

YOGA

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Hari Om

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Editor: Swami Shaktimitrananda Saraswati

Assistant Editor: Swami Yogatirthananda Saraswati

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Plates 1–8: Three generations of hatha yoga vidya



GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

Perform action, O Arjuna. Be steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and being balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga.

—*Bhagavad Gita 2:48*

You should perform actions with a balanced mind in success and failure. Equilibrium is yoga. The attainment of the knowledge of the Self through purity of heart which is obtained by doing actions without expectation of fruits or results is called success. Failure is the non-attainment of knowledge by doing actions with expectations.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

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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 ॥

New Year Message

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



You can make this year what you want it to become. Every year comes like a blank whiteboard with nothing written on it, and it is you who writes on the blank board with a pen. What you write is what is important, not what comes. How you write and what you write is more important than thinking about what you are going to receive.

As a spiritual person, you have to rise beyond the idea 'What am I going to receive?' and you connect with the idea 'What can I be?' If you can be then that is your achievement,

yet if you keep thinking about 'What I can become' or 'What I want to become', you will never be anything.

Cleaning and writing

Begin this New Year with a clean board. It is easy to say that you have a clean board but it is not that easy to actually clean. You can rationalize about it but you cannot change the basic nature or the qualities with which you act and respond to a situation.

By becoming aware you can reduce the number of times things happen. With last year you fell into the pits and traps one hundred times. This year, if you are aware, you can save yourself from fifty. That is fifty percent less. You will still fall the remaining fifty times. However, the gaps between each fall will be bigger as you will be more aware, more responsible and more alert of yourself to achieve the best in your life.

It is the individual who is the important factor. What do you write, how do you write and with what sentiment do you express it? It is only juggling one aspect of the mind, nothing more.

Here is an example: if you write the sentence 'I am nowhere', it is a negation, it is a negative statement. You change the statement of negation into something positive by simply shifting the letter 'w' from 'where' to 'no'. Then from the sentence 'I am nowhere' you have the new sentence 'I am now here'.

Shifting and connecting

This is the shift that has to take place. Only one thing has to shift in the mind, nothing more. What has to shift in the mind is the attitude of how you perceive yourself, your nature, your environment, your people, your place. If that awareness can come you will be connected, and in connection there is an experience of love. In disconnection there is an experience of separation and frustration.

Your positive connection will make you happy. Your restrictive responses will make you unhappy. Decide which dog you will feed this year, the white one or the black one.

The black dog is the tamasic one, the white dog is the sattwic one. You are the owner of these two dogs, you look after them both. Both fight, the black dog and the white dog. Which one will win?

The dog who you feed the most will win for it is stronger, better, bigger. The dog you feed less will be weaker. You are the owner of these two dogs, the positive and the negative, the good and bad, the virtuous and the sinful, the uplifting, the limiting and destructive. Look after both, but encourage the one, who can bring you more happiness, more joy and contentment. Interact with the tamasic dog less and interact with the sattwic dog more.

This has to be your effort this year. You should be aware of what you write on your board, on this clean board which you begin today. Your aspiration should be to know what is being written and to ensure that you write the best story this year.

– 1 January 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger



Happy New Year

On this glorious New Year's Day make a strong resolve to wipe away the old tendencies and bad impressions and to control the senses and the mind. Have you finished your stock taking of last year? How is the balance sheet? What divine positive virtues have you developed? Have you got a balanced mind and equal vision? Or is there a standstill in your sadhana?

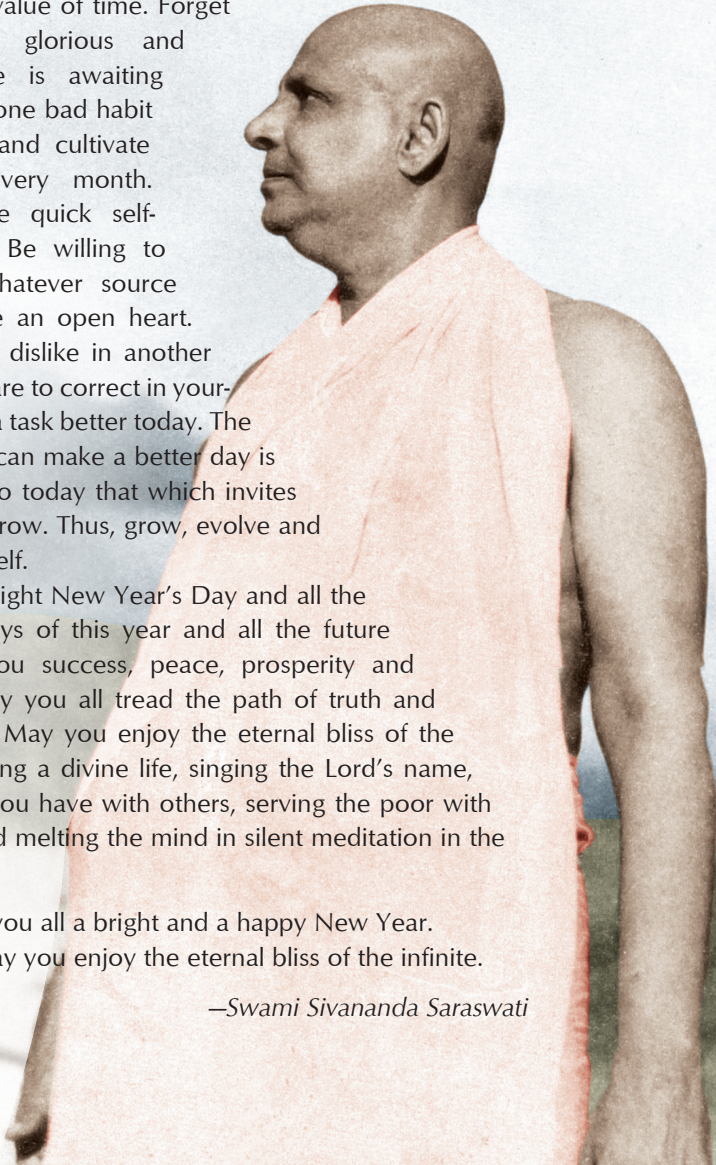
Know the value of time. Forget the past. A glorious and brilliant future is awaiting you. Remove one bad habit every month and cultivate one virtue every month. You will have quick self-improvement. Be willing to learn from whatever source possible. Have an open heart. Whatever you dislike in another person, take care to correct in yourself. Try to do a task better today. The only way you can make a better day is to think and do today that which invites a better tomorrow. Thus, grow, evolve and improve yourself.

May this bright New Year's Day and all the succeeding days of this year and all the future years bring you success, peace, prosperity and happiness. May you all tread the path of truth and righteousness. May you enjoy the eternal bliss of the absolute, leading a divine life, singing the Lord's name, sharing what you have with others, serving the poor with atabhava and melting the mind in silent meditation in the Supreme Self.

I wish you all a bright and a happy New Year.

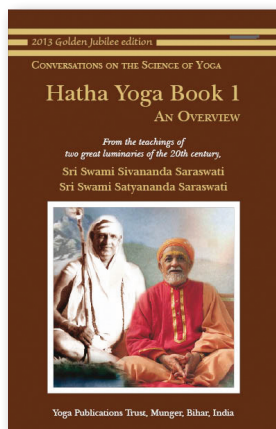
May you enjoy the eternal bliss of the infinite.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati



Evolution of Yoga

From Conversations on the Science of Yoga – Hatha Yoga Book 1:
An Overview



What is the relative importance of the written and oral traditions in the evolution of yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The origin of yoga lies hidden in the mists of pre-history. It was slowly evolved and developed by the ancient sages, not only in India but all over the world. It has, however, been modified to suit regional languages, social ideas and other cultural influences. The essence of yoga was wrapped up in or explained in different symbols, analogies and languages. Some traditions believe that yoga was a divine gift revealed to the ancient sages so that humanity could have the opportunity to realize its divine nature.

Generally the techniques of yoga were passed on from teacher or guru to their disciples by word of mouth. In this way there was a clear understanding of the meaning of the techniques and aims of yoga as the guru, through his personal experience, guided the students along the right path and away from any confusion and misunderstanding. It was only when the various systems of yoga were written down that people began to see contradictions in the teachings. These discrepancies were only superficial, however, and arose through misinterpretation.

The writers of the classical texts cannot be blamed, for they recorded their ideas on yoga as clearly as possible in order to avoid misinterpretation. They expounded their ideas with the minimum amount of words so that people would not lose

themselves by trying to intellectualize about word meanings, or in other cases they clothed their writings in symbolism and analogies. This was done so that only a person prepared and ready for a teaching would be able to understand the symbolism, if necessary with the help of a guru.

Nevertheless, even though these precautions were taken, many misunderstandings arose, mainly among overly verbose and intellectual scholars who did not have the personal experience to support their commentaries. Unfortunately people have listened to the commentators without resorting to the original texts and the advice of people more in touch with the spirit of yoga. The result has been confusion, and as a consequence many well-intentioned people have performed the most bizarre acts in the name of yoga. Some often quoted examples are walking on fire, sitting in the midday sun and torturing the body in a variety of ways, such as standing on one leg in one place for months on end.

The yoga that we now know and which developed in India, was used, at least in its rudimentary form, more than five thousand years ago. In archeological excavations made in the Indus Valley at Harappa and Mohanjodaro, in what is now Pakistan, various statues have been unearthed depicting people practising yoga. They show Lord Shiva and his wife Parvati sitting in asanas and practising meditation. These ruins were once the dwelling places of people who lived in the so-called pre-vedic age. These discoveries are a definite indicator that yoga was practised in India even before the Aryan civilization started to flourish on the Indus subcontinent.

The first books to mention yoga are the ancient Vedas. Though scholars are not positive, it is generally felt that these books were written at least four thousand five hundred years ago. They don't give any specific yoga practices but generally allude to yoga in symbolic form. The seers of the Vedas clearly recognized that there existed a dynamic life principle which they called *vayu*, prana. They also clearly saw that this prana was closely related to breathing. The Vedas also briefly mention

the existence of *chakras*, pranic centres, within but not of the physical body. The science of sound was clearly recognized for they mention various mantras that can be used for the attainment of both material goals as well as spiritual aims.

Therefore, it can be said that the concept of yoga was known in vedic times in one form or another, as it had been for many thousands of years before. In all probability, however, the system of yoga was not properly formulated before or during the time of the recording of the Vedas. The experiences of yoga were known but the science of yoga had yet to be systematized.

From the Upanishads until today

With the advent of the Brahmanas and the Upanishads we begin to see yoga take shape and assume the form that it has today, and it is the Upanishads which put yoga on a firmer foundation. The Sanskrit word *upanishad* can be interpreted to mean 'to sit down near and receive teachings from a master', and also as 'secret teaching'. There are believed to have been about two hundred different Upanishads. The oldest was written somewhere around 600 BC and the most recent as late as the fifteenth century AD.

Many of the Upanishads devote much space to describing prana and its implications. They describe the psychic pathways which exist within and through which prana flows, including the major nadis, ida, pingala and sushumna. The concept of kundalini in the form of a serpent power within the body is also indicated. One of the so-called minor Upanishads, the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad*, covers a wide range of practical aspects of yoga ranging from asanas and pranayamas to psychic centres and self-realization. The other Upanishads are also a source of many practical and theoretical principles of yoga.

The Upanishads, however, lack a systematic treatment and summary of the paths of yoga. They are a conglomeration of profound ideas mixed with various other kinds of information. It can be said that the Upanishads are intended more to inspire than to instruct. During the era of the writing of the



Upanishads, right up until quite recently, instructions were always imparted personally by a guru. The writers knew this, so detailed techniques were not recorded. This was left to the discretion of the guru and to later yogic texts.

At the same time as the spiritual and yogic literature was unfolding, yoga was being refined and developed by its practitioners and gurus, who then passed on their teachings by word of mouth. In fact, it is certainly these people who evolved and improvised yoga practices by their personal experience in an endeavour to achieve the best results. All the texts can do is reflect current and prevalent ideas.

Since the teachings of yoga were generally passed on orally, its development was haphazard. Different teachers taught different methods so that before it was systematized, yoga was a collection of varied and unrelated techniques, riddled with all types of personal beliefs and superstitions. It is here that the writers of the classical texts served their greatest purpose by bringing all these different ideas together and intergrating them. One of the most successful of these writers was Sage Patanjali who wrote the text called the *Yoga Sutras* some time before the birth of Christ. This is still regarded as the classical and authoritative book on raja yoga.

Large numbers of hatha yoga texts were written throughout the ages. The most well known of these are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Shiva Samhita* and the *Gheranda Samhita*. These texts give details on asanas, pranayamas and other hatha yoga practices, together with techniques for performing mudras and bandhas. All the books, however, emphasize that the hatha yoga practices are not specifically aimed at making the body healthy. They are a means to higher ideals which first demand a healthy body.

There are many sages and yogis who have contributed to the growth of yoga, both in ancient and in modern times. The list is endless. The number of books on yoga runs into the thousands and the list grows with every year that passes. For personal growth through yoga, however, it is not necessary to read any of these books, as yoga is one hundred percent practice. The techniques are widely available in modern books on yoga, in ashrams and yoga schools and can be learnt from a competent guru which is the best way.



Introducing Hatha Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Hatha yoga is considered to be the first yoga, and the original work on it is *Shiva Samhita*. It is the first book written on hatha yoga and it contains the teachings given by Shiva, the originator of yogas. He gave these teachings to Parvati, his wife and disciple.

The story goes that before beginning his discourse, Shiva told Parvati to keep acknowledging that she had understood what she was hearing, to let him know whether she was following the satsang or not. Just as I say to you that if you have understood, say 'Yes'.

Then Shiva closed his eyes and started to speak on yoga, and Parvati was listening. Now you know the human nature, if you focus too hard the mind becomes introverted, there is drowsiness and sometimes you fall asleep. Parvati went to sleep. However, Shiva continued, as he kept hearing, "Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes." At the end when he opened his eyes, he saw Parvati in yoga nidra, snoring away. He wondered who then was acknowledging his teaching all through, so he looked around and saw a tiny fish.

When gods speak, they speak in all languages. You can understand God in English, I can understand God in Hindi or Sanskrit, somebody else can understand God in their own language. Therefore when Shiva was speaking, even the fish was able to understand him.

As the fish had listened to all the instructions on yoga, Shiva gave it a boon: "Become the first propagator of yoga in human society." The fish became Matsyendranath, the first hatha yogi who propagated yoga. Credit goes to Matsyendranath for bringing the teachings of hatha yoga to our level. He was the first human visionary, the first human disciple who understood what hatha yoga was.

The tradition which Matsyendranath started, the Natha sampradaya, still carries on today. The Nathas are considered to be adept hatha yogis. They don't have many ashrams, yet they number in thousands. They don't stay in any one place; they are constantly travelling, and diligently practising their hatha yoga. They are masters in hatha yoga.

Development of different schools

From the first tradition of hatha yoga evolved different branches and teachers, who in different ages focused on the prevalent need of human society and propagated the subject accordingly. When Swatmarama was propagating hatha yoga, he was teaching in villages and towns, to people in active social life, so his approach was different.

Gheranda, on the other hand, was teaching not in society but to students who came to his ashram and had a spiritual bent of mind. Therefore, his focus was more on using hatha yoga for spiritual gain, whereas Swatmarama's purpose lay in helping people manage their difficulties.

There is also a third school of hatha yoga, propagated by Sage Dattatreya, and that is a very tough school. There are other schools not as commonly known as Swatmarama's or Gheranda's. For example, there is another major treatise on hatha yoga, *Hatharatnavali*, which gives a detailed exposition on the subject.

When we look at this whole picture, it becomes clear that hatha yoga is not a subject dealing only with the physical aspect of the body. It is a complete subject in itself with progressive levels.

Progressive levels

The term 'progressive' indicates a specific yogic sequence. From the yogic perspective, within this physical body there are four other bodies; we are the owners of five bodies. Just as when you open up a Russian doll, inside there is another doll; you open that up and inside there is another doll, and



so on. The first one is big and the rest are each smaller. Our body is like that.

The outer body is known as *annamaya kosha*, the body made up of matter. *Kosha* means dimension and *maya* means filled with; therefore, 'annamaya' kosha means dimension filled with *anna* or matter. The inner body is known as *manomaya kosha*, the body of mind, the mental dimension. Then there is *pranamaya kosha*, the energy dimension; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the consciousness dimension - *vijnana* means specific knowledge of the self or consciousness; and *anandamaya kosha*, the bliss dimension - *ananda* or bliss arising out of spiritual realization. These are the five bodies, koshas, all contained within each other.

When all the koshas work at their optimum positive level that is perfection of hatha yoga. When your body is functioning optimally, there is good health and the senses are all fired-up and active, there is a sense of physical vitality, lightness, euphoria and dynamism. When the mind is happy, there is a feeling of buoyancy, contentment, positivity, optimism; nothing appears dark, everything is seen as light and bright. This optimum condition of body and mind is the perfection of hatha yoga.

Blocks in koshas

Blocks are formed at the five levels of koshas naturally and unconsciously due to lifestyle and circumstances. For

example, when you are under stress, certain areas of the body become affected, three regions in particular. One, the neck region, where the neck and the shoulders become tight; two, the abdominal region, where the muscles of the abdomen become tight, when you pull the abdomen in, in the 'fight or flight mechanism'; three, the perineum where you pull in the perineum whenever there is stress.

A normal experience of stress can unconsciously create muscular stiffness and blocks that reduce circulation of blood and prana. Your natural pattern of sleep and hunger can become disturbed. Sometimes when you are mentally and emotionally burnt-out you cannot sleep; the stress affects the relaxation pattern. The hunger is also affected, some people cannot eat and some people overeat under stress.

Just as there are blocks of the body, there are blocks of prana, which are also three. The pranic block is perceived in the *granthis* or knots that are created in the pranic body unconsciously and naturally. These blocks have to be cleared for the prana to flow. Once the prana begins to flow, the behaviour of the mind changes and there is a sense of euphoria and happiness. Thus in yoga we work through the five bodies to attain an optimum state of being.

Clearing the koshas

Hatha yoga takes you from annamaya to pranamaya to manomaya. Raja yoga will take you from manomaya to vijnanamaya, and kriya yoga will take you from vijnanamaya to anandamaya. Therefore, Sri Swamiji has given us these three yogas as the progression in yogic life.

You start with hatha yoga and rectify all the imbalances and blocks of annamaya kosha or the body, pranamaya kosha or the energy, manomaya kosha or the dissipated mind. Then you move into raja yoga and work with manomaya kosha. The dissipated mind is now focused, channelled and guided. You move into dharana and dhyana, leading to a balance in the manomaya and vijnanamaya experience. Then in kriya yoga

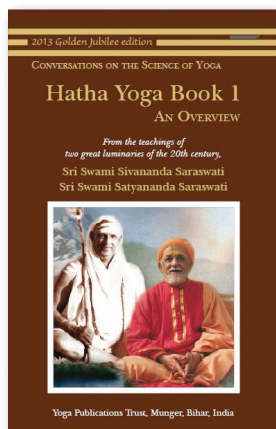
dhyana is intensified, leading to the experience of anandamaya, the spiritual dimension. In this way, these three yogas indicate Sri Swami Satyananda's progressive teaching in yoga.

*– 24 September 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger,
Hatha Yoga Training – Module 1(Extract)*



Purpose of Hatha Yoga

From Conversations on the Science of Yoga – Hatha Yoga Book 1:
An Overview



What effect does hatha yoga have on the body and mind?

Swami Sivananda: By the process of hatha yoga the yogi attains a perfect physical body. *Bala vajrasam-hanana kaya sampat* – “The perfection of the body consists in beauty, grace, strength and adamant hardness.” The power to bear extreme cold and heat, the power to live without water and food and other powers come under the category of *kaya sampat*, perfection of the body.

Since the body of the hatha yogi is perfect and firm, his mind is also firm and one-pointed. By practising dharana and dhyana he reaches the highest rung in the yogic ladder and attains immortality through yogic samadhi. The yogi who has reached the highest stage, will have the eight major and all the minor siddhis. This is stated in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:8):

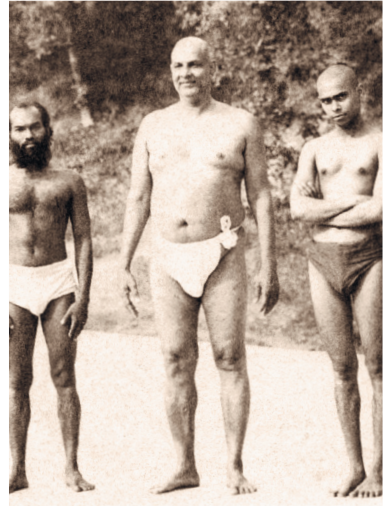
*Aadinaathoditam divyamashtaishvaryapradaayakam;
Vallabham sarvasiddhaanaam durlabham marutaamapi.*

Adinath said the mudras and bandhas are the bestowers of the eight divine powers. They are held in high esteem by all the siddhas and are difficult for even the gods to attain.

I have seen many Vedantins who are in a sickly condition with a very poor physique. A Vedantin is afraid to do asanas and pranayamas on the grounds that their practice will intensify body awareness, and adversely affect the practice of vairagya. Although the two paths of hatha yoga and Vedanta

are different, a Vedantin can harmoniously use pranayamas and asanas to great advantage.

The body is closely related to the mind. A weak, sickly body also means a weak mind. This body is a horse to take one to the goal. The body may be inert and useless but it is an important instrument for self-realization. So it must be kept clean, strong and healthy. The Vedantin who practises a little hatha yoga to keep his body and mind healthy and strong is capable of doing very good sadhana and reaching the goal of life quickly.



Does physical weakness limit one's spiritual potential?

Swami Sivananda: Unfortunately, yoga is more or less regarded as a form of physical culture divested of all its psychological and spiritual significance. This is due to an exaggerated emphasis on the yoga asanas. Hatha yoga practices do form a preliminary background for progress in yoga, but they are not absolutely indispensable for yoga sadhana. While a strong body is an asset, a weak body is not always a handicap. There are instances in the history of yoga where the ultimate has been achieved while dispensing with the practices of hatha yoga. Nevertheless, I believe that everybody should do asanas regularly. One of the aims of this yoga movement is to popularize the use and the benefits of asana in the daily life of men, women and children. *Hatharatnavali* (1:22), states:

*Yuva bhavati vriddho vaa vyaadhito durbalo'pi vaa;
Abhyaasaatsiddhimaapnoti sarvayogeshvatandritah.*

He who untiringly practises yoga in all its aspects attains success even if he is young, old, diseased or weak.

Yoga Research on Practices

From the teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati



We have been practising different spiritual techniques for centuries, but from time to time the intellectuals discouraged us from doing it. They made up so many 'cock and bull' stories, and then they dissipated our interest.

In recent times scientists have done some very commendable work and their investigations have at least verified scientifically that certain practices produce positive changes in the body and mind, nervous system and behaviour.

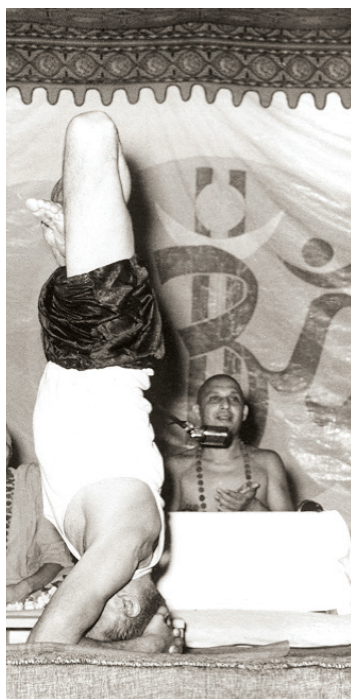
Change of acceptance

About thirty years back, if you told someone who was suffering from blood pressure to sit down and practise meditation, he would have said you were crazy. Now those instruments that you are talking about like bio-feedback have clearly indicated that, when the practice of meditation goes deeper and deeper, the alpha patterns appear in the brain. As the alpha patterns dominate in the brain, the pressure is

released from the heart, and there is a great change in the oxygen consumption of the system. Nowadays if anyone is suffering from high blood pressure and I tell him to meditate, and if his physician knows, the patient will not object.

Thirty years back if you were asked to practise *sirshasana*, the headstand pose, many people would have said, "Don't do that, you'll go crazy." There was a lot of controversy about the headstand pose. Those who have followed the scientific researches, their minds are now clear.

About thirteen years ago, a team of scientist conducted some research into the effect of *sirshasana*, the physiological effect of *sirshasana*. This research was conducted not by one man, but by a team. They had about one hundred practitioners of different age groups, and the experiment was continued over a period of six months. What were the results? The same that were given in the yoga book, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. The modern scientific instruments have not glorified yoga, but they have tended to dispel the ignorance in the minds of many people about yoga.



Discovering the right asana

If anyone is suffering from a slipped disc or from sciatica, I teach him just three asanas: *bhujangasana*, *shalabhasana*, *makarasana*, some pranayama and simple *bhastrika*. It will take a maximum of one week for him to recover even if he has been suffering for years. How did I come to this conclusion? I will tell you. It was by chance that I was visiting a lawyer in Calcutta,



and that lawyer was also very much interested in yoga. At his home that day were a few American people. They had a number of instruments with them, electro-encephalogram, electro-cardiogram, and machines for measuring skin resistance, portable versions of the laboratory models.

They were measuring the responses of each other, but not in a particularly scientific way. One man was tested for muscular tension. He sat down in the same posture that we

are in now, and the instruments were connected to him. The muscles showed a high rate of tension. Then he was asked to practise bhujangasana. As soon as he lay down on his stomach, the machine indicated that the tension was falling. When he actually went into bhujangasana, all his back muscles were on zero, completely relaxed, right up to the sacral system. There was not one part with tension. The same results showed in shalabhasana and makarasana. Then it came to me that it would be the best practice for slipped disc and sciatica.

Looking for kundalini

The scientific instruments have been revealing to us the potentialities of yoga practices. Now many people talk about kundalini. About ten years back, one doctor asked me, "Have you seen kundalini?" I asked him, "Did you see it?" He said that he had dissected a whole body and he did not see it. I told him, "What do you mean by it?" He said there cannot be a kundalini shakti, because he did not see it in his dissections. I only asked him one question. I said, "While dissecting the brain did you find a thought?" The doctor had no answer.

There is a doctor in Japan, a very good friend, Dr Hiroshi Motoyama. He is a doctor of medicine and he has improvised an apparatus which can register the impulses in the chakras. He has a long-size, big machine. If you are six feet, he puts the machine at six feet. If you are short and Japanese he puts the machine at small. He exactly fits those sections at the chakras, mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, and monitors them.

Then he will ask you to practise bhastrika pranayama, for example, or anything else. When you are practising bhastrika, take the breath in, practise jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha, moola bandha and then you see what is happening through the chakras. It is of course no kundalini awakening. It is the chakra becoming active. After this investigation has come out, many medical doctors are keeping quiet, because now the kundalini shakti has been accepted as a force.

The monitoring system

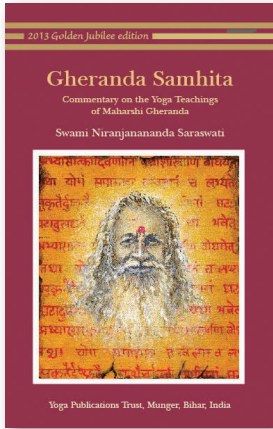
In the last thirteen, no in the last thirty-one years, more than one thousand researches on meditation have been conducted by scientists all over the world. They have conducted fantastic research on kundalini yoga, zen and on other forms of meditation. We have many such apparatus which we can use to explain the effects of different yogic practices on the body and mind.

A few years back in India a swami stopped his heart and went underground for seven days. Indian doctors, non-Indian doctors and doctors from overseas came to investigate. They declared him clinically dead, but after ten days he came out.

Now what did that prove? It proves that even after the heart attack, if you know yoga you can survive it. The cardiac monitoring system is in the brain and not in the heart. The heart attack takes place not because your heart has failed, but because the monitoring system has failed to regulate and coordinate. If you know how to manipulate that monitoring system, the heart attack can be avoided.

Purpose of Shatkarmas

From *Gheranda Samhita*, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Through the shatkarmas, harmonization of ida and pingala, the two main flows of prana, is established, resulting in physical and mental purity and balance. The shatkarmas also balance *vata*, wind, *pitta*, bile, and *kapha*, mucus, the three disorders created in the body. According to ayurveda and hatha yoga, any imbalance in these three disorders gives rise to disease. The shatkarmas are also utilized before pranayama and other higher practices

of yoga so that the body becomes free from disease and does not create any obstacles on the spiritual path.

These powerful practices should never be undertaken just by reading about them in a book or by learning from inexperienced people. According to the tradition, a person has the right to teach others only after being instructed by the guru. It is essential that these instructions are given personally, including the knowledge of when and how the practices are to be done, according to the needs of the individual. *Gheranda Samhita* (Chapter 1, Verse 12):

*Dhautirovastistathaa netih laulikee traatakam tathaa;
Kapaalabhaatishchaitaani shatkarmaani samaacharet.*

Performing the shatkarmas: dhauti, basti, neti, lauliki, trataka and kapalbhati, is essential.

In this verse, the six types of cleansing practices are listed: 1. dhauti, 2. basti, 3. neti, 4. lauliki (also called nauli), 5. trataka and 6. kapalbhati. The shatkarmas purify the body. Their

purpose, however, is not only physical purification, but inner purification as well. When the body is purified, internal disorders are removed and good health is achieved. Without such purification the body will not be ready for the higher practices of yoga.

After purification a human being lives longer on this earth. In the Upanishads and Vedas it states in a number of places that human beings live for a hundred years, *jeevema sharadam shatam*. This is not only the thinking of the Vedas, Upanishads or ancient philosophies, it is the truth. If a human being remains healthy and free from disease, living for a hundred years or more is natural. Accurate genetic copying of the cells can continue for that length of time if the programming is not disrupted by impurities or imbalances.



Trataka

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Trataka means to gaze, and it is an important practice of pratyahara. It is the last practice of pratyahara, which leads to dharana.

In *trataka* the mind is fixed right from the word 'go' on an object, a visual object. In your practice of yoga nidra, you go through a gradual introversion. From body awareness you move to sound awareness, then to rotation of consciousness through body parts, breath awareness, and so on. You gradually go deeper, withdrawing the mind from its external associations and connections. In *trataka* it is one hit, you are









there, you have to be there, for there is no gradual movement to concentration. You have to have that state of concentration right from the word 'go'.

Sage Gorakhnath's mastery

Trataka involves sight, and sight is connected to ajna chakra. There is a story that Sage Gorakhnath, one of the main propagators of hatha yoga, perfected hatha yoga spontaneously through trataka.

Once he was sick and bedridden. On the wall of his room was hanging an earthen lantern with a burning wick, as it used to be in the olden days. In the dark room the lamp would be burning continuously, and lying on the bed he would gaze at the lamp. By doing this he perfected trataka. While he was sick, he watched the flame and perfected his trataka. That perfection bestowed certain special abilities upon him, and then his guru Matsyendranath came and took him as his disciple.

Different methods of trataka

Trataka is a visual practice and it uses sight to bring about a state of concentration. It uses vision to still the dissipations of the mind, and therein lies its beauty.

There are many methods of practising trataka and each brings about a different experience. For therapy purposes the method is different, for achieving mental concentration the method is different, for psychic experience the method is again different. Trataka is not one practice, though usually only one method is taught as that is the safest. If the other methods were taught, you could have experiences that you may not be able to manage. Remember, this is not a subject of curiosity or of bravado that you can manage it; you have to work from where you are and gradually go up.

It is believed that trataka opens up the human psyche. It activates ajna chakra, due to which you begin to foresee things; you become the seer of events. That, however, is the final attainment of trataka. In the primary class of trataka,

it is practised for two purposes: therapy of the eyes and concentration. At the Bihar School of Yoga, *trataka* has not been taught for psychic discovery or awakening.

In terms of therapy, the practice improves the eyesight. In fact, whenever you feel that your vision is deteriorating, perhaps at the age of forty or forty-five, practise *trataka*. When you begin to have a little blurriness in the vision and notice that you need to hold the paper away from yourself, at that time if you practise *trataka* regularly for six months your eyesight will get better. After some time, when you again notice a slight blurriness and there is an urge to move the paper away, again practise *trataka* for fifteen days. That is how *trataka* is used for therapy purposes.

For the purpose of concentration, to stop the dissipation of mind and improve concentration, *trataka* on a candle flame is practised at night. That is the technique used in the Bihar Yoga system more than any other. Rather than trying to practise and teach twenty different variations of *trataka*, which will not be used properly, this single practice helps improve the eyesight and concentration.

Swami Satyananda was the first person to use this particular technique while everybody else was doing *trataka* on yantras, symbols and black dots. Swami Satyananda said, "No, they may be practices of hatha yoga but they are irrelevant to the needs of today. What is relevant in relation to physical and mental health is what we are going to use." Thus, in the Bihar Yoga system, *trataka* using a candle flame is the style that Sri Swamiji introduced.

Stages of *trataka*

There are four stages of *trataka*. First is *bahir trataka* or external *trataka*. This uses an external object on which the vision is fixed; one has to look at it without flickering the eyelids. That is the rule of *trataka*: while you are looking at something you cannot flicker the eyelids. The moment you have the urge to blink or move the eyes for any other reason, you have to stop



the external gazing, close the eyes, look at the after-image, and remain with the eyes closed until that inner image disappears.

Initially, when you are not used to the practice, the nerves and the muscles get tired quickly and there is a strong urge to close the eyes, and when you close them tears begin to flow. The tear ducts become activated due to the pressure exerted on them by steady gazing, and that is a good sign, as the eyes are being lubricated. This is known as *bahir trataka*.

The second stage is *antar trataka*, internal trataka, and here a symbol is used. For example, at the beginning of a class during Shanti Path you are asked to visualize a candle flame at the eyebrow centre. That is the beginning of *antar trataka*, where you are recreating the image of a flame in your mind. You have to recreate the flame as a 3D image: the colours, the height, the width, all have to be seen. In *antar trataka*, the effort is to actualize the form that you visualize or think of.

Then the third stage of trataka, after *bahir* and *antar trataka*, is *shoonya drishti*. *Shoonya drishti* means gazing into nothingness, into void. How this is practised will become clear if you recall the practice of *antar mouna*. You would have

noticed that in antar mouna when you are asked to become aware of your thoughts, there are no thoughts, you find that you cannot think. That is because the moment you begin to observe something, that activity stops. The moment you move your mind away, again the thoughts begin to come. That applies to trataka as well.

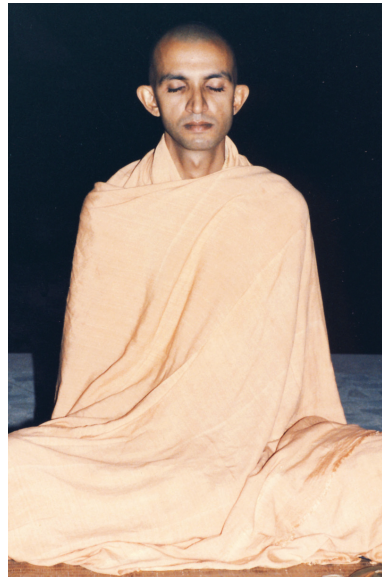
Vision is considered to be one of the major causes of dissipation in the brain. You receive information through all the senses, whether touch, smell, taste or sound, but the volume of information received through the eyes is much more than all the other four senses put together. Out of the two billion bytes of information that your brain receives every second, maybe sixty percent is vision-related, ten percent is hearing, ten is touching, ten is smelling and ten is tasting. Therefore, it is the vision that always creates mental disturbance, and in trataka the vision is being focused.

If you close your eyes and remain with the eyes closed for five minutes, your brainwaves will change. They will become alpha waves. Then, when you open your eyes and reconnect with the world, the brainwaves will again change instantly, as the shapes, forms and colours are being again recognized and absorbed. At that moment beta waves will predominate.

In bahir trataka you are focusing your *jnanendriya*, the physical organ of the eyes, on an object, and with that the agitations connected with sight stop. The brain becomes less active, as the influx of information has reduced. When you practise antar trataka, there is disconnection from the outside influx and you are self-contained. You don't move out of yourself into what is outside. With the intensity of concentration, all chatter is forgotten and you come to a state of shoonya, nothingness, void. The mind becomes absolutely still, not a single thought comes. Even if you try to think, you will not be able to, you won't know where to pick a thought from. It is a condition of absolute void.

The fourth stage of trataka is *chaitanya trataka* or continuous trataka. It refers to one's ability to remain focused at all times.

Once I said to Sri Swamiji that it will be nice to have an ashram in the mountains, in the Himalayas. He looked at me and said, "The idea is good but remember the purpose. If you are thinking of peace, then you won't find peace in the Himalayas if your mind is not at peace. If your mind is at peace then even in a place like Munger you won't hear a single sound, as you won't be distracted by what is around. You will be one with the experience of peace."



That is chaitanya trataka, where the focus and the sharpness of the mind is so intense that there is no deviation of attention or awareness. Right now your awareness can fluctuate at any moment. A big bang behind will make everybody turn around and question, 'What was that noise?' In chaitanya trataka, when you are maintaining the state of trataka continuously, you can be in the middle of a battlefield and remain as peaceful as Buddha.

One who is able to maintain equipoise in all the critical conditions of life practises chaitanya trataka. One who enters the state of samadhi experiences shoonya drishti. One who becomes established in pratyahara and dharana experiences antar trataka. One who learns about disassociation and disconnection from the external influences performs bahir trataka.

Benefits of trataka

The benefits of trataka became clear during an incident. Once I was giving yoga classes to a group of violent prisoners accorded maximum security in San Francisco, USA. There

were about fifty of them in the room. Before I went into the class, the warden said to me, "They have difficulty sleeping at night. Can anything in yoga make them sleep better?" I said, "Let me think about it."

While giving the class, an idea came, 'Why not make them do trataka in their cells at night?' So I said to them, "Would you like to try one yogic experiment tonight? It is something you can do in the quiet of your own cell." They said, "Sure." I asked the warden if he could organize candles for them. He said, "Well, swami, there are safety issues. They may burn anything." I said, "Let us try for one day. If need be, you can put a guard in front of every cell to see that nobody is burning anything." In this way, we tried trataka.

My instructions were being boomed through the speaker system. I was not watching them, but I was able to see them on the CCTV screen. I led them through the practice of trataka for half an hour, and then we finished. I returned to the guesthouse with the warden.

About twenty minutes later as I was having a cup of tea with him, he received a phone call: "All the people who have done that funny eye exercise are sleeping." They slept like babies that night, and the next day they were late risers. This incident left an impression and later when other people said to me, "Swamiji, we cannot sleep at night," I asked them to practise trataka, and it worked.

The reason trataka helps in sleep is that you experience a very deep relaxation in the practice. Not just that, when you wake up the next morning the freshness and relaxation that you experience in the body is unique. Trataka rejuvenates the whole mind by disconnecting it from its sources of distraction. That is the trade secret of trataka.

*– 27 September 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger,
Hatha Yoga Training – Module 1 (Extract)*

Yoga and the Eyes



In the Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga system, eye exercises are taught for good reason as the eyes play a major role in movement. The movement of each eyeball is controlled by six eye muscles. Of all the senses, the eyes provide the most sensory information to the brain. Through the eyes one becomes aware of the environment.

There is a strong link between the eye and neck muscles. When one looks to one side, the head, in fact the whole body, prepares itself to move in that direction. One can experience that connection by placing the palm of one hand on the neck region. Keeping the head still while moving the eyes from side to side as well as up and down, one can use the feedback from the palm of the hand to sense how the neck muscles respond to the movement of the eyes.

Correct posture

One can practise moving the eyes independently from the head. This is particularly useful when performing daily activities such as using digital devices – smart phones, laptops and computers – where one tends to look down and the whole body tends to go into a stooped flexion pattern. As a result one can lose the support of the sitting bones and the breathing becomes more shallow as the diaphragm muscle has less space to expand.

In order for the eyes to move independently the head should ideally move from the top two vertebrae of the spine, C1 and C2, with the lower regions of the neck remaining passive. Two requirements are necessary to make this possible. The first one is finding a dynamic skeletal support while sitting. From the side the pelvis looks like a triangle pointing down. Finding the support on the pointed parts of the pelvis at the bottom of the pelvis (the sitting bones) allows one to sit upright with ease. Then the tail bone (the tip of the coccyx) is pointed back upwards, accentuating the forward slant of the pelvis. This establishes stability in the natural forward-pointing curve in the lower back ensuring an upright position of the spine, back and head, with minimum muscular effort.

The second aspect is that the jaw can move freely. The jaw connects to the skull in the region of the ears. Loosening the jaw by practising the roaring lion pose enhances the capacity of the head to move freely. This allows the head to sit balanced

on top of the neck so that the torso can remain in an upright position while the eyes look freely in any direction. When one moves the head with the lower part of the neck the eyes tend to lock. When the eyeballs are fixed within the eye sockets, the ability to move freely is lost.

Eyes and asana

The eyes can also be used to lead one into an asana as the brain organizes movements in patterns rather than as singular muscular activity. Using the eyes consciously one can engage the body in an asana. This has the advantage that the demand, both on a muscular and skeletal level, is more evenly distributed over the whole body. The thoracic spine, where the ribs are attached, is invited to become more active. Areas like the neck and lower back which are often overused have a chance to recover and heal.

One can also use the eyes to tone the muscles once one is established in a twisting asana, either standing or sitting, by keeping the head and torso still while moving the eyes slowly in the opposite direction. When one looks to one side the neck muscles prepare the head to turn to that side. Eye and neck muscles move in the same direction in a coordinated manner. By moving the eyes in the opposite direction to the head movement, the neck muscles have to work harder. In the process the neck muscles are toned and movements become more fluid and efficient.

The brain learns by recognizing differences and relationships. Moving the eyes and head in opposite directions requires higher organization and attention. Unusual and unfamiliar, the brain becomes aware of the strong influence the eyes have on movement. When the eyes and head move again in the same direction one will find that the quality and range of movement has improved and increased.

Looking straight ahead, one can keep a relaxed focus on the horizon while moving the head from side to side or up and down. The same can be done by lying on the back, looking



straight up to the ceiling while the head is turning from side to side. This has the advantage that the brain receives additional feedback through the contact with the floor.

The eyes also play a major role in maintaining balance. One can experience this by establishing oneself in a balancing asana. When the eyes are closed, one relies more on the joint receptors to maintain balance. The joint receptors give information about where one is in space as well as the direction and speed of movement. The brain uses the periphery of the visual field to

orientate and maintain balance. Due to modern lifestyle and the use of digital devices people tend to use only the central part of the visual field. As a result the brain is deprived of the visual information coming from the peripheral field that is essential to maintain balance.

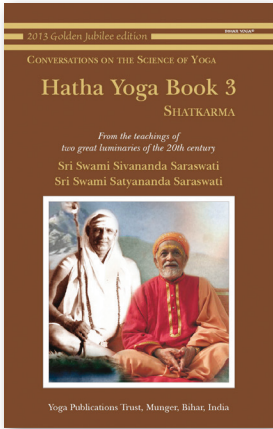
One can practise shifting from focused to peripheral vision by extending the arms with the thumbs pointing up. Slowly moving the hands and arms apart and back together and following the movement of the thumbs provides an opportunity for the eyes to re-establish an awareness of the peripheral visual field.

Consciously using the eyes in the various asanas can bring more ease and comfort, thus increasing the range of movement and the ability to relax into a pose.

– Sannyasi Prabhavananda, *New Zealand*

Body and Mind

From Conversations on the Science of Yoga – Hatha Yoga Book 3: Shatkarma



How can stress be managed by lifestyle?

Swami Sivananda: If there is mental fatigue in students due to too much strain and study, if there is mental fatigue in merchants on account of business worries, if there is fatigue in officers on account of overwork, they should take proper rest at once. They should go to the hills or the seaside for a change. They should do pranayama and take a light, wholesome, nutritious

diet. They should do japa and kirtan vigorously and practise easy asanas.

Why does hatha yoga recommend a regulated and moderate lifestyle?

Swami Sivananda: Physical health is an important condition of mental health. Strain of any organ, excessive fatigue and mental strain should be avoided. One's life must be well regulated and disciplined. *Samyama*, restraint, must be practised in all things. Excess of any kind should be avoided. Stick to the happy, golden medium. Rest is necessary. Yogi Swatmarama advises such restraint in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:15):

*Atyaahaarah prayaasshva prajalpo niyamagrahah;
Janasangashcha laulyam cha shadbhiryogo vinashyati.*

Overeating, exertion, talkativeness, adhering to rules, being in the company of common people and unsteadiness (wavering mind) are the six (causes) which destroy yoga.



How do the conditions of the body and mind affect each other?

Swami Sivananda: The mind is intimately connected with the body. The mind acts upon the body and the body reacts upon the mind. The mind influences the body – a pure, healthy mind means a healthy body. Grief in the mind weakens the body. The body influences the mind in its turn. If the body is strong and healthy, the mind also becomes healthy and strong. If the body is sick, the mind also becomes sick. A pain in the stomach causes depression in the mind.

The primary cause of diseases which afflict the body is bad thoughts. Whatever is held in the mind will be produced in the physical body. Any ill feeling or bitterness towards another person at once affects the body and produces some kind of disease in the body. Intense passion, hatred, long-standing bitter jealousy, corroding anxiety, fits of hot temper actually destroy the cells of the body and induce disease of the heart, liver, kidneys, spleen and stomach. Violent fits of hot temper do serious damage to the brain cells, throw poisonous chemical products into the blood, produce general shock and depression and suppress the secretion of gastric juice, bile and other digestive juices in the alimentary canal, drain away energy and vitality, induce premature old age and shorten life.

When the mind is agitated, the body is agitated. Wherever the body goes, the mind follows. When both the body and mind are agitated the prana flows in the wrong direction. Instead of pervading the whole body steadily and equally it will vibrate at an unequal rate, without rhythm.

How can anger be managed with hatha yoga?

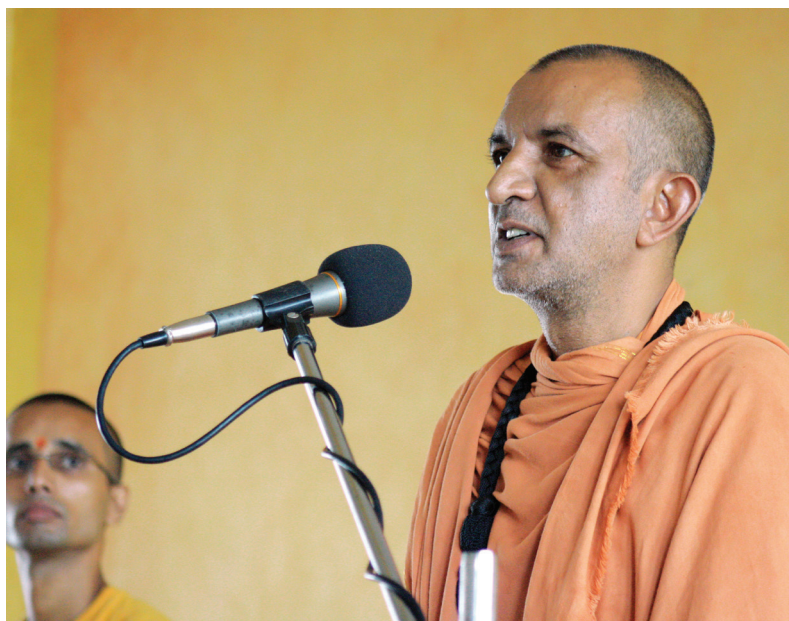
Swami Sivananda: Prana entwines the mind like a creeper. Pranayama leads to the control of mind. Pranayama will put a break on the impulse of speech. It gives one an abundance of energy to check anger.

Do asanas and pranayama also affect feelings and moods?

Swami Sivananda: When one is not practising yoga, the nervous system is slow, and as a result, there is a sort of depression. Additionally, the energy in the body usually remains blocked at one or more centres as the nervous system is not activated. When yoga asanas and pranayamas are practised, the various systems in the body, such as the respiratory, circulatory, cardiac and nervous systems, are properly activated. As a result of this, the feelings in the brain that had been blocked are released, and pranic energy is introduced into the higher centres of the brain, allowing one to feel light and relaxed.

Paschimottanasana

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



There are different machines which measure the stress of muscles. Not EMR, EMG, but other electrodes which are put over the body and measure the stress level as you are performing an activity. Once that experiment was done with asanas. The entire body was covered with electrodes and people were made to do asanas to measure the stress level. The measurement used to happen in units, so many units of stress.

We did paschimottanasana, touching the toes. While doing paschimottanasana the muscular stress, the physical stress reduced by 90 units. Visually, it is a difficult asana as you are stretching every part, every muscle, and trying to touch your toes. So your whole body is in a state of chronic tension, but what is perceived as chronic tension or difficult, what is perceived as aches and pains in the back, stretching out and

grabbing the toes, is actually relaxing the muscular system of the body. When you release and lie down in shavasana, the whole body suddenly flops and relaxes more than what it was used to before – like you stretch a rubber and then you release.

Connecting to the intention and spirit

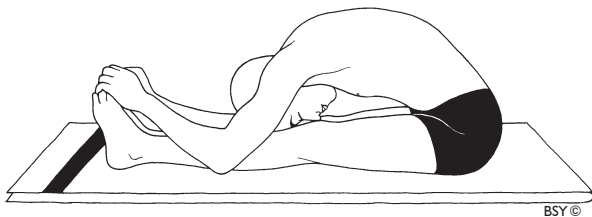
So you stretch your muscles, then you release it. If you use this knowledge to create a specific condition in your body which can counteract stressful situations, then no matter where you are in life, in profession or in renunciation, you can manage the psychological effects of stress and anxiety in a much better manner.

This is an indication of understanding and applying the yogic practices to create a definite change in the pattern of the body and psychology. Then yoga does not remain only a mechanical practice that by habit you are doing morning or evening, but it is a conscious practice to create and alter something in your life, and that is how we had learnt.

It is that teaching of Sri Swamiji which again we are presenting, for in the last 50 years there has been lot of dilution of yoga teaching according to the teacher who is teaching. Practices are remembered but not the original intention nor the instruction that Sri Swami Satyananda gave.

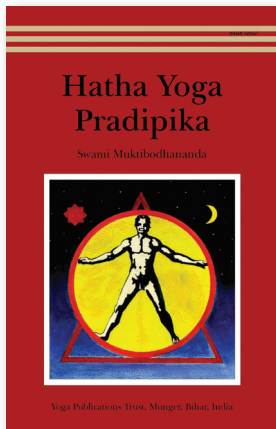
We are reviving that and connecting with the spirit with which he taught us the practices – not to become a teacher but to become the experiencer of yoga.

*– 30 September 2016, Ganga Darshan, Munger,
Hatha Yoga Training – Module 1 (Extract)*



Common Sense

From *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Swami Muktibodhananda



*Vahnistripathisevaanaamaadau
varjanmaacharet
Tathaahi gorakshavachanam –
“varjayed durjanapraantam
vahnistripathisevanam
Praatah snaanopavaasaadi kaayaklsha-
vidhim tathaa.”*

Fire, women and long pilgrimages should be avoided. Therefore Gorakhnath said: Bad company, mixing with women, bathing in the early morning, fasting and tasks which produce pain in the body should be avoided.
(Chapter 1, Verse 61)

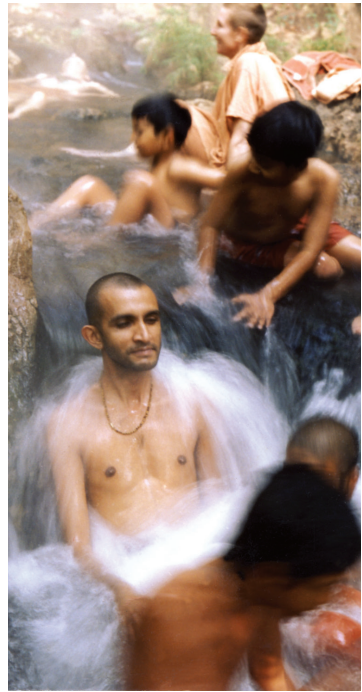
Anything which demands excess energy and depletes the system should be avoided. Standing or working near a fire exhausts the prana. 'Bad company' means those who live an anti-spiritual life or who think negatively. People without any purpose in life, who are unaware of the importance of spiritual evolution do not enlighten one's soul and should be avoided by a sadhaka.

Involvement with the opposite sex and sexual intercourse for pleasure alone, deplete energy and tax the nervous system. Sexual desire can never be fulfilled and when you feed that desire it is like throwing kerosene on a fire. It is not the physical act which is 'bad' but the mental repercussions which can be harmful for the sadhaka. Thus it is better not to

indulge for some time if one wants to awaken prana through hatha yoga.

One is also advised not to undergo long journeys or pilgrimages. Of course, it should be remembered that when *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* was written, jets and fast cars were not in existence. People travelled by foot, physically exhausting the bodily and pranic reserves. A pilgrimage implies a religious search to find God somewhere else. The hatha yogi can realize that highest state travelling anywhere.

‘Bathing early in the morning should be avoided’, but the sentence is incomplete without adding ‘with cold water when the weather is winterish’. In India most people bathe in water from the well or water reserve, few take a hot bath. Particularly when it is very hot, nobody wants to bathe in warm water. However, in winter it is cold in the early morning and if one bathes in cold water it strains the nervous system and lowers the body temperature. Hot water baths weaken the body’s resistance to the outside temperature and can make one feel very lethargic and sluggish.



The hatha yogi should eat regular meals and not make a habit of fasting often. Fasting is useful to stimulate the digestive system, to eliminate toxins and to help bring the senses and mind under control. In sickness it stimulates the body to produce the necessary antibodies to fight disease and rebalance the body structure.

In India many people follow the age-old tradition of fasting in conjunction with the phases of the moon. There are particular

days which are conducive for either a full or half-day fast, e.g. the fourth, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth and fifteenth day of either the bright or dark fortnight. Swami Sivananda says, "Occasional fasting once a month or when passion troubles you much, will suffice."

Though fasting has a lot to offer and many people advocate it, one who devotes many hours to hatha yoga sadhana should not strain the body in such a way. Any actions which are strenuous and create pain or extreme conditions in the body should not be undertaken by the yogi. Without being fanatical, one should take proper care of the body and avoid any unnecessary strain or injury, as the body is the vehicle to higher consciousness. Of course, one has to be sensible about all these instructions and take into account the situation and conditions.



Cure Becomes Possible

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Nowadays people connect asanas with the body and disease. They say, if this asana is performed then that particular disease will be cured. These are words spoken by people not yoga. Teachers may say that they can cure a particular disease with the help of yoga, yet yoga does not say so. According to yoga, diseases are not cured and one should not even try to cure them. All one has to do is manage and discipline one's life, and diseases will be cured automatically.

I am not sick

Sri Swami Satyananda said that people generally believe that yoga cures the disease. However, if a sick person always thinks about his sickness and believes that he is sick, then no form of medical practice is going to help. Therefore, the first therapy for a sick person is to remove the thought from his mind that he is sick. As long as one does not remove this thought, there won't be freedom from the disease. The first thought which must come to a sick person is 'I am not sick, I am not sick'.

When the person thinks 'I am not sick', the mind starts affecting the body. If one constantly thinks about physical ailment and disease, then even a healthy person will get sick due to constant negative thinking. The first principle is 'I am not sick', and the second principle is the appropriate practices. It means for every condition there are not more than four to six practices. The general practices are for the enhancement of health and not for the cure.

Three aspects for maintaining the body

When one connects the body with yoga in hatha yoga then three effects are seen. The first effect is if there is any disease or ill health then its removal becomes possible through yoga.

After that, one strives to enhance health, to become free from disease and ill health, and to make the healing condition all the more powerful. After that comes prevention. If any condition, tension, germ, bacteria or pollution affect the body, the body must have the immunity, power and strength to fight it. If before one would have fallen sick for ten days, then now one would fall sick only for two days.

Yoga has three aspects considering the body: curative, preventive and promotive. Generally people should practise the promotive aspect. They should do the practices for the enhancement of health, and allow regulation, discipline and organization to come into their lives.

Otherwise people sleep until eight o'clock, eat at eleven and call the yoga teacher at ten. They complain of pain and ask to be taught asanas. They eat breakfast at twelve, lunch at three, sleep at eleven in the night and want to keep themselves fit. By being in the mud, they want to keep their clothes clean. That is impossible. By going into the coal mine, they want to keep their clothes clean. That is impossible. Wherever they will go, the clothes will be stained.

If you go into the world, you have to bear the suffering of the world, with discrimination, not with fear and anxiety. When you are afraid of disease and tension you cannot treat yourself. However, if you perform your work with discrimination, then every type of cure becomes possible.

– 29 July 2014, Netaji Subhash Stadium, Kolkata



Improving the Quality of Every Life

If the system of yoga included only asanas many people in the world would be excluded from practising it. Fortunately the original tradition of yoga deals not only with the physical aspect of yoga, but takes a complete and integral approach to human life, addressing all the layers of the personality by using all the branches of yoga. This is how physically disabled people can also benefit from it.



This is a story of a woman who not only became a student of yoga, but also a sincere and committed practitioner despite her difficult condition. When I met her she already lived yoga. In theory she did not know anything about yoga, but she expressed a yogic attitude in action, thinking and behaviour, being one of the most intelligent, positive and optimistic persons I have known.

One day a friend asked me to meet a paralyzed woman with the view to help her through yoga. I asked him, "How do you think I can help this lady?" He said, "You are the yoga teacher, go and find out." So I went. She was waiting for me, sitting in a wheelchair. We had a chat and she told me that she was 60 years old and had had a car accident nearly 20 years ago in which her neck vertebrae and spinal cord were broken, paralyzing her from the neck down.

She explained to me that there were different degrees of paralysis, with some still being able to move their upper body,

the arms and hands. She was paralyzed to an extreme degree, which allowed her just a slight movement of her head, and so she required the care of nurses 24/7. She also added that she was looking forward to our yoga sessions very much as my friend had told her that it would help her. Frankly speaking at that moment I had no idea what to do with her, but I offered to come and see her twice a week.

Yoga nidra – the first gift

Before our first session the only thing which came to my mind was yoga nidra, where the body has to be still, which was very much the condition of her body. I started to teach her yoga nidra. In the beginning I had to slow down the tempo, as it took her longer to navigate through the body with her awareness than for a healthy person. For the first time after so many years she became aware of and felt into her body parts. After a few weeks I could increase the speed to normal and she was able to follow it with ease, and gradually we progressed to the full yoga nidra with sankalpa, visualizations and opposites. Then I recorded a CD so that she could practise when I was not there.

Weeks and months passed and we met twice a week, continuing with yoga nidra. After the sessions I stayed with her for some time to chat. On one of those occasions she told me that she was very grateful that we had met, because yoga nidra was helping her considerably. She said that by the end of the practice all her pain was gone. This had already happened at our first session, but she could not believe that it was because of the yoga nidra. However, this occurred each time we met, so she was sure that it was yoga nidra which caused this painless state, which was an unimaginably great relief for her.

She explained that this pain is called central nervous pain and is a well-known phenomenon for paralyzed people. When I asked her to describe the degree of the pain she said, “Imagine that you deliberately make a very deep cut on yourself with a razor blade and try to feel that pain in a thousand places in your body simultaneously.” She added that most times it is

unbearable, so doctors normally treat it with morphine which reduces the pain but has many negative side effects. The first gift for her was yoga nidra which helped her to manage the pain. Since then she has been practising it on a daily basis.

'Snuffle' pranayama

The second big positive change in the quality of her life happened through pranayama. I noticed that she was lying in her bed covered with a minimum of two blankets even on hot summer days as her body temperature is lower than normal, due to the lack of physical movement and activity. Another consequence of this is low blood pressure which especially in the mornings causes dizziness and general discomfort. It took her about two hours every day to recover from that extreme state to her more normal one.

I decided to teach her some basic breathing techniques starting from simple breath awareness, to abdominal breathing to full yogic breathing. We were progressing slowly as she had to develop the right breathing patterns first, which was quite difficult for her. Then one day when we were practising abdominal breathing I told her to speed it up little by little. Eventually it became a kind of bhastrika, which she enjoyed very much and called 'snuffle'. The next time, she was already sitting up in her bed and smiling. When I asked what had happened she said that this snuffle had changed her life.

Now, the first thing she does in the morning is bhastrika and it immediately raises the blood pressure and body temperature, so instead of two hours it takes her only ten minutes to normalize her condition.

I was very glad to hear that it helped her, and the first thing which came into my mind was that all this would not have been possible without our tradition and gurus. This shows the power of yoga, that even the simplest practices can have profound effects and can indeed bring about positive change in one's life.

– Swami Bhaktananda, Hungary

A woman wearing a bright red dress and an orange headscarf with white polka dots stands with her back to the camera, looking up at a tree. Her right hand is raised towards the trunk of the tree. The tree has a white-painted lower section. The background is a lush green garden with a blue fence and a building in the distance.

Blessing to Yoga

Like the rays of the moon
The light of yoga is expanding.
All religions, beliefs and sects
Are receiving shelter
Under the kalpataru of yoga.
Towards the evolution of consciousness
Yoga has done unforgettable work.
Yoga will become tomorrow's culture
And will show
A new way of life for mankind.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati



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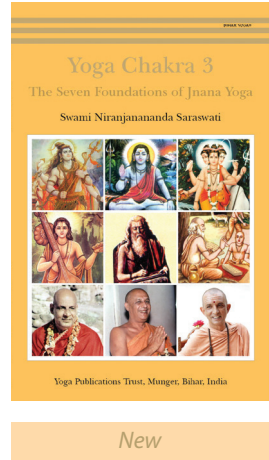
Yoga Chakra 3:

The Seven Foundations of Jnana Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

76 pp, soft cover, ISBN: 978-93-84753-56-6

From 1st to 7th November 2015, Swami Niranjanananda gave a series of satsangs during the Yoga Chakra program held at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth. The theme was jnana yoga, one of the spokes in the six-spoked *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga. Swamiji explained the sequential process inherent in this yoga, which is often misunderstood as abstract self-enquiry. Beginning with *shubhechha*, positive intention, and ending at *turyaga*, transcendental awareness, the seven-step ladder of jnana yoga leads one to apply the learning and develop strength of wisdom. This allows one to manage the negative manifestations of the mind and experience inner positivity and purity.



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Websites

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

The official website of Yoga magazine contains an archive of over 30 years of the magazine. This archive is fully searchable and ever expanding.

[Avahan Online](http://www.biharyoga.net/sannyasa-peeth/avahan/)

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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Yoga Peeth Events & Yoga Vidya Training 2017

Jan 28-31	Sri Yantra Aradhana
Feb 1	Basant Panchami Celebrations/ Bihar School of Yoga Foundation Day
Feb 6-May 28	Yogic Studies, 4 months (Hindi)
Feb 12-18	Yoga Capsule - Respiratory (Hindi)
Feb 14	Bal Yoga Diwas, Children's Yoga Day
Feb 26-Mar 4	Yoga Capsule - Digestive (Hindi)
Mar 19-25	Yoga Capsule - Arthritis & Rheumatism (Hindi)
Apr 9-19	Total Health Capsule (Hindi)
Oct 1-30	* Progressive Yoga Vidya Training (English)
Oct 2-Jan 28	* Yogic Studies, 4 months (English)
Oct 16-20	* Kriya Yoga - Module 1 (English)
Oct 16-20	* Kriya Yoga - Module 2 & Tattva Shuddhi (English)
Nov 4-10	* Hatha Yoga - Module 1: Shatkarma Intensive (English)
Nov 4-10	* Hatha Yoga - Module 2: Asana Pranayama Intensive (English)
Nov 1-Jan 30 2018	* Yoga Lifestyle Experience (for overseas participants)
Dec 11-15	Yoga Chakra Series (English)
Dec 18-23	* Raja Yoga - Module 1: Asana Pranayama Intensive (English)
Dec 18-23	* Raja Yoga - Module 2: Pratyahara Intensive (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 Ramacharitamanas

* Indicates training 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:

Bihar School of Yoga, Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger, Bihar 811201, India

Tel: +91-06344-222430, 06344-228603, Fax: +91-06344-220169

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