, you were not

ensuring that you had enough rest so you could walk again tomorrow if need be. In the early days action was primary, relaxation was secondary. In the agricultural society, action and relaxation became balanced. This much work and this much of rest is also possible. You could go to your hut, tepee or shelter and rest while events took place outside. When the idea of rest developed into a habit and the intensity of action reduced, sedentariness started to set in. This opened the door for illnesses and diseases.

Sri Swamiji used to say that yoga is not necessary for everyone. He would say, "For people who live a natural life in villages, who walk and work all day long, they don't need yoga. People who don't live a natural life, who don't walk or do physical work, need yoga." If you look at this statement of his, it is totally relevant. As sedentariness sets in in life, there is a need to move. The agricultural society brought in the idea of acting and resting, working and resting, preserving and protecting, storing and consuming. The whole mind-set in understanding life and living life went through a change, and now entered hatha yoga.

When there is a block in your stomach, you know it. It is the physical blocks that you become aware of first. If there is any pressure in the stomach, you become aware of it. If there is any tension in the body, you become aware of it. The blocks, the tensions and compressions make us aware of the body. That is the first manifestation of an imbalance. Shatkarma is useful here, not asana. The yogis were extremely observant people. They may not have had the intellectual graph of a high-IQ person of modern age, but they were observant enough to know the right thing to do in a wrong situation. Therefore, I advise people to always listen to their elders.

Today people don't listen to their elders as they think the elders will enforce their ideas and try to prove they are right. That is incorrect. One should listen to one's elders, for they have had more experience at knowing what is wrong. If you listen to them, you can avoid making their mistakes. It is not

because they know more than you, but because they are more experienced in managing the situations in life.

The blocks of the body, its gases and solids, are always identified first, therefore purification and clearing of those blocks has to happen first. Once the blocks are cleared, then you can go into dynamic movements with greater ease and comfort, and that is where asanas come in. This is how hatha yoga developed during the agricultural period.

The nomadic lifestyle never disappeared entirely. There are many people who still live that life in different parts of the world. They do not store for tomorrow, remain mobile and do not accumulate. They follow the principle of *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness. There are many people, individuals and also small groups in many countries who try to live this natural life. Some are merely trying to copy a lifestyle, for their ancestors did not live like that, their fathers and grandfathers did not live like that. However, in India there has been continuity of that lifestyle. Sadhus have lived this way since ancient times till today in exactly the same manner, there is no break in the tradition. They still follow the same nomadic lifestyle: not storing or accumulating anything, travelling light and living light, living in nature and dying in nature, not in hospitals.

### **Agrarian wisdom to modern age stress**

The agricultural society represented the coming together of a community. This is still seen in the ashram culture. Originally, ashrams were agrarian communities with a spiritual bent of mind. They were able to balance the material and the spiritual, and be masters of both subjects. The ashrams and gurukuls were centres of learning from where the agrarian society could develop, enlarge and grow. People pooled in their knowledge and taught, trained and informed others. New people were equipped with that knowledge and given the opportunity to experience, experiment with and master it. They in turn propagated the skill, profession or vidya they had to other people. In this way, the ashrams became the

catalysts for the agricultural society to propagate knowledge and hold communities together.

The modern society came into being in the last two to four hundred years, and the mind-set changed very fast. Previously people used to talk about generation gap, now it is every-day gap. There is no compatibility anymore. No merging together of thoughts, ideas or intentions anymore. Previously people used to look for compatibility, now everyone is only looking for assertion, "My way is the right way." People are more assertive today and less accommodating. The entire nature, mental behaviour and instincts have been influenced by the scenario of the twenty-minute period of the twenty-four-hour span. That is what is being lived.

In the agricultural society, which was identified as 'vedic society' in India and in other forms in other parts of the world, the material and the spiritual subject matters were both looked into deeply. There was a renaissance of knowledge. It was a time when across the world, thinkers like Plato, Socrates and other rishis and seers brought in ideas, thoughts and opinions about life, survival, mind, spirit. Everyone was contemplating these things; it was a natural pattern of thought that evolved. In India, these ideas were encouraged whereas in other parts of the world they were suppressed and society was compelled to move in a different direction. What Socrates said was not accepted in his lifetime and he was harassed for it. It was the same with many other people who offered new ideas and went against the prevalent ideas of society at that time.

In the vedic civilization, the ideas that emerged were not only related to the social or material dimension, but also incorporated spiritual understanding. You have to remember that extreme environment becomes the catalyst for technological development. Therefore, Europeans became the discoverers of modern technology. They had to survive in harsh, icy winters. They had to develop better weapons to hunt and better ways to store. So they invented refrigerators,

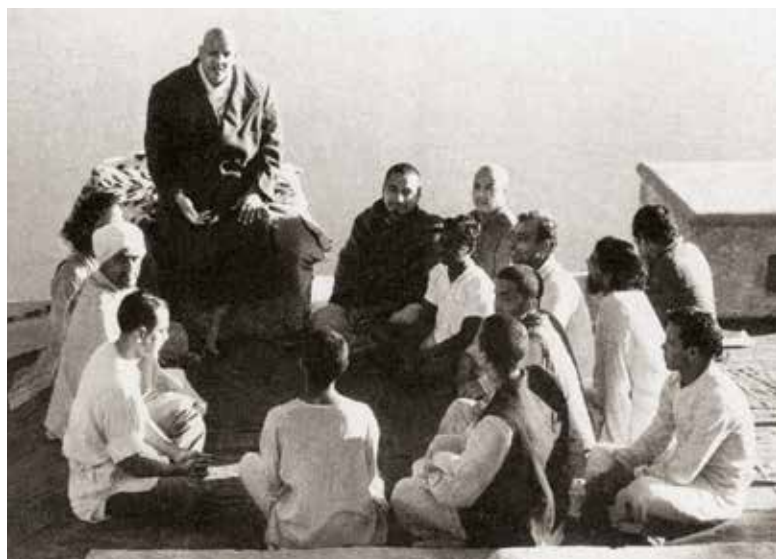
heaters, and many other objects of use. The quest for survival in extreme climatic conditions influenced their lifestyle and thoughts and they discovered solutions which were previously not thought possible.

People living in warmer climates did not have the need to develop weapons to hunt or technology to preserve and store their food. There was plenty of water, food, greenery, trees, animals. They did not become a technologically-savvy civilization unlike those in harsh climates. This resulted in two different kinds of mind-set. The technologically savvy eventually became a consumerist and materialistic society. Their minds became more scientific and material, and the aspect of contentment and happiness gradually diminished. Desires increased, expectations and demands increased, and the mind became more and more cluttered. Since the time of the industrial age, the levels of stress and tension have had big spikes. Just as you see the graph of population shooting up, in the same manner there have also been spikes in stress levels.

### **Swami Sivananda's peace salve**

When Swami Sivananda came on the scene, he realized that if we are not able to pacify the mind now, we will lose the focus and control, and destroy ourselves. He gave many options to follow. Buddha gave only one option: *Ahimsa paramodharmah* – “The highest dharma is ahimsa, therefore become a non-violent person.” However, Swami Sivananda gave many options: serenity, regularity, absence of vanity: the 18 ITIES; pratipaksha bhavana; the sadhana for head, heart and hands; the understanding of how we can improve our life, expression and behaviour. He was a very practical person who looked into all these aspects and a versatile genius who wrote over three hundred books.

Once I asked Sri Swamiji, “How did Swami Sivanandaji read so much?” He looked at me, smiled, and said, “Swami Sivanandaji? In those days, there were no books, no internet. Printing was impossible, only a few books were published.



He had this memory, this understanding, this mind which was luminous. He knew everything. You could talk to him on any topic, any literature, any religion, belief, culture or civilization and he would give you the answer. He knew so much.” From where does this information come when the written information is not available? From the cloud! What you call ‘cloud’ today, in ancient times was known as the akashic record. Twenty years ago you would not have been able to imagine that today you would be storing things in the cloud. Similarly, people think of the idea of akashic record as impossible. They say, “It doesn’t happen. It’s all rubbish, propagated by these funny yogis.” However, there are things beyond the reach of the ordinary mind.

Swami Sivananda applied the yogic tradition for correcting the imbalances of human nature, therefore he gave so many options. He did not choose one path. He did not say, “Do transcendental meditation only.” He did not say, “Do vipassana only.” He did not say, “Yoga nidra is the final thing.” He did not say, “This idea is the final statement.” He said, “For each aspect of your nature, these are the things

that you can do to improve it.” He gave practices which were physical in nature and which were mental in nature. Pratipaksha bhavana, for example, is a mental practice: to cultivate the opposite in your mind. It is a mental awareness that you must have. If the awareness is not there, then you cannot practise pratipaksha bhavana. Similarly, he gave many other practices. Pick up any book by Swami Sivananda and you will find twenty options and one of those will be appropriate and suitable for you.

### **Hatha yoga to manage instincts**

When Swami Sivananda spoke on hatha yoga, it was as a means to overcome the negative aspects of the instincts. That was the focus of Swami Sivananda’s hatha yoga. One’s routine comprising of sleep and food and also one’s insecurities, sensualities and passions have to undergo a change, for they represent the main behaviours of the mind: *ahara*, *nidra*, *bhaya*, *maithuna*; craving, sleep, fear, sexuality.

Craving is one of the main behaviours of the mind: desire, wanting. Whether it is something for the body, mind or emotion, desire or craving covers all aspects, and it is known as *ahara*. Uncontrolled *ahara*, uncontrolled craving leads to obesity of body, mind and spirit, all three. The mind becomes so obese that it cannot move. The body becomes so obese that it is difficult to move, you need to have metal supports on your knees to sustain it. The spirit becomes so fat that it cannot ascend to heaven; it falls flat to the ground.

How do you manage the instincts, for example, anxiety? Let us say you are feeling so anxious that it is affecting the normal patterns of your life, including sleep. How would you manage this anxiety? You think of anxiety as one idea; however, it has to be seen from different perspectives. Is it muscular anxiety which manifests as nervousness; cerebral anxiety which manifests as confusion, conflict, too many thoughts, headache; or emotional anxiety which manifests as the heart beating wild? What type of anxiety is it? After identifying the type of anxiety, do the appropriate practice.

For mental anxiety, practise *trataka*; for nervous anxiety, practise *pranayama*; for some other anxiety, another practice.

Similarly, to deal with fear there is no one technique. You have to first observe where that fear is affecting you, in which system of the body, and then deal accordingly. In this manner, Swami Sivananda gave simple indications of how the normal behaviour can be improved in daily life or in times of crises by following small practices.

In relation to sleep, he said the minimum time required on an average is seven hours. Young people need a bit more, eight. Adults can do with a bit less, six. He said create a regular sleep habit, do not sleep at random times whenever you feel like it. Train the mind to shut off at a specific time. That is why in the ashram the lights are out by eight o'clock. Even if you sleep by nine, you can easily wake up well before the sun wakes up. You can welcome the sun and tell him, "I am ahead of you today." The sleep time has to be identified and fixed, and that is one of the most important requirements for both physical and mental health.

One of the biggest problems today is the hours of sleep becoming less due to mental distraction. Some time ago, the British Medical Association recommended the government to change the school timings for children as they were deprived of the right hours of sleep. The reason being, they were listening to music and watching videos on their mobile phones under their blankets. While the parents thought the lights were off, the children were awake, doing everything under the sun, and sleeping late.

Parents today have become gutless. They cannot say no to their children. In the garb of rights for children, they have lost the ability to say no. They do not have the strength to stand up for what is correct. If you are unable to control your own children, how can you control your own mind? When you are unable to give the right *samskaras*, education and discipline to your own children, how can you give that discipline and education to yourself for walking upright in life? Ask yourself, what are you giving to the future

generation? Even a scientist like Stephen Hawking has said, “Humanity has approximately two hundred years more left. After that we will become extinct.” This is an indication of the path of destruction that we have taken. We have sacrificed wisdom for self-gratification. It is the path of destruction for the entire human civilization.

All this is due to the improper management of instincts. In nomadic times you ate today to have energy for tomorrow. Today you eat as you enjoy eating, and there is no consideration of health or the ill-effects of overeating. The body just keeps on swelling and you have no control. That is an indication of lack of inner indiscipline. When you cannot sleep and wake up on time, it is also an indication of lack of inner indiscipline.

I will give you my example. My biggest problem when I was young was my sleep. When I used to sleep, bombs could go off and I would not wake up. It was such deep sleep. Many times, my guru brothers would pick up my whole chowkie and put it out on the road, beyond the boundaries of the ashram, surrounded by honking cars and bicycles, mooing cows and rickshaw-wallahs looking to see who was sleeping there. I had no control over my sleep and it made me suffer too as I missed many good opportunities. I really felt it, ‘What am I doing here wasting my time, I can’t even get up like everyone else at four am.’ I tried, but after one week I could not do it. Too tired. Then I heard a satsang of Sri Swamiji in which he said, “You have to train yourself gradually.”

I started thinking, ‘How do I train myself gradually? Either I do it or I don’t do it. What is this gradual thing that he is talking about?’ So I asked him, “Swamiji, what is the meaning of gradual?” He said, “Little by little. Small steps at a time. Not big steps. Baby steps at a time.” Then I started to think, ‘How will I apply these baby steps to overcome my overpowering sleep habit?’ Suddenly one day, the answer came. One student had come with an alarm clock. When I saw it, I was very impressed. I am talking of the 1960s. After the student had completed the course and was leaving, I

asked him, “Can I keep the alarm clock?” He said, “Sure you can.” It was one of those folding ones. My waking up time was eight o’clock. For the first week I put the alarm to 7:55 am. The second week I put it at 7:50 am. The third week 7:45 am. The fourth week 7:40. Each week I reduced five minutes of my sleep until I came to four o’clock. Gradually, step by step, effortlessly, without any tiredness, with perfect ease. If I had struggled with myself, ‘No, I have to do this, I have to do this’, my mind would have defeated me. I might have won the battle, but I would have lost the war. By following this method, I might have lost a few battles but eventually I won the war.

In this way, the mind has to be retrained. Psychologists now say that if you cannot sleep, don’t count sheep anymore. If you count more than a hundred sheep, there is something wrong with your brain and mind. You should be able to sleep before you reach fifty. If you cannot sleep even after counting hundred, get up, walk around, read something, engage yourself in some way, and ten minutes later go back to bed and try to sleep. Don’t just remain in bed turning and tossing. Again engage yourself and become active for some time, and then go back to bed to sleep. These things that people are saying now are ways in which people have lived in the past due to their common sense, due to their ability to observe life.

Today there are people who don’t even know where their armpit is. It is true. Once, after a yoga nidra class, a person from an English-speaking country raised the arm and said, “Swamiji, where is armpit?” People don’t know the names of body parts as they have never connected with their bodies. Many people don’t know that they have toes until they practise yoga nidra. They do everything yet never become aware of their body parts individually. The awareness is absent and it has to be built up gradually. That training has to be given. The cravings have to become less, the body has to become healthy, sleep has to improve, the whole lifestyle has to be regulated.



Yoga was always a lifestyle, not a practice. You think of yoga as practice since you go to a yoga studio or to a teacher one hour per week or two days per week. Therefore for you it has become an activity of the classroom, but in reality it is not an activity, it is a lifestyle. Today walking and jogging have become activities, whereas previously they were part of the lifestyle. The lifestyle has changed; therefore, they have become 'activities' in your routine. That idea has to change in your mind. You have to see lifestyle as a whole and ask how you can improve this whole thing. Starting with hatha yoga is a good option.

### **A judicious flow**

Hatha yoga is a sequential practice. There is perfect logic behind the practices of shatkarma, asana and pranayama. In yoga, each statement follows, supports and enhances the next one, and that is the beauty of yoga. Nothing is taken as an isolated subject, everything merges into the next topic. The body merges into prana, prana merges into mind, mind merges into consciousness, consciousness merges into spirit.

The purpose of asanas in hatha yoga is *sthairyam*, stability, and *dridhata*, firmness. The purpose of pranayama is *dhairyam*, patience, and *laghavam*, lightness. The purpose of mudras and bandhas is *dridhata*, firmness. The purpose of pratyahara is *dhairyam*, patience.

There are many mudras. There are *natya mudras*, which are used in dance to depict a mood or an expression. There are *dhyana mudras* which are used in meditation. There are *bandha mudras* which are used to remove the energy blocks. Bandhas are actually mudras. There is no category of bandha, in classical literature they are known as bandha mudras. In this way, there are many classifications of mudras. There are control mudras, ashwini mudra, vajroli mudra, sahajoli mudra. There are granthi mudras, which affect the granthis directly. Therefore, mudras have to be used in the context of the practice. The book *Mudra Vigyan*, 'The Science of Mudra', covers a lot of ground in describing how mudras work and what is their purpose and function.

**Swamiji, you talked about how to reduce sleep. My question is, how to increase sleep? I sleep five hours a day and do a yoga nidra in the afternoon, and I feel fresh, I don't have any sleep issues. Is that okay?**

That is fine. Some people need less sleep by temperament, you might be one of them. If you don't feel sleep-deprived, it is fine. That is your natural state. It is like blood pressure. The range given is 80/120, which is called the universal range. Many people don't have 80/120, they can be 85/125, 90/130, and that is also normal. It differs from person to person. Researches show an average, they don't take individuals into account; they take numbers into account. When you take individuals into account, then according to your tendency, you can require more or less hours of sleep. The same is true of food. Some people need to eat a lot, some people don't.

# Make the Transition

*26 April 2019*



**Please guide as to how we should start and progress with chakra awareness and visualization.**

That is not the subject of this course. Hatha yoga deals with chakras in the fourth module, not in the first or the second. Right now you only have an intellectual concept of chakras, not a clear understanding. As we progress through the hatha yoga modules, a clear understanding of the role of chakras will emerge.

People think of chakras as psychic centres containing psychic powers. Chakras are much more than that. Your life is managed by four chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata. These are active in everyone.

Mooladhara represents procreation, sensuality, the desire to be attractive, to be wanted, to connect in the outer dimension. However, there are also other dimensions with which you are not familiar. Even in the outer dimension you are not familiar with all the aspects of human behaviour corresponding to a chakra.

If you concentrate on a chakra now, it is like a child listening to a fairy-tale and fantasizing about it: “I can visualize the prince, the princess, the golden tree, the silver stream of water, the flying horse.” It is the same with chakras. You can say, “Oh, mooladhara. It has four petals, I am visualizing it, I am concentrating on it,” and suddenly you feel a tingling. Then you will be running to me, “Swamiji, I’m getting this tingling in my mooladhara. What do I do?” There should be no need for you to run to me. That awareness, understanding and knowledge should be there as part of the learning, as a natural outcome of the progression in hatha yoga.

**During yoga practice, the colours in chidakasha keep on changing. Do these colours represent activation of different chakras?**

Don’t be obsessed with chakras. The colours will change as a natural process. When you look at something, there is always an after-image in your chidakasha which has the opposite colour. When you close your eyes, a bright image that you see outside will flash inside also but it will have the opposite colour. What is green outside will be seen as red inside, what is blue outside will be seen as yellow inside, and so on. Therefore, the colours will keep on changing.

At the beginning the colours that you see in chidakasha are just retinal impressions. When the retinal impressions subside, then psychological impressions emerge. When they subside, then psychic impressions emerge, samskaras and karmas emerge. When they subside, then shanti emerges and when shanti becomes stable, illumination takes place. It’s a long way to go, don’t worry.

**Is air the only source of prana and does pollution reduce prana in the air? Is breathing the only way to assimilate prana?**

This is a subject that I have been thinking about. I do feel that the concentration of prana shakti is in the air. It is available in other things also: the food that you consume has prana shakti, the greens that you eat have prana shakti. In some food items there is more protein, in others more carbohydrate. If you want protein and you are a vegetarian, you go for nuts and peanuts. If you are a non-vegetarian, you can opt for eggs and other things that have high protein. In the same manner, there is more concentration of prana in the air.

The prana in the air is also dependent on weather patterns. If there is rain and thunder, the environment changes. There is more prana in the air due to the electrical charge in the air, due to negative ions: electrically charged particles of air. As the heat increases, the negative ions become positive ions. There is less of electrical charge in them so the body does not get that zing, you feel sluggish, lethargic, sleepy. On a hot day you feel sleepy, but if there is a thunderstorm, again you will be upright and alert as the body is responding to the electricity in the environment, the electrical charges in the air particles. If the air particles are pure, they retain more charge. If the air particles are polluted, they retain less charge.

As the air pollution increases in the coming decades and centuries and the air that you breathe becomes impure, it may not be advisable to practise pranayama anymore. In the 1980s, scientists had taken samples of air from all different sources possible: the top of Mt Everest, the middle of an ocean, the middle of the Sahara Desert, towns, cities, forests, and they said that they found pollution everywhere. There was not a single area of the planet which could be said to have pure, clean air. In the future, as chemical pollutants, industrial pollutants, human pollutants and all other emissions clog the purity of the environment, pranayama

practice will have to be cancelled or set aside for a time when the air is clean again. That will happen. But then, there are also other ways to receive prana.

The body has to become like a magnet. If you place a nail north-south and hit its head a hundred times with a hammer, the nail will become magnetic. It may not be as strong as a real magnet, but it will have magnetic properties. It will be able to attract some pieces of iron-filings, not a great many but definitely a few will be pulled. Just as the atoms in a nail can be realigned to become magnetic in nature, the atoms of the body need to be realigned to become magnetic in nature. That can happen through the practice of hatha yoga.

I gave you the example of Swami Nadabrahmananda who did not breathe for one hour while playing the tabla. There was no oxygen going in yet he was active, as his body was attracting prana from all sources, not just through the breath. His skin had become like a blotting paper which soaks in the ink or like a sponge which soaks in water. That is possible through hatha yoga. Therefore, even if it is not possible to practise pranayama, if you are able to master the practice of hatha yoga to a certain extent, I believe the body will be able to take prana from the atmosphere without the need of closing the nostrils. It will create a result where the lungs attract those pranic particles.

**In yoga nidra can we choose the pratyaya we want to work on? Can we replace the last negative one with a previously pleasant one?**

Why not? Have a go, try if you can. Sankalpa has that function also. When you make a sankalpa and stick to it, you are actually creating a pratyaya, a conditioning of thought which is positive, optimistic, hopeful, uplifting and good in every respect. Therefore, sankalpa is the creation of a pratyaya as well.

### **Human evolution and yoga**

Our discussion has been on the history of development of yoga. In this context, it was mentioned that if the timespan of

emergence of human life in antiquity to today is considered a twenty-four-hour period, then for twenty-three hours and forty minutes we lived the hunter-gatherer, nomadic life. It was during this period that enquiries started and became the foundation-stones of knowledge, experience and discovery. The first enquiry was in relation to me, the body: 'Who am I?' In relation to the environment and nature: 'Where am I?' In relation to the universe: 'What is all that?' And in relation to the source: 'Who created all this?' These are the four main enquiries, and they gave birth to spiritual thoughts: 'There is some higher power. There is a system. There is a span of life. There is a progression. There is a sequence.' Everything was noticed.

The spiritual culture first developed at a time when the lifestyle was mobile. No apartments, homes, luxury or comfort. It was a spartan life, which gave birth to *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness. While the general society shifted from nomadic to agricultural society, a few people who were entranced by the idea of natural life and spiritual life carried on the tradition of *aparigraha*. In every tradition of the world, you will find monks and priests who lived a nomadic life of *aparigraha*. They lived a life free from material accumulation and burdens to devote their time to thinking, experiencing and understanding the answers to the four basic questions, out of which all philosophies and religions evolved.

Even today, the sadhus in India follow that nomadic lifestyle. There are two groups of sadhus in India: those who follow the path of dharma and those who follow the path of renunciation. Those who follow the path of dharma belong to a *parampara*, tradition, and those who follow renunciation are the thousands who wander the streets of the country. What are the possessions of those thousands? I am not talking of their intention; I am talking of their possessions. They have nothing. They don't even know from where they will get their next meal. They don't even know where they will be at the same time the next day. It is a free and natural life. This nomadic tradition is still carrying on as it contained a

vibrant spiritual thought pattern, which eventually became the philosophies, beliefs and religions.

For twenty-three hours and forty minutes, we lived the spiritual lifestyle where we connected with *sat*, truth. Then, as people settled, agrarian communities formed. These were small, tribal communities, small villages comprising of five or ten people. They started making walls for protection and defence. As people settled down, there was more time. So what to do with their free time? They were used to continuous movement, now they had plenty of free time. How to compensate for the urge to move, and yet be still? The idea of exercise evolved. All the physical cultures evolved in this period, the agrarian age. All the martial arts developed at this time. These were not necessary in the prior age.

Now, with the static lifestyle, dynamism had to be created in the body to compensate for all the hours they used to spend walking and running. Complex postures came up. Who would have thought that the scorpion pose would be a good thing to do? They discovered all that and developed a physical culture which gave them physical discipline and ensured that the little lethargies and weaknesses that they were beginning to feel were managed. The emergence of yoga took place in these two periods: first as a spiritual culture, second as a material culture.

### **Influence of chakras**

Human beings live only four chakras. For a normal person, only mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata are active. They are not active spiritually, internally or psychically. They are active sensorial and mentally; they send energies to the senses and mind. The energies are not directed in but out. When mooladhara is active, the pleasing, the sensual, the attraction, the love and belonging aspects of life are highlighted. 'I am needed', 'I want people to feel me' is highlighted. You want to make yourself more appealing. The concept of beauty is connected with the concept of sensuality and sexuality. This is mooladhara. We are not going into



the psychology or functionality of the chakras. This is just to indicate that mooladhara is active in everyone every day, every moment; even now it is not sleeping.

Swadhisthana, representing fear and insecurity, is active in everyone. It is active at the tamasic and material level, just as mooladhara is active at the tamasic and material level. When swadhisthana is active at the material, tamasic level, then all fears, insecurities, inhibitions, complexes and phobias are highlighted. They tell you that by becoming like this or that, you can cling on to your feelings of security and safety.

In the early days, sabre-tooth tigers used to cause fear. Today it is FOMO, 'fear of missing out'. You are always checking your mobile phone, 'What did I miss? What did I miss?' The fear of not being accepted socially is highlighted. If you don't receive a 'like' on your posts, you mind it, that's your fear. The expression of fear has changed. In the past human beings were afraid of animals. Today you are afraid of social media. The fear is still there and is being expressed in every aspect of life. When you work your Facebook, that is your swadhisthana working your fear and insecurity.

Similarly, manipura is active in everyone. The cravings, wants and desires are endless. There is a drive

for accumulation, the anti-aparigraha tendency. From a dysfunctional pen given to you by somebody eighty years ago to old pairs of shoes which you have never worn to all the memorabilia gathering dust in your attic, you keep them all thinking they are connected to your life. They represent the craving, *ahara*, *manipura*, and you are living it every day.

Anahata connects to *nidra*, relaxation, sleep. When your heart is content, you are all right; when the heart begins to beat faster, you are disturbed. Being perfectly at ease is *nidra*. The state of anxiety, disturbance, is the waking state.

You live the four chakras every day, every moment of your life, and all their expressions are external, connected to *tamas*. All the tentacles go out and latch on to something outside your boundary. That is the world and that is where you are.

If you analyze the yogic practices properly, you will discover that improvement in life takes place when you are able to manage these four chakras, not when you practise *surya namaskara*, the shoulderstand or *agnisara kriya*. When you make the effort to remove the distressing spikes of *tamas* and they become less sharp, you begin to connect to *sattwa*. You poke and hurt other people less. When the spikes are sharp, there is hurt; when they become blunt, they don't hurt. They might tickle but they don't hurt. Once they become flat, all ups and downs are gone, then it is complete ease and comfort.

People speak about the awakening of *kundalini*. The *kundalini* awakens in the *sattwa* state, when all the bumps are gone. Awakening of *chakra* is the awakening from *tamas*. To wean you away from *tamas*, the *rajas* qualities become activated. They pull you away from the *tamas* and propel you towards *sattwa*. When you have gone through *sattwa*, then *kundalini* follows track. This is possible through the yogic discipline of *hatha yoga*.

## **Two perspectives of hatha yoga**

As mentioned previously, there are two schools of *hatha yoga*. One for the recluse represented in *Gheranda Samhita*, in which the description of *hatha yoga* is philosophical. The progression

is the same: shatkarma, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dhyana and samadhi. However, it describes different states, practices and techniques of meditation and six stages of samadhi which are different from Patanjali's samadhi. This is hatha yoga for recluse sannyasins, and it goes up to samadhi.

In Swatmarama's *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the emphasis is on the body, not on spiritual ideas. It takes you through shatkarma, to asana-pranayama, to mudra-bandha, to one practice of nadanusandhana, one practice of meditation and descriptions of mooladhara and sahasrara. It does not talk of higher meditations. What was not needed for civilian society was taken out by Swatmarama, and from spirituality the emphasis shifted to the physical body, as that was the need. The presentation changed.

What we have done until 2013 was to go through the practices of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, which became the book commonly referred to. In the second chapter of yoga, along with *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, we are also introducing the principles and practices given in *Gheranda Samhita*. These are two different literatures. Read both to know the difference. Although both deal with hatha yoga, there is a main point of difference. One deals with prana and the other deals with mind. Which book deals with which, let that be your research.

### **The lame and the blind**

There are two aspects of life: the mental and the energetic. The mental relates to thinking, planning, desires, ideas and thoughts. The mind is like a physically-challenged person who does not have limbs yet has eyesight. The mind cannot move by itself, though it can think, plan, desire, expect. All these are mental processes. Prana is like the blind person whose limbs are fully functional. Prana can run, walk, pick up things, do everything, yet prana is blind, it cannot see. One hatha yoga book defines how to deal with the mental process of the four chakras while the other one speaks of prana.

How does prana work? An example: you have an old memory, doesn't matter whether good or bad. You cannot

forget that memory even if you want to. Why? You forget so many things, yet you cannot let go of this particular memory. Hatha yoga gives a beautiful answer. Memory is definitely a mental activity, a mental condition. However, memory will not die until you remove prana from it. You can analyze the memory, transform it, make it positive by practising pratipaksha bhavana and so on, yet you cannot eliminate it. It continues to be alive as it has prana. The samskaras come alive when they have prana. Mental abilities become functional when prana is infused into them. Thoughts become functional when prana goes into them.

What you need to realize is that the processes for mind and energy have to be done simultaneously. Many of you have been practising antar mouna as a practice of meditation. You sit down, see the condition of your mind, your mental state. If you are disturbed, you find out why you are disturbed. You pick up a thought, and analyze its rationality or irrationality. You go through a deep intellectual process and say to the thought, 'I have acknowledged you, I have seen you, now please go.' You push the thought away. In this entire process, you are dealing only with your mind. You are not dealing with your pranas yet. Therefore, although you have acknowledged the thought, you have not removed it. This training is given in hatha yoga. Hatha yoga is where pranic pratyahara, pranic dharana and pranic dhyana is taught. Where mental pratyahara, mental dharana and mental dhyana is practised, that is raja yoga.

It is understandable why two different approaches are given within the body of hatha yoga. The yogis and ascetics who perform meditation for long periods of time, need to clear their blackboard. They have to take the prana away from every memory, so everything dies. In the years 2007–2009, when people would go to Rikhiapeth for Sri Swamiji's darshan, he used to say publicly, "Don't mind it if I don't recognize you, because I am wiping my blackboard clean. All my identifications, associations, recognitions, connections, I am wiping them clear. You might have been my friend for

fifty years but once I wipe out your name from my mind, you are a stranger again to me. I am clearing my blackboard.” There came a time when he had cleared his blackboard completely. There was no association, no attachment of any kind, with anyone, for any reason. Nothing. He had become a *jivanmukta*, a liberated person. That was because he took the prana away from memory. If the memories were there and prana was not removed, identifications and associations would still be highlighted and prominent. That is an example of the ascetic’s sadhana. Your sadhana is not that of removing the prana. Your sadhana is acknowledging and releasing, not wiping clear. Wiping clear entails a much stronger commitment, a much stronger personality, and a different intention and lifestyle.

### **Live and propagate yogic lifestyle**

The final point is: hatha yoga is a lifestyle. It is not a practice or an activity. In a sedentary lifestyle, the effort that is made is called activity. Why have a sedentary lifestyle? It is better to experience life in its full glory, experience all the qualities of head, heart and hands, of creativity and harmony. For this, an integrated approach has to be taken.

Generally people come to yoga when they are undergoing some difficulty or problem. Whether it is stress, a physical condition, or some other kind of problem, they come to yoga for relief, and they are helped. Then they go away. There is no change in their lifestyle. They come for the purpose of therapy and cure. However, yoga is not limited to managing the ills that you are confronting. It is not therapy or stress management. It is an intervention at that time to bring you back into the state of relaxation and comfort, yet it is not therapy. Ultimately, from the therapeutic and curative, you have to come to the preventive, and then to the promotive. When you are able to make a habit of promoting the good, then that becomes a lifestyle.

We are not looking at the preventive, ‘If I do this now, I will avoid getting sick in the future.’ We are not looking

at the curative, 'I am suffering from stress, anxiety, chronic fatigue disorder, what can I do to find betterment?' You may apply yoga to help the condition, but ultimately, to make yoga a part of your lifestyle and derive its full benefit, it has to become promotive. Practise it in order to promote your complete wellbeing, not merely to rectify a fault in your system, your mind or your attitude.

In lifestyle, it is practice plus mind plus attitude plus action. Everything has to come together, and that is how it was in the past. It was common to do the minor dhautis in the morning. They take five minutes. While you brush your teeth, do the other dhautis too, and you will see the difference within one week. You will experience the improvement in your body organs. Don't limit yourself to asana and pranayama. Include the cleansing practices. Live a yogic lifestyle and you will discover that in one month you will ooze health rather than seek health. Right now you are seeking health, then you will be oozing health.

The understanding and application of yoga has to change in your life. It is not classroom training. Those who only teach in classrooms are people who go through the books but have not actually experienced yoga. In the second chapter, the attempt is to bring the other vision of yoga into life. You have to begin by applying it little by little. Even if you are able to apply one item at a time, life will change qualitatively. Even if you are able to apply *manahprasad*, being happy during the day, life will take a drastic turn.

If you look at the condition of the world today, everyone seems to be regressing more and more into deep instincts every day. There is less application of knowledge and wisdom, more identification with anxiety and stress and less with peace. There is more identification with discord and less with cooperation. The only way to maintain your sanity in the future is for you to begin to develop a good routine now, and for that you need to work with yourself. At the same time, you also need to propagate this ideal and samskara to other people. That is your responsibility.

# Rules of the Journey

*27 April 2019*



To understand hatha yoga, there are two ideas you need to be clear about: ida and pingala. The word ‘hatha’ is composed of two sounds, *Ha* and *Tha*, which are the bija mantras of ida and pingala. When they come together, they are read as ‘*ha-tha*’. Many Indians translate hatha as forcefulness, so they have the idea that hatha yoga is a practice in which you force your body into a posture. With that idea, the emphasis is more on force rather than on practice. In fact, it is one of the biggest misconceptions about hatha yoga that Indians have. Those from other countries are more balanced in their

understanding, as they do not have any preconceived notion of the word.

When hatha yoga came into existence, the yogis were not thinking about using force but mind and prana. The body is the playground for mind and prana, which are both cosmic and individual in nature. In the cosmos, universe, space, there is mind and there is prana. However, they are experienced differently. As individuals, we are also composed of mind and prana, which we live and experience in the physical body.

### **Prana of body and mind**

There are two aspects of prana. The gross prana is experienced as the physical force, physical vitality, and is called *prana shakti*. The subtle prana moves the mind and is known as *chitta shakti*. The manifest prana in the senses, the physical body, the sense organs is the vital energy, prana shakti. The subtle prana working behind the curtain, doing all the thinking, rationalizing, planning, wanting, deciding, desiring, is chitta shakti. It is not mental force; it is the force of chitta. The term used is chitta shakti, not manah shakti. Chitta is a deeper layer of mind from where the samskaras and karmas, the impressions, manifest. It is the latent and subtle power which makes you into a person, gives you a nature, a personality, a mind-set and habits. Thus, that which modifies the mental dimension is chitta shakti, and that which modifies the physical dimension is prana shakti. The two are seen as ida and pingala.

There are five major physical pranas and there are also five major mental pranas. There are five minor physical pranas and there are also five minor mental pranas. The different levels of mental prana have not been spoken about by people as yet. Just as the body is controlled by prana in five different forms: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana, the mind is also controlled by five different pranas. The entire mental function and jurisdiction is governed by five subtle pranas. And just as the minor physical pranas reflect

the autonomic functions of the body, the minor chitta pranas represent the modifications of the mental dimension.

As a practitioner of yoga or as an enquirer, have you ever wondered or thought about that when the body is spoken about, five types of prana are described? Yet when the mind is spoken about, nobody describes the different dimensions of prana. Why? Because people don't know it. It is a process of pranic experience. The mind is a pranic experience as well. Pingala represents the five physical pranas and ida represents the five mental pranas. Pingala is connected with the sympathetic nervous system. Ida is connected with the parasympathetic nervous system in the physical body. When there is activity, pingala, or the solar energy, becomes dominant. When there is relaxation, the passive, lunar energy becomes dominant. In the physical dimension, ida and pingala represent the active and rest periods of the body. In the mental dimension, they represent the extrovert and introvert natures. The extrovert nature is pingala and the introvert nature is ida. In this way, the whole perception of the body is divided into ida perception or experience and pingala perception or experience. When we say 'ida-pingala', we are referring to both: the pranic and the mental, the gross and the subtle. Finding a balance and harmony between the two is the focus of hatha yoga.

### **Attitudinal practice**

Hatha yoga is not only a physical practice, it is also an attitudinal practice. This aspect is covered through the yamas and niyamas. Those who consider themselves knowledgeable about yoga will proudly proclaim that there are five yamas and five niyamas in yoga. Then they will proudly proclaim that Patanjali has described five yamas and five niyamas, which every yogi must know. That understanding is incorrect. There are many yamas and niyamas beyond the five. Each yoga has its own yamas and niyamas.

You are practitioners of hatha yoga. Do you know how many yamas and niyamas there are in hatha yoga? There

are twenty yamas and twenty niyamas in the hatha yogic tradition. These are attitudes or conditions that you create voluntarily and wilfully to bring in a positive, qualitative change in your life. They are not to be considered as ethical or moral codes of conduct.

A positive expression in life cannot be defined as ethical or moral code of conduct. Those who have disconnected from positivity and the beauty of life, who are engaged in self-destructive, dissipated actions and behaviours, can think that to be good is to impose a condition or discipline on the mind, and therefore the yamas and niyamas are morality and ethics. However, as a yogi, if you connect with sattwa, and the best qualities manifest in your life and your garden becomes beautiful, that does not make you into a moralist or an ethical person. It makes you a human being.

It is another misconception that yamas and niyamas are moral and ethical codes of yoga. No, they are the natural expressions of an enlightened mind. You have to go through that process and you have to express the enlightenment. Enlightenment is expressed when there is positivity flowing in you and emanating from you. That positivity is identified in the yamas and niyamas.

During this program, we have spoken on the yama of manahprasad. Is it an ethical and moral code of conduct, or is it just learning to be happy in life? However, to be happy in life, you have to make the effort, just as to make another person happy you have to make the effort. If you have to make someone smile, you have to smile yourself. That effort is both ways. It requires cooperation, connection and an expression of the positive. Therefore, yamas and niyamas represent the attitudinal correction that you need to make in your life. It is altering the output of the mind from the tamasic to the positive and the sattwic.

### **Supports for sadhana**

The yamas and niyamas should be understood in the right perspective, for they become the tools by which it is possible

to bring together prana and mind. Prana and mind come together when you are able to live a yama, as it represents the culmination of the effort to tweak one aspect of your nature, personality or mind-set.

In hatha yoga, the yamas and niyamas also aim at introducing the idea of sanyam. Example: *mitahara* or appropriate eating. It has been defined as a yama. When it is said that mitahara must be followed, it indicates that you have to become aware of what you eat. You have to choose the right food for your health and vitality. You have to be aware of the impact of junk food and of naturally-cooked food on your body. When you eat junk food, the pranas are depleted so there is more craving to replenish the prana. Therefore, you keep eating and eating. You know the outcome well. Agreed that it is not practical or possible for everyone to completely regulate the diet. Yet it is a yama of hatha yoga, as hatha yoga is aimed at purification and detoxification. Here, food awareness has to be there: what you should eat, how much you should eat, how to keep the digestion healthy and proper, when is the digestion unhealthy and improper and what to do about it.

Over-consumption and less consumption are equally detrimental for the body. Mitahara means the correct understanding of eating what is appropriate for the body's health and wellbeing. When you are practising hatha yoga, this is the main yama that you need to follow. It complements hatha yoga and it increases your awareness towards health, food and diet. It makes you more aware of what you need to consume in order to optimize your health.

Your actions and speech are generally mismatched. You speak of change yet you are a slave to your habits. People who suffer from diabetes take insulin to lower their sugar level and continue to eat sweets, believing that the injection they are taking is balancing their sugar. They don't change their habit. There is a mismatch between action and intention. If you can avoid sugar and treat the body, in the course of time you will become victorious over the illness. If you think, 'I can

eat my sweets and I can also balance it out with medication and injection', that is abusing the body for which you will suffer later on. This is an example of practising a yama that supports the sadhana.

### **Progressing in yoga**

The practice has to become a sadhana and not remain a practice. There is a progression in yoga training and learning. When you come to yoga for the first time, you come with a reason: to manage certain conditions that you are unable to manage through your normal routine, to manage stress levels that you cannot manage by any other means, to manage illnesses when all other interventions and therapies have failed. Then you say, 'Okay let us try yoga as the last resort.' You come to a yoga class and spend some time doing your practices. Your intention is to help yourself. You sustain the practice for one month, two months, six months, maybe one year. Once your requirement is met, you automatically distance yourself from yoga, as that was your intention. Your intention was not to become spiritual, contrary to what the teacher was thinking.

This is the biggest mistake that every yoga teacher makes. When people come to their class, they think, 'Oh another person has come to become spiritual' and they play this game of holier-than-thou. The person who has come for the yoga class thinks, 'Am I here to become spiritual or am I here to de-stress myself?' Teachers do not recognize why students have come to their class. Even teachers present here do not.

When people first come to yoga, they do not come with a spiritual intention or inclination and they find the holier-than-thou attitude of the yoga teacher peculiar. The teacher will speak so softly that the students can hardly hear them conveying peace and beauty. The student thinks, 'What am I doing here?' while the teacher thinks, 'Oh I have made a big impact on my student. Now the student is mine!'

The point is, people come to yoga to use the practice for a specific reason and once the purpose is over, they move on.



But there are some people who develop an interest in yoga and want to explore and experiment with it. When yoga is only a practice, which is at the initial stage when you come for your own reason, then the attitude is, 'This is my expectation, this is what I want to achieve from yoga.' However, when the interest is developed then you want to know, 'How do I control my chitta vritti? How do I meditate? How do I do this? How do I do that?' You pick up an idea of yoga, 'How do I awaken my chakra?' and try to explore it. Just as people ask me every day, 'What is a chakra? How can I awaken it?' That inquisitiveness makes you pick a topic; it interests you and motivates you to enquire. If you are true and sincere to that, then you become a yoga sadhaka, for now you are not pursuing your own aspiration, thoughts and ideas; you are trying to experience a thought or idea conveyed by yoga. There is a greater and deeper interaction with the subject.

As you imbibe yoga more and more, you move into the third aspect where yoga does not remain a classroom teaching any more but becomes a natural expression of life. This is when it becomes a part of your lifestyle. You begin to live yoga. Ultimately, yoga becomes a culture of your life.

Thus the four stages of progression are: yoga practice, yoga sadhana, yogic lifestyle, and yoga culture. In yoga practice, flirt with yoga as much as you like and get out. In yoga sadhana, decide a goal for yourself and like an arrow fly true to the goal with conviction, sincerity and seriousness. In yoga lifestyle, live those principles, precepts, understandings. Promote wellbeing in your life rather than fire-fight problems; promote physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing; live that heightened, healthy life of body and mind. When you express the positive and the creative in you, then you express the yogic culture which is harmonious and balanced. This is the progression of yoga.

Ninety percent of people are stuck in the practice part, and they are the people who sustain all the yoga teachers in the world by giving them money for the classes. Out of the remaining ten percent, some think about the possibility of exploring yoga vidya and some start exploring. Out of them a few make yoga into a lifestyle, and out of them a few express yoga as a culture.

### **The path of sadhana**

The Bihar School of Yoga is no longer in the business of propagating yoga. It is not concerned with yoga practice any more. For that there are many teachers globally who can teach you better. We are now focusing on experiencing yoga as sadhana and as lifestyle. That is the focus of the second chapter of BSY. Keeping this in mind, if you want these Yātras of yoga vidya to take you into progressive experiences of yoga where you are able to explore the creative dimension of your nature and live that, certain changes have to be made in life. An indication is given in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:14), in relation to what kind of an attitude you should have towards sadhana:

*Sa tu deerghakala nairantarya satkara sevito dridha bhoomihi.*

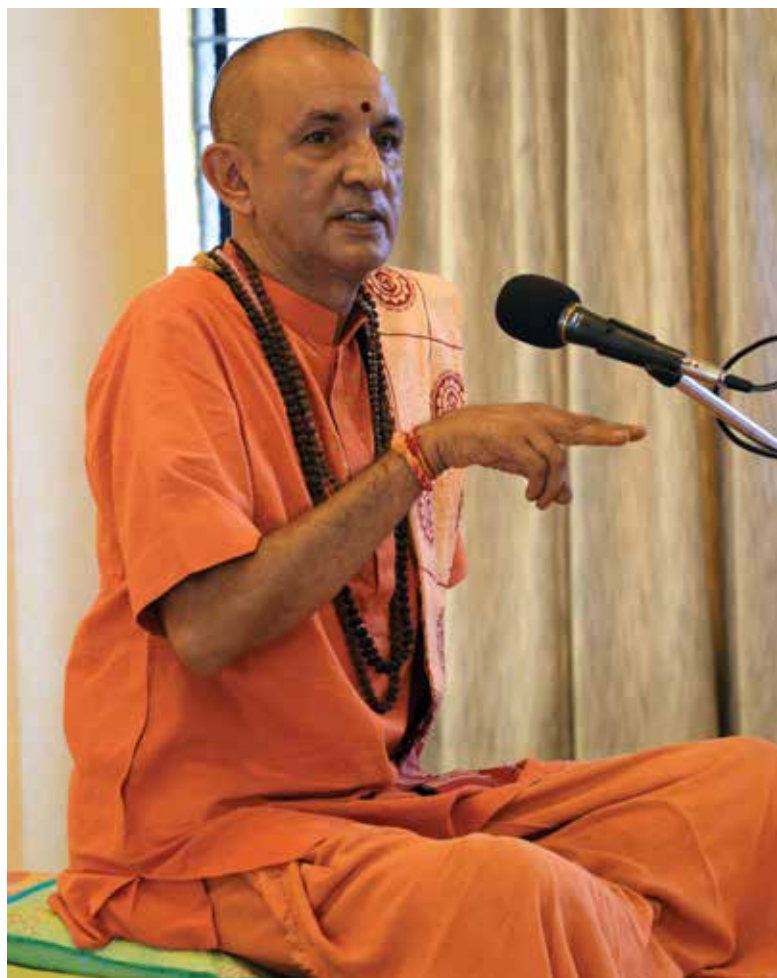
The sloka says that to embark on the path of sadhana, first of all be convinced that you are going to do it and also be convinced about the process and the result. There has to be

clarity and conviction. When you embark on a drive, you have a map charted out in front and you start the journey with the conviction, 'If I follow this route, I will arrive at my destination.' In the same manner, when you start your yogic journey, it has to be with the conviction, 'I will attain my goal.' That conviction requires you to have faith in yourself and trust in the teacher. Without this, learning does not take place. Without this, everything is information and you can flounder.

Information becomes knowledge when it follows the right sequence and somebody has to tell you that sequence, that connection. Information becomes knowledge and wisdom when experience is added to the sequence or the procedure. This applies to yoga also. You can read all the books, all the four hundred books of BSY, yet that is only information. You cannot achieve anything with that information, for the correctness of the procedure will not be known to you. You may definitely attempt the practices and say, "It is written like this in the book." However, unless you apply your common sense and wisdom to recognize your abilities and limitations, the book cannot do anything.

If you apply your common sense and wisdom, then the book can become a guide, not a teacher. If you live in a fantasy about yourself, wanting to be illuminated and self-realized while living a normal life and doing nothing for it, then it is not going to happen. You don't have the clarity on what you need to do. You are like little children, "I want that, I want that, I want that." "Kundalini, oh yes, I want to awaken it. How do I do it? Teach me." Then you practise hundreds of rounds of kapalbhati and all the head-trips begin. You are unable to recognize those head-trips and you don't know what to do. You have the information but no understanding or experience. Therefore, conviction is a primary quality for a sadhaka: 'What I am doing is correct, for it will take me to my desired goal.'

The second idea is: *nairantarya*, which means continuously. You do your mantra, as an example, for one week and say,



‘Oh, wonderful.’ Then one day you say, ‘Today I am feeling tired, I will not do it.’ A break happens. The second day, ‘I am a bit rushed today.’ Another break happens. The moment you stop something, the strands begin to break and the rope becomes weak.

Regularity is a must. There are people who ask, “If there is a break in my sadhana, I feel guilty. What do I do about it?” Option number one, don’t have a break. Why do you want

to feel guilty? First you break your sadhana, then you say, “I am feeling guilty because of my desire to break.” It is your own fault. Therefore, conviction comes in first and regularity comes in next. If you have to gossip, you will not bother about time. If you have to sit and do your mantra for five minutes, you will say, “I don’t have the time.” When you while away your time, you don’t look at your watch, but for five minutes of meditation it is, “I don’t have the time.” Where is your feeling, conviction, sankalpa?

Conviction is a primary yama of yoga sadhana and regularity is the second. If your food habits are irregular, you will not enjoy good health. For some time, your body may be able to sustain it, but eventually you will destroy the body. Irregular sleep will alter the brain and mind functions. Similarly, irregular yoga practice will take you one step forward and two steps backward. There will be regression. You can try and experiment. The body will not build its own memories.

Every act you do builds a memory. There is not only intellectual memory and visual memory, but also muscle memory. Through sustained and regular practice, if you are able to build the muscle memory of an asana, your body will respond in a unique way. It will be completely harmonious and coordinated. It is sustained practice that develops it. When you go to a gym, you sustain your practice until you become Mr Universe. If you go to the gym one day a week, then not go for a week, again go for two days, will you be able to build up anything? No. Then why this half-hearted practice of yoga and yet you expect the biggest achievement? It is not going to happen. Regularity is a rule of sadhana: unbroken practice.

The third rule is: doing it for a long period, as perfection does not come in a day. You have to make the effort to master the subject. Until you master the subject, don’t leave it. That is the meaning of ‘long period’: the length of mastery.

These are the three basic rules of hatha yoga. When you begin to build them up, they are applied in other yogas as

well. Once the three rules are incorporated in your normal day-to-day practice, you will notice that your yoga practice has become a sadhana. Your mind will be much more focused and clear, your body much more responsive and healthy, your pranas much more vibrant. Your mind will also be much more relaxed. It will have a greater ability to manage its own expressions and those of the senses. It will be able to handle interactions and relationships better. There will be an overall improvement, not only spiritual but also material and social.

**You said yesterday that to forget something we need to remove the prana. Is there a way to put prana into a thought so that we can remember it? For example, if we hear the satsang now, how can we put prana into it?**

The reason prana is locked into memories is that there is a lot of emotion attached to them. Emotion is not rational, it hooks into an experience, and emotion and prana are connected. So if you want to put prana into something positive, it cannot be an intellectual exercise. All of your feelings, all of your spirit and bhava have to go into that experience, then it can be retained. You have to put your heart into it. The connection has to be there.

If you are able to put your heart into something, it is retained as a pleasing memory. If you put your heart into a class, like you have done, this class will remain a pleasant memory for a long time. If the heart is not there, the thoughts will be different, 'Where have I come?' When the heart is there, it is, 'I am enjoying it, I am fully into it, I am one with it.' If that kind of feeling and connection can develop, 'Yes, this is it. This is what I need. I am going to go to the end', then the memory will be retained for much longer. If you can be that optimistic self, if you can give and cultivate positive emotions in a situation, then it will remain with you as a pleasant memory for a long time to come.

# The Flowing Tradition

*28 April 2019*



Our story begins with Swami Sivananda and his teachings that were propagated by Swami Satyananda. Swami Satyananda did not have his own teachings. He merely conveyed the teachings of his master, and we are on the same path: conveying the teachings of the tradition.

## **The ocean of Siva**

Swami Sivananda was an experimenter, not a believer. He would experiment with spiritual life and spiritual practices, observe his attainments and understanding, realize the effects on himself first, and then teach. That is how Swami Sivananda came to the conclusion that in the coming times, it would not be a philosophy or religion that would give solace to humankind. Instead, a discipline that incorporates body, mind and emotions would be effective. That would keep the individual on track and allow them to express the creative dimension of their nature. With this idea he said to his disciples, “Go and propagate yoga.” Yoga is not the tradition of sannyasins, yet he gave the mandate to not teach philosophy, not teach anything except yoga. He said that it is through yoga that people will be able to experience peace and harmony within and have a better control over the dissipated nature of the personality.

This was the instruction given by Swami Sivananda to his disciples who spread out in all directions and started to teach yoga. They were the first wave of yoga teachers who left the shores of India and took the vidya of yoga to other parts of the globe. Prior to them other people had spoken of yoga, however, they never taught yoga. Swami Vivekananda spoke on yoga yet he did not give a single practice. He was a theoretician, therefore people came to know of yoga as a theory. Paramahansa Yogananda introduced only kriya yoga and no other aspect of yoga. When the disciples of Swami Sivananda went out, they introduced the components of hatha yoga, raja yoga and various other yogas, and the propagation of yoga truly started. Yet, the main focus always remained on hatha yoga, as that was the yoga people could identify with in the West. Eventually, raja yoga was also introduced in the form of different meditations.

## **The river of Satyam**

In this group of disciples was also our guru, Swami Satyananda. In 1956, Swami Sivananda told Swami Satyananda to go out into the world and propagate yoga. As Swami Satyananda was

leaving, Swami Sivananda said to those present, “There goes my true successor, who will spread the light of Siva around the world.” That was the connection that Swami Sivananda had with Swami Satyananda. Just as Swami Vivekananda was identified by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Satyananda was identified by Swami Sivananda.

Swami Satyananda had a unique personality. He did not care for anybody except his guru and his guru’s mandate. This became his aim in life. In the course of time, he established the Bihar School of Yoga, which possibly became the first institution in the world to provide training in the wholistic concept of ‘yoga for head, heart and hands’. While all other yoga organizations in the world today follow one path of yoga, whether hatha yoga or raja yoga or bhakti yoga or kriya yoga or jnana yoga, BSY stands out due to its integrated approach.

Swami Satyananda believed that everything has to be done in the right proportion. When you cook a vegetable, you add one litre of water, one kilo of spinach, a tablespoon of salt and a pinch of condiments. Do you put one kilo of spinach, one litre of water and also one kilo of salt and one kilo of condiments? If you put everything in the same proportion, the meal will be unpalatable. Just as you cook a vegetable with the right quantities of oil, salt, condiments and water, yoga has to be practised in the same manner, said Swami Satyananda. To so much of asana, add so much of pranayama, so much of mudra, so much of bandha, so much of pratyahara, so much of mantra, so much of dharana, so much of relaxation, so much of karma yoga. In this way, prepare your yoga vegetable which will be tasty and palatable to you.

He established the system of Satyananda Yoga. Initially he taught us the Yoga Chakra, but society was not ready. Therefore, the whole Yoga Chakra model had to be scaled-down to what is known as Satyananda Yoga today. It is a completely valid system, as it is applicable to all people with or without spiritual inclination. If you do not have a spiritual

inclination, it does not matter. You have a yogic inclination, so practise yoga. If you have a spiritual inclination, you can also practise yoga. The Satyananda Yoga system is applicable to everyone, and it was propagated for fifty years.

### **The waves of yoga vidya**

In 2013, it was declared that the age of propagation is over. Now, with seriousness, sincerity and commitment, we have to explore the yoga vidya. To do this, from 2014 to 2018, we started reviving the training and the original intention of Swami Satyananda. Now, in five years' time, we have shifted the entire focus of yoga to sadhana and lifestyle. This is the second chapter.

I resigned from the management and administration of Ganga Darshan in 2008. I am a retired person. After my resignation, I said to my guru, "Give me the permission to walk out of Ganga Darshan." He looked at me and said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You walked out. After handing over the charge, you walked out of Ganga Darshan. I have handed over the charge, now I should walk out." He said, "Your destiny is connected to yoga and to sannyasa, and the seat of yoga and sannyasa is Munger. You will continue to live in Munger. It is not necessary for you to live in Ganga Darshan, you can live in a rented room in town, but don't leave Munger. Work for yoga, develop yoga, and work for sannyasa, develop sannyasa." In June 2009, he gave the plan of Sannyasa Peeth and then attained mahasamadhi in December 2009.

Since that time, my life has been different from the ashram's life. The ashram has provided me with a section where I live my own life. I don't come to the ashram, as I am not part of it. I do my sadhana. I do my panchagni. I explore yoga, experiment with yoga. I explore sannyasa, experiment with sannyasa, I explore sadhana, experiment with sadhana, and that is my life. I don't care whether there is water in the ashram or electricity in the ashram.

Since 2013, I have immersed myself in the sadhana of sannyasa and yoga. In this five-year period, fifty books have

been written. In fact, the intellectual contribution of BSY is unparalleled in yogic history. There are many centres and teachers but they empty their knowledge-bank after writing one or two books. Here, since we are beside the Ganga, there is a continuous flow of trying to know and explore the intention and motivation behind the yogic principles and systems. Due to this, new thoughts, ideas and interpretations, and new forms of training and learning are coming to the forefront.

I will continue to explore and teach yoga until people are ready to carry on. Then I can withdraw and do something different. So I am waiting for the right people, not those who come and go but those who come and devote their life to exploring, experimenting with, living and teaching yoga. For that, the right mind-set has to be there. Not all sannyasins are capable of doing it. For that you need to have a commitment, a focus, an understanding and not just be happy that 'I am recognized by people as a good yoga teacher.' That is the ambition of most people. So, I am still waiting for a group of people who are committed, at least fifty percent like me, if not a hundred.

### **The stream of sannyasa**

This year we also formally launched Sannyasa Peeth. It has two main functions. One is to provide a direction to sannyasins who are sincere, not the transient or curious ones but the true ones; provide training to them of the sannyasa sadhanas and lifestyle. The second relates to civilians. Inspire them to cultivate spiritual samskaras that can be lived in society. Keeping in mind these two paths, approaches and directions, we have officially commenced the programs and events of Sannyasa Peeth.

In my life, for five years I practised the panchagni sadhana, the sadhana of four fires and the sun. From January to June, light four fires, sit in the middle with the sun overhead. The temperatures soar up to eighty degrees and one has to sit there doing one's sadhana. People would find it

impossible to stand even for half minute in the vicinity of the sadhana area, the heat was so intense. The whole experience was a big revelation, for until then I lived a most dynamic life.

Hearing about the panchagni sadhana, many acharyas of the sannyasa tradition in India have expressed their desire to learn it. This year, one acharya came, stayed here for one month, learnt and practised the panchagni sadhana under our guidance and then went back. So, that work has also started from this year: training of acharyas of the sannyasa tradition into the higher sadhanas.

In addition, many vedic traditions are being revived. We have revived three yajnas in Sannyasa Peeth which nobody in India knew about, as they were last performed 5,500 years ago during Krishna's time. Since then these yajnas were not performed in Kali Yuga. After spending many hours of research, we revived these three yajnas: Pashupatastra Yajna, Narayanastra Yajna and Brahmastra Yajna. These are private invocations, not public. Only people who have that understanding and appreciation and who are not curious are allowed in. The mantras of these yajnas are being heard after 5,500 years, and that has been an achievement of Sannyasa Peeth.

Similarly, the old scriptures are being looked into. Bihar and Munger have been the seat of *Saurya tantra*, the tantra of the sun. There are five schools of tantra: Shaiva, Shakta, Saurya, Narayana and Ganapatya. Bihar and Munger are the seat of the third, the solar tantra. The king of this place was known as Suryaputra, 'son of the sun'. Most books on solar tantra were written in Bihar, including the *Chakshushopanishad*, which was written in Munger. It is the tantra of eyes and helps to improve the eyesight. We experimented with two sannyasins who wore thick glasses. They started chanting the mantras of the *Chakshushopanishad*. After one year, their eyesight improved and the number on the glasses was reduced. They continued, and one person came to the point where, at the age of eighty, he could read without glasses. These are aspects of the solar tantra.



This year we also revived the tradition of Sankranti. Every month, we celebrate the Sankranti, which falls on the fourteenth or the fifteenth day. Sankranti is sun worship. It is very good for various health issues: problems related to eyes, skin and blood are rectified by the solar tantra practices. There is a tradition in Bihar, *Chhat*, three days of sun worship. Its result is that white spots of the skin disappear and you attain a clear skin.

In this way, many things are being looked into which are ancient and traditional, and which can be applicable even today in our life. In the next five or ten years, the contribution of Sannyasa Peeth will also be immense in reviving the traditions which connect us with health, nature and the divine. The journey has started and it has been a hopeful and optimistic beginning.

These are the two paths I am introducing to you today: yoga at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, and sannyasa at Paduka Darshan Sannyasa Peeth. These are the two mandates given to me by my guru and this is the direction of Munger at present.

## IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS



### **‘TRUST’ in the process**

I am going to use an acronym to convey my thoughts: TRUST. Starting with ‘T’, the first impression that stood out for me is ‘tradition’. The satsangs about hatha yoga vidya with Swamiji were very enlightening. It was mind-expanding to hear about the historical development through the nomadic culture, the questions that they were asking which led to the development of the spiritual ideas, the spiritual and vedic culture. And from there to hear about the agrarian culture with the formation of communities, the need for stillness and how that brought forth practices from hatha yoga. How the whole tradition has emerged, coming to the two key texts of *Gheranda Samhita* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and how each of these have a different emphasis. When you look at the texts they seem interesting, but until you have that knowledge working inside you, it stays outside of you.

Coming to ‘R’, the word that stands out here is ‘responsibility’. We have a responsibility to take these practices and maintain the progression and the system that is being given. Even though I have come many times to the ashram, I feel

like I have again come back to the start and am building a really solid foundation.

The next letter is ‘U’ and the highlight here is ‘understanding’. Understanding relates to our ability to imbibe the teachings, not only have the knowledge. That imbibing comes through the practical experience, through working through the system and applying the principles of yoga in our lives: bringing them through from practice to sadhana to lifestyle to culture.

There were many ‘Ss’. We were the shatkarmi group, we had swadhyaya, simplicity, sincerity, SWAN. However, the one ‘S’ that stood out for me was ‘simplicity with depth’. The way in which the practices were delivered – they were simple and clear yet there was a lot of depth to them. Some of the feedback from the New Zealand participants who were here for the first time was that the simplicity enabled them to acknowledge their limitations and they had a better appreciation of relaxation and where they are within the physical body. The way Swamiji teaches is very clear and precise, and we are able to perceive the depth of an experience through that simple but clear approach. It’s not simplistic, it’s crystal-clear.

The last ‘T’ is thanks. Thanks to fellow students, who asked all our questions for us. To the residents who supported us in this process and to our coordinators. Of course, our biggest thanks to Swamiji for allowing us the opportunity to come and work through this process in a systematic way. We feel very inspired and our bodies are lighter, our minds clearer and our hearts fuller.

—*Samnyasi Pragyadhara, New Zealand*

### **The traveller’s tale**

Dawn breaks and the body awakes,  
People moving silently with the red sun rising.  
So begins a new day, a fresh experience,  
On the hatha yoga yatra training.

Morning chanting and the Devi's grace,  
The Ganga sparkles, our smiley face.  
Swamiji guiding and gently supporting,  
Forwards, backwards, left and right.  
Inhaling, exhaling, the prana flows  
And the inner light starts to shine bright.  
Bodies cleansed, minds steady,  
Hearts expanded, the spirits soar,  
Completely realigned and standing tall.  
Where else could one wish to be,  
But in the ashram  
On the Hatha Yoga Yatra Training with Swamiji.  
Hari Om, Swamiji.

—*Sannyasi Atmasangeeta, Ireland*

### **Recharged**

I just want to thank Swamiji and the Bihar School of Yoga to give me this opportunity to be part of *Hatha Yoga 1* and *Hatha Yoga 2*. For someone like me who leads a very ordinary and sometimes undisciplined lifestyle, I am really happy to be able to add this dimension of hatha yoga to my life. As I leave from here, I leave with a feeling of rejuvenation and that my spiritual, physical and mental batteries are recharged. I leave ready to face the world with a big smile.

—*Banamali, Madhya Pradesh*

### **Ahobhagya!**

I have been associated with the ashram since the last twenty-four years, but I always wanted all the gains without any pain. Swamiji is there, ashram is there, any trouble, knock-knock.

“Swamiji we have this problem.”

“Blessings!”

Knock-knock.

“Swamiji this time we have this problem.”

“Blessings are there.”

So, it was all gain without any pain. Then I realized that in this process, I was not evolving. My internal progression was not taking off. Then came Hatha Yoga Yatra 1 in which I participated two years ago. I could see many changes in me in these last two years, and I really want to thank my guru that he had the patience of two decades before I realized that I have to do something.

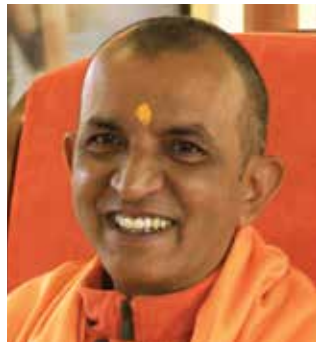
I have been a professional for the last twenty-three years and suddenly I am able to handle and adjust with my growing responsibilities very nicely. I am not shouting at my children anymore yet they are more obedient. I did not realize that these changes had come in me, it was my family and friends who made me see them. There were two things that gave me the confidence that yes, I have really changed, and I am looking at the world around me with a different eye. First, the demise of my mother. I was able to handle this personal sorrow in a very peaceful manner. The second, my husband, family and friends enquiring when was I going for the next hatha yoga. This made me realize that something has changed for good in me. To share a few words:

I can hear the Ganga make a gurgling sound,  
As I finish surya namaskara, five rounds.  
Gradually my cluttered life takes a beautiful shape,  
And with delight and awe I feel and gape.  
The chaos inside me settles day by day  
As I see moving towards me a divine ray.  
My guru and my guide shows me the way  
And dispels the darkness and takes ignorance away.  
That I came for my second hatha yoga,  
I just had to say this to myself,  
*Ahobhagya!*

—Neena Kumar, Delhi



**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 were the Hatha Yoga Yatras of 2019, consisting of modules 1 and 2. The history of yoga and hatha yoga unravels and invites all aspirants to become part of the journey.

This book presents the satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda during the programs, in which new dimensions of the yogic experience were unravelled in Swamiji’s unique style, combining simplicity with profundity.

