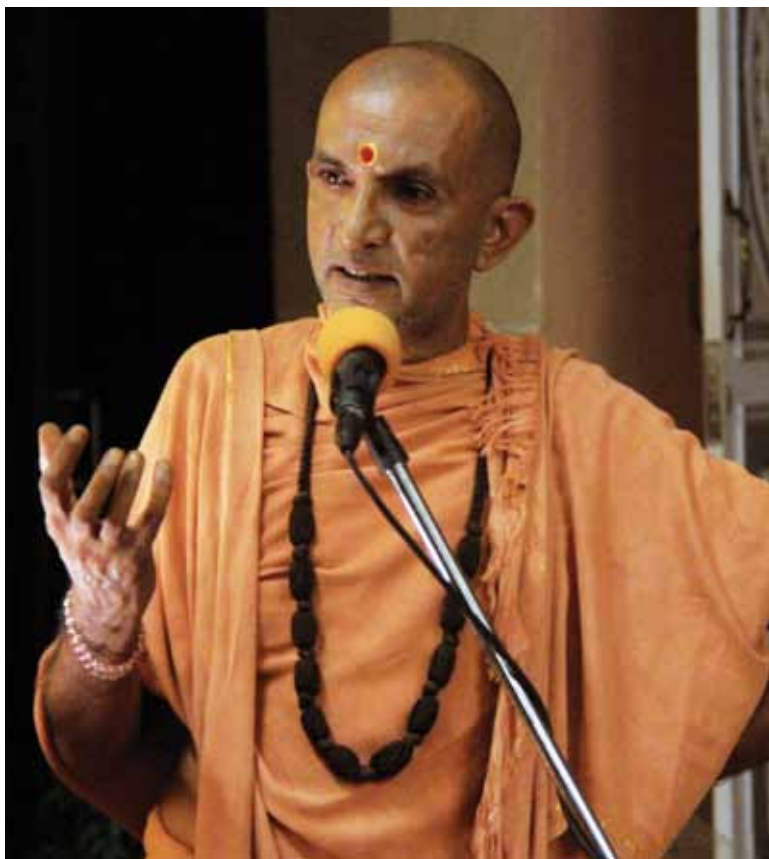


Raja Yoga Yatra I

Understanding Asana and Pratyahara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Raja Yoga Yatra I

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Raja Yoga Yatra I

Understanding Asana and Pratyahara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
during the training of Raja Yoga Module 1:
Asana & Pranayama Intensive,
held from 21st to 28th October 2016 at Ganga Darshan
Vishwa Yogapeeth, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger.*



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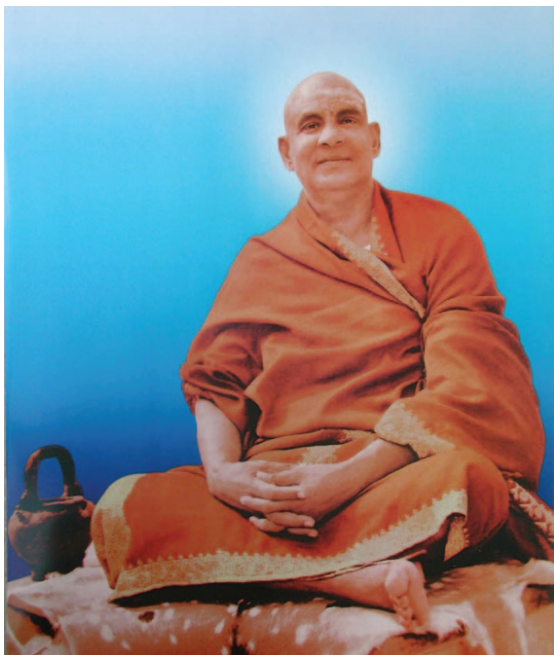
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Dedication

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

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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.

For Those Who Dare

21 October 2016



The month of October has been declared the happy month here in the ashram, so no one with a frowning face is permitted to be here. The requirement to live in the ashram this month is to be happy from morning until evening and

from evening until the next morning. You have to fulfil this requirement to participate in this course, and this is not a joke.

Happiness is the first yama of yoga. People know of the raja yoga yamas given in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali and think that they are applicable to all other yogas. No, every yoga has its own set of yamas. Raja yoga speaks of five yamas and five niyamas, while hatha yoga speaks of twenty yamas and twenty niyamas. Similarly, other branches of yoga have other yamas and niyamas.

When you start your journey in the yogic tradition, the first yama that you need to follow is *manah prasad*, happiness. You have to make the effort to increase your happiness quotient day by day. Let your happiness scale go up every day by five minutes. If today you are happy for five minutes and unhappy for 23 hours and 55 minutes, tomorrow try to be happy for 10 minutes and unhappy for 23 hours and 50 minutes. The next day, 15 minutes of happiness and 23 hours and 45 minutes of unhappiness. Be aware of this. You are living with your unhappiness every day, now let this be conscious living; be conscious of your unhappiness and your happiness.

If you keep on building up five minutes of happiness every day, before you depart from planet Earth, you shall be very happy! Thus, your training in the ashram begins not with asana, not with meditation, but by following the first yama, which is happiness.

Taking yoga to another dimension

In 2013 during the World Yoga Convention it was stated that the first chapter of yoga teaching and propagation is over and now we are entering in the second chapter of yoga sadhana. In the first chapter the focus was on yoga propagation, and that was the mission. However, people would join a few classes, learn a few asanas, and open a centre, calling themselves a Satyananda Yoga teacher. In this way, about twenty or thirty generations of Satyananda Yoga

teachers have appeared, from the first teacher to the second teacher who taught the third group, and so on. The original was photocopied twenty times over, and in each version the print was less clear. Therefore, the only people who are true practitioners and teachers of Satyananda Yoga are those who belong to the first and the second generation, and possibly some from the third. Beyond that, despite holding a certificate, nobody can be recognized as a Satyananda Yoga teacher.

What do the majority who call themselves Satyananda Yoga teacher know of yoga? A selective series of asanas, three-four-five pranayamas, only one technique of pratyahara: yoga nidra, and maybe a few techniques of meditation, such as antar mouna, ajapa japa, chidakasha dharana, which they practise sporadically. Beyond this, there has been no other learning in yoga. That was acceptable for the first fifty years. Now, when yoga has become a multi-billion-dollar industry in the world and there are yoga teachers with one-week training in yoga reaping the commercial benefits of yoga, yoga has to be taken to another dimension so its purity is not lost.

New programs

To take yoga to another dimension, a lot of thinking was done since 2013, and we had to take a global perspective. Gradually we started to develop prototype programs in Munger and implementing them. These programs have been successful, as they have been able to take the yoga practitioner to another dimension of experience.

The first chapter was the yoga practitioner's chapter. Everybody was experimenting with yoga to find solutions to their own conditions: "Can yoga help me with my limitations and difficulties?" "Can yoga help me with my stress and anxiety?" "Can yoga help me sleep?" "Can yoga help me relax?" "Can yoga help me do this and do that?" The person was the focus, and yoga became the medium to improve whatever was lacking in one's body or mind. Although the

practices were limited to a few select techniques that all teachers across the globe taught, the focus was always on how the practice could help ‘you’ the practitioner, whether for stress and anxiety, good sleep, easing the back pain, or other such things.

People read and hear about the deeper aspects of yoga, yet they do not live them. Have you lived all that you have read and studied about yoga? It is difficult to even sit down for one’s mantra meditation on a regular basis at night. They are rare people who do their mantra every day. This failure is there as you are trying to fulfil your own needs, what you lack in your life, through yoga rather than following the progression of yoga. You are using yoga to improve your personal life, to fulfil what you need in your life, whether physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual.

You have the book *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, but how many follow the whole book? You take selected practices that you think are beneficial and create a syllabus out of that, but there is no progression. It is only practice. This first chapter, the age of propagation, did bring people and society enormous benefits, but now, with the global resurgence in the field of yoga, yoga must go to another level.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, we worked on modifying the yoga program at BSY, we experimented with prototype programs and courses. From 2016 we have changed the entire teaching system: the methodology, the syllabus and the training, and closed all the courses that were conducted at BSY for the last fifty years. Completely new courses have developed and are being developed, where the focus is to experience, learn and live the progression that yoga gives. You can learn yoga anywhere in the world, but to understand the progression of yoga and how to deepen the yogic experience – that is the subject of yoga sadhana, and from this year we are focusing on that. Thus the new courses have a specific aim.

We have introduced Progressive Yoga Vidya Training program for yoga teachers who have been teaching yoga and

have been involved with yoga for the last ten to forty years. Even they are finding a new experience in yoga as they go through the Progressive Training. We have also initiated specialized courses in Hatha Yoga in different modules. The first module this year focused on shatkarma. This Raja Yoga Module 1 is 'Asana-Pranayama Intensive', so you will learn about asana and pranayama but from a different perspective and style: from the raja yoga perspective and style. Similarly, there is the Kriya Yoga course. In this manner, every year new programs are being added.

An important aspect of these new programs is experiencing the totality of yoga. They are not limited to the physical and mental experiences of asana, pranayama, relaxation and concentration, but the focus is to experience the yogic aspirations. For instance, many people have been practising meditation for thirty or forty years, yet they are not able to control their moods and reactions, their anxiety, aggression, fear, jealousy, hatred and envy. Those years of meditative practice did not bring any qualitative change in the mind, rather the practice only became a medium to escape from the worries for a short while, to relax and go into a self-created universe with angels and flowers and lights, and when you come out you are back in the grind of the world. This happens as the practitioners of meditation do not go through the progression from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana. There is no gain as nobody wants to go through the pain!

Pain is not only an ache; it is also dissipation of mind that does not allow you to remain fixed. If we teach only pawanmuktasana for one week to those who come for yoga courses, half of them will leave. They will say, "What is this yoga? I have come for dynamic, modern style yoga." The mind does not allow them to remain focused in something for an extended period of time. Always some newness is desired. That dissipation is a state of mental pain, it is suffering. Therefore, the focus has to be to experience what yoga wants a sadhaka to attain.

For those who dare

The purpose of raja yoga is *chitta vritti nirodhah*, not samadhi. People think of samadhi as the goal of yoga, not *chitta vritti nirodhah*. Anybody who delves into yoga will study Patanjali, but they will always say, “Can I experience samadhi?” Nobody will say, “How do I control my mental behaviour?” Nobody wants to recognize the shortcomings in their life. Even the most incompetent person who is only able to close their eyes for ten minutes believes they have become a yogi just by virtue of closing the eyes – they don’t realize one has to actually work on improving oneself. There is no working with oneself, whereas the purpose of sadhana is to work with oneself. That is the beginning of the yogic experience, the path that we have embarked upon.

Every yoga has defined a goal. What is the goal of hatha yoga? Has anybody experienced it, despite practising yoga in front of full-length mirrors in studios, despite going to retreats and ashrams, despite teaching yoga to others? Has anybody experienced what hatha yoga tries to develop in the individual? No. They have not experienced it as they have treated hatha yoga as physical exercise. People think hatha yoga means ‘get your body moving, get your body shaking’. That is the common understanding of hatha yoga. However, the real meaning of hatha yoga is ingrained in the term itself, which is made up of the two mantras *Ham* and *Tham*. How many people have experienced a balance between *Ham* and *Tham*, between the solar and lunar energies in their practice?

Similarly, the purpose of raja yoga is *chitta vritti nirodhah*, yet nobody cares about that. Everybody wants to meditate without paying heed to their chitta vrittis, therefore meditation is not successful. It just creates another distraction in the mind that is already in a distracted state. You are distracted by the world, by stresses, anxieties, worries, problems, finances, family, society. You close your eyes, drop everything, and then what do you do? You try to feel peace, but you don’t observe the mind, you don’t work with your chitta vrittis, you don’t work with your own reactive

nature. You always point the finger at somebody else's faults and reactive nature; you never look at your own self. You think that you are always the pure one who never makes any mistake and does nothing wrong. It is all attributed to everyone else; others are responsible for creating imbalance, disturbance, dissatisfaction and anxiety, and you are flawless. With that attitude there is no yogic attainment in anybody's life, despite so much practice.

Given this scenario, the training at the Bihar School of Yoga now is not for learning yoga for one's own perceived needs, but for experiencing the real aims of yoga. Be the brave one. Who are the brave people? They are willing to take on challenges and discover new things.



The mission before us

Ultimately our commitment is towards our guru and the yogic tradition. People will come and go, but the *vidya*, the knowledge, will sustain humankind. It is that knowledge which has to be maintained properly.

Therefore, your purpose here should be to deepen your experience by learning. Don't think, 'Oh, how am I going to use this in my class when I get back to teaching?' If that is your thought, then this is not the place for you, for the right training can only be imparted to the right student. The right student is one who has commitment, sincerity and seriousness: the three words that were adopted during the Convention. You have to be serious, you have to be sincere, and you have to be committed; only then can yoga do justice to you and can you do justice to yoga. If these qualities are not there, then yoga becomes only a means to pass the time.

In the second chapter, we have a mission: to make sure that yoga is ingrained in those who come here. Previously, the mission was to teach yoga, and now the mission is to ingrain the subject and the principles of yoga in you so that you can be a living example of those principles. After all, a professor is happy when his student shines. It was not Einstein who was happiest when he discovered the formula $E=mc^2$; it was his teacher whose head floated in the clouds, he was so proud of Einstein. Therefore, make me proud of you by being the yogi in the real spirit.

Whether you see yourself as a junior learner or a senior teacher, have the resilience to learn, modify and improve your skills and yogic education. Connect yourself with the *vidya*, not just the practice but the understanding, the concepts, the thought, the principle, and let the second chapter of yoga commence in your life.

The Focus of Raja Yoga

22 October 2016



This is the first Raja Yoga Intensive training being held at the Bihar School of Yoga, and forms part of the second chapter of BSY. This year we have also had the first Hatha Yoga Intensive, and in November the Kriya Yoga Module 1 will be conducted. These three yogas, hatha, raja and kriya, are the foundation for the development of the second chapter. The

three yogas are interconnected, and in order to understand that, we have to go back in history.

When yoga re-emerged on the global scene about a hundred years ago, there were not many who had any concept or idea of yoga. There were yogis, sannyasins and sadhus who would incorporate different practices of yoga in their sadhana, routine and lifestyle; however, they used the practices for the fulfilment of their own aspirations. Therefore when the term 'yoga' came out in society, people did not have any clarity on what it stood for. There were many misconceptions, including that yoga is for self-realization, attainment of samadhi, and so on. While all these ideas were floating in the layman's world, some people who were experimenting with yoga and living yoga, realized that it is not just a practice meant for the individual's own sadhana, but has a wider application.

Sri Swami Sivananda, our grandfather guru, was one of the first persons to give a practical, dynamic and understandable dimension to the yogic principles and practices. His background as a medical doctor also helped in developing an understanding of yoga from the scientific perspective. He taught yoga to his disciples on a wide-open scale, with the awareness that yoga is for the cultivation of the faculties of head, heart and hands.

Sri Swami Satyananda, our guru, was among these first disciples of Swami Sivananda. When he was leaving the ashram in Rishikesh after completing his seva there, Swami Sivananda told him to propagate yoga from 'door to door and shore to shore'. For many years Swami Satyananda did not open any centre or ashram, but travelled through the subcontinent to understand the needs of the society and the aspect of yoga that should be taught first. For nine years he travelled, and then he came to Munger, established the Bihar School of Yoga, and developed his own procedures, system and sequence of yoga. He chose six yogas as the medium to carry on the mandate of Swami Sivananda, and these six yogas have been defined in the book *Yoga Chakra*.

Yoga chakra

The first three yogas of the *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga, are hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga, which represent the experiential aspect of yoga. You practise them, experience them, change your shortcomings internally with their help, and you improve. Thus these three became the yogas to develop a personal experience of the process of inner awakening. The other three yogas – karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga – represent the expressive yoga: what you gain through your experience, you express through these yogas. So experiential yoga is where you go through the process of change, transformation, self-discovery and understanding, and the expressive yoga is where you interact in the outer dimension with the help of those awakened faculties. The six yogas together form the *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga with six spokes.

SATYANANDA YOGA-BIHAR YOGA CHAKRA



In this yoga chakra sequence, there is another combination. Hatha yoga and karma yoga are placed opposite each other, and they complement each other. Similarly, raja yoga and bhakti yoga complement each other, and kriya yoga and jnana yoga complement each other. Each one is a support to the other. Think about why hatha yoga supports karma yoga and karma yoga supports hatha yoga; why raja yoga supports bhakti yoga and bhakti yoga supports raja yoga; why kriya yoga supports jnana yoga and jnana yoga supports kriya yoga. If you can analyze this correctly, then you will know the essence of the wheel of yoga.

The yoga chakra reflects the vision of Swami Satyananda and the fulfilment of the aspirations of Swami Sivananda. It comprises yogas that allow for the cultivation of the faculties of the head, heart and hands: for the hands hatha yoga and karma yoga, for the heart raja yoga and bhakti yoga, and for the head kriya yoga and jnana yoga. These are the yogas for human society the world over.

Purpose of hatha yoga and raja yoga

Hatha yoga is the first stepping stone in which you work towards attaining purification and detoxification of the body. You work with moving the prana shakti and balancing the flows of ida and pingala. Through hatha yoga you are creating a physiological balance between the gross or the manifest, and the subtle or the unmanifest energies that exert their influence on the human body and behaviour. Only when the *annamaya kosha* and the *pranamaya kosha*, the physical body and the energy body, have been brought to balance with the practices of hatha yoga, do you move into the practices of raja yoga.

Raja means king, so raja yoga is king of all yogas. It is defined as such since it deals with the mind. The deity of the mind is Indra in the Indian mythology who is the ruler of all the demigods, just like Zeus in Greek mythology or Odin in Scandinavian mythology. Raja yoga seeks to control the mind, to become the king over the mind, the ruler of the mind. The intention is clear in the word itself: through this

yoga you have to learn to govern your mind. In the light of this idea, look at the first three sutras of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, which define the purpose of raja yoga.

The first sutra is: *Atha yogah anushasanam* – “Now, the instructions on yoga.” The word used is *atha*, ‘now’, which indicates raja yoga is a continuation of a previous practice – hatha yoga. It implies that since you have completed your hatha yoga, now you are ready to receive the instructions of raja yoga. Another word used here is *anushasana*, discipline, regulating. Here it refers to regulating the subtle functions, behaviours and expressions of the mind. Thus the sutra says: now the instructions on raja yoga to regulate the behaviour patterns of the mind.

The second sutra is: *Yogah chittavritti nirodhah* – “Yoga is control of the inner modifications.” Many times people say ‘mental modifications’ while translating this sutra, as the concept of the word ‘chitta’ does not exist in the English language. Chitta is generally translated as mind in English, and that concept of mind remains vague. Which mind are you referring to? The rational mind? The cosmic mind? The subconscious? The unconscious? So to say ‘modifications of the mind’ does not give a clear understanding of the sutra; the intent becomes clearer when you say ‘inner modifications’.

The third sutra is: *Tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam*. It explains what happens when you control the inner dissipations – you become established in your own nature. You realize your true nature: not what you believe yourself to be, but what in reality you are.

The three statements of Patanjali in these sutras indicate that:

1. Raja yoga follows hatha yoga.
2. It is used for controlling the modifications, the upheavals, the distractions, the disturbances of the mind and the inner nature.
3. If you succeed in the above, then you will discover your inner, peaceful, luminous identity. This is the focus of the *Yoga Sutras*.

Progressing from hatha yoga to raja yoga

Hatha yoga begins with the practices of purification, *shatkarma*, to detoxify the body. After this purification, you move into the practices of asana, then into pranayama. The asanas of hatha yoga are dynamic and the pranayamas of hatha yoga develop control over the breath and respiration. Mudras and bandhas are also part of hatha yoga, through which you develop the skills to direct the energy flow. This is followed by practices of concentration to focus the mind. All this constitutes hatha yoga.

When this much is perfected, you come to raja yoga. It is like finishing primary school before entering secondary school. Just as there are several classes in primary school, there are several steps in hatha yoga. If a student of the first class says, “I want to join the secondary school”, will the teacher allow it? No. However, the hypocrites in spiritual life do allow it. So those who are sincere in spiritual life must understand that hatha yoga has to be perfected first and then one can move into raja yoga.

In hatha yoga you start with shatkarma to purify the body, then go through a progressive sequence of asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, and specific concentration and meditation techniques. You prepare one dimension of your existence: the annamaya and pranamaya koshas. In raja yoga you deal with manomaya and vijñanamaya koshas, and therefore raja yoga begins with yama and niyama. The first step of raja yoga is not asana, as everybody thinks. It is yama and niyama.

Yama and niyama

Yama and niyama are practices for harmonizing manomaya and vijñanamaya koshas, not annamaya or pranamaya. They are for the mind, they change the mood of the mind. Yamas create a positive conditioning, a positive mood, and the niyamas enforce those conditions. People ignore yama and niyama, and that is the major flaw when trying to attain mental discipline. For example, when you meditate, you try to empty out your mind, you try to remove anything

that is troubling the mind. Then what? You open your eyes. The meditation is over when the mind has been emptied. The problem is, the moment you open your eyes the mind again gets filled with things that had disturbed you, which indicates that you did not create a mental condition in your meditation that could be sustained as a natural state when the eyes are open. You emptied the mind, but once it was empty you didn't fill it with something positive, therefore the real result of meditation is never experienced. You only say, "Oh, I feel good, I feel relaxed, I feel peaceful, I feel quiet." Beyond these fleeting feelings, there is no deeper experience in meditation.

When you are dealing with the mind, after you remove the dross you need to put in the positive. When there is a vacuum inside, when you have emptied the mental pot of anxiety, stress, worry, distractions and dissipations, you need to fill it with some positive content that can remain with you for some time. This is where yamas and niyamas come in. When you focus on a yama in the state of meditation, your mind gets coloured with that yama, and in the course of time it becomes a natural expression. It becomes a condition of mind, not imposed ethics or morality. Yoga does not speak about ethics and morality; it takes you into states of perception, purification, experience and expression in the most positive sense.

The focus of raja yoga is to create a positive state in the mind. So the asanas and pranayamas of raja yoga are also for deepening the meditative state, the state of mental one-pointedness. When you practise asana, your priority is to find *sthirata*, stability in the posture. In hatha yoga you should have developed that sthirata. When you come to raja yoga, that stability should already be there. Therefore, when raja yogis define asana they say that asana is a posture in which you are already firm, stable and comfortable. You are not seeking physical stability in raja yoga, you have to gain that in hatha yoga. In raja yoga you simply continue that state of stability and comfort to deepen your mental experience.

The asanas are defined in raja yoga as sthiram and sukham. *Sthiram* means stable, fixed, and *sukham* means comfortable. Comfort is an offshoot of the happy state of mind. If you are not happy you will not be comfortable. It is not just a physical state; mental happiness and physical stability come together to create the experience of comfort. The mind has to always be positive to come to that point of comfort. Therefore the raja yoga asanas are static postures that help internalize the mind.

It is the same with pranayama. Hatha yoga describes many different types of pranayama, while Patanjali says, “Inhale, exhale, hold – that is pranayama.” This description of pranayama is often quoted by teachers while practising hatha yoga pranayama.

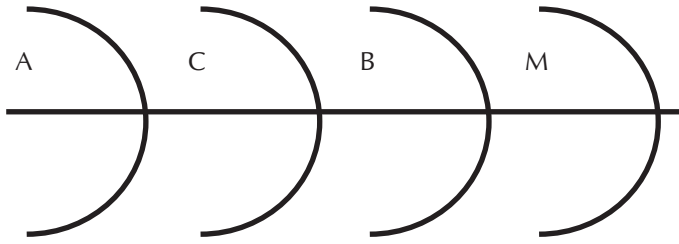
Towards pratyahara

Whether it be yama, niyama, or raja yoga asanas and pranayamas, to come to the point of *chitta vritti nirodhah*, controlling the inner modifications, an important stage of raja yoga has to be attained: pratyahara. Therefore keep in mind *chitta vritti nirodhah* and pratyahara. These two are the foundations of raja yoga.

Pratyahara begins with the understanding that ‘I am going to work with my mind, I am going to see myself, I am going to de-stress myself, I am going to observe the chatter that goes on in my mind in the form of thoughts, visions and experiences.’ Pratyahara is the condition that you have to achieve when you practise raja yoga, not dharana, not dhyana, not samadhi. The subject of raja yoga revolves around pratyahara.

The notion of chitta

To understand the concepts of chitta vritti and pratyahara, we will use a diagram, as follows. Here you see a line, with four half circles on it. This line represents the continuation of life and the four half circles are ahamkara, chitta, buddhi, and manas. Some people say that chitta is the total consciousness.



That is one perspective. Some people say that chitta is an experience of manas, buddhi and ahamkara put together. That is another perspective. Those who say that chitta is the total consciousness are partially correct. Those who say the chitta is the experience of manas, buddhi and ahamkara are also partially correct. Those who say the chitta is a storehouse of memories, impressions and samskaras are also partially correct.

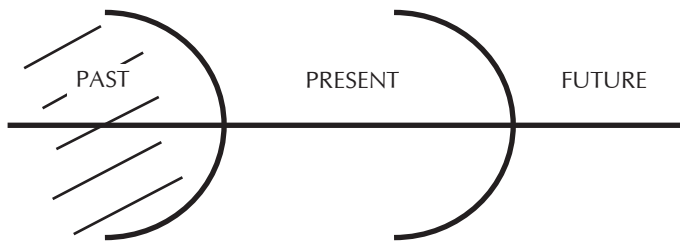
We are going to put all the partially correct ideas together to see the whole picture. From the yogic perspective of creation, we move from the subtle towards the gross. *Prakriti* or Nature first evolves into *ahamkara*, the ego, and then the other aspects of mind come forth. Therefore ahamkara comes first in the diagram. Now, if you put a ball through a wind tunnel, what will happen? The velocity will carry it forward through all the curves. Similarly, you can imagine this line as the tunnel and due to the motion forward of creation, the individual consciousness attains all the other aspects of the mind: chitta, buddhi and manas. Due to the motion, the ahamkara energy interacts with the chitta energy, chitta energy with buddhi energy, and buddhi energy with manas energy. Now, if the wind is blowing the other way, then the ball will fly in the reverse direction. Similarly, when an external experience is encountered, the reverse movement takes place in the mind: the manas experience merges with the buddhi experience, the buddhi experience merges with the chitta experience and the chitta experience merges with the ahamkara experience.

This whole thing can be called consciousness, as the different aspects simply flow into one another. Therefore it is accurate to say that manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara constitute consciousness, and it is also accurate to say that buddhi, manas and ahamkara constitute consciousness. It is merely a progression of perception and experience that is consciousness.

Consciousness and time

Consciousness is perception; however you do not have future perception, you only live with past perceptions. In the line of life, you are living the present, you have lived the past, and you are yet to live the future.

If consciousness is cognition and perception, it will always relate to the past, never to the future. Therefore what you call consciousness is nothing but accumulative perceptions of the past. You don't have any perception of the future, you don't know what is going to happen one hour ahead. However, you do know what has already come within the range of your perception, which is the past. So, that consciousness gained from the senses and thoughts does not project to the future; it simply remains connected to the past, that is the cognition and perception it has gained in the course of life.



If the perception and cognition is of the past, where is it stored? It is not stored in manas and not in buddhi; it is stored in chitta. This cognitive perception of the past, which people call consciousness, is retained in chitta. For example, a child puts his hand in fire. He doesn't have logic, doesn't know right from wrong, doesn't know what fire or water are.

He only sees something bright and shiny and wants to grab it, so he puts his hand in it. Until now there was no cognition, no consciousness, no awareness. The hand feels hot, it gets burned and blistered, he experiences pain, and the child identifies that 'putting hand in the fire is not good for me'. This cognition now becomes part of his consciousness.

Another example comes from the story of the Spanish people first landing in the new world of America. The native Indians who were there saw the ships entering the harbour; however, as they had never seen a ship and had no memory of any ship, they did not see them as a threat. They just allowed the Spanish people to walk in and shoot them. What this implies is that it is only when you see something and have some concept of it stored in chitta that your cognition kicks in; if you haven't seen something you will remain blissfully ignorant.

So the past cognition or past experiences become present consciousness. The chitta is not an isolated entity; it is a cognitive process and a storehouse of the memories of those cognitions, whereas buddhi is not, manas is not.

The relationship between the four faculties of the mind becomes clearer if we use the analogy of a fan regulator. When you switch on a fan, there is a regulator through which you control the speed of the fan. At one the fan rotates slowly. At two, fast. Three, faster. Four, even faster. Ahamkara is number one speed, chitta is number two, buddhi is number three, and manas number four. Manas is the most active aspect, it is thinking and thinking and thinking, so the fan is on full speed. When it is negative manas, tamasic or rajasic manas, at that time the fan is on full speed. Then you stop the manas activity, reduce it, slow it down, and move into the buddhi area. Buddhi is at number three, not as fast as manas but still turning. Chitta is number two, not as fast as buddhi, since here it has to hold the past impressions.

Manas does not have to hold anything, so the speed is fast; you can think and move into a state of worry or unstoppable thinking. Manas has no retention power, it only

has thinking power. Buddhi also has no retention power, it only has analytical power. Chitta has the retention power, so here the speed is slow: number two of the regulator. If it moved faster, whatever is retained would be thrown out, therefore the speed is maintained at a steady rate naturally in order to retain whatever is seen and absorbed. Ahamkara is the slowest, it moves maybe one RPM per minute, whereas manas moves one thousand RPMs per minute. That is how the four faculties of the mind work. The important point is that the area of your past experiences defines your realm of consciousness, from the present forward there is no consciousness until cognition and perception become part of your chitta.

The faculties of the mind

Patanjali uses the words ‘chitta vritti’, he does not use the words ‘manas vritti’, ‘buddhi vritti’ or ‘ahamkara vritti’. Manas vritti, the incessant thinking, can be stopped with certain practices. Buddhi vritti, the clear and the confused conditions, can be managed through certain practices. However chitta vritti, the storehouse of all the perceptions and cognitions that have happened in the past, becomes the cause for present upheavals and disturbances. Therefore Patanjali says that it is those vrittis that have to be managed.

The idea of chitta becomes clearer through the Hindi language. In Hindi, from the word *chit*, meaning the faculty of consciousness or knowing, comes the word *chiti*, meaning the knower, and from *chiti* comes *chetana*, meaning the state of consciousness. Thus there is a full progression that defines what is *chit* or *chitta*, what is *chiti* and what is *chetana*, as evolutes of the same state. So *chitta* is not one-fourth of the line of consciousness, for there is no division or compartmentalization in reality.

When people use the words *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta*, *ahamkara*, they tend to believe that these are separate compartments, and that is due to a lack of understanding. They are not compartments, they are progressions. Are child-

hood, youth and old age compartments in your life? Do you suddenly become old one day? Or is there a gradual progression and you don't even know that you are moving in that direction? You move from childhood to youth to adulthood to old age in a natural manner, without realizing that you are doing so, there is no compartmentalization. Yet when you speak of old age, youth and childhood, it seems as if each is a separate period. In reality they are just continuations of your body's journey. In the same manner, manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are not compartments; they are continuation of the same outer experience becoming subtler and subtler.

Similarly, the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious are not compartments. When you dive in the ocean, do you say that the light comes only up to here, therefore this is the compartment of light, this is the compartment of dusk, this is the compartment of darkness? No. The light gradually reduces as you go deeper and deeper; there is no demarcation of any type. As you dive deeper there is diminishing of light until total darkness is experienced. When you come up again from darkness to light, again there are no demarcations. It is the same here, as you move there is deepening of one experience, one awareness, one cognitive faculty.

Chitta and vritti

The chitta awareness begins with pramana, which is the first of the five vrittis mentioned by Patanjali. *Pramana* means direct cognition or proof. All the impressions in your mind, both the good and the bad, are proof or pramana that you have had those experiences. If you don't like someone, your aversion towards the person is pramana of your dislike. If you like someone, your affection is pramana of your love towards the person. The whole process begins with pramana, as you filter out from the mind that which is not pramana. Pramana or direct cognition represents your connection to chitta.

Let us say you are meditating and a childhood impression comes up: you see yourself as a child being scolded by somebody. Until now it was just an impression in the mind,

but now it has become manifest, it has become pramana, and you are able to extract the real experience that you went through at some time in your life. Pramana does not mean that the inference has to be right, as many people think. Pramana is you recognizing and reliving what you have experienced in the past, and through that clearing it out.

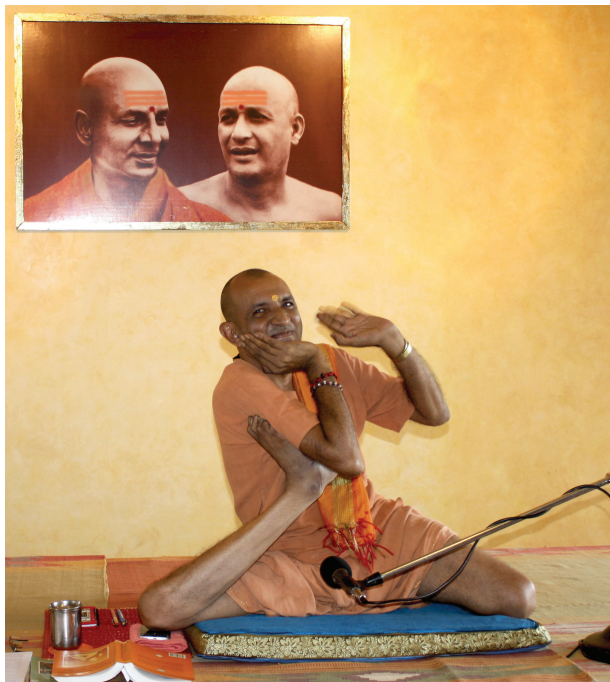
When you stop or manage your chitta vrittis, you are also clearing out the impressions. These impressions are called *pratyaya*. When you enter any country, the immigration officer puts a stamp on your passport, indicative of your entry and exit. That is pratyaya, impressions that you have in your mind, the good thoughts you have, the limiting and negative thoughts you have, they are all pratyayas. These impressions are like asteroid marks on the moon. When an asteroid hits it leaves an imprint, and the moon is pock-marked by asteroid hits. They are pratyayas. You are also pock-marked by asteroid hits; not the cosmic ones but the ones that people transmit to each other. Sometimes the asteroids clash in the middle, sometimes they go and clash against the planet or the moon, and leave a dent. These impressions that a situation, an event, a relationship or even miscommunication leave behind, triggering a tamasic, rajasic or sattvic expression in you, are called pratyayas.

Raja yoga aims at clearing these impressions, which happens through pratyahara. For this reason the focus of raja yoga is twofold: managing the chitta vrittis and clearing the pratyayas through pratyahara. Samadhi is not the relevant aim of raja yoga; clearing of pratyayas in pratyahara is raja yoga, and once they are cleared, samadhi can be experienced.

Raja yoga is a system of clearing the mind and mind management, and the mind we are speaking of here is the total personality, the *mahat*. This is the subject of this seminar. The focus of this Raja Yoga Yatra is on asana and pranayama, therefore in the training you will be taught different systems of pratyahara during asana and pranayama in the raja yoga style, and we will also explore other concepts of raja yoga.

The Raja Yoga Perspective on Asana and Pratyahara

24 October 2016



A question has come: “Is there anything called intuition? If yes, how do you explain it with the example that you gave the other day of the ball and the wind tunnel?” The answer is, if you try to apply logic, it is not intuition anymore. Intuition is an unconscious cognitive faculty that does not go through buddhi or manas; it is an expression of chitta. If you try to

think about it logically, then it is not intuition, it becomes an activity of buddhi and manas. Therefore, let intuition remain intuition and use your intuition to figure out what is intuition.

Asana in raja yoga

This point is relevant for all raja yoga practitioners, as even the practice of asanas should enhance the experience of raja yoga. This is possible when you can flow into asanas in an intuitive way without getting caught up in head-trips about your asana practice. Therefore, there are certain things that you should know with regard to asana in raja yoga. First, the focus of asanas in raja yoga is sthiram and sukham. *Sthiram* means stability and *sukham* means comfort. Therefore in your practice, you have to become aware of your comfort level, which is physical as well as mental.

If you are not able to perform an asana one hundred percent right and your comfort level is at twenty percent, be there. Don't try to exert, strain or force yourself. Don't try to copy the person beside you in a class. There is no competition, there is an effort to discover your state of sthiram and sukham, stillness and comfort. In any asana, find out your comfort level. If you are able to bend forward and not touch the toes but simply hang the hands in air, that is okay. However, every time you perform an asana, practise it in such a way that your comfort level is enhanced. Gradually condition yourself to perform the perfect asana, and one day you will get it.

I will give you an example. When I was a young boy, I could sleep for twenty-four hours; just wake up to see the sky and then go back to sleep. Then we had the sannyasa training program and everyone was required to be up early and be in class. I could never attend the classes as I would be sleeping, and my sleep would be so deep that an atomic bomb could go off but not a single hair on my body would be ruffled. If I decided to force myself to wake up at four or five, I could do it for one, two, three or four days, but on the fifth day: crash, and down for another week. Then again make the effort,

for four days good, and again crash. I said to myself, 'This cannot go on.' I asked myself, 'How do I train myself to wake up early?' So, for one week I observed my sleeping pattern. 'If I sleep at this time, what is my comfort level for waking up?' Let us say, it was six o'clock or seven o'clock. Once I discovered that, every day I would put the alarm back by five minutes. That meant that every day I would be waking up five minutes earlier than the previous day. It was not a shock to the system, I was not fighting with myself or forcing myself. Rather, it was training myself to wake up five minutes earlier every day. I continued that until I came to four o'clock, and there was no loss of energy, no tiredness, no desire to rest or sleep during the day. The natural systems kicked in.

The same principle applies to the body as well. For example, tall people have difficulty touching their toes. I used to have that difficulty. When Sri Swamiji would ask me to be a demonstrator, I could not do the number three position of surya namaskara. However, instead of forcing myself and breaking my back, I allowed my body to hang. Then hang one degree more, the next day another degree – each time remaining in my comfort level. Therefore, instead of forcing myself or competing with others and injuring myself, I reached my potential to touch the toes in a natural way over a period of time. This is the conditioning you have to develop through steadiness and comfort in asana.

You do not need to do the perfect asana in two days. Do not demand that from yourself. Do not stand in front of a full-length mirror and push your body to come into the perfect posture, straining your muscles, ligaments and joints, and falling over and breaking bones. If you can do twenty per cent, good. That is a good start from doing nothing, and sustain it. You have to be aware as a sadhaka of this responsibility towards yourself. The teacher is not responsible for your perfection. The teacher can only teach and give you hints to improve. You have to take up the responsibility and have that awareness to improve and come to the point of perfection. Perfection in yoga is not the

teacher's responsibility, but the student's own responsibility. That is what enhances the commitment, the sincerity and the seriousness towards yoga.

Yoga for children

Another point I want to mention is about yoga for children. Children are going through many crises today. There are too many distractions and dissipations that do not allow them to focus. When they are distracted they are unable to harness the positive qualities of life. In some places of the world, children go through extreme conditions of living. In the war-torn areas, for example, they have no education, no sympathy, no support, no understanding, no love, no compassion. In such environments, children pick up guns and become part of the militia, losing the concept of humanism. There is a large population of children who are in such environments. You hear about children's armies in Africa, in the Middle East. The environment they grow up in is not conducive to bringing out their positive potential, instead it brings out the tamasic and destructive potential.

Then there is another segment of children who have no opportunities. They are not living in extreme environments, but they simply have no opportunities as their parents cannot afford it. For example, in the villages in India, children are not under the cloud of war, but are deprived of opportunities.

There is another segment of children that makes the attempt to study and grow, yet they diversify into other areas and forget their focus. They become the floaters: six months here, six months there, three months here, three months there. There is no stability in their life.

There is another group of children that has the opportunity and feel they are fortunate, but then they become arrogant and try to control other people. In this situation, how can one even think of bettering the future generation? In fact, parents are losing control over children. There is a report by the Psychiatric Association of the UK, who are recommending the education department in the UK to

change the school timings for different age groups, and reduce the hours of study. The reason they were giving was that children, on an average, are deprived of their sleep by six to seven hours a week. They are deprived of sleep due to the Internet connectivity; they are listening to music, watching movies, Facebooking, texting, talking, and not sleeping. This is becoming a major problem. It has even give rise to aggressive behaviour, to the extent that a child shoots her mother when the mother refuses to give her an iPhone.

Therefore we have to ask what is the mindset of children now and what is the responsibility of yoga teachers towards the betterment of the quality of life for this generation and the next. For this, yoga education for children becomes extremely necessary and important. It has to be done in the right manner so that they can experience the benefits of yoga. This work has been going on in Europe and also in North America for the last thirty or forty years. People like Swami Yogabhakti and Rishi Arundhati have been active in this area. However, more people have to contribute to this effort, as today there is an urgency. We no longer have the environment where we can teach yoga to children as an extra-curricular fun activity and say, 'Oh, we are teaching yoga to children.' There is an urgency to improve the quality of life so that humanity can sustain itself. To improve that quality of life, the right samskaras have to be given. The children have to be helped to acquire the right understanding and mindset, and that can be done through yogic practices.

We should work with children, five, ten, twenty, one hundred, two hundred, whatever number is possible, and teach them yoga, so that there is always a balance between darkness and light.

The concept of relaxation in yoga nidra

In raja yoga, the fifth stage is known as pratyahara, and a practice of pratyahara is yoga nidra. In common language, pratyahara means sensory withdrawal, though the classical meaning is different.

Now, what is the concept of relaxation for a normal person who doesn't do yoga? How do they see and define relaxation? Some people will sit on a comfortable chair with a glass of beer or a cup of tea or coffee, spread out their legs, look heavenwards and say, "I am relaxing", and be like that for half an hour or one hour. By doing nothing and letting the body flop on a chair, they feel they are relaxing. Other people think, 'If I lie down on my bed and sleep for an hour, I will relax.' There are also those who think forgetfulness will help them relax, so they get drunk, forget everything, and sleep in a stupor. Here external agents are used to induce forgetfulness, stupor and relaxation.

Whatever be the process or technique of relaxation people adopt, it signifies emptying the mind. If the mind is active, you will not be able to relax or sleep, as you would have experienced. When there are too many thoughts rushing through the mind, you toss and turn on the bed; you are unable to sleep. Thus the idea of relaxation is that you empty the mind. Up to this point, it is fine. However, what is the process being used to empty the mind? Is it a positive one helping you attain a sattwic state of mind or is it a negative one pushing you deeper into tamas?

In yoga nidra also we try to come to the point of relaxation, not by emptying the mind, instead by activating the mind. The period of yoga nidra is the most intense period for the mind, where it has to continuously move from one thing to another. Would you do that in a normal situation? No. You would say, "It tires me out", and you will feel tired if you tried doing it.

In pratyahara, we are not looking for blankness of mind; we are looking at activating the mind. That is the paradox which most people do not understand. You withdraw the mind and shut its connections, yet keep it active inside. The process is such that many times in yoga nidra you feel that you have been awake all the time yet you only hear the first *Hari Om* and the last *Hari Om*. In between, you were awake, you were not sleeping, but where were you? You did not hear

any instructions. Where were you then? You would swear that you were not sleeping, but if you were awake, where was your awareness? How does that state arise where you are awake but totally disconnected? That is pratyahara, which all of you have experienced at one time or the other, where you have withdrawn yourself, where you have not heard, seen or experienced anything yet you have been awake all the time. That is the state of pratyahara.

Some of you may wonder, what then is the state where you stay aware and awake and follow the instructions throughout, where you remember everything yet feel introverted at the end of the practice. That is the state of introversion; it is not pratyahara. Your senses have disconnected from sense objects outside yet the disconnection is not complete; you have not gone deep enough where the mind creates its own experiences without the help of external sense objects. Nevertheless, you have to begin with the state of introversion to move into pratyahara. Also remember that it is in the state of introversion that you are likely to fall asleep, and that is why you are told again and again to check that you are not sleeping. If you don't fall asleep in introversion then you will be able to reach the state of pratyahara.

The states of introversion and pratyahara have to be sustained and extended. To do that the mind is not left alone, but given continuous instructions and guidance. Otherwise, it is just sleep. If you have to merely relax, then instructions need not be given. You can play some relaxing music and go to sleep. If your aim is to attain the state of pratyahara through yoga nidra, then specific instructions must be followed.

When you maintain the state of introversion, then you are consciously aware of the instructions. However, when you move into the state of pratyahara, you think you did not hear the instructions yet they register on the inner senses, and it is this continuous guidance that helps you sustain the state.

Purpose behind specific instructions of yoga nidra

One of the first instructions in yoga nidra is, “Do not sleep”, which is repeated several times during the practice. If you hear Sri Swamiji’s recordings of yoga nidra, every third or fourth sentence is “Do not sleep.” That is the condition to maintain that level of awareness. If you sleep then you move into nidra, therefore the instruction, “Do not sleep.”

The second instruction is, keep the mind active, don’t allow it to fall into slumber. Engage the mind. The teacher is saying something and you are hearing, engaging your auditory faculty. When the body parts are named, you repeat them mentally after the teacher, engaging the verbal faculty, even though mentally. You have to visualize, so the faculty of vision is being involved. You have to feel different sensations, so the tactile faculty is being involved. In this way, all the senses are kept active within the confines of the mind; they are not rushing to outside objects, there is no distraction from the external world, yet they are kept engaged. That is the second criteria.

Third, opposites. There are specific pairs of opposites that Sri Swamiji has used, such as sensations of heat and cold, heaviness and lightness, pain and pleasure. Although there are many dualities, he has only used three or four for a specific reason: to explode the memories of chitta, to explode the memories that are retained in the mind in the form of suppressions or elations, so they remove any conditioning and in deeper states of meditation do not create disturbance. Other ideas can take you on a flight of fancy which you may enjoy but they will not help in your progression. However, if you think of pain, what is suppressed will come up; you may not like it, you may prefer the flight of fantasy, but this is what will allow the clearing of chitta.

The visualizations are also specific in yoga nidra. They are intended to trigger the experience of different chakras. Therefore images that relate to the chakras are used, such as water, river, plants, fish, moon, and so on. They all relate to the symbology of chakras. The visualizations

are not imaginative journeys that many teachers like to take their students through, travelling to Mars, Moon and Jupiter or travelling in space. Those imageries are not used in pratyahara; only those imageries are used that cause pratyaya, as the pratyayas have to be removed.

Our guru, Sri Swamiji, was so specific in order to create a condition that would allow transformation and purification to take place simultaneously. The CDs of yoga nidra available in the market with waterfall music and birds chirping do not constitute the practice of yoga nidra. They again connect your senses to the world around you, so you do not experience yoga nidra. For commercial purposes they may be labelled yoga nidra, but in reality they are not. Therefore in our system we do not use music in relaxation, only instructions.

The awareness should only connect to the instruction of the teacher and not be diverted by the music. Even the voice of the instructor has to be firm and strong, it should not be a soft, sleepy voice that makes the mind dull and inactive. Think about hearing “Do not sleep” in a strong voice – if you were drifting, your awareness would immediately come back. So there has to be force in the yoga nidra instructions. You don’t have to scream, but you have to speak in a natural tone which the person at the back of the room can hear, and not whisper to yourself in a way that even the person in the first row cannot hear.

Yoga nidra is an example of how Sri Swamiji selected specific aspects in a practice, and did not go beyond. He maintained his practice to those four or five stages, so that people could experience pratyahara, explore their pratyayas and release them, and prepare for dharana, concentration.

Clearing the mind

The first step in yoga is clearing, just as the clogged drains of the house have to be cleared for the water to pass through. The dirt that has accumulated over months and years is blocking the flow of water and has to be cleared. Therefore

the first condition in yoga is *shuddhi*, purification. Even hatha yoga begins with shuddhi kriyas, the shatkarma, not with asana. In raja yoga, the clearing has to take place in the mind, in all the four faculties of the mind. The four aspects of the mind are *ahamkara*, the ego; *chitta*, the memory, *buddhi*, the intelligence; and *manas*, the reflective power. They are blocked as they are influenced by the three gunas: tamas, rajas and sattwa.

Three forms of ahamkara: The tamasic ego is self-obsession, 'me and mine, me and mine'. It is the self-oriented awareness, the selfish attitude in life.

Self-projection and narcissism is the rajasic ahamkara. In Greek mythology there is the story of Narcissist, who would look at his reflection in the water and say, "How beautiful I am!" That is rajasic ahamkara. Facebook is nothing but an expression of the rajasic ahamkara. If you like Facebook, you will not want to agree with me, but the fact is that self-projection in any form is rajasic ahamkara.

Sattwic ahamkara is connection with the higher awareness, 'me and my God', 'me and my inspiration', 'Thy will be done'. The connection with that inspiration represents sattwic ahamkara. Thus, if there is a block in ahamkara, it will be in tamasic and rajasic ahamkara, and that has to be cleared.

Three forms of chitta: The tamasic chitta dwells upon negative memories. 'This person is like that, that person is like that, he had harmed me, he had screamed at me.' Dwelling upon your negative memories about people and situations, which may be due to your own impositions, is tamasic chitta.

The rajasic chitta highlights memories of your achievements and attainments. 'This year I climbed Mt. Everest which nobody around me has done', so you think about it and feel happy.

The sattwic chitta consists of memories that inspire you. 'My moments with my God when I shared an apple with Him.' That is a positive memory!

Three forms of buddhi: The tamasic buddhi is inactive, dull, and shows lack of appreciation.

The rajasic buddhi is the application of the intellect to satisfy one's own needs. The manipulations and justifications constitute rajasic buddhi.

The sattwic buddhi sees the whole picture. 'This person is like this due to this situation, condition, event, or interaction.' When the sattwic buddhi is active, you have the full picture; it is not a reactive picture.

Three forms of manas: Tamasic manas has a low capacity for analysis and rationality. When tamasic manas is predominant, there is no learning. You could be hearing the same lesson for thirty years, but it will not go in.

Rajasic manas represents excessive analysis. 'Why did that person say that?' and the mind goes on a whirlwind trying to make out every possible scenario. This over-analysis is the rajasic manas. For example, when you look at somebody and smile, their rajasic manas kicks in: 'Why did that person look at me and smile? Am I alright? Is my hair okay? Is something off?' Why not just accept that the person was simply happy and therefore he looked at you and gave a nice cheerful smile. When you try to find the reason behind every small thing, twisting your mind in a knot, you are under the influence of rajasic manas.

Sattwic manas is the balanced analysis arriving at the right conclusion.

Pratyahara as mental shuddhi

The three conditions of the three gunas exist at all the levels of the mind: ahamkara, chitta, buddhi and manas. The tamasic and the rajasic conditions block the mind, they become the rubbish inside the head. Therefore shuddhi has to be applied at all levels in yoga. Shuddhi does not denote merely physical purification but also mental purification.

Mental shuddhi is pratyahara. Just as physical shuddhi is shatkarma, mental shuddhi is pratyahara in raja yoga. Before you can reach the state of *dharana*, concentration, you have to attain mental shuddhi through pratyahara so that the energy can flow without obstruction or distraction.

The principles of pratyahara should be applied in your normal day to day routine and also in your yogic routine. Just as there is a set of five or six specific rules for yoga nidra, for every practice of pratyahara there are specific rules and conditions that define where you have to go, what you have to acquire and become, and what you have to release. If you follow them in a systematic way, not follow the whims of the mind but the path given by yoga, then in a few years' time you will see a beautiful butterfly emerging from the cocoon. Otherwise every year we will be meeting here, discussing and debating, and the same questions will be repeated. Therefore, you take the decision on what you wish to do and become.

Chitta clarified

There is still some confusion about chitta, and a question has come: "If we look at the Samkhya philosophy, in particular a text like *Samkhya Karika*, the word chitta does not appear at all; the evolutes of Prakriti are defined as only ahamkara, buddhi and manas. In Vedanta, the four components of the mind are talked about, including chitta, and there chitta is interpreted as the storehouse of smritis and samskaras, the place where all the memories are kept as pratyayas and where all the impressions go in. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, whenever the word chitta is used, it is in the sense of the total mind, total consciousness, everything that comes within the domain of *antahkarana*, the inner instrument. Therefore the question comes that when Patanjali refers to chitta in the *Yoga Sutras*, which chitta is he referring to. Is he using the word in the sense of the total mind or is it the Vedantic chitta, the storehouse of memories and samskaras, or is it something else? Of course, at the end of the day, these are all concepts and open to interpretation, and it is one's experience that counts."

Yoga is part of tantra and yoga is also part of Vedanta. The origin of yoga and the tradition of yoga does not begin with Samkhya. The tradition begins with the Vedas, tantras and the Upanishads. These represent the tradition of yoga. Vedanta speaks of chitta, the Yoga Upanishads speak of chitta,

and the tantras speak of chitta. They are the source of yoga, not Samkhya. Samkhya has been used as a support to define certain aspects of yoga in relation to the tattwas and others.

Patanjali was not a Samkhyan, he was a yogi who belonged to a tradition, who had an understanding and a concept, and he went by that tradition and those concepts. Therefore, it is not a question of what is correct or incorrect. If you see the timeline and how things evolved, the idea will become clear to you. If Patanjali was a Samkhyan, he would not follow the yogic tradition, he would not speak of the yamas and niyamas and many other ideas, including the concept of Ishwara pranidhana. Ishwara pranidhana is a bhakti concept, and Samkhya does not accept bhakti. Therefore, Patanjali may have used Samkhya to establish the ideas and principles of his yogic tradition, but he was not a Samkhyan.

As for chitta, human beings have the tendency to compartmentalize and demarcate everything. When manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are talked about, everybody thinks these are four demarcated parts, twenty-five percent



each. Nobody said that they are twenty-five percent each, they are defined in the tradition as four states, yet you decided that they are twenty-five percent each, as you saw them as part of a pie cut in four.

When you see a flame, what do you see of the flame? Just the 3-D burning flame. If you take a picture of the same flame, what will you see? A 2-D image of the flame. Now if you pixellate that picture in the computer, what will you see? Will you see the flame as you saw in reality? No. First you will see a pixel of black or white in the centre, then around that you will see a few pixels, little squares, in red. Above that you will see squares of orange, and beyond that you will see squares of yellow. The flame is one and the same, so why are you seeing four different colours when the image is pixellated? When you say, "This part is red, this part is white", you are giving each a name. You are saying, "This centre point is white, that is the hottest flame. The next in intensity is the red part, then the orange, and then the yellow." That is how you interpret the pixels, yet when you see the flame can you say which part is less hot and which is more? It is the same with consciousness.

When you pixellate the consciousness, then you see aham-kara, chitta, buddhi, manas. They are the four colours. When the pixellation is not there, all you see is the burning flame in full glory: the consciousness. Therefore it is irrelevant to debate who is right and who is wrong. The *Bhagavad Gita* is right, Vedanta is right, tantra is right, Samkhya is right, and Swami Niranjan is right. We look at the pixellations only in order to understand the concepts. The white part has to be treated in a particular manner, the red, the orange, the yellow, each has to be treated in particular manner since the intensity of heat, colour and light is different in all of them. That becomes evident only in the pixellation. However, when you come out of pixellation state, all you experience is consciousness.

Finally, nobody can tell the ultimate truth, and that is what the yogis have said. At the end they said, *Neti, neti* – "Not this, not this."

Pratyahara and Dharana

25 October 2016



There are certain ideas presented in raja yoga that indicate the process and the development of the sadhana that is given in raja yoga.

First, the intent of raja yoga: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – “To control the modifications of the greater mind or

consciousness is yoga.” The idea that is presented here first as the goal of raja yoga is where you are able to manage your chitta vrittis.

Second, the method: the *angas*, or the limbs of raja yoga, which are eight – yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. The first six are the practicable aspects, what you can practise. Dhyana and samadhi are extensions of dharana, what you attain due to your perfection in pratyahara and dharana. If you have perfected pratyahara and dharana, then dhyana is spontaneous, you don’t have to practise dhyana. If you have perfected pratyahara and dharana, then moving into samadhi from dhyana is spontaneous, as that is deepening of the same state. Therefore, dhyana and samadhi are not practices of raja yoga, but the attainments of raja yoga. Dhyana is experienced when the chitta vrittis are still. As long as the chitta vrittis are active, the mind, the emotions, the sentiments, the buddhi, are active, dhyana or meditation cannot take place. Therefore what most people do using the word ‘meditation’ is not meditation; the effort they make can take them only up to dharana, beyond that it is grace and destiny. With personal effort, there can be perfection of dharana; dhyana and samadhi are beyond your control.

The essential practice to attain *chitta vritti nirodhah* is pratyahara. Thus the focus of raja yoga is pratyahara, not dharana, for dharana will come after you have gone through pratyahara and cleared the causes of mental agitation. The first focus is attaining the state of pratyahara.

Purpose of asana and pranayama in raja yoga

Thus the two points of emphasis here are: chitta vritti nirodhah and pratyahara. Yama, niyama, asana and pranayama are supports to induce the state of pratyahara, to stop the chatter of the mind. That is why the style of asana practice in raja yoga is slower; it is not a dynamic practice, it is a slow and sustained practice. You hold the pose, focus on the chakra, deepen the awareness in that state, find your comfort

so that your mind is not distracted but is concentrating in the chakra, and stay there for five minutes. In this way, the asana becomes a practice in which you are practising pratyahara and concentration; it is not a physical movement only as in hatha yoga.

In hatha yoga you are going through a dynamic activity, in raja yoga it becomes a passive state. In hatha yoga the focus is the body; in raja yoga the focus is the state of mind in the posture. Therefore even asanas are used to induce a state of awareness, concentration and meditation.

It is the same with pranayama. In raja yoga the only state of pranayama that is considered effective for moving into the meditative condition is kumbhaka. Patanjali says:

*Tasminsati shvaasaprashvaasayor gativichchhedaha
praanaayaamaha.*

The asana having been done, pranayama is the cessation of the movement of inhalation and exhalation.

The different kinds of pranayama, whether nadi shodhana, bhastrika, sheetali, sheetkari, etc., are practised in hatha yoga and are described in hatha yoga texts such as *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. After one has perfected these through sustained practice, one can attain the state of kumbhaka effortlessly, which is the aim of pranayama in raja yoga. Remember that extended kumbhaka is only possible as a natural development after perfection of pranayama in hatha yoga.

Pranayama is used in raja yoga for stilling the chitta, as there is an inherent connection between the breath and the mind, between prana and the mind. When pingala nadi is active then the condition of mind is active. When ida nadi is active, the condition of mind is passive. Pingala externalizes the mind, and with the mind externalized all the faculties of the senses and the mind become extroverted. When ida is active, all the senses and faculties slow down and become introverted. With the practice of pranayama,

balance is attained between ida and pingala and between the corresponding states of the mind. Thus pranayama does find its target in the mind.

This balancing of ida and pingala has been defined in hatha yoga too. The word hatha represents the mantras *Ham* and *Tham*, the pingala mantra and the ida mantra, the pingala swara and the ida swara. These two have to be balanced. Hatha yoga is not saying awaken your prana, hatha yoga is saying balance your prana, attain that balance between the active and the passive. The process of balancing takes place in hatha yoga, and then when you are able to sustain that state of balance, it becomes raja yoga. Thus asana and pranayama become supports to pratyahara.

Understanding pratyahara

The word pratyahara has been explained by different people in different ways. One is to break it up as prati + ahara. *Ahara* means to consume and *prati* means reverse. Therefore pratyahara is reverse consumption. What does reverse consumption mean?

The senses are continuously feeding on sense objects in the external world. Whether consciously or unconsciously, knowingly or unknowingly, the senses are feeding on the outer objects: on whatever you see, hear, smell, taste, feel and experience. It is this outer feeding which distracts and disturbs the mental balance. Therefore, instead of the senses feeding the mind, in prati-ahara the mind feeds the senses. Things come up from inside to feed the senses. That is known as reverse consumption.

This point is important aspect to understand in relation to pratyahara. It is a state where nothing is coming from outside; you are cut off from the outside world. The senses have been withdrawn, yet they are not left dull, they are kept active. Their activities still continue in pratyahara. You are not stopping the mind in pratyahara, you are stopping the mind from its connections externally. Instead of seeing a person with your eyes open, you see the same person with

your eyes closed. When you see someone with your eyes open you see a certain form, shape and dimension: that is external perception, you are seeing the form outside and recognizing it inside. When you close your eyes you don't see the outer form, but you can still feed the same information to your senses by bringing the impressions up from your mind. Thus when you don't see anything outside, and instead create your own figure inside, that is pratyahara.

Another definition of pratyahara refers to *pratyayas*, which mean impressions. Consciousness is built upon layers and layers of impressions. It is not possible to find a unit of consciousness without impression. If it was without impression, it would be illuminated, pure and untainted. Only Purusha is free from karma, vipaka and all the kleshas described in the *Yoga Sutras*. Only Purusha, the elevated one, also identified as Ishwara has that clarity and purity of consciousness. According to the *Yoga Sutras* (1:24):

*Kleshakarmavipaakaashayairaparaamrshitah
purushavishesha eeshvarah.*

God (Ishwara) is a special soul untouched by afflictions, acts, their traces and their fruits.

In the normal human condition, one cannot clear the consciousness. The raja yoga systems realize this clearly, therefore they have said everything ends in samadhi, signifying that ultimately that purity is attained. They describe the states of samadhi but there is no guideline on how to experience samadhi. Even the topic of dhyana is discussed in an oblique way, saying that three dharanas equal one dhyana. Patanjali has left the ideas of dhyana and samadhi to people's inference; when they experience these states they will understand the subject. The focus for practice is pratyahara and dharana.

When we see pratyahara as a process of clearing of the pratyayas or impressions, we have to understand what pratyayas are. These impressions form the layers of con-

sciousness. The deepest ones, which are the support or the bases of the other layers, are known as karmas. The middle layers of pratyayas are known as samskaras, and the upper layers are known as memories. However, the word 'memory' indicates a specific function of the total mind; in yoga, the term used is pratyaya. In fact, to even say that the chitta is a storehouse of memories does not convey the idea properly: the chitta is the storehouse of pratyayas.

The consciousness is nothing but a collection of accumulated impressions, which always relate to the past. From the present to the past is the total consciousness. There is no consciousness of tomorrow, the future is not known to you, you don't even know what time you are going to get up. Even if you put an alarm on, you may doze off saying, "Five minutes more." Even that much is not certain. The future is not in the purview of consciousness. The present and the past make the total consciousness that everyone experiences through the mind.

Everything of the past is an impression, a pratyaya, even the memory of what you had for breakfast yesterday is a pratyaya. It is not a heavy pratyaya, it is feather-weight, and will be forgotten by you after a few days. However, if somebody harms you, that becomes a heavy-weight pratyaya, you cannot throw it away, it will remain there. Thus pratyayas indicate the density of impressions. When the impressions are dense and heavy, they become part of consciousness. When they are not dense or heavy, they are forgotten.

A conflict with a child will be forgotten after a month. A confrontation with an enemy will never be forgotten. Even if you don't see the person throughout your life, that moment will never be forgotten. With the child there was less density in your interaction, and with an adversary there was greater density. When it is really dense, things will not normalize, and that impression will bring out the feeling of anger, or the thought of injustice or harm being done to you. It is the removal or clearing of these pratyayas that becomes the focus of pratyahara.

How do you become aware of pratyayas? By entering into the state where the mind begins to feed the senses and the outer objects do not feed the mind.

Clearing the chitta

We come to the word chitta again. *Chitta* is a collection of impressions and evolves into *chetana*, the state of consciousness, and you the individual is known as *chiti*. Chitta is in you, but you are chiti. Chiti means the knower of consciousness. Chitta here becomes the building block of experience, chiti becomes the dimension of experience, and you become the experiencer of that.

For the clearing of chitta vrittis, everything that is contained in the form of an impression has to be brought to the surface and re-cognized. It has been cognized and is part of you, now you have to re-cognize it. To recognize, you begin to bring up impressions, starting with something that happened yesterday. You first clear the impressions from yesterday, as that is recent. Then you go back to the day before yesterday, you go back as far as you consciously can, and clear those impressions.

The recent accumulations will come under the purview of your observation, the drashta nature. Instead of trying to be the witness of all your life, see if you can be the witness of just one hour of your activity. If you can succeed in one hour of witnessing, then you can succeed in everything else. Everybody makes a lot of effort to become the observer, then the eyes open and you forget that you are the observer. With eyes open you again become involved; it is only with eyes closed that you observe. That is the conflict. You are a yogi only when you close the eyes, and you are a bhogi when your eyes are open; you are an indulgent person with eyes open and a spiritual person with eyes closed. What a contradiction!

That drashta nature is the observation and clearing. People say, “Drashta means to observe, so I am observing.” That is an incomplete process. You are observing the dirt but you haven’t cleared it. You can keep on observing the

same pile of dirt for years and years together, and the only thing you will discover is that the little mound becomes bigger and bigger. You become the drashta of that negative thing getting bigger in your own life. Therefore, drashta is not observation, drashta is the work that you have to do to open the door and the windows of the closed room, and then clean, dust, prepare, organize, beautify. When you have done all that then you can say, “Yes, the room is ready to receive guests.” When you have done all that then you can say, “Yes, today I have become the drashta.” Once you recognize where the dirt is and again and again go back to remove it, that is clearing the mind of the vrittis, of the pratyayas. Therefore, begin the process of chitta vritti nirodhah by using the techniques of pratyahara and becoming the observer of your own interactions and experiences.

Filling with the positive

Just like asana and pranayama, yama and niyama are also supports to pratyahara. When you are clearing out something that has been a part of your consciousness for so long, there is a sense of vacuum. You might have had the experience that after doing some yogic practices, even asana and pranayama, suddenly the consciousness becomes extremely clear yet non-specific. That is the state of blankness I am talking about. A disconnection takes place and there is nothing there, it is total vacuum. You don’t know where you are, you cannot focus on anything, there is no activity, only silence, as if you are floating in space. That is vacuum of mind, and not a meditative state.

As the clearing of pratyayas takes place, you continue to bring out memories and release them, they leave a vacuum. That vacuum has to be filled by the antidote to the problem which made its location in the mind as a boil. This is done through *pratipaksha bhavana*, cultivation of the opposite quality. If in your pratyahara practice you release the memory of death, then the opposite idea to bring in would be life. If you release a memory of suffering, the opposite would

be happiness. Whatever you are working on – a memory, an impression, a feeling, a sensation, a pain, a conflict – as you observe and release it, you have to fill that space with the opposite virtue of what you are releasing. This is an important aspect of pratyahara.

Swami Sivananda has laid great emphasis on the practice of pratipaksha bhavana to improve the quality of mind. Yamas and niyamas are part of this process, as they help to identify and cultivate the positive qualities you need to fill in the vacuum. They have been selected to fulfil a specific role in the attainment of a mental condition. The yamas and niyamas in each yoga, whether hatha, raja, bhakti, or kriya kundalini yoga are different, as each yama and niyama represents a quality or virtue that is needed for what you are dealing with in that particular yoga. Therefore the yamas and niyamas of raja yoga support pratyahara.

The yamas and niyamas should not be taken as codes of ethics and morality. That is a social perspective, not the spiritual perspective. The spiritual perspective sees them as qualities of mind, not imposed behaviours in the mind. At the social level, they become enforced behaviour: “Watch it, don’t do that, don’t say things like that, use proper language, do this, do that.” The restrictions come in and the behaviour is modified. However, the positive qualities have been part of spirituality since time immemorial. When they were first thought about, it was not in the context of morality and ethics, but to develop a better quality of life. It was realized that if you can be that, you are the ideal person. The attainment of these conditions of mind represented your drive to experience and become good, through your own effort.

So yama, niyama, asana, pranayama support pratyahara, as you go through introspection, awareness, observation, releasing, filling. When all the causes of distraction have been observed and have come within the field of your perception and awareness, then you move into dharana.

Dharana: the second objective of raja yoga

Dharana is fixing the mind on one idea; maintaining one state, one mood. You are not only fixing the mind on one idea, but also sustaining that state of mind and not allowing it to become dissipated. If you are happy, happiness becomes the dharana. If you are kind, kindness becomes the dharana. If you are compassionate, compassion becomes the dharana.

Dharana is something in which mind is merged with the idea of observation and concentration, there is no distinction between the two. Yet it is not a permanent connection. It is connectable and breakable. The moments of connection in dharana have to be increased for the process to become dhyana.

Thus, pratyahara is the first objective of raja yoga and dharana is the second. You start clearing the chitta vrittis and dealing with the pratyayas, which leads you to a focused state of consciousness, not just of the mind. In dharana, manas, buddhi, chitta, ahamkara are seen as one, it is the total consciousness. That is the end of raja yoga as far as practices go. The next stages of dhyana and samadhi cannot be practised, they have to be experienced. When dharana has been perfected and at least a glimpse of dhyana is received, then you can move into the psychic dimension with kriya yoga and kundalini yoga.

Hatha yoga is for the annamaya and pranamaya koshas, raja yoga is for the manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas, and kriya yoga is for the vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas. That is the sequence that Sri Swamiji had given to us, through a clear description and sequential development in every practice, and we will look at some of these practices.

Three practices of pratyahara

1. **Yoga nidra:** Yoga nidra means psychic sleep. What is your understanding of the meaning of the phrase ‘psychic sleep’? Some people say psychic sleep is sleepless sleep. Some people say it is conscious sleeping. Some people say shutting off the mind and losing it is the definition of psychic sleep. However,

all these ideas relate to manomaya kosha, and manomaya kosha is not psychic; it is vijnanamaya kosha which is psychic. This means yoga nidra is a practice that connects you to your vijnanamaya kosha. The psychic awareness of vijnanamaya kosha is not of the outer consciousness but of the total consciousness, and the total consciousness involves all the levels of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara.

In yoga nidra you keep yourself active all the time and create stimulation of different senses. For example, you create your own inner visual stimulation when you visualize different objects or scenes. That is due to the memories of what you have seen in your life. You can also imagine what you have not seen as a result of these memories. I have never seen a purple cloud, but I can visualize a purple cloud as I know what clouds are and I know what the colour purple is. So I can put those two together: the image of the cloud and the colour. In this way, you can see anything, even a rabbit with wings.

When unrealistic images come together, images that are not compatible in reality, it is a different experience from the coming together of compatible images. The incompatible



images become fantasy. Many people lose their path in pratyahara when they go on such flights of fancy, as two totally un-associated impressions are trying to create a third impression. You are creating more pratyayas, impressions, by going into flights of fancy, that is why visuals in yoga nidra are restricted to specific things. It is not that you can say anything under the sun and make up any story according to your liking, desire and whim. If you have done that, it is wrong, so come back to basics. Understand the visualization stage in yoga nidra from the perspective that the visuals have to first bring out memories that are soft in nature, not the hard ones that disturb you or destroy the peace and balance of mind.

In yoga nidra, when you begin to go into the pratyaya level, you begin with the soft memories. If I say, “Visualize a lake”, you search in your memory for a lake that you have seen, whether in the morning, afternoon or evening. It is an image that impressed you, an image that you liked and retained. If somebody said “Visualize a lake” to me, the lake that I naturally used to visualize was a place I liked: the scenery, the water, the surroundings, the trees, the snow-capped mountains, the Ozarks in America. It would always be that lake, which had made a deep impression. However, it is possible for another memory to overpower the previous one. If today somebody says visualize a lake, the image of Manasarovar in Tibet will come as that is a better impression and has more feeling associated with it. It has overpowered the memory of the Ozarks lake and now my deepest impression has become the Manasarovar lake. Now that visualization is natural, as it is stronger than the previous one. You begin to practise visualization with such things: lakes, rivers, mountains, flowers, a garden, forest walk, moon, sun, star, something that you see on an everyday basis. Yoga nidra practice ends with visuals.

In the preceding stage of yoga nidra, experiencing opposites, the sensations that are used are also limited. They are related with bringing up memories that might disturb

the peace of mind, and then harmonizing those memories. Therefore, the sensation of heaviness comes first, before the sensation of lightness. If you change the order, it is not yoga nidra as it will not explode the pratyayas in a balanced way. If you explode a heavy pratyaya, you have to replace it with a light one. If you explode a painful pratyaya, you have to replace it with happiness, this order is necessary. The feeling of heaviness first, then the feeling of lightness. The feeling of pain first, then bring up the memory of pleasure. You are always changing the negative into a positive, not the other way around.

Every stage of yoga nidra has a specific purpose and therefore it is done in a particular way, which has been given by Sri Swami Satyananda. Even if you are an experienced teacher, check your practice to make sure you have not lost the track.

2. **Antar mouna:** After yoga nidra you move into another practice, antar mouna, the second rung of the ladder. The same thing is being done, but this time you are using thought as the medium to internalize yourself. Thought is an activity of the manas level. How do you control your manas? How do you observe your manas? What are the strings of manas? The strings of manas are the thoughts. In yoga nidra, you relaxed and cleared the impressions, recent or old. Then you go into antar mouna and begin to work with manas. The subsequent meditations lead you from manas to buddhi to chitta to ahamkara.

In antar mouna, you look at the strands of mind and see them come and go. The only problem is that these strands of mind, the thoughts, are usually an unconscious activity, not a conscious activity. Therefore, when you begin to observe your thoughts, you suddenly find that they are not coming. Spontaneous thinking is an unconscious activity, you find it cannot become a conscious activity, you cannot consciously think. You can brood over something. You can pick up a thought or an idea and brood over it, but that is not thinking. It is brooding, which means circling around an idea.

In order to observe your thoughts in antar mouna, you have to withdraw your attention a little bit. That will allow them to come again. As long as you are 100 percent externalized, the thoughts won't come. You have to go 50 percent into your awareness, then they will again start trickling in. The moment you again intensify your awareness, they will stop. Therefore, the state of mind in antar mouna should be 50 percent awareness.

In 100 percent awareness, you struggle with yourself, 'The thoughts are not coming, now what do I do? I have to think about something. I have to bring them back.' You create more stress in your antar mouna here. In 50 percent awareness, you can see the strands of thought moving. Without intensifying your attention, you can look at them without obstructing them. When you are able to do this, it indicates the resilience of awareness and mind. It is like the strength of the body. If you have to pick up a book, the strength is used in a specific manner. If you have to pick up a bucket of water, the strength is used differently. Resilience has to develop in antar mouna before you progress into the next meditative technique.

The seven stages of the practice develop resilience and the skill to be with your manas from every possible angle. See the thoughts, stop them. Call them, stop them. Create them, stop them. You are controlling and developing your manas. You are not learning concentration, you are not meditating; you are becoming aware of and observing your manas. You are silencing the chatter of thoughts, and silencing the chatter of thoughts is known as inner silence, *antar mouna*.

The thought process is also connected to pratyayas. Every thought has a link somewhere in the past. A thought is like a weed: on the surface you see only seven centimetres, but when you start digging you find that the weed goes down seven feet. That is the nature of a thought also. What you see is only the seven-centimetre growth, but it is linked with your ahamkara and buddhi, with your ambitions and desires. All the traits of the personality reflect themselves in your thoughts. Can you pick up the different traits of your

personality in one thought? Can you observe them? Can you change them? This is the learning of antar mouna.

3. **Ajapa japa:** The third practice of pratyahara is ajapa japa. When the mind is still and you are able to observe your own thoughts, then there is a need to channel the mind and prana, to bring together prana and mind and merge them. Therefore, after antar mouna comes ajapa japa. From yoga nidra to antar mouna you are working with the upper 25 per cent of the consciousness, the manas level. In yoga nidra you do go deep into your consciousness, into vijñanamaya kosha, but you bring the matter up to the surface, to the manas level. Then in antar mouna you deal with everything at that level. Once this is done, you have to merge manas with prana, and that is done through ajapa japa.

In ajapa japa, the breath, prana and mind work in unison. The training is to visualize the movement of mind and prana in different areas: in the frontal passage, the nasal passage, the spinal passage, the circular passage, the lateral passage, the vertical passage, the inverted passage. These passages denote a movement of mind and prana shakti through different *nadis*, energy channels, and *chakras*, energy centres.

With the intensification of ajapa japa, the chakras can be awakened and an altered state of mind achieved. The poet yogi Kabir has spoken of ajapa japa as the ultimate meditative practice. In the vedic literature too, the meditation most recommended is ajapa japa. In fact, it has been considered so important that there is a separate Upanishad dealing with the subject, called *Hamsa Upanishad*. The mantras *Ham* and *So*, *So-Ham* or *Hamsa* is the subject of the *Hamsa Upanishad*, and it provides the methods, varieties, systems, techniques and attainments of ajapa japa. The reason the ajapa practice has been given such a prominent place in the meditative techniques of yoga and spirituality is that it merges mind and prana together.

With the three practices of yoga nidra, antar mouna and ajapa japa, the first level of pratyahara is complete. The subsequent practices take you to other levels of pratyayas.

The Behavioural Aspect of Raja Yoga

26 October 2016



There is an important sutra in the *Yoga Sutras*, which indicates the attainment of raja yoga, not in samadhi but in one's behaviour. Swami Vigyanchaitanya will tell you about it.

Swami Vigyanchaitanya: The sutra is:

*Maitreekarunaamuditopekshaanaam
sukhadukhahapunyaapunyaavishayaanaam
bhaavanaatachittaprasaadanam*

In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful.

The sutra uses the word *chittaprasadam*, the state where your chitta is happy, and it gives the tools of how to achieve this prasad, this cheerful state. It gives a method of how, in spite of the negativity which may be there in the environment, one can maintain a positive state.

The sutra presents four situations that we meet in the environment. The first is *sukha*. *Sukha* means happiness. Whenever we see somebody happy in our environment, we should have *maitri*, a friendly attitude towards the person in our mind, and then that happiness also becomes ours. We are not thinking, 'I wish I could be happy like that person.' That is jealousy. In this process we are eliminating the negative tendency of jealousy from the mind and instead cultivating the positive attribute of friendliness.

The second idea is *dukha*, sorrow. Wherever we come across someone who is sorrowful, we should have compassion towards that person, we should have the feeling that 'This sorrow is also mine.' In this case the attitude is not, 'Thank God it didn't happen to me.' That is also a negative tendency that we have, so we are getting rid of that negativity from our mind by thinking, 'This is also mine, I also feel bad because this has happened.'

The third situation is when we encounter *punya*, goodness. Many people say that the world is going to the dogs, that everything is in a terrible state. No, there is so much of goodness around, and when we see that goodness, we should have the attitude of *mudita*, gladness. We should be exultant, bubbling with joy, realizing that goodness is always around.

The fourth situation is when we encounter *apunya*, wickedness. Then we should have the attitude of *upeksha*, ignore it.

The sutra states that if you can maintain these attitudes, your chitta will achieve that state of *prasadam*, and remain in that state.

Swami Niranjan: What has been explained is the behavioural aspect of raja yoga. Raja yoga is not only practice and experience. You are not merely practising yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, and hoping to experience dhyana and samadhi. The first six are the so-called practice aspects and the last two are the so-called experience aspects, yet that is not raja yoga. What is the result of practising and experiencing these limbs of raja yoga? Is meditation and samadhi the result or is improvement of mind the result? Meditation and samadhi cannot be the result as people think. In fact, you should remove the word 'meditation' from your vocabulary, as you give a wrong understanding of the idea.

When you look at the system of raja yoga, you see techniques and the possible experiences, and the outcome of these techniques and experiences is balance of mind. The sadhana does not remain limited to the point of dhyana or samadhi. In the process of clearing the mind and refilling it with the positive, you are altering the condition of the mind, and naturally a change in behaviour follows. When you consistently practise ahimsa, satya, asteya, aparigraha, brahmacharya, saucha, santosha, tapa, swadhyaya, Ishwara pranidhana, the mental condition does change.

Satya is not going to give you the experience of meditation. Ahimsa is not going to give you the experience of meditation or samadhi. They will transform your nature, your mind, your perceptions, your outlook, your attitude, and make them more harmonious, regulated and balanced. When the positive traits become predominant then negative traits diminish. With that, dissipations and distractions also diminish. The positive traits become highlighted in your

behaviour, understanding of situations and perceptions. All yamas and niyamas reflect in the behaviour, not only those of raja yoga but also the twenty of hatha yoga that you practised before you came to raja yoga. They become part of your expression. When the positive becomes your expression, it means the mind is clear; the tamasic, negative and destructive pratyayas that usually have deep roots, have been cleared.

Two levels of the drashta nature

With the practice of raja yoga, you also cultivate the faculty of observation, the *drashta* nature. For example, right now you are breathing but you are unaware that you are breathing. If somebody says, “Observe your breath”, then the natural tendency is to regulate and control the respiration. You were not asked to regulate or control the breath, you were asked to observe it, yet you begin to regulate, control and move the breath according to your wish. Why do you do it? Lack of understanding? You don’t hear the instructions? You don’t understand the instructions? What is the reason? The reason is that when you become aware of something, controls automatically come in.

If your children are playing around on a wet floor and you are engrossed in something else, you are unaware of them and they do as they like. The moment you become aware, you say, “Don’t run there or you will slip.” Two minutes ago you were not concerned, but the moment you observe and become aware, control comes in. Similarly, when you are not observing your thoughts, they come continuously, but the moment you begin to observe them in antar mouna, controls come in and they stop.

Therefore, it can be said that there are two levels of observation. One, observing without imposing any control. Two, interfering with control. Interfering with control is the first stage, as the wild horse has to be held in check and you have to pull in the reins. That is acceptable to change a specific attitude or action, just as when you see a child running on wet ground you say, “Don’t run, you might slip, walk carefully.”

That is controlling a situation so that no harm comes and wellness prevails.

You do the same with the mind: see, observe and modify. You control the expressions and then modify them. That level of observation is the beginner's level. The yogi's level of observation is different. One who has already attained stability of mind is not seeking to control or modify anything. He simply becomes the witness. The state is that of a passive drashta. In the early stages, the drashta is active. In the novice stage, the process of observation is active, leading to modification and change. In the peaceful state, the drashta nature becomes passive.

Drashta in pratyahara and dharana

In pratyahara, the first level of drashta is used. As you observe your own nature, you notice the faults, and you try to correct them. When you observe the breath, you realize that you were breathing shallowly so you try to deepen the breath. When you observe the thoughts, you realize that the mind was incessantly pouring out negative thoughts and you try to stop them. This is where you make the effort to improve the manas, buddhi and chitta, and the tamasic and rajasic expressions of ahankara. The moment your awareness goes to a point, you try to control it. This is the dynamic drashta, which remains active only until the pratyahara state. Then in dharana the passive drashta comes in. In dharana there is no clearing; you are just holding. The more you hold and the more you isolate the distractions the better the dharana.

There is a story of the Pandavas and Kauravas, the hundred and five brothers who were taught the science of archery by their guru, Dronacharya. At the time of examination, the guru placed a clay bird on top of a branch and asked the students to shoot the bird's eye. He called one student and said, "Take aim." The student took aim and the teacher asked, "What do you see?" The student said, "I see everything: the bird, the branches, the leaves, the people, the tree, the sky, the clouds." The guru said, "Put down the bow and arrow."

He called the next one. “Take aim. What do you see?” “Oh master, I see my brothers, I see you, I see the ground, the tree, the flowers, the fruits, I see everything including the bird.” The guru said, “Put down the bow and arrow.” One hundred and four people came and they were all asked to put down their bow and arrow. The last one to come was Arjuna. The guru said, “Take aim.” Arjuna took aim. “What do you see?” “Nothing except the target.” “You don’t see leaves?” “No.” “You don’t see the whole bird?” “No.” “You don’t see the clouds and the sky?” “No.” “You don’t see your brothers and me?” “No.” “What do you see?” “Only the eye that I have to shoot.” The guru said, “He has passed the exam.”

It was not as if Arjuna could not see everything. He could, yet his mind was not distracted. Although he was seeing everything, his focus was the eye of the bird and nothing else. That is dharana.

There might have been times when you have also experienced this state of dharana. When there is loud music playing, so loud that you cannot hear anything, and somebody mouths something from a distance, you are able to understand despite the noise. That is the state of dharana. Despite the noise, you are able to hear a whisper, which normally you would not be able to. Normally, you would question, “What did you say, what did you say?” However, if there is dharana, then even amid the noise you are able to make out the words.

Similarly, a mother is able to recognize her child among thousands of children. That is due to their inner connection, the sentiment, the love, the affection, the connection of birth. That is also a dharana connection, it is not a superficial connection. If the child is in some other country and some incident happens there, the mother will intuitively feel that something has happened to her child. That connection is dharana.

Dharana as interconnectivity

When that same connection is with many, when several dots are connected, it is known as *vibhu*, which is the second stage of dharana. There are two stages of dharana: single

focus and multiple focus. The single focus is one experience, one connection, one feeling, one thought, one image. That is where you hold your mind. Like Arjuna watching the bird's eye: seeing everything yet his whole mind focused on the bird's eye. That is single dharana. That is all right when you are dealing with manas, buddhi and chitta, as each experience of manas, buddhi and chitta is a singular experience depending on the pratyaya or impression which is highlighted. Therefore, up to chitta it is single dharana, but then dharana changes.

If you draw four dots on a blackboard, they will not mean anything until you come to the level of ahamkara. You will see them only as four points on the blackboard. However, if you move into the second level of dharana and connect one dot with another: the first with the second, the second with the third, the third with the fourth, and the fourth with the first, what emerges is a square. That means that by connecting the multiple dots, you create an impression. That dharana happens at the ahamkara level.

Ahamkara, not the ego but the self-image, the individual existence, is activated only with the emergence of buddhi, chitta and manas. When these three are absent, you are only with ahamkara, the self-identity, the self, or the individual awareness. Without chitta, buddhi and manas, you will not have any pratyayas to deal with. Impressions are absent. Nothing has been formed, created or defined. Nothing has come within the range of your perception, nothing has become part of your consciousness or past awareness, to form an impression. At the ahamkara level, what you see is the play of the gunas. Therefore dharana at this level happens on the gunas.

Dharana on sattwa

The three gunas create three conditions of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. However, when you come to the stage of dharana with regard to ahamkara, you hold on only to the sattwic nature. There is no perception of rajasic or tamasic

nature here, as the tamasic ego and the rajasic ego, self-obsession and self-projection, were identified in pratyahara or the first level of dharana and cleared. Now you are targeting the sattwic ego, which is not self-obsession or self-projection, but rather connection with the higher nature. You are no longer the ego which is arrogant, angry, jealous, hateful, loving, demanding, giving. You are aware of your connection with the higher self.

The higher self can be guru, God, or the inner spirit, who you perceive as inspiration. The dharana on the sattwic ahamkara is the connection with the inspiration. You are not looking at the face of guru or your deity and saying how wonderful and beautiful they are, rather you are connecting with the inspiration that they have given to you to evolve and grow in life. You are connecting with the encouragement, inspiration, motivation and propulsion that you experience in your spiritual life. You realize that it is not your effort, but you are being carried. You are not doing anything, it is being done through you. In this connection you become the medium through which that higher agency expresses itself, whereas in the tamasic and the rajasic connection you are expressing yourself. That is the dharana of ahamkara.

Once that connection becomes strong, then dharana moves into meditation. There is no jump or shift, there is no new thing for you to practise to go from dharana to dhyana.

Thus, just as there are two types of drashta, the active and the passive, there are two types of dharana. One, at the level of chitta, buddhi and manas, which represent the impressions of the world. The second, at the level of ahamkara, which is the last covering before luminosity. Once ahamkara dissolves, you are there. In this dharana, you are not focusing on a single perception or pratyaya; you are connecting all the dots to create a picture of your inspiration, and that is known as vibhu.

Behavioural raja yoga

Attainment of the state of vibhu through the practice of dharana is the aim of raja yoga. Therefore, don't think in terms of dhyana and samadhi, just aim to experience this goal. If you can do that, then you will become a yogi.

Chitta vritti nirodhah is the objective of raja yoga, and the medium are the six angas: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana. The perfection of these practices leads to the last two angas: dhyana and samadhi, which are experiences. The deepening of that experience is modification in behaviour: as you connect with harmony and happiness, everything changes in your interactions and relationships. This is the behavioural outcome of raja yoga as stated in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:33):

*Maitrikarunaamuditopekshaanaam
sukhaduhkhapunyapunyavishayaanaam
Bhavanaatashchittaprasaadanam.*

In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful.

The first is: friendliness towards those who are happy. When you encounter or see somebody happy, you are automatically attracted to them, "Oh that person is really happy, I like that person." Although you have not spoken to the person, their happiness has motivated you to say good things about them. If they have a frown, you would say, "Oh, that person is frowning. I don't think I want to talk to that person." There is a natural tendency to appreciate happiness and also to become part of it. That is the statement in this sutra: *sukha* and *maitri*, happiness and friendliness go together.

The second idea is recognition of suffering, *dukha*, and the mental behaviour or attitude towards suffering: that of compassion. This attitude will motivate you to act in a manner that will help the other person. It is not sympathy

where you are saying, “Oh, you poor little thing.” It is not even empathy. Compassion is different from sympathy or empathy. Compassion means you are involved with helping the other person overcome their difficulties. You are not just doing lip-service, “Oh, you poor little thing.” Lip-service is sympathy. If you feel the pain of another person, people call it empathy. However, that is transference of a condition to another person. Someone’s feeling of pain is transferred to you, and you also begin to feel the pain. Someone’s suffering is transferred to you, and you also begin to feel the suffering. How do you clear that? How do you clear those impressions? It is difficult.

For this reason, yoga does not use any word denoting sympathy or empathy. The word used is *karuna*, and *karuna*, in the broader sense, is your participation in the alleviation of someone else’s problem. Whether that is objective or subjective is up to you and your own head-trips. If it is your child, you will become subjective; if it is somebody else, you will remain objective. Nevertheless, the quality that has to be cultivated is compassion.

The third idea is: be happy on seeing someone virtuous. To become bubbly and happy on seeing somebody virtuous, pious and good is an expression of the positive nature. There is also a natural magnetic energy around the virtuous. When people used to go to Swami Sivananda, before they even entered the ashram they would start bubbling over. That was his influence. They would begin to feel a change in their mental and emotional states, and suddenly feel uplifted, although they were not in front of him. When people used to come for darshan of Sri Swamiji, their heart would begin to beat fast: boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, and they were all bubbly. Not expectation, but anticipation. This is the combination of *punya* and *mudita*, goodness and joy; the result of the goodness is inner joy.

The fourth idea is to ignore the wicked. Some people have a moral conflict with this statement: “How can we ignore the crooked? We should try to help them. We should

try to improve them.” They talk like reformists. Yoga does not believe in reforming the outer world; yoga believes in managing the inner world. If you wish to reform somebody, that is your inclination, but be clear that yoga does not seek to reform anybody.

The nature of a barking dog is to bark. The postman goes to deliver letters and the dog goes on barking. The postman takes precautions and ignores the dog. That is what is meant here. When dogs bark at you, ignore them. Buddha used to ignore them. All masters have ignored people who barked at them. There is a saying in Hindi: *Haathi chale baajaar, kuttaa bhounke hazaar* – “When an elephant walks to the market, a thousand dogs will bark but the elephant will not bother.” The elephant will ignore them all. Only another dog will recognize what is being said, as that is dog language. If a dog barks and you react, it means you are also a dog who can understand the barking. *Khag jaane khag ki bhaashaa*. Only birds know the language of birds. Only dogs know the language of dogs.

If you react to the wicked, you will be disturbed. Your intention may be good, but the other person’s intentions are not good. You may want to give butter, but the other person has a knife that can easily cut through butter. Your softness is nothing compared to the hardness of the other person. Your gentleness, sympathy or compassion is not strong enough to deal with the hardness of the wicked.

If you want to control an elephant, you have to apply a strength that is greater than the elephant’s. If you want to control a horse, you have to apply a strength that is greater than the horse’s strength. If you want to control a dog, you have to apply a strength that is greater than the dog’s strength. Therefore, if you want to modify the wicked, you have to be ten times stronger than the wicked to influence them in a positive manner. If you are at the same level, you won’t have a chance. They have the sword and you have the flower. Who will win? The sword will win, unless you are ten times stronger.

The idea is that to counter a force, you need to have a stronger force. This strength can be cultivated with positive inputs. The sutra is indicative of that. If you can cultivate and strengthen a positive state of mind and being, then outer behaviour need not be worried about; the appropriate expression will take place naturally. If you see a scorpion while walking at night, you will definitely give a wide berth to it. If you see a snake, you will give a wide berth to it. If you see a terrorist, you will give a wide berth to him. In any kind of damaging or destructive environment, it is the natural tendency to give a wide berth to the danger to be safe.

People think that in order to be spiritual they have to help everybody, and common sense is thrown to the winds. The wicked are as dangerous as the snake or the scorpion in the grass, and you don't have the strength to counter that negative force. Therefore, avoid it. Would you go running and bash your head against a wall? No. You know that nothing will happen to the wall but you will crack your head. There is an awareness of what is hard and what is soft, and of acting accordingly.

Wickedness represents the hardness of life, not the human softness. It is like the raw potato, which you cannot eat. In order to eat the hard potato, you have to boil it and make it soft, then you can enjoy it and swallow it. Similarly, there is no use trying to melt mental hardness, for you are not strong enough to deal with the negatives of the mind. You cannot even deal with the hardness of your own mind, the negativity of your own mind, forget another person. Therefore, just focus on cultivating the positive within yourself; maintain your balance, be the observer, and hold the mind in control. That is raja yoga.

The Path of Interconnection

27 October 2016



We were discussing the concept of *vibhu*, which means interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is the quality that true yogis desire. Interconnectedness and bliss are the two things that yogis crave when they are involved in their sadhana. Whether in the Himalayan caves in their isolation or amid people in a community, they await the experience of *vibhu* and *ananda*.

At the end of the *Saundarya Lahari* we chant four mantras:

Namaste namaste vibhovishvamoorte
Namaste namaste chidaanandamoorte
Namaste namaste tapoyoga gamya
Namaste namaste shrutijnana gamya.

These four lines indicate the aspiration of raja yoga. First it is acknowledging, 'I surrender'. *Namaste, Namaste* – "I surrender, I surrender", not "I salute". I surrender to what? To *vibhovishvamurte* – that cosmic form which is interconnected. This is not a philosophical concept, on the contrary, it is a down-to-earth practical experience that everybody has.

An example: when you seek love, what are you seeking? Connection. When you love, it is interconnection. As long as that love is pure, there is upliftment, but when you change that love with your tamasic and rajasic qualities, initially there is happiness but later on discontentment comes in. The initial effort was of connection, and everybody wants to be connected. However, the connection that you seek with your friends and family members is not the spiritual connection; it is a gross, material, selfish connection, based on desires, expectations and individual perceptions.

If you forget that self-oriented connection, and experience your connection to be the appropriate, the true and the pure one, without the influence of tamas and rajas, then can you imagine the state of happiness that will be all around, the state of fulfilment that will be all around? That will be the state of vibhu.

Sri Swami Satyananda speaks of *atmabhava*, the state of mind where you are able to see yourself in others, and it is part of the vibhu awareness. It allows you to connect even with strangers. Through *atmabhava* you connect not only with those who fulfil your needs and whims, but also with those whose needs you can fulfil. Ultimately, that is the connection of *atmabhava*. That cosmic self or higher self represents the connection with each and every thing. Therefore, the first acknowledgement is of that cosmic nature: *Namaste, namaste, vibhovishvamoorte*.

That interconnected, universal nature is also identified in the second line: *chidanandamoorte*, representing the total consciousness and bliss in consciousness. Not a single part, fraction or percentage of the consciousness is devoid of that whole experience; it is *chidanandamoorte*.

The way to attain this interconnectedness and bliss is given in the third and fourth lines. You can experience that vibhu and chidananda state through *tapas*, austerity, and *yoga*, practice, discipline. You can experience it through *shruti*, listening and imbibing, not inferring your own ideas, but imbibing and trying to understand; through *jnana*, knowing. These are the four components to come to that level.

Yoga is not just a simple comfortable practice; it is also a *tapas*. If you do it in the right spirit, in the correct manner, with the appropriate awareness, it becomes a *tapas*. *Tapas* means to purify and bring out the pure from within. When you put gold in fire and heat it, all the fluff of the gold comes to the surface and can be removed. Heating of gold is *tapas*. Heating of the hard potato is *tapas*. After all, the potato goes through *tapas*, boiling in hot water, in order to become soft.

People want experience without effort, and that is human nature. Humans are the species that wants to have everything without any effort. They shy away from effort, and to avoid effort they create a false image of themselves. If you compare all humans on a scale of intelligence, you will find that nobody is equal, yet everybody wants to prove that they are better than the other person. When you are trying to project what you are not, that is the tamasic *ahamkara*.

From manah prasad to ananda

To transcend the tamasic *ahamkara* and experience *ananda*, a process has to be followed, and it is a simple one. The most important thing, which people do not realize, is that if the goal is *ananda*, then you have to begin with happiness. That is why the first yogic *yama* is *manah prasad*, happiness. That is the beginning of the string that will take you to its end at *ananda*.

If you have to enter a dark cave, and somebody gives you a string, you hold on to the string and find your way through the cave. You catch hold of the beginning of the string, and gradually inch your way through the darkness with its help, until you reach the other side. The part of the string you were

given to hold at the beginning is one extreme and you have to gradually come to its end. Holding on to the string of manah prasad, you have to start working your way forward until you come to satchitananda: from micro to macro. Therefore, begin with manah prasad and go to ananda. Let manah prasad be the foundation of your mental state, condition and mood when you practise yoga. Then, no matter how dark it becomes on your journey, you will have the string to hold on to, and you can keep on walking.

Sequential process of yoga

You have to realize that yoga is a sequential process. It is not random ideas thrown together that you have to siphon through to select what is good for you. If you wish to flirt with yoga, you can do that; but if you wish to experience yoga, you have to know the process and realize where your shortcomings are. That is how you move forward. For this reason, the understanding of the yoga chakra has to be clear and complete.

Be clear on how different yogas complement each other in the yoga chakra. Hatha yoga and karma yoga go together; raja yoga and bhakti yoga go together; kriya yoga and jnana yoga go together. Raja yoga is working through the mind, and at the same time you have to work through the heart with bhakti yoga. Thought and sentiments come together to support each other in improving the quality of mind and human expression. As you go through raja yoga and the practices of pratyahara, in the same breath you are working with sentiments and emotions, as they also form part of the mental behaviour.

Bhakti yoga has nine different *angas*, limbs or components, just as ashtanga yoga has eight. The main aim of bhakti yoga is *sayujya*, channelling one's emotions towards that higher consciousness so that one experiences complete union with that. This is transformation of tamasic and rajasic ahamkara into sattwic ahamkara with the help of emotions. In raja yoga you attain this state through the processes of

pratyahara and dharana, in bhakti yoga you attain it through the process of channelling emotions.

The biggest problem in human interactions is the influence of tamasic and rajasic ahamkara, and it is only on the rise. Today you constantly hear people speak in terms of ‘me’ and ‘my’: “This is my experience, this is my understanding, this is my idea.” You would not hear your grandmother speak like that. That generation never spoke in the language of ‘my’, they did not use the word ‘my’ in their vocabulary as they lived for everyone. Today’s generation does not think like that; they are focused on ‘This is mine’.

This mentality of ‘me and mine’ represents a deep tamasic identification with the ego. It indicates that there is unconcern for other people, the primary concern is you. You are always saying: “My thought, my experience, my practice, my realization, my need, my this, my that.” With such a state of mind you cannot become a yoga sadhaka.

Until the hard ego is softened, you cannot experience yoga. For this, bhakti yoga becomes an aid to raja yoga, as the first thing that you have to drop in bhakti yoga is the idea of doership, the idea of ‘I am doing this.’ Instead, the opposite idea comes in: ‘I am only a medium through which this is being done. I am a medium, this life is an expression of the Divine Will. Just as my body is the medium for my mind to function, this life is the medium for the Divine Will to manifest.’ With this, the idea of I, me and mine recede into the background.

Be willing to change

The ‘I’ is the biggest stumbling block in any yoga. It is the biggest stumbling block in life, as it is the cause of disturbing the goodness in life. No matter how much good there is, when I, me and mine come in, all that is finished. That is the reason there is so much dissatisfaction in society today. Nobody wants to think about the other person.

If practitioners and sadhakas of yoga also think in this manner, then there won’t be any sustainable growth or

progress. You will be benefited by your practice no doubt, but you will not be practising yoga, you will only be doing exercises like aerobics. You practise yoga when you become aware of the qualities of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*, and change the *tamas* into *sattwa*. The journey of yoga, in a nutshell, is not towards self-realization but changing *tamas* into *sattwa*. That is the focus and the aim that yogis have given to yoga. Change the bad into good and be that, change the negative into positive and be that.

What blocks this process is the arrogance, the *tamasic* and *rajasic* ego. If someone were to point out your shortcoming, your immediate reaction will be: “Who are you to tell me anything?” Disciplines, rules and systems are not respected, and people try to manoeuvre their way around the rules. Does that indicate sincerity of intention? No. It indicates a rigid condition of mind where you feel that your rights are being suppressed by other people, and therefore there is rebellion and reaction. If instead you tried to understand the purpose behind the discipline and apply your discrimination, your response would be different. Otherwise, you can fantasize about greatness yet never become great.

As a yoga practitioner and *sadhaka*, you have to be willing to see your shortcomings. Don’t think that you are above-board. The human mind is not straight, it can twist itself into knots without your even realizing that it is doing so. Therefore, be always willing to hold up a mirror to yourself, be always willing to see your shortcomings, to be open and to improve. Only then you can practise yoga.

Don’t carry a false image of yourself, don’t think that you can’t be touched by the forces of negativity. Soften that arrogant nature and develop humility, and strengthen the drive towards luminosity. It is not merely meditation that will give you illumination, but the twenty-four-hour awareness, the second-to-second awareness. So, don’t try to become a yogi by closing the eyes, but by keeping the eyes open and doing the right thing with respect, dignity and honour.

The basis of the yogic journey

The journey of yoga begins with moment-to-moment awareness. Many people come to the trainings thinking they will be learning techniques and practices. The techniques and practices are there, and they are being taught with a new understanding and clarity, so you can apply them better. However, the important point is that no matter where you are or what you are doing, the mind has to be in your grip. Even while doing asana you have to practise pratyahara, and even when you are not doing asana you have to practise pratyahara. This is the truth of the yogic journey.

You have both options: go the easy way or make the effort to experience yoga. Practise your asana and pranayama like aerobic exercise and be happy with it, go to twenty different teachers and experiment with this technique and that technique. Or, pick up one and go to its end. Sri Swamiji used to say that instead of digging fifty holes one foot deep to find water, dig one hole fifty feet deep and you will have more chances of finding water. The choice is yours.

Therefore, if you are a serious yoga practitioner, work towards the aim of vibho vishvamurte, interconnection with the most positive strength that you have. That is the teaching of Swami Sivananada and that is the teaching of Swami Satyananda: connect with the positive strength and then the petals of the flower will open automatically. You will not have to pull each petal out to make the flowering faster. Just be quiet, be sincere, serious and committed, and let the petals of your inner self blossom spontaneously.

Q&A

Can the drashta, the witness, also be changed and improved?

The moment you become aware of something, there is scope of improving it. If you are unaware then there is no possibility of understanding how to improve. If you are aware then the inclination to change what you are observing will automatically be there. That is true of the drashta also. You

can improve your drashta awareness and it can evolve. It is not just one static condition.

You are a witness the whole day long, your eyes are open, but what do you observe? Your ears are open, but what do you hear? Your mind is active, but what do you understand and accept? Being a drashta is not merely a meditative process, it is a twenty-four-hour awareness. If that awareness is there, the quality of your whole life changes.

Is it right to take impressions of one's suppressed emotions and work on them, gradually going back in time – from today, yesterday, going back into the past as far as possible.

Emotions and raja yoga is a subject in itself. There is a whole section of raja yoga that is still unpublished, relating to emotions. What is published is the mental component, the practices of yoga nidra, ajapa japa, antar mouna, etc.

There are different practices of pratyahara in which the emotions are observed, seen and released, just as you do with the mind. Just as there is antar mouna for the mind, there is antar darshan for emotions. *Mouna* means silence and *darshan* means to see. If you think in relation to mind, mouna is the appropriate term to be used, to stop the chatter of the mind. All the agencies of the mind chatter continuously: manas is a chatter box, buddhi is a chatter box, chitta is a chatter box, ahamkara is a chatter box. Therefore mouna, silence, has to descend in all these four aspects. Darshan means to see, and this seeing applies to emotions. You don't generally see emotions, you flow in them. Whatever emotion is there right now, without even recognizing it, you are flowing in it. You are always in the state of experiencing a sentiment and emotion, stimulated by the environment, people, or other influences. The emotion that you are already living has to be seen, and this begins with observation of the present day. As the questioner said, you can work backwards, or you can also take an old, suppressed emotion and work through that.

Remember though that this is not an easy process. People think they are strong enough to deal with whatever is inside,

but then they find that they are not and crack. That is why antar darshan is not a common practice. If you bring up the memory of a past suppression and you are not able to handle it, then that will affect your mental behaviour. Due to this inability of people to manage themselves, the emotional component of pratyahara has been reserved from public knowledge.

For the fifty years of the existence of BSY, you have not known about the emotional content of pratyahara. I taught it at one point of time and then stopped it, as I realized that people were not ready for it. The mind gives enough trouble, if you also activate your emotions, it will become even more difficult to process and digest.

The mind and emotions together become extremely powerful, just as two hands working together create more strength compared to using one hand independently. Thus, for general practice antar mouna is used, and only when people realize that antar mouna is not what they are looking for and they need to explore beyond that is antar darshan taught to a select few.

Generally, if somebody comes to the level of antar mouna they think they are ready for dharana. Similarly, if they practice a few visualizations of chidakasha dharana, they think they are ready for dhyana. Such people will not be able to deal with the emotional component. Only those firmly grounded in discipline will be able to handle the emotional component, and therefore we do not teach these practices, not even to 'advanced teachers'. However, we will give you a glimpse of this practice during this course, not the complete practice but just a glimpse, so that the person who has asked that relevant question has an idea of how the emotions are observed and dealt with when you go deeper into pratyahara.

Are emotions totally different from what we observe in antar mouna?

They are interconnected; however, the intensity of an experience is much stronger in emotion than in thought. When the same thought contains an emotion, it becomes more powerful.

Being a Raja Yogi

28 October 2016



Most yoga practitioners do not practise raja yoga. What is the range of practices that an average person does? Ten or twenty asanas, four or five pranayamas, a few mudras and bandhas. All these belong to hatha yoga. What are the practices of raja yoga that are used? Relaxation, yoga nidra, and a few chosen practices of pratyahara, never the full range of pratyahara

and dharana practices. Maybe some people do more, but this is the general trend. Yet when it comes to describing yoga, everybody takes the help of the *Yoga Sutras* to explain what hatha yoga is, mentioning one or two points about the brain and vrittis. The knowledge of yoga does not go further.

It is possibly for the first time that many of you are learning the principles of raja yoga in this course. You might have known these ideas before, but the connection was not made, the *vibhu* perception was not there, the interconnectedness was not there. You knew the dots, but the dots were not connected. From this perspective, this is the first introduction to raja yoga in the fifty-four-year history of the Bihar School of Yoga.

The subject is not something that can be either explained or taught in one week, particularly as the majority of people are not prepared for it: there is no mastery over asana, so the basic criteria for being eligible for raja yoga is not met. The ability to come into a posture and sustain it is not there, and that is a setback for raja yoga. For example, when you do surya namaskara, the style is different in hatha yoga and in raja yoga. In the hatha yoga style, you follow the breath, the movement, the visualization; you follow the speed of breath in your postures, at a balanced speed, not too fast and not too slow, yet enough dynamism to keep you going. In the raja yoga style, you stop at each pose for a few mantras, in each pose you can repeat five mantras, hold the pose and be comfortable in it, feel the ease, feel the body responding to the posture. You are not moving the body in a dynamic way, and that is the requirement of raja yoga: to come to the point of *sthirata*, stillness.

Towards being a raja yogi

Before coming to raja yoga, you need to focus on the practice of asanas to acquire the physical stamina whereby you can sustain a posture for an extended period of time, and not necessarily the lotus pose. If you can sustain each posture of surya namaskara for five mantras or at least ten seconds, that will give a good indication of your state of sthirata. Instead of a dynamic practice, the raja yoga method is a gentle practice

in which the movements are controlled and you are able to comfortably stay for at least ten seconds in the final position.

As a raja yoga sadhana, I would recommend that you try to perfect this practice of surya namaskara. Do the other asanas dynamically, in the hatha yoga style, and do surya namaskara in the raja yoga style. Begin with five seconds and over two or three months increase up to ten, always remaining comfortable in the posture. When you reach the ten-second posture holding state, it will be an indication that your body is getting used to staying in a posture for an extended period of time without feeling discomfort. The benefit of surya namaskara will also be multiple if done in this manner, and you can experience it for yourself. The blocks will clear at many levels, not just physical, and you will feel greater clarity, as the steady practice in the raja yoga style will have a deep influence on the unconscious and psychic levels.

The focus of raja yoga is internalization, as it is only with internalization that you can explore the dormant centres of the brain and mind. When you enter the fold of raja yoga, the self-awareness and self-observation should increase. That is the mental state of raja yoga: you are acutely aware of how you are acting, responding, thinking, behaving, desiring, wanting. Awareness has to be a necessary component of all the activities of the mind, the senses and the body. Without this, raja yoga does not begin.

Hatha yoga is the primary class, raja yoga is the middle school, and kriya yoga is the university education. By the time you come to the higher secondary school, it is implied that you have passed through the classes of the primary school. Can you apply this analogy to yourself? If you can, you are a yogi. However, if you feel these practices are too inferior for your level of achievement, then don't bother.

Place of faith and trust

An important aspect of deepening the experience of yoga is to have faith in oneself and trust in the practice. If you have faith in yourself and believe that the practice will take

you where you want to go, then yoga will have a meaning and purpose. But if you don't trust yourself or the practice, then you will not get anywhere. Yoga is not a person who can provide you with all the things that you require; it is a tool for progress in life. Therefore, don't ask, "What can yoga give me?", but ask "What can I receive from yoga?"

When you have this attitude and mindset, you will find that your awareness deepens and expands, and you are able to see a bigger picture in the course of time. If you place a black and white picture of a tree on the ground, and an ant walks on it, what will it see? Only a black field followed by a white field. However, from where you are, you will see the complete picture. That is the attempt in yoga. Cultivate your perception, understanding, awareness and observation to such an extent that you are not caught up in the black field and white field. Rather, elevate yourself little by little to see bigger and bigger parts of the picture until you are able to see the whole picture. This is the sequence followed in raja yoga.

Working with the cause

You are living and experiencing all that the world throws at you in your waking as well as your sleeping life, but you don't have clarity at that level. You feel daunted by the situations and the environment. You lose your clarity, you become doubtful, uncertain of whether what you are doing is correct or incorrect. Pratyahara is the first step in which you elevate yourself about thirty percent from the floor, and begin to observe the causes of disturbance and distraction. You do not identify with the disturbance and distraction as a feeling, suffering or experience; you identify the cause of the problem and work with the cause.

Many people say, "I want peace in my life." They would find that peace if they knew the cause that disturbed their peace in the first place. If you know the cause, you can work at it and discover your peace again. If you simply parrot, "I want to be peaceful", it means you have never tried to

identify the cause of your disturbed state and therefore you cannot work with it. Finding peace may be your desire, but the action required is working through those causes that disturb your peace. Finding peace is the goal and the aim, but the effort lies in locating the causes that disturb your peace and removing those causes. Once the cause of disturbance is gone, peace will descend again. This is the principle of pratyahara. Therefore it requires you to observe, go to the source, find out why that disturbance is there, what is the real reason behind it. You are not merely dealing with the symptom, you are trying to find the root cause. That is the level of pratyahara discussed here. It is the first level, where you elevate yourself thirty percent to see a bigger area of the photograph. Then dharana comes. You elevate yourself another thirty percent, and see a bigger picture, including what you discovered in pratyahara. Then you go up again: ninety percent in dhyana. Now you are at another level where you have an even bigger view, and that is all you can do. The remaining ten percent is grace, not your effort. When that comes, it becomes samadhi.

Thus, cultivation of awareness and observation is the beginning of raja yoga. Sustaining a posture and being comfortable in it is the physical aim of raja yoga, for the body. The mental aim is to stop the upheavals of the mind.

According to the principles of pratyahara, the cause of mental upheavals is the connection of the senses with the world, and through the senses the connection of the mind with the world. Therefore, you have to first become aware of that connection between the senses and the world, and the senses and the mind. Then you disconnect. When the disconnection is achieved, then the state of mind is different. Like the example of Arjuna and the archery contest. Arjuna was only seeing the bird's eye. He did not have tunnel vision. He was seeing everything else too, but he was able to eliminate the distractions caused by all else and remain focused on the target. He was able to eliminate the distractions caused by every other object of the world and

remain one-pointed. The point is not that he emerged as the best archer, but that he had the understanding that ‘I have to eliminate those connections that cause disturbance in my experiencing a particular state or mood of mind.’

To be successful in this process, the first ability you have to develop is that of observation. You have to be able to identify the conditions that are restricting the flowering of consciousness, and deal with them. Through this, the *pratyayas* and *vrittis* are dealt with automatically. You don’t have to focus on any individual *vritti*, simply focus on regulating your lifestyle. If you are able to do that, the negative *pratyaya vrittis* will be automatically eliminated and the balanced *pratyayas* and *vrittis* will gain strength. With the regulation in lifestyle and clearing of *pratyayas* and *vrittis*, you move into *dharana*.

As you go through the yogic journey, perfect *hatha yoga* and also make every effort to master *raja yoga*. That will be the biggest gift you can ever give to anybody, including the tradition, for this will indicate that you are living the teachings, the *vidya*.

Q&A

What is the best position for sleeping?

It is any pose in which you can go to sleep!

You talked about getting rid of doership as one of the main elements of bhakti yoga. Can you also talk about other aspects of bhakti yoga.

Getting rid of doership is as much a part of *bhakti yoga* as it is of all the other expressive yogas including *karma yoga* and *jnana yoga*. In *bhakti yoga* you have to offer up the idea of doership and go beyond it, to become the medium. In *karma yoga* too, you have to offer up the doership. In *jnana yoga* also, if the sense of doership is there, the *jnana* will not be experienced. Thus, the first stage in all these yogas is to understand that “I am a medium, I am not the doer.”

Sometimes people confuse the idea of doership with freewill and destiny, therefore be clear on this. For example, you tie an animal to a twenty-foot-long rope. It is free to run around in the area that the rope allows it to, but beyond the length of the rope it cannot go. In the same way, although everything is destiny, karma is the rope, and you can go as far as that karma will allow you to wander in this life.

Despite destiny, it is karma that makes you move within your zone. It limits the area where you are free to move. When you feel the obstruction, beyond the length of the rope, that inaccessible area is destiny. These are the two aspects of life. What is beyond the length of the rope is destiny, which you cannot know or access. You are tied due to destiny, but you are able to move twenty feet in any direction due to your karmas.

Doership comes up when you are moving around in the twenty-foot area. You are tied yet you are grazing on the grass. Sometimes you munch here, sometimes there, and that is your doership. For anything that you do, you become the centre: “I am performing, I am doing, I am enjoying, I am experiencing.” As long as the ‘I’ identity is there, you are the doer. To change this is the first condition in the expressive yogas, whether bhakti yoga, karma yoga, or jnana yoga. Once this major hurdle has been crossed, then life flows.

With regard to bhakti, there are two kinds of bhakti: *apara*, the mundane, and *para*, the transcendental. In *apara* bhakti, there are many different paths and processes of realizing bhakti. Mantra is one of them. Whatever mantra you chant, whether *Om Namah Shivaya*, *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, or something else, it becomes a medium to purify the emotions. You may do it in the meditative style, with eyes closed repeating the mantra, or you may sing it in kirtan style. The same mantra can take you inside and also elevate your mood externally. One method is mental repetition, another is verbal, the third system is writing the mantra, the practice of *likhit japa*. All this is part of *apara* bhakti. This is the individualistic path. Mantra, japa, anusthana are things

that an individual can do to elevate and purify the emotions. At this level there are social activities of bhakti as well, like a communal pooja, or a yajna, in which several people participate. In this there is no individual effort to internalize, it is more of a festivity, but that is also accepted as part of the bhakti tradition.

The apara or the mundane bhakti, from the yogic perspective, is for the individual. Its purpose is to manage and 'sattwimize' the emotions, not 'tamasize'. It is to channel the nature, the mind, the sentiments, the feelings, the emotions towards sattwa. Thus, the first level is dropping of the idea of doership: *samarpan*, surrender. The second level is internalizing, clearing, identifying. The third level is para bhakti, the transcendental bhakti, where the union with the Higher Self is experienced.

From the individualistic perspective, the mantra, used in many different ways, becomes the medium of practice. Therefore in yoga, mantra initiation is the first and the last. There is no other initiation beyond it. Even Sri Swami Satyananda at the time of his maha samadhi was practising his guru mantra. The mantra is the one thing that a novice uses and a perfected master also uses. The mantra does not change, and therefore it is the only initiation in yoga and the only recognized form of bhakti in yoga. Rituals are not part of yoga. From the yogic perspective, the only bhakti is the use of mantra, whether verbal, written, mental, japa or anusthana.

How do we know if we have reached vijnanamaya kosha? What are the signals or symptoms?

It is difficult to know, as there are no boundaries or defined borders. There are different shades of grey, different gradients of awareness. Just as there is a colour gradient from white to dark, in the same way there is a gradient of consciousness. It begins with tamas, which is dark, and as you continue, it becomes white. In this gradient change, how can one define which is anandamaya, which is vijnanamaya,

which is pranamaya, and which is manomaya? Ultimately, the experience of consciousness is combined in manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. If you have the experience of consciousness at any of these four levels, then you also feel the presence of conscious awareness at the other levels. Your manas is active, your buddhi is active, your chitta is active, and your ahamkara is active. How do you decipher which is your manas, which is your buddhi, which is your chitta, which is your ahamkara? In the same way, how do you decipher which is your pranamaya, manomaya, vijñanamaya or anandamaya? Theoretically you can, but practically it is next to impossible to have clear dividing lines between them. Yet, certain indications have been given.

In the higher stages of meditation, symbols do appear which indicate that a shift in consciousness has taken place. You have to observe the play of consciousness. When you are in manomaya, then the experience of *shanti*, peace, stilling of every activity which is in relation to the world, will indicate manomaya balance. Whenever you are not at peace, it is the disturbance of manomaya. At night, when you cannot sleep and a continuous train of thoughts is going on, that is manomaya activity. When that train of thoughts stops and you go to sleep, that is also a manomaya experience. The manomaya kosha covers the gross expressions of buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. Vijñanamaya kosha also covers manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, but not the gross expressions. It is the realm of what has been carried forward, that which is not a part of your current environment but what you have brought with you as samskara and karma.

Many people think that if they develop the ability to astral travel it will indicate that they are in vijñanamaya kosha. That is only a way to convince themselves or others that they are in a higher state of mind. Astral travel is not an aspect of vijñanamaya kosha. The experience of vijñanamaya kosha is luminosity, the effulgence of consciousness. When you identify with the element of Shiva in you, when the duality of the world has stopped and you are endowed with a singular

awareness, which we call *Shiva*: the auspicious, balanced, harmonious, centred nature, then that is the experience of vijñanamaya kosha. After that point it is only the experience and expression of bliss.

There is the story of Archimedes and his famous exclamation of 'Eureka!' He was taking a bath, thinking about a mathematical problem, and when the realization hit him he forgot everything. He ran naked from his bathroom to court. Where was his body awareness at that time? Where was the social awareness at that time? He ran through the middle of the road, straight into the king's court. That is vijñanamaya kosha, when you are so taken by your realization that you forget the outer environment and the body. There is a term in yoga, *dehadhyas*. It means awareness of the body. When you transcend the awareness of the body, you are in vijñanamaya kosha, which is only one step away from *anandamaya*, bliss.

So, the purpose of this raja yoga seminar has been to connect with the tradition and the vidya. Those who have the inclination will be able to follow this aim, by developing the right understanding, the right awareness, and following the right path. That is also the purpose of training at the Bihar School of Yoga now. It is not a yoga centre where you can go and learn a few practices of yoga and leave. Here the effort is to bring out the teachings of yoga from the tradition and make them accessible to people. It is a place where sincere aspirants can go deep into the subject. In the global scenario of yoga, where the focus is on the physical, BSY will continue to maintain the traditional and classical teachings and forge them as part of the training. It will continue to be the place where yoga in its entirety will be maintained and propagated, and you will continue to be part of this effort.

Hari Om Tat Sat

IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS



A new learning experience

Out of all of my visits to Ganga Darshan, in which I usually spend at least a month or two, this last one was the shortest, but it was also one of the richest and most meaningful.

This time around I felt as though I was developing deeper levels of perception and understanding. Each day I could see clearer and understand yoga in more profound, complete and lucid way.

While Swamiji gave his talks and satsangs, a light would turn on in me and allow me to see myself and my life in a clearer way. I could see and scrutinize the shortcomings in my own practice as well as the mistakes that kept me from evolving and recognizing the real objective of yoga.

During the asana and pranayama classes, Swamiji's clear, simple and precise instructions helped us carry out each practice with the consciousness and focus needed in order for the exercise to be most effective. I was able to observe what I was doing with the attitude of a witness, and this helped me to be more precise and aware in my practice.

During our daily yoga nidra and meditation practices, I went back in time, remembering the first practices I followed under the guidance of Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan. I was able to relive what had motivated me to make yoga my personal discipline.

Swamiji responded everyday to the questions asked by the students. During his talks he would explain with such clarity and simplicity the objectives of each branch of yoga. He explained how these branches are related and what techniques need to be practiced in order to understand their real purpose. One of these techniques is to observe and understand our true personality and overcome our difficulties by transforming them into something positive. In this way we can live life with optimism and happiness and we can take this energy everywhere we go and transmit it to the people we encounter.

At the end of the course one thing was very clear to me: I needed to go back and remember my introduction to yoga, return to the basics and apply them dutifully in my daily practice in order to properly carry out the lessons of yoga and transmit them to others.

This was a special week of learning, of deepening my understanding and perfecting my practice of yoga. The joy and satisfaction of this experience was further enhanced by the festival of lights, which filled our spirits with bliss.

—*Swami Sivamaya, Colombia*

An experiential journey

The Raja Yoga course of 2016 was for me an extraordinary experience. It was not a dry theoretical course, but rather a journey guided by Swami Niranjan and his innate wisdom where we had direct experience of the principal aspects of raja yoga.

Normally practitioners, especially westerners, approach this branch of yoga full of theoretical knowledge from the classical texts, but without proper understanding of

its true aim. They are mesmerized by ‘meditation’ and do not understand that it is a state to be attained. They never properly investigate the means and the tools to obtain that state of consciousness.

Swami Niranjan guided us to experiment by ourselves the basic points of raja yoga. We experienced firsthand how this branch presumes having obtained proficiency in other branches of yoga, especially hatha yoga. We also experienced how to use the asanas and pranayamas to begin the process of raja yoga. The approach here is different that when practised as merely hatha yoga. The most remarkable thing is that this knowledge has always been at our disposal, but we are usually unable to see it. Here we corroborated the ancient tenet of the need of a guide, a guru.

We were shown the real aim of raja yoga, and the central role that pratyahara has in this regard. We experienced by ourselves the need for graduality in the practice. We also understood that the control of the vrittis cannot be obtained with only a limited period of ‘practice’ set in the morning or evening. It should be a process that includes every aspect of our daily life, and thus saw the role of the yamas and niyamas as tools for this process and not as mere codes of ethic or moral conduct.



In summary, Swamiji Niranjan not only explained the basic theoretical points of raja yoga, but more important, he guided us in a journey where we had a direct experience, or at least an experiential glimpse, of those points. This experience was for me a source of inspiration to continue in the process of sadhana with a broader and clearer vision.

—*Ignacio Copete (Agni Dev), Colombia*

A new mind

The Raja Yoga Training along with seva in the ashram has created a clearer state of mind. It was not at all what I expected. It was better. Body and mind is energized and there is enthusiasm. I shall establish a routine at home when I am back so that the practice can take place. Antar mouna will be added daily to allow unbeneficial pratyayas to move away. Thank you for leading me to the sankalpa of positivity.

—*Naomi Lossin, Israel*

Towards connection in life

In this course the challenge, gently given but clear and strong, stated: shall we stay as we are in the shadow of our accumulated images and live in the fantasy of yoga, or are we willing to truly complete the hatha yoga process so that we can take hold of the tools of raja yoga and allow them to bring the change and transformation of the mind – our views, attitude, perception, and behaviour – that will lead us to a newer, happier, more harmonious and useful life, to a connected life?

Swamiji emphasized the process that is raja yoga: a gradual becoming and flowing into the next stage. By guiding our eyes and vision in how to perceive the components, their connection and interconnection, the methods, until now flat and one dimensional, became vibrant, real and practical tools. Yoga can become a 24/7 experience with eyes open and closed.

—*Swami Yogajyoti, Ireland*

The pieces in place

What I had experienced as yoga before coming to the raja yoga training was something like pieces of a puzzle, offering limited understanding. After this training, I feel that the pieces of the puzzle begin to find their place, forming a more coherent and comprehensive image that I hope will continue to guide and inspire me.

—*Daya, Romania*

A pratyaya of conviction

Very grateful to do the course in the ashram environment. This completely enhanced the learning about what yoga really is and how to bring it to life. Being taught by Swami Niranjanananda is learning that is infinitely powerful. The clarity of the teaching reinforces all that we have been encouraged to do previously. The straightforward way in which he teaches gives us all the strength to continue and understand what and how to teach.

The week has left a ‘pratyaya’ of conviction for lifelong, moment to moment learning and new-found resources to live a yogic life.

—*Brigid Liston, Ireland*

Truly inspired

Swamiji opened a wide horizon in front of us where previous experience and knowledge fell into place and were put into a wider context that we did not know of before. I feel truly inspired to go back home and start my sadhana anew in a more systematic, steady and continuous way – go back to the basics with hatha yoga, and gradually adopt and develop the spirit of positivity in life. October was the month of happiness, and I hope that every month of the year be October, and that we spread that happiness around us.

—*Sannyasi Antarshuddhi, Austria*

A smiling man with a shaved head, wearing an orange robe, stands outdoors. He is holding a small flag with red, white, and blue stripes. The background is a soft-focus view of green foliage and a brick wall.

Encouragement on the path

I received so much from this course. The techniques, which I knew in their basic form, were presented clearly and in a completely different way, and from another perspective. The most inspiring aspect of the course was the satsangs. Sometimes uplifting, sometimes painfully truthful, yet they encouraged me to go further. I hope to have strength for seriousness, commitment and discipline, in order to prove worthy of the chance that has been given to me.

—*Marija Stevanovic, Serbia*

New focus in self-observation

Each year, whether for a few days or a few months, a stay at BSY, Munger, seems essential. It inspires, fills up the prana tank, gives an opportunity to share with the sangha, and most important, it is a time to receive training and grace from guru.

This year, participating in the Raja Yoga Intensive, I received all this and more. Swamiji imparted raja yoga in a clean and precise way with depth, yet simplicity. He brought a whole new dimension to the theory and practice of raja yoga. The way in which he explained the gunas in relation to manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara awakened new understanding and inspiration to bring into daily practice and use as a focus in self-observation.

Doing the hatha yoga practices with a raja yoga flavour was an opportunity to deepen the practice and connect with the original roots of the practices as imparted by Sri Swamiji.

Not only were pearls of wisdom shared, but humour, positivity and a focus on happiness. A light to carry with us in our hearts and minds as we go back out into the world.

—*Swami Karma Karuna, New Zealand*

Notes

Notes

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



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

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

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

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

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



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

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

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

Among these programs was Raja Yoga – Module I: Asana-Pranayama Intensive, during which the focus was on understanding the essence of raja yoga and practising asana and pranayama from the raja yoga perspective and style.

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



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