

# YOGA

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## Hari Om

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## GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

### OBSTACLES TO SADHANA

#### Fear

One must be prepared to risk one's life if one wants to attain immortality. Spiritual wealth cannot be gained without self-sacrifice and self-denial. Fear is not an imaginary non-entity. It assumes solid forms and troubles the aspirant in various ways.

Fear of public criticism stands in the way of the aspirant's spiritual progress. Fear of all sorts should be totally eradicated by reflection, enquiry and devotion and the cultivation of the opposite quality, courage. Positive overcomes negative. Courage overpowers fear. If fear is conquered, one is on the road to success.

—Swami Sivananda

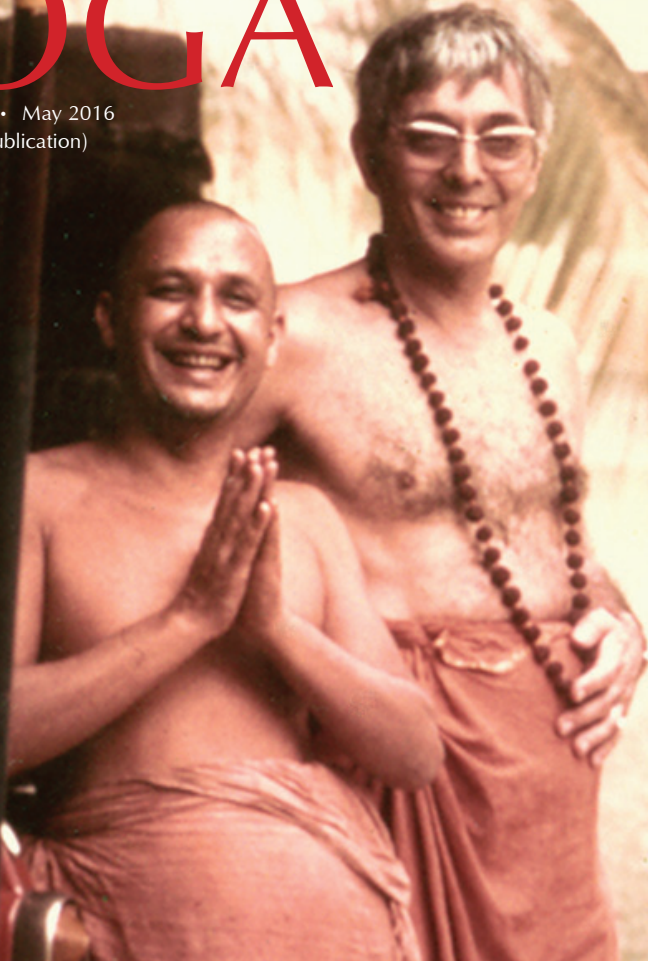
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## Contents

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 4 Making the World a Better Place                                    | 26 Sunday Satsang                         |
| 6 Namaskara Yoga   | 35 Brain Metamorphosis (Extracts)         |
| 7 Saraswati  | 41 Bal Yoga Diwas                         |
| 10 The Science of Yoga   | 44 Thank You Satyananda Yoga School       |
| 12 Introspection   | 46 Origin of Ashrams                      |
| 16 Aspiration and Aim  | 50 We Travel Together                     |
| 19 How Can I Control My Mind?  | 53 Simple Living and Spiritual Experience |
| 21 Observations in a Yoga Class for Students with Multiple Sclerosis |   |

The Yogi is superior to the ascetic. He is deemed superior even to those versed in sacred lore. The Yogi is superior even to those who perform action with some motive. Therefore, Arjuna, do you become a Yogi. (*Bhagavad Gita VI:46*)

तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोधिकः । कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन ॥



# Making the World a Better Place

*From Yoga Chakra 2: Cultivating Spiritual Samskara, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



*Namaskara* means salutation, and salutation means that you are connecting with, respecting and honouring the other person.

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

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

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

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

# Namaskara Yoga

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

There is no harm in prostrating before all, for all are manifestations of the Lord. I do prostrations even to cow-dung, for everything is Brahman. Even before donkeys and other animals, I do mental prostrations. To my disciples and devotees, I first do namaskara. I behold the Essence behind all names and forms. That is real Vedanta in daily life.

Doing prostrations is by itself a sadhana, *namaskara sadhana*. You should not think, 'He is a thief, he is a wicked man.' Sri Krishna Himself has said, *Dhyutam chalayatam asmi* - 'I am the gambling of the cheat.' By doing prostrations, good health is acquired and life is prolonged.

There was a Maharashtra saint who used to prostrate before asses and horses. Once he prostrated before a dead ass and the ass came back to life. Such is the power of namaskara.

You may not actually prostrate, but are you ready to do prostrations to pigs, bulls, asses? All are manifestations of God. So you should have the readiness to prostrate before all. There should not be any inner conflict. Your prostrations should be wholehearted and sincere.



# Saraswati

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

In India, the arrival of spring is celebrated in a special manner. Spring represents emergence of new life, of greenery on trees and on the ground. It is the emergence of beauty in plants and of a milder climate.

## **True birth**

The fifth day of spring, according to the jyotish calculations, is dedicated to the Goddess Saraswati. This Goddess represents knowledge. She is not spoken about much. People speak more about Durga, Kali and Lakshmi. Saraswati represents knowledge and understanding.



Elders say, "This celebration of Mother Saraswati is for you children. So, go and celebrate it in schools. Say a prayer to Mother Saraswati, a prayer for wisdom and knowledge, and she will grant your wish." Parents, on the other hand, pray to Lakshmi for economic gain.

Saraswati is not really somebody who has captured the imagination of the selfish nature of people, for she is pure. She belongs to the realm of sattwa. Her work, her duty, her dharma is to bestow knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

According to spiritual principles and thoughts, you can take birth in this life but it will not be called birth. It is only physical birth. However, the moment you take birth in knowledge it is



defined as the real birth. After all, it is knowledge, wisdom and understanding which will lead you on the path of success and development in life. If there is no knowledge, understanding and wisdom, how will you know how to do things? The mind is not trained.

Without knowledge one does not grow in life. You can have a lot of money, yet if there is no grey matter active in the brain, what use is money? You need to activate this grey matter. You need to know, understand, realize and you need to take birth in vidya.



## **Vidya and samskara**

There is a couplet in Sanskrit saying that when we are born, we are ignorant; and when we take birth in knowledge we are called twice-born.

*Janmana jayate shudrah,  
Samskarat dwija uchyate.*

That knowledge gives us samskara which is the expression of life. Samskara and knowledge are interchangeable words. They are not different for knowledge is knowing and samskara is the natural, spontaneous and free flowing expression of that knowing.

If you are happy, your face will also look happy. You cannot hide the happiness from your face if the mind is jubilant. You cannot hide the frustration from your face if the mind is under pressure and tension. The subtle and the gross, they respond to each other.

In the same manner, it is the vidya which becomes the medium of expression in life, and that is known as samskara. Saraswati represents the process, experience and achievement. Saraswati is the primary power, the primary force in the universe without whose aid we cannot progress. She is the Goddess of spring, regeneration and rebirth.

## **Invoking her Grace**

It is on this day that the Bihar School of Yoga was established, founded and inaugurated by Sri Swami Satyananda 53 years ago. Since then, every Basant Panchami is celebrated as the Foundation Day. On this day, a special invocation to the Cosmic Power Saraswati is conducted. This invocation happens with the worship of Sri Yantra. It is the most beautiful, most ancient practice of the shakta tantras to invoke the Shakti tattwa as Grace to bring knowledge, wisdom and luminosity into our life.

*– Basant Panchami, 12 February 2016, Ganga Darshan*

# The Science of Yoga

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



We will start writing about the science of yoga right from the beginning so that there shall be no misunderstanding or misconception about this great and life-saving science, which the rishis of the past discovered in the silent practices.

The reference to the word 'yoga' first appears in the most ancient book, *Rig Veda*, in which it is said that Brahma, the cosmic creator, preached the science of yoga to Hiranyagarbha, the golden womb. In Hindu mythology Brahma, the creator, represents the creativity in the individual and the creative power in the cosmos. In each and every being, there is that cosmic art of creativity, and that cosmic art of creativity is the mythological Brahma of the Vedas, who preached yoga to the people.

The rishis and sages tried this science and in meditation they had experiences of light, or unconsciousness. These experiences led them to discover all they could about yoga, and right from the *Rig Veda* period they tirelessly investigated the mystic, the mysterious, the great secrets and wonders that were being manifested by the human mind unconsciously and superconsciously.

Then came the Upanishads which tried to define yoga, and finally this science was summed up by the great rishi Patanjali in his sutras on yoga. Today these yoga aphorisms of Patanjali come to us in Sanskrit with commentaries in different languages. In the beginning of the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali gives us a definition of yoga as being the complete control over the patterns of consciousness. Therefore, following Patanjali, we shall say that yoga is a method by which we have absolute

knowledge of all the states of consciousness, of all the patterns of consciousness.

### **Defining yoga**

The individual awareness in us functions in different states of sleep, dreaming and experience over which we have no personal control. As such it is not possible for one to harness the great energies which are inherent in this consciousness, to realize the great powers which one has in oneself. It appears that every human being, that every individual has great power, has great knowledge, great experience and great understanding in him, which is part of his own self. Consider how, with the conscious mind, with conscious awareness of which man has become master, how many miracles he has been able to realize and how many discoveries he has made. However, if only he could also master the subconscious forces, how much more would he be able to accomplish.

Yoga can be defined as a method by which we can maintain individual consciousness even in an unconscious state. The development of this awareness is realized through meditation and practices of willpower. Yoga is a method of seeing the subconscious and unconscious. Yoga is a process of knowledge, awareness, understanding, observing and fulfilling our experience. This is how we define yoga. The first definition is that yoga is an art by which we have complete mastery over all the patterns of awareness. The second definition of yoga is that it is an art by which we become a spectator of all the experiences of awareness. The third definition of yoga is that it is a process of dehypnotization of all the stages of consciousness.

Yoga is a science of consciousness. Yoga is a science of personality and a science of creativity. Come to yoga, and you will definitely realize that you have something more to give, something more to learn, and something more to gain.

*– Published in YOGA - Education and Youth, Indian Institute of Yoga, Sixth Anniversary Souvenir 1975*

# Introspection

*From the teachings of Swami Sivananda Saraswati*



The self-existent Brahman created the mind and senses with outgoing tendencies. The mind has a pernicious habit of externalization from time immemorial. So you behold the external universe and not the internal Self.

It is the *vikshepa shakti* or *Maya* that draws you out. From your childhood, you are taught to look to the external world and not to the internal, psychic world. You have entirely lost the faculty of introspection. To have a comprehensive understanding of what is going on in the inner 'mental factory', a *shuddha buddhi*, pure reason, and subtle intellect with power



of introspection is needed. You will have to turn the mind inside, then concentrate all its powers and throw them upon the mind itself, in order that it may know its own nature and analyze itself.

This is raja yoga. Make a vigorous and earnest search within. Do not trust the mind and the indriyas. They are your enemies. In introspection, the mind itself is the subject of study. A portion of the mind studies the remaining portion of the mind. The higher mind studies the lower mind.

### **Become a witness**

Introspection is apperception. Just as you watch the work done by a coolie, a portion of the mind watches the movements of the rest of the mind. If you are one with the mind, if you identify yourself with the mind, you cannot know your defects. If you are a *sakshi* or the silent witness of the mind and if you practise introspection, you can know your various defects.

By a careful watch, many defects are detected and removed by suitable sadhana. Enter a quiet room. Enter into silence daily for about fifteen minutes, morning and evening. Introspect. Watch the mind carefully. The mind will be doing either thinking, planning, feeling, knowing or willing. You will have to find out through subjective introspection what the mind is exactly doing at a particular time. To go through this practice, you must have *antarmukha vritti*, a subjective mind and a subtle buddhi.

Buddhi can be rendered subtle by studying philosophical books, satsang, control of indriyas, *dama*, and sattvic food. The constant utterance of holy names of God as Hari, Om, Narayana, Rama, Shiva purifies the mind-stuff and helps make the mind introspective.

### **Be ready to change**

You are the best judge of your mind. Introspect by living alone in solitude or retiring into a calm room for an hour. You must sit quietly in a solitary room alone, with closed eyes and watch

the activities of the mind. You will then know your defects and weaknesses very clearly.

You should afterwards feel the necessity of removing them. Then your *swabhava*, your nature, should agree to change. You must know the right method to remove the defect. You must apply the method constantly. Then only improvement will set in. Constant application of the sadhana is an indispensable requisite.

You must watch the improvement every now and then, say, once a week, a fortnight or a month. You will have to keep a record of your progress in a spiritual daily diary. You must watch carefully whether you are progressing on the spiritual path, whether you remain stationary or are retrograding, whether the mind is distracted or concentrated. If it is distracted, you must remove the distracting causes one by one with patience and vigilance by suitable methods. If one method fails to bring about the desired results, you will have to combine two methods - the yogic methods and *vichara*, enquiry.

### **The triplet**

Remember the triplet: self-analysis, self-reliance, self-determination. It will be of immense use in your spiritual sadhana. Analyze yourself through introspection. Find out the nature of your *vrittis*. Find out what *guna* or quality is predominant at a particular moment, whether it is *sattwa*, *rajas* or *tamas*.

How long can the mind be absolutely fixed on your *lakshya*, the point of meditation, be it God, Brahman, an idea or object, whether internal or external?

How long can the mind be fixed on the object, rose and rose alone to the exclusion of all other objects, be it two seconds or two minutes or five minutes or half an hour? This is self-analysis.

Rely on yourself alone. You are your own redeemer and saviour. Nobody can give you *moksha*. You will have to tread

the spiritual path step by step. Books and gurus can show the path and guide you. This is self-reliance.

Make strong self-determination: "I will realize God. I will have *atma sakshatkara*, self-realization, or *Brahmanubhava*, experience of Brahman, this very moment and not in the uncertain future." This is self-determination.

### **The worldly nature**

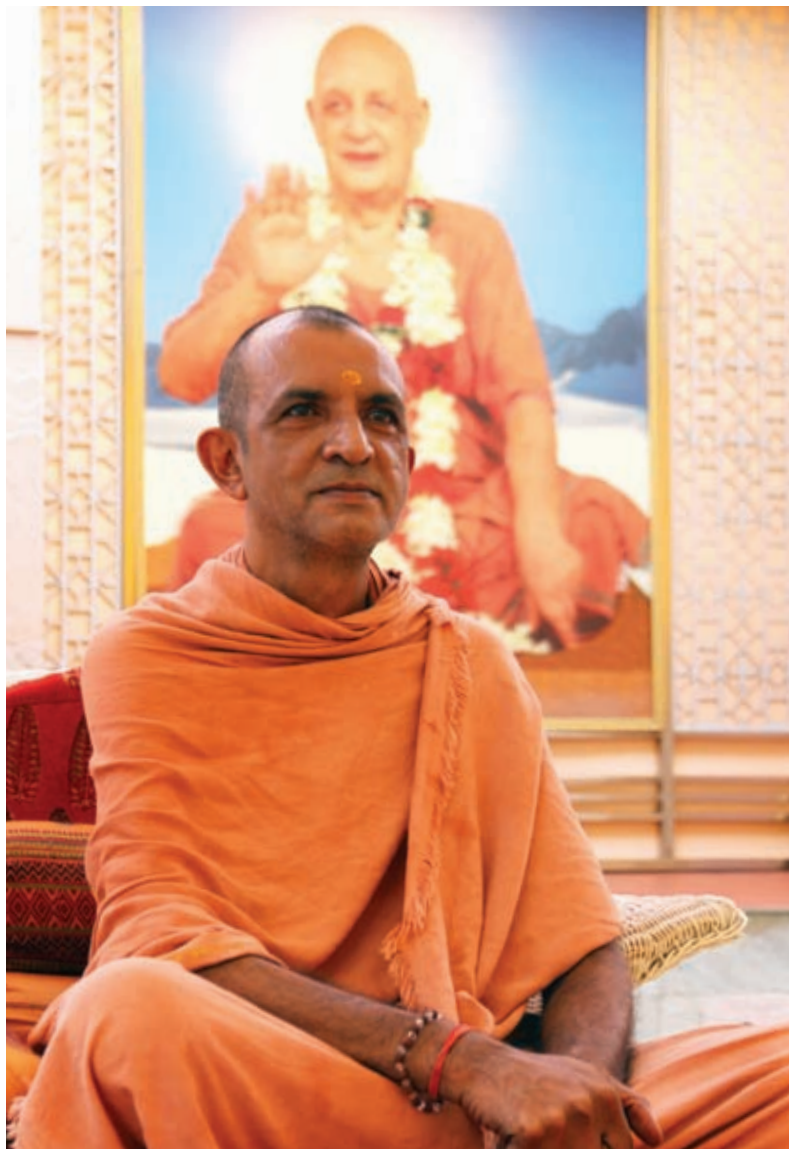
Worldly-minded people have no time to think even for a few minutes over the problems and the mystery of life. They get up in the morning. Their minds usually run to the special objects of enjoyment on account of *raga*, attraction. Their mental energies are poured forth in the usual grooves and avenues in thoughts of body, eating and dressing, wife, children, friends and also thoughts of office work and business. Thus, the day is over. The same routine follows day after day, week after week. Years roll by and life is wasted. It is highly lamentable, indeed!

Only they who do *manana*, reflection, and introspection through *antarmukha vritti* can change their worldly nature. Only in these aspirants the idea of Brahman can get permanently lodged.



# Aspiration and Aim

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*





Psychology defines mental illness as an altered state of mind where the idea and concept of reality changes into something different. Schizophrenia and phobias are gradually becoming part of the mental illnesses which people face in their life.

In yoga, the concept of mental illness is not new. It is as old as the knowledge of physical illness. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, mental illnesses have been defined as being *mano rog*. There are six sources of *mano rog*, the mental illnesses: *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya* – passion, anger, greed, infatuation, arrogance and envy. These are the causes of distorted mental behaviour, which manifest in the form of mental illness.

### **Names not seed**

The entire yogic discipline is geared to manage the six stressors. They are called stressors, for from them stress arises. The entire system of yoga, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, are systems which are geared to harmonize the negative spikes of the six conditions in the mind. When the negative spikes of the six conditions are managed, one is free from mental illnesses, however, as long as one is not able to manage the mind, one will have to confront one's mental problems.

Yoga has been clear. Whatever modern name is given to lunacy, psychotic behaviour, schizophrenia, depression or bipolar disorder, one is only creating a name to understand an existing condition. These names do not mean anything, but the causes mean much, as from there everything comes up, therefore, the six seeds have to be managed properly.

Once the six conditions are managed, one is free from one's self-created problems. Most of the problems which human beings face are self-created based on their perception and level of understanding. People have to know their mind, deal with their mind, and stop projecting their mind on other people.

### **Cultivating the opposite thought**

One of the main teachings of our paramguru, Sri Swami Sivananda, was the cultivation of pratipaksha bhavana. It was

not the practice of mantra or meditation, asana and pranayama that he advocated. He advocated the practice of pratipaksha bhavana. It is the positive connection of mind where one disassociates with one's tamasic nature and connects with the positive nature.

For Swami Sivananda, yoga teaching is insignificant and the practice of yoga is insignificant. For him, being the right person, doing the right thing, thinking the right thing is of primary concern. This is a quality that has to be developed by understanding the idea of pratipaksha bhavana.

For example, there cannot be loose and irresponsible speech. If there is loose talk, then there is no *sanyam*, restraint, there is no attainment of yoga. If there is *sanyam*, one is connected with positive expression, positive behaviour, positive thinking. At that time, even anger can become positive. Passion and desire can become positive, provided one is connected to the sattwic aspect of oneself and not the negative and detrimental.

What you are reflects in your speech, your behaviour, in how you hide things and project a side of yourself which is not true but which is hypocrisy. Only talking about the meaning and definition of the six friends, the six seeds, is not going to help you in any manner. Connecting with the luminous, the sattwic nature, will help you for it will help change and transform the expression of your thought and actions.

Pratipaksha bhavana leads to *sadvichar*, *sadvyavahar* and *satkarma*. That is the aim of cultivating the opposite thought. It leads you to the development of right thinking, *sadvichar*; right behaviour, *sadvyavahar*; and right action, *satkarma*. Therefore, to overcome the lower vrittis and tendencies of the mind should be your aspiration and aim.

– 18 October 2015, Ganga Darshan, Munger

# How Can I Control My Mind?

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Who is controlling who? You say, "I want to control my mind." Are you different from your mind? Who is trying to control the mind? Or is one aspect of the mind saying, "I need to control the other aspect of my dynamic nature?" If you say, "I want to control the mind," it is incorrect and wrong. The mind cannot control itself. The whole idea of controlling is incorrect.

## **Observation versus control**

Yoga does not speak of control but of becoming the observer, the *drashta*. There is a big difference between control and *drashta*. In yoga, the use of the word 'control' does not exist. The word 'observation' is used in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali (1:3):

*Tada drashtu swaroope avasthanam.*

Then the seer is established (abides) in his own essential nature.

If you are the observer, you are simply a witness to every game that happens around you. When you see children play, you are sitting on your chair and watching the children play. You are not controlling the children. You are simply observing the children. If you want to control the children, you have to stop observing and start to involve yourself with them.

Either there is involvement or there is observation. Through involvement you are trying to control and that is not going to happen. Through observation you can separate yourself from the influences of the environment and that is possible. Then there is no control, only observation and application of wisdom with observation.

How can the mind control itself? It is like saying, "I will control myself." When do you control yourself! Do you control yourself when you walk? Do you control yourself when you eat? Do you control yourself when you drink? Do you control yourself when you speak to people? When can you control yourself?

### **Extreme and normal behaviour**

It is an incorrect idea which becomes reality when you are in extreme behaviours. If you are angry, somebody can say, "Control yourself," meaning the extreme behaviour of anger. If you are nervous, somebody can tell you, "Control yourself." Therefore, control is for extreme behaviour.

Control is for extreme behaviour; observation and modulation is for normal behaviour. You cannot control the mind in normal behaviour and you cannot observe the mind in extreme behaviour. The roles have to change.

Therefore, do your simple yoga of observation, concentration and meditation; that is enough. Slow and steady wins the race.

– 29 November 2015, Ganga Darshan, Munger





# Observations in a Yoga Class for Students with Multiple Sclerosis

MS (Multiple Sclerosis) is a progressively degenerative, autoimmune disease of the nervous system in the brain and spinal column. The myelin layer that usually protects and supports the nerves becomes inflamed, damaged and eventually completely destroyed. The communication through the nerve impulses may break down. The course of the disease can be different for each person. Often people will experience attacks of varying duration (days, months or even years) followed by a restoration period where functions will improve again, only to then experience another relapse years or even decades later.

All parts of the individual that are controlled by the nervous system can be affected including functions of vision, hearing, speech, walking, writing and memory. Muscle weakness and spasms, fatigue, numbness, and prickling pain are common symptoms. Decreased concentration, attention deficits, depression, manic depression and paranoia can be part of the mental changes. As the disease worsens, patients may experience sexual dysfunction or reduced bowel and bladder control<sup>1</sup>. Symptoms can vary during different phases and among different people.

It is estimated that there are approximately 4,000 people living with MS in New Zealand. Unfortunately, as Medline Plus<sup>2</sup> states, "There is no known cure for multiple sclerosis at this time. However, there are promising therapies that may slow the disease. The goal of treatment is to control symptoms and maintain a normal quality of life." The Happy Families website<sup>3</sup> states that yoga and Tai Chi are good for stretching and a sense of wellbeing.

A study<sup>4</sup> in 2004 in the USA showed improvement in fatigue in the groups that exercised and practised yoga compared to the control group that performed neither. No effect on attention or alertness or any clear changes in mood were noted.

Professor Burk<sup>5</sup>, a leading neurologist in the USA, noted that people with MS: utilize available resources, have a good relationship with their health care professionals, educate themselves – find out more through MS support groups and their own information library, learn to say “no” to work and family commitments when not well, maintain a healthy lifestyle including healthy diet, exercise, and adequate rest, take up recreational activities and hobbies that give positive support, reduce toxins: alcohol and tobacco and negative friends and family, reach out to peers with MS to share common issues, and be an advocate for MS causes.

### **Implications for a yoga class**

The above information suggests that yoga (asana, pranayama, meditation and yoga nidra) can benefit people with MS by improving health and wellbeing on the physical, energetic, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. In fact, yoga is an excellent complementary therapy for people with MS. Practising yoga in a group environment on a regular basis allows clear instructions and assistance from the yoga teacher as well as encouragement and support from peers. When people with MS take up yoga, they need to be especially cautious with balance and standing movements, as well as being aware of their own limitations so as not to overdo. A yoga class therefore needs to be gentle and flexible to cater for each person’s different abilities.

Because students with MS tire easily, the class which we give in New Zealand is only one hour in duration. We meet once a week in a gym where exercises are practised on other weekdays. The group is small at this stage, only five regulars come: three women and two men, all over fifty years of age. They have agreed to start the class sitting up, even though one

participant cannot do so for extended periods. People either lean against the wall or sit cross-legged without any other support during stages 1 to 3 of kaya sthairyam followed by chanting the mantra *Om* three times and the *Shanti Path*.

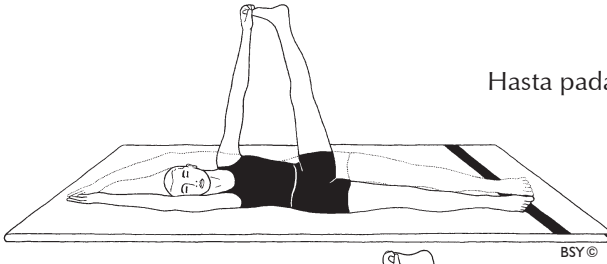
### **Some observations on yoga practices**

Often, it is a struggle for everyone to be ready on time for an already short class. Some of the students may take several minutes to move into any of the base positions. Because most students cannot stand or are unable to stand without support, asanas are restricted to those starting from sitting, lying on the stomach or back, vajrasana and on all fours. An easy flow of postures has been created to save time by avoiding unnecessary changes in base positions. This flow moves from sitting asanas to postures on all fours and/or vajrasana, to postures starting from lying on the stomach, then rolling onto the back and finally completing the class with yoga nidra in shavasana for the last 15 to 20 minutes.

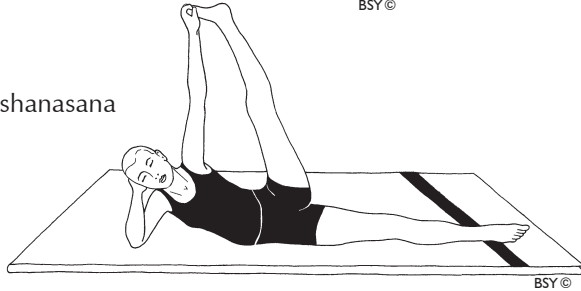
In each session, some movements from the pawanmuktasana (PM) part 1 series are practised while still sitting up. Sometimes one of the first three asanas of PM part 3 is added (rajju karshanasana, gatyakmak meru vakrasana or chakki chalanasana). Favourites from vajrasana include shashankasana and ananda madirasana. Marjariasana and vyaghrasana are practised with varying outcomes. Lying on the stomach, asanas like the full locust or half locust as well as simple backward bends play an important role in keeping the back flexible and strong. Lying on the back, all asanas that strengthen the abdominal muscles are particularly important as well as spinal twists.

The willingness of the students to try new asanas keeps astounding me and often the result is much more encouraging than expected – by me. We have done a vipareeta karani asana variation against the wall, where apart from getting the legs in place, the main problem was to keep them from slipping back down. We have given hasta pada angushthasana and meru

Hasta pada angushthasana



Meru akarshanasana



akarshanasana a go and performed a TTK (tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana) variation sitting up against the wall.

The class finishes with yoga nidra to counteract any fatigue that may accompany the physical exertion of getting to class, onto the floor and then performing asanas. Rotation of consciousness especially supports the growth of new neural pathways, and the breathing will sustain a sense of wellbeing and connectedness. Usually pranayama – other than yogic breathing in shavasana just before yoga nidra – falls prey to the time shortage.

We introduced ashwini mudra, then vajroli/sahajoli mudra followed by moola bandha a fortnight later. Within a month the feedback from the students was that urinary incontinence had now been mastered without drugs. This possibility was not known before. Originally the mudras were introduced in preparation for moola bandha, which was to be taught for pain control as well as energy preservation.

### Students respond

The students are a chatty bunch and focus continues to be a challenge for some. The mood is always cheerful. People are determined to see the good in their situation and make the

best of life, as Brendon says, "The word 'giving up' is not part of my vocabulary."

The students say they are feeling great and relaxed at the end of the yoga class. They find it generally enjoyable and the effects remarkable. Brendon comments, "Yoga and exercise complement each other. Since I started practising both several times a week, I have been able to do things again I couldn't before. It is a pity not more people attend."

Brian explains, "Without yoga and gym I wouldn't be able to walk now. The yoga class challenges me to give movements a go I wouldn't think of trying otherwise."

Diane observes, "It makes you feel good, the stretching is so good for our bodies, and we don't get it like we do while doing yoga, also the breathing is really great, especially for an asthmatic like me. It also has enabled me to be a much better sleeper. I relax more fully and concentrate on the eyebrow centre and can then drift off to sleep which has been a godsend when the pain is really bad. Also I love finishing off with the yoga nidra; it is so good."

The social aspect is important, and the feeling of a support group shows when a cup of tea and biscuits are enjoyed after class.

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– *Sannyasi Samadhimurti, New Zealand (2007)*



# Sunday Satsang

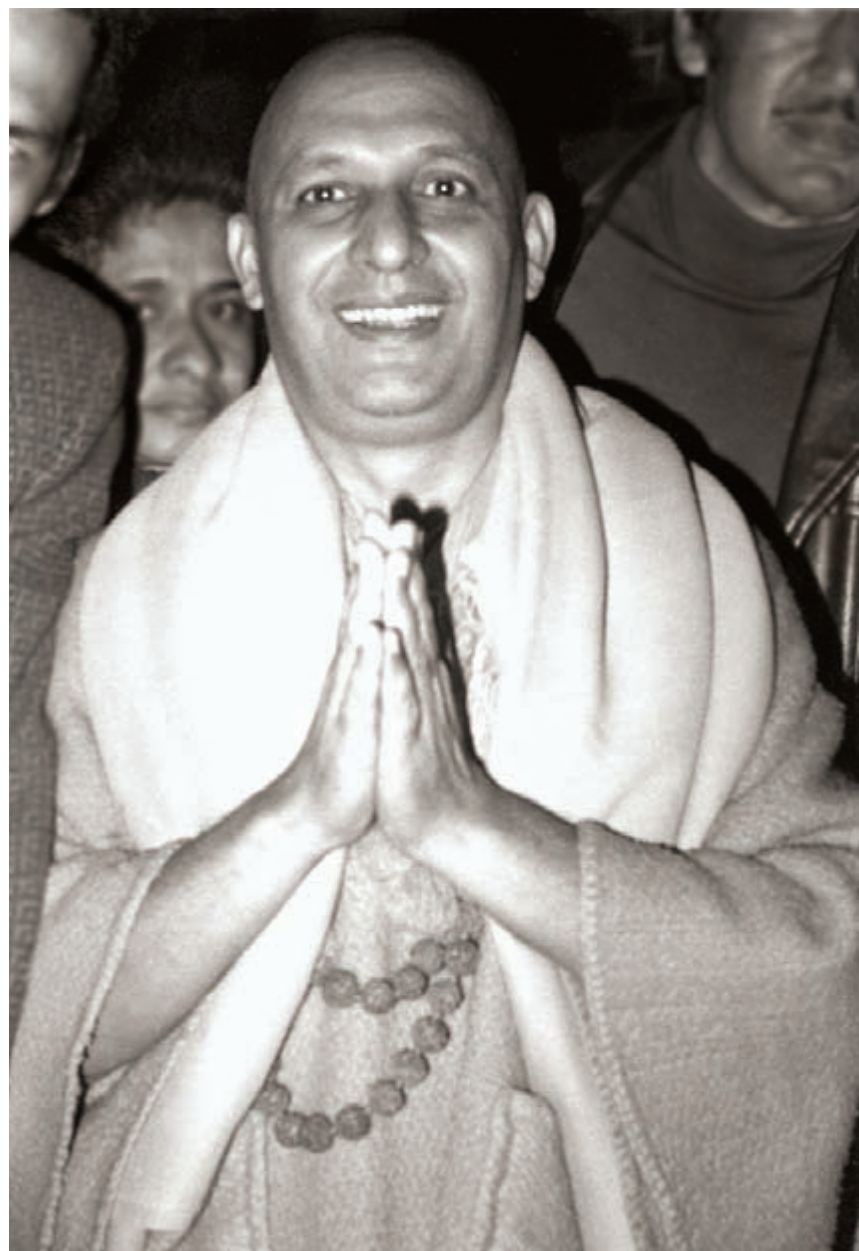
*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



## **Can an aspirant have the same spiritual experiences as Sri Swami Satyananda?**

We all are of a different brand like the cars on the road. Some are expensive like Mercedes and Alfa Romeo; some are accessible and some are low-cost cars. In the same way, we all are branded. We are not one and the same. No two people in the world are one and the same.













Our brand of life indicates how we function, how we think, believe, perform, live, act and respond. Our mindset, nature, personality, belief, everything is contained in the brand to which we belong. Therefore, the level of experience, the type and the quality of experience is different.

### **Your brand**

Why say Swami Satyananda, why not anyone of that stature, in the past or present? Has anybody come to the stature of Jesus, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Teresa of Avila, Ramana Maharishi, Yogananda, Vivekananda or Swami Sivananda?

Nobody has come to the level where masters have lived. If you come to that level, you will become the master. Therefore, if you are seeking the same experience as Swami Satyananda, find out if you are of the same brand. If you are, then it is possible.

If you are, then through sadhana you can come to the same point as Swami Satyananda, Swami Sivananda, Swami Yogananda or Swami Vivekananda. A Mercedes can compete with a Mercedes, a Toyota can compete with a Toyota, an Ambassador can compete with an Ambassador; it is as simple as that.

If you think that you are of the same stature as Christ and that through your determined effort you can have the same experience, you will become the master yourself.

### **Be yourself**

We all have our own samskaras, our own karmas and our own desires. Sometimes, our desires want us to become something like somebody else, however our karmas and samskaras will not allow that to happen. Our desires are not powerful enough to influence, alter and change the samskaras and karmas.

Once you know that you can make the attempt to at least fine-tune yourself and refine yourself, then through your effort you can try to bring about that change.

Begin by changing the things that need changing in your life. Begin with what you need to change qualitatively within you. Don't try to copy somebody else. If you are copying, you are not allowing your own expression. You are just a simple copycat, a photocopy which will fade after some time. You are not writing the original script. Try to cultivate that which is good within you instead of copying something else from somebody.

That is your sadhana. Have an aim, an aspiration which you can attain and experience, and be yourself. Then it becomes possible for you to make that metamorphosis and change and have a glimpse of the state where the enlightened ones, the sages, had their fulfilment. By that time, if the samskaras and karmas are purified, you will be absorbed into that state.

**Is it possible on a scientific level, to improve one's ability in subjects such as mathematics and science, through yoga and, more importantly, meditation?**

Whether it is mathematics or anything else, it is a vidya, *knowledge*, which is attainable. It is not something that you are acquiring from outside, it is something that you are experiencing inside. You are bringing vidya out from within you.

Aryabhatta, the first mathematician of the world, had intuitive ability due to meditation and the lifestyle he lived. Vedic mathematics were revealed by sages and saints who were in states of meditation.

Vidya is not abstract. It is clearly definable, sequential and progressive. Science like maths can be learnt through meditation, and that ability can be cultivated through meditation as well.

**What is sparsha yoga?**

Pashupata yoga was the original yoga taught by Shiva to Parvati. Pashupata yoga had five branches: mantra yoga, sparsha yoga, bhava yoga, abhava yoga and maha yoga.

From sparsha yoga, hatha yoga and marma yoga evolved. What today is known as marma therapy, is marma yoga, the science of skin. *Marma* means skin and sparsha means touch. Therefore, sparsha yoga is the yoga of touch. Touch means an awareness of the body, of different body parts, of this existence and of this unit.

What do you do in hatha yoga? You connect with your body to purify the body, to cleanse the body of its toxic content. You practise asana to balance the hyper and the hypoactivity of the pranas. You practise pranayama to regulate the physical pranas and to elevate them to the spiritual dimension. In hatha yoga, you are connecting with the koshas which you are.

Your body is made up of five skins or layers. The annamaya kosha, the pranamaya kosha, the manomaya kosha, the vijnanamaya kosha and anandamaya kosha. Hatha yoga deals with the awareness, the realization of annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya koshas. The actual work takes place in these three, however the aspiration is to go up to anandamaya.

The second aspect of hatha yoga is marma yoga, a more intense direction of energy. Marma yoga is the mother of the science of acupressure and acupuncture. It is also the science of touch. By altering the flow of energy currents one is able to induce an altered state of mind and harmony of the hyperactivity of the energy systems.

In sparsha yoga, the main focus has been the two major branches, hatha yoga and marma yoga. That is the relationship of sparsha yoga with today's yogic practices and concepts.

### **Do the yamas and niyamas correspond to specific chakras?**

Nobody has mentioned a relationship between yamas, niyamas and chakras, yet definitely they are connected. There is no question about it. Yama represents a state and a quality of mind. Niyama is the expression of that state and quality. The quality is associated with a specific chakra and with the awakening of the chakra, that particular quality will start to be active.

Then with the awakening of the quality, the corresponding behaviour of the mind will change into yama.

Humility and forgiveness are the qualities of ajna chakra as you have to transcend the experiences of the mind. The experiences of the mind are contained up to vishuddhi chakra, the fifth element. Beyond the fifth element, you are nowhere. If you chop off your head, you are finished.

In the same manner, up to the fifth element is the mind. The sixth element is ajna chakra which is transcendence of *ahamkara*, self-identity; it is transcendence of the lower mind which retains and holds. Therefore, humility comes in, and with the release of what you hold onto, you are able to forgive, *kshama*. These are qualities of ajna chakra and represent the mindset of ajna chakra.

### **What is the meaning of ‘forgive and forget’?**

The interesting part in ‘forgive and forget’ is that one is to get and one is to give.

‘For’ indicates that something is to be used or applied in something; something is for a particular purpose. So when you say ‘forget’, it is for you to get something, and when you say ‘forgive’, it is for you to give something.

What are you getting and what are you giving? You may, think of ‘forget and forgive’ as something that you do in your mind. However, forget means to release something and not to hold on to it, and forgive means to extend your sympathy, compassion and love, without holding on to any reaction which you may be experiencing.

When you are giving your good intention to a person who has done something bad to you, that is forgiving. When you are receiving something bad from a person, yet it is not affecting you, it goes away, then that is forgetting.

– 21 February 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger

# Brain Metamorphosis (Extracts)

*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

*Talk given at Vivekananda College, Madras, 9 February 1982*



*Hari Om* to everybody here.

In the last thirty years, yoga has been subject to scientific studies in India as well as abroad. First of all scientific studies were carried out on the most well-known aspect of yoga called *yogasanas*.

## **Yoga and the mental personality**

Later, thinkers began to ponder over the possibility of whether or not yoga could influence the activities of the brain and consciousness. Even now research is going on all over the world



and the results which we have obtained so far very positively indicate that some of the other aspects of yoga, not necessarily asana, can alter the behaviour, chemistry and waves of the brain. I will try to tell you in layman's language so that you can carry home the knowledge.

I am not concerned about your practice, that is left to you, but for me it is more important that I explain to you how far yoga has been understood by the thinking people of the world today; not necessarily by Hindus or Muslims but also by agnostics who don't have any concept of God, reality, atma or afterlife, who just believe in matter – total matter, and nothing beyond matter. They have come to the conclusion that, through the practice of yoga, the quality of the contents of the brain can be changed, influenced, transformed or completely metamorphosed.

If that be so, how are we going to apply this science of yoga to our own profession, to our own career and our own station in life? We are sannyasins, some are businessmen, and you are students. Everyone has his own career and profession. It is possible therefore to apply this science of yoga in such a way that it will improve the quality of our performance, the quality of our experience, the general experiences we have every day with the people we come across, including the experience in interaction with social and national problems. That mental personality should be developed through yoga. We believe it is possible, but how?

### **Archetypes and the genius mind**

There is a general opinion now prevalent in western countries, and certain circles in India as well, that through the practice of pranayama, dhyana, yoga nidra and antar mouna, the mind of students can be improved. In Switzerland, educationalists have been working hard on this and on the behaviour of archetypes in the brain. These archetypes are in billions and trillions in the brain and seem to become a barrier in expressing our mental personality. Many times you feel that you understand things

better, and sometimes you don't understand. At times you are experiencing total clarity whether you study geography, mathematics or history, and at times it seems everything is clouded and you don't understand. In this connection you will have to study the behaviour of that mechanism which is the seat of understanding, and this is the brain.

The archetypes in the brain come in the way of your expression. They are the substances which lie buried in the depths of the human mind, not the external mind which is connected with the senses, that is the externalized mind. Through the eyes, ears and other mediums of perception, this mind obtains knowledge; I am not talking of that mind. That mind is just a reflector, but there are other areas of mind, of *chitta*, which you should be able to touch if you want to develop genius; if you want to be a student of outstanding success. You don't have to have much to do with this mind, particularly that part which depends on external sources of the senses, the *indriyas*; not even with that mind which depends on the storehouse or fund of knowledge which you have collected. There is an area of the mind which you do not know, which you have never experienced, which has to come out. That mind can only come out if you can fix the archetypes.

### **The science of yantra and mandala**

Scientists, particularly those in Switzerland, have developed, in connection with the educational system, a science called yantra and mandala which of course most of you know about or have seen, but you have not tried to understand exactly what these things are. Many times you see geometrical figures known as Sri Yantra, Kali Yantra or Tara Yantra. We thought for some time, even in our own country which is the origin of this culture, that these yantras were a mystical substance. People did not understand them, but now in order to improve the quality of understanding in terms of education, and with mentally retarded children in particular, they are using yantras. And what do they tell you to do? To concentrate on the yantra

with eyes open, then close the eyes and visualize the yantra as long as you can.

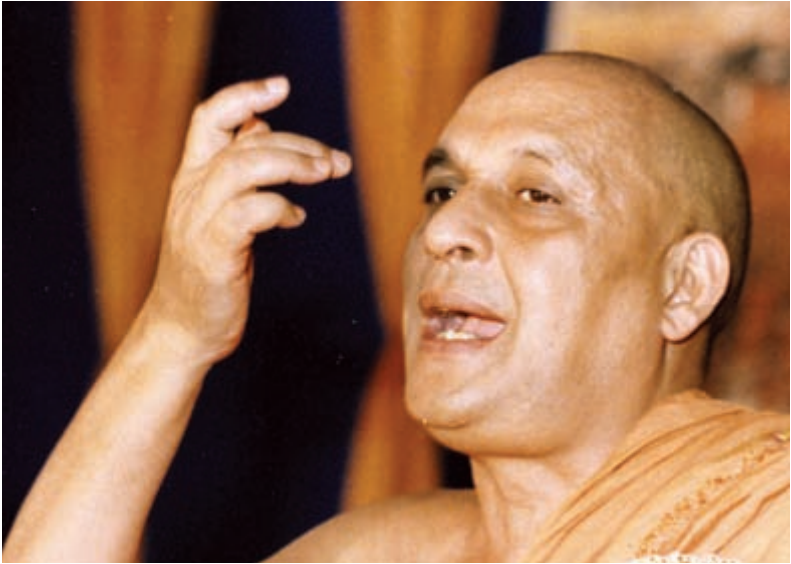
When you are not able to visualize with the eyes closed, then open the eyes again and gaze at the yantra. Go on practising this system of *trataka*, *dhyana* on the yantra, twice a day for ten to fifteen minutes. What will happen? They say that yantra has the capacity and power to penetrate far into the depths of the mind, that area of the mind I was talking about, and manifest or express that mind. Through this practice of yantra meditation, mentally retarded children are helped in the countries whose cultural tradition is not yoga, yet in this country where we have the tradition, we have completely forgotten what these funny geometrical things are.

The second thing they have been talking about is mandala. For us it is a scientific process of conceptualizing the subconscious and unconscious areas of the mind. They even go to the extent of saying (you will be surprised) that concentration on those mandalas can finally stabilize the alpha, beta, theta and delta waves in the brain which have got voltage, frequency, ampere and vibration. It is like electricity. If you can reorganize, reset or restructure the brain wave patterns, then you can manifest a new quality of brain, a new quality of understanding.

### **The pineal gland and a balanced personality**

I am not talking about the relationship between yoga and the mind. I am talking about the relationship between yoga and consciousness, between yoga and man's personality, his *swabhav*, *prakriti* or nature. It is true that yoga postures help everyone and you must practise quite a few of them every day (at least you must practise *surya namaskara*) but yoga does not end with that – with that yoga begins.

Scientists are talking about a very important thing. At the age of seven or eight the pineal gland begins to degenerate in every child and the pituitary is unleashed. It is opened completely, and with its opening the hormones come into the



body unchecked, and imbalances in the personality grow. In order to maintain the health of this gland so that it may survive for as many years as possible, mantra, pranayama and surya upasana were introduced.

I am not going to talk about mantra and surya upasana. I will just speak a few words about pranayama. How does it affect the pineal gland situated at the top of the spinal column in the medulla oblongata? In the religious theme it is known as the 'Third Eye of Lord Shiva'. We call it *ajna chakra*, the monitoring centre, from where the respiratory system, excretory system and all other systems of the body are given orders and monitored. Even paralysis, pineal paralysis, muscular atrophy and other diseases can be directly controlled by training the pineal, ajna chakra. Scientifically we call it the monitoring centre and that can be trained through pranayama.

### **Pranayama and balancing the brain**

Breathe in through the left nostril; breathe out through the right, breathe in through the right; breathe out through the left - a simple thing. Just control the breath for one



second, two, three, four, five. We have seen in our scientific studies that when we breathe in through the left nostril the right hemisphere of the brain is acting – contracting and expanding, contracting and expanding, contracting and expanding. When we breathe through the right nostril, the left hemisphere acts. In this way you are training a very important part of your body – the brain and pineal gland. In the days when pranayama was taught it was with the view that our children would have this pineal gland maintained in a healthy condition for many years so that they would have

a balanced personality: a balance between emotion, thinking and experience.

So, I did not talk to you about yogasanas and exercise because I thought many of you know about them. I wanted to give you this information because I am involved in scientific research into yoga. I still believe that just as you can improve the quality of everything, you can improve the quality of the brain also – it is possible. The brain is not a static substance and if you are an idiot, it does not mean that you have to remain an idiot; or that if you have a bad memory, you should always have a bad memory and nothing can be improved.

In this particular context I ask you to think about yoga but kindly remember that perhaps the only place in India that gives you this explanation about yoga is the Bihar School of Yoga.

– Printed in YOGA, March 1990



# Bal Yoga Diwas

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Today globally, people are celebrating Valentine's Day. Valentine was a saint. He was a compassionate, kind and loving person, who used to look after each and every thing in nature, from bird to animal to poor person to rich person. He was a person who had equal vision for everybody, *atmabhav*, as Sri Swaniji had said. It is in his memory that we celebrate this day as Saint Valentine's Day, so that we too can connect with the feeling of love, compassion and kindness. It is a day when we are able to connect with the purity of our spirit, which is expressed as love for all.

## **Practice and shiksha**

In Munger, we have changed the purpose of Saint Valentine's Day a little bit. We celebrate it as the Children's Yoga Day on 14th February. If it is to experience compassion, beauty and kindness inside, it should also be connected with the yogic principles which can help us attain that experience. The way of teaching yoga to children and the way of teaching yoga to adults are totally different. When we teach yoga to adults, it is for their need. Stress management, back ache, knee ache, head ache, sinus, abdomen, lungs, liver, kidney, joints, anything. People want to learn how to be rid of their pain. That is the yoga taught to grown-ups.

For children the approach of yoga is creative. Learning and imbibing are two different things. Listening and hearing are two different things. One can hear many things, but not listen, however, what one listens to, one understands.

In the same manner, *abhyas*, practice, and *shiksha*, education, are two different things. Practice is for grown-ups, and yoga education is for children. It allows them to bring out the positive traits of their nature. Elders have a hard time; they are

all hard-baked in the fires of the world. They have a difficult time changing the stereotype of their mind. It is hard to be happy, difficult to smile and to let go.

Children fight in one moment and are friends again the next moment. They don't carry the grief, the anger, hatred in them like adults do. They have the resilience of mind which can change instantly from good to bad, from bad to good. Adults cannot change the mind as children can. For an adult bad remains bad and good is somewhere in the background. Good only becomes a philosophy, yet the behaviour remains hard. Children pick up the ability to convert their bad into good. This happens through a simple education in which there is feeling, trust, belief and respect for the other person.

### **From somewhere inside**

People say that I was taught in yoga nidra. I don't remember anything. I have to accept it for elders are saying it, yet as far as I am concerned, I was fast asleep. The shiksha of yoga which I received from my guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, was not in the form of asana, pranayama or other practices. My education started not with A, B, C, D. My education started with pratyahara and dharana.

Yoga nidra is pratyahara. If I was given something, it is in me. I feel that something is there. I don't know what, I have not been able to put my finger on it, but definitely something is there which I can tap into from time to time.

Once, at the age of ten I had to give a lecture to the medical fraternity at the Charing Cross Medical Hospital in London, England. I did not know what to speak on. I went to sleep at night and in my dream I saw myself giving the lecture. When I woke up, I remembered the points which I wrote down and four hours later I gave the lecture to the medical fraternity.

They said, "Swamiji, where have you learnt medicine? Do you know what you were talking about?" Although I had no idea, but to save face, I said, "Well if I have spoken, I should know." The medical officer said, "You have spoken on the

biofeedback system, which we are only developing now.”

From where did that knowledge come? It was not logical, not conscious; it came from the depth of my mind in my dream. When time demands, something happens, something comes. I don't know from where it comes or how it happens, yet it is an indication that there is an aspect inside everyone which is craving for expression, for positive expression, and we have to allow that to happen with yoga.



### **To move forward in life**

The children who come to Ganga Darshan do their little bit of asana, pranayama, but they do it in such a perfect manner, even grown-ups cannot do. They can do headstand without the help of a blanket on the bare floor. That is the level of perfection and mastery which they have. And they do it in a happy, joyful manner.

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal is celebrating its Foundation Day today. The uniqueness of this date is the Bal Yoga Diwas, which is not celebrated anywhere else in the world except in Munger. This is the achievement of the children. Twenty years have gone by and many generations of children have come and gone.

There is a level of feeling and trust. It is that simplicity and innocence, purity of thought and intention which will always make these children move forward in life.

One day people will acknowledge that Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal and Yuva Yoga Mitra Mandal are the best gifts that Munger can give to the world.

*– 14 February 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger*

# Thank You Satyananda Yoga School

Hello! I am one of the sixteen people who are attending a course on yoga in the jail in Milan. The course is directed by a man who comes from outside the prison. His name in the yoga world is Gyanbodha. I would like to explain my situation, which I think is common to many people who have been sent to jail.

I entered jail in January 2015. I was frightened and disoriented. Everything around me, especially the looks of other people caused a deep sense of fear in me. When I was called by the educator and asked what activity I would like to choose among many possibilities, the one I favoured was yoga. I had always heard about it in a positive way, from people who stressed the benefits I could draw from this practice. However, due to my work, I never found time to devote myself to it, so I enrolled in the course.

## **All about breath**

At last the first day of the course came. It was Thursday! I was surprised to find myself sitting at a table with only two other people, one of whom was a prisoner like me. I immediately listened to the teacher with immense pleasure. He spoke about positivity, love, consciousness, giving from time to time little advices, explaining how to prevent and control particular situations through the control of breath. Thus the first lesson ended, leaving in me the desire for another lesson in which I could do something more.

In the following lessons I introduced myself. I explained that I suffer from a state of anxiety and do not know how to get out of it; I do not want to take tranquillizers, but want to find a natural way to suppress my fears, and control my thoughts and worries. I need help! My request was immediately granted,

and I was shown how to breathe in a controlled way, a practice that later, I learned, was called pranayama.

The first teaching is to breathe correctly. This is abdominal breathing, exactly the contrary of what I used to do! I have learnt to listen to my respiration, to breathe slowly, deeply and, I believe, better. The breathing that I used more to balance the left and right brain hemispheres is called nadi shodhana pranayama. I found out about this name by reading the book given by Gyanbodha to the people of my section who attended the course.

Little by little, I realized that my anxieties were gradually disappearing, my thoughts were carefully kept away from the place where I live, and were replaced by the consciousness that no bars can imprison you if you want to be free, even if you are in jail.

### **My life as a mandala**

What Gyanbodha is doing with us is highly appreciated by everybody. With him we have the possibility to learn always new things, even the asanas we are practising more often are relaxing asanas for the back, given that we sleep on uncomfortable beds, and our backs become rather crooked.

Little by little the other prisoners have seen the benefits that I have reaped from this course. I always try to find positivity even where others cannot find it, and so the group has expanded. We are also given the possibility to practise the exercises in the gymnasium.

I want to consider my life here like a mandala, and try to do the most beautiful and meaningful things I can. When my term in jail ends, perhaps I will understand that everything has been temporary.

I conclude with a "Thank you, Gyanbodha, may your work be an encouragement to other people."

*– Fiorenzo, Italy*

# Origin of Ashrams

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



In previous times, when there were less people enclosed in areas in the form of villages and hamlets, there were certain people who were knowledgeable in that society. Where they lived, other people of the community would go for advice, learning, knowing something and for some solution to their questions.

## **A family affair**

Where it took a mystical religious turn, those people became the pandits, the priests, who guided society with their knowledge and understanding.



Where these people had no external, material, social bent of mind, they became the munis who reflected on various thoughts, ideas and perspectives. They brought the first teaching to society. People came for learning, and eventually, started to live with the munis for extended learning. Then, children started to come for learning and to develop traits and skills; and these first organically developed ashrams were known as *gurukuls*, the family of the teacher, the family of the master.

Just as in a school, you see different classes, in the same manner in the gurukul, there would be different classes where the *vidya*, the knowledge, could be imparted according to the receptivity of the student. Gurukuls became the main education centres over a period of time.

They were like the first schools, the first colleges, where sixty-four different social and spiritual disciplines and skills were taught. These subjects were managed and maintained by the people who were known as the seers, the rishis, the knowledgeable, the intellectuals of society, the sadhakas, practitioners, developers of the society. These gurukuls where the rishis lived were not bachelor pads. They were households. The teacher, with the wife and their children were the main group from whom the learning was derived. It was more like a family affair.

### **Ascetics**

Out of this group, another group emerged who were the ascetics. They did not want to live in the human community, and left the human community to follow their own spiritual aspirations. These ascetics, *tapasvis*, were originally known as *yatis*. Possibly the word 'yeti' has come from this word 'yati', a recluse who does not mingle with people and society. They lived in isolation and were self-content and self-contained.

From these *yatis* who were the first level of *tapasvis*, evolved the other groups of renunciates and ascetics in which *sannyasins* were a group. The *sannyasins* followed the path

of asceticism in the past and were well versed in the ancient scriptural lore. Therefore, they also became the holders of knowledge, experimenters, exponents and practitioners of knowledge. The lifestyle of yatis and sannyasins revolved around this understanding and living.

Later on, the ascetics became quite powerful due to their austere lifestyle, intense and keen understanding and perception of nature and the cosmos. They were able to express many of the abstract truths which were previously only in the realm of experience in the form of prose and poetry, in the form of an idea, a thought and a philosophy. From there the darshanas evolved. The various philosophies from Samkhya to Vedanta, pre-Shankaracharya, to Nyaya, Vaisheshika, to the yogas, tantras, Upanishads and Vedas evolved from such keen insight into nature. Many of these groups were rishis and many were ascetics, both.

### **Come to work**

Ashrams were identified as those places where the ascetics, the renunciates lived. Gurukuls were identified as those places where the educationists, the householders lived.

In an ashram where a renunciate was living, people started to come. If somebody practises meditation, some practical organization has to be there for maintaining the place, cooking, purchasing, cleaning. A single person cannot meditate eight hours, ten hours without any support or help.

Where austere sadhanas used to be practised by the tapasvis for days and days, or weeks and weeks, a group of people used to come together to help the ascetic. That became the *aa-shram* – come to work.

The word ashram is something that developed over a period of time naturally as an indication that the people who were helping the tapasvi, were going to an ashram. The tapasvi used to do his tapas for years and years, and his helpers would collect wood, make the fire, cook, clean and organize. In this manner, the ashram developed.

## Living and learning

Later, two different groups of people started to come to the ashram: one group who simply came to live and who were not interested in philosophy, theory or the discipline of the ashram; and the other group who came for the teaching which was their focus, and they were not interested in living.

At Ganga Darshan ashram, there are also two types of people. Everybody here is not a yoga knower, practitioner, or a teacher, and they need not be. They have not come for yoga, they have come for living, and that is perfectly accepted in the ashram.

Living in an ashram does not make anyone a yoga teacher. Not everybody knows yoga. Some people dedicate themselves to yoga, learn, live, develop and propagate yoga. It is one small group.

In the past, sannyasins have come to society and retreated back into isolation. They brought something to society and then they went back to maintain and preserve their knowledge until the next need came. This happens every time in the propagation and development of a *vidya*, knowledge, and understanding. In Munger, Sri Swami Satyananda never spoke on Vedanta or on any other philosophy or theory. He only spoke on yoga: the practical, the scientific, the physical, the psychological, the psychic, the mystical, the spiritual. He spoke on every subject, but in a practical, scientific and clear manner.

That was the mandate he received, and to fulfil that mandate, he established the Bihar School of Yoga. The continuation of that mandate is: yoga as a vocation, as a profession, as a practice and yoga as a sadhana, as a lifestyle and as a culture.

Ashrams are not gurukuls or static centres; they are evolving places following a sequence of growth, development and evolution where the exposure to something can turn into a better connection and a deeper experience.

– 10 January 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger

# We Travel Together



In August 2009, ten women from Bulgaria arrived at Ganga Darshan for a gurukul lifestyle course. Their age varied and they had different professions and experience of yoga. Only little had united them. Everyone had come with their own dreams, ideas and plans for life.

It was my first time in India and in the ashram. My first impression was, "This is my place. I want to live here." Pavitra, another woman, said, "I want to go back to Bulgaria, to roast capsicum, to stock them for winter and to look after my grandchildren."

I was startled. This vision was something which I was not able to understand, still the memory of roasted capsicum was also very dear to me. I grew up with the smell of roasted capsicum, an open fire and autumn. I looked at her and said, "I know a place where this dream may come true."

## **The journey begins**

It was the beginning of our journey together - with the ashram discipline, yoga classes and Swamiji's promise that we may attain dynamic samadhi if we follow strictly all his instructions.

The four months flew by in the blink of an eye and we had no idea how much we had received.

Back in Bulgaria, pure and fresh, we celebrated the first spring together. These women of different ages, different feelings and different talents were no longer that different. There was something invisible but very real which united us: Atmayoga, Durga, Murti, Nadamani, Pavitra, Premantra, Shantirupa, Sitasharan, Vedajyoti and myself. This alliance was not an idea or aim. It was trust, understanding and synchronicity.

With materials in hand, a little creativity and a lot of joy, as learnt in the ashram, we renovated a small flat and converted it into a beautiful yoga studio.

We had meetings, discussions and questions about the matters of life. We were like little kids hidden under the table, searching for the eternal answers of life. We were turning the pages of the ashram books, remembering Swamiji's satsangs and when we were not able to find answers we drew pictures of our world with our own imagination.

The days flew by again like the blink of the eye and a few of us started to pack our suitcases, this time for the three-year sannyasa training, 2012–2014. Five set out and five remained to serve at the home front. The people in the rear provided all that was required for those who left. The sannyasa training was the second chapter of our journey together. This chapter enriched our small team with Premgiri, Shanti Devananda and later on Suryatirth.

On our return to Bulgaria, we opened the third chapter with a new big project – turning an abandoned country house into our spiritual home. When we opened the doors for the first time, we stumbled across cobwebs and dust – insects and years of abandonment had done a really good job! This did not discourage us. Our Accommodation Department began to work hard and everything flowed as if some higher force was doing the work instead of us. Soon everything was clean and tidy and on the stove ashram-type khichari was simmering.



We made one pooja room where we spent unforgettable evenings around a havan fire with the mantras learned at the ashram, the smell of incense and samagri, and the force of agni.

### **A dream come true**

The whole environment changed very quickly. The garden was cleared and in summer we picked the first fruits. Pavitra's dream came true. She began to prepare jams for winter for all of us.

On Guru Poornima, the whole house was decorated with flowers and we sang kirtan under the stars until late at night while Pavitra's granddaughter was sleeping next to us.

This old country house became a place where we not only gathered but also had the opportunity to live what we had learnt in the ashram. Later guests started to come and joined our 'daily ashram routine'. They had to clean the floor without mopping sticks and bring water from the spring. In this simple way, they came to know that yoga is not something one practises twice a week in a yoga studio but a way of life.

Mopping the floor by hand was not just cleaning but the spontaneous practice of crow walking. This exercise was the first introduction to yoga for guests who did not have any real interest in yoga. This practice combined with the instructions to be aware of movement, breath and feeling fascinated them so much that they came again and again.

The eternal question, 'What is the meaning of life?' was answered around the fire with the reply received at the ashram, 'to attain a sattvic mind'. We practised the yamas and niyamas, not as a code of conduct but as a powerful method to change the software of the mind. The SWAN meditation became the main tool in our effort to understand our own behaviour and the responses and reactions of others.

We tried to apply the methods of yoga in our life. We soon discovered that yoga truly worked and our small world became more beautiful and a better place to live in.

*– Sannyasi Dharmajyoti, Bulgaria*

# Simple Living and Spiritual Experience

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



What do you mean when you say 'simple life'? Instead of having five-star food, you have dry roti and dhal. How do you define simple living? Different people have their opinion about it. My observation and experience of various teachers and masters, who have struggled through life to come to a state of realization, has been the striking factor that life is not complicated. Simple living means uncomplicated living, not negation, not rejection, not change of thought, not change of idea, not change of anything.

Spiritual life and the spiritual experience also leads to transcending the complex nature of the mind and connecting to the simple, untainted expression of the spirit. These are the

two words: simple living means uncomplicated living. What makes life complicated? Expectations, desires, ambitions, attachments, immaturity of mind, immaturity of intellect and immaturity of emotions.

The dissipated, distracted, disturbed mind is the complicated mind leading to complicated living. When the complicatedness of the mind subsides, life becomes easier to live, and that is called simple living.

In spirituality, the same thing happens. As you go beyond the gross nature of the mind, by dealing with your shortcomings and strengths, and by cultivating the strengths, you are observing and dealing with your mind. It is a process of personal observation and the drive to change.

That process of self-awareness is spiritual. In this process of self-awareness that we undergo in raja yoga, through pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, we are making our life simple, and our spiritual awareness continues to develop.

Making life uncomplicated is simple living, and giving a clear focus and direction to the mind to develop, evolve and grow is the spiritual experience. They both go together and therefore are synonymous with each other. One cannot have a spiritual experience without simple living, and one cannot live simply without spiritual experience.

Somebody once asked Buddha, "How does one know that one is progressing in spiritual life?" He said, "The indication of that progress is that your desires and dissipations of mind will become less. The desires which connect you to the world and make you chase the mirage of happiness will lessen. When the desires become less, one's involvement and participation with the world will be streamlined. Once life is streamlined and there is clarity, direction and focus, peace enters your life. Life becomes simple, and spiritual awareness develops." This is not only Buddha's answer. It is the answer inherent in all spiritual traditions.

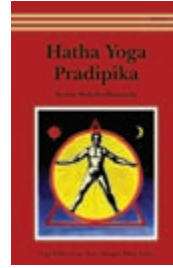
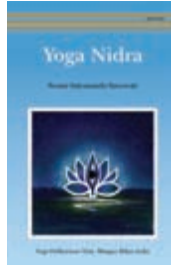
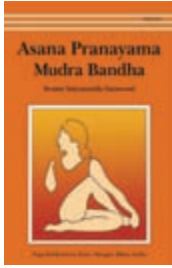
*– 9 October 2009, Ganga Darshan, Munger*



# Yoga Publications Trust

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## Websites

### [www.biharyoga.net](http://www.biharyoga.net)

The official website of Bihar Yoga includes information on: Satyananda Yoga, Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar Yoga Bharati and Yoga Publications Trust catalogues.

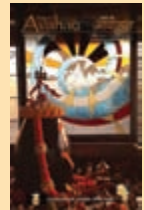
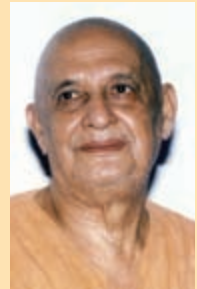


### [www.yogamag.net](http://www.yogamag.net)

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### **Avahan Online**

[www.biharyoga.net/sannyasa-peeth/avahan/](http://www.biharyoga.net/sannyasa-peeth/avahan/) provides online access to *Satya ka Avahan*, the bi-monthly magazine of Sannyasa Peeth, which contains the higher teachings of Sri Swami Sivananda, Sri Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda, along with the programs of Sannyasa Peeth.



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Jul 15-18	Guru Poornima Satsang Program (Hindi/English)
Jul 19	Guru Paduka Poojan (Hindi/English)
Sep 24-30	* Hatha Yoga: Shatkarma Intensive (Hindi/English)
Oct 1-30	* Progressive Yoga Vidya Training (English)
Oct 3-Jan 29	* Yogic Studies Course, 4 months (English)
Oct 22-28	* Raja Yoga: Asana & Pranayama Intensive (Hindi/English)
Nov 5-11	* Kriya Yoga: Preparatory (Hindi/English)
Nov 7-Feb 2017	* Yoga Lifestyle Experience
Dec 19-23	Yoga Chakra Series (Hindi/English)
Dec 25	Swami Satyananda's Birthday
Every Saturday	Mahamrityunjaya Havan
Every Ekadashi	Bhagavad Gita Path
Every Poornima	Sundarkand Path
Every 5th & 6th	Guru Bhakti Yoga
Every 12th	Akhanda Path of Ramacharitanas

\* Indicates training & courses available in English language for Overseas participants

Please be aware that mobile phones are NOT permitted in the ashram.  
Ensure that you do not bring your mobile with you.

**For more information on the above events contact:**

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