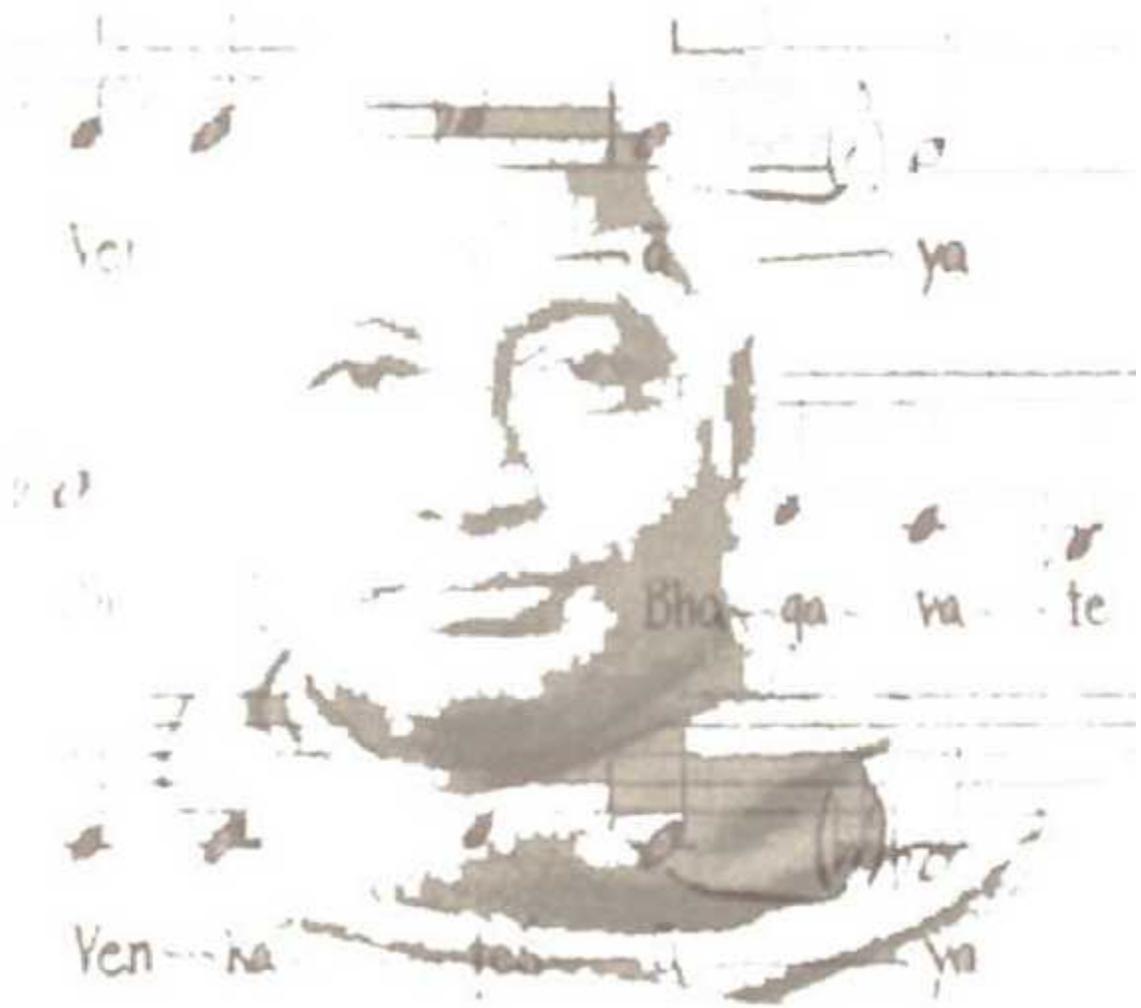




Yasodhara Yoga Talks 1975
Jnana Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda



Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Yasodhara Yoga Talks
JNANA YOGA

Contents

Morning and afternoon sessions

This series of talks was given at Yasodhara Ashram in British Columbia in the Spring of 1975.

Swami Venkatesananda regarded these as Swami Sivananda's Integral Yoga.

Over the course of 10 weeks, Swami Venkatesananda spoke for roughly 20 hours on each of the five major branches of yoga - Hatha, Bhakti, Karma, Raja, and Jnana, devoting 10 hours to formal talks in the morning, and 10 hours to questions and answers during the afternoons on each of these topics.

One discovers in the course of listening to these talks that the five are not separate paths; that each branch of yoga incorporates elements of the so called 'different' paths. While many people often focus on just one branch of yoga, one cannot escape the realization that it would be far better to assimilate them all in some fashion in order to create a balanced approach to sadhana or 'spiritual practice.'

Swami Sivananda taught that the aim of this integration - Integral Yoga or the Yoga of Synthesis - is to avoid becoming lopsided. In so doing, the aspirant nurtures the whole being. As demonstrated in the lives of both Swami Sivananda and his disciple, Swami Venkatesananda, the words 'whole' and 'holy' are completely interchangeable.

Yasodhara 1975 - Jnana Yoga

Swami Sivananda was known as 'The Sage of Practical Wisdom' and while it may be regarded by some as an obtuse platitude to point out that nothing could be more practical than wisdom, we seldom regard the day to day practical things as important, as all the intellectual and wordy definitions, searching instead for some missing answer to the puzzles posed by the mind that will somehow unlock the doors to an enlightened life, forgetting all the while that it is enlightened living (the day to day living as enlightened beings that defines enlightenment).

The treasures to be found in grounding the teachings to the practical matters of living a sane and enlightened life was a key element in the teachings of Sivananda, a fact not lost on his major devotees, including, of course, Swami Venkatesananda.

These Jnana Yoga Talks continue the themes raised in the Hatha, Karma, Bhakti and Raja Yoga talks. Swami Venkatesananda was regarded by some as having a special flare for mirroring the essence of Jnana in his day to day life and interaction with all those who came into contact with Him. So it may be especially fitting that these talks culminate in a discussion of where Jnana's place within the total scheme of Sivananda's Integral Yoga.

June 9 - Day 1 - Introduction.

I think we are coming to understand that yoga means the discovery of the non-existence of the divider. A division has been created in consciousness, in intelligence, that is what I think. I think there is a difference between me and you, I think there is a difference between experience and expression, and I think there is a difference between me and the other - within myself, between us, and between us and the material universe. I think there is a division. Then we intellectualize the whole thing - try to figure out - and vaguely understand that the ego is the divider.

What is the ego? The divider, that which divides you from me is the ego. The ego is a divider. And what divides? The ego. There again is a circular argument which has no beginning and no end. If our no beginning, but it ends. This is the famous theory of maya. Maya has no beginning. Illusion has no beginning, because we are born in illusion. When you open your eyes there is an illusion. But it is not endless. It can be brought to an end. There is division and the divider. The divider is the ego. We have never inquired into the nature of this ego. Does it exist or does it not exist at all? Unless I inquire into the nature, I cannot even know whether it exists or not. I have taken it for granted. Having taken it for granted, I give a name: ego. I suppose the word ego comes from the German 'Ich'?

Student 1: From Latin?

Student 2: No, Greek. Thank you very much.

Swami Venkatesananda: This is another example. I take it for granted that it comes from German and she takes it for granted that it comes from Latin. And he takes it for granted that it comes from Greek. And to me both Greek and Latin and are all the same. Anything that I do not understand is Greek or Latin. In this small talk we have discovered a great truth.

The whole thing is taken for granted. And one thing is merely explained in terms of another, that so called explanation in terms of another. In which case, you go away thinking you are satisfied, blissfully ignorant. Yoga is the investigation into the nature of the me. It may be discovered that it does not exist, but one does not proceed on the assumption that the ego does not exist - is another great error that most advanced students of yoga have committed. All of us are advanced, aren't we? I have never really heard anyone considering himself to be a student and a beginner. Except in the case of these yoga asanas, where we are scared of advanced yoga postures. Then we say, 'No, I am only a beginner. Do not twist me into those funny knots.' But when it comes to meditation, when it comes to samadhi, things like that, we are not interested in the beginning: 'Teach us something advanced. I must have done beginning things in my previous birth.'

By this we mean we do not want to undertake the investigation afresh, but we want to jump on the shoulders of a Christ or a Krishna or one of the great Upanishadic sages, jump on their shoulders and right on from there straight to heaven. That is slightly impossible. I cannot assume that the ego does not exist. I must investigate it.

That is what the word 'discover' means. The word 'discover' means that I must have the courage to see the cover. I must have the patience to see the cover, and I must have the ability to see the cover. 'Cover' in Sanskrit is called 'Avarana' or 'veil.' I only see the ego. Even that is doubtful. And I must investigate it, and I must investigate it in all its aspects. That is what we have been doing these eight weeks.

June 9 - Day 1 - Afternoon Q/A

These afternoon Q/A sessions are intended for the free exchange of ideas. There may also be some difficulty for new guests since we have been doing this for two months now, and so it is possible we may take something for granted. If something is not clear, you can ask about it. Anything concerning what we have been discussing, or otherwise?

Student: I was wondering about meditation. Sometimes yogis concentrate on certain centers, your heart or your third eye, the base of your spine. What significance is concentrating on a particular spot or does it matter where you focus your attention?

Venkatesananda: From a purely spiritual point of view, it does not matter at all, because the spirit is there everywhere. And, when we use the word 'spirit,' it does

not mean a spirit that is localized. And when we use the word 'heart,' it does not mean it does not mean the physiological organ, at a spot in the body. It means the heart of the whole body which is also the heart of the whole universe. Spirit means that which is immaterial, beyond the physical organ, beyond the life force, beyond beyond, Neti-neti - not this, not this.

Then why do have all these different techniques concentrating the mind here and there and so on? In the beginning one needs to have a focal point. 'In the beginning' does not mean in the beginning of your meditative career, but even in every day's beginning, the beginning of every day's session of practice. At the start of every session I begin to focus the attention at some spot. And when you get close and enter that point of attention ...

When you look at it at the start, it looks like a small spot, but then you enter into it, and it fills you, and you are filled by it, and it is everywhere around you. So you may select a heart for the eyebrow center, or wherever it is, first to focus your attention and then from there being attention, you enter into it, and are filled by it, and it is around you everywhere.

And this is what we do in meditation. In morning meditation too, there is a simple method or technique or procedure or whatever you wish to call it, where you use a mantra, and get into it; not merely sit outside the mantra and watch it. No, you get into it! And to begin with ... Hm. Of course, you may not do exactly what I going to describe to you. But I will describe to you what we do, as much as it can be described.

June 10 - Day 2 - Morning Talk

We were discussing the qualifications of a seeker, particularly one who wishes to tread this path of Jnana. Jnana is self-knowledge. It is translated as 'wisdom.' It is translated as all sorts of things. No translation is really adequate. There is total and immediate knowledge of truth, and truth being none other than self-knowledge. All other things are dependent upon... you... the I. On what does 'I' depend? Just these two steps, and you are there: everything in the universe is dependent upon 'I,' so what is 'I' depending upon?

So, real knowledge, according to the Jnani, is self-knowledge and that is called Jnana; not a rational understanding, not an intellectual understanding, not a verbal understanding. And here it is possible that one may not be able to use any words to denote what one refers to. That's a problem, a big problem! That is precisely why they insisted upon the qualifications, a qualified spiritual aspirant. Words may have to be used, not always, not necessarily. If there are no words exchanged, the teacher must be able to communicate adequately, and the student must be able to grasp adequately also. You must have the proper transmitter, and I must have the correct receiving set. Then it is marvelous. But it needs this 'tuning' the transmitter must be perfect in the receiving set must also be equally perfect.

June 10 - Day 2 - Q/A

It is not so much a question as a statement concerning this 'death,' but the funniest part of this death we were talking about today, is that it (just) happens; it cannot be made to happen. The I that wants to die is the I that wants to survive; the self that wants to die, is the self that wants to survive. Why do I want to die? Because the Bible or the Bhagavatam or something or someone says that I will have eternal life. That is not death! You want eternal life!

The remarkable thing about death that it comes uninvited, by surprise, stealthily, when you are not looking. And so you can only get rid of the desire to live, the desire to achieve, the desire to do, the desire not to do, the desire to have, the desire not to have. That is death. But if you say, 'I want to die,' then the I that wants to die is the I that wants to live forever. And so, here, the frontal approach is self-defeating.

One has to leave the whole thing alone, and approach it differently by asking: 'What is the obstacle to the self dying?' The obstacle to the self dying is ... desire. I cannot wish to die, I cannot wish for somebody to make me die. That does not work. However, if all the obstacles are removed, that is death. Also, the desire to live an eternal life is what makes one afraid of death. It does not sound logical. You go on feeding me with this 'eternal life' and so the mind begins to ask: 'If there is there is eternal life, why should I die at all?' And so instead of accepting this thing called physical death, you want to insure there is going to be eternal life.

Can the mind be emptied of all temptation, and then function without temptation or threat? That is pure spontaneous action, action that does not belong to the me at all!

June 11 - Day 3 - Morning Talk

The qualifications that qualify a student understand the teaching are said to be fourfold. In some they are described as qualifications. In others they are described as ... no, we will come back to that.

We will start with Sadhana. Most of you know this word, but probably the meaning is not clear. The qualifications are known as Sadhana, four-fold sadhana.

What is Sadhana? Any practice which one undertakes to attain something, in order to reach something is Sadhana. That which is reached or attained is called siddhi, not necessarily psychic powers. These two came to be confused. Siddhi means I have got it, or I have reached it, and since perfection or self-knowledge or what have you was considered the goal to be reached, that was called 'siddhi.'

What I do in order to reach the siddhi is sadhana, and that which is reached is the siddhi, and he who gets there is called the siddha. If you demythologize some of these terms, and look at their plain meaning, they are quite simple. Then you begin to wonder why these theologians have made it so jaw breaking.

The Sadhana for gaining self-knowledge is fourfold. Self-knowledge is not knowledge of the other. Self-knowledge is knowledge, period! Knowledge of the other is what you call science, is what you call philosophy is what you call the 'ology', all that. But here self-knowledge is knowledge without the other, period. Can knowledge remain free of the other? That is the basic question. Knowledge can be directed externally in order to know something else.

That is the normal way in which the mind functions. When the mind begins to function, it grasps something other than itself. Does the mind always grasp something other than itself? How does this mind function? The mind functions through the senses. What are the senses? What is the sense of hearing, the sense of taste, the sense of charge, the sense of smell?

June 11 - Day 3 - Afternoon Q/A

Student: You mentioned this morning that there is a difference between outer knowledge and inner knowledge, self-knowledge. What part does outer knowledge play in arriving at inner knowledge? You have a great deal outer knowledge, and you use it quite extensively. How important is this to arrive at inner knowledge.

Venkatesananda: Ah!

Student: Or is it something only used once there is inner knowledge.

Venkatesananda: How important is outer knowledge arriving at inner knowledge? Hm. Bluntly, it is an obstacle. That may seem too blunt but it is an obstacle. But, since it is there already, and since we become aware of it when we become aware of the whole problem of knowledge that which is really an obstacle may be used as a stepping stone, as a diving board, as the first step.

One great sage is said to have remarked that self-realization was easy for him because he had not gone to school, and had not read anything. You and I, we learned this only after having one to school, yes? I have to read that book. I go to school. And only after finishing my schooling do I pick up the book, and read that I have been better off not to have gone to school at all. It's too late!

Since I start from there, I must learn to question. Hmm? And as I question, the quest begins. That is why it is the first part of that word 'quest'-ion. The question is not for it's own sake. The question is a quest! And in order to question, there should be something which should trigger that question. And the external knowledge, or outer knowledge is the trigger for this question to arise. And the

question starts off to quest which either points to a factor that is hidden - even in this outer knowledge, or transcends it - both of them are the same thing.

What is called 'outer knowledge' is not 'outer.' Right? It is the nature of the mind - that's what we are told, and that is the truism that we begin with, that the mind, by nature, becomes aware of object ... till we discover that it is the mind urge to experience that creates the object. It is the mind own urge to experience its own hidden potentialities or latent potentialities, or natural potentialities, it is that urge itself that creates what is known as an experience which stands as the object in relationship to oneself, which is the subject. So, what is called the outer knowledge, to begin with, can be used as diving board to dive within, then to discover that there is really no outer knowledge: knowledge is knowledge.

June 12 - Day 4 - Morning Talk

Viveka and Vairagya we have seen in the other branches of yoga we have discussed so far, but something of special significance in this path of Jnana is the third qualification which is Sadsampat. Sad means six, and sampat means wealth, the wealth of six qualifications. And one who is not endowed with his wealth is poor spiritually, and, therefore, may not be able to relate to the teacher of wisdom. Although these are, of course, based on the fourth qualification in yesterday's list, which is mumukshutva, a deep and keen yearning for liberation.

Mumukshutva is often phrased as the burning desire for liberation. The burning desire must be a consuming desire. That which burns must be consumed. Then it is real.

Can the desire for liberation in some be nothing more than the ego's attempt for aggrandizement? Venkatesananda warns it is a tricky business. This mumukshutva is not about ego aggrandizing, but rather an yearning to sublimate it or burn itself out. Venkatesananda takes up the subject along with naming the six-fold accomplishments that qualify the student of Jnana.

June 12 - Day 4 - Afternoon Q/A

Student 1: In one of Swami Vivekananda's books, he mentions that forbearance is the greatest virtue.

Venkatesananda: That is there in the Ramayana. There is a whole chapter glorifying forbearance. In the Gita on the other hand, there is a slight distinction there made between Titisha, forbearance, and Summum. It has no real translation at all, except to say that it is 'sameness' that transcends endurance. 'Endurance' implies that I feel bad but put up with it. There is one stage higher, and that is that it does not hurt me at all. In some ways, that is a better image to hold. The Jnana yogis must have been addressing the prevalent reaction of the beginner. To begin with, I am hurt, upset. And so they said, 'All right, at least for the present, endure it.' But ultimately, the hurt is not supposed to touch us at all.

If I walk in the forest, and I am caught by a tiger, and it wants to eat me, the tiger is happy, and I am not. But if God dwells in all of us, how does God feel? In a disembodied state of enlightenment, there can be no disturbance. This is perhaps closer to what is meant by summum, in other words, a state of total equanimity; a state where there is no psychological disturbance at all. But the non-existence of psychological disturbance does not mean that the body must be sitting absolutely quiet. The mind cannot be burned by fire and cannot be made wet with water, but that does not apply to the physical body. To say that because the Spirit is always enlightened and clean and healthy, and insist that the body must be also like that does not make sense. The body is the body; it is subject to its own laws. Equanimity of a disembodied consciousness is where the inner psychological state is absolutely and totally undisturbed, even though the body may undergo its own reaction. If the enlightened man's arm is chewed by a tiger, the eyes may weep and the throat might yell!

Student 2: Will the sage then simply be eaten by the tiger.

Venkatesananda: When you ask if the sage will be eaten by the tiger, you are confusing the sage with the body.

Student 2: Well the sage has decision to either run or stay and be eaten.

Venkatesananda: Not the sage.

Student 2: Does he just live in the now, and therefore just stand there.

Venkatesananda: No, Sir. There is neither now, nor yesterday, nor tomorrow. It is only one eternity. That sage has become one with eternity, with the infinite. He does not exist as an individual any more. If you look at the lake, you will understand this simply and easily. You see a wave, and for the moment, you think: 'Ah, what a beautiful wave.' On that lake there is a wave? No, the wave is the lake. It is almost like saying, on my palm, there is a flower, but there is difference between the two. On my palm, there is a leaf, but the leaf is independent of my palm; not of the same substance. But when you say there is a wave on the surface of the lake, you are making a distinction that does not exist.

The sage has reached that stage of non-distinction within himself. Within himself, he has no illusion that 'I' and the 'cosmic consciousness' are two different things. And to that cosmic consciousness, there is no difference between the tiger and the body that is occupied by one who is called 'the sage.' And the body does what it has to do, just as the tiger does what it has to do.

Student 2: So that sage's reality is ...

Venkatesananda: Total! That is the reason why in India, they say that the sage is God.

Student 2: I do not quite understand. There would be no pain to ...

Venkatesananda: No pain to that consciousness. To the body there is pain. To the intelligence that is locked up in the body, there is pain. To the life force that is locked up in the body, there is pain. It is not quite correct to say that he 'is' the

body. It is equally unwise to say that because he is enlightened the body will operate on a different basis now.

Student 3: Presumably it could if he wanted it to.

Venkatesananda: If he wanted to attain his freedom from his bondage to the body, why would he want the body to act in a particular way?

Student 3: Well ...

Venkatesananda: Wait, wait, wait! See this clearly! When he started, his consciousness was confined to the body, his consciousness was limited to the body, his consciousness was imprisoned in the body, as it were, when he had the personality. He thought: 'This is my personality. I am the swami!' That is the imprisoned consciousness. And realizing that that imprisonment was the source of all his sorrow, he practiced yoga, and he attained liberation from this confinement to this body consciousness. Once he has broken that shell ... Even a chicken does not do that, my dear. Once a chicken has broken out of the shell, it does not look back and say, 'Oh my god, it is broken. Let me put it all back together!' It doesn't do that. So, you think that so you think that even what a chicken does not do, a sage is going to do?

June 13 - Day 5 - Morning Talk

Talk 5 touches upon several viewpoints regarding Yama's 'teachings' found in the Kathopanishad as a way of rounding out the previous discussion of the qualifications for self-knowledge. The following passage appears a little more than half way through this discussion:

This room did not come into being when the walls were put up. The space was [already] there. So what came into being when the walls were erected and the roof was laid? The materialization of an idea. [Since] the space in this room was not created by the room, (it was here before [the room]), it will not perish when the room is destroyed. Even so, that which you are is eternal. It does not come into being, and therefore does not cease to be. The Self is there all the time.

There is a crazy idea that I am so-and-so-the idea that I am this body, or that I am this personality, and that [this] personality acquires its own characteristics, including the materialization of a body. Once the body has come into being, that body creates its own sensory avenues, and the senses keep following in their own particular avenues. These in?riyas or subtle senses, have nothing to do with you at all! These subtle senses are like horses which run along some road or track. The track along which the sense of sight runs is called form. The track along which the sense of hearing runs is called sound. The sense along which the sense of taste runs is called taste (sweet, sour, et cetera.). That's all! These are horses which are running here and there along their own tracks! When the senses function in this manner, a conjunction takes place-that is called 'experiencer.'

The self is unborn, it is everywhere. And these senses are also everywhere, and

they flow along channels-which are their own. The eye see light, and the ears do not see light; the tongue does not see light either; [each has] its own avenue along which [to] run. While this goes on (the movement of the senses along their own avenues), in cosmic consciousness, a thought jumps up and says, 'I' - 'I got it!' That is the experiencer. If thought can be avoided, then there is no experiencer, but when atma, indriyas and manas come together, there is what one may call 'the experiencer.'

And this experiencing - pleasure, pain, happiness, unhappiness, joy, sorrow, this will go on as long as you are asleep and allow this conjunction to take place. It is the mind-thought which gets confused with the natural movement of senses among their own objects, and says, 'This room is fragrant.' 'This room is not fragrant.' There is no aroma in this room. There is an incense stick, which releases particles into the air when it is burned. It is the nature of the air to pick up such particles. That is all. What has this poor room to do with the aroma that wafts in the air? But yet the mind, or the thought, associates the movement of the floating 'aroma' with the room and not the air. Is that not right? We do not say that the air here is got a little bit of incense. We say, 'Oh the room is full of aroma!' The room has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with your aroma. The space is not affected by the aroma. It is simply the natural affinity of the air to carry these particles. That's all.

In the same way, when the eyes open, sight moves along the channel of light. When the ear is enlivened, it picks up sounds; the skin picks up heat, but the intelligence is everywhere unlimited, unconditioned, like space. When this [the functioning of the senses] happens, a thought comes up, somehow, somewhere, and says 'I taste this. I see this. I hear this.' The conjunction continues as long as you remain asleep. And, therefore, Yama says, 'Wake up!'

June 14 - Day 5 - Afternoon Discussion

Student 1: How does it come about that the mind gets contaminated? Not the mind, I meant the Atman. The Atman is always clean, is always pure, but then your mind. I do not know what I'm asking.

Venkatesananda: No, no. You are asking something very real. That is, the Atman or cosmic intelligence is every pure, and what you call contamination is the mind. Water is H₂O, and when you add sugar to it, it becomes syrup. In fact, you do not call it water any more; you call it syrup. The yogi would argue that the water in the syrup is still pure; it is not been changed. So that, you merely boil that syrup and cool the steam, and you get that water back, exactly as it was before. That heating process is called tapas, or yoga, or meditation.

June 13 - Day 6 - Morning Talk

When a student is equipped with these famous four means of liberation, it is possible that he finds the illuminator, the light, within himself and it is possible

that he seeks [it], and in the course of the seeking, he finds the source of illumination. The source of the illumination is called guru. The light is within, but someone who can direct attention to that inner light is the guru. Or the inner light itself is the guru. Though the Kathapanishad story has been dramatized, and made to appear rather exciting, those of us who are familiar with the biography of one of the saints of India who lived recently, Ramana Maharshi, may entertain the feeling, if not the belief, that the whole story is based upon a psychological trip, an inner journey, not necessarily going from here to a thing called the world of death and there encountering the god of death. All this may or may not be true; but what is true is that this boy confronted death, as Ramana Maharshi did.

However, I do not have to go to a place called the abode of death; the body is the abode of death. And if I want to, I can face death even now, right now. It is possible [in the Kahapanishad] that the death experience itself was the guru of Natchiketes. One who has had this inner experience might still have the thought: 'Are you sure you had the experience?' Although it is the experience of inner light, it is better to have it attested to by someone who has also had it. Then, in that encounter, it is possible for you to verify your own experience, and remove all confusion. And in that encounter [with the guru] all that will be sifted and the truth made clearer to you.

So you reach out to the guru to confirm the inner experience. And in order that you may not be led away by the externalization of the guru, the guru throws you back upon yourself. And that is called upanishad.

June 17 - Day 6 - Afternoon Discussion

Venkatesananda: There is no need to say that I must be myself. I am myself.

Student 1: Isn't that a thought?

Venkatesananda: Can I be anything other than myself? Can I do, at this moment, anything other than what I do?

Student 2: Well there are choices, of course.

Venkatesananda: Are there choices?

Student 2: Well, not really. Not if you are in tune.

Venkatesananda: Even if you are not in tune, do you have a choice?

Student 2: Sometimes you are asked to do things that are pretty scary, and you almost waver into sidestepping that risk to do what you really; so, in that sense there is a choice.

Venkatesananda: Is there a choice? It is scary and it is risky, (but) is there a choice? Sitting here, I am looking at the lake. And she says, 'Let's go for a swim.' Let's take that concrete example. And, I am sitting here and [see] it is cold and miserable. But she says, come on! So I say, 'I will go with you' [but for me] it is risky and scary. 'Risky and scary' is the vision of the prospect that I have now, and I have no choice but to feel that it is risky and scary. [But] I walk over and dip the toes into the water. The toes says, 'You have absolutely no choice but to get the toes out!' There is no choice at all there.

Student 2: But you are listening to that inner

Venkatesananda: Let's say I do not. Let's say she challenges me or provokes me. I jump in. [The body reacts and I get out.] You have no choice!

Student 1: Before you even approach the water, you have a choice before you ...

Venkatesananda: Is there? What makes the choice? You think there is a choice. And, at that moment, when you are in a state of confusion something within you says, 'Do not go in there! It is too cold!', and something else within you says, 'She is good friend, and being a great yoga teacher ...' In that state of confusion, there appears to be a choice, and you have no choice but to think you have a choice ... in a state of confusion. But you can only do either of these two things: you can refuse to enter the water or not enter the water.

Student 3: Do you agree that you make decisions?

Venkatesananda: Something makes decisions. You can say 'the choice is made.' But, you do not have two choices. At each stage you choose to do a certain thing.

Student 3: In other words, [it is] not a choice between this and that?

Venkatesananda: [Yes, you are] choosing this! Choosing what you did, and choosing what you do, at each moment. You could not have done the other thing at all! When there was this confused thinking of the existence of a choice, the urge was not strong. When the urge is not strong in life, you think you can do one thing or the other.

Student 3: So the best thing to do when there is this confusion or things are luke warm is to ...

Venkatesananda: Take a nice warm bath, and jump into bed.

Student 3: Because that's what you are doing anyway!

Venkatesananda: Exactly! Now you have hit the nail on the head!

June 17 - Day 7 - Morning Talk

It is usual in these upanishadic dialogues between the teacher and student, the Master and the disciple, to lead the student back into himself for the extremely simple and good reason that the Omnipresent is closest to me in me. The Omnipresent is everywhere no doubt, it is on the other side of the Sun, but it is closest to me in me, and therefore, if I am somehow made to dive within myself, to see what is the reality or the truth concerning me, what I have been calling me - there is already a confusion there; the confusion is resolved, there and then, here and now, at the very rock-bottom of my own thinking, my own heart, the Omnipresent is touched.

That which is here [within] is everywhere; that which is everywhere else is here [within]. So instead of looking around everywhere, why not look here? The simple logic. And therefore whenever there is a direct encounter, almost a confrontation, between seeker and the enlightened, the enlightened one slaps the

seekers inquiries back upon himself: 'Look within and see who is the one who asks this question? That is self-knowledge!'

June 17 - Day 7 - Afternoon Q/A

Venkatesananda: The Jnana yogis or Vedantins have - it looks bad to say this - have divided spiritual experience or the enlightenment experience, into two parts. One they call parokshajnana and the other is Aparokshajnana. 'Paroksha' [can be translated as indirect] but 'Para' means 'the other,' and jnana is wisdom, [therefore] wisdom or knowledge seen through somebody else's eyes is Parokshajnana. In other words, you are not experiencing the truth yourself, but you are experiencing it through the eyes of others. Aparokshajnana is wisdom without an intermediary. We are all familiar with parokshajnana - the books, and the scriptures, and the teachers, and so on. But what Aparokshajnana? It is the wisdom that tells you that you are alive.

Student: If one removed the channels of Parokshajnana from a seeker, would it facilitate Aparokshajnana?

Venkatesananda: Some say yes, and some say no.

Student: Who says yes, and who says no?

Venkatesananda: The traditionalists say no. They say by taking [away] the channels or the means through which the seeker gains parokshajnana, the whole system will collapse, and people will continue to be worldly and materialistic. That's one point of view. The other point of view is ...

Student: But the seeker!

Venkatesananda: What about the seeker? What is a seeker? How does he become a seeker? In the beginning, the seeker is the questioner. He is dissatisfied with the state of the world. He is dissatisfied with the state of his life. And so, he begins to question: 'Is this all? Am I bound to this miserable world? Is my life inevitably ridden with sorrow?' That's the seeker.

And parokshajnana suggests (the scripture and the teacher suggest) that 'No, my child, there is a way out of this, and I will tell you.' The traditionalists suggest that unless the teacher and the Scriptures are there to help this seeker to go forward, he would be lost. [They suggest that he must just say] 'I can't tolerate this miserable life. I do not like this world as it is organized. I want to change it.' [In which case,] he might even become a tyrant. It is possible. And that is their (the traditionalists) argument.

The argument of the others is that as long as answers are provided, especially before the right questions are asked, the questions themselves become problems. If someone comes to you with an appropriate question in the appropriate spirit of humility and so on, then your answer is likely to be meaningful. If on the other hand, you provide me with crutches, you give me a Bhagavad Gita early in the morning, you give me a Yoga Vasistha in the afternoon, and I read it and I am

going to say, 'Ah, I understand all this! The whole universe is the infinite consciousness! How marvelous! It is highly inspiring! Tremendous!' I go away with it. But there is no problem that this had to solve. There is no questioning for which this has provided the answer.

Student: I think it could even cover up the question.

Venkatesananda: Apart from the question not arising, this becomes an illusion in itself. I am living in a world illusion, which I am not questioning, and in addition to that, I have this Jnana illusion which actually prevents me from questioning this world illusion. It is when I question this world illusion, and then go to a spiritual master and if that fellow gives me the same knowledge, then it is meaningful.

And therefore, the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita - you know the story - it is the story of the battle and Arjuna's confusion and collapse. That [chapter] is also called yoga. The colophon at the end of the first chapter reads: 'Thus ends the first chapter entitled 'The Yoga of The Despondency of Arjuna.' Arjuna's despondency becomes yoga? Yes! That is, if you do not reach that state of despondency, the rest of the story is meaningless. Hm? And if I do not reach that same despondency within myself, the rest of the teaching is meaningless, [it's merely] words.

June 18 - Day 8 - Morning Talk

To be able to look within without taking anything for granted and without stopping - continuous questioning without assuming - that seems to be the pattern that emerges from the Upanishads. I [the student] am not allowed to take anything for granted, but I am not allowed to stop questioning [either]. If you put these two together, you discover that a certain amount of faith is necessary and that faith must be accompanied, not by a destructive doubt, but by a constructive doubt. Such is a questioning doubt - a doubt that does not doubt the possibility, but doubts the immediate reality. And, I must have faith that there is, perhaps, something beyond this world that I see - because when I ask the Master, he says that there is something other than this [world that I see]. I must have faith in that, but I should not assume that I have got it [already]. Without assuming that this is the ultimate truth, the final truth, I must look forward to the discovery of truth. Without assuming that either he is right, or I am right, [I must have] what you call an open mind, and an open heart, and [running through this openness] there [must be] a razor sharp intelligence.

June 18 - Day 8 - Afternoon Q/A

First, let's take on one question that came up after our morning discussion ended. We had taken on the Second Upanishad. [In that Upanishad] the trend is that the Master is convinced that meditation must be self-knowledge. If it is not, then it is simply brain work. But meditation is not mental activity, nor is it mental

inactivity. There is something in between the two, and that is mental non-activity. Non-egotistic, non-volitional action of the mind or the body, is non-action.

Student 1: Effortless action.

Venkatesananda: Not only effortless. Effortless action may be a automatic, reflex action. This is a pure non-action, where, [if it is the body], the limbs themselves may be involved in an effort, and [if it is not the body] the mind may be involved in a effort, but there is non-action. The ego interference is not there. And viewed that way, the whole [of] life could become a meditation.

June 19 - Day 9 - Morning Talk

The Chandogya Upanishad and the entire Mandukya Upanishad is a discussion of three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and sleep. And after challenging the validity of these, it is suggested that there is a fourth state, [called] Turiya. I think it is important to investigate this. Not that I am suggesting that it is right, but often it is implied that the super-conscious state or samadhi is not the waking state, nor the dreaming state, nor the sleep state, but a fourth state - which means you are supposed to reject or abandon all these [three states, and go looking for a fourth state]. The truth may be very different.

June 19 - Day 9 - Afternoon Q/A

Two important factors were discussed this morning. One was that everything we see and we hear, everything that we think and we feel, everything we experience, is a modification of consciousness - so that there is essentially no difference between a swami and a politician. The same consciousness thinks it is a swami here, and the same consciousness thinks it is a politician there. The same consciousness thinks it is a dog here and the same consciousness thinks it is a holy man there.

The other factor is that everything in the universe is my guru. But until one realizes [these two things] That is why the word realization is insisted upon - it's not a realization, but a matter of theory. So if there is a doubt, as in the case of the questioner [which we have been discussing], and the question arises: 'If this is so,' then it is not so.

When there is direct realization, no question arises. Only in this case, is it true, is it real. And until it becomes real, with the greatest of certainty, then there is uncertainty.

Why don't you admit it is not real to you? It must become real. That is what is meant by the word realization. It's not that the Self or God is not real or that cosmic consciousness is not real: realization only means that it has not been real to me so far. How can I make it real to me also?

June 20 - Day 10 - Morning Talk

The very essence of Upanishad and therefore the very heart of Jnana Yoga is said to be the Mahavakya. The word simply means: 'the great sentence,' or 'the great utterance,' since 'Maha' means great and 'vakya' means statement or utterance. There are four great statements which have been regarded as the very essence of the Upanishads, and therefore, of Jnana Yoga.

The guru says, 'That is the truth! That is the Self! That you are!' And the guru goes on repeating it until finally the disciple says, 'Thank you. Got it!' And that is the final adventure called Jnana. There is a sense, to begin with, a sense of discarding: 'not this, not this, not this.' And when I discard in this way, what do I discard? I discard the description. No truth is discarded. The truth cannot be discarded. What exists cannot be discarded. What is discarded is the mental conditioning: the notions and the concepts and the descriptions that are stored in my own mind, and the descriptions that have become the mind.

What is the mind except all those concepts and notions put together? So, when all these concepts and notions and so on are discarded one after the other, what remains is not something other than what is. But, 'what is' undergoes a drastic and revolutionary and total transmutation. There is a complete, radical change in my vision. In that vision, there is no division - the division being the creation of my own notions. I, you, this, that - when all these are gone, there is pure homogeneous experience, and that is experiencing without even the division of a subject and object.

June 20 - Day 10 - Final Q/A

Student 1: When you say that this is 'Sivananda yoga' that you have been teaching, what is it that makes it Sivananda yoga and not just yoga?

Venkatesananda: 'I am Hatha yogi. I am not interested in your Vedanta.' That was the usual attitude of people who were practicing yoga before Swami Sivananda started teaching all this. Or, 'I am a Bhakta. I am not interested in doing any asanas.' It was Swami Sivananda who pointed out that there is no such thing as just Hatha Yoga, or Bhakti Yoga, or Karma Yoga, or Raja Yoga or Jnana Yoga - that the division between all of these is nonexistent. And He also pointed out that anyone who is seriously practicing yoga has to include some of the practices which are supposed to be the mainstay of each of the other practices.

So you cannot meditate on the chakras and the rest of Hatha yoga, unless you also have some faith and devotion in God and some amount of wisdom - Jnana. And whilst you are doing this [chakra practice], you are also [necessarily] doing some Raja Yoga, some meditation. And, in order to meditate, you have to have a firm posture - Hatha yoga, and also pranayama - Hatha Yoga again. In this Raja yoga, there is also, [necessarily], some surrender to God and devotion to humanity - unselfishness - Karma yoga. And while you are practicing the Karma Yoga, you have to be healthy, so you do a few asanas every day. Likewise, Karma

yoga without Bhakti and Jnana is impossible. Karma Yoga also demands a constant meditative mood - otherwise it is not possible for it to be 'non-action'.

One flows into the other. Swami Sivananda's specialty was to try not to separate one from the other. So, one can practice all these together and there is no contradiction or division at all. One can be greatly devoted to one's health without being selfish; one can meditate, one can study without suffering from a guilty conscience. And one knows that God is not confined to one statue or one idol of the Lord Buddha, or what have you.

Yet [at the same time], without violence to one's conviction - knowing that God is omnipresent, one can still approach [the Lord] through one of these idols, or images, or holy men. One can know that spiritual truth is not recorded in books and that the study of these may be a waste of time, but still one can study them to better equip oneself with a theoretical understanding of the truth.

Swami Sivananda excelled at combining all this. He not only pointed out that all the yogas are valid, but went even one step further and said that it is better to combine them, [in other words], do not specialize.