

HANDBOOK ON YOGA

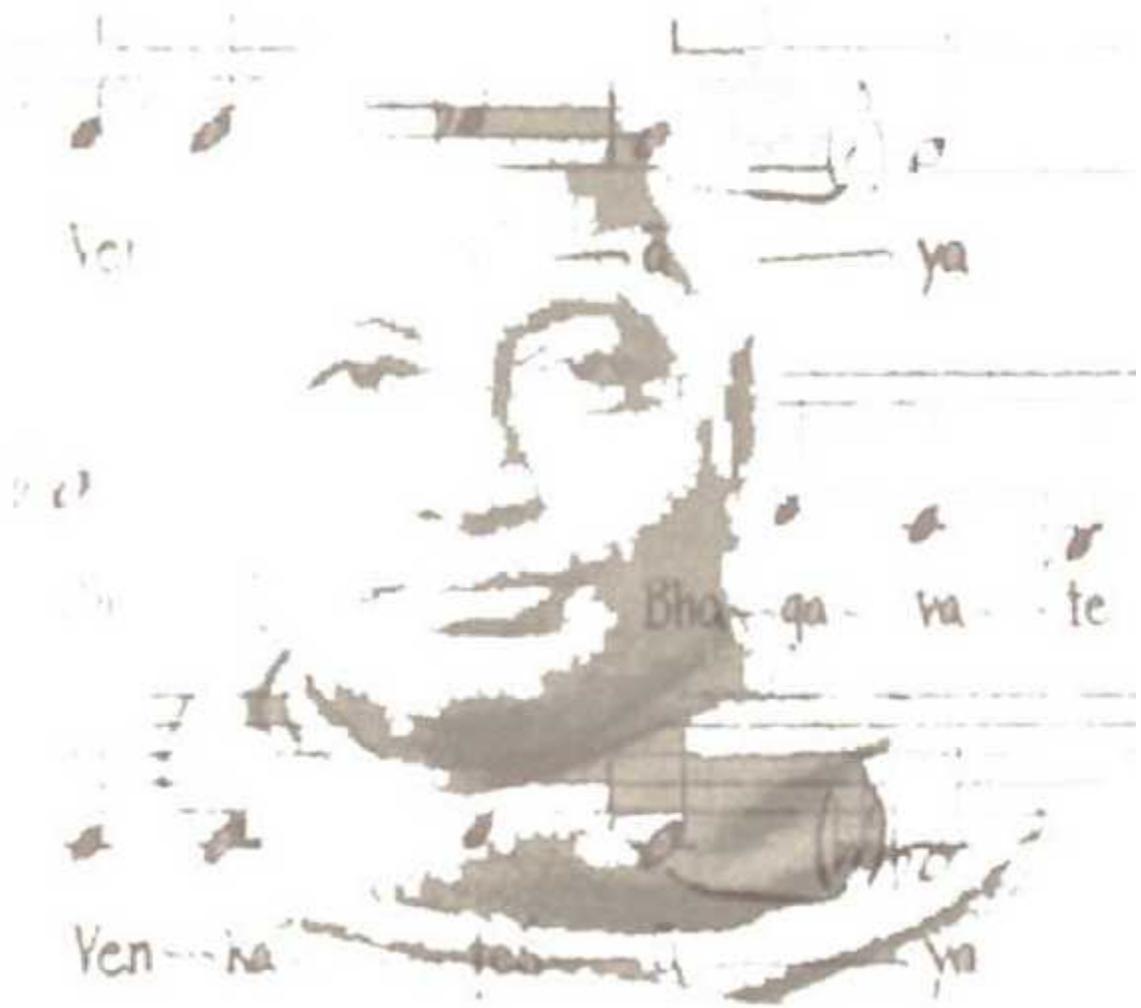
by

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Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Handbook on Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda

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Dedication

I humbly dedicate this flower at the feet of our divine Master Sri Swami Sivananda.

As I have often mentioned in my talks, what I am and what I have I owe to Him. Only His supreme grace a little of which I could absorb during the sixteen years that he had given me shelter at His Feet, has enabled me to serve you all, as your brother and Sevak.

God's Grace enabled me to drink freely the Guru Charana-Amrita - holy water in which Gurudev's Feet had been washed. It is only That which has enabled this humble instrument at the hands of my Master to render this little service to you.

May this flower be acceptable to Him.

Swami Venkatesananda

Universal Prayer

O adorable Lord of mercy and love,
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee.
Thou art Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient,
Thou art Satchidananda.
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.
Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,
Faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength
To resist temptations and to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed and hatred,
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.
Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms,
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms,
Let us ever remember Thee,
Let us ever sing Thy glories,
Let Thy Name be ever on our lips,
Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.
Om Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!

Sri Swami Sivananda

1. Life: Its Meaning and Purpose

Om Namah Sivanandaya

The first question that every thinking man asks is: 'What is the purpose of life?' Why are we born as human beings? Or, is there any purpose at all, or, do we merely exist till we die?

It takes some time for these questions even to arise in the mind. The normal man in the modern world is far too busy with the struggle for existence to find time for such thoughts. He has to be awakened. There comes a stage in ignorance when it is mistaken for wisdom. A stage in slavery when liberation is resented. At such times, the Almighty Lord grants us great spiritual awakeners like our Master Swami Sivananda, to come into our midst and live with us, but different from us, thus revealing a pattern of life which has greater meaning than merely awaiting its end.

In the process of awakening, too, there are two ways, even as in the case of getting rid of ailments of the body. If we heed the example and precepts of the Master, we can get spiritually healed and awakened, the easy way - even as a wise man can resort to a physician and find a remedy for his ailment through simple drugs. But, if we ignore the Master's message, God, our Benign Mother, will have to resort to other methods to bring home to us that we live in a world of pain and death, and we cannot find real happiness here. It is like the patient neglecting the physician's advice and later being handed over to the surgeon for a more painful treatment of the disease.

Sooner or later, the easy or the difficult way, we have to ask ourselves the great question: 'What is the purpose of life?'

Scriptures and men of God tell us that we have passed through countless births before reaching this human birth. As minerals, we merely existed. We were not satisfied with that. So, as plants, we grew up. Even that did not satisfy us. We began to move about as insects, roam about as animals, and fly as birds. Guided by instincts, we hunted for prey, ate, drank and slept, enjoyed or suffered, helplessly. We were unable to find permanent satisfaction or happiness in the world.

We, who were walking on four legs, looking down on the earth, lifted the forelegs, looked up to heaven and prayerfully asked: 'There is no permanent satisfaction here. Is it there, in the heavens ?' It was then, when we lifted up the forelegs that we became human beings, with the distinguishing characteristic of discrimination. We took this human birth to find a way to attain eternal satisfaction or perennial happiness. Yet, such is the power of Maya or of nescience, that soon after our birth, we forget this and do nothing better than we have been doing in our former incarnations: hence, Gurudev sings:

Is there not a nobler mission than eating, drinking, and sleeping?
It is difficult to get a human birth, therefore try your best to realise in this birth.

It is good to keep these flaming words of wisdom ever before us, so that our life is illuminated by the light of our Master's life and teachings.

2. Quest of Happiness

Happiness is within you, reminds the Master, and you failed to get it only because you were searching for it where it did not exist.

To illustrate this truth, our Master has an interesting little story. An old woman was searching for something outside her house. A good young man wanted to help her and joined the search. Not finding anything, he asked her what she was searching for. 'For a sewing needle,' said the lady. 'Where were you when you dropped it?' 'In the kitchen.' 'Then, why are you searching for it here?' 'Because, it is all dark in the kitchen!' 'When will she find it? And, when shall we discover eternal happiness in the outside world, while we lost it - through ignorance - within ourselves?

In a stirring song our Master sings:

Within you is hidden God,
Within you is immortal soul,
Kill this little I, die to live, lead the divine life.
Within you, fountain of joy,
Within you, ocean of bliss.
Rest peacefully, in your own Atma.
Drink the nectar of immortality.

How can we prove it that there is happiness within ourselves? Our Master has a very simple argument. He asks us to reflect over the common, universal experience of deep sleep. In deep sleep - not the dream state, nor the state of nightmares and visions, we are at peace within ourselves, and we enjoy what we later express: 'I slept happily.' In fact, this sleep is the only period of the day when we are really happy, free from all fear, worry and anxiety. More-over, from sleep we awaken thoroughly refreshed, too. Without any tonic, injections or vitamin tablets, we 'rested within ourselves' and got new energy. What is it that prevents us from enjoying this happiness constantly? Why can we not enjoy that deep sleep happiness always? Because of ignorance, the little 'I' is unable to find its way consciously to this Inner Source, and, therefore, endeavours to find that happiness in the external objects of the world, which it can see, grasp and experience.

Lord Yama declares in the Kathopanishad that

Paranchi khani Vyatrinath Swayambhuh Tasmad Paran Pasyathi Na Antaratman.

The Creator put a little bit of restlessness in the mind and the senses, and this outgoing tendency compels them to see only external objects and not the Inner Self.

And, He describes the way out:

Kaschit Dheerah Pratyagatmanam Aikshath Avrittha Chakshuh Amritatwam Ichchan.

But, a rare great hero, desirous of attaining immortality, turns his gaze within.

It is through a deliberate turning away from the objects of pleasure in this world, and by the practice of meditation, does the seeker after Truth or Eternal Bliss, enter the Inner Realm consciously and with full awareness. Hence that state of Superconsciousness is called 'sleepless sleep'.

3. Divine Life

Serve, Love, Meditate, Realise.

Swami Sivananda, our Master, tells us of a highly practical way of combining activity and inner life, based on the conclusions drawn from deep sleep. In deep sleep, we forget the world and forget ourselves and, so we enjoy unalloyed happiness. In other words, if only we can forget ourselves during the waking state of activity, then we can still be happy. It is when we are swayed by desires and cravings, when the mind clamours for the fulfillment of its desires, that we become unhappy. Swamiji asks us to engage ourselves in selfless service, constantly thinking of and working for the welfare of all beings, self-forgetfully, and assures us that in such service we shall derive the same happiness as we had during deep sleep. When we are least conscious of our health, we are healthy. When we are not mindful of pain, it disappears. If we learn to rejoice in the happiness of others, and therefore, work constantly for the wellbeing of others, there need be not one moment of unhappiness for us.

This, then, is our Master's secret of happiness: and He Himself is the best exemplar of this secret. At 75 today, He works with the zeal, enthusiasm and vigour of a man of 17, all the time self-forgetfully and self-sacrificingly. He has no time to think of Himself or His comfort or convenience. He does not even allow Himself a 'change' or visit to a health resort, and happily asserts 'change of work is rest.'

Serve, serve all, serve selflessly, self-forgetfully and self-sacrificingly, is the first principle of divine life.

There is a condition precedent to a genuine desire to serve - it is love. Unless we love, we will not serve. And, here again, there is a universal experience which goes unnoticed and unreflected upon. When are we intensely and consciously happy in our daily life? When we are close to one we love - be that a husband or wife, father or mother, son or relative. When we are close to our beloved, we are intensely happy. Our Master, therefore, says: 'Love all', and you see readily that this is the best way to ensure continuous happiness. It is only when we dislike or hate someone, and when we are in the presence of that person or think of that person, do we feel unhappy. This applies to our experiences in life, too. If we learn to love all, and to greet all experiences as gifts from the Lord, we shall always be happy.

It is only when we love all, will we serve all and share what we have with all. But, there is a mysterious power within us which does not normally allow us to love all. This mysterious power generates two currents of attraction and repulsion, likes and dislikes. Caught in these currents, we feel happy when we are in contact with those we like, and unhappy when we are in contact with those whom we do not like. Unless we rise above these two currents, we cannot cultivate cosmic love and love all.

Nothing but meditation - coupled with selfless service, can enable us to rise above these two currents of raga - infatuation and dwesha - hatred. Therefore, our Master asks us to meditate daily in Brahmamuhurtha. We can adopt the nirguna meditation, by enquiring into the true nature of the 'I' - and arrive by stages at the truth that we are not this body, we are not the mind and that we are the Eternal Spark of God that dwells in us and in everything else, or the Saguna meditation, adopting some image of God, which, too, will eventually lead us to the same goal. The latter is easier.

But, the one unalterable law is that if we are sincere in our practice of meditation, we must arrive at the truth that the God Who dwells in our heart dwells in all. This realisation must come, sooner or later - sooner if we at the same time endeavour to practise selfless service of humanity and cultivate cosmic love.

We shall then realise that the world is indwelt by the Lord. We shall love all and serve all. We shall have an entirely different attitude towards the world - the world will no longer be to us an arena of warring nations, as it appears to the politicians, not a sleeping man's treasure which we can loot, as is the vision of the selfish, narrow-minded economist, and not a laboratory in which all of us as guinea pigs serve the scientist in his experiments with suicidal weapons. But the world will appear to us as God Himself. Then we shall love Him in all. We shall serve Him in all, self-forgetfully and world-forgetfully. When we forget ourself and the world, we shall enjoy peace and happiness. This peace and this happiness will be ours, consciously, and even when we are engaged in the performance of our daily duties.

This is my Master's message of Divine Life. This is the religion of tomorrow. We already see the glimmer of the dawn of this new era.

4. Integral Perfection

Divine Life is divinising our entire life. We cannot be saints for a day in the week, or in an hour a day, and a sinner during the rest. Swami Sivananda, therefore, pleads for an integration of our entire personality, and the spiritualisation of all our activities. That is the spiritual significance of a story that occurs in the Mahabharata: the story of Nala. Nala was a righteous king and therefore, Satan could not have access into him. Satan was waiting for his chance when one day Nala forgot to wash his heels, and Satan entered Nala, through that neglected heel. This story illustrates the truth that, in the words of Swamiji, a lop-sided development of our personality will not lead us to the goal, and that we should aim at the integral development of our personality. Due attention should be paid to all the aspects of our personality at the same time - no specialisation

Hence the Prophet of Divine Life exhorts us to combine all the spiritual practices in our daily life and thus ensure that we have a 'balanced spiritual diet' every day, which will enable us to grow harmoniously into a perfect personality, very soon. His doctrine, if His simple teaching could be so termed, is 'The Doctrine of A Little'. He has himself put it in the form of a simple song:

Eat a little, drink water a little, speak a little, sleep a little,
Mix a little, move a little, serve a little, think a little,
Give a little, work a little, rest a little, worship a little,
Do Asan a little, Pranayam a little, meditate a little, do Vichar a little,
Do Japa a little, do Kirtan a little, write Mantra a little, have Satsang a little.

A little bit of everything keeps us ever alert and keeps boredom away. Moreover, this concerted attack on the inner enemy, viz., egoism, eliminates him more quickly and thoroughly.

Often we know a lot but do little. Idle knowledge is more dangerous than ignorance, for it adds to our vanity. If we know a little, and put that into practice, we shall liberate ourselves.

We have this story in the Panchatantra. A cat and a jackal were discussing, on the outskirts of a forest, their ability to deal with a hunter if they met with one. The jackal said that it knew a thousand and one ways of escaping from the situation. The cat felt sorry that it knew only one. Just at that time they noticed a hunter aiming at them. The cat quickly went up a nearby tree, the only way of escape it knew. The jackal was reflecting over the best way to effect an escape when the hunter shot his arrow and killed it. The cat was wiser, for it acted upon the knowledge it possessed.

Gurudev therefore asks to give our resolutions a practical shape. Based on our understanding of our need, we ought to take a few resolves annually. These will take the form of a determination to grow in virtue, to eradicate evil habits, to do a little of the spiritual practices enumerated above. Then, we should draw up a

daily routine, incorporating all these in it. That was the way Benjamin Franklin achieved greatness, and that is what made our Master great, too. He revealed once, when a great leader of India expressed astonishment at the ceaseless flow of spiritual literature from Gurudev's pen, 'I stick to the daily routine: I must write a few pages every day, and this regularity has built up this volume of literature.' Even if we do a little of each item, if we are regular as the routine time table will ensure, we can achieve a lot. There is often a human tendency to make big resolutions, do something for a few days, and then to let the zeal slacken by and by. To prevent this, our Master gives a priceless companion the Spiritual Diary. We should maintain it regularly and have it reviewed by our Master, for further guidance. Then we shall ourselves be amazed at the rapidity of our spiritual progress. What is needed is sincerity, and that is the first casualty of modern civilisation.

A humorous story illustrates the depth of sincerity of the modern man. A few old widows used to visit a temple in South India and pray to the Lord daily: 'Oh Lord, we have no one to look after us in this world. Please take us away and liberate us from Samsara.' The priest's heart melted one day and he prayed to the Lord, too. But, the Lord was unmoved. At night, the priest had a vision of the Lord in which He gave him some advice. The next day, as the widows were approaching the temple, the priest hid himself behind the image of God. The moment they concluded their prayer, he shouted from there: 'Oh devotees, I am highly pleased with your devotion. I am ready to liberate you just now.' The moment the widows heard this, they ran away in great haste. One said, 'My eldest grandson has gone to England, how can I leave this world before he returns?' Another said, 'My third grand-daughter is in the family way, how can I go away before her confinement?' and so on. After they had all left the priest came forward, bowed to the Lord: 'Oh, Lord, many people may, but, how few are sincere.'

If we are sincere and earnest, the path is smooth. This is the worst mistake that even spiritual aspirants commit - they take spiritual life as a sort of labour imposed upon them, as a burden to be carried, as something unpleasant. This makes Sadhana difficult and arduous. The secret lies in understanding the fact that we are bound to realise the Self one day or the other, and it is a great joy doing so earlier, and also to take a keen interest in undertaking adventurous trips into the realms of the mind and the Spirit. Then Sadhana becomes delightful. Failures lose their depressing effect, but act as stepping-stones to greater effort and ultimate success.

If we are sincere and eager to do Sadhana, these three - Resolves, Daily Routine and Spiritual Diary - will prove to be a wonderful weapon, even as the Trident or the Trisulam of Lord Siva was, to tear the veil of ignorance that hides the Reality within us.

5. Yoga of Action

Yoga of Action

Karma Yoga plays a vital role in this scheme of Yoga Sadhana. But, it is one of the most misunderstood of paths. A big businessman once visited our Ashram in Rishikesh and, after noticing the various spiritual practices that Sadhakas underwent there, remarked: 'You people here practise Hatha Yoga or Bhakti Yoga or Jnana Yoga; but we practise Karma Yoga.' Is the business that he does Karma Yoga? No. All action is not Yoga. We have to understand the spirit of Karma Yoga carefully. For, according to Lord Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, it is the spirit in which the action is done that matters, not the action itself.

Doorena-hyavaram Karma Buddhi Yogaad Dhananjaya.

Inferior is action to Buddhi Yoga.

If the right attitude is maintained and the correct spirit understood, then all action becomes Yoga. If not, even great acts of charity and service, however good and beneficial they may be, do not constitute Yoga. That is why doctors and nurses in hospitals, workers in charge of charitable institutions, priests and mendicants do not automatically attain salvation. The attitude is absent. It is given in a picturesque manner in the Gita.

Swa Karmana Tamabhyarchya Siddhim Vindathi Manavah.

By worshipping the Lord with his actions, man attains to Perfection.

This spirit of worship is most important. It presupposes the recognition of the hidden God in all. 'God pervades all beings,' says the Isavasya Upanishad. 'I am the Self of all beings,' says Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. It is only when we thus see the Lord in all and serve the Lord in all, that we shall serve selflessly, without any selfish motive, for gaining no selfish ends, regarding the act or the service itself as reward enough, for the sake of God. Only then shall we avoid being swayed by the deadly currents of Raga and Dwesha, and serve all with equal vision and balanced mind.

This is extremely difficult to understand if we do not watch a living Yogi demonstrate it. I have seen our Master demonstrate this times without number. In fact, His divine life is but one continuous commentary on the half Sloka of the Gita that I just now quoted. 'Jaya, Bhagavan,' is the expression constantly on His lips. After serving you, He always thanks you for the opportunity you, His God, gave Him for thus worshipping the Lord in you. In rendering this service, no considerations of caste, religion, nationality, etc., matter. Even if the person in need of service be one who had regarded himself as our Master's enemy - he himself has no enemies in the world, the service is not denied. For, all the time, the Master is conscious that the Lord is hidden in the person whom he serves, and the service is worship of the divine. 'When you shampoo the legs of a sick

man, feel that you are shampooing the Lord's Feet,' said Sri Gurudev, instructing an aspirant in the art of selfless service. That was what He used to do even when He was serving the sick as a doctor in Malaya, before He renounced the world in 1923. He would share whatever He had with the patients, whatever their caste or social status. He would not charge them any fees. He would give them some pocket money when they departed, to help them buy their food, etc. This great quality accompanied Him in Sannyasa when He took His abode in the Himalayas in 1924 and began serving the monks and the poor people in the neighbourhood of Rishikesh. He would give them the medicines free, shampoo their legs, and then fall at their feet. This prostration is the hall-mark of our Master. It was strange in India for a Swami to bow to a layman. But, Master would bow down even to little children, servants and scavengers - these distinctions did not exist for Him, and to Him all are the manifestations of the Lord. It is in that spirit that we should work, in order to transform all our activities into Yoga.

The next important factor is the 'Nimittha Bhavana'. God Himself is serving His own manifestations through us. We are but instruments in His hands. Even so, we enjoy great benefits. His will alone prevails here. We are able to live, to love and to serve by His will and power only, to surrender our little will and merge it in His is a great blessing. It liberates us from selfishness and egoism. This, too, is readily evident in the daily life of our Master. His genuine humility, His thorough unselfishness and His wonderful optimism even in the face of seeming crisis in the life of the institution He has so painstakingly built up, are the surest indications of the total self-surrender to the divine will, in which He works. After years of dynamic, untiring, selfless and self-sacrificing service, when the Divine Life Society was on the verge of a great financial crisis in 1949, the Master cheerfully and readily said: 'We shall all of us go to the alms-houses in Rishikesh, take alms and carry on the work of the Lord as best as we could. We should bow to the Lord's Will.' The crisis soon vanished in the face of such cool optimism and moral courage. Never once has the Master looked back, with satisfaction or pride on His own superhuman achievements, nor ever rested on His laurels. I have never seen another person who lives more truly in the Eternal Present, ever looking forward to doing more and more in the service of humanity, as the worship of the Lord. In a number of letters He has written to His foremost disciples, Gurudev has exalted dynamic selfless service as the best form of meditation and worship of the Lord, though He has always advised them to combine both service and meditation.

The spirit of Karma Yoga frees us from another problem in our daily life, the shock from which we suffer when someone whom we have served and loved, behaves badly towards us, insults or hurts us. I have seen Gurudev's own divine reaction to such behaviour in the way He reacted when a young man whom He had sheltered in the Ashram and looked after nicely for months suddenly 'lost his head' and came to hit Gurudev with an axe. Gurudev's calm assertion: 'God only must have come in the form of Govindan to wipe out some Karma, and to reveal His mysterious saving Grace,' was an eye-opener to all of us. We do not resent when someone repays a debt he owes; we are happy. When that takes the form of

an insult or injury, why should we react differently? Happy in all conditions, let us continue to serve, serve all selflessly, self-sacrificingly and untiringly, feeling that we are serving the Lord for His sake, as His instruments.

That is the secret of Karma Yoga, which will liberate us from Samsara, with the help of the very activities which, otherwise, bind us.

6. The Path of Love

Bhakti has often been taken to mean mere emotionalism. Crying, jumping, dancing, fainting and such other abnormalities have often been mistaken for true devotion. We often forget that, though sages may behave like mad men, mad men are not sages. In our Ashram, there once was a visiting devout couple and the lady used to wipe her eyes often while the Lord's Names were sung during Satsang. I used to envy her devotion, till, one day her husband came to me for advice on his wife's ailment, viz., constant watering of the eyes. We should know the genuine and the spurious. Otherwise, we shall regard Bhakti as a mere riot of emotion. It is not.

Worship of an image of God, singing of Kirtans, repetition of the divine Name, etc., have all their places in our Sadhana. But, we shall not forget that the goal is realisation, not imagination. Here, again, as in Karma Yoga, it is the inner attitude that matters, not the amount of money spent in the worship. The symbolism of the worship should not be forgotten. As we grind the sandal-paste, we should pray to Him to bestow upon us forbearance, to do good to even those that do evil to us, even as the sandalwood gives fragrance to the man who cuts it and grinds it. As we offer flowers at His feet, we should feel that we offer all our actions as flowers of worship. As we wave the incense in front of the Lord, we should inwardly feel that He is all-pervading as the scent of the incense pervades, though imperceptibly the entire room. As we wave the single faced lamp, we should feel that we adore the Lord with the Inner Self or Soul. Similarly, the three-faced lamp represents the three bodies, the three states of consciousness and the three Gunas; and the five-faced lamp represents the five Pranas, the five organs of action and the five organs of knowledge. Through all these we adore the Lord. When the multi-faced lamp is waved we should feel that we adore Him with all our thoughts and emotions. With the camphor, we should melt and pray to Him that our individual personality may thus get absorbed in Him. It is the Bhavana - inner attitude that ultimately blossoms as Anubhava - actual experience in due course. It is all-important in Bhakti Yoga.

It is this Bhavana that leads us gradually from idol worship to meditation on the Absolute. Our Master is regular, even today, with the daily worship of His own Deity. He sets the example for us to emulate. He asks us not to stop there, but to practise constant remembrance of God. The technique is this: let everything that we see remind us of God - the light of the sun, moon, stars, fire and the electric lamp, the vast blue sky or the ocean, the beautiful flower and the innocent face of a child, the gigantic tree and the strong arm of a gymnast, the image of God on the altar and the radiant face of a saint - let them all remind us of the existence of God in them. Side by side, Gurudev wants us to practise constant Nama-Smaran - repetition of the Name of God. One helps the other. When they are combined, we grow God-conscious very soon.

Idol worship should lead us on to meditation on the Absolute. Without the first step of idol worship, meditation on the Absolute is almost impossible. And, if we

do not extend the frontiers of divinity beyond the idol, we may get stuck there. Hence, even in the method of worshipping idols, our ancient Seers had introduced elements of adoration of the Nameless and the Formless - in fact, they emphasised that we should superimpose the qualities of the Absolute on the idol. Again, they declared that mental worship of the chosen deity was superior - when we are ready for it, of course - to gross external worship, and that Para Puja, a way of adoring the Omnipresent God, through all our thoughts, words and deeds, was superior to all other forms of worship.

The sincere aspirant realised always that he could not get anywhere on this path, without the help of an idol to fix his mind on. The idol also provided a concrete Form of God on which he could pour out the devotion of his heart, to which he could pray, and on which he could lean in times of stress and strain, trials and difficulties. He found great relief from tension, worries, and anxieties when he had a 'tangible God' to whom he could talk. The Omnipresent Divinity which was, of course, present in that idol, too, heard his prayer and granted it.

When the concentration grew intense, the power latent in the idol was revealed. Thus we have stories of the great mystics who could 'see' God in and through the idols. Let us not forget: God Who is Omnipresent, is in the idol, too, and He Who is Omnipotent can reveal Himself in any Form to the devotee,

In all our Sadhana, Japa - repetition of a Mantra or Name of God, plays a vital role. This is our Master's forte. It is a solution to all our problems. For, all our problems are created by the impure mind and repetition of the Mantra is the best purifier of the mind, and tranquilliser, too.

A Yogi had stayed in the house of a devotee for some time and the young son of the family had served him devoutly. While departing from the place, the Yogi volunteered to fulfil any of the boy's wishes as he had control over an invisible Spirit. The boy, however, wanted the Spirit to be loaned for some time. Reluctantly, the Yogi gave the young man command over the Spirit, with the warning that if he found any difficulty in dealing with it, he should think of the Yogi. The Yogi went his way, and the young man called up the Spirit. The Spirit agreed to do anything for him, provided he would keep it busy always, failing which it would eat him up. The young man had all his desires fulfilled in a few hours - had a palace built, furnished, a car made, etc. - and he was at a loss to know how to keep the Spirit busy any more, as otherwise his life was in danger.

In keeping the Spirit busy, he could not even enjoy the wonderful things it had provided for him. He thought of the Yogi and he appeared and gave the young man some secret advice. As soon as the Spirit appeared after the last mission, the young man asked it to erect a big pillar in front of the house, and to climb up and down, till he asked it to stop. That was the Yogi's solution; and that defeated the restless Spirit.

We have such a restless Spirit in us, it is the impure mind. If we do not keep it

busy with some good activity continuously, it will create impure desires and thoughts and destroy us. The best way to keep it constantly busy, without obstructing our daily work, is Japa of God's Name.

Gurudev gives us extremely practical hints to cultivate this Japa habit. As soon as we get up from bed in the morning, we should start repeating the Mantra. Then sit down and repeat the Mantra for, say, half an hour. Then, during the day, every hour or so, we should close our eyes for just a few seconds, and repeat the Mantra a few times. This way we shall soon be able to create the habit and ultimately, along with our daily activities, the mind will go on repeating the Mantra, as a sort of under-current. Even during sleep, the mind will involuntarily go on repeating the Mantra. This is a great purifier of the mind and it will also steady the mind and enable us to enjoy great peace and happiness. Before going to bed, too, we should repeat the Mantra for half an hour. Then we shall sleep soundly and well. The current will be kept up during sleep also.

7. Hatha Yoga

The Indian Yogi recognises that in his endeavour to perfect himself, he has to take note of three distinct aspects of his being. Yoga is a perfect and scientific system of self-culture, and therefore it caters to the needs of all three aspects.

At a wedding reception, the bride gets a number of presents from friends: they fall into three categories, viz., flowers, dress and ornaments. What is most beautiful is the gift of flowers. Lovely, fragrant and attractive; they attract our attention most. The friends who bring them have to take great care to see that they are not crumpled or the arrangement disturbed. But, the bride knows that they will fade away soon; she wears them with great joy, but throws them away into the nearest bin when the reception comes to a close. The dresses are taken into the apartments and left in the wardrobe. They will last longer and are more useful. But the ornaments which perhaps attract much less attention than the flowers or the dresses are carefully preserved in the steel cabinet; they are of permanent value.

Similarly, we have the three aspects of our being. The body: the thing that immediately catches anyone's notice is the thing to which we attribute charm, beauty, magnetism, etc. Then we have the mind. And then the soul. The body has to be well preserved and looked after. It has to be kept in good health, free from ailments. But to devote all our time and attention to it would be like taking the flowers into the steel cabinet - the jewelry would have no place, then. Health is very important, either for living a happy life here, or for achieving success in our undertakings or for evolving spiritually and enjoying communion with God. Therefore, Yoga has provided a system of physical culture, called Yoga Asanas.

The Yoga Asanas are not body-building exercises, but they bestow upon the practitioner good health, inner resistance to diseases, strong nerves, and clear mind, by promoting the health of the internal viscera in the body and of the extremely vital endocrine glands which play a great role in our health and long life. The Sirshasana, for instance, promotes an abundant blood circulation to the head, strengthening not only the vital organs like the eye, the ears, etc., but also the little pineal gland and the pituitary gland, which are vital to our well-being. The shoulder-stand or Sarvangasana massages the thyroid gland - another vital organ. The Halasana, in addition, ensures the health of the abdominal viscera. The Matsyasana, besides relieving the crampy feeling one may have after Sarvangasana, expands the chest cavity and promotes deep breathing. The 'spinal triad' - cobra pose, locust pose, and the bow pose, and the spinal twist - Ardha-Matsyendrasana, keep the spine mobile and prevent their stiffening, with consequent undue and unhealthy pressure on the nerves which branch off from the spinal cord. Paschimottanasana prevents abdominal ailments and the fashionable disease, diabetes. So does Padahasthasana. Mayurasana helps digestion and assimilation of food. And, the wonderful system of exercises called Suryanamaskara combine some of these postures, a little bit of quick physical movement, sun-bathing, worship of God - sun, and thus achieves a marvellous

combination. Finally, Savasana enables you to relax all tensions in the body. This relaxation should be consciously brought about by sending thought-currents to the various parts of the body to relax. The mind itself should be relaxed by offering it to God.

The few Pranayama exercises - simple breathing, breathing through alternate nostrils, and breathing through alternate nostrils with a little retention, that we need to do daily, will enable us to breathe as we should and derive the maximum benefit from the fresh air we breathe in. Bhastrika generates instant vitality in the body. The goldsmith uses his bellows for augmenting the fire, and we use the bellow-movement of the abdomen to augment the fire of Prana within us.

These physical exercises and breathing exercises calm the nerves and ease all tension in the body and the mind. They purify the subtle astral 'nerves' or Nadis, the subtle 'wires' through which the Pranic current flows. They purify the mind also and prepare it for the higher Yoga practices.

Now, this is like the dresses presented to the bride at the wedding. They are of vital importance, but yet secondary to the diamond necklace. Even so, these physical exercises and the regulation of breath are vitally important to the practice of Yoga. But we should not stop with them. We should go deeper and obtain the precious diamond we have within ourselves. We should own and possess that precious thing - the Self, by knowing it, by realising it as direct experience. Concentration of the mind and meditation lead us to this direct experience of the Self. Our divine master, Swami Sivananda therefore insists that we should, side by side with these Yoga Asanas and Pranayama, go on with the concentration and meditation exercises, so that we may reach the goal of our life here and now.

Our master says that the goal is God-realisation. We shall not stop short of that goal. We shall enjoy good health and long life and shall utilise these for attaining that goal.

8. Meditation: the Master-Key to Spiritual Power

The intellectual giant, the mighty leader, the heroic leader, and the great saint-are all 'men' only. What they have done, you can do also. If - and it is a big 'if', you can discipline the mind, concentrate its rays, powers, and meditate or apply them to an ideal with a singleness of purpose.

That is what the Yogi does when he meditates. He is full of energy, he was wonderful personal magnetism, he enjoys great powers of healing and blessing, because he meditates. When he has realised his oneness with God or the Self within, in Samadhi, he radiates divine light and peace. In his presence your miseries vanish and your doubts are dispelled. Samadhi is the culmination of meditation.

But, do not forget that meditation itself is the seventh rung in the ladder of Yoga. Yoga is a perfect scientific system expounded by Patanjali Maharshi. It is open to all, and is not hedged in by religious or sectarian dogmas. Everyone can and should practise meditation. In fact, the supermen in all walks of life do meditate. Their devotion to their chosen task makes it natural and effortless for them to meditate. The spiritual aspirant whose aim is to attain salvation should, however, practise meditation, consciously, willingly, and purposefully. He should also pay attention to the first six rungs in the ladder of Yoga.

The first two relate to your conduct. The impure mind will refuse to yield to the will-force. It will go its own way. The pure mind is a greater conductor of the will-force and will faithfully guide you to the Inner Realms of Knowledge and Power, Bliss and Peace. Purity is essential. Yama and Niyama, the first two rungs, purify the mind. Be truthful. Love all. Be pure. Do not covet the wealth of others. Be charitable, do not hoard wealth. Do not beg or put yourself under the obligation of others; be contented with what you have. Observe the laws of cleanliness. Develop contentment. Lead a simple life. Study scriptures and repeat the Name of God. Do total self-surrender to God and earn His Grace and blessings. These are the Yama-Niyamas.

The third step is Asana. Any comfortable and firm posture is Asana. You must be able to sit for a long time in this posture. Padmasana helps you in this.

Padmasana: sit and stretch the legs forward. Take hold of the right foot with the two hands and, folding the leg at the knee, place the foot on the left thigh. Similarly, fold the left leg and place it on the right thigh. Keep the body erect and place the hands between the heels, one over the other or on the knees with Chinmudra. If the posture is easy, steady and comfortable, then you are able to forget the body soon.

The fourth step is Pranayama or the control of breath. Breath is intimately connected with the mind. When you are thinking deeply, you breathe slowly, rhythmically. When you are disturbed in thought, the breath is also disturbed,

heavy and laboured. Even so, if you breathe in and out, steadily, rhythmically and deeply, the thought-process is slowed down and the mind concentrated easily. Breathe in deeply, rhythmically, without producing noise, through the left nostril, closing the right one. Hold the breath for a few seconds. Then breathe out through the right. Now breathe in through the right nostril, retain and breathe out through the left. This is one round. A few rounds will enable you to get the meditative mood.

When the mind does not run here and there, the next step - Pratyahara, or withdrawal of the mind from external objects, becomes easy. Repetition of God's Name helps in this. Visualisation of the Image of God, in the heart, also helps. The mind should be tempted to flow inward. If it is given a name and a form within, it will be busy with them and will not wander.

The rays of the mind thus withdrawn from the external objects should be concentrated on the image of God within. This is Dharana. Till you acquire a certain amount of mastery over the mind, it is good to sit in front of an image of God, or a picture, and look at it with a steady gaze, at the same time repeating the Name mentally. When the mind is steadied, close the eyes and visualise the image in the heart. Let the mental repetition of the Name go on. If the mind tries to wander now, give it some work to do. With every repetition of the Name, offer a flower, mentally, at the Feet of the Lord. The mind thus engaged, will not run.

Meditation follows concentration. Meditation culminates in Samadhi. The man who attempts at concentration of mind is like one who stands outside the palace and looks at it with one-pointed mind. Meditation is like entering this mansion. You roam about in the palace, but all the time remaining within it. You know all the inner secrets of the palace. Samadhi is like the discovery of this man, that he is himself the King, the owner of the palace. It is the end of the search.

This process - concentration-meditation-samadhi - will reveal the hidden Truth, the Inner Secrets, of anything. It will give you wonderful mental, intellectual and psychic powers. But, do not be misguided by them. Your goal is far higher - Salvation. Let your meditation be on God and God alone.

As soon as you sit for your daily practice of concentration and meditation, chant some hymns in praise of God. Repeat Om deeply a few times. Drive away sleepiness or lethargy by Pranayama. Then begin repeating the Name of the Lord with the eyes fixed on His picture. Let the picture become a Living Presence for you. Speak to Him. Pray to Him. Ask for His Grace. Then close the eyes and visualise the picture in the heart. Worship Him there. Concentrate. Meditate. Commune with God.

Persevere in the practice. Never miss a day. Keep a room apart for this purpose; the meditative atmosphere will be built up in it. The moment you enter it, you will want to meditate. Set apart a particular period.

At the same time, pay attention to the cultivation of the virtues - Yama-Niyamas. The lesser the craving you have for sensual pleasures, the lesser your attachment to worldly objects, the deeper will be your meditation and the sooner will you attain God-realisation.

May you shine as a Yogi here and now.

The procedure

As soon as you get up in the morning, at 4 am., have a quick wash of the face and mouth, or a quick bath if this is feasible. The most important thing is that the Brahmamuhurta - 4.30 to 6 am. - should be spent in meditation and in no other activity. Sit in front of your Ishta Devata. Recite the following morning prayers.

Morning Hymn

Praathasmaraami hridi samspurathaathina tatvam
Satchit sukham paramahamsa gatim turee yam
Yat svapna jaagara sushupti-mavaiti nityam
Tat brahma nishkalamaham na cha bhootasamgaha

In the early hours of the morning, I think of the Self which shines in the chambers of my heart, which is of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Absolute, which is the goal of the Paramahamsas, and which is the Fourth State of Consciousness. I am that Brahman which is Nirguna and Eternal, beyond the Three States of Consciousness - waking, dreaming and deep sleep, and I am not composed of the elements.

Pratar bhajaami manaso vachasaa-magamyam
Vaacho vibhaanti nikhilaayadanugraheyne
Yam neti neti vachanair nigamaa avochuhu
Tam deva deva-maja-machyutha-maahuragrayam

In the early hours of the morning, I adore Him Who is the God of gods, Who is beyond the reach of mind and speech, and by Whose Grace alone speech is illuminated, Whom scriptures describe by the Neti Neti formula, Who is unborn, Achyuta, and the Primordial Being.

Praathar namaami tamasah param-arkavarnam
Poornam sanaathana padam purushoththamakhyam
Yasmin idam jagadasesha-masesha-murthau
Rajvaam bhujangama iva pratibhaasitam vai

In the early hours of the morning, I bow down to that Purusha Who is beyond darkness, Who is of the brilliance of the sun, Who is full, eternal, and in Whom this universe appears as a snake appears in the rope.

Sloka thraya-midam punyam lokathraya vibhooshanam praathaha kaaley pateth yastu sa gachcheth paranam padam.

He who reads these verses which are auspicious, the ornament of the three worlds, attains to the Supreme State of Self-realisation.

Then recite the following Santi-Mantras. They ward off all the obstacles caused by the three Taapaas - Adhyatmika - internal, Aadhidaivika - divine, and Aadhibhauktika - environmental.

Peace prayer

Om sahanaavavathu sahanau bhunakthu saha veeryam karavaavahai,
thejasvinaavadheetamastu maa vidvishaavahai,
Om shantih shantih shantih.

Om. May He protect us both - the teacher and the taught. May He cause us both to enjoy the bliss of Mukti. May we both exist to find out the true meaning of the scriptures. May our studies be fruitful. May we never quarrel with each other. Let there be threefold peace.

Then, think of your Guru and, mentally prostrating to Him, recite the following Guru Stotras or hymns in praise of the preceptor.

Hymn to the Guru

Om Brahmanandam parama sukhadam keyvalam jnaamoorthim, dwandwa-
atheetham gaganasadrisham tatvamasyaadi lakshyam, ekam nityam
vimalamachalam sarvadhee-saakshibhootham, bhaavaateetham tringunarahitam
sat-gurum tham namaami.

I prostrate myself before that Guru, the Existence, devoid of the three Gunas, beyond comprehension, the witness of all mental functions, changeless and pure, one and eternal, transcending the pairs of opposites, expansive like the sky, reachable through the sentences like 'Thou art That', the Bliss of Brahman, the giver of supreme happiness, the mass of absolute wisdom.

Gurur brahmaa gurur vishnuh gurur devornaheshwarah, guruh saakshaath para-
brahma tasmai sri guraye namaha.

Guru is Brahma. Guru is Vishnu. Guru is Siva. Guru is the Supreme Brahman
Itself. Prostrations to that Guru.

Ajnaana timiraandhasya jnaanaanjana chalaakaya Chakshurunrneelitham yeyna
tasmai sri gurave namah

Prostrations to that Guru who, through the collyrium of knowledge, opens the eye
of him who is blinded by the gloom of ignorance.

Dhyaanamoolam guror moorthih poojaamoolam guroh-padam manthra moolam
guror vaakhyam mokshamoolam guroh kripaa.

The form of the Guru is the root of meditation. The feet of the Guru are the root
of worship. The teaching of the Guru is the root of all Mantras. The Grace of the
Guru is the root of Salvation.

Om namah sivaaya guravey satchidaananda murthayey, nishprapanchaaya
shaanthaaya niraalambaaya thejasey.
Prostrations to the Guru, Siva, the essence of Satchidananda, worldless, peaceful,
supportless and effulgent.

After this, recite the hymns in praise of your Ishta Devata, and also the following
Kirtan Dwanis:

Jaya Ganesha Jaya Ganesha Jaya Ganesha Pahi Mam
Sri Ganesha Sri Ganesha Sri Ganesha Raksha Mam
Jaya Saraswati Jaya Saraswati Jaya Saraswati Pahi Mam
Sri Saraswati Sri Saraswati Sri Saraswati Raksha Mam
Saravanabhava Saravanabhava Saravanabhava Pahi Mam
Subramanya Subramanya Subramanya Raksha Mam

Jaya Guru Siva Guru Hari Guru Ram
Jagad Guru Param Guru Sat-Guru Shyam
Adi Guru Adwaita Guru Ananda Guru Om
Chid Guru Chidghana Guru Chinmaya Guru Om

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Namah Sivaya Namah Sivaya Namah Sivaya
Namah Sivaya Namah Sivaya Namah Sivaya

Dattatreya Dattatreya Dattatreya Pahi Mam
Dattaguru Dattaguru Dattaguru Raksha Mam

Anjaneya Anjaneya Anjaneya Pahi Mam
Hanumanta Hanumanta Hanumanta Raksha Mam

Ganga Rani Ganga Rani Ganga Rani Pahi Mam
Bhageerathi Bhageerathi Bhageerathi Raksha Mam

Om Tat Sat Om Tat Sat Om Tat Sat Om

Om Shanti Om Shanti Om Shanti Om.

Then chant Om deeply for a few minutes. The vibrations of the holy Pranava
should fill the entire chest. Listen to the sound with one-pointed mind. Feel that

the sound emanates from the heart or the navel. Feel that the sound fills your whole being. In order to achieve this, the sound must be deep and vibrant. If, at the same time, you listen to the sound too, the mind will very quickly quietens down. Another important factor to be borne in mind is that the Pranava must be uttered with a long Om, the M-sound gradually fading out in the heart. It is this that will fix the mind in the heart.

In the same tone, repeat your Ishta Mantra. Say it aloud, at an audible pitch and not louder, for a couple of minutes. All the time, keep steadily looking at the picture of your Ishta Devata kept in front of you. Then, 'whisper' the Mantra for a few minutes. The most important point is that the inner sense-organ of hearing should be tuned to hear the sound of the Mantra within, and the eyes should continue to look at the picture steadily. Now, while the eyes are still open, visualise with the inner sense-organ of sight, the picture of the Ishta Devata, in the heart. As the mind is already introverted by listening to the Mantra-sound within, this visualisation also will become easy with a little persistent practice. When you are able to visualise the image of God at heart clearly, the picture in front of you will become more or less hazy, out of focus. Now, the concentration has been completely shifted inwards. You will want to close the eyes now. Close the eyes and continue the Manasic Japa.

Throughout this process, associate the Mantra-repetition with the breath. Split the Mantra into two, repeating one while breathing in, and the other while breathing out. For instance, if the Mantra is 'Om Namō Narayanaya', while breathing in say mentally 'Om Namō' and while breathing out say 'Narayanaya'. If the association is persistently practised, the breath itself will take up the Japa and continue it day and night.

Japa itself will lead to meditation. The Lord's Grace will lead you to meditation and Samadhi.

If evil thoughts enter the mind, do not pay any attention to them. Let them depart, as uninvited guests will, if totally ignored. Go on with your Japa visualising the Lord in the heart. If the mind wanders, resort to mental worship; or, open your eyes again and gaze at the image.

It is very important to see that the body and mind are relaxed. There should be no tension anywhere. The posture of the body should be steady but not tense. The mind should be concentrated on the object with ease; otherwise, every extraneous thought entering the mind will also get fixed there. Let go your hold on the world and gently hold on to His Feet.

In the initial stages of meditation, it is possible that as soon as the mind is concentrated and you begin to do Japa, something you had forgotten will be recollected by the mind. If it pertains to the business of the day, the mind will be distracted. It is, therefore, in the initial stages, advisable to keep a piece of paper and pencil by your side and note these down, so that the mind may be reassured

that it will not be forgotten again and that it could go on with the Japa. Use your commonsense in overcoming such obstacles.

On no account should you give up the morning meditation and get up from your seat before the appointed time. If the mind knows that you are a hard taskmaster, it will meekly obey you!.

At the close of the practice, offer the Universal Prayer and get up from your seat.

Pray for the health, long life, and well-being of all:

Om Sarvesham Svasti Bhavatu
Sarvesham Santir Bhavatu
Sarvesham Purnam Bhavatu
Sarvesham Man galam Bhavatu
Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Niramayah
Sarve Bhadrani Pasyantu
Ma Kaschid Duhkha-Bhag Bhavet

Auspiciousness be unto all. Peace be unto all. Fullness be unto all. Prosperity be unto all.

May all be happy. May all be free from disabilities. May all look to the good of others. May none suffer from sorrow.

Asato Ma Sat Gamaya
Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya
Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya

Lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.

Om Purnamadah Purnamidam
Purnat Pumamudachyate Purnasya
Pumnamadaya Pumamevavasishyate.
Om Santih Santih Santih.

From the Whole - God, the Whole Universe appears. When the Whole Universe dissolves, the Whole - God, alone remains.

It is most important that the return to the work-a-day world should be gradual. After you open your eyes, take at least five minutes to get up from the seat, all the time continuing the Japa. Even afterwards slowly walk around the room, repeating the Mantra for another five minutes. Then come out of the room.

Even during the day, close your eyes every hour and consciously withdraw the mind from the world, repeat the Mantra and meditate upon God for just a few

seconds. Keep up the current.

Self-control or control of the senses and mind is the indispensable prerequisite to successful meditation. Mind can be controlled only by Abhyasa - systematic practice, and Vairagya - dispassion for worldly objects.

Progress in meditation will be rapid if you thus lead a well-regulated life and practise the Yoga of Synthesis. Combine Hatha Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga and jnana Yoga. You will have integral development. Without God's and Guru's Grace, you cannot enter into deep meditation. Therefore, never give up Japa and worship. Maintain good health through the regular practice of a few Asanas and Suryanamaskar. Selfless service of humanity will enable you to gauge your progress in the practice of meditation. If the meditation was deep, you will be filled with compassion and the spirit of selfless service, and experience the presence of God in all.

9. Glimpses of Indian Philosophy

Lecture delivered on the 15th of June, 1961 at the Natal Tamil Vedic Society Hall, Durban.

I felt that the title for this evening's talk had better be 'Glimpses of Indian Philosophy' rather than 'Hindu' philosophy, for the simple reason that, as a result of the study of some of the very good works by Indian Muslim scholars on the tenets of Islam, and by Indian Christians on Christianity, I am led to believe that the enlightened Indian has always striven to find these strands of fundamentals running through all the major religions of the world.

Let us first ask ourselves if philosophy is necessary at all. Can we not live our life in this work-a-day world without bothering ourselves about these deeper or higher values of life? What will happen to us and to the world, then?

We see it already now. In spite of their very best intentions, wishing to work for the welfare of humanity, the best among scientists, economists, politicians and social leaders have only been using us as guinea pigs for their experiments in their various fields and leading us from bad to worse. Why? Because, neither these leaders themselves nor the people whom they wished to serve had been prepared to receive the blessings they hoped to confer.

Unless I know who I am, why I am here, what my relationship with society is, I cannot shape my own career, I cannot understand my responsibilities to society, and I cannot guide others. These, therefore, were the questions that exercised the minds of our great ancestors.

Often we boast that all our ancestors were uncivilised, uneducated, uncultured persons, devoid of intelligence - without realising that the logical inference might be that we, who are the descendents of these foolish men and women, can be no better, but far worse. But these questions which formed the fundamental bases of philosophy were the ones that they directed their attention to.

Whom am I? What is this 'I'? Who am I? It links the three states of consciousness-waking, dreaming and deep sleep. In the waking state, we are aware of the external world. In the dream state, when this is shut out, we are yet conscious of another wonder-world, where the events that take place in spacial and temporal factors which are quite different from those of our world of waking consciousness. We create our own world within ourselves. When even these dreams come to an end, we enter into deep sleep. Whilst we know nothing while we sleep, we are able to say after we return to waking consciousness: 'I slept soundly, I was happy, I was at peace.' Through all these states, this 'I' has persisted.

Not only this: this 'I' persists even during the various stages of life. I was a babe in the cradle. I was a little child. I grew bigger to be a boy. I was a young man. I will

grow old. And then I will leave this body and depart from this world. Through all these, the 'I' persists. It is that that really matters, for it governs our personality. We must know what it is in order to be able to take our proper place in this world and do what we should do in a way it should be done.

The ancient philosopher, reflecting over this, arrived at highly intelligent conclusions through an amazing process of reasoning - which is amazing for its simplicity. As we noticed just now, this 'I' exists always, through all the three states of consciousness and through all the stages of life; even death of this physical body only means to it a change of abode. The 'I', or its substratum, is the Indestructible Something in us. Therefore, we do not want even to be told that we shall die. From this, the ancient sage discovered that that Something was Immortal Existence. This 'I' within seeks happiness always. We live, we function in this world, and all our life is centered round this innate wish to be happy always. Sense-enjoyment, which is temporary, illusory and self-destructive, creates a hunger for repetition which is a worthless substitution for perpetuation. This hunger or urge for repeated sense-indulgence is in reality pain only, as has been recognised by modern psychology. The quest for happiness in external objects therefore lands us in this anomalous position where we have brief periods of nerve-excitation sandwiched between long periods of suffering and pain. This proves the perpetual inner urge for permanent happiness.

Another important factor should also be taken note of. Even granting we always get what we want, we are not satisfied with what we have. There is a tendency in all of us to feel that 'the other man' is happy. As Gurudev puts it beautifully: 'The bachelor longs to get married and the married man envies the lot of the single man and wants to run away to an Ashram.' I have heard many rich people who often visit the Ashram for peace and solace, say: 'How I wish I could give up all that wealth and live like you all here.' The rich man envies the peace of the poor man; the poor man, on the other hand, envies the comforts the rich man enjoys. We not only want that this happiness should be perpetual, but that it should be full, infinite. This led the ancient sage to conclude that Bliss Absolute is the nature of the Self or Atman. Without awareness or consciousness this Existence or this Bliss has no meaning. Moreover, we are all eager to learn and know everything, from our very childhood. This points to the nature of the Self as Knowledge Absolute or Consciousness Absolute. The sage concluded, therefore, that the nature of the Self, the substratum for the 'I', is Existence, Immortality, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute.

The story of creation

'I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. But how is it I am caught up in this snare of the world? How did I arrive here at all? How did this world come into being?' These were some of the problems to which the ancient sage applied himself. We are told in the Upanishads that long, long ago, before the universe came into being, that Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute alone was, one without a second. It willed: 'May I become many.' And there sprang up this universe.

Many great thinkers who wanted to reduce this abstract philosophical truth to the level of the common man's understanding, have given highly interesting accounts of this process. Some said: 'That Being whose nature was Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute wanted to experience the Bliss aspect.' In other words sugar-candy wanted to taste its own sweetness. You might have seen a picture of the Lord as Child, sucking His own big toe. He is trying to see for Himself how sweet are His Feet which are kissed by all His devotees who claim that nectar flows from Them. Others said: 'That Omnipotent Being wanted to realise by actual experience that omnipotence, by creating the universe and re-discovering His omnipresent omniscience.'

When the Sankalpa arose in that Being, when that vibration arose, the three qualities - which constitute matter - of His Nature which were in a state of equilibrium before creation, were disturbed. Their action and interactions on one another resulted in this creation. Modern science, too, has come to recognise that matter in its ultimate analysis is reducible to the three - electrons, protons and neutrons, which might correspond to Tamas, Rajas and Sattva respectively. Science agrees with Vedanta in that Rajas - protons and Sattva - neutrons are interchangeable, that Rajas can be sublimated into Sattva and that Sattva can express itself as Rajas - dynamic selfless activity. We also find that the neutron - Sattva is the power which can be used to break the atom and release the cosmic forces. It looks as though science is actually knocking at the door of Reality, but whether it will be able to enter is another question.

These three qualities of God's Nature constitute the world. The Divine which is all-pervading is within all beings and It thus gets involved in matter. It becomes the focal point, as it were, in every being. When the spirit thus encased in matter tries to recapture the Bliss Infinite, the energy thus generated by this attempt cuts grooves, called senses, for it to flow outwards. Through these senses, it tries to grasp and perceive what Exists. Since It itself is encased in matter and is, therefore, limited, and since the senses are imperfect and finite, It gets a distorted view of what Exists. The Cosmic Being is now perceived as the world. God perceived through the senses and interpreted by the deluded mind is world. Because of this outgoing tendency of the mind and the senses, we are unable to see what exists as it really is. We understand it, according to convention and mental habit, in the manner presented to us by the lens of the senses and interpreted by the mind. Let us look at a flower, without distinguishing it as a flower, without 'calling' it mentally as a flower and 'perceiving' its colour or 'sensing' its fragrance. In other words, let us suspend the operation of the mind and look at it. This is an exercise which may ultimately lead to correct perception of the Reality as it really is, and not as it appears to be to our mind and as the world.

This extroversion of the mind and the senses, and this false perception of the Reality deluded us and we are distressed. How are we to get over this delusion. It demands keen discrimination to sift the Real from the unreal. It is this power of

discrimination that distinguishes us from the animals. This should not be merely a passive discrimination, limited in theory. It should be active and practical - which means dispassion. If we know that the thing that appears to be running water in a desert is nothing more than a mirage, we shall not go there to quench our thirst. If we realise that the objects of the world are snares for the mind and senses and that the Reality is within us, we shall not be tempted by worldly objects. Again, a virtuous mind, a pure mind, is transparent. A vicious mind is spiritually opaque, through which perception of the Reality is impossible. Therefore, we should cultivate virtues. To sustain all this, we should have burning aspiration to realise the Reality. These four - Discrimination, Dispassion, Virtues, Aspiration - are the first steps on our return voyage to our Home, the Abode of Reality, the Kingdom of God which is Bliss and Peace. Finally, one needs to practice this discipline under the expert guidance of an Adept, a God-realised saint who has direct vision of the Absolute Reality.