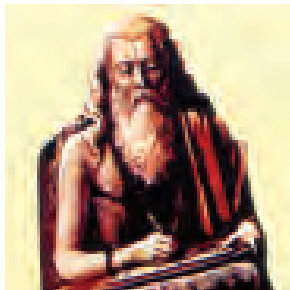


Yoga Chakra 2

Cultivating Spiritual Samskara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Chakra 2

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Yoga Chakra 2

Cultivating Spiritual Samskara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
during the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra
held at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger,
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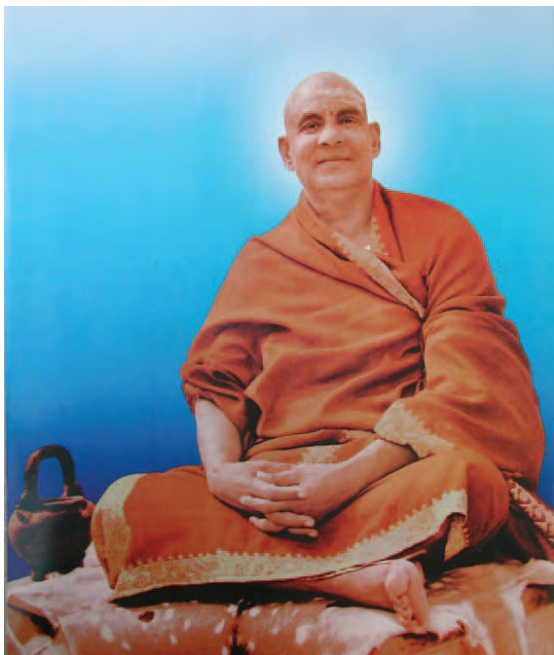
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Dedication

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

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Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra

17 July 2015

The Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra is a long name, a mouthful. However, just as it is mouthful, it is also 'lifelike', for every word of this course represents a meaning and a direction for life. This is not an event; it is a course, and 'course' implies a system of living and learning: live to learn and learn to live.

Samskara

To understand the concept of the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra, you will have to first understand the concept of samskara. People say a samskara is an impression or the blueprint of life that one has come with. The traits, the characters, the habits, the nature, that give you your identity are called samskaras. These are the traits you live all your life, from the time you are born until the time you die. Samskaras decide your thoughts, behaviour, pattern of perception, understanding, expression, reaction, everything. However, generally samskaras in life are directed outwards in the realm of the material nature and material objects. They are material, gross, related to the senses and sense objects. You don't have spiritual samskaras naturally; spiritual samskaras have to be called for. One has to strive for them, but the material samskaras are expressed naturally.

The material samskaras are guided, motivated and directed by the six major traits of mind: passion, aggression,

infatuation, arrogance, greed, and jealousy. These are the colours that tint your thought and actions when your association is with material life; distractions and dissipations take place in your nature, mind and life. Clarity of thought or of the spiritual path is not there.

The purpose of this course is the cultivation of spiritual samskaras. The material samskaras are always there. As long as you have a body, you will have your needs. As long as you have a mind, you will have your requirements, ambitions and desires. As long as you have emotions, there will be the need to fulfil those feelings and emotions, to find satisfaction. This is not going to change. However, along with this movement in the material direction, you have to cultivate the spiritual samskaras, the spiritual nature and quality.

Spirituality

What is spirituality? Spirituality is sometimes confused with religiosity. In reality, they are like the two banks of the river of life; life is the water that flows in the middle. The spiritual bank is defined by awareness of the positive qualities in life, and the religious bank is defined by the awareness of the presence of a divine force or power in life. Thus spirituality is qualities and religion is presence. In religion, the figure is highlighted, whether it is Rama, Krishna, Devi, Christ, the idea of God or the Holy Spirit, or the unmanifest God, Allah. Different ideas make up the pool of religiosity, and they relate to the presence of one power that controls and governs. Spirituality, on the other hand, is discovering the luminosity of your own spirit, the sattwa nature.

The direction in material life with the material vrittis and tendencies is tamasic, while the spiritual quality is sattwic. Therefore, it is the cultivation of spiritual, sattwic samskaras that you have to focus on. The idea that spirituality leads to emancipation, freedom and God-realization may or may not be true, but it certainly leads you to a better understanding of your inner luminous nature. It makes you aware of what you are capable of experiencing and expressing. That has

to be the focus in life, for spirituality is not God-realization; it is acquiring the ability to go through life with faith, conviction and positivity. If you can go through life with faith, conviction and positivity, then you are there. You are at peace, happy and content, you live in bliss. You have to see spirituality from this perspective, and not as a path that leads to God-realization where you sit in the lap of God on his throne in heaven.

Spirituality is a way to become a better person, a more human person. The more human, sattvic and luminous you become, the more that power moulds your life and makes you an instrument of its will.

Beyond asana and stress-release

To come to this level of spiritual awareness, Sri Swami Satyananda gave, after yoga, the idea of atmabhava. The two have to go together: yoga and atmabhava. A change in your health, stamina and strength is not going to lead you to peace and happiness. It is the mental transformation that will lead to happiness and peace. That is what you have to look for ultimately. Therefore what you need is a practice, system or technique that can help you deal with your nature and mind. The body is incidental. It is important to survive, sure. A healthy body is much better than a sick body, but you cannot attain spiritual awareness by simply focusing on the body, nor can you attain it by basic meditation, prayer or worship.

Everybody likes practising asana, as it is something dynamic and physical with which they can connect. However, the final attainment of asana is only physical and pranic. What has been the gain of the asanas that you practise? A practice like surya namaskara might feel excellent for the body and stamina, and give you the workout you feel you need, but has it helped you manage your mind, sentiments, feelings, or spiritual awareness in any manner? No.

People also like to meditate, as it allows them to escape from the reality of the present moment into an abstract idea

of goodness and godliness, so they can forget their problems for a short while. They emerge feeling a little stress-free and say, “Oh, I had a good meditation.” What needs to be asked is: what is the long-term effect of your practice of meditation?

Let us be frank about it. In ten, fifteen or twenty years of meditation or mantra practice, has there been any inner gain in life? Are you able to manage yourself, your responses and reactions better? I don’t think so. Meditation has not helped you change. You still have the same fears, phobias, beliefs, convictions, the same awareness of the limitations. Meditation might have helped you overcome your anxiety and stress levels, but has it changed you? Has your practice of mantra changed you? It might have helped you to focus and become one-pointed, to develop visualization of your ishta devata, to stop the dissipation of the mind for a while, but has it given the peace that everyone seeks? No. If it had, the reactions, the responses, the behaviour, the mind and the expression would be different.

The practices of yoga that you have adopted so far, have not fulfilled the real needs in your life, for you have never allowed them access into your life. The only way you can allow them access is by recognizing that you need to connect with positivity and goodness. That applies to everyone. Rather than anxiety and frustration, you have to connect with positivity and goodness. That has to be the state of mind of a spiritual sadhaka. That is the quality and nature of a spiritual sadhaka: to connect with positivity, and not to grind one’s nose in the stone of negativity. The whole world does that. People who suffer do that. You as a yogi, as a sannyasi, as an aspirant, should make the effort to extract yourself from negativity and connect with positivity and happiness. It is due to the lack of this effort that, despite living in an environment which is conducive to development, no development has taken place. That is the stark reality. The reason has been your own limited perception, the drive to fulfil your own associations and attachments in relation to the senses and sense objects.

Missing yogic knowledge

Due to this tendency, people have ignored a very vital aspect in yoga: yama and niyama. Patanjali, whom everyone refers to, has given eight stages of yoga and the first is yama and niyama. However, people skip yama and niyama and go straight to asana and pranayama; they skip pratyahara and dharana and go straight to dhyana. Yoga teachers and ashrams speak of Patanjali, they speak of the greatness, completeness and wholeness of yoga, but in practice only asana and pranayama are used, not yoga. There is a big chunk of yogic knowledge missing from life.

The yogic knowledge which you apply in your life is confined to some hatha yoga: asana, pranayama, shatkarma, and maybe a little bit of raja yoga. It is a general trait, even here in the ashram, more people will come to a class of asana and pranayama, fewer to a meditation class, and none to a yama and niyama class. Even if they come, they never apply any yama or niyama. They believe it is not for them, they are pure, already attained.

The big chunk of knowledge missing from life is contained in the yamas and niyamas. It is the application of yamas and niyamas that will allow you to experience the wholeness and completeness of yoga. There are many yamas and niyamas spoken about in yogic texts. Patanjali speaks of only five yamas and five niyamas as they were applicable to his thesis on raja yoga; however, there are many more. There are yamas and niyamas in hatha yoga, in bhakti yoga, in jnana yoga, in kundalini and kriya yoga. There are yamas and niyamas in every yoga, corresponding to the nature of that yoga.

Connecting with positivity

People think of yamas and niyamas as ethical and moral teachings. That is incorrect. They are an expression, a behaviour and a conditioning of the mind. In moments of strife you want to discover peace. So why not also try to discover love, compassion, sympathy, understanding and joy?

What stops you from experiencing the beauty that life has to offer is your inability to connect with positivity in life. It is easy to connect with negativity. Anything can be a trigger for that; the negative inside you is just waiting for a trigger to explode but there is no inclination to connect with the positivity. No wonder Nelson Mandela said, “If there is anything people are afraid of, it is their own luminosity.”

People can't confront their own luminosity. How many of you can live up to your luminosity and goodness? Do it for twelve hours, for one day, in your life. Try tomorrow. If you fail in one hour, then know that you have to work hard. Try to live a good, happy, joyous, cooperative and harmonious life for at least one day in the eighty years of your strife-filled existence. That is the beginning of applying yama and niyama.

Every spiritual guru has said: be good and do good. That is the checklist. See how good you are today. How much good did you do to other people? Towards whom did you do good or not? Who did you rattle and who did you support? Compare that, see the percentage, and you will discover a different you – not the one that you think you are, pious, humble and gentle. You will discover, in the words of Tulsidas, *Mo sama kauna kutila khala kami* – “There is no one more crooked, wicked and debauched than me in this world.” So the area of knowledge missing in everyone's spiritual life is the understanding of yama and niyama.

Towards lifestyle change

Yama and niyama relate to lifestyle, for they represent the emergence of a better, positive conditioning. They always connect you with the positive dimension of your nature and are an antidote to the negative. If *himsa*, non-violence, is negative, then you connect with *ahimsa*, non-violence, which is positive. If *asatya*, absence of truth, is bad, you connect with *satya*, truth, which is positive. In this way, yamas and niyamas always take you in the most positive direction that you can aspire for. Yet you don't walk that path.

Therefore there is no change in lifestyle and your practice is mechanical.

After twenty years of practising asana-pranayama you say, “What did I gain spiritually from yoga? Nothing. Maybe my teacher was not right. Maybe I chose the wrong guru. Maybe the ashram I went to was not right. Maybe the training I received was inappropriate.” The doubt comes and always reflects on another person, never on you, for you don’t have the ability to look at yourself or your limitations, or to analyze to what extent you have progressed or regressed. In this situation, how can you expect a change in your mental state or conditioning?

In this situation don’t say that you are a practitioner of yoga, say that you are a practitioner of asana and pranayama. If you say you are a practitioner of yoga, then you have to look at the whole picture of yoga and your involvement in it. This is where your own seriousness, sincerity and commitment comes into play.

Begin with thought

What is samskara? The word samskara comes from the root *samyak*, which means harmony. Samskara is *samyak akara*, meaning harmonious form, shape, or personality. While the word *sanskriti*, which is translated as culture, comes from *samyak kriti*, harmonious act, in other words, cultured act. When you say, “This person is cultured”, it means the behaviour or actions of that person are appropriate. So harmonious act is *sanskriti* and harmonious form is samskara.

The form to your nature is given by your thoughts. What you think is how you act and what you become. Therefore, it is the thoughts that have to be observed and managed. The change has to come in thought first. It has to be a conscious effort. Different yamas and niyamas are used to create this change in the thinking pattern which then transforms your behaviour and actions. Thus samskara is accessing the thoughts and making them better and more luminous, more

sattwic. Samskriti is accessing the performance, and making it creative. Here we are dealing with *adhyatma samskara*, spiritual samskara, or cultivation of spiritual thoughts.

Can you do it?

Spiritual thought is developing positive qualities in life and overcoming negativities. If you scream at somebody, take a sankalpa, “Never again will I scream at that person”, and try not to, from that moment onwards. Don’t think that screaming today has given you the right to scream at that person at every opportunity you get. That is an attitude. Can you live it? If you have the courage, then live it and show it. Show that you are capable of doing it, start living the yamas and niyamas. That is the beginning of adhyatmic samskara.



Fine-tuning Life with Happiness and Japa

18 July 2015

Today's topic in the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra is related to one yama and one niyama. We are trying to create new samskaras in this satra, and yamas and niyamas allow us to do that.

Samskara and awareness

Samskara means a conditioning or trait that relates to a change in thought, creating awareness in behaviour and action. In order to attain this samskara, this positive change in life, awareness is the first sutra.

Are you aware, that is the question. You are not aware, that is the answer. You are aware of only self-oriented and self-centred motivations, expectations, desires, thoughts and ideas. You are not aware of anything beyond this; you are not aware of other people, their feelings or conditions. Your awareness revolves around your own expectations, needs and desires. If something does not fall within these categories, then you are not aware of that; it is not your priority, it is not in the forefront of your mind. Thus, in order to cultivate a samskara, awareness is the first sutra. This awareness is in relation to three aspects of life: *iccha shakti*, *jnana shakti* and *kriya shakti*.

Harmony in desire, knowledge and action

Ikcha shakti means desire – for some fulfilment, happiness, or gratification. Everybody has desire, from a renunciate to

one who is involved in the world. Desires are called *eshna*, and different types of *eshna* have been identified: *putreshana*, desire for progeny; *vitteshana*, desire for prosperity and money; *lokeshana*, desire for fame and recognition. Desire is a behaviour of the mind, which is governed by the will, *iccha shakti*. It is because of *iccha shakti* that you are connected to the material world. Due to *iccha shakti*, your actions, perceptions and needs are external, and you seek sensorial, mental and emotional fulfilment from your associations.

The second aspect of life is *jnana*, knowing. *Jnana* has two forms: intellectual and applied. There are many things that you know, yet you never apply them in your life. Where is the use of that knowledge? You have studied many ideas and appreciated them, but when the time comes to live them, where do they go? Why don't you live what you have appreciated and wanted? This is an indication that *jnana* or knowledge has remained only as an intellectual gymnastic and has not become wisdom, or applied knowledge.

The human mind is like plastic. It does not change. Although the desire to change is there, the change does not come naturally or spontaneously. You have to struggle with yourself to create a positive change in life. Like plastic, the mind is rigid and stiff, due to the material conditionings. You can leave plastic submerged in water for weeks, and then take it out, clean it, and you will find that the plastic is dry. There is no effect of water on it. A different object like wood will get soaked; it will absorb the water. The mind is not like wood; it is rigid like plastic. You want change but you don't accept a change without criticism and headtrips. You keep on revolving around the same thought. The application of *jnana* is not there.

Similarly, morality, ethics and spirituality are only intellectual. Everybody wants to have a nice experience of realization, but nobody wants to confront the challenges that life throws at them. Thus there is absence of applied *jnana*. In this absence of *jnana*, *iccha*, desire, colours the *kriya*, the action, but it does not lead to any wholesome satisfaction.

So iccha shakti, jnana shakti and kriya shakti have to be harmonized, and this harmony is known as samskara.

When jnana is absorbed, when knowledge becomes a part of you, then it will convert into a behaviour, an attitude, a perception. It will change the way you act and perform. Therefore jnana, knowing, has been identified as a yoga. It is not the yoga where you cram the intellect with bookish knowledge which can never be lived, but where you reflect on the right methodology to improve yourself and apply that. Jnana is a yoga only due to this reason: you have to understand, reflect on, analyze, accept, live and express the knowledge.

Material rights and spiritual discipline

Ikcha shakti, jnana shakti and kriya shakti are influenced by material and spiritual life, both. Material life expresses the three faculties as a means to discover your own right, power and freedom. In spiritual life they become a tool to educate and discipline the mind.

In material life, you search for your 'human rights' and you don't want to live in a disciplined way. You consider discipline to be anti human rights and an imposition on your freedom. Discipline is always seen in a negative context, as it contradicts the selfish desires, needs, and the search for power and position. Every action in material life seeks the right that empowers you to act in your preferred manner. There is no such 'human right' in spiritual life; here you are not seeking to express yourself based on your selfish preferences, but in an educated, balanced, restrained and disciplined manner.

Spiritual life is made up of disciplines; material life is rejection of disciplines. This happens even in an ashram. Even sannyasins do not understand when, how and in which manner to live. After all, they come from the same stock as you, they are not born pure. So where is the attitude of sannyasa, of adjusting and accommodating in every situation? Where is the surrender? You are unable to understand or practise that. That is the reality.

Spiritual life begins with yama-niyama

People do not understand the essence of spiritual life, for they try to mould it according to their own desires, needs, expectations, greed for power and position, and ideas of independence and freedom. When these forces come in, there is no cooperation or support, there is no sympathy, connection, or love, and everybody lives the negative aspect of their personality.

This is where the gap comes in your education. You think of asana and pranayama, the physical aspects of yoga, as the catalysts to lead you to a different state of mind. It is not going to happen. You think of meditation and mantra as the catalysts to develop a better mind. It will not happen. Until and unless you think of incorporating little changes in your life, fine-tuning your life, you will not live the change. This fine-tuning can be done through yama and niyama.

As mentioned yesterday, there are many yamas and niyamas besides Patanjali's. Among the yamas and niyamas that deal with life, the first yama is happiness and the first niyama is japa.

Happiness: the first yogic yama

Many thousands of years ago, Parvati asked her consort and guru, Lord Shiva, "In this creation, this manifest dimension, this world, this nature, everything is transient, nothing is permanent. There is so much pain, suffering, anxiety and frustration here. What can one do?" Shiva replied, "There are methods and practices by which one can overcome the pain and the suffering, recognize the causes of pain or suffering in a particular moment and overcome them. However, the best way to manage any pain or suffering is to remain happy. Therefore always be happy." In this way, happiness became the first yama.

Any negative state of mind can be managed by being happy, by smiling and laughing. Even depression can be managed by being happy. You may wonder, 'If I am unhappy, if I am suffering and depressed, how can I be happy?' Yes,

you can be – because happiness is your natural state of being. It is a limited understanding of happiness when you think that you need a cause or a trigger to be happy or that if the circumstances are difficult you cannot be happy.

This can be understood when you look at children. They also cry, become angry, don't want to eat this or that food, but this state does not last. Immediately afterwards they are laughing with an innate happiness; the circumstances are superficial and irrelevant to their happiness. Think of the laughter of children. Why does it sound so beautiful? Because it is natural, and not a result of any circumstance or joke.

That happiness, which children express, continues to be a part of you. However, adult life makes you forget it. With the onset of teenage years, grumpiness comes. It may be a result of hormones, technically speaking, but this is when you begin to move in a different direction. Your awareness connects more and more with external circumstances, and they buffet you. To be spiritual is to move back into that natural state, which is happy without cause. That is what you have to learn to connect with, experience and express.

As long as you are dependent on a cause to make you happy, the absence of that cause will make you unhappy. For example, you sing a very nice kirtan, everyone praises you and you feel very happy. The next day you don't sing well, someone else sings much better than you and they receive all the praise, and you feel dejected and unhappy. Therefore, if you depend on external circumstances to make you happy, you will always be swinging between happiness and unhappiness. This is *samsara*. To develop *samskara*, to maintain equipoise between the opposites and become a yogi, you have to tap into the positivity without cause, which exists within.

If you can learn to consciously move into that natural experience of happiness, which is not dependent on any cause, then you will be able to change your mood, the behaviour of your mind, your character, traits and the whole

personality. Your anxiety, tension, depression and frustration will disappear.

That is also the Niranjana challenge. Be happy for twelve hours of your waking time. If you can do that, I will write down in your diary that you have attained peace in life. If you can't, then you will have to come back again and again, not only to ashram but also to this life, until you find your peace.

Japa: the first yogic niyama

Now for the first niyama, which is *japa*, repetition. You are connected with the senses and sense objects all the time. Japa becomes a method to disconnect the mind for a little while, whether ten minutes or half an hour, and connect with something different. The connection between your mind and the senses and sense objects is broken. In that break you direct your attention and awareness towards discovering your inner nature, and that is where you find peace.

As long as you are connected with the world, there is strife, dissipation, distraction and discontinuation; however, when you connect with yourself, suddenly you feel peaceful, quiet, silent, happy. Whenever you repeat your mantra, you will discover that your mood always becomes better. Although you may think, 'Oh God, I have to sit for one mala of mantra!' and not apply yourself fully to the mantra, even then you discover an experience of *shanti*, peace, which you did not have before you started. Thus, japa is the niyama, the rule of conduct that allows you the flexibility to experience connection and disconnection. When you disconnect from the external world, it gives you the resilience to focus your entire attention on an experience which is personal to you. When you connect with that personal experience within, you discover peace and happiness.

Japa also creates a particular state of mind: that of remembrance. It makes you remember something. It is easy for you to remember your pain from the past, as the impression is there. As time passes, that memory recedes in

the background, yet it is there. Whether ten, twenty, forty or eighty years go past, the memory still lingers. Even at the moment of death, that memory is there. Memory is *smaran*, remembrance. Smaran during japa refers to remembrance of your internal connection, your own experience of peace and contentment. Due to this smaran, japa takes you into a different space, and makes you feel happy, elated, content.

The moment you come out and confront life again, you are disconnected from that peaceful state and connected with the state of dissipation, but japa gives a relief to the mind from its involvement with stress and anxiety. Imagine that on a hot day, when the temperatures are soaring, you pass by an air-conditioned room and receive a blast of cool air. That momentary blast gives you solace from the sweltering heat, and you say, “Ah, so nice.” That is the experience of japa. In the blowing hot winds of samsara, it is the coolness of japa that gives you peace and happiness. Thus, japa is the first *niyama* for life and happiness is the first *yama* for life.



Reinventing Yourself with Forgiveness and Namaskara

21 July 2015

We are introducing the concept of yama and niyama in this Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra to clarify one aspect of yogic knowledge. Yama and niyama are not limited to Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. The five yamas and five niyamas selected by Patanjali do not reflect the complete collection of yamas and niyamas of yoga. Rather, for his work on raja yoga in the *Yoga Sutras*, for the thesis he was working on, he selected yamas and niyamas which relate to managing the vrittis of mind. However, every yoga and yogic branch, whether hatha yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, kundalini yoga or chakra sadhana, incorporates within it a reference to yamas and niyamas that are relevant to the attainment of perfection in that particular yoga.

Enhancing the beauty of life

Yamas and niyamas were also a part of the vedic culture. The aim was to enhance the beauty of life, appreciate life, give a purpose and meaning to life, and make life a journey of learning, attainment and fulfilment. This was the aim of the vedic culture and of their spiritual traditions, practices and thought. It is these yamas and niyamas that must be imbibed and lived. Practising them requires modification and rectification of one's routine, environment, as well as perception.

The practice of asana and pranayama cannot give mental peace. They are physical in nature, so the benefits will be

physical. The meditation that you practise has not provided the balance it is intended to, as you have never accepted the two sides of yourself: neither the negative nor the positive, while having access to both. That is the story of a human being. You know that being good is good, but have you tried to be good? You know being understanding and supportive is good, have you tried being understanding and supportive? You know that being angry is bad, have you ever held yourself back when you express that explosion of emotion? You know that fear and insecurity are bad, but when you confront them, are you able to distance yourself from that experience? The good is never imbibed and the bad is never given up. That is the nature of samsara, the cycle of birth and death; you keep on going round and round with no escape.

Six defining traits

The only way out is to connect yourself with the good in an environment that creates an exposure to the bad. Yes, it is the environment that creates exposure to the bad. When you are born, you have both good and bad qualities. Even as a child, your negative qualities manifest much faster than the positive. A child has jealousy, leading to sibling rivalry. A small child of one or two can display anger; needs and desires manifest in children the moment they are born. These qualities are then expressed all through life, they make up the behaviour and the personality. They become the six companions of life: *kama*, or need, desire; *krodha*, or aggression, anger, drive, motivation; *lobha*, or greed, wanting more and more; *moha*, or delusion, infatuation; *mada*, or being egoistical, arrogant; *matsarya*, or being envious of everybody, rejecting everybody, not accepting anybody, being competitive and comparing. These are the six traits that shape your mentality, behaviour, and patterns of life from the moment you are born.

In meditation you seek relief from the stresses, anxieties and tensions that are on the surface, and you shy away from the experiences that manifest from the depth of your

nature. Even if you face them, you are not able to manage or control them, and become subject to their tamasic hold. Thus, your behaviour and life continues to be shaped by the six traits. They are your friends at the beginning and become impediments or enemies in the course of time when you realize that you need to discover peace. When you think, 'Enough of struggle, enough of strife', then you see them as enemies. When you ask, 'Is there an aim to life, is there something more than the external involvement with the senses and sense objects?' then they become enemies.

Reinventing yourself

How can you live more constructively, creatively, positively and in an uplifting way? By reinventing you. Just as a dirty piece of cloth is washed, the mind also has to be cleansed of its old habits and samskaras. That old dust has to be removed. How many people allow that to happen? Meditation does not do it. You say, "I am disturbed, so I will do my meditation." So you do your antar mouna, ajapa japa, breath awareness or mantra for some time until your mind becomes focused and you feel lighter and happier. However, that is like a symptomatic treatment. What about the cause that is inherent in your nature, which you are reacting and responding to? This is also what psychology speaks about, and this is what yoga is all about: changing the habits to make them more conducive to your specific lifestyle.

If you are an athlete, your lifestyle, motivation, drive, skill, understanding and education have to be different from those of a lawyer, a chief executive of a company, an iron worker, or a plumber. Equally, when you are fed up with life, your motivation, drive, aspiration, everything is different. You get fed up with life when you encounter problems. As long as there are no problems, you enjoy life, and are carefree. The moment a little problem comes, suddenly the whole focus is there. That problem becomes primary and everything else becomes secondary. You may argue that it is bound to be so as the problem is present and affecting

the perception, logic, behaviour, etc. Fair enough. However, there is another side to it. Look at the cause. If you do so, you will find that you are unable to manage this cause that generated the reaction inside you. You will confront your weakness, and it will be related to either kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada or matsarya, one of the six. That is what holds you back. It doesn't allow you to change your lifestyle or mental attitude. You continue to follow the same patterns and there is no acceptance of anything different. You continue to express the same weaknesses and shortcomings.

How does one change that? Meditation can't, it hasn't until today. So what will help that condition? A change in lifestyle, which allows you to wash away the old and accept the new. This washing is of the mind, and it can be done with the practice of yama and niyama. They help to change the samskara, the basic conditioning of human nature.

Shades of human nature

Take an earthen doll which is totally dry. Pour water over it for long enough and you will find that the water will soak in and the doll will become damp through and through. Now take a dry piece of wood and leave it in water for long enough. Eventually, it will become wet. Take a rock and soak it; it will soak water but not all the way through. Now put a piece of sponge in water, it will instantly soak everything. Take plastic, leave it in water for one thousand years, and then take it out, wipe it with a cloth, it will be as dry as the first day.

All these examples indicate different shades of human nature. There are people whose mind is like plastic; they can remain submerged in wisdom for years but when they are taken out, they are as dry as plastic. Then they wonder what happened, "Did I miss something? Did I waste so many years?" There are people who are like sponge. They come and in one association are able to fill their heart with inspiration and use it constructively and positively. In between are all other degrees, from fabric to wood, with

different capacities to retain water. However, this human mind can be made more porous so the water can go in.

In all these objects we can make a hole, whether with a pin, nail or chisel, and then the water can go in deeper. In the human mind this hole is made by connecting with the positive aspect of yourself. The negativity is the hard shell that has covered your nature, and has to be broken. To break it you have to use a nail and a hammer. The nail goes in and the hammer hits out. That which goes in is known as yama, as it reaches inside and changes you within. The hammer that hits and remains on the surface is niyama, the external act that you perform to experience the yama inside: the piercing of the nail through the hard shell. That is the spiritual experience. Christianity has talked about it in terms of piercing the veil, other religions have also spoken of it.

Play of rajo guna

The yamas and niyamas that apply to life are associated with rajo guna, and the two evolutes of rajo guna are kama and krodha, desire and drive. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:37): *Kama esha krodha esha rajo guna samudbhavah* – “It is desire, it is anger born of the quality of rajas.” Therefore the yamas first deal with kama and krodha. Kama is desire, need, expectation, want, dream. It is always self-oriented: “This is what I must achieve, know, become, experience.” That is the first concern: I. Then this ‘I’ becomes connected with other things: ‘for my friend’, ‘for my family’, ‘for my wife’, ‘for my child’, ‘for my God’, ‘for my religion’, ‘for my country’, ‘for my guru’, ‘for my society’, and so on. So ‘I’ is now connected out, and each of these connections represents an expectation that is both ways: you from them and them from you. That is the area of your *sakama* and *niskhkama* involvement, selfish and selfless involvement.

The selfish is that which allows you to attain what you desire, for the satisfaction and gratification of yourself and of those with whom you are closely connected, your immediate family. That is known as swartha. Where you step

out of the boundary of *swartha*, selfish nature, and begin to think of somebody else, is called *niswartha*. You see a beggar on the road, feel compassion for him, and decide to give him a hundred rupees. For that moment you suddenly become selfless. You are not thinking about yourself, you are thinking of the pain the other person is experiencing. Both possibilities exist: to be contained within 'me and my group', or to step out of this boundary and look out. This is yogic theory from the psychological perspective.

Antidote for craving: happiness and japa

The selfish desire gives birth to craving, and craving gives birth to those thoughts, ideas, actions and behaviours that fulfil that craving. The only antidote for craving is happiness. When you are happy, craving takes a backseat, *kamana*, desire takes a stop on the journey, until it can think of a next plan to ensnare you.

The first niyama is japa. Japa, as you are aware, is repetition of mantra. It is interesting why it has been considered a niyama. It is because the external act of japa allows you to become aware of your inner spiritual nature. All your life you are aware of the outer nature. Japa is the only time when you can disconnect and withdraw your mind from the outer nature, and instead focus on the symbol, the mantra and the process of doing the japa. For those ten minutes you disconnect sensorially from the outer world. Otherwise you are never disconnected from the outer world consciously. Even in a state of relaxation or ill health, when you lie in bed, you are only brooding over problems.

Japa allows you to separate yourself from your involvement with the external world and from kama. The moment you are connected with the world, you are connected with kamana. The moment you disconnect from the world, you are free from kamana. You are free from interaction with the first of the six friends for some time. As these six friends control you all the time, if you can disconnect from one for ten minutes, it is an achievement. Gradually that period is extended through japa;

it gives you the ability to move from the outer connection to an inner connection consciously and wilfully.

Whenever you are connected with the outer world, there is always worry and anxiety. However, when you are connected with something internal, there is peace and happiness. That is everyone's experience, yet you are more concerned with the external world. You don't want that peace and happiness. If you did, you would make the effort to reduce your connection with the external and increase your connection with the internal. There are very few people who have taken that step. You think of this connection as something nice and you want it, but you don't want to leave the outer connection either. Therefore, there is always a pull between the material and the spiritual in everyone's life and uncertainty about what one should or should not do. Just do what you are comfortable with. Don't expect answers from someone else.

Antidote for anger: forgiveness and namaskara

When kama, desire, is unfulfilled, krodha, anger, comes. You become more determined and driven to fulfil your desire, your ambition intensifies, you act aggressively, your wisdom disappears and instead the animal instinct becomes prominent. You become like a tiger ready to pounce. Anger shreds everybody to pieces, that is the expression and behaviour of anger. When you are angry with somebody, what do you do? You slash them, like an animal would. Anger is the uncontrollable animal instinct to tear someone down. The antidote for this is the second yama, *kshama*, or forgiveness.

What does it mean to forgive? If you don't empty your bowels for a day, you suffer; you need to eliminate everything from the stomach regularly. In the same way, you have to take out the rubbish from the mind. In meditation, when you are discovering the cause of your happiness and unhappiness, the person who has triggered these states will appear in your consciousness. At that moment, visualize the person clearly and forgive them. Just finish the negative emotion, take it out from your heart, clear it. The next morning, give a nice

smile to the other person and say, “Good morning. How are you today?” Let them wonder what has happened, what miracle has taken place. If they think some miracle has taken place, their anger will also subside.

To be able to smile and drop your aggression, that is forgiveness. The moment you drop your aggression, the other person will also drop their aggression. That is the power of forgiveness. This works particularly well between friends who have had a fight. There is an instant result, as they want to get back to a supportive and happy relationship. They don’t want that strife. Therefore, in order to avoid strife, forgiveness is the yama that has to be practised.

The corresponding second niyama is namaskara. *Namaskara* means salutation, and salutation means that you are connecting with, respecting and honouring the other person. You are controlling your arrogance and ego and expressing your humility. If you want to bring happiness in the life of others, I will give you an advice. When you are walking on the street, look at a stranger and give him or her a big smile, and continue walking. You know what the stranger will think for the rest of the day? ‘Who was that person who smiled at me?’ You will have touched the mind of that stranger.

You can acknowledge another person, smile and say, “Good morning. How are you?” or you can ignore them and keep walking with a grumpy face. What does this indicate? You are either humble or arrogant. If you are arrogant, then be ready to receive the result of your arrogance, from people who will not accept your arrogance. That is how conflicts are created.

Swami Sivananda says in his autobiography that as a rule in his life, he would always say ‘Om’ to anybody he saw. When he was walking on the road, he would greet everybody with ‘Om’. Every man, woman or animal he saw on the road, he would bow to them mentally. That was his awareness and attitude, expressing humility and not rigidity or arrogance. That was his inspiration. It was not an intellectual concept; it was an inspiration that he lived, and what a beautiful way of living.

Thus, the first yama is happiness, the niyama is japa; the second yama is forgiveness, the niyama is namaskara.

SWAMI SIVANANDA ON NAMASKARA YOGA



Swami Sivananda was one day returning to his Kutir from the morning satsang in the ashram office. As usual, a few devotees followed him. Just then, he saw a sannyasin prostrating before a householder devotee. Swami Sivananda knew that that sannyasin had long been averse to prostrating before others. Seeing her prostrating before a householder, he asked her, "Why should a sannyasin prostrate before a householder?" She answered, "I found other sannyasins prostrating before her." Swami Sivananda then advised, "There is no harm in prostrating before all, for all are manifestations of the Lord. I do prostrations even to cowdung, for everything is Brahman. Even before donkeys and other animals, I do mental prostrations. To my disciples and devotees, I first do namaskara. I behold the Essence behind all names and forms. That is real Vedanta in daily life.

"Doing prostrations is by itself a sadhana, *namaskara sadhana*. You should not think, 'He is a thief, he is a wicked man.' The Lord Himself has said, *Dhyutam chalayatam asmi* – 'I am the gambling of the cheat.' By doing prostrations, good health is acquired and life is prolonged. There was a Maharashtra saint who used to prostrate before asses and horses. Once he prostrated before a dead ass and the ass came back to life. Such is the power of namaskara. You may not actually prostrate, but are you ready to do prostrations to pigs, bulls, asses? All are manifestations of God. So you should have the readiness to prostrate before all. There should not be any inner conflict. Your prostrations should be wholehearted and sincere."

Entering the New Dimension of Yoga

22 July 2015

In order to understand what the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra is aimed at, it is important that you understand how much you have known of yoga, and how much of this knowledge is compatible with your achievements and aspirations in life. This refers to the general perceptions and practices, across society.

The first chapter of yoga

There are three aspects that emerge from the first phase of yoga in the last fifty years.

1. *Prevalent theoretical idea of yoga*: Across society, nationally or internationally, when you say the word yoga, what idea comes to the forefront? It is the idea of enlightenment. How that enlightenment is attained or experienced is everyone's own understanding, whether it is seen as a spiritual condition or as a breakthrough in life. Thus the word yoga conjures up an idea of knowing something better, of doing the right thing, of meditation and introspection, or of experiencing a divine presence. This is the theoretical idea of yoga that people have: that yoga can lead one to enlightenment, luminosity, knowledge, peace, darshan, or samadhi.
2. *Prevalent literature of yoga*: What literature of yoga have people studied in the last fifty years, across the world? The most well-known books have been the *Yoga*

Sutras of Patanjali and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. From the traditional point of view, these two books have become the foundation for teaching yoga, and most yoga teachers across the world have heard of these titles. Some interested people may have looked through other literature, but their percentage is negligible.

3. *Prevalent practice of yoga*: What parts of yoga do people practice? The majority practise asana, pranayama and some form of meditation. Nothing more. We have spoken of yogic concepts; Sri Swamiji, myself and other yoga teachers have spoken about ida and pingala, pratyahara and dharana, relaxation, concentration, chakras, kundalini, prana, pranayama, prana vidya, prana nidra, and so on. This may have contributed to developing some understanding, but that has not become as important or as prevalent as the practice of pawanmuktasana or surya namaskara. It is these physical practices that everybody wants to do every day, just to get the body moving.

Therefore, the main practical teaching has only been confined to asana, pranayama, and some form of meditation. The main literature that has founded the basis of yogic knowledge has consisted of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. The main theoretical idea about yoga has been enlightenment. Thus, what people have thought, read and practised are all different.

Preparing for the next chapter

People have spoken about bhakti yoga, karma yoga and jnana yoga, however these ideas have only remained as lectures. Nobody has actually investigated them or looked into the traditions and theories of yoga related to them. For fifty years even the teachers here were speaking of jnana yoga in general terms, in terms of 'enquire who am I'. Now, for the first time, the stages of jnana yoga have been defined in the first part of the *Yoga Chakra* series of books. For fifty years people spoke of bhakti as kirtan, mantra, japa and,

worship. It was considered religious by some, spiritual by others, and confusion remained. What is bhakti yoga? Is it the yoga of devotion, or the yoga of emotional management, or a supreme authoritative transformation in life? For the first time, in *Yoga Chakra*, the stages of bhakti yoga and their impact on human psychology are identified. However, they have not been put into practice yet. They are being identified and defined as preparation for the next chapter of yoga: application in life.

The Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra is part of the same project, to go beyond asana, pranayama and a little meditation, and apply certain principles of yoga in life. It is not a philosophy that we are applying, rather the focus is on improving the nature, the behavioural patterns and the understanding, and to have the qualitative experience of a transformation where you are a bit better each day and do not repeat the mistakes of yesterday. That is the learning required, and for that the mind has to be open.

This applies to everybody, to all yoga practitioners, sannyasins and non-sannyasins, across the globe. The theory of yoga has not been tested by you. The word yoga conjures up an image which might be true, but is a distant reality in life. The knowledge of yoga is limited to only hatha yoga and raja yoga, and the practice of yoga is limited to asana and pranayama, and a little japa and meditation. With these, you expect to bring a qualitative change in your entire personality? That is not possible. With asana you will improve your physical health, but that won't lead you to mental peace. With pranayama you can activate your prana shakti, but that won't awaken your kundalini. With meditation you can escape from your stressors for a limited time, but then you have to continue living in the same environment. Therefore, the first wave of yoga teaching has been on an introductory or primary level: the idea was to introduce the basic asana-pranayama-meditation and let people live it.

Lifestyle change

Now, as we close the first chapter and begin to write the second, one aspect that is highlighted is lifestyle. What is lifestyle? Everyone who comes to the yogic path is a seeker, and everyone starts at their own level of understanding. Therefore, you have to start working from where you are. If you want to make yoga a tool to improve your lifestyle, you have to start bringing the positive attributes into your life, beginning with thought. The moment you make your thoughts positive, marks the beginning of your yogic change. This process of making the thoughts positive is known as *pratipaksha bhavana*.

Swami Sivananda says, sow a seed in your thought, nurture it, and it will become the tree of your destiny in the course of time. Therefore, you have to sow the right seed in your thought, and that is always the positive one, the virtuous one. Whenever a negative condition, state, idea, thought or reaction appears, instantly counteract that with a positive one.

Countering negativity

You have to recognize that whenever negativity appears, it makes only you suffer. No one else suffers due to your negativity. Whenever you become negative, you are only hurting yourself, you are being a masochist. You like to live in that negativity, you like to think it and express it. Therefore if you form a negative opinion of somebody you can never change it, and it keeps on building until one day it explodes. You like to give yourself that pain, and that is the normal behaviour of the mind.

Pratipaksha bhavana is the opposite: bring in the positive. If you dislike somebody, begin to like them. At work, in interaction, behaviour, speech, thought, ideas, in everything bring in the positive in the face of the negative. Don't harbour resentment and animosity, these will only disturb the whole environment. You may justify your negativity by saying that you are doing the right thing, but then you are not a sadhaka. The first requirement of a

sadhaka is alertness to change the negative into positive. Therefore, stop being a masochist, apply pratipaksha bhavana so you can manage your kama and krodha.

Attachment and detachment

Kama and krodha are associated with asakti and virakti. *Asakti* means attachment, *virakti* means detachment. Virakti is not negation, it is simply not wanting, needing or desiring something; the object may be there but you do not use it. Asakti is the association created due to some latent expectation, need or desire. This attachment can be to anything: an inanimate object, a momentary behaviour and expression, a lifelong habit, or an individual. For example, you are seated on the floor. If your body feels achy from sitting on the ground, your attention will go to the chairs, and a desire will emerge, 'I should sit on a chair.' You will give yourself a reason, 'I am suffering by sitting on the ground, my body is painful.' The moment you become aware of all this, an association and an attachment is created to a chair. However, if you are comfortable, there can be a hundred chairs around but your attention won't go there. That is detachment: there is no need, expectation or desire. Attachment is based on desire, need and expectation. It can be with a chair, and it can also be at an emotional level with those who are dear to you. When you do not feel the need, desire or expectation, that is virakti: *rakta* means to be involved, *vi* means to be separate from that involvement.

Asakti means 'to be established in', whether in a thought, desire, need or ambition. It happens at different levels. At the emotional level, you can have asakti for a person you perceive as your support – for providing you with security, comfort, satisfaction, contentment and happiness, for helping you feel that you have fulfilled the purpose of your life. This purpose is usually attaining external happiness, the feeling that 'I am happy with my family, my house, my finances, my friends, I am comfortable in life.' This is what everybody wants when fulfilment is sought externally.

The ideal state of mind is that of virakti. You acknowledge that your husband is there, but he is as much a support to you as you are to him. You acknowledge that your wife is there, but she is as much a support to you as you are to her. It is fifty-fifty, no dependence, not eighty-twenty. That supportive nature has to develop. Once the supportive nature develops, then attachment lessens gradually due to awareness. A more fruitful, interactive and creative relationship develops, not based on fears and insecurities, needs and aspirations, but on understanding and supportiveness. This allows you to nurture that relationship.

Of course, the mood of the mind may change and lead you to asakti, but then the awareness will lead you to virakti. One may swing between the two, and usually there is more emphasis on asakti, the attachment aspect, and less awareness of virakti, the detachment aspect. However, this has to be gradually turned around in the life of a spiritual aspirant.

Such detachment does not mean rejection, negation or leaving. It is the appropriate application of the behaviour, the mind, the relationship, and not infatuated misuse. This virakti, this understanding, develops with pratipaksha bhavana, or making the mind positive. In the state of negativity, the mind becomes dependent and latches on. A positive mind is free of associations, instead it honours and respects one's connections; it supports, nourishes and receives inspiration from each connection. If this happens, then uplifting relationships can develop between friends, families, gurus and disciples, societies and nations. From one little group, the attitude can extend to a bigger group and to a bigger group. This miracle can happen only if you connect with positivity and stop being a masochist.

Resolve of the sadhaka

There is one point about lifestyle that you must understand with regard to ashram. An ashram is not a place where a

spiritual environment exists, although the idea seems to indicate it. Just as a hospital or a health centre is not actually a health centre – there is nobody healthy there, it is the same with an ashram. Everyone in the health centre is sick, they go there for therapy. Similarly, if you think that all the geru-wearers in the ashram are holy, you are mistaken. Yes, they are ‘holey’, with big holes. They are not spiritually ‘holy’, they are mentally ‘holey’. Yet, they have the determination and the drive, the inspiration and the motivation, to make the effort to live the change. They recognize that the holes have to be plugged in. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, there is a doha – *Mohe kapat chhala chhidra na bhava*. Rama says, “I don’t like hypocrisy. I dislike people who are hypocrites. I don’t like those who dupe others, who lead others astray. I also don’t like those who have holes in their mind.”

People who come to the ashram are looking for a way to experience the transcendental state by overcoming the limitations of the mind. They have to fight with themselves, their mind, their nature, and they make the effort, there is no question about it. Therefore they are able to sustain being here for so long. If they did not make the effort, after one week, one month or one year they would say, “Okay I have had enough.” People who continue year after year are making the effort as sadhakas to go through all the expressions of their nature and mind, with the hope that one day Rama will come to their doorstep. They are the sannyasins. So remember that everybody who comes to the ashram or wears geru is not holy in the spiritual sense. Rather, they are sick people buffeted by the ‘six friends’, who are fighting with them and trying to overcome them. We may falter, we may fail, but we will continue trying. That is the resolve of the residents and the sannyasins who live here.

Making the World a Better Place

25 July 2015

The Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana course, which was conducted here for nine days, had a specific purpose: developing and presenting the next idea of yoga. The term *adhyatma samskara* indicates the direction of this effort; it means spiritual qualities. These are qualities that one can express to experience and appreciate the beauty of life. After all, we are all life members of this planet. Once we leave this planet, our membership ends. While we use our membership, we have certain outer and internal obligations. The outer obligations relate to the senses and sense objects. The outer world with which we interact connects with the senses and sense objects through the agency of the mind. The spirit remains separate.

Experiencing the spirit

The spirit is experientable just as the mind is experientable. In fact, you experience the spirit every day. People say, “How can I experience my *atma*, my spirit? It is too subtle, too internal.” You can experience the spirit. There are only three things in life: the senses, the mind and the spirit. The senses connect you with the outer world, the mind connects you with the mental world, and the spirit connects you with the spiritual world. Just as you can experience your mind in the form of thoughts, desires, aspirations, hatred, jealousy, anger, frustration and anxiety, you can experience your spirit

when you express compassion, generosity, happiness, peace and contentment. These are qualities of the spirit that you express in life. Of course you are not aware of the source from where they emanate and you identify more with the expressions of the mind. However, in those moments when these positive expressions overpower a negative condition of the mind, and when, in a stressful situation, you are able to experience peace and joy, it is the spirit experience. It is not a mind experience, for the mind does not have the capacity to express goodness in its true nature.

The nature of the mind is defined by the ‘six friends’: desire, aggression, greed, infatuation, arrogance and envy. These are the six teachers of the mind in the material world, and all responses in the material world are coloured by one of the six. That is how the mind develops; it does not develop in an environment of love and compassion. These attributes may exist in a family environment; however, they do not constitute the environment through which the mind may develop its character.

There are two aspects of life: outer and internal. The outer is acquired and the internal is expressed, and both are known as *samskaras*, impressions or expressions that you live. The positivity that you express represents the quality of your atma, your spirit. The negativity that you express and feel in your life are mental. These six aspects colour you; they restrict you from expressing a better aspect of yourself, whereas the aim of life is to connect with the positive. To come closer to that source of luminosity, the spirit, is the aim of life. There are processes for this.

Present understanding of yoga

Yoga has been an effective process, as the human mind has been receptive to the concepts of yoga. We do not know what may happen fifty years down the line, but until now the human mind has been receptive towards the yogic concepts and ideas, as that has been the need. However, what has been your understanding of yoga? When you say the word

yoga, you associate it with a philosophy indicating God-realization, moksha, liberation, or some such abstract idea. Across the globe, every individual who has some inkling, understanding or knowledge of yoga, will say that yoga is a subject of God-realization.

What have people studied of yoga? What classical literature are they aware of? Only two books: *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali and possibly *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. These are the two main books that people from Asia to America to Africa know as yoga.

Now, what is the practice of yoga that people in society do across the globe? They only practice two components of raja yoga and hatha yoga, which are asana and pranayama, nothing more. There may be groups that practise different types of meditations, or teach different techniques to guide you into concentration and meditation, but that is limited. The majority of yoga practitioners practise asana, and a minority in that group practise pranayama, and another minority in that practise meditation. Therefore, the high-flying concept of yoga is limited to two books and two physical practices.

That is the trend that developed with the emergence of yoga in the last fifty years. That was the first wave of yoga. The teachers and the masters spoke on the aims and aspirations of yoga, gave the references of the two literatures of yoga which could be commonly grasped, and restricted their teachings to asana and pranayama, which people wanted for physical benefit. While this became the main trend, there were some groups, or times, when different experiments revealed other aspects of yoga: the scientific, the therapeutic, the meditative, the psychic. Despite this, yoga as a practice remained limited to asana, pranayama, and a little japa and meditation.

Entering the new dimension of yoga

In 2013, the Bihar School of Yoga celebrated its Golden Jubilee. At that time it was announced that the first wave of yoga propagation is complete, and now we will prepare for

the next wave. This means developing an understanding of how to go deeper into the experience of yoga. We took our time, two years, to formulate certain ideas and thoughts that reflect the next stage in the propagation of yoga, and more time will be taken. However, the first step into this new dimension of yoga has been taken with the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana course.

What is this new dimension of yoga? It relates to lifestyle. It is established that for physical benefit yoga is good. Many people are applying this concept, whether in schools, colleges, professional fields, police, army, railways, industries. People are using yoga in all these areas. This will continue, as that is the immediate need. That work will not stop, it will continue to develop into a better presentation and structure. Apart from this, what has to be our focus for the next decades to come? Lifestyle.

Lifestyle is definitely taking a beating everywhere. The stressors in life are reducing the physical and psychological capabilities of every individual. If this is not rectified, humanity will definitely be in a crisis in the next couple of generations. We will have babies being born with weak bodies, weak immune systems, weak nervous systems and limited brain capacity. Science will speak of evolution, but the reality will be devolution of human life, for no attempt is being made to rectify the imbalances and come to a point of balance. Negativity will become rampant; violence, anger, jealousy, hatred will become rampant. That is the society you are going to live in if you don't make the effort to change your lifestyle and mindset. If you want to live in a destructive society then continue to do so. Maybe you can find your own little niche where you can find peace; however, if you want to contribute to change in society, including yourself, your family, friends and community, then you have to think of the next stage of yoga.

Change begins from lifestyle, not with the practice of asana and meditation, not with the attempt to wake up at five o'clock every morning. These are little beneficial regulations

that you may practise, but the actual transformation takes place when you look at your own lifestyle and begin to finetune that. The moment you do that and express a better aspect of yourself, you are attaining new samskaras, impressions, visions, perceptions, new ways to express yourself. That has been the subject of the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana.

Eternal principles of positivity: yama and niyama

During this course, the first yamas and niyamas of yoga were also introduced. The first yamas and niyamas of yoga are not what you read about in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. There are many more yamas and niyamas of yoga. Patanjali's yamas and niyamas reflect management of the mind, not management of life, not management of crisis situations externally, not management of emotional changes, not the behavioural aspect. There are many aspects of life that are considered in yoga. Patanjali is only one of the yoga exponents; yamas and niyamas have existed in yogic literature prior to Patanjali and will continue to exist even when humanity has changed. They are the eternal principles that define the positive traits in life, representing a culmination of the human effort to experience the beauty, peace, bliss, truth and expansiveness in life.

The yamas and niyamas that were introduced relate with the management of the first two friends who are tenants in your mind: kama and krodha. Kama means desire, passion, need, ambition, that which motivates you to interact with the outer world for a gain. The way to manage kama is through the first yama, which is *manah prasad*, or happiness.

This yama also reflects the Niranjana challenge. You have to pass the Niranjana challenge to qualify to establish yourself in spiritual life. Be happy for twelve hours of your waking time. If you can, you qualify for spiritual life. If your happiness fluctuates, then you don't qualify for spiritual life; you qualify for training, disciplining and educating yourself and your mind. Just smiling does not mean you are spiritual;

it is a state of mind that you have to maintain for twelve hours of the waking state. That is the Niranjana challenge.

The corresponding niyama is japa. Japa allows you the resilience to move from an outer connection to an inner connection, by disconnecting from the outer and connecting with the internal, and then again disconnecting from the internal and connecting with the outer. Resilience and flexibility are attained through japa. Otherwise, even while dreaming you are under stress and anxiety. There is no psychological relaxation, people worry even in sleep.

Krodha is the second tenant of the mind that we discussed. Krodha means aggression, anger, carelessness, behaving like a bull in a china shop. The antidote for that is the second yama, *kshama*, or forgiveness. Forgiveness creates a big change in the human mind as it releases your tendency to remain in suffering, your masochism. Every human being is a masochist, they like to enjoy the pain and suffering and cry about it, even when events are long past. You connect more with the negative and less with the positive. You share more of the negative with other people and less of the positive. If these are not symptoms of masochism, then what is?

The necessary antidote for this behaviour is the second yama that must be incorporated in life. This is the ability to forgive, to let go of the negative. You hold on to a tree and say that the tree is not letting you go. The moment you release it you are free, you can forget. It is a quality and an ability that very few people acquire. People say, "What do I forgive and what do I forget?" Just think: you have heard about forgiveness, but have you really forgiven anybody for their wrongdoing? Or has it only been lip-service, and in your heart you still carry the resentment? It is easy to give a speech on forgiveness, but very hard to attain it as a state in which you can let go of the negative feelings you hold on to, to experience freedom and release, and connect with the first yama, happiness.

The second niyama is a simple and beautiful one: namaskara. Just smile at everybody, greet, respect and

honour everybody. Namaskara is an indication of humility. When you practise namaskara, humility is expressed and arrogance recedes to the background. Greeting is an expression of the senses that connects you with a feeling and a mood. When you greet somebody, when you say 'Hari Om', when you look at them and smile, you actually bring happiness in their life. If you frown and are angry, you don't bring happiness. What harm is there if you smile at somebody? It can actually work miracles.

When you are walking on the street and come across a complete stranger, look at him and give a big smile. For the whole day that person will be thinking, 'Who was that guy who smiled at me this morning?' Whenever this person remembers the smile, he will become happy. Maybe the next day he will smile at somebody else. Then, this third person will smile at somebody else. In this way, with respect, honour and humility, the world will become a better place.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Appendices

Questionnaires

These questionnaires were given to all participants of the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra. They provide a step-by-step method to understand and apply the yamas and niyamas so they may become real experiences and eventually translate into behaviour and personality.

You may create a separate spiritual diary to do this practice. Give yourself a specific period of time, say three months. Write out each question on an individual page of the diary and at the end of each day, jot down the answer. At the end of the period, look at the picture it presents. You can also create a graph (where applicable), for your answers to a given question over this period, which will indicate the pattern you have played out.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON FIRST YAMA: HAPPINESS

1. When you woke up in the morning, what was the state of your happiness? Rate between 1 to 10.
2. As the day progressed, did the happiness go down or up? Rate the quality of your happiness at the time of going to bed, between 1 to 10.¹
3. Identify three thoughts/situations each that caused happiness and unhappiness.
4. Replay in your mind the situation that caused maximum unhappiness and watch the reaction it has caused within you. Identify the negative quality in yourself that this shows up.²
5. Identify the opposite of the above negative quality and see it in yourself. How much of this opposite positive quality do you possess? Rate between 1 to 10.³
6. Now try to deepen that positive quality to take it at least two points up. Are you able to do it?⁴
7. If the situation involved others, identify the quality in others that makes you unhappy. If it is a negative quality, then just as with yourself, see the opposite positive quality in them and deepen it. If it is a positive quality, then try to appreciate it, and also see it in yourself.⁵

¹ You may create a graph of the fluctuation of your happiness across the day. This will also indicate how far you succeed in the 'Niranjan-challenge'!

² This is often the difficult part. In order to be precise, you should not be satisfied with the first answer you give to yourself. Go deeper and find the root cause of the negativity with total honesty and fearlessness. For example, it is not enough to say 'My problem is anger.' Find out where the anger comes from: from attachment, from fear, from a sense of inadequacy, etc.

³ Very often we think of positive qualities as something we have to bring from outside and acquire. The trick lies in knowing that these qualities already exist within us, we simply have to connect with them. The rating is actually an indication of the degree of your connection with the quality, not of its existence.

⁴ In order to deepen the connection, various tools can be applied: dwell on the quality itself, see it in an inspirational figure and connect with it in them, recall a time when you did express the quality, etc.

⁵ Others can trigger unhappiness in us due to both their negative as well as

8. Imagine the same situation in your mind with a projection of these positive qualities. What is the outcome?
9. Now replay a situation that caused happiness. Identify the quality in yourself that makes you happy. If it is something negative, then develop the opposite quality in the above manner. If it is something positive, then deepen it.⁶
10. Try to feel the happiness without cause. Are you able to do it?⁷

positive traits. If it is a negative trait, then just as with yourself, try to see that they too possess the opposite positive trait. By doing this, you will connect with that positive trait in them and also, in a subtle way, help them connect with it. If it is a positive trait that bothers you, then you must invoke the strength to acknowledge that they underwent the process to connect with it, and then make the sankalpa to do the same yourself.

⁶ Our happiness does not always stem from the noblest reasons: flattery can take us to Cloud Nine, the fall of someone we consider our enemy can make us feel rather pleased, etc. If such is the case, then we need to obviously work on ourselves. If, however, our sense of exultation comes from a purer source, the effort has to be to maintain and deepen that experience.

⁷ See pages 12–14 to understand what is meant by ‘happiness without cause’. Experiencing this is the last step in the progressive development of the yama. This is what a sadhaka has to ultimately come to. The rest of the questionnaire gives you an understanding of your own nature: what makes you happy and what makes you unhappy. This process is necessary to arrive at the final step. If you jump the rungs, it will become a self-deluding idea, and when the triggers come you will again be buffeted. See your mind, understand it, identify the change you need to bring about, make the effort, become the change – and then the natural happiness without cause will shine. This can happen in small doses; it is not only when you become the epitome of the change that you experience this natural happiness. You can experience it the moment you release the cause of happiness-unhappiness.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON FIRST NIYAMA: JAPA

1. Did you do japa of your guru mantra today?⁸
2. What was the state of your mind before the japa? Did it change afterwards? If yes, how?
3. To what extent were you able to maintain the awareness of your mantra and to what extent did your mind wander? You can rate yourself from 1 to 10.
4. How did you feel about doing the japa – happy, eager, tired, bored, duty-bound?
5. How did you feel while doing the japa? Agitated, peaceful, externalized, internalized, eager to finish, happy to continue?
6. Did you do it mechanically or was there any *bhava*, feeling, in it?
7. Was your pace fast, medium or slow?
8. Did you synchronize it with the breath?
9. Were you able to maintain awareness of the symbol?⁹
10. Did you remember the mantra at any other times during the day? During moments of stress, while walking, during participation in other activities?
11. Did you do your mantra repetition with any specific focus or sankalpa?¹⁰
12. Did you do likhit japa today? If yes, identify its effect on you in one word.
13. What is the one thing you need to do to improve your practice of japa?

⁸ If you do not have a guru mantra, then practise with the mantra *Om* or *So-Ham*. Do two malas (108 beads) every day.

⁹ If you do not have a symbol, then use the symbol of a flame. Visualize it in your mind as you do japa.

¹⁰ Usually the guru mantra is done with awareness of the mantra itself. However, there are times when you do it for a certain purpose, for example, you are going through a difficulty and while doing the mantra your background thought is the elimination of that difficulty. The questionnaire is not indicating a preference for either method, it is to simply make you more aware of your practice.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON SECOND YAMA: FORGIVENESS

1. How forgiving would you say you are? Rate between 1 to 10.
2. Bring to mind one situation from the past when you were not forgiving. To what extent are you holding on to it – strong, medium, weak?¹¹
3. What is the feeling that memory generates in you? Hurt, anger, frustration, sadness, any other?
4. Analyze this feeling to identify and understand the root cause of your lack of forgiveness.¹²
5. What are your thoughts about the other person in this situation?
6. Which specific quality do you perceive in them?¹³
7. Consciously change your negative thoughts towards the person by focusing on their positive qualities. How successful are you? Rate yourself and see if the rating improves over a period of time.¹⁴
8. Bring in the thought of forgiveness and try to forgive the other person. Do you find this easy or difficult? Is there a tool that you can apply to make it easy?¹⁵

¹¹ It could be something that happened yesterday, a week ago, a month ago, a year ago, or even in your childhood.

¹² As in the case of happiness, this is the critical step. An example: someone dear to you remarks, “You are dishonest.” You feel angry, hurt, unforgiving. Now go deeper into the feelings. Did you feel hurt because a) your expectation that you as a person should be honoured by someone dear to you is not met b) your self-image, which you have been attached to, is shattered c) your self-esteem is dependent on that person’s opinion d) you are not open enough to accept a view contrary to your own e) you feel your perspective is not valued, etc. Identifying the precise cause can not only lighten the negative feeling, but also point a way out.

¹³ In the fifth question, you allow a free flow of your thoughts, even as you watch them. You are subjective and likely exaggerating the other person’s flaws. Next, in the sixth question, you step out of subjectivity and move into objectivity. Without judgement, you analyze the quality the person expresses. It may be a negative or a positive quality. If it is a negative quality, then just as with yourself, try to recognize where it is coming from. This will give you an understanding of human nature. The analysis may even show that you were mistaken about the intentions of the person and their actions were actually rooted in a positive purpose.

¹⁴ You may try visualizing them as expressing these positive qualities.

¹⁵ You forgive their faults and transgressions, but if you realize that the fault did

9. Take the experience of forgiveness into your heart and allow it to expand. After doing this, do you feel happy, can you smile at the thought of the person, and are you ready to meet them with a hearty namaskara?¹⁶

QUESTIONNAIRE ON SECOND NIYAMA: NAMASKARA

1. Did you remember to practise namaskara sadhana today?
2. To how many people did you offer greetings today – approximately?
3. Did you do it as just a social greeting or did you do it with a bhava?
4. If there was a bhava, what was it?
5. Did you try to follow Swami Sivananda's precept of doing namaskara as if you are greeting the God, or the inherent goodness, in another person?
6. Were there different bhavas with different people? If yes, mentally see what your spontaneous response to different people is.
7. Can you make a resolve to have the same bhava of 'greeting the goodness' with everyone and try to practise it? You can rate the success of your practice over a period of time.
8. Can you notice any positive change in your overall attitude or level of respect towards others after one week, one month, or one year of practice?

not lay in them but in yourself, you still have to forgive them for the hurt you experienced. Examples of tools: Say to yourself, "Everyone has faults, they do, I do"; see their perspective; recall how someone else practised forgiveness; connect with the quality of forgiveness in inspirational figures; think of a situation when you were forgiving; see it as an opportunity to practise forgiveness, etc.

¹⁶ This is a meditative process. In the previous questions, you were applying your intellectual incisiveness to understand yourself, the other person, and develop the ability to forgive. However, it is only when the quality comes into the heart that it becomes a real and abiding experience. Visualization can help: such as your heart becoming luminous with forgiveness and this luminosity expanding outwards into your whole body, etc. The litmus test of whether you are successful lies in the next part of the question – do you feel happy.

Pointers in Practising Yama and Niyama

In order to experience an abiding state of positivity, or to become established in a yama or niyama, we have to go past our negativities. Most of us fail at this very first step. Whenever we look at a negative situation, we begin to find fault in the ‘other person’, continue to dwell on this and exaggerate it in our minds. This remains the nature of our contemplation. We don’t stop to ask: “This reaction that I am experiencing due to the other person, where does it come from? Which negative quality in me is causing this?”

Even when we venture to do this, it often remains a superficial exercise. We don’t go into our root intentions. As we have been told we should be positive, we may try to smile and be friendly. This is also an effort in the right direction; however, it does not become a deep or abiding behaviour because we haven’t acknowledged the root cause of our negative behaviour, and when the trigger comes we are back to square one. Therefore, awareness, recognition and acknowledgement of our negativities comprise the basic process to develop positivity.

Reasons we are not able to acknowledge our negativities

1. *Mental dissipation*: A still mind is essential to do the internal questioning and answering, therefore one must acquire a certain degree of mental focus to walk this path. The solution: do a yogic practice to still the prana

and mind, and then do a short session of self-analysis. To begin with, you may ask just two questions from the questionnaires given in the previous section.

2. *Excuses*: “I don’t have the time to sit down and think.” Or: “Contemplation is not my cup of tea. I leave it to the jnana yogis.” The solution: recognize that you are making excuses and try to appreciate the benefits of the practice.
3. *Fear of non-recognition*: We all want to believe that we are a likeable person, and we derive energy from others’ recognition of us. In this search for validation we often try to form intimate friendships. If we identify our negativities, we may be forced to believe that we are not as likeable as we’d like to believe and that others’ criticism of us is justified. The solution: not being afraid of criticism or of not looking nice, and not depending on other people for a sense of our own value.
4. *Guilt*: We can feel overpowered by guilt and the associated lowering of self-esteem/confidence when we look at our negativities. The solution: recognizing that negativities are part of the human condition, so there is no problem if I have them. I just have to work on them.
5. *Fear of negativity itself*: Yes, negativity scares us. The answer lies in invoking the courage to face everything.
6. *Feeling of superiority*: Many of us who come to spiritual life believe that we are superior to others, even our fellow seekers. If we look at our negativities, we are forced to admit that we are all in the same boat. The solution: admit that we are in the same boat.
7. *Sense of conflict*: We condemn others for negativities, so how can we accept that we possess what we condemn? The solution: don’t condemn; recognize, but don’t condemn.
8. *Deluded notion of spirituality*: Some people say, “I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am the effulgent spirit, so why should I bother with the mind?” True, but is it an idea or is it an experience? To get to the experience, one has to go past the mind and its negativities which cast the veil over the experience of the spirit.

How one can acknowledge negativities

- Overall, it takes: *sankalpa shakti* or firm resolve, courage, determination, *mumukshutva* or an intense desire to be free of the lower nature – in other words, sincerity, seriousness, commitment.
- Keep going. When one begins to experience freedom and relief due to the precise identification of a negative root, one will want to go through the process again. Through this repeated effort, a new neuron pathway is created in the brain and it becomes easier and easier to do it.
- Understanding that being able to look at our weaknesses is one of the biggest strengths.
- Understanding that we will not lose connection with the positive when we go through this process. On the contrary, the positive will strengthen.

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.



In the ongoing effort to develop the next chapter of yoga, Swami Niranjanananda gave a series of satsangs during the Adhyatma Samskara Sadhana Satra. Held from 17th to 25th July at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, it was the first course of its kind. The aim was to take yoga practitioners beyond asana and pranayama into a broader understanding and application of yoga. They were given the tools to develop the ability to practise the yoga that can transform the mind and behaviour, thus creating a new lifestyle and resulting in harmony within oneself and in society.

Swamiji explained that the path is laid out in the *yamas* and *niyamas*, the positive attributes of life. Usually people refer to the *yamas* and *niyamas* listed by Sage Patanjali, but Swamiji delved into those presented in other yogic and spiritual literatures. Two *yamas*: happiness and forgiveness, and two *niyamas*: *japa* and *namaskara* were taken up. Participants were also given questionnaires and asked to maintain a spiritual diary so they can cultivate these four qualities in their life as a *sadhana*.

This book presents the satsangs and also includes the questionnaires.



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