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Hari Om

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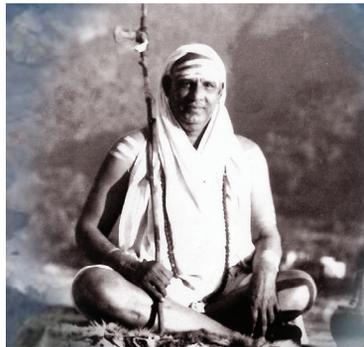
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Front cover and Plates: Yoga training for members of Yuva Yoga Mitra Mandal, 2021



GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

Ahimsa – non-injury

The practice of ahimsa develops love. Ahimsa is another name for truth or love. Ahimsa is universal love. Where there is love, there you will find ahimsa. To fail to relieve another's pain, or even to neglect to go to the person in distress is a sort of himsa. It is the sin of omission. Avoid strictly all forms of harshness, direct or indirect, positive or negative, immediate or delayed. Practise ahimsa in its purest form and become divine. Ahimsa and Divinity are one.

—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 ॥

Love – Your Innate Nature

Swami Sivananda Saraswati



The Absolute alone exists. Love for external things is an unconscious internal urge to become unified with everything. For in reality man is everything, the Absolute Itself. Man is only an ego, apparently separated from it.

Love is the forerunner of experience. Love is the craving, experience is the fulfilment of it. None can live without love for something. Love looks not with the eyes but with the heart. Where there is love, there is peace and harmony.

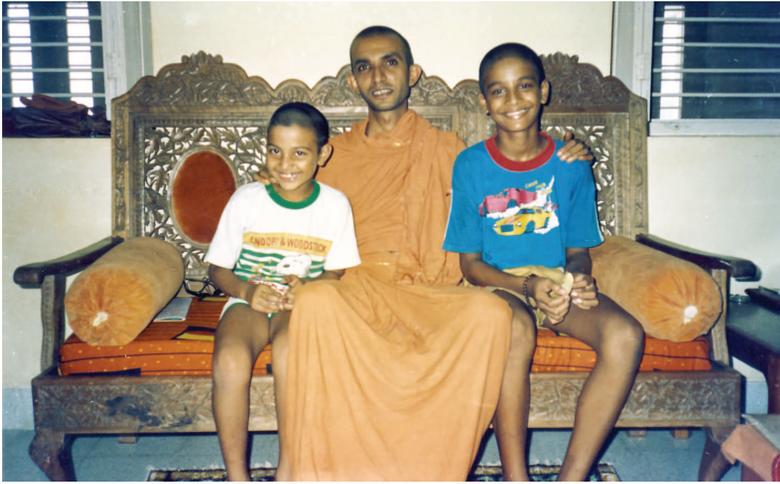
About Dharma

How can one know one's dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to the laws of dharma, there is no scope for either feeling or rationality. Dharma is purely an understanding of the natural interaction and the natural law that governs the individual, society, the world and the cosmos. Dharma is knowing the potential that exists in each and every dimension of this creation, and not only is it cognition of that potential, it is also living according to the appropriate conditions. In one word, *dharma* is appropriateness.

Some people say dharma is duty. Some say dharma is religion. Some say dharma is the natural law. However, dharma, in spirit, represents three main functions: appropriate action, appropriate behaviour and appropriate thinking. As long as one's thoughts, behaviour and actions are appropriate to the situations and circumstances, one is on the right track. Dharma entails understanding. Dharma is not a reactive response to circumstance; it is the appropriate response which develops after one has understood and is in control of that particular situation, whether it be personal, social or global.

If there is proper understanding of the situation, then dharma is natural and spontaneous. If there is no understanding of the situation, then there is a headache trying to figure out what one's dharma is. Asking, "Should I do this? Should I not do that?" is confusion. Therefore, natural and spontaneous expression is dharma. If one's child falls down and is hurt, what would a mother's response be? Would she think, "Shall I pick up my child or not?" or would she act spontaneously to help the child? If she acts spontaneously, believing in something, that will be dharma. If she acts according to some intellectual process, she will never find the answer to what dharma is and further confusion will be created.



Dharma cannot be rationalized. In order to live dharma one needs to act as one would to protect one's child, with that awareness and clarity. If there is no understanding, there is no dharma. If the mind is clear, there is dharma.

How can one live one's dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is the responsibility inherent in every interaction, the inherent commitment that an individual feels when relating to everything outside. This creative expression of dharma makes one free from mental and emotional strife. One has to observe the reactions, responses, interactions and communications and be aware of each and every word that one says before it is spoken. One has to cultivate this awareness, realize one's interaction with the world, other people and society, and regulate this behaviour. Regulating one's behaviour is following dharma. Irregular, eccentric behaviour is not dharma. When the expressions are regulated, whether through the senses, mind, emotions or intellect, they bring peace.

– *Published in* Conversations on the Science of Yoga –
Bhakti Yoga Book 4, In the Presence of the Divine

Living With Nature

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

It is said that St Bernard, a great mystic of the twelfth century, recharged himself with energy while walking through a forest of oak trees. What do you think of the possibility of human communion with nature, of psyche of animal psyche and vegetable kingdom?

In recent years we have been talking about ecology, but in the past we have been taught that the birds and the trees and the whole vegetable kingdom contain the same consciousness we do. The trees, they witness everything, and there is a great spirituality in their existence. But man in his arrogance has considered himself most superior in this creation.

Even now, the most sincere yogis retire into the forest, and live amongst trees, plants, birds and animals because in essence there is complete unity in this creation. The names and forms differ but the essence of everything, including men and animals, the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, is the same.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is an explanation that the supreme essence pervades every speck of creation. Just as the thread passes through all the beads in your mala, in the same way the one consciousness penetrates through and through everything. When we live in the world of the senses and the mind, then we perceive duality and multiplicity. But, when we have withdrawn from the sensory world, then we see just unity and one essence. And that is the concept of the Upanishads.

In the Upanishads it is declared that when you have transcended matter you see yourself in all, you see everything within you. This is called the advaita experience, non-dual experience. We live in a world of duality; saints live in a world of non-duality. We see multiplicity; they see unity. And this unity should not only be realized in your own kith and kin, your own relatives, this unity should not only be realized

in your own countrymen and fellow men, it should also be realized with other kingdoms in creation.

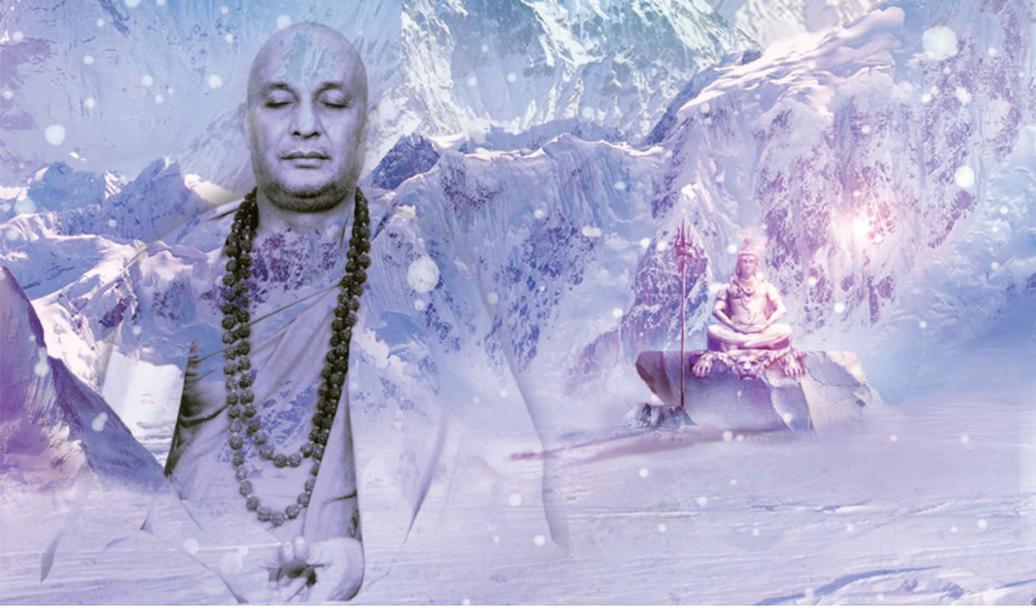
Just as science realizes the energy behind the essence of all matter, just as a scientist realizes the unity behind all matter, in the same way, the yogi realizes the unity behind all creation. And for this purpose it is necessary that one should retire from the hustle and bustle of life. It is something that is not necessary for our existence. We have created it in our ignorance, it has been man's greatest folly and man will have to pay a penalty for it.

Behind every home there has to be a little forest, behind every house there has to be a little pond, around a house the birds must sing, the tall trees must grow, keep the motor cars far and far away. So far it seems to be a utopia, yet that is the way you can automatically realize the unity.

Many, many years ago, when I went to a place in the Himalayas called Kedarnath, there was a solitary temple built by Shankaracharya. There was snow and snow everywhere. It was very cold, but it was so quiet, I can't describe it. It was so quiet, just as here you have sub-zero temperature, I think there was sub-zero vibrations, and my mind began freezing. I am using the word freezing. Something happened to it. And I lost myself. You see, I did not do anything. The atmosphere was such – there have never been sound vibrations there.

A few hundred persons go during summer, they go with all their devotedness, and then offer the worship to Lord Shiva. Before that, when I was in Rishikesh, I visited Mount Kailash. Mount Kailash is under China. At that time it was in Tibet, and Tibet was an independent country. It was a very different terrain. But I could manage to reach Mount Kailash. At the foot of Mount Kailash is a very big lake. Its name is Mansarovara. There is no temple there. There is no truck, there is no sign of living habitation. There is no priest, there is no chanting, no prayers, no carols, total silence. I think since eternity it has been silent there.

I was the sole person present on that day, usually many people never went there. Myself and my pony and one Tibetan



guide. That's all the life that was there. I took my bath, and after that I wanted to know what I should do. But by the time I wanted to decide what I should do, my mind got jammed, stopped. And when the mind stopped a picture arose in my vision. And that was the picture of Shiva seated at the top of the mount in padmasana, with tigers around and the crescent moon on the right side of his head, cobras hissing around his neck and arms, the whole body beautifully smeared with the ashes of the burial ground. Eyes closed, even the third eye was closed.

I thought that I saw him for hours together, but in fact this must have been like lightening. How did this experience come to me? Because I could get into the unity and essence of creation. This unity of creation which I am talking about, is not an intellectual concept, it is a happening, it happens when you keep yourself in certain congenial circumstances.

Saint Bernard used to walk in the forest of oak trees. For many people he must have been a crazy heretic. But no, when he lived with nature, and when he lived with that nature, which is silent all the time, then the quality of his consciousness got transformed. When the quality of mind changes, the experiences also change. Now, you should first change the circumstances, surroundings, environment and the total setting

around you. You must even change the quality of wife and husband around you. You have to change even the quality of your bathroom and toilet and bedroom. It is not a joke; it is reality, because these settings also affect your mind.

The mind is under the constant influence of the things with us, in us and around us. Therefore we should learn from this question: How are we going to reset our own surroundings in order to realize the one unity of one essence?

When I lived in Rishikesh with Swami Sivananda, behind the ashram there is a great forest. You go miles deep into it. You get only wild animals, sometimes somewhere you find one cowherd boy or a grass cutter. He is playing the flute, or is singing a wild song in the wilderness. Or the carpenter bird is making whistles and you hear many types of birds chirping in their own way. That becomes an antar mouna. And sometimes when the gale of wind passes through the breast of the trees, there is a whistling sound, and the whole nature begins to sing.

What we used to do was very funny - to get out of the ashram, we kept on entering into the forest. And the deeper you go, the lonelier you are. The further you go, you are far from everybody. And once it so happened that on my way back I lost my way. I went on trying every way but I was lost more and more. At that time the ashram was very small, there was no electricity, there were not even little lamps, so I could not see which way the ashram was. I did try to climb up a tree and see all around, but nothing. And it began to drizzle and rain. There were wild animals, the tigers and the panthers. Every now and then I used to listen to all those ferocious sounds.

I climbed up a tree, and at that time, I remember very well, I understood how man lives in this world. When I climbed up the tree, I thought, 'This is how a man feels secure when he is at home with his wife and children'. But there was a great miracle, in spite of the ferocious sounds, and I must have been hearing a lot of them, I could recognize every sound. That was a tiger, that was a panther, that was a leopard, that was a hyena, and that was the stag and that was the antelope - because it was a

very rich forest, with all kinds of wildlife. But in about an hour or so, I lost contact with everything. It seemed that the whole setting around me jammed my brain. And the mind completely slowed down, and ultimately the vibrations were seized. I could not understand those sounds at all. There was total ananda. I forgot the ashram and also these animals singing around me, and thus came the dawn of the day. I found that I was very close to the ashram, about two hundred yards.

So this is a very important reminiscence of my life. Many times I have taken tours of the Himalayas, the place where Jamuna originates, the place from where Ganga originates, the places called Badrinath and Kedarnath. Also a place in Kashmir called Amarnath. Many more places I visited during my life as a mendicant. I can assure you that is a very powerful sadhana. When you live with nature and realize unity with it, then nature helps you to reset the conditions of your mind.



It is a very simple experience of everyday life. Maybe you are unhappy, you may have quarrels in your family or a lot of other troubles - you just go into a beautiful garden, what do you feel? You feel better, don't you? Why do you feel better, tell me? Because the setting has changed the quality of your mind. The moment the quality of mind changes, the experience also changes. So let us try sometime in our life.

It is said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to reach heaven. Therefore, one must live a very simple life. Poverty is paradise.

– August 1981, Chamarande, France

The Magic Wand of Love

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

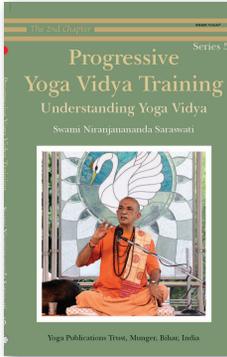
To live is to love. To love is to live. One lives that one may learn to love. One loves that one may learn to live in the Eternal. A life without faith, love and devotion is a dreary waste; it is real death. There is no virtue higher than love; there is no treasure higher than love; there is no knowledge higher than love; there is no dharma higher than love; there is no religion higher than love; love is Truth; love is God. God is the embodiment of love. In every inch of his creation, one can verily understand his Love.

Love is the immediate way to Truth or the Kingdom of God. It is the life-principle of creation. It is the highest expression of the soul-force. It is the sum total of all the duties of religion. It is the magic wand in the hand of a devotee by which he conquers the whole world. It was the driving force behind Mira, Radha, Tukaram, Tulsidas, Gouranga, Jesus and the God-intoxicated Sufis, Mansoor and Shams Tabriez.



Hatha Yoga – Beyond the Body

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



There are seven *bhumikas*, conditions or platforms, defined by hatha yoga. The first is *shodhanam*, which means purification or detoxification. Whatever practice you do, even if it is pawanmuktasana, the first outcome is detoxification and purification. Whether it is asana practice or shatkarma, it will first lead to purification of the body systems and balance of the three humours: *pitta*, *kapha* and *vata*, bile, mucus and gas.

After purification and balance comes the second condition: *sthairyam*, stillness. The *Yoga Sutras* present *sthairyam* as *sthiram sukham asanam*. Stillness of the body indicates that you are able to manage the movement and activity of the senses. Mastery over sensory activities leads to stillness. As long as the sensory activities are hyper, stillness will not be experienced. Even if you close your eyes, your eyeballs can be moving rapidly, making you agitated, disturbed and definitely not focused. Any activity of the sense organs will break the state of stillness and balance which is both physical and psychological.

The third condition is *drirhata*, fixity. We did the practice in which you visualized yourself sitting on a triangle and then encasing the body in a pyramid. At that time, you became fixed. There was stillness and fixity of the body. Not a single part of the body was moving, and there was comfort in that state. Fixity means an unchanging condition of comfort: absolute and total comfort, no distraction or disturbance of any kind.

The fourth condition is *dhairyam*, patience. From fixity comes patience. Here you move from body to mind, for patience is a quality of the mind whereas fixity is a quality of the senses. When the mind is still, there is patience. When the mind is agitated, there is impatience. Patience is a state or condition of mind where nothing is disturbing it and you are able to remain in that state quite comfortably.

It is hard for people to tolerate peace and quiet of mind. Although everyone seeks peace, no one can manage it. Patience is a condition that sets into the mind when there is no distraction from sensory activities, from the *karmendriyas* and *jnanendriyas*. That condition affects the mind and it becomes still and peaceful. Once the senses and the mind become still and quiet, the fifth stage of *laghavam*, or lightness of body, is experienced.

In ancient times, monks would walk on rice paper to test their level of concentration and control over the senses. If they could walk without leaving any imprint, they were considered to have mastered the senses and attained lightness of body. This is one of the tests in Shaolin martial arts, as control of *prana* lightens the body. The more you focus, the lighter your body becomes.

Laghavam or lightness of body is considered to be a natural outcome of harmony between the senses and mental behaviour. The activity of the senses represents pranic activity and patience represents mental activity; therefore when mental activity and pranic activity are balanced, lightness is experienced.

From lightness emerges *pratyaksham*; it is a state where you are able to identify with what you are experiencing. In the morning class you were asked to identify how aware you were in each of the five components of the *asana* practice. If you apply your awareness one hundred percent in each component, that will be *pratyaksham*: complete absorption and identification with what you are doing and experiencing. You become one with the movement, you become one with



the experience of prana, you become one with the breath, you become one with visualization, you become one with the chakra, you become one with the mantra. That sound resonates in you; it is not just a mental repetition; it becomes a living experience. Visualization, breath, prana, they all become living experiences. It can happen and will happen, given time. Thus, pratyaksham is to live an experience.

Pratyaksham leads to the seventh condition, *nirlipta*, a state of mental non-involvement. You are not involved, you are simply the witness, *drashta*. You are not the *bhokta*, the enjoyer or the experiencer. Once you are able to witness your own experiences, you become *nirlipta*. You cultivate the ability to see, to become the observer.

These seven conditions have to develop with the practice of physical yoga. Once these have been mastered, then you move into the mental yoga. Whether it is shatkarma, asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha or any other physical practice, it will lead you through these seven conditions, indicating the progress in your sadhana. They represent the outcome of the

physical practices. If you do the shatkarma, shodhanam will be attained; if you practise asana and pranayama, sthairyam and dhairyam will be attained; if you perfect pranayama, laghavam will be attained. In this manner, whatever practice you do will take you to a condition, a platform, as that is the objective or aim of the practice.

Yama and niyama

While you do the physical practice, there is another aspect that you have to take into account: the mental awareness, attitude or condition that you create to facilitate the progress of your sadhana. The practice is physical and the attitude is mental. This attitude has been identified as yama and niyama.

Yama and niyama have been translated into English as ethics, morality and disciplines of yoga. This does not convey their right meaning. *Yama* means to hold, to hold something that you have become. When you become something and you are holding that state, you are experiencing a yama. It is an indication that you have passed through something, which is the negative, and have become something, which is the positive. Therefore, yama is to hold the positive in sight, to become the experience of the positive in life.

There are two fields in which you run. One is the field of positivity, hope and happiness. The other is the field of negativity, despair and suffering. It is your choice in which field you wish to run. The inherent tendency in life is to go towards the negative, while you hope and aspire for the positive. While you hope and aspire for the positive, all the responses and reactions of your daily life are coloured by the negative. Your aggression, anger, frustration, greed, ego is coloured by the negative. That is what you are living, and it indicates that the natural gravitation in life is towards the darker field.

Your direction has to change. You have to connect with the lighter, luminous and positive field. That is where attitude comes in. With the help of awareness, you can transform the negatives of your attitude into positives and create another

attitude. That is the pratipaksha bhavana which Swami Sivananda propagated. Pratipaksha bhavana is nothing but cultivation of different yamas, or positive qualities, in life. Yamas are not only the ones mentioned in the *Yoga Sutras*; yamas are all those qualities which bring out the creative and positive you. Swami Sivananda indicated this when he said, "Always change the negative into the positive, a bad thought into a positive thought." However, that is difficult. The mind always gravitates towards the negative and the detrimental; it does not look for the positive and the optimistic. That is the biggest challenge in yoga: dealing with the mind.

Raja yoga sounds very nice, but has it worked for you? You have been meditating for so long, has any improvement been seen in your life? You have to see what has happened to you, what you have gained from your practice.

In the physical dimension of yoga, there are twenty yamas and twenty niyamas. They are thought patterns that change the response of the mind from worse to better. If you follow one idea to the end, it will change the nature of the mind. When you put a dirty cloth and soap in the washing machine, after some time the cloth comes out clean. In the same manner, when the positive soap scrubs the mind all the negative grime is gradually washed away, and the luminous mind emerges. That is the outcome of yama and niyama. Yamas are an awareness of how you respond, and whether you respond positively, constructively and creatively or not. It is fine-tuning of the mind by cultivating thoughts, samskaras and ideas which are positive and uplifting.

Niyamas are conditions that regulate the lifestyle and bring in some order, system, sequence and progression in your routine. Thus, fine-tuning of the daily routine through practice will lead to attainment of the seven conditions and fine-tuning of the attitude will improve the human nature.

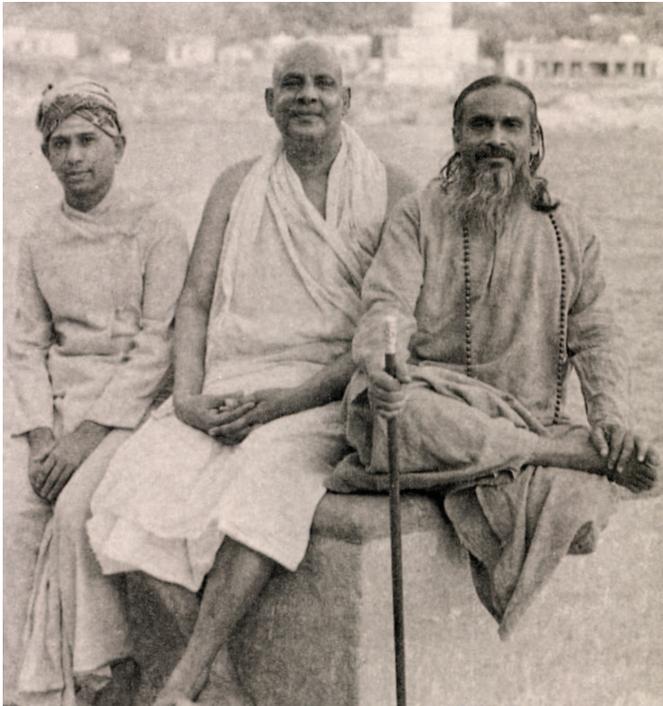
– *Published in Progressive Yoga Vidya Training, Series 5,*
Understanding Yoga Vidya

The Law of Love

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Love is the law of life. To love is to fulfil the law, and to fulfil the law means eternal peace and everlasting happiness. This world has come out of love, it exists in love and it finally dissolves in love. Love is the motive-power of the universe. Love is life, love is joy, love is warmth.

Love is constructive and creative – it binds and builds. Love is the principle of regeneration. Love is an actual substance one can use with confidence. Love is a positive, concrete thing. One who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work wonders. The law of love is a far greater science than any modern science. The law of love prevails among saints and good men.



Therapeutic Yoga Interventions for Chronic Pain (Extracts)

Ting Qi Huang, Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University, April 12 2021, Supervisor: Dr Eleni Hapidou

In 2020, the International Association for the Study of Pain redefined chronic pain as ‘persistent or recurrent pain lasting longer than three months’. The impact of yoga on chronic pain has been extensively researched. In Alberta, Tul and colleagues observed seven chronic pain patients in an eight-week hatha yoga program consisting of group classes and at-home practice. Group sessions included a question-and-answer period, beginning and ending breathing exercises, 5 to 12 postures, and guided deep relaxation exercises. A main characteristic of the yoga program was to teach participants to be aware of their bodies and minds during the sessions, without concern for any desired outcomes.

By the end of the eight weeks, through qualitative analysis the researchers identified three themes of improvement in the participants:

- renewed awareness of their body,
- transformed relationship with their body in pain, and
- a sense of acceptance of their situation.

Increased awareness of their bodies led to participants noticing pain patterns, uncovering certain tensions and feelings that incite painful responses. By remedying the initial trigger to pain, for example, conducting yoga stretches when triggering tensions are noticed, the final pain sensation is cancelled. In this study, the practice of acceptance relies on the letting go of expectations and goals, and coming to accept that even with chronic pain, one is ‘still okay’. This mindset is analogous to the letting go mindset of MM (Mindfulness Meditation). The letting go mindset of MM echoes the same ideology of relinquishing one’s expectations for the treatment, while placing focus on the present.

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a disease characterized by widespread continuous pain, negative affect, and poor sleep. Lazaridou and colleagues studied the impact of a six-week Satyananda Yoga program on fibromyalgia patients with chronic pain. The Satyananda Yoga program consisted of weekly in-person 1.5 hour sessions and included asanas, meditation, and mindfulness-based practices. Participants were also encouraged to follow a daily 30-minute yoga video as homework in between the in-person classes.

Thirty-six participants completed the study to a meaningful extent (attended 4-6 classes and reported home practice), all female, with an average age of 48.5 years. Results revealed that pain intensity, as measured by the Brief Pain Index (BPI), significantly decreased from baseline to post-treatment. The greatest benefit was observed in participants who practiced 25 min/day or more compared to those who did less than 25 min/day. This study was limited by the lack of a control group, making the generalizability of the beneficial findings difficult.

Veterans

Recent explorations of yoga in medicine have highlighted the practice of yoga as a promising, novel non-drug therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain in veterans. In 2016, 8891 US military veterans were surveyed regarding their use of non-drug therapies for chronic pain, with 6.4% indicating practice of yoga, and 19.8% using mindfulness or meditation.

In a pilot study, the impact of a hatha yoga intervention was observed in veterans with comorbid chronic pain and PTSD, at an urban Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Virginia, United States. The study was designed as a cross-sectional, open-trial with pre- and post-test measures.

In total, 87 participants were enrolled, with 49 completing the sessions, presenting an attrition rate of 44%. The majority of the participants were African American (69%) and male (61%), with an average age of 51.41 years. The primary study

analyses were conducted on those who completed the full program (n = 49).

The intervention, Yoga for Warriors, initially consisted of 12 weekly, 90-minute classes. Over the course of the study, with the addition of time and access constraints, the program format was changed to eight weekly, 60-minute classes. All symptom measures decreased from baseline to post-treatment, with the physical functional measures increasing. Of note, significant differences between pre- and post- measures existed for an increase in social functioning, decrease in PTSD symptoms, kinesiophobia, depression, and anxiety.

Veterans and lower back pain

Donaldson and associates examined differences in yoga practice between veterans with and without chronic pain through survey. Out of the 174 participants contacted, 110 were actively practicing yoga and among these participants, 41 had chronic pain. Yoga practitioners with chronic pain were slightly older and less likely to report excellent or very good health in comparison to those without chronic pain. They were also more likely to practice yoga independently at home, and use gentler exercises.

In the qualitative results, the authors found that chronic pain participants commented on feelings of self-consciousness in group yoga practice, with participants feeling self-conscious when seeing others perform agile postures. While other participants reported ease of concern when practicing yoga in group settings, as they enjoy the social aspect of practicing together. Overall, the participants enjoyed the convenience of yoga. Participants feel that they are able to practice yoga on their own terms and when needed. A limitation of the study is the possible impact of recall bias, as the qualitative results were based on participant recollection of past yoga practice.

Attitudes, perspectives and preferences of military personnel and veterans towards yoga as a therapy were collected via qualitative interviews by Hurst and colleagues. 36 participants were enrolled in the study, with 24 yoga students,

and 12 yoga instructors, each participating in 45-50 minute interviews with a researcher to discuss their yoga experiences.

Results found that all participants highlighted the clinical relevance of yoga for managing symptoms and conditions, regardless of the participant's health status. Improvements in managing pain and related symptoms were noted by several students and instructors. Many participants included examples of how yoga reduced pain for conditions such as arthritis, lower back pain, migraines, and headaches.

Participants touched on the importance of integrating yoga into the military, as it is a cost-effective therapy and beneficial to all ranks. Yoga stigma was also explored in the interviews, with participants touching on misconceptions of yoga that are often shared in military culture. Yoga can be type-casted as not macho or manly, and not comparable to endurance and physically taxing workouts.

This study shed light on the interpretation of yoga in the military, and shared personal anecdotes of veteran yoga participants with the clinical field. It is limited by the structure of the interviews, as the researchers may have introduced interviewer bias to the conversations.

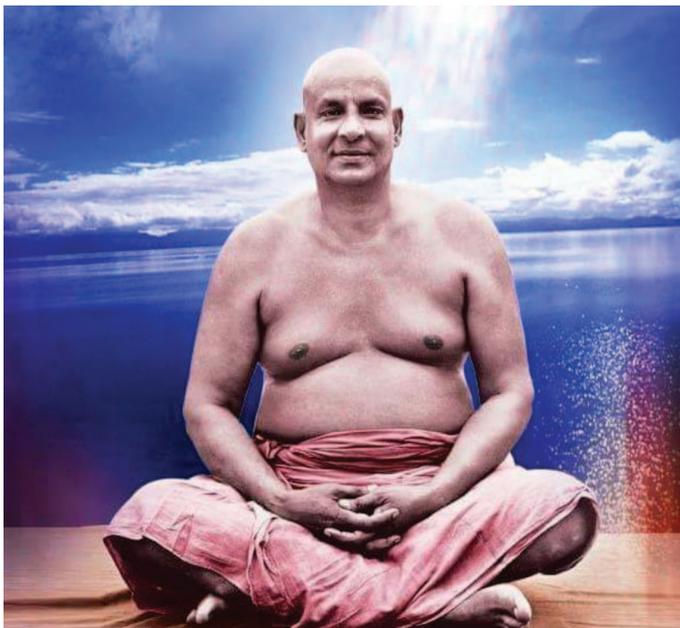
Conclusion

The impacts of yoga on chronic pain were explored through qualitative and quantitative research studies. Results highlight the improvement of various pain outcomes in both the general population and veterans. Participants comment that yoga has transformed the relationship with their bodies in regard to pain and uncovered the possibility of remedying painful sensations using self-awareness and yoga.

Future studies should focus on employing larger sample sizes, as well as further in-depth quantitative analysis of the effect of yoga on various populations. The use of yoga in treating chronic pain prompts healthcare practitioners to re-evaluate treatment programs and represents a transition towards exploring non-drug therapies in medicine.

The Golden Link of Love

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

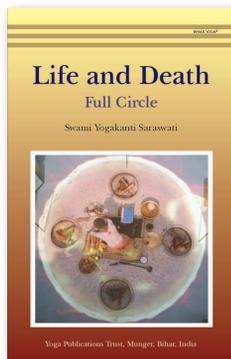


Love is the golden link or tie which binds heart to heart, mind to mind, soul to soul. Love is the crowning grace of humanity. Love never reasons but gives profusely. It is not affected by offence or insult. Love makes great sacrifices. Love is anxious to help and serve others and make others happy. Love forgives. The love of a mother is never exhausted. It endures forever.

Love is not getting or bargaining, but giving. Love is goodness, honour, peace and pure living. Pure love is without selfish attachment. It is being willing to suffer for the good of others. Cultivate pure love slowly in the garden of your heart through japa, kirtan, faith, service of all beings, meditation and the company of saints. Speak lovingly, act lovingly and serve lovingly. Love your neighbour as your own self. Love God with all your heart, mind and soul.

Rebirth and Research

Swami Yogakanti Saraswati



How much do we remember the concept of the Law of Karma governing our lives? This is thought of as a truism in most eastern cultures. There is some debate on how much is destined, and how much can be changed by effort, but generally speaking this resolves into a discussion of how one can skilfully adjust to or manage one's responses and behaviour within the general framework and force of karma. Dr

Hiroshi Motoyama, a research scholar from Japan specializing in designing equipment to measure subtle energy flows, comments that although karma controls life, one can change the way the past manifests in one's life. For him, the point of a spiritual consultation is to teach ways to dissolve a specific karma that is manifesting problematically.

One might expect that an astrologer would definitely be on the side of karma causing unalterable destiny, but in fact that seems not to be the case. Vedic astrology is called *vyotisha*, meaning 'the eye of the Veda'. The science is subtle, and awareness is considered to be a force in itself. Being able to accept and understand why a particular thing is going to happen means one can deal with it more skilfully, and the results or the ensuing karma will therefore be more auspicious.

Karma and rebirth

Most people do not know the time they will die – often they don't really believe they will die either – and in the West, many doubt that they will be reborn. This uncertainty and rejection in the face of death is not a world-wide phenomenon. The Tibetan culture has been based on the sure and certain knowledge that

the Dalai Lama will be reborn, and will give directions so that his new incarnation can be found. The present Dalai Lama is the 14th, and was recognized at the age of two as replacing the 13th Dalai Lama.

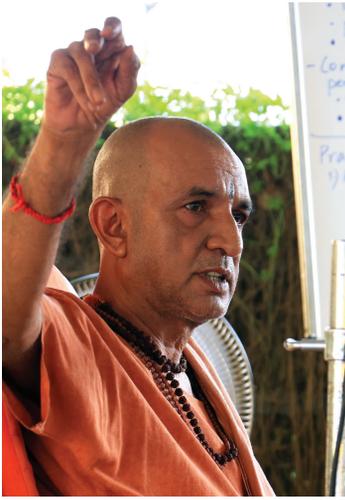
People often ask questions wanting a particular sort of reply, but the answer may rather provoke a lot questions that one has to answer for oneself. For example, in April 2007 Swami Niranjanananda was asked:

Does rebirth exist?

Maybe it happens and maybe it does not happen. What I would like to look at however is the drawbacks and the merits of someone deciding that it happens or that it does not happen.

Let us say it does not happen. What are the merits and demerits of rebirth not happening? Think about that. If you believe that rebirth does not happen, then this is the only life that you live. In infinite time, this is the only one time when you appear, like a flash, and then disappear again. Therefore, in this life it might be better to just enjoy it; earn money, take loans and enjoy the good life before you die, because you are not accountable to anything or anyone and nobody is going to bug you after you die, anyway. This non-believing attitude gives birth to an aggressive, materialistic mentality which is known in India as the charvak philosophy, a system that accepts only what one can see as valid.

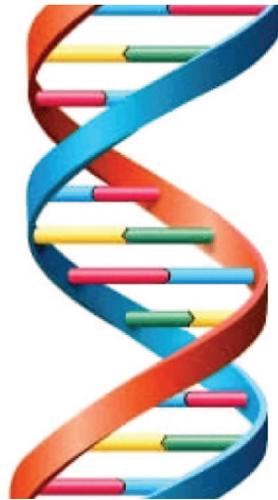
The merit in this idea is, 'Enjoy this life and that's it, nothing more to it'. The demerit is the aggressive, materialistic tendency which gives rise to the negative traits of personality: anger, possessiveness, hatred, the search for power. It distances you from the balancing and positive qualities of life such as sympathy, compassion and affection. The mind and heart become very hard and instead of living the life of a human being, you will be living life in a different manner.

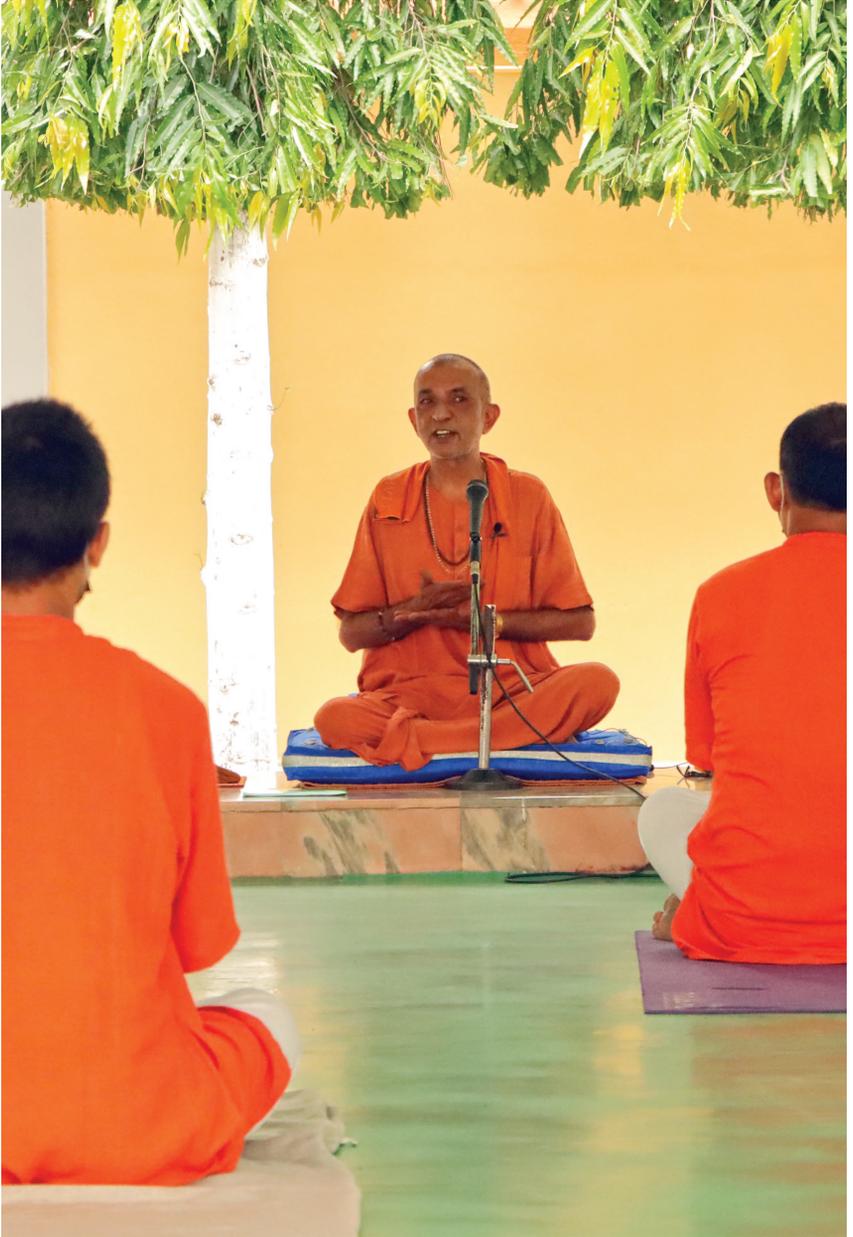


Now let us suppose that reincarnation happens. I see this as the check and control of life – the belief that one’s consciousness is evolving continuously. If rebirth did not happen, if you only had to live one life and there was no rebirth, then there would be no ongoing evolution. Evolution is perceived as the changes that you observe in consciousness, it is a continuing process.

Look at the DNA helix for example. Is the information contained in the DNA helix acquired in one lifetime only, or is there something at the physical level that has come with you through all the generations? Genetic information has come down through all the generations of parents to you; their memories, their knowledge, their understanding, their impressions and their samskaras. If this is happening at the physical level, just imagine the mental DNA helix. Imagine the DNA helix of consciousness, which goes back into infinity. This continuity is the evolution of consciousness that everybody speaks about. The body may not be the same, that is all right, but the inner substance will continue.

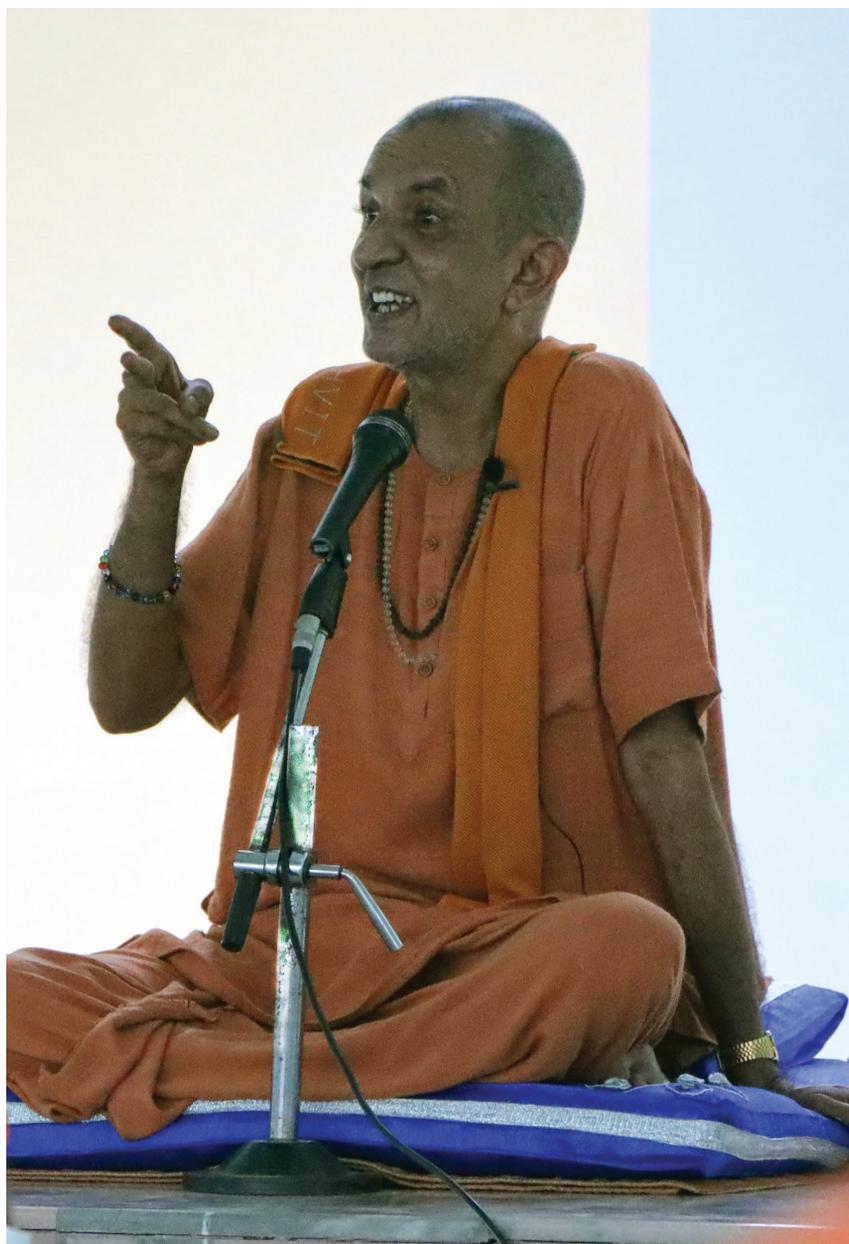
If you know that you are going to be around tomorrow, then you will improve your behaviour today and you will become better. However, if











you believe that you are not going to be here tomorrow, then you might do anything you wish under the sun. sure you will still rest in peace after death, totally unaffected by your behaviours here today. That is my understanding, and from my perspective I can see that understanding about rebirth has a valid role to play in our lives and should not remain an intellectual, philosophical or religious debate.

Knowledge of past lives

The traces of past lives are perceivable in advanced forms of meditation, known as *samyama*, where one oscillates between dharana, dhyana and samadhi, and is enabled to dive deep into the unconscious and return with the information – rather than losing it as novices do. Patanjali first mentions a technique for understanding past life impressions in his discussion on yama and niyama, and in particular, on the fruits of *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness.

On becoming steady in non-possessiveness, there arises the knowledge of how and from where birth (comes).
(Yoga Sutras 2:39)

Swami Satyananda comments:

The samskaras of possessiveness must first be completely washed away and then one can start a new life. Thus aparigraha is a temporary course of sadhana in an aspirant's life. If this particular sadhana is continued beyond reasonable limits, it gives rise to weakness and obsession. However, it is necessary to practise in the beginning in order to break the old habits. When they are broken, one can have different things which are needed for social work and service to humanity. When this sadhana is firmly established, the aspirant comes to know about the previous birth – its kind, its time and its reason. Similarly, one can even know the next birth. Just as by seeing a cloud you know that there will be rain, similarly, you know about the previous or the next birth by being firmly established in aparigraha.

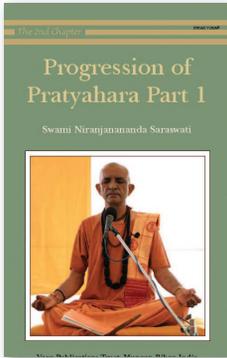


Being aware of one's own samskaras means you become aware of the subtle residual impressions left behind in the consciousness during various births. You may choose to explain this as 'genetic impressions' or 'instincts', but definitely when one is first born, there are impressions or tendencies in the unconscious mind. They remain in a very subtle form throughout life, guiding our perceptions, inclinations and actions unconsciously. Children in particular, often remember details from past lives spontaneously. As adults, we can turn round and really focus on these recordings from our own past nature, but it is not advised; Patanjali is just mentioning milestones that indicate we are indeed going along the path, he's not advocating we hang the milestones round our necks.

– *Published in Life and Death – Full Circle*

Beginning to Practise Pratyahara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Indriya pratyahara, sensorial pratyahara, is not merely withdrawing the senses into the mind. It begins with a simple practice called *kaya sthairyam*, which Sri Swami Satyananda taught as the first stage of learning to meditate. *Kaya* means the physical body, the physical form, and *sthairyam* means stillness. The stillness of the physical form has to be acquired before you still the mind. To become still physically, you have to be in a comfortable state in the body and in the mind. You have to observe the body, the movements of the body, and restrict them. You have to be still, in that stillness there should be no tension or tightness, only stability. In that stability you have to be totally at ease with yourself. The condition that you create in your body will also encourage the mind to become like that: still. That is the first level.

Practising drishti (vision) pratyahara

The second *indriya pratyahara* comes when the body has become still. Then use your vision. For example, I have a flower before me, I look at it intently for thirty seconds, as if performing *trataka*, then I close my eyes and recreate, visualize the flower in my *chidakasha*, as I have seen it. If it has five petals, there should be five petals in my vision; if it has a hole in one of the petals, there should be a hole in one of the petals. You have to recreate the same flower inside. The impression that you have taken from outside has to be seen inside. You have clicked the shutter of the camera, now



you have to see the photo inside. After seeing the photo, you drop that image, and maintain a blank visual state in which no colours, shadows, shapes or lines appear. If you find that there is a play of light and shadow, dots and sparkles and all that, which tends to happen, then you again open your eyes and focus on another object.

The practice is similar to *trataka*, the difference being that in *trataka* you have to use bright objects, or contrasting objects, such as a white sheet of paper with a black dot on it, or a white sheet with a hole in it to look at the moon, or a candle flame. The objects that can be used for *trataka* have been specified, as the intent is different. Here you work with whatever you see to help focus and concentrate the mind.

Each time you open your eyes, you look at a different object, and the focus, awareness and concentration are of a different quality. If you look at a more complex object and try to see the same thing internally, the experience is different from when you try to recreate a simple object. You may not be able to do the practice in the first attempt, but through sustained effort you will find that there comes a time when you can look at something, acknowledge it, and drop it. Your mind is not attached to that object, person or idea anymore. How you use your *drishti*, when you withdraw, and when you shut down becomes your choice.

Practising ghrana (smell) pratyahara

The third level of pratyahara is of smell. The peculiar aspect of smell is that your senses tend to get habituated to it. If incense smell is in the room, when you walk in, you can smell it and after some time you don't notice the smell anymore, it doesn't register anymore. If there is another smell, again the mind registers it, and the reaction to smell is based on raga and dwesha. For sight, the reaction is not raga and dwesha, but awareness. With smell, raga and dwesha come alive. The nervous system reacts instantly to a foul smell: 'I don't want to smell that', the olfactory nerves tend to shut down and you blow out whatever has gone in. That one foul smell evokes many subtle actions.

You have to identify all those subtle actions and not allow your nervous system to cringe, not allow your nose to shrink, not allow your brain to react with, 'Yuck!' Instead maintain a normal state, saying, 'I acknowledge it as a pleasant or foul smell.' If you can observe all these little components of the smell factor, then you can use this awareness to deal with raga and dwesha when you are faced with the vrittis. Thus the ghrana pratyahara of smell is remaining unaffected and unresponsive to any kind of smell, pleasant or foul.

Practising swad (taste) pratyahara

Next is taste pratyahara. The same principle of smell pratyahara is applied here: taste something, see the reaction, hold the reaction. When you sip Coca-Cola, feel the taste, then neutralize it. Taste of white wine, feel it, neutralize it. Taste of pungent food, spicy food, bland food – feel it, neutralize it.

The main point here is that one should not be affected by craving. That is the purpose of taste pratyahara: the cravings of the senses have to reduce. If you are thirsty, you should not start dreaming of drinking something cool and sweet and pleasant, or desire that. You have to be free from that desire, that craving.

During our sannyasa course in 1970 in Munger, as part of our training, we were given a bucket. There were no thalis,

katoris, spoons or forks, and all food used to go into that bucket, like into a begging bowl. Dal or kheer, samosa or rasagulla, everything used to go into the same pot. We used to mix everything and eat. Sri Swamiji used to eat in the same way with all of us. We did it for one month. There are some people like Swami Kaivalyananda, who still eat like that every now and then even today. In swad or taste, pratyahara, taste may be enjoyed, but the craving of the taste should not be there.

Practising charma (skin) pratyahara

Skin pratyahara is meditative. During shavasana or yoga nidra you are sometimes told to feel the contact points between the body and the floor. That is one level of knowing the touch sensation. The second: becoming aware of the clothes that you wear around yourself. The third: the texture of objects; some are pleasant to touch, some are hard or rough, some are thin, some are thick, and so on. Each texture, each touch perception evokes a different response. You observe the body and the items by which the body is enveloped, as that is the touch you are experiencing at the moment. You become aware of the touch of clothes and then the outer environment. The heat and the skin. Feel the heat on the surface of the skin, feel it in the deeper parts of the body, and then find your comfort level.

I had to practise this during panchagni. If skin pratyahara had not been there, I would have been conscious of the heat and become uncomfortable. It was due to pratyahara that extreme heat did not disturb the focus, the concentration and the stability of the mind and the physical body.

Practising sravan (hearing) pratyahara

The fifth is hearing pratyahara. You have experienced this in the practice of yoga nidra: becoming aware of a sound, letting it go, and then moving on to the next sound. Those of you who are able to do this practice properly would have noticed that when you don't do the practice, the sounds disturb you during yoga nidra. If you do it properly, even a loud bang



next door is not going to make you jump. You are hearing the noise, you are wondering what it is all about, but the physical and psychological reactions are much reduced.

Merging the conscious with the subconscious

Finally, 'merge the mind into the mind'. What is this? First you have withdrawn the tentacles of the octopus. There are six tentacles: body, vision, sight, taste, touch, hearing. These are withdrawn. Now the mind has to be withdrawn. How do you withdraw the mind into the mind? If the mind is seen as a triangle with the three levels of conscious, subconscious and unconscious, as long as the conscious is active it will be connected to the senses, as the conscious cognition takes place only due to the senses. Once the cognitions have been withdrawn, the senses have been pacified, their grip on you has been loosened and your association with them has been released, then the consciousness merges into the subconscious. As there is no activity, it becomes quiet. You are not sleeping, only there is no conscious activity and you are in a state of sleepless, wakeful harmony and peace. That is the final level of kaya sthairyam or sensory pratyahara.

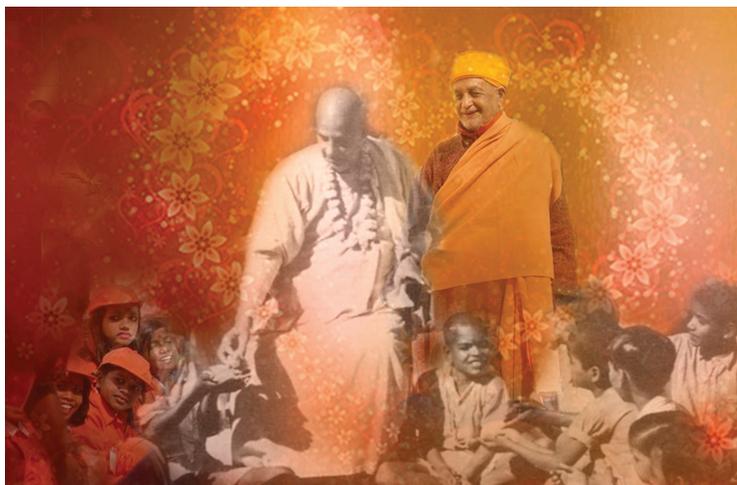
– *Published in Progressive Yoga Vidya Training,
Progression of Pratyahara 1*

Encircle the World with Love

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

In love lies the salvation of all beings. Love is the hope of this dark, lonesome world. This world needs leaders filled with sympathy, cooperation, love, compassion, sacrifice and tolerance. In the cultivation of this cosmic love lies individual spiritual progress, the welfare of the entire community and the peace of the whole world. The saints and prophets of the world have spoken of love as the aim of life. The divine sport of Lord Krishna is filled with spiritual love. Lord Buddha was an ocean of love. Lord Rama lived a life of love, showing love in every inch of his activity.

My dear children of love, draw inspiration from their teachings. Tread the path of love, commune with God and reach the eternal abode of love. Live in love, breathe in love, sing in love, eat in love, drink in love, talk in love, pray in love, work in love, think in love, move in love, meditate in love and die in love. Purify your thoughts, speech and actions in the fire of love. Bathe and plunge in the sacred ocean of love, become an embodiment of love. Let the whole world be circled with a heart of love.



GURU PRASAD

As part of the Guru Poornima digital prasad 2021, the updated version of the Bihar Yoga app was launched. Yoga aspirants from around the world used the occasion to strengthen their connection with the Masters and derive inspiration from their teachings. Within two weeks of the launch, the app was downloaded by almost 30,000 yoga aspirants from the following 111 countries:

Albania	Czech Republic	Kuwait	Romania
Andorra	Congo	Kyrgyzstan	Russia
Angola	Denmark	Latvia	Saudi Arabia
Argentina	Dominican Republic	Lebanon	Serbia
Armenia	Ecuador	Lithuania	Singapore
Australia	Egypt	Luxembourg	Slovakia
Austria	Finland	Macau	Slovenia
Azerbaijan	France	Malaysia	South Africa
Bahrain	Georgia	Maldives	South Korea
Bangladesh	Germany	Mali	Spain
Belarus	Ghana	Malta	Sri Lanka
Belgium	Greece	Mauritius	Sweden
Bolivia	Guatemala	Mexico	Switzerland
Bosnia	Hong Kong	Montenegro	Taiwan
Botswana	Hungary	Morocco	Tanzania
Brazil	Iceland	Nepal	Thailand
Bulgaria	India	Netherlands	Trinidad and Tobago
Burkina Faso	Indonesia	New Zealand	
Cambodia	Iran	Nigeria	Turkey
Cameroon	Ireland	Norway	Ukraine
Canada	Isle of Man	Oman	United Arab Emirates
Chile	Israel	Pakistan	United Kingdom
China	Italy	Panama	
Colombia	Japan	Peru	
Costa Rica	Jersey	Philippines	United States of America
Côte d'Ivoire	Kazakhstan	Poland	
Croatia	Kenya	Portugal	Uruguay
Curaçao	Kosovo	Puerto Rico	Vietnam
Cyprus		Qatar	Zimbabwe

Also about 3,000 new aspirants from 69 countries accessed the Satyam Yoga Prasad website or app during this period.

Health, Happiness and Harmony

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Over the last sixty years, Bihar School of Yoga has not only propagated yoga, but has also focused on living yoga. We believe that there is a progression in yogic practice. Yoga is a system of disciplining the lifestyle. Yoga is a system of harmonizing the upheavals of mind and emotions. Yoga is a system to connect with the creativity which can be expressed in life for the betterment of ourselves, our family, our society, the nation and the world. Today the focus of yoga is health, happiness and harmony in life.

Health

Yoga has become very popular as a therapy and many people are using yoga asanas to treat many kinds of physiological problems, imbalances and illnesses. But that is not the purpose of yoga, and what you do to help your body is not yoga, it is the practice of yoga asanas. Yoga is a science of life – it is a lifestyle. People call *asanas*, the physical postures, yoga. This is a misnomer. Yoga is a science, asana is a component of that subject. People use the practice of asanas to attain health. Remember, yoga is not merely a therapy, yet there are three therapeutic aspects of yoga. First is the promotive aspect which enhances health. Second is preventive, which prevents imbalances occurring in the body and illnesses from debilitating the body. The third aspect is curative.

The focus of yoga therapy is not on the curative aspect, but on the promotive. When yoga becomes part of our daily routine and lifestyle, just as brushing the teeth, then practising *neti* and asanas can become part of our routine and lifestyle. In this manner, we can promote our health, we can develop better immunity, better digestion, better circulation of blood through the system, better oxygenation in the body, better

management of the nervous agitations. We can improve the performance of all the physical, internal systems. That is the promotive component of yoga.

Once the health of the internal organs and systems of the body has been achieved, then the stamina, strength, immunity, and vitality of the body naturally stops the attack of external foreign agents from affecting the body and debilitating the body. Immunity and resistance power is greatly enhanced.

People do not find time to practise a balanced yoga sadhana, so they don't really look after their health. At the expense of work or working too much, health is lost, and we suffer from various psychosomatic and somatopsychic illnesses. By the time we reach forty, we are under the attack of many illnesses and diseases. Yoga practices of asanas, pranayamas, mudras, bandhas, relaxation and concentration techniques give us the ability to strengthen and rejuvenate our bodies. We can harmonize and regulate our systems and attain optimum health.



Sadhana

For this one does not need to practise one hour of yoga. Bihar School of Yoga promotes a simple yoga sadhana. Early morning when you wake up, practise three mantras with sankalpas for health, wisdom and overcoming distress in life. Repeat mentally the sankalpa to attain health, total health, and chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times. Repeat the sankalpa of attaining clarity of mind, stress-free mind, wisdom and creativity, and chant the Gayatri mantra eleven times. Make the sankalpa to overcome all difficulties and distresses in life and chant the thirty-two names of Durga mantras once. The whole process will take five minutes, yet it will create a foundation to start your day on a positive, optimistic note. You will be aware and relaxed throughout the day. You will feel different strengths and stamina fill your entire personality and body. This is the first sadhana in the morning to connect with positivity in life.

The second sadhana is the practice of five yoga asanas: tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana, surya namaskara and one inverted posture. This is enough to maintain the health of the body, maintain vitality in the body, increase immunity,



improve respiration and circulation. The practice of these five asanas will not take more than twenty minutes, and it can be easily done before breakfast.

Then come two pranayamas. One is *nadi shodhana pranayama*, alternate nostril breathing. Inhale through the left nostril, exhale through the right, inhale through the right, exhale through the left. Make sure that your breathing is long, slow and deep, and practise it for five minutes. The second pranayama is *bhramari pranayama* – plugging the ears with your fingers, inhale deeply and while exhaling make a humming sound. Practise this pranayama seven to ten times.

The pranayamas can be done before you embark on your journey to the office. It will take ten minutes, no more, however these two pranayamas will improve the lung function, stimulate the production of melatonin which helps to relax the body, senses and the mind, and also stimulate the production of nitric oxide in the body, which allows your blood pressure to be regulated. Scientists today have seen that *bhramari pranayama* produces fifteen times more nitric oxide than normal breathing. Nitric oxide is useful for maintaining the health of the lungs.



The fourth practice is of relaxation when you come home after your work. For ten minutes lie down on your bed, close your eyes, release all stress and tensions from the muscles, joints and body. Release all thoughts and stresses from the mind and practise yoga nap. That will remove tiredness and weakness from the body, and it will rejuvenate the entire physical and psychological system.

Then at night practise five minutes of simple concentration to stop the agitation of the mind. Focus on your breath, observe the inhalation and exhalation between the navel and throat. When you inhale the breath comes up from the navel to the throat. When you exhale the breath goes down from the throat to the navel. Observe this for five minutes, and as you are observing the breath, moving up and down the passage between navel and throat, mentally repeat the mantra *So Ham*. *So* with inhalation, *Ham* with exhalation. Practise this for five minutes and then go to sleep. You will have better, deeper, relaxed sleep.

For attaining health, you can start with these simple, basic practices of yoga which do not cater only to the body, but also to the overactive mind, emotions, distractions and dissipations.

Happiness

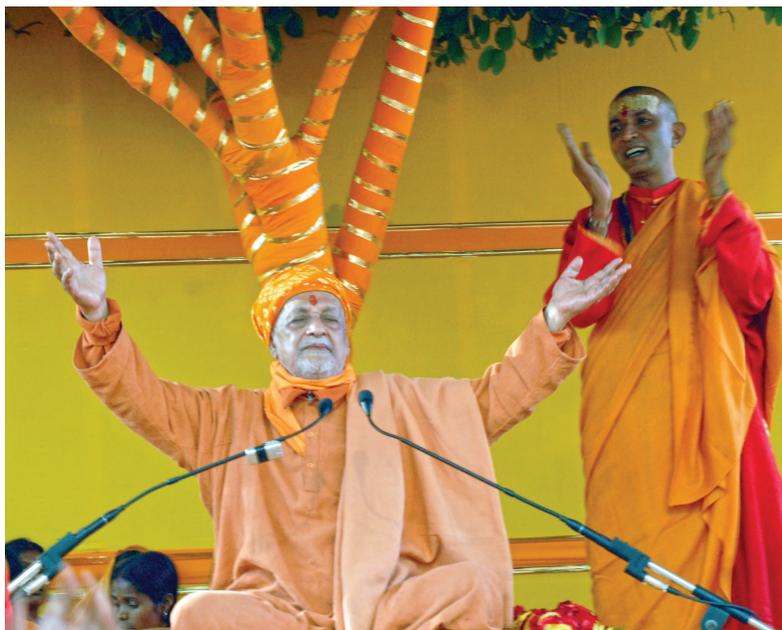
Next comes happiness. The whole of society is searching for happiness today, but how to find it? When somebody is happy, a special chemical known as serotonin is produced and when one is seeking pleasure, a special chemical known as dopamine is produced. People mix pleasure with happiness, they don't know the difference between the two. Pleasure is mental entertainment. For pleasure you try to entertain yourself by doing something different, like going to a party, to a disco, watching a movie, or going out with friends to have a good and great time. These activities give you pleasure. There are people who drink and smoke for it gives them pleasure. They feel they are able to relax.

Pleasure is not happiness, it is momentary, it comes and goes, and it becomes addictive. Pleasure seeking produces

dopamine in our bodies, which makes us more introverted, more addicted to the pleasure-seeking desires, thoughts and actions. When one is happy, serotonin is produced. This happiness is much more than the normal pleasure that you achieve. It lightens up the body, it lightens up the mind, it lightens up the spirit. It keeps the feeling of optimism, hope and goodness alive. People have forgotten how to be happy in their search for pleasure.

So how can we be happy while living our normal pleasure-seeking life? Smile at everyone, that is the first step. Find time to laugh jovially for five minutes every day. Cultivate optimism, inspire others and increase these moments of joy and happiness by one minute every day. Don't see a problem as a problem, but as something which you can easily overcome if you apply the wisdom, skill, training and the understanding which you have. Everything is possible.

My Guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, used to say, "What we live in our life is nothing but our own mind." Our thoughts,



our desires, everything that comes from the mind, is what we live in our daily life. There are very few short moments when we can separate ourselves from the mind, even at night in sleep separation becomes difficult. However with practice it becomes possible to consciously separate the mind from the desire of pleasure and connect it with the experience of happiness. Try this and you will greatly be benefited.

Harmony

Harmony within oneself, harmony in the family, harmony in society – how can that be achieved? Not only through material pursuits, but also by training our mind and emotions to do the right thing at the right time, to think the right thing at the right time, and to act in the right manner at the right time. This will bring harmony into our life, our family and our society. These are the roles that yoga fulfils, not only through asanas, but as a complete wholistic science of life.

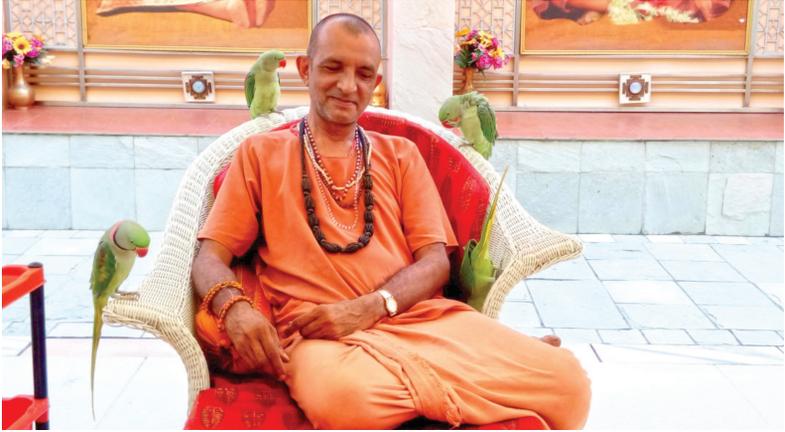
This is the theory of Yoga Chakra, starting with health, tweaking the body and mind to remove the imbalances, to develop the coordination and harmony of the internal systems, to manage the mind, the stresses, the tensions, the anxieties. This changes the quality of mind by making it more happy, optimistic, creative and inspirational. Then through our behaviour, through our karma, through our jnana and through our sentiments, we live and express the beauty of life.

That is the subject of yoga, which our Guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, and his Guru, Sri Swami Sivanandaji, have propagated. Yes, we do start with our body, yet let us not forget the aim of yoga, which is the awakening of the human personality and nature to attain, health, happiness and harmony; to attain peace and prosperity in life. Therefore, our humble request is that you give yoga a chance in your life.

*– 17 July 2021, Online message delivered to the
Law Department, Delhi University, on the occasion of the
International Day of Yoga (Extracts)*

Santosha

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Santosha or contentment is an expression of a harmonious and balanced mind. One who does not desire or crave anything, one who is satisfied yet active and dynamic, is in a state of *santosha*. Often contentment is seen as a negation of effort and people say, “If I am content, it means that I don’t have to make any effort. I don’t have any desire, I don’t have to want anything, I don’t have to like anything; I just have to be satisfied with what I have.” That is wrong, as it goes against the principle of contentment. Contentment does not deny effort. Contentment emphasizes *purushartha*, the effort that one makes to become better. It is not just an action or performance of life, it is a continuous effort to become better each day.

Nobody makes that effort, and yet everyone wants to have the attainment. Contentment does not deny *purushartha*. It is an attitude, an awareness that “Yes, I am happy.” Just as one is aware of one’s suffering on a day-to-day basis, on a moment-to-moment basis, one has to be aware of one’s happiness on a day-to-day and moment-to-moment basis. If one has a fight with somebody, the whole day one will be aware of that person.

The whole day the thoughts about that person will go around and around in the head, about the awful things said and done. Just as one is aware of the pain and suffering constantly and continuously, can one make the effort to become aware of one's happiness constantly and continuously? If one can do that, there is santosha and one is contented. Contentment is an awareness, an attitude.

When the aspirant identifies, maintains and sustains for extended periods of time, for as much as possible, the connection with internal happiness, and minimizes the experiences and projections of pain and suffering, that is contentment.

No faultfinding

Santosha means finding contentment within and not finding fault with others. Both go hand in hand. Complete santosha is being contented and at peace. Many people are contented but not at peace. They are happy, yet still they try to find faults in other people or situations, believing that if they would change, they would become even more contented and happy. That is the ego principle again playing up: 'I want more, this is not enough.'

One who does not struggle, or fight, who does not see any kind of fault in other people, but who lives and flows with life, is content. After all, who is at fault here? One is expressing oneself according to one's level of evolution. Grass is small, trees are tall. Is it the fault of the grass that it is smaller than the tree? Is it the fault of the tree that it is taller than the grass? No. There is a natural law governing each and every being, each and every blade of grass, and everyone expresses themselves according to that natural law.

If there is acceptance of the natural law there will be no criticism. Of course, one has to strive to uphold the dharma because that is also a level of bhakti. Sri Krishna could have sat quietly and said, "Everyone is following their law, let the Pandavas do their thing, let the Kauravas do their thing." He never criticized anyone He followed his dharma with happiness and contentment.

Over the year 2021, YOGA magazine will publish the poem *Light Fire and Darkness*, written by Dhiru Desai (1932–1991)

Light Fire and Darkness

*A modernized version of the Bhagavad Gita,
by Dhiru Desai*

A Word from the Author

In the ancient Hindu epic called the *Mahabharata*, the Pandavas, five brothers who epitomize good, go to battle against their one hundred cousins, the Kauravas, the forces of evil. Before the battle Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, hesitates to fight against friends and relations. Sri Krishna then expounds his philosophy, which came to be known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. In *Light Fire and Darkness*, Arjuna becomes the devotee and Sri Krishna becomes the divine voice. Chapters 1 and 11 are spoken by the devotee and the rest of the text is the divine message.

This is not a translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. This is a modernized version. I am not a scholar of Sanskrit and in this work I have not used any Sanskrit words, nor have I linked it in any way to Hindu philosophy. I have tried to write in a way that is likely to appeal to one not familiar with vedic culture.

– Dhiru Desai, May 14 1987, Memphis, USA

CHAPTER 15 – THE DIVINE TREE

The tree has roots
deep in the earth;
it branches out
into the skies;
its leaves are green;
and its purpose
is to yield fruit.
This is the view
of the worldly.
But the wise see
the divine tree
as rooted in
high heaven;
its branches touch
all devotees;
and every leaf
is a divine chant;
each juicy fruit
is filled with knowledge.
The wise climb this tree
with strenuous effort,
kiss each leaf lovingly,
seek the fruit of knowledge
with humbleness and truth,
and find their roots in me.

The wise know that
on this planet,
there is the mortal
and the immortal;

the soul within
every being
is immortal;
all else is mortal.
They know that
I am in the perceived,
and in the unperceived,
in the real
and in the unreal,
in the known
and in the unknown.
They know that
I am the memory
and the wisdom,
and that
I know the truth,
I make the truth
and I am the truth.
Those who know me thus
know all.



A Mysterious Tree

Swami Sivananda Saraswati



Lord Krishna declares in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the Supreme Being is the source of all existence, and refers allegorically to this phenomenal universe as being like an inverted tree whose roots are in Para Brahman, and whose spreading branches and foliage constitute all things and factors that go to make up this vast and variegated created phenomena.

This is a very mysterious “Tree” which is very difficult to understand, being a product of His inscrutable power of Maya: and hence it has a marvellous apparent appearance without having actual reality. One who fully understands the nature of this Samsara-Tree goes beyond Maya. To be attached to it is to be caught in it. The surest way of “cutting down” this Samsara is by the excellent weapon of non-attachment and dispassion.

Detachment

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna was instructing Arjuna about detachment in the middle of the battlefield while the missiles were flying overhead and hundreds of people were dying in the war. Here the battlefield represents one's own personal battle in life.

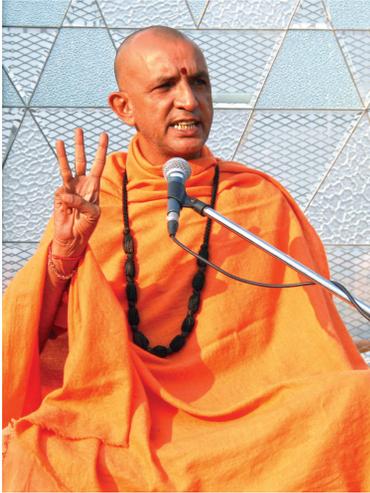
This means one should be able to practise detachment even when the scales are heavily loaded against one, when everything is going wrong, when one's love has been betrayed, when one's confidence has been shattered, when friends have deserted one, when one's philosophy and deep-rooted convictions have fallen through and failed to help you.

The first mental disease that man suffers from is despondency, dejection, frustration, nervous breakdown. There is conflict all the time, and that is the first step to yoga. When one is angry, violent, terribly unhappy, what does one do? One fights, because one is trying to create a balance, come out of that situation. That is called detachment; that is called yoga.



The Axe of Non-Attachment

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



This inverted tree is nourished by the waters of the three gunas. The emergence of new leaves and flowers is like the budding of desires. When the three gunas water and nourish them, they sprout and each represents one *vishaya*, object of desire. The branches of the tree are spread in all directions and each represents a life form in creation. A person can be caught in the branches without being able to liberate himself.

He is caught due to the bondage of karmas and attraction to the objects of desire.

This cosmic tree has no beginning or end as the source from which it is coming is eternal. If you want to free yourself from the bondage of karma and the branches of the cosmic tree, then you have to cut down the tree, and it can only be cut with a sharp instrument like an axe. That axe is non-attachment.

Cutting down this firmly rooted peepal tree with the strong weapon of non-attachment, one should seek that supreme state; once having reached this state, one never returns, saying, "I seek refuge in that Primeval Purusha from whom this ancient creation has streamed forth." (15:3-4)

The axe has to be of non-attachment. If you can make sure that you are not attached to the objects of pleasure and can maintain your equanimity, you will be able to cut down the tree in which you are caught and liberate yourself.

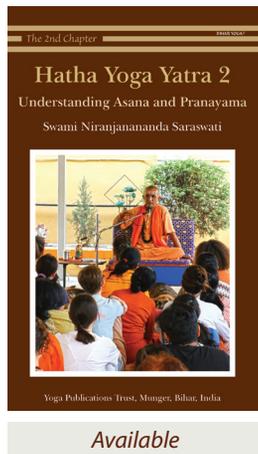
Hatha Yoga Yatra 2

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

62 pp, soft cover, ISBN : 978-93-84753-72-6

In writing the second chapter of yoga, a complete change in the training programs at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth has come about since 2016. The new programs are setting a standard of understanding the practices and principles of yoga from the perspective of the original intentions of yoga.

Among these programs was Hatha Yoga Yatra 2: Asana-Pranayama Intensive, during which the focus was on understanding the asana and pranayama of hatha yoga and placing the practice in the broader context of yoga and spiritual life. This book presents the satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda during the program.



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